



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

Ministerial Briefing

June 2020



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1 Department Overview

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

The Department currently has a total of 194 staff– 38 of these are assigned to the Charities Regulator, the remainder are primarily located across the Department’s main office locations, at Trinity Point (75) in Dublin and in Ballina (74). A number of inspection and compliance officers (7) are also assigned to regional locations throughout the country.

The Revised Estimate 2020, published in December 2019, provides for a gross budget of €308.25 million for the Department of Rural and Community Development – comprising €158.25 million in current funding and €150 million in capital funding. This represents a 6% increase on the 2019 funding level of €291.2 million.

The Secretary General of the Department is Kevin McCarthy. He is joined on Management Board by three Assistant Secretaries. William Parnell is the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Rural Development and Regional Affairs, Bairbre Nic Aongusa is the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Community Development, and Sheenagh Rooney is Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Corporate Affairs and Strategic Development. Management Board members are based in the Dublin office.

Other key Departmental information:

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MISSION OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department's current Statement of Strategy was published in March 2018 and outlined the mission of the Department as follows:

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

The Strategy also set out the following strategic goals of the Department:

- Work across Government to advance the economic and social development of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life for people who live in rural Ireland.
- Contribute to enhanced regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions to contribute to economic recovery.
- Support local communities to develop, empowering them to identify their needs and aspirations and providing them with the opportunities, skills and confidence to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes which affect them.
- Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy
- In addition, the Strategy contained a commitment to build the organisation through investment in its people, improving communication with stakeholders and the general public, and driving gains through innovation and improved systems and procedures.

A new Statement of Strategy, covering the forthcoming three-year period, must be prepared and published within six months of a Ministerial appointment.

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

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

FUNDING PROGRAMMES

The Department delivers funding support across the following three programmes:

Rural Development Investment Programme - €149.7m

This includes:

- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)
- LEADER Programme
- Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure scheme (ORIS)
- Local Improvement Scheme (LIS)
- CLÁR Programme

Community Funding Programmes - €153.9m

This includes:

- Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)
- Community Services Programme (CSP)
- Community Enhancement Programme
- PEACE IV
- Public library funding
- Dormant Accounts Fund

Charities Regulator - €4.61m

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Since its establishment, the Department of Rural and Community Development has advanced the following policies which come under its remit:

Action Plan for Rural Development (APRD)

The *Action Plan for Rural Development* was the key policy framework for the delivery of support for the economic and social development of rural areas over the period 2017-2019. The Action Plan was built around the Pillars of Supporting Sustainable Communities, Supporting Enterprise and Employment, Maximising Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential, Fostering Culture and Creativity, and Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity. The Plan, which had cross-Departmental delivery, reached the end of its three-year timeframe at the end of 2019.

Forthcoming Policy for Rural Development 2020-2025

This Policy builds on the Action Plan for Rural Development, but with a more forward-looking approach to the policies, programmes and structures needed to embed economic and social development in rural areas and underscore the interdependence of urban and rural areas in national economic, social and cultural recovery.

DRCD is leading on ensuring strong coherence across key Government policies to ensure that rural communities and economies are in a strong position to:

- adapt to future challenges e.g. changing demographics within rural communities, climate change adaptation, Brexit, post-COVID recovery, and to
- take advantage of available opportunities (e.g. diversification of rural economies, new ways of working, increased Government investment targeted at balanced regional development).

The Policy will deliver for rural Ireland in an integrated and strategic way across Government, with DRCD playing a central co-ordinating role.

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland – published August 2019, implementation commenced

The Department of Rural and Community Development is leading an ambitious All-of-Government strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector over the next 5 years.

- By working with colleagues in other Departments, state agencies, local government, local and community development and community and voluntary sector to achieve the 11 high-level objectives and 43 associated actions, we will build on the collaboration and partnership fostered during the co-production of the Strategy between the Department and the sector.
- The Strategy will entail far-reaching changes across Government and the community and voluntary sector and will require an incremental building of supports over the strategy period and beyond to ensure its performance as an enabling framework to support the sector to achieve positive societal change.

Social Enterprise Policy – published July 2019, implementation commenced

The new National Social Enterprise Policy is the Department’s blueprint to enable social enterprises to increase their social, environmental and economic impact.

Many social enterprises are based in rural or isolated areas and provide services to communities that may not otherwise be available. They also operate in our cities and other urban areas, often providing services to disadvantaged communities.

Public Library Strategy – *Our Public Libraries 2022* - launched June 2018 implementation commenced

The Department aims to improve access, use and visibility of the library as a community hub and develop libraries as a focal point for community and cultural development by:

- increasing active library membership by removing fines and placing increased emphasis on digital and technology capacity (*My Open Library* initiatives)

Forthcoming Volunteering Strategy 2020

The Department has, following a consultation process, developed this strategy and public consultation on the final draft has been completed. The overarching aim of this strategy is:

- To put the best possible supports and infrastructure in place so that volunteers and volunteer bodies continue to prosper and that the volunteering needs of present and future generations will be met.

Forthcoming Philanthropy Policy

DRCD has commenced working with key stakeholders to develop an informed and effective policy on Government's relationship with philanthropy and to set out a strategy to facilitate the further growth of philanthropy in Ireland.

Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan - published plan in November 2019

DRCD is the lead Department on this fund. Funds are directed towards economic and social disadvantage and educational development and disability sectors.

- The 2019 Action Plan saw 43 measures approved across nine Government Departments with a funding total of €45.4 million. DRCD delivers its own measures within the fund - €12.5 million. Operation of the fund has greatly improved under DRCD leadership with expenditure in 2019 of over €37 million.
- The 2020 Action Plan will be formulated during the year, in collaboration with other Departments, for approval and later in the year.

CROSS-GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The Department contributes to a number of significant government priorities, including:

National Broadband Plan

The Department has been working with Local Authorities (LAs) throughout the country to prepare for the roll out of the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

DRCD works with Broadband Officers in all Local Authorities to support local digital and telecommunications development. As part of the NBP, the Department is working with LAs and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to establish more than 300 community Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) nationwide. The majority of these sites will be connected within the coming 12 months and will provide early onsite access to high-speed broadband for rural communities, including some islands. Additionally, DRCD provides the Secretariat for the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which identifies and delivers initiatives to facilitate improved access to mobile phone and broadband services. The Taskforce Implementation Group has operated for three years, with a decision on the future of the Taskforce to be made.

Project Ireland 2040

The Secretary General of the Department is a member of the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board. The objective of this board is to provide strategic direction and leadership, oversee implementation structures and performance and ensure a coordinated and collaborative whole of government approach in the delivery of Project Ireland 2040.

The Department actively coordinates with other Government Departments who are delivering other Project Ireland Funds and the Department of Expenditure and Public Reform on the Project Ireland 2040 Coordination Group. The Department also oversees policy and funding of the €1 billion rural and regeneration fund established to deliver the objective of strengthening rural economics and communities.

Climate Action

DRCD has also been actively participating in cross-Government climate action policy, and has lead responsibility for a number of actions in the Climate Action Plan, in addition to contributing to several others led by other Departments. Specific Climate Action commitments under the Departments remit have also been included in policy documents such as the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy. The Department also inputs into Just Transition planning to ensure that climate action measures do not unfairly impact one region or economic sector.

Brexit

The Department has been actively engaged at all levels in Brexit preparedness and contingency planning. DRCD has a vital role, through its funding programmes and supports, in supporting all communities and rural Ireland in managing the impact of various Brexit scenarios.

Local Community Development

Through strategic oversight of both Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), the Department oversees the implementation of many cross-Government initiatives at a grassroots level and actively encourages the utilisation of these existing and important participative structures for the delivery of services, the encouragement of best practice and the engagement of communities. In 2019 the Department conducted a review of the effectiveness of the LCDCs and is in the process of delivering these recommendations.

Future Jobs

The Department has provided input to the Future Jobs Ireland process since its commencement in 2018. Future Jobs Ireland is led by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and aims to ensure that Ireland's economy is well positioned to adapt and prosper in the future as the nature of work and the workplace changes.

The Department's input supports objectives such as broadening the enterprise base (through our Social Enterprise Policy), Enhancing Skills and Increasing Participation in the Labour Force through programmes such as SICAP.

CAP Reform

Through its role in relation to the LEADER programme, the Department is involved in the negotiations on CAP reform for the period 2021-2027 and has regular engagement with DAFM who are leading on Ireland's negotiations at EU level.

DELIVERING THROUGH ITS AGENCIES

There are four agencies which come under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development

Western Development Commission

- The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the western region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare).
- It does this by supporting SMEs and projects in a wide variety of sectors. Through the Western Investment Fund it provides loans and equity to business and local communities in the Western region. The WDC also co-ordinates the work of the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce for the Department.

Pobal

- Pobal works on behalf of government to manage and implement a number of publicly funded programmes designed to improve outcomes for local communities, particularly those encountering social and economic disadvantage. While Pobal provides services on behalf of a wide range of Government Departments, governance oversight of the agency rests with DRCD.

Water Safety Ireland

- The Department provides oversight and support to Water Safety Ireland (previously Irish Water Safety) in its mission to reduce the number of deaths by drowning, through increased education, instruction and public awareness measures.

Charities Regulator

- The Charities Regulator is Ireland's national statutory regulator for charitable organisations. It is independent in the exercise of its functions.

- It maintains a public register of all charitable organisations in Ireland and ensures their statutory compliance. It also promotes and supports best practice in the charitable sector.

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

Rural Development and Regional Affairs – Assistant Secretary William Parnell

This Division is responsible for:

- Policies and programmes to advance the economic and social development of rural Ireland, including through the development and implementation of national rural development policy.
- Delivery of a range of rural programmes, including LEADER, CLÁR, Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, LIS, the Walks Scheme and the Tidy Towns competition
- Regional development objectives, including the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative and facilitating Local Authorities in their preparations for the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and local digital development.
- Development and implementation of Social Enterprise policy.
- Oversight of the Western Development Commission.

Community Development – Assistant Secretary Bairbre Nic Aongusa

This Division is responsible for:

- Community Development policies, including the development and implementation of the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector; the Public Library Strategy; the forthcoming National Volunteering Strategy; and the philanthropy policy in development.
- Supports to Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs)
- Delivery of a range of community supports and programmes including the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Community Services Programme (CSP), Community Enhancement

Programme (CEP), PEACE Programme and the Dublin North East Inner City Initiative.

- National policy on dog control and burial grounds.
- Oversight of Pobal, Water Safety Ireland and the Charities Regulator.

Corporate Affairs and Strategic Development – Assistant Secretary Sheenagh Rooney

This Division is responsible for:

- The Department's strategic policy development, corporate affairs, and governance, including programme inspection and compliance
- Organisational development and human resources
- Finance and evaluation
- Corporate supports such as accommodation, communications and ICT
- Oversight and coordination of the Department's policy work on cross-Government strategic matters such as Climate Action and Brexit
- Delivery of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and oversight of the Dormant Accounts Fund.

2. Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

The Department has moved to ensure it has the ability to maintain business continuity during the COVID-19 crisis through the following measures:

- Expansion of remote working capability
 - All members of staff now have the ability to access DRCD networks and work remotely on Department-issued portable devices.
 - The Department has also taken the opportunity offered to secure additional Citrix licences for remote working. Citrix allows staff to use their own personal laptop or PC and broadband connection to access their Department workspace through a URL link
 - The Department now has a higher remote working capability than almost any other Department.
 - This is being done to allow our staff to comply with social distancing and remain productive and to allow our functions to continue to be delivered to the greatest extent possible given the circumstances which prevail.

- Continuation of Payments to suppliers/grant recipients
 - DRCD Finance Unit have made arrangements to allow the payment of priority suppliers/grantees to continue.

- Reassignment of DRCD staff
 - A number of DRCD staff have been temporarily reassigned or made available for reassignment to assist colleagues in frontline public bodies dealing with Covid-19. This includes assignment to HSE for contact tracing work and DEASP as they deal with the surge in welfare claims.

- DRCD steering group overseeing the Department policy and operational response to COVID 19 meets regularly to review developments and monitor working arrangements. To date the Department has continued

to operate effectively in an environment where staff are working from home.

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN FOR THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE

As part of the government's response to COVID-19, the Department of Rural and Community Development established an Advisory Group on the Community Response. The Chair of the Advisory Group is a member of the NPHET Subgroup on Vulnerable People which is tasked with providing oversight and assurance with regard to the specific preparedness, measures and actions that need to be taken to protect vulnerable groups and individuals in society.

The overarching purpose of the Advisory Group is to encourage and facilitate community engagement in response to the needs of vulnerable people – such as older people or people with disabilities - living in the community.

With the assistance of the Advisory Group, on 20 March 2020, the Department published the COVID-19 Action Plan to support the community response.

The Plan set out three key areas of initial focus:

- letting people know how and where they volunteer through our partnership with Volunteer Ireland and our network of Volunteer Centres
- to provide community supports for older people by providing funding to ALONE for their crisis telephone support line and follow through practical supports
- launching an email helpdesk facility in the Department of Rural and Community Development to assist smaller community groups with their queries

Measures include:

- The volunteer support programme – the volunteer centre network and Volunteer Ireland are represented on each forum providing practical advice, assistance and coordination of local volunteer efforts;

- The SAS/ALONE initiative is supporting the forum through identifying support needs across the cohort of senior alert participants; and
- On 2 April 2020, a Seniors Alert Scheme befriending initiative was launched that will allow participants in the scheme to receive calls to check on their wellbeing during the crisis.

Following the launch of the Action Plan, the Department contributed to the development of the Government’s “Community Call” initiative, which involved the collaboration of national and local government, the community and voluntary sector to support vulnerable people in communities throughout the COVID-19 emergency. The initiative is being led by the Local Authorities and involves each Chief Executive leading a dedicated Community Forum to connect services and supports to people in their homes. The Department is represented on the National Oversight committee, along with the Departments of Housing and Taoiseach and has provided funding support for a number of elements of the response.

Additional measures put in place include:

- The Department funds the COVID-19 Community Outreach (CCO) programme. Coordinated by The Wheel and Irish Rural Link the programme links and supports the work of thousands of community groups across Ireland who are responding to meet the needs of communities during the COVID-19 crisis.
- CCO mobilises a network of Community Champions across the 26 counties. These individuals have strong existing links within their local areas, existing experience of engaging with community organisations and volunteers, and are already in contact with the people that the programme ultimately seeks to support. Each Community Champion participates on their local Community Forum established under the Community Call initiative.
- A €2.5 million fund was launched on 9 April to support community and voluntary groups involved in the delivery of COVID-19 community response efforts. The COVID-19 Emergency Fund will provide immediate and urgently needed funding. Funding is available to groups that are participating in the “Community Call” initiative. Local Authorities are administering this fund. Further detail, including allocations by local

authority area are available. Since the call for volunteers to support the community response to COVID 19 went out in March, 16,957 people have registered to volunteer through the iVol app as of 24 May 2020.

- As a result of COVID-19 the Department has recently developed a 2020 Support Fund to assist all Community Service Programme (CSP) supported organisations to continue to retain their CSP supported employees on their payroll, during this crisis period. The Fund with an estimated cost of €1.2m will provide an additional once off payment to cover the 12 week period from 26th March 2020, with the first round of payments to issue week ending 8 May 2020. For full-time CSP employees, an enhanced CSP contribution will be provided so that employers can pay a maximum of €350 net per week. For part-time CSP supported employees the Fund will help ensure that those paid less than €350 net per week will continue to get paid their normal working weekly hours, with a maximum CSP contribution provided at a rate of €10.99 per hour, inclusive of employers PRSI @ 8.8%.

Volunteering:

- Since the mobilisation of volunteers by Volunteer Ireland and the Volunteer Centres, over 12,400 new volunteers have registered with the Volunteer Centres.
- Over 1000 volunteers have been referred to organisations requiring volunteers with over 200 of these volunteers placed to date. This initiative is continuing and the figures on volunteers referred and placed with organisations continues to increase in line with demand.

Supports to Community and Voluntary Sector:

Through our ongoing engagement with the Community and Voluntary sector, the Department is keenly aware of the challenges faced by the sector whilst meeting increased demands on many of their services. With ongoing social restrictions, the sector has seen fundraised and earned/ traded income collapse.

For a significant portion of the sector, previously announced supports such as the Temporary Wage Support Scheme and credit / loans to small businesses are unsuitable owing to negligible payroll costs for volunteer dependent organisations, and the inability to recover income lost due to the crisis. While assurances have been provided regarding continuity of grant funding, in many cases it is insufficient to ensure service delivery at current levels as most often we do not operate a full cost recovery model, additionally non-pay costs are often ineligible for offsetting by grant / service level agreement funding. Conscious of these factors, the Department launched a €40 million package of supports for Community and Voluntary Organisations, Charities and Social Enterprises on 8 May.

On May 11th a €40 million support package for the Community and Voluntary Sector, Charities and Social Enterprises was launched by Government and is being administered by the Department. This funding is being made available through the Dormant Accounts Fund, which is specifically set aside to support initiatives which will benefit the most disadvantaged groups in society.

The package consists of:

- A €35 million 'COVID-19 Stability Fund' which will provide a level of support to qualifying organisations who are most in need and have seen their trading and/or fundraising income drop significantly during the crisis; and
- A €5 million Government commitment to a Philanthropy Fund, (Innovate Together) which will focus on supporting responses to the COVID-19 crisis that require innovative and adaptive solutions to existing and emerging challenges.

First announcements under this package were made on June 26th with the 179 applications receiving funding amounting to €10.5 million. Further announcements will follow.

This new funding is provided in addition to the more than €45 million in funding, announced last November, for the Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2020. That funding was allocated for 43 separate measures to be delivered across 9 Government Departments to benefit disadvantaged groups.

The funding package for these organisations is complementary to the range of other supports provided by the Government to support businesses, employers and employees on foot of the crisis.

Supports to Libraries:

- In response to the crisis, systems were put in place to allow people to join the library online without having to physically visit. This has resulted in an upsurge in online members with over 30,000 new members joining the library in March 2020 compared to just over 17,000 in March 2019.
- DRCD subsequently provided €200,000 funding to purchase an additional 5,000 eBooks and eAudiobooks to meet the rising demand for online services. Members now have access to an online catalogue containing over 33,300 eBooks and 25,200 eAudiobooks, 4,000 magazines, 2,500 online newspapers from over 100 countries, over 500 e-learning courses and over 100 online language courses, all free of charge. A further investment of €200,000 was announced on 31 May 2020 to support the provision of additional eBooks and eAudiobooks in order to meet the significant increase in demand for access to the public library online service during the COVID-19 crisis. A fund of €20,000 was also announced to support the provision of an EasyReader collection of books for emerging adult readers and people with literacy needs. The funding will be directed through the Local Government Management Agency.
- Public libraries are continuing to innovate with various initiatives online to keep young people entertained, including online STEAM Workshops, Virtual Coding Workshops, Facebook Live story times and writing competitions. The annual 'Spring into Storytime' programme, which is normally provided in branches, is being delivered entirely online this year.
- In some participating library authorities books are now being distributed to people cocooning. It is hoped to extend this service to the prisons, Direct Provision Centres and isolated individuals. It is unlikely that it will be available nationally due to the redeployment of staff in many authorities.
- A large number of the libraries have also collaborated with Engineers Ireland to manufacture 3D facial shields for health workers.

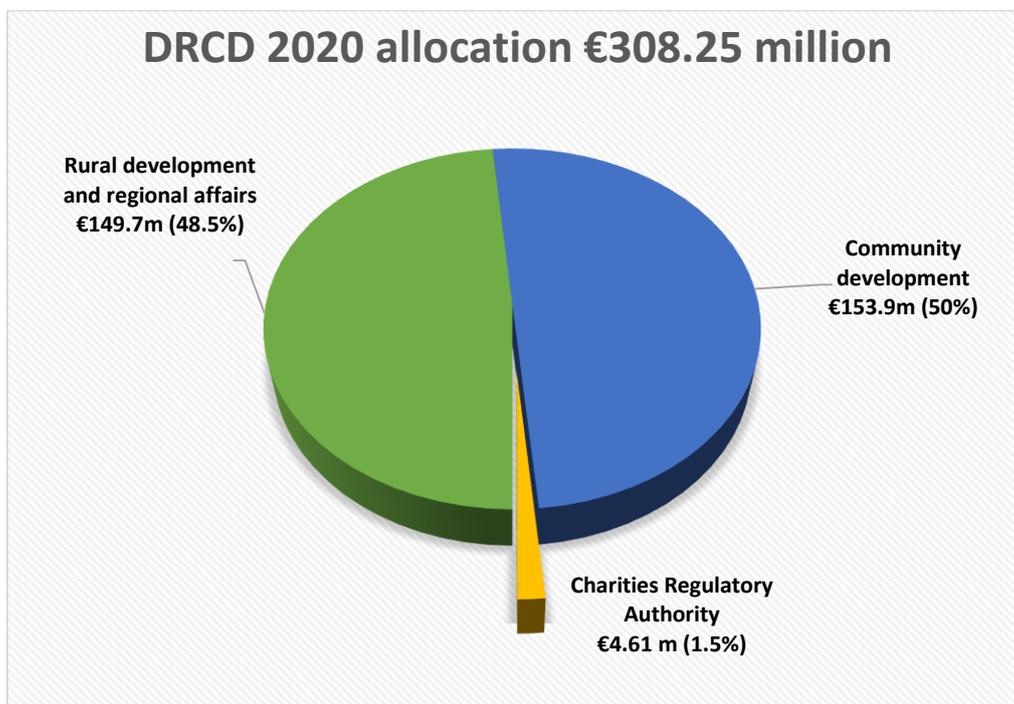
In respect of the Department's other programmes, funding commitments are being maintained, and though delays may be experienced in delivery for a period of time it is expected that all projects and initiatives will continue when safe to do so.

The 2020 Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR programme, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which were announced in recent weeks, all place a particular emphasis on supporting a post-COVD recovery.

3 Financial and Budgetary Context

Overview

The Revised Estimate 2020, published in December 2019, provides for a gross budget of €308.25 million for DRCD – comprising €158.25 million in current funding and €150 million in capital funding. This represents a 6% increase on the 2019 funding level of €291.2 million. The budget is split across the three programme areas of the department as below:



Provision for administration costs is included in this budget, with €12.06 million allocated for DRCD administration costs in 2020, of which €9.6 million is for staff salaries.

Capital spending is focused primarily on the rural development programme, with €133.8 million of the capital budget allocated to that programme area. This supports a range of capital schemes including LEADER, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, Town and Village Renewal, CLÁR etc.

Current spending is focused primarily on the community development programme, with €137.9 million of the current budget allocated to that programme area. This supports schemes including the Social Inclusion and

Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Community Services Programme (CSP) and other supports for the community and voluntary sectors.

The table details the allocations made in 2020 for the schemes operating across the rural development and community development programme areas.

DRCD 2020 ESTIMATE PROVISIONS	Current '000s	Capital '000s	Total '000s
V42 - RURAL & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (GROSS)	158,247	150,000	308,247
A - RURAL DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL AFFAIRS	15,780	133,882	149,662
A.1 - ADMINISTRATION - PAY	5,276	0	5,276
A.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	1,154	182	1,336
A.3 - WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION	2,049	0	2,049
A.4 - RURAL SUPPORTS	5,600	15,000	20,600
A.5 - LEADER	0	40,000	40,000
A.6 - TIDY TOWNS	1	0	1
A.7 - REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	1,700	700	2,400
A.8 - RURAL REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT	0	78,000	78,000
B - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	137,861	16,118	153,979
B.1 - ADMINISTRATION - PAY	4,177	0	4,177
B.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	891	152	1,043
B.3 - SUPPORTS FOR C&V SECTOR	12,587	0	12,587
B.4 - SICAP - LOCAL/REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS	44,065	0	44,065
B.5 - LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES	2,405	0	2,405
B.6 - SUPPORTS FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES	5,233	1,267	6,500
B.7 - DORMANT ACCOUNTS MEASURES	10,070	2,500	12,570
B.8 - PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION	6,317	650	6,967
B.9 - IRISH WATER SAFETY	1,124	0	1,124
B.10 - LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHIVE SERVICE	1,102	7,049	8,151
B.11 – COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME	0	4,500	4,500 ¹
B.12 - COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMME	46,890	0	46,890
B.13 - SOCIAL INCLUSION UNITS	550	0	550
B.14 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS	2,450	0	2,450
C - CHARITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY	4,606	0	4,606

With regard to the above, it should be noted that the €15 million capital allocation for A.4 Rural Supports funds both the Local Improvement Scheme and CLÁR.

¹ €2.5m of this has been used for a COVID-19 Emergency Fund. The remaining budget is €2m.

Similarly, the €78 million capital allocation under A.8 Rural Regeneration and Development funds the following:

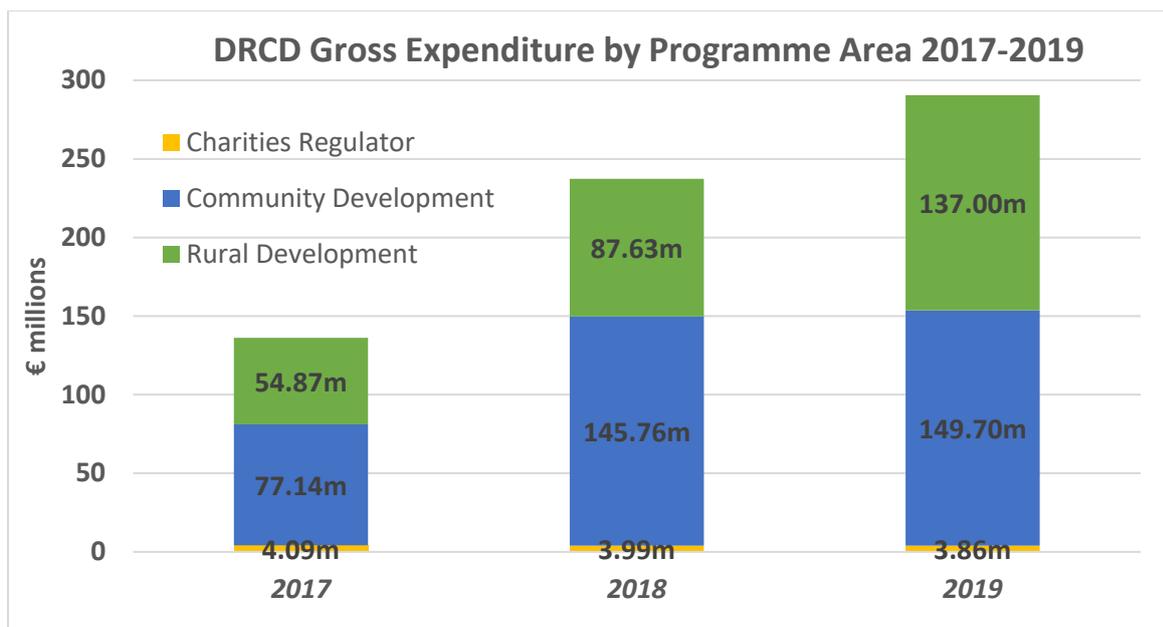
- RRDF Category 1 (i.e. shovel ready projects) & Category 2 projects (i.e. seed funding) (€53 million in total)
- Town and Village Renewal (€15 million)
- Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme (€10 million).

It is also worth noting that the Department's gross expenditure of €308.25 million in 2020 includes funding from receipts/appropriations-in-aid of €44 million. These are expected receipts from EU co-funded programmes LEADER (€25 million) and PEACE (€6.974 million); and expected receipts from the Dormant Accounts Fund (€12.6 million)

Monitoring of DRCD Financial Performance

As noted, the Department was established in July 2017, with an annual allocation of €162.6 million, of which €24.7 million was returned to the Exchequer at year end. Since then funding allocations have increased substantially to €239.2 million in 2018, €291.2 million in 2019 and €308.3 million this year.

Both 2018 and 2019 saw the Department manage its budgets very effectively, and fully utilise its allocations. In 2018 the Department had an outturn of €237.5 million. This equates to expenditure of 99.2% of the voted allocation. In 2019 the Department had a provisional outturn of €290.6 million. This equates to expenditure of 99.8% of the voted allocation.



With regard to ongoing monitoring and management of the DRCD financial performance, a profile of expected expenditure by month for each programme area is compiled at the start of the year. Expenditure relative to this profile is then monitored on an ongoing basis. Management Board and the Minister are updated on this expenditure performance on a monthly basis. This ensures effective oversight and budget management of the allocation provided to the Department.

Future year expenditure ceilings

Current and capital expenditure ceilings for the period 2020-22 were published alongside Budget 2020 for all Government Departments, and are detailed in the table below.

Year/ DRCD ceiling	2020	2021	2022
Current (€m)	158	158	158
Capital (€m)	150	152	175
Total (€m)	308	310	333

The above funding ceilings would see stable funding in 2021, followed by an increase of €23 million in capital funding in 2022. This funding increase is based on increased funding for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, as detailed in the National Development Plan.

Whilst these ceilings are in place and published, the annual allocations that are ultimately made each year remain subject to the annual budget negotiations.

Capital commitments and DPER sanction

To meet its strategic goals, and effectively manage its capital funding allocations, the Department must ensure that a good pipeline of capital project approvals are in place. This enables a consistent drawdown of capital funding each year and ensures that the Department fully utilises its resources.

Given the multi-annual nature of capital projects the Department typically builds up a pipeline of commitments for future years. All such commitments must be in line with the sanction in place from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER).

In order to safeguard public finances, DPER sanction limits capital commitments to certain maximum levels. As detailed in the table below, based on the 2020 capital allocation, the Department can enter into commitments of up to €277.5 million for future years.

Sanctioned level of future capital commitments (€ millions)		
2020 capital allocation	150	
75% (2021 Sanctioned commitment level)		112.5
60% (2022 Sanctioned commitment level)		90
50% (2023 Sanctioned commitment level)		75
Total sanctioned capital commitment level		277.5

The Department compiles and updates the position with regard to such funding commitments on a regular basis. The existing level of capital commitments across programme areas is in line with this sanction. The significant outstanding capital commitments include RRDF (€117 million), LEADER (€97 million), Town and Village Renewal (€29 million), ORIS (€15 million) and CLÁR (€6 million). The Department must continue to manage the level of future approvals, and commitments entered into, in line with this sanction.

Other budgetary issues of note

As detailed, the Department is effectively managing its budget allocations and ensuring the allocations provided are fully utilised. However, specific funding pressures arise within the Department due to our delivery of two EU funded programmes, LEADER and PEACE. Both programmes are demand led, with the Department having limited control over the timing of payment demands in any given year. The Department will seek to continue to manage these demands within our allocated resources, however, there remains a risk that these demand led EU programmes could give rise to capital funding pressures in 2020 or future years that cannot be met within the overall resources allocated to the Department.

Additional Expenditure around COVID-19

Approval has been provided for a number of additional costs associated with COVID-19. These include:

Additional funding for Covid measures

Support	Amount	Funding Position
Volunteer Support Programme	€407,000 (current)	€257,000 from A.4 Rural Supports (current) €150,000 from A.7 Regional Development (current) To B.3 Supports for C&V Sector (current)
Philanthropy Fund 'Innovate Together'	€5m (current)	Additional Dormant Accounts Funding under B.X Dormant Accounts Fund - Covid Supports (current)
Covid-19 Stability Fund	€22m (current)	Additional Dormant Account Funding – DRCD portion of €35m Stability Fund under B.X Dormant Accounts Fund - Covid Supports (current)

Covid measures delivered using money allocated to existing schemes

Support	Amount	
Covid 19 Community Outreach	€450,000	No change – now from existing current resources in B.4 SICAP and Local/Regional Development supports.
Seniors Alert Scheme Befriending Initiative	€200,000	No change – existing current resource in programme area
Covid-19 Emergency Fund	€2.5m	No change - existing CEP resources

CSP Support Fund	€1.2m	No change - existing CSP resources
Funding for Libraries – eBooks and audiobooks	€400,000	No change - existing libraries resources

4 Policy Framework

RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Action Plan for Rural Development (2017-2019)

Unit: Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit (TP)²

Status: Published January 2017, concluded end 2019.

Policy outline

The Action Plan for Rural Development was launched in January 2017 as the first ever whole-of-Government approach to supporting the economic and social progress of rural Ireland. The measures outlined in the Action Plan focus on supporting sustainable rural communities, job creation, rural connectivity, culture and tourism. The Action Plan has been the key vehicle for delivery of the Government's support for rural development over the last three years.

Stakeholders

The Action Plan contained over 270 actions to be delivered across Government, State agencies and other bodies.

Implementation

Progress on the implementation of the actions was overseen by a Monitoring Committee, chaired by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, and including senior representatives of relevant Government Departments and key rural stakeholder interests. Progress Reports on implementation are published twice-yearly. The final Progress Report, which concluded the Action Plan's lifecycle, was published on the Gov.ie website in June 2020.

Communications

Progress Reports published twice a year, outlining implementation status of individual actions. Case studies illustrating the positive impact of delivery of measures in the Action Plan included in Progress Reports, and published on both Gov.ie and Rural Ireland website (www.ruralireland.ie).

² TP – Based in Trinity Point BA - Ballina

Rural Development Policy 2020-2025

Unit: Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit

Status: In development, significantly advanced, with publication possible in Q3 2020 if required.

Policy outline

Our Rural Future (working title) is a new overarching policy statement and five-year programme which builds on the progress achieved through the *Action Plan for Rural Development*. *Our Rural Future* reflects a whole-of-Government approach to supporting the economic, social and cultural development of rural Ireland. It is forward-looking and ambitious and is underpinned by the *Project Ireland 2040* objective of achieving balanced regional development and economic growth. It complements other Government policies and initiatives such as the Climate Action Plan, Future Jobs Ireland, and the National Broadband Plan rollout, and places a particular emphasis on the relevance of those initiatives to rural areas.

Other key themes include the centrality of communities, the role of towns and villages in economic recovery, optimising digital connectivity, and coastal and island communities.

Stakeholders

Rural communities, enterprises, other Government Departments, LAs and State Agencies.

The development of the policy is underpinned by a deep level of engagement with rural stakeholders. A series of 11 regional consultation workshops were held by DRCD to obtain views on the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities and economies over the next five years. In total, approximately 500 people attended these workshops. In addition, two special workshops were held with young people to obtain their views, and two “town hall” type public engagements also took place. The workshops were backed up by an on-line survey, to which over 1,700 responses were received. Bilateral meetings

were held with other Departments and Agencies to identify areas of relevance to the policy. An Inter-Departmental Working Group was established to inform the high-level development of the policy and to ensure synergies with key policies across Government.

The draft policy is currently being reviewed to reflect the impact of COVID-19 on rural communities and economies, through consultation with stakeholder Focus Groups.

Implementation

The commitments in the policy will be delivered progressively over the lifetime of the policy. Each will be led by a named Government Department, State agency or other body. Progress on the implementation of the policy will be overseen by appropriate structures including a High-Level Oversight Group and a Monitoring/Advisory group to ensure that implementation is on track. Progress updates will be published every six months. An annual work programme will enable further actions to be added over the lifetime of the policy.

Communications

Proposed development and roll out of a rural communications campaign to highlight the measures outlined in the policy and the impact of delivery on rural economies and communities.

SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES: A FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN IRELAND 2019-2024

Unit: Libraries and Community Development Policy (BA)

Status: Published 28 August 2019

Policy outline

With actions to be implemented over the next five years, the Strategy sets a general direction of travel for government policy in relation to the community development, local development and the community and voluntary sectors for the coming decade.

The high-level objectives and actions will support consultation, inclusion and participation of communities, particularly disadvantaged communities, in public policy and decision-making at all levels. The Strategy also copper-fastens the renewed relationship and partnership between government and the community and voluntary sectors which has developed during the course of its preparation.

Stakeholders

The community and voluntary sector, local and community development representatives, the Cross-Sectoral Group on Local and Community Development, local authorities, other Government Departments.

Implementation

Bi-annual meetings with the Cross-Sectoral Group (CSG) on Local and Community Development. Work plans drafted on an annual basis with the input of the group. Ongoing engagement with the sector via their representatives on the CSG. Formation of subgroups consisting of Group members and other external members to progress specific bodies of work. Next meeting of full CSG scheduled for June 2020.

NATIONAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE POLICY FOR IRELAND 2019-2022

Unit: Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise (TP)

Status: Published July 2019

Policy outline

The aim of the policy is to provide a framework to support Social Enterprises in Ireland, whether operating in rural or urban communities. A Social Enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. The Policy is focussed on three core objectives, 1) Building awareness of social enterprise, 2) Growing and strengthening social enterprise, 3) achieving better policy alignment (with National and International policies).

Stakeholders

Social enterprises, social entrepreneurs, organisations supporting social enterprise - (Local Development Companies, local authorities, financial institutions, Higher Education Institutions), other Departments, (Dept. Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Dept. Justice & Equality, Dept. Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Dept Climate Action, etc.), commercial business groups, community groups, legal experts, etc.

Implementation

Implementation of three Policy Objectives (subdivided into 26 Policy Measures) will be achieved with the support of the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group who are drawn from among the various stakeholders listed above. The policy details a summary of Policy Measures, the timeframe for completion of each measure, and the lead body and implementing partner(s) for each measure. Annual updates on the progress of implementation are to take place following consideration by the National Social Enterprise Implementation Group.

Communications

A significant 2020 output will be the development and delivery of a National Social Enterprise Awareness Strategy. The Policy stipulates that a National Social Enterprise Conference will be hosted by the Department and held annually. Some of the Policy measures may require further consultation with the various stakeholders and with the general public.

OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2022: INSPIRING, CONNECTING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Unit: Libraries and Community Development Policy (BA)

Status: Launched in June 2018

Policy outline:

The key aims of the Strategy are to –

- increase active membership from 16% of the population to 30% by end-2022.
- improve access, use and visibility of the library as a community hub, and develop the library as a focal point for community and cultural development.
- open 100 *My Open Library* branches.
- upgrade library buildings.
- remove barriers to access such as eliminating fines and membership charges (completed in January 2019).
- enhance the digital capacity across the library service.
- raise general awareness of the services available through public libraries with a national promotion campaign.

Stakeholders

The Strategy was co-developed with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the County and City Management Association (CCMA). The local authorities and County/City Librarians as well as the public are key stakeholders.

Implementation

The Strategy has an Implementation Action Plan overseen by the Libraries Development Committee which comprises representatives from DRCD, LGMA, CCMA and County Librarians.

Communications

A national promotion campaign which was funded by the Department was launched on 20 January 2020. A Libraries Open Day was held on the 29 February and was very successful, with 5,728 people registering as new members in the week that followed. This was an increase of 27% compared to the same week the previous year.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY 2020-2025

Unit: Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes (TP)

Status: Final Public Consultation – January 2020. Publication anticipated in 2020

Policy outline

The purpose of this Strategy is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. The Strategy also provides an opportunity for Government to acknowledge how important volunteering is to the well-being of the nation and to steer the delivery of an agreed and ambitious vision of volunteering.

Stakeholders

A National Advisory Group on Volunteering (NAG), chaired by the Minister for State, was convened for this Strategy and includes interdepartmental and sectorial representatives respectively.

Implementation

Final consultation phase was completed by 31/01/2020 with a final draft for approval to be submitted to National Advisory Group on Volunteering (NAG) in Q2/Q3 2020. , prior to submission to Government.

Communications

Final submissions from the public on 31/01/2020. The NAG was scheduled to convene in February 2020 to examine these returns and agree a draft for submission for Government but this will be rescheduled to a later date. Given the role that volunteering has played in terms of the community response to COVID-19, it will be useful to incorporate the experience and lessons learnt into the strategy formulation.

NATIONAL OUTDOOR RECREATION POLICY/STRATEGY

Unit: Rural Programmes & Policies (BA)

Status: National Strategy to be developed through Comhairle na Tuaithe (Countryside Council) in 2020.

Policy outline

The Department is responsible for the co-ordination of policy measures to support the development of the outdoor recreation sector, and specifically for the production of a National Outdoor Recreation Strategy that will be developed through Comhairle na Tuaithe and delivered across Government. A cohesive Outdoor recreation Strategy has the capacity to benefit rural economies, while also promoting responsible use of the countryside.

It is anticipated that the new Strategy will be developed in the second half of 2020 with a view to launch in 2021.

Stakeholders

Public & private landowners, relevant public bodies (e.g. Sport Ireland, Failte Ireland), recreation users (e.g. Mountaineering Ireland, Angling Council of Ireland), commercial providers (e.g. adventure companies), infrastructure providers (e.g. local development companies), responsible use advocates (e.g. Leave no Trace, Irish Uplands Forum) etc.

Implementation

Implementation to be monitored by Comhairle na Tuaithe and facilitated through an inter-departmental/agency group to be established by DRCD.

DORMANT ACCOUNTS FUND

Unit: Finance and Evaluation Unit (TP)

Policy outline

The main purpose of the Dormant Accounts Acts is to reunite account or policy holders with their dormant funds in credit institutions or insurance undertakings. These bodies are required to take steps to identify and contact the owners of dormant accounts and unclaimed life assurance policies. Any unclaimed funds are transferred each year by the holding institution to the Dormant Accounts Fund which is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). The transfer of moneys takes place on the basis that the beneficial owner will have a guaranteed right of reclaim to their property at any time in the future.

The legislation also introduced a scheme for the disbursement of funds that are unlikely to be reclaimed for the purposes of measures to assist:

- the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
- the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged or;
- persons with a disability.

The Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012 provides for the Minister to put in place Disbursement Schemes which cover a three year period. These schemes set out the principles and priority areas for disbursements over the period. Subsequent Annual Action Plans, which are also prepared by the Minister in consultation with other Ministers, detail the approved measures for funding each year.

As the beneficial owner may reclaim their funds at any time, the use of money from the Fund adds to Government debt. It is, therefore, Voted expenditure subject to the same constraints as any other Voted expenditure. This limits the ability to utilise money from the fund – with the amount approved each year subject to the limits on Voted expenditure.

Current Position

The 2020 Dormant Accounts Action Plan was published in November 2019. It approved funding for 43 measures across 9 Government Departments, with total funding of €45.5 million approved. These measures are to be delivered by each relevant Government Department throughout 2020 using voted moneys, with the funding then recouped from the Dormant Accounts Fund. Of the €45.5 million approved, €12.57 million in funding rests with DRCD for the delivery of 8 measures within this Department.

As noted, the Minister is responsible for the development of 3 yearly Disbursement Schemes; annual Action Plans; and annual reports. A new disbursement scheme is required to be prepared this year. It will set out the principles for Action Plans prepared over the 2020-22 period. The next Action Plan will be prepared over summer 2020, for approval and publication in late October/early November, after agreement on Budget 2021.

The legislation also requires for an Annual Report on the operation of the fund to be prepared by 30 June each year, covering the previous year of operation of the fund.

To co-ordinate this work area across Government the Department chairs an interdepartmental group on Dormant Accounts which meets twice yearly. This ensures co-ordination of the delivery of measures, and active participation by Departments in the Fund.

The value of the Dormant Accounts Fund at 31st December 2019 was €295 million. Of this, €95 million is set aside by the NTMA as a reserve for future reclaims by account holders. This leaves €200 million for use in future Action Plans. However, as noted, the use of this money is subject to the constraint of it being voted expenditure which limits annual funding to that amount which has been voted upon as part of the Budget.

The operation of the Fund has improved greatly over the last number of years. The amount of money used from the fund has increased from €12 million in 2016, to €16 million in 2017, and to €28 million in 2018. 2019 saw expenditure of over €37 million.

Legislation:

- Dormant Accounts Act 2001.
- Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003.
- Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012 – which provided for the exercise of functions previously exercised by a “Dormant Accounts Board” by the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government. These functions now rest with the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

Consultancy on potential additional sources of dormant assets:

A review of possible additional sources of dormant assets is currently being carried out by consultants and is nearing completion. The purpose of the review is to identify possible additional sources of dormant assets that could be utilised to support worthwhile causes; to assess the scale of the assets; and to consider how they could be utilised.

Given the current scale of the fund, and the issues around utilising funds given that it increases Government debt, the review is taking place in the context of potentially supplementing the fund in the longer term.

DOG CONTROL / BURIAL GROUNDS

Unit: Social Inclusion and Communities (BA)

Dog Control

Policy outline:

The Department is responsible for Dog Control policy and legislation, and publishes annual statistics on the local authority Dog Warden service, strays and unwanted animals, dog licences, enforcement action, operation of local authority dog pounds and dog breeding establishments.

The budget provision in 2020, under Subhead B.4.6, is €100,000. Funding is provided to meet various responsibilities, including statutory responsibilities, relating to dog control.

The Unit also proposes to open discussions with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the transfer of dog control functions to that department, in view of the link with their animal health and welfare functions.

Proposed amendments to the Dog Breeding Establishment Act and the Dog Control Act (and an associated Statutory Instrument) are detailed in the 'Legislative Programme Proposals' section of this document.

Burial Grounds & Cemeteries

The Unit has policy and legislative responsibility in respect of the regulation of local authority burial grounds. Under the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Acts, 1878 to 2001, local authorities are deemed to be burial boards for their respective functional areas. Acting in their capacity as burial boards, local

authorities are responsible for the management, regulation and control of burial grounds in their functional area.

PROJECT IRELAND 2040

Unit: Rural Fund and Corporate Support (TP)

Project Ireland 2040, launched in February 2018, is the Government's overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. It includes a detailed capital investment plan for the next ten years, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027, and the National Planning Framework which outlines the broader policy principles and priorities in planning for future population and economic growth to 2040.

As part of Project Ireland 2040, in addition to the programme of capital works set out, four new Funds were established:

- The €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, led by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, which seeks to secure more compact, sustainable growth in Ireland's five cities and other large urban centres;
- The €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, led by the Department of Rural and Community Development, which sets out to support job creation in rural areas, address de-population of rural communities and support improvements in our towns, villages and their hinterlands that enhance the quality of life of communities and enhance their attractiveness for families who want to live and work there;
- The €500 million Climate Action Fund, led by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, which seeks to support initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets; and
- The €500 million Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, led by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, which seeks to invest in the development and deployment of disruptive innovative technologies and applications, on a commercial basis, targeted at tackling national and global challenges.

Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board

The Secretary General of the Department is a member of the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board, which is made up of Secretaries General from the main capital spending Departments and meets regularly to ensure effective leadership of the implementation process.

A core function of the Delivery Board is to track delivery of projects and policies both in relation to capital investment and spatial planning. The Delivery Board seeks to identify potential challenges to successful implementation of Project Ireland 2040 (for example, in monitoring the construction market) and has been monitoring progress in terms of the rollout of the four Funds established under PI2040, the development of the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies, as well as successfully overseeing the update of the Public Spending Code in 2019.

Project Ireland 2040 Coordination Group

The Department is also represented at Principal Officer and Assistant Principal Officer level on the PI2040 Coordination group. The group is again made up of representatives from key capital spending Departments and provides a forum for Departments to discuss cross-cutting issues related to the delivery and communication of Project Ireland, for the identification of issues relating to implementation to be addressed and to agree on how the decisions of the PI 2040 Delivery Board can best be followed through.

The Group also provides a useful opportunity for the Department to coordinate with the other Government Departments who are delivering the Project Ireland 2040 Funds and the Department of Expenditure and Public Reform. The dialogue between the Departments leading on the four Funds is also maintained through representation on the Project Advisory Boards governing the conduct of the Funds and through bilateral and other contacts.

The Department liaises particularly closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, given the synergies between the Rural and Urban Funds.

BREXIT

Unit: Coordinated by Corporate Policy and Strategic Support Unit (BA/TP)

The Department has been actively engaged at all levels in Brexit preparedness and contingency planning and expects this to continue throughout 2020 as negotiations proceed.

Brexit coordination is led by the Corporate Policy and Strategic Support Unit and the Department is represented on the following groups, with attendance at other groups as required:

- Secretary General Brexit Group
- Assistant Secretary Brexit Group
- Brexit Coordinators Group

While not facing the same level of policy implications as other Departments (no Day 1/Week 1 issues were identified under our remit ahead of a potential no-deal Brexit), DRCD has a vital role, through its funding programmes and supports, in supporting all communities and rural Ireland in managing the impact of various Brexit scenarios.

- The uncertainties surrounding Brexit and its potential impacts on local economies and communities, particularly in the border region, reinforces the importance of the Department's role in building sustainability and resilience within communities.
- Brexit is considered as part of ongoing policy and programme decisions
- The Department is aware that we must build greater flexibility into our programme of funding to allow for responses to emerging needs and consider the requirements of the various scenarios for the future relationship.
- Impacts of Brexit are not certain but we are preparing to support our regions who may be adversely affected. Wherever there is greatest need we will react.
- Specifically, there are concerns among those working in the farming and agri-food sectors, which forecasts have shown have the potential to be most seriously affected by the various potential future relationship scenarios.

- In October 2019, the LEADER Food Initiative, a €15million fund for small food businesses, was broadened to increase the scope of participants eligible to avail of funding in light of expected market challenges that lie ahead.
- One issue that was identified was around the supply of Seniors Alert pendants from the UK – contingencies have been put in place through Pobal should this become an issue at the end of the transition period.

CLIMATE ACTION

Unit: Coordinated by Corporate Policy and Strategic Support Unit (BA/TP)

DRCD has also been actively participating in cross-Government climate action policy, and has lead responsibility for a number of actions in the Climate Action Plan, in addition to contributing to several others led by other Departments.

While individual units are responsible for delivery of actions, coordination of inputs and engagement with the Department of the Taoiseach is led by the Corporate Policy and Strategic Support Unit.

Communications is an important strand to achieving climate action objectives, and the Department is working with colleagues, through an interdepartmental sub-group, regarding the improvement of engagement with rural communities.

The Department currently attends the following groups on this issue:

- Climate Action Delivery Board (Secretary General)
- Senior Officials Group on Environment
- Just Transition Review Group
- Climate Communications Sub-Group

DRCD has a role in a number of actions as a lead or contributing Department, including:

- RRDF consideration of projects with a climate action focus
- Improving supports and awareness in communities (LCDCs, PPNs, Tidy Towns)

- Consideration in Policy Development (Social Enterprise, Rural Development Policy)

The Second Progress Report on the Plan (covering actions due in Q4 2019), is currently being finalised by the Department of the Taoiseach and DRCD has provided updates on its actions for this report. Work has also begun on the Third Progress Report.

- DRCD is also focused on achieving a Just Transition across Ireland and is represented on newly established Just Transition Task Force. A just transition is crucial to ensuring that the costs and impacts of the Plan do not disproportionately fall on certain regions, sectors and communities.
- DRCD continues to provide funding/supports to many local climate change initiatives, assisting with building community resilience. These include projects funded under the LEADER programmes, outdoor recreation and enterprise hub projects and funding for Tidy Towns committees.
- As well as being a key objective in the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy, Climate Action also features in the new rural development policy, *Our Rural Future 2020-2025*, which is currently nearing completion.
- Engaging with communities, particularly those experiencing marginalisation, or in rural Ireland, and supporting them remains key to the success of the Plan.

MOBILE PHONE AND BROADBAND TASKFORCE

- The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in September 2016 to address barriers to the rollout of the NBP and to improve access to services (both broadband and mobile phone) for consumers. The work of the Taskforce is jointly co-ordinated by DRCD and DCCA. The Taskforce has been (co-)chaired at Minister of State level up to now.
- The Taskforce has largely delivered upon its original remit, with engagement between industry actors and Government a particular high point. With the recent signing of the contract with National Broadband Ireland, it is an appropriate juncture to consider the future of the

Taskforce and what role it may have in the telecommunications area into the future.

5 Programmes and Supports

PROGRAMME AREA: A – RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS

CLÁR – (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais)

Subhead:	A.4 – Rural Supports
Budget 2020:	€5 million (Capital)
Unit:	Rural Programmes and Policies

Programme Outline:

- The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) provides funding for small-scale infrastructural projects in rural areas. It is a targeted capital investment programme for designated rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation, based on CSO data.
- There are designated CLÁR areas in all counties excluding Dublin, Kildare and Wexford. The amount of a county designated as CLÁR varies from county to county, for instance, all of Leitrim is a designated CLÁR area, whereas only small parts of County Wicklow are designated.
- CLÁR aims to support sustainable development in the designated areas by encouraging people to continue to live and work there. The funding works in conjunction with local funding and on the basis of locally identified priorities.
- CLÁR was first launched in 2001, however from 2010 to 2015 (inclusive) only historical commitments were honoured and no new funding was committed under the scheme.
- Since it's relaunch in 2016, the programme is delivered based on distinct funding "Measures" delivered primarily by Local Authorities, with the exception of the First Response Support Measure and Support for Mobility and Cancer Care Transport Measure.

Measures funded under the scheme since 2016 include:

2016

- Safety package for Schools/Community Facilities
- Outdoor Play Facilities Enhancement Scheme/support for the development of Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA).
- Local Access Roads (replaced by a designated LIS scheme in 2017).

2017

- Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures
- Play Areas
- Targeted Community Infrastructure Needs

2018

- Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures
- Schools/Community Play Areas(including MUGAs)
- First Response Support Measure Support (open to applications from Vol. Groups)
- Support for Mobility and Cancer Care Transport Support (open to applications from Voluntary Groups)

2019

- Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures
- Schools/Community Play Areas (including MUGAs)
- Community Wellbeing Support
 - a. First Response Support (open to applications from Vol. Groups)
 - b. Mobility and Cancer Care Transport Support (open to applications from Voluntary Groups)
 - c. Sensory Gardens

2020

- Measure 1: Schools/Community Safety measures (expanded in 2020)
- Measure 2: Community Recreation Areas (new in 2020)
- Measure 3: Community Wellbeing Supports, comprising:
 - Meals on Wheels and linked services (new in 2020)
 - Mobility and Cancer Care Transport

Delivery:

- The 2020 CLÁR Programme was launched on 25 June. The closing date for applications for all measures is 28 August 2020.
- On the basis of this timeframe, announcement of successful applications will be made in late Q3/Q4.
- The following table outlines the CLÁR funding approved and the number of projects approved from 2016 to date:

	No. of applications	No. of projects approved	Funding approved	Amount remaining to be drawn down
CLÁR 2016	958	638	€8.2m	Nil (prefunded)
CLÁR 2017	521	231	€6.9m	€33,900
CLÁR 2018	486	389	€11.8m	€454,407
CLÁR 2019	494	179	€5.9m	€5,027,142
Total	2,459	1,437	€32.8m	€5.5m

Current position:

- The 2020 round of funding under the CLÁR Programme was launched as part of the Department's Rural Development Investment Programme. The supports provided through CLÁR have been tailored this year to help rural communities to respond to the new COVID-19 environment.
- There are also a number of CLÁR projects approved in prior years that will be completed in 2020.
- A review of the CLÁR programme has been initiated which will examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data, and possibly the addition of new socio-economic criteria.

- The Department is working with National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) in Maynooth University in respect of this review. It is anticipated that this element of the review will be completed in Q2/early Q3 and will be followed by a wider stakeholder engagement. It is likely therefore that any new criteria for the CLÁR programme will apply from 2021.

Challenges to delivery:

- A significant percentage of projects, around schools in particular, do not complete on time. Under the 2019 scheme, a longer timeframe for project completion of such projects has been provided.
- The scheme stipulates that facilities – particularly play areas - must be open to the public without appointment. This can cause issues for community groups and schools as regards insurance; in other cases the insurance is covered by the Local Authority.

Communications:

- Press Release to launch the 2020 scheme and to announce the successful projects under the different measures

Local Improvement Scheme (LIS)

Subhead:	A.4 Rural Supports
2020 Budget Allocation:	€10 million (Capital)
Unit:	Rural Programmes and Policies

Programme Outline:

- The Local Improvement Scheme, (LIS) is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in rural areas which are not under the normal maintenance of the Local Authorities. The scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and is administered through the Local Authorities.

- 25 Local Authorities (County Councils) in rural areas are eligible for LIS funding.
- There was no dedicated funding available for this scheme for a number of years due to constraints on public expenditure. The scheme was re-launched in 2017. In 2016, LIS was a measure under the CLÁR programme.
- Allocations to each relevant Local Authority under the 2020 LIS were published by the Department in Q1 2020.
- The statutory basis for the Local Improvement Scheme is contained in Section 81 of the Local Government Act, 2001. The scheme is also guided by a scheme outline from 2002 which sets out the broad scheme parameters. This is currently under review, in consultation with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA).
- A Focused Policy Assessment of the scheme has also been completed by the Department's Evaluation Unit.
- The following table outlines the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) allocations and expenditure, number of roads approved and completed from 2017 to date;

Allocations and Expenditure 2017 to date			
Year	Total Allocation	Spend in Calendar Year	Number of Roads Completed
2017	€17,539,167	€16,960,703	717
2018	€20,800,712	€16,400,734	932
2019	€10,000,002	€13,629,190	405
2020	€10,000,000	€37,325	TBC
Total	€58,339,881	€47,027,952	2,054

Delivery:

- Local Authorities are allocated a defined amount based on the physical area of the county.
- Local Authorities decide which roads they will prioritise.
- Eligible projects under the Local Improvement Scheme include:

- roads which provide access to parcels of land of which at least two are owned or occupied by different persons engaged in separate agricultural activities, or
- provide access for harvesting purposes (including turf or seaweed) for two or more persons or shall in the opinion of the Local Authority be used by the public.
- Up to 25% of the projects put forward by the Local Authority can lead to important community amenities like graveyards, beaches, piers or tourist or heritage sites; Local Authorities can pay the matching contribution for these roads.
- Landowners/Householders must pay a local contribution towards the cost of the works. The local contribution is set at 10% for eligible roads with up to and including five householders/landowners and is set at 15% for those with six or more householders/landowners.
- In 2019, a number of small, but significant, changes applied to the scheme:
 - Local Authorities were allowed to claim up to 10% of the net cost of the projects selected for administration— a reduction of 5%;
 - Local contributions by individual households or landholders was capped at €1,200. The cap only applied to roads where ALL beneficiaries contributed.

Current Position:

- €10 million secured for LIS 2020.
- Allocations for each county were published on the Department’s website in Q1

Challenges to delivery:

- The Local Authorities tend to complete these small projects at the end of the year after their main volume of work is completed, leading to very late drawdown of funding from the Department.

Communications:

- Generally, a Press Release is issued when the scheme is launched, with a breakdown of each Local Authority’s funding allocation.

The Walks Scheme

Subhead:	A4: National Rural Development Schemes
Budget 2020:	€4m (Current)
Unit:	Rural Programmes and Policies

Programme Outline:

- The Walks Scheme facilitates the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's key walking trails by contracting landholders to undertake maintenance work on the trails in line with agreed work plans.
- Payments under the Scheme are in the region of €2.6m per annum.
- The Department part-funds an insurance policy, held by Sport Ireland, which provides protection to the landowner against public liability claims arising on their section of the trail, or adjoining land.

Delivery:

- The Walks Scheme is currently operating on 39 trails supported by 1,970 landowners and is being managed by 16 Local Development Companies (LDCs) around the country.
- At present, the Department funds Rural Recreation Officers (RROs) in 12 of these LDCs who, amongst other rural recreation initiatives, administer the Walk Scheme.
- Total costs in respect of the Scheme in 2019 were in the region of €2.8m, made up as follows:
 - Just over €2m was paid to 1,970 individual participants;
 - €623,500 was paid under Service Level Agreements with LDCs for administration of the scheme, and
 - €188,900 was paid for materials.

Current Position

- The Action Plan for Rural Development included a commitment to double the number of walks covered by the Scheme. In line with these commitments, annual funding for the scheme has doubled from €2 million to €4 million.
- In February 2019, Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were invited from suitable trails deemed ready to be added to the scheme. To date, 62 EOIs have been received from 18 LDCs. This is an open-ended EOI process.
- In December 2019, it was announced that 10 new trails and one new RRO (in Leitrim) would be added to the Scheme under phase 1 of the expansion. The Department is currently in the process of bringing these walks onto the Schemes through the work of the relevant LDCs and RROs.
- A review of the Walks Scheme will take place in the coming months. The terms of reference include examining how the scheme is currently delivered and the role and resourcing of the RROs.
- The review will also consider the level of funding provided to the local development companies to deliver the scheme.
- A Request for Tenders for the review closed on 1 May 2020. Evaluation of the tenders has been completed and the contract has been awarded.
- The recommendations of the review, when completed later in 2020, will inform decisions on the further strategic expansion of the scheme.

Challenges to delivery:

The outcome of the Review may dictate changes in the strategic direction of the Scheme, some of which may have additional cost implications. It could recommend, for instance, that additional RROs be recruited to cover new areas, and that trails in parts of the country not currently served by the scheme are taken onto the scheme.

It is worth noting, however, that the recruitment of additional RROs and/or addition of new trails may take some time, as all trails under the scheme must meet standards set by Sport Ireland and are assessed against those standards.

Communications

- Press releases announcing the expansion of the scheme in December 2019;
- Further press releases expected as scheme expands.

Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Programme

Subhead: A.4.5 Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise

Budget 2020: €400,000 (Current)

Unit: Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise

Programme Outline:

Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise subhead allocation of €400,000 will support actions across both strands of the Unit's work – delivery of the new Rural Development Policy and the new National Policy on Social Enterprise, which was published in 2019.

Delivery:

Commitments include holding a National Social Enterprise Conference 2020, support to the Irish Research Council Postdoctoral fellowship in Social Enterprise, the development and delivery of a Social Enterprise Awareness Strategy, delivering several stakeholder engagement events in the context of the new rural policy as well as a Rural Youth Assembly, the development of a Dark Skies Strategy and support to research in the area of rural development.

Challenges to delivery:

Ambitious timelines will place pressure on existing level of financial resources and human resources.

Communications:

Significant Social Enterprise Awareness Strategy will be developed in first half of 2020 and delivered throughout the year in partnership with stakeholders and under the guidance of the Social Enterprise Implementation Group.

Communications measures to be undertaken in the context of the new Rural Development Policy when launched.

Both strands of communication present a significant opportunity to develop the profile of DRCD amongst the general public and wider stakeholder groups.

LEADER 2014 – 2020 programme

Subhead: A.5 – LEADER – Rural Economy Sub-programme

Budget 2020: €40 million, Capital

Unit: LEADER Policy & Operations Unit

Programme Outline:

LEADER supports both private enterprise and community groups in delivering projects aimed at improving the quality of life and encouraging the diversification of economic activity in rural areas. It accounts for over 6% of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, with planned expenditure of €250 million in the period to 2020. This funding is co-financed by the EU at a rate of 63%. The RDP is overseen by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and predominantly focuses on the farming sector, including direct payments.

LEADER is governed by EU regulations that provide for the development and implementation of public-funded Local Development Strategies by partnerships of key public and private actors (Local Action Groups - LAGs) in the relevant area.

Funding is delivered through 29 Local Action Groups in line with the Local Development Strategies in respect of the 28 sub-regional LEADER areas in Ireland (2 LAGs in County Galway).

The LAGs are a mixture of Local Development Companies (LDCs) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) The LCDCs are committees of the Local Authority responsible for developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development.

The 2014-2020 LEADER programme funds projects under three main themes:

- Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation
- Social Inclusion
- Rural Environment

For the most part, projects selected for funding are determined by each LAG based on the objectives of their Local Development Strategies, as linked to these themes. There is also a small amount of funding provided at national level to support projects in the food sector and where Local Action Groups come together to jointly deliver Co-operation projects.

Delivery:

The table below provides details of expenditure under the LEADER Programme for the period 2015 to date. The majority of expenditure is core project spend. LAGs are entitled to draw down 25% of their total budget to cover administration costs. As project activity has ramped up over the programming period, expenditure on core projects has increased exponentially. Project payments are drawn down as approved works are completed and payment claims are submitted for approval.

LEADER Expenditure 2015 -2020

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
	€	€	€	€	€	€	€
Administration Costs	1,251,185	1,260,920	11,462,007	10,478,474	11,638,062	2,563,360	38,654,008
Core Projects	0	0	661,844	12,502,282	30,068,037	12,282,307	55,514,470
Food Initiative Projects	0	0	0	0	532,223	601,695	1,133,918
Co-Operation Projects	0	0	0	2,957	69,273	101,027	173,257

Total	1,251,185	1,260,920	12,123,851	22,983,713	42,307,595	15,548,388	95,475,652
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As of 26 April 2020, a total of 2,849 projects were approved by the LAGs for core funding of over €109 million. A further 425 core projects with a combined value in excess of €31 million were at earlier stages of the approvals process.

In addition, over 150 Food and Co-operation projects have been approved at national level under the thematic schemes referred to above.

Over 1,400 approved projects are now fully complete and the promoters have received their final grant payment.

Current position for 2020:

- Ensure that all LEADER funding has been allocated by the LAGs to project promoters by 31 December 2020 as currently required under EU Regulations.
- Ensure current Vote allocation is fully utilised and secure additional allocation as required to meet anticipated demand
- Input into the draft CAP Regulations for the period 2021-2027 in so far as these relate to the LEADER Programme.
- Input into the draft Transitional Regulations from the European Commission for the year 2021 in so far as these relate to the LEADER Programme
- Prepare for development of new LEADER 2021 – 2027 programme

Challenges to delivery:

- €40 million has been allocated to the LEADER Programme in the Department's Vote for 2020. Following a ramping up of project approvals, this may not be sufficient meet demand this year. Current indications are that in excess of €50 million will be required in 2020. Expenditure progress will be closely monitored over the course of the year.
- Delay in agreeing the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) at EU level will have implications for agreeing CAP Regulations for post 2020 period and the Transitional Regulations for the year 2021.

- Development of the new LEADER 2021 – 2027 programme particularly if there is further delay in agreeing Regulations at EU level.

Communications:

The National Rural Network (NRN) on behalf of the Department is currently finalising a publication of case studies of completed LEADER funded projects. It is hoped that this publication would be launched by the Minister with publicity around the launch.

Legislation:

Legislation is planned to enable Local Authorities to statutorily conduct certain verification checks on projects under the LEADER programme, but this has not yet been advanced.

Currently the verification checks are carried out under Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the Local Authorities on an administrative basis, but legal advice has suggested that this should be underpinned by primary legislation.

Inputs into wider government work:

CAP Consultative Committee: - (D/AFM)

The Principal Officer of LEADER Policy and Operations Unit sits on the CAP Consultative Committee chaired by the Assistant Secretary of the EU Division of DAFM.

This Committee is made up of a wide range of agricultural and rural development stakeholders to provide input into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) proposals for the period 2021-2027. Input from this Unit is in the context of the next LEADER Programme.

TIDYTOWNS

Subhead:

A.6 TidyTowns

2020 Budget Allocation: €1,000 (Current), plus funding from main sponsor

Unit: Rural Programmes and Policies

Programme Outline:

The TidyTowns Competition has been running since 1958. TidyTowns has become Ireland's most well-known and popular local environmental and sustainability initiative. Right from the start, the primary focus of TidyTowns was to encourage communities to improve their local environment and make their area a better place in which to live, work and visit.

This subhead provides a nominal sum for the administration and promotion of the National Tidy Towns competition and associated transnational competitions: Entente Florale (European), Communities in Bloom (International) and Ireland's Best Kept Towns (a North/South initiative). In practice, the competitions are funded through sponsorship provided by SuperValu and other secondary sponsors.

Delivery:

- The competition is known as the SuperValu TidyTowns competition. SuperValu are the title sponsor and are in their 29th year of sponsorship. The current sponsorship deal was due to run out on 31 December 2021, but has been extended by one year due to the COVID-19 disruption to the 2020 competition.
- The competition had a record number of 924 entrants in 2019.
- A team of 32 adjudicators are contracted by the Department to adjudicate each of the applications received.
- There are 8 categories in the competition:
 - Community - Your Planning and Involvement
 - Streetscape & Public Places
 - Green Spaces and Landscaping
 - Nature and Biodiversity in your locality
 - Sustainability - Doing more with less

- Tidiness and Litter Control
- Residential Streets & Housing Areas
- Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes
- The National Awards ceremony is normally held in September each year. There are also 4 Regional Award Ceremonies held in October/November each year and the Minister is given the opportunity to attend these ceremonies.
- A total of 319 prizes were awarded in the 2019 competition totalling €260,800 with a further €7,000 in non-cash prizes.
- The winner of the 2019 competition was Glaslough, County Monaghan.
- The decision was taken to cancel the 2020 SuperValu TidyTowns Competition due to Covid-19. On 20 May 2020 it was confirmed that funding that had been allocated to support the TidyTowns groups throughout the country this year will still be available to them, even though the 2020 SuperValu TidyTowns competition has had to be cancelled due to public health considerations. Funding of €1.4 million was allocated to TidyTowns groups in September 2019 to assist them in their preparations for the 2020 competition.

Transnational/international Competitions

The Department also coordinates Ireland's entries into a number of associated transnational/international competitions. These competitions have been postponed for 2020 and the entrants will be carry forward to the 2021 events.

- Glaslough was entered into the 2020 Communities in Bloom which is an international competition for national winners. It is held in Canada each year.
- Entente Floral is a European competition with 2 high achievers being nominated from the entrants to the TidyTowns competition each year. Keadue, Co. Roscommon & Carlow, Co. Carlow were nominated as Ireland's entrants for 2020.
- Ireland's Best Kept is an All-Island competition into which one nominee from each of the 8 population categories in the TidyTowns competition are entered. The 2020 competition was due to be hosted by the Northern Ireland Amenity Council in Belfast.

Grant Scheme

- In each of the last three years, a €1.4 million grant scheme was provided to support TidyTowns committees in their initiatives based on available savings within the Department. This scheme allowed each local committee to apply for a grant of between €1,000 and €4,000. Up to 900 Committees have benefited from these grants each year.

Current Position:

- 2020 competition was due to be launched on 26th March, but was deferred due to the Coronavirus. A decision on the running of the competition this year will be guided by public health advice.
- Discussions were being held with possible new secondary sponsors for 2020.

Challenges to delivery:

- Current Database is out of date and does not meet the current requirements of the competition. Tender for design and implementation of a new Database expected in 2020.
- Current sponsorship deal was to expires in 2021, but has been extended for one year.
- Current sponsorship combined with the nominal Subhead allocation does not meet the financial commitments for administration of the competition. Submission will be prepared for Estimates 2021 discussions to seek increase in Subhead allocation.

Communications:

- Periodic Newsletter to Groups.

- Press Releases issued in respect of Launches and various results and awards ceremonies for the SuperValu TidyTowns competition and associated ancillary competitions.
- Results Booklet listing winning entries printed each year. Commenced listing towns in both English and Irish in 2019.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)

Subhead:	A.7 Regional Economic Development
Budget 2020:	€608,025 - Capital
Unit:	Regional Development and Innovation

Programme Outline:

As part of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) roll-out, DRCD, in consultation with Local Authority Broadband Officers and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE), has identified more than 300 sites across the country that will act as Broadband Connection Points (BCPs). BCPs will be the first premises connected under the National Broadband Plan.

The majority of BCPs will be connected within the first 12 months post-NBP contract execution. All of these locations are in remote and rural communities and include some islands. The aim of the BCP initiative is to provide early onsite access to high-speed broadband for communities likely to wait longest for a permanent high-speed connection under the NBP.

BCPs are typically public buildings, such as schools, community centres and sports clubs. The BCPs will share this connectivity with the public, providing rural areas with onsite access to high speed broadband. There is potential for BCPs to provide a wide range of services for people living in the locality, such as hot-desking, accessing online services, trading online and taking part in digital literacy training.

The cost of connecting all locations will be shared between DRCD and DCCAE.

In addition, DRCD has committed to provide a capitation grant of €600 for each BCP in order to ensure that each location is ready to receive high-speed broadband. The total cost of this initiative is capped at €191,400. In addition, DRCD has also committed to supporting every Local Authority by providing funding for the initial connection of each BCP and 75% of the subsequent ongoing retail connection costs for all non-commercial BCPs for a period of up to 3 years, or until such time as the locality is connected under the NBP.

Current position

The tender for the provision of broadband services has been awarded to Vodafone, following a tendering process.

Communications

In collaboration with National Broadband Ireland, DCCAE and the winning Retail Services bidder, DRCD will oversee a demand stimulation and public awareness campaign aimed at raising the profile of the BCP network. While there will be high visibility communications activity around openings, launches and high profile / high impact sites, there will also be localised communications activities aimed at informing and supporting communities, BCP site owners and other stakeholders.

Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce

Subhead:	A.7 Regional Economic Development
Budget 2020:	Not Applicable
Unit:	Regional Development and Innovation

Programme Outline

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in September 2016 on foot of a Programme for Government commitment. The objective of the Taskforce was to address barriers to the rollout of the NBP and to improve

access to services (both broadband and mobile phone) for consumers. The work of the Taskforce is jointly co-ordinated by DRCD and DCCAIE. The Taskforce has been (co-)chaired at Minister of State level up to now.

A list of over 40 actions was initially identified and delivered, along with further actions in sequential Action Plans in 2017, 2018 and 2019. In total, some 85 actions have been identified since 2016, the majority of which have been delivered through the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders.

The Taskforce has largely delivered upon its original remit, with the introduction of a national road opening charging framework, a consumer-orientated mobile phone coverage map and the establishment of a network of Broadband Officers being some of the key deliverables. It has also encouraged closer engagement between industry and Government in solving telecoms issues.

With the recent signing of the contract with National Broadband Ireland, it is an appropriate juncture to consider the future of the Taskforce and what role it may have in the telecommunications area into the future.

DRCD and DCCAIE officials are of the view that the Taskforce has paved the way for a new, more collaborative way of working between Government Departments and key stakeholders, and wants to retain the sense of momentum which has been developed since 2016. This momentum extends beyond industry and includes positive relationships between public bodies.

Current position

The new Minister's approval will be sought in respect of proposals for the future direction of the Mobile and Broadband Taskforce.

Communications

Launch and press coverage when a decision is taken on the future direction of the Taskforce's work.

Support for Local Authority Broadband Officers

Subhead:	A.7 Regional Economic Development
Budget 2020:	€1.4 million
Unit:	Regional Development and Innovation

Programme Outline

The Broadband Officer (BBO) is the dedicated local point of contact in each Local Authority, with responsibility for promoting telecommunications infrastructure development. The BBO acts as the liaison with telecoms operators on telecommunications coverage and roll-out issues. The role has a particular focus on enabling and supporting the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and the development of Broadband Connection Points. BBOs are also responsible for developing a Local Digital Strategy in their areas to ensure that full use is made of the new broadband infrastructure under the NBP once in place.

Current position

The Department provides €42,000 each year to co-fund the employment costs of a Broadband Officer in each of the 31 LAs. The Department also organises regular BBO network meetings to allow for the exchange of ideas, experiences and expertise.

Communications

Social media opportunities throughout 2020 in parallel with the NBP/BCP roll out.

WiFi4EU

Subhead:	A.7, Regional Telecom Development
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Budget 2020: Not available - Contingent on LA draw down from EU

Unit: Regional Development and Innovation

Programme Outline:

The WiFi4EU Programme is a European Commission initiative to make Wi-Fi available to citizens in centres of public life, for example parks, libraries and town squares. The Wi-Fi networks will be free to use, free from advertising and will not harvest user data for commercial purposes (some usage data will be collected to ensure that value for money is achieved).

Local Authorities in Ireland may apply for 4 vouchers worth €15,000 each. The Department has committed to match each voucher secured from the Commission with up to an additional €15,000 to extend or otherwise improve Wi-Fi deployments.

The Department provided pre-funding of €311,000 to Local Authorities in 2019 to allow preparatory works to commence. In order to collect the balance, Local Authorities must submit evidence of actual expenditure and will then be reimbursed.

Delivery

The EC initiative has been divided into 4 separate calls for applications, starting with Call 1 in Q4 2018. Once a Local Authority has secured a voucher, they have 18 months to complete the Wi-Fi network installation. The co-funding from the Department will therefore be allocated in tranches to reflect the WiFi4EU timeline. This project will see the deployment of approximately 120 networks of free public WiFi throughout the country.

Current position

A number of Local Authorities plan to launch their WiFi4EU networks in 2020. Should all expected networks complete this year, a post-completion balance of €949,000 will be drawn down.

Communications

Awareness raising and communications activities have already commenced with a series of press statements issued by both the Department and Local Authorities. As networks are launched, the Department will push out information via PRs, social media content and will participate in events as appropriate.

Digital Innovation Programme

Subhead: A.7 Regional Economic Development

Budget 2020: Capital - None currently assigned.

Unit: Regional Development and Innovation

Programme Outline

The Digital Innovation Programme (DIP) is a funding mechanism administered by the Department to encourage Local Authority-led projects that use innovative digital technologies to benefit local communities.

Supported projects must be scalable or replicable elsewhere - learnings from the design, implementation and monitoring of the funded projects are disseminated among Local Authority Broadband Officers via a Review Report for each project that receives funding.

Since 2018, the Unit has distributed more than €800,000 to 26 projects run by 17 Local Authorities. Three DIP projects have won national innovation awards, with three further projects shortlisted for awards.

Current position

The pilot DIP proposal was funded in 2018 using savings elsewhere in the Department's Vote. While the pilot was very successful, at present, there are no funds available for a further round of funding in 2020.

Communications

No proposals at present, but as projects funded under the pilot come to fruition or expand, the opportunity is taken to highlight the Department's role in supporting these innovative projects.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

Subhead: A.8 Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

Budget 2020: €53 million - capital
(The A.8 Rural Regeneration and Development sub-head has a capital allocation of €78 million - €15 million is allocated for Town and Village Renewal, €10 million for ORIS, with the remainder for the RRDF).

Unit: Rural Regeneration and Development Fund Unit

Programme Overview

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is part of the overall investment programme for Rural Ireland administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development. €315 million has been allocated to the investment programme over the period 2019 to 2022.

The Fund is unique in that it seeks to support ambitious projects of a large-scale strategic nature which have the potential to be transformative for rural economies and communities.

The Fund also seeks to support projects which fall between or are excluded from other funding programmes delivered by the public sector.

In particular, the Fund is aimed at support such projects in rural towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and their outlying areas.

Currently, lead parties for applications to the Fund are State bodies, such as Local Authorities, State Agencies or Local Development Companies. These bodies, however, are strongly encouraged to engage with rural communities and other stakeholders to identify agreed targets for investment which will address issues identified in individual rural areas and communities.

Application and Approval Process

Applications to the Fund can be made under Category 1 or Category 2.

Category 1 are large infrastructure projects that are ready to commence, with planning and other consents in place. There is a minimum funding request of €500,000.

Category 2 projects are those which require support for further development to make them ready for Category 1 status. There is no minimum or maximum funding request.

Proposals to the Fund are generally not limited in terms of sector, with tourism, enterprise, community development and other areas all potentially supportable. However, the Fund has focused on achieving regeneration in rural towns and villages with a view to generating further economic and social activity within them.

Funding is awarded on a competitive basis and proposals submitted to the Fund undergo an extensive assessment process, as follows:

- The initial assessment and analysis process is undertaken by the RRDF team in the Department.
- The applications and internal assessments are then examined by the Project Advisory Board, made up of representatives from key Government Departments and external experts.
- The Minister of Rural and Community Development then makes the final decision on projects to be approved for funding based on the recommendations provided by the Department and the Project Advisory Board.

Project Delivery and Spending Profile

The first call for applications to the Fund closed in September 2018. Arising from the first call, 38 successful Category 1 projects and 46 Category 2 projects were announced, with funding of €86m provided from the Fund to support projects worth €117 million.

The second call for Category 1 applications closed in August 2019. Arising from the second call, 26 projects were approved for funding of €62 million to support projects costing €95 million.

To date, the Fund has now provided €148 million for 110 projects across Ireland, worth a total of €212 million.

Expenditure in relation to successful projects is now profiled out as far as 2023.

In terms of 2019 spend, the Fund released €31.3 million to 65 separate projects. Two Category 1 projects were completed in 2019 – the Gteic Digital and Innovation Hub in Spiddal, Co. Galway in October and the Ennistymon Digital Hub and Multi Service Centre in Co. Clare in December.

In 2020, projects already approved under the first and second calls are currently expected to draw down the full budgetary allocation of €53 million (€37.3 million relating to projects approved under the first call and €15.7 million relating to projects approved under the second call).

Further expenditure of €39 million is profiled in 2021 and €23 million in 2022 for projects already approved to date.

Current position

The second call for Category 2 applications was opened in December 2019 and will close on 28th February 2020. Following assessment, recommendations for successful projects were announced by the Minister in June 2020.

The third call for proposals under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund was announced on 19 June 2020. The closing date for the receipt of proposals is **12 noon, on Tuesday 1st December 2020** .

This call for applications to the Fund seeks to provide assistance in supporting economic recovery in rural areas in light of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and to assist in delivering sustainable regeneration in rural towns and villages, driving greater economic activity and helping to address

challenges such as dereliction and vacancy. Applications to the Fund which support in the decarbonisation of the economy and environmental sustainability are particularly welcome.

Issues Arising

The Department has put in place contractual arrangements designed to specifically negate risks in relation to implementation and undertakes regular one-to-one engagement with project leads to identify and manage any issues that might lead to non-delivery.

The Department has updated its due diligence procedures to provide more control in relation to costs, particularly those emerging following procurement. In addition, procedures for applications to the Fund contain requirements relating to ensuring realistic estimates for costs and timelines for delivery.

However, a very small number of projects have encountered difficulty in terms of delivery. This has led to the cancellation of one Category 2 project approved under the first call and the ongoing management of issues relating to project cost and funding shortfalls in a further 2 projects.

Impact to Date

The Fund is only in operation for just over 18 months but its impacts to date have been widely welcomed.

The scale of the projects being supported is larger than anything supported under programmes with similar aims in the past.

The application, assessment and project oversight processes are very streamlined, with the Fund being managed and delivered by a small team.

The RRDF team has worked with a wide range of stakeholders with a view to ensuring that local authorities and other organisations and the communities they serve are fully informed of the aims, intentions and requirements of the Fund and to ensure that the Fund continues to support the best projects in the areas where they are needed most.

Proposals to the Fund are therefore driven and guided by consultation and community input, ensuring that the proposals put forward enjoy the widest level of support possible.

Through the Fund, the Department is in a position where it can directly fund large capital projects which address issues in rural areas and do so in a very efficient and cost-effective way, with the lightest possible administrative burden for all parties to the process.

Inputs into wider government work:

Project Ireland 2040 Coordination Group - (D/PER)

DRCI Involvement: Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, Eddie Forsyth. Coordination with other Project Ireland Funds and Department of Expenditure and Public Reform.

Project Ireland Delivery Board (Secretary General)

Town and Village Renewal Scheme:

Subhead: A.8 (3) – Rural Regeneration & Development: Town and Village Renewal

Budget 2020: €15M Capital

Unit: Rural Programmes and Policies

Programme Outline:

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme (T&V) is part of a range of measures to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland under the Department's Rural Development Investment Programme.

The Scheme was introduced in 2016 and, to date, almost €68 million has been approved for more than 830 projects across the country. The central aim of the

Scheme is to support the revitalisation of towns and villages in order to improve the living and working environment for their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future.

The projects supported cover a range of activities from improving the public realm, to job creation initiatives such as the development of enterprise hubs and digital hubs. The focus of the Scheme is reviewed every year prior to launch.

The Scheme supports small to medium capital projects which enhance the town or village centre environment. Funding of between €20,000 and €200,000 is available for approved projects.

The Scheme is funded and managed by the Department and is administered through the Local Authorities. Under the Scheme, Local Authorities are required to advertise for Expressions of Interest from towns/village in their area and can then select up to 12 proposals for development into detailed applications to be submitted to the Department.

Delivery:

Projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme can take up to 2 years to deliver. The level of funding allocated each year is contingent on the budget available and the level of commitments likely to mature from previous years' allocations.

In 2019, funding of €15 million was approved for 156 project nationwide, while in 2018 funding of €21.3 million was approved for 290 projects.

See table below for details of Town and Village Renewal Scheme approvals and expenditure since 2016. Projects normally take up to 24 months to complete, therefore limited requests for funding have been received to date for projects approved under the 2019 Scheme.

T&V Scheme Year	No of applications received	No of projects approved	Grant Funding approved	Value of approvals drawdown to-date
2016	172	170	€9,880,000	€9,880,000 (paid in advance)
2017	313	281	€21,637,435	€19,780,430
2018	290	224	€21,320,121	€9,102,606
2019	309	156	€14,989,996	€106,960
Total	1,084	831	€67,813,099	€38,869,996

Current position:

Funding of €15 million has been allocated for the Scheme for 2020.

There is currently €29m of commitments outstanding from the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Schemes.

Details of a €15 million allocation for the Town & Village Renewal Scheme for 2020 were announced on 27 May, with a focus on supporting post-COVID economic recovery. The closing date for submission of applications under the general strand of the Scheme is 28 August 2020.

A new standalone Measure was included in the 2020 Scheme includes a simplified application and approval process to enable smaller projects which are part of a response to COVID-19 to be approved and delivered quickly. The Measure will provide funding of up to €25,000 per project, increasing to €40,000 for higher impact projects. Earlier closing dates of 3 July and 14 August

apply in the case of this Measure to enable Local Authorities to provide adaptations swiftly to support increase footfall in rural towns in a safe manner.

Challenges to delivery:

Projects funded under the T&V Scheme can take 18 to 24 months to complete, therefore projects announced in 2020 will not be fully completed until 2022.

Communications:

Press Releases are issued on launch of scheme and when successful projects are announced.

Associated Policy Area - Town Centre Living Initiative:

A pilot scheme, (the Town Centre Living Initiative) to encourage increased residential occupancy in rural towns and villages was launched in October 2018. The six towns participating in the pilot are:

- Boyle, Co Roscommon
- Callan, Co Kilkenny
- Ballinrobe, Co Mayo
- Banagher, Co Offaly
- Castleblayney, Co Monaghan, and
- Cappoquin, Co Waterford.

Funding of up to €100,000 was made available to each of these towns to assist in developing innovative proposals to encourage town centre living and bringing policy solutions forward.

It is envisaged that the lessons learned through this pilot can help to inform the approach to supporting and investing in rural towns and villages in the future. It is also envisaged that the pilot could lead to the development of more substantive proposals for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

Current position:

Representatives from each of the participating towns have met collectively on a regular basis to discuss the issues that are emerging from their work on the scheme. This included a workshop hosted by the Department in September 2019 which also involved other relevant experts in this area.

Officials from the Department and the relevant Local Authorities also discussed progress under the scheme with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Rural and Community Development at its meeting on 13 November 2019.

On 22 June 2020, a report on the pilot “Town Centre Living Initiative”, which examined how to encourage more people to live in rural town and village centres, was published.

The independent report, prepared by Space Engagers, outlines the approach taken by each town under the pilot to encouraging increased town centre living. It sets out the key issues identified in repurposing vacant properties for modern living, and the key findings which emerged. The report concludes by identifying a range of 15 suggested actions for further consideration. It is proposed to establish a Steering Group to examine these suggested actions and bring forward proposals to Government.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme - ORIS

Subhead: A.8 – Rural Regeneration & Development

Budget 2020: €10 million Capital

Unit: Rural Programmes and Policies

Programme Outline:

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) provides funding for the development, maintenance, enhancement or promotion of outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. The aim of the scheme is to provide outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland – projects

located within any of the five city boundaries are not currently eligible under the scheme.

The Measures funded under the scheme are as follows:

- Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing (up to €20,000)
- Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail/Amenity Development (up to €200,000)
- Measure 3: Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategic Trail/Amenity Development (up to €500,000)

Delivery:

Lead Applicants under Measures 1 and 2 of the scheme are Local Authorities, and Local Authorities or State Agencies for Measure 3, in consultation with other stakeholders. In 2018, Local Development Companies were also allowed to apply under Measure 1 as a lead applicant, but the response was relatively poor.

The Department entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Fáilte Ireland under the 2018 scheme to support the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, with Fáilte providing a funding contribution of €3 million for medium-sized projects.

Fáilte provided a further €4 million towards an €8 million allocation to Measure 2 and 3 projects under the 2019 call for proposals.

Fáilte have indicated that they wish to continue this collaboration in respect of medium and large ORIS approvals over the next number of years

Yearly Funding Approvals & Funding Drawdown

The following table outlines the ORIS funding approved and the number of projects approved from 2017 to date:

	No. of applications	No. of projects approved	Funding approved	Amount drawn down to date
ORIS 2017	376	251	€13.6m	€10.03m
ORIS 2018	381	224	€20.77m	€10.91m
ORIS 2019	284	153	€10.2m	€0
Total	1041	628	€44.57m	€20.94m

Current position:

- Current scheme criteria, applications forms, terms and conditions and scoring process are being reviewed prior to announcement of the 2020 programme.
- Funding of €10 million was announced under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for on 29 May. The Scheme will have an important role to play in supporting the Tourism sector in a post-COVID recovery, including when overseas tourism resumes.
- The deadline for submission of applications under Measure 1 is 30 September 2020. The deadline for other measures is 30 November 2020. Follow-up is required to finalise ongoing ORIS projects approved in previous years. At the end of 2019, there was €14 million in approvals that had not been drawn down by project promoters for 2017, 2018 and 2019 schemes.

Challenges to delivery:

- A review of the timelines specified for completion of projects, especially under Measures 2 and 3, is required in order to allow Local Authorities sufficient time to complete projects.
- The approach to assessing the large volume of applications received under the scheme will be reviewed, particularly the approach to the lower value Measure 1 type applications.

Communications:

Press Release on scheme launch and at funding announcement.

Atlantic Economic Corridor

Subhead: A.8 Regional Economic Development

Budget 2020: Current : €300,000 - Capital: €100,000

Unit: Regional Development and Innovation

Programme Outline

The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) is the term applied to a non-administrative or "linear" region along the Western seaboard, stretching from Kerry to Donegal, which has the potential to contribute to effective regional development by providing a counterpoint to the East Coast.

Following a February 2016 proposal led by the Chambers of Commerce of Limerick, Shannon, Ennis, Galway, Mayo and Sligo and the American Chamber of Commerce, the development of the AEC was included in the Programme for a Partnership Government and subsequently in the National Planning Framework.

The overarching objective of the AEC concept is to maximise the region's assets and connect the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to generate a value proposition of scale which will attract investment and support job creation and an improved quality of life for those who live in the region.

Delivery

The AEC is a collaborative initiative driven by the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce which was founded in March 2017, initially chaired by Minister Sean Kyne and subsequently by Minister Séan Canney.

The Taskforce comprises representatives from key Government Departments, public bodies, the business sector, local and regional government bodies and

Third Level Institutions. In late 2019, Minister Canney signed off on a review of the AEC Taskforce which will streamline the membership, place an increased focus on project delivery and recalibrate the direction of the Taskforce to more closely align with, and contribute to national and regional policy frameworks such as the National Planning Framework, and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

The WDC provides an overarching co-ordination role for the AEC Taskforce's work, while the Department retains overall policy direction and Secretarial support to the Taskforce.

Current position

The Department has recently completed a review of the AEC Taskforce and is moving forward with implementing the strategic and operational changes agreed and outlined by Minister Canney at the Taskforce's meeting in November 2019. It is intended to convene a meeting of the Taskforce as soon as possible following the appointment of a new Minister, which it is hoped the Minister will chair.

In line with the renewed focus on tangible project delivery, significant progress is being made in developing an interconnected network of more than 100 digital, enterprise and related hubs identified as either operating or in development, in the AEC region. The development of the hub network has the potential to bring significant economic value to the AEC region in terms of entrepreneurship, remote working and community value.

Challenges to delivery:

Moving forward, the key task for the AEC Taskforce is to deliver on the refreshed mandate which the Minister set out for the group in November 2019. Separate briefing on this can be provided to the Minister in due course.

Communications

A regular online e-zine on developments along the Atlantic Economic Corridor is circulated to over 500 contacts by the WDC, as co-ordinators of the Taskforce's work.

Further events to promote the AEC will be considered as the Taskforce delivers on its new mandate.

PROGRAMME AREA: B – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Volunteering Supports (National)

Subhead: B.3.1 Supports for Community & Voluntary Sector

Budget 2020: €3.5 million (€653,000 also allocated from Dormant Accounts Fund)

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

Programme Outline:

The Department's Community & Voluntary Supports & Programmes provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. The programme supports:

- 22 volunteer centres nationwide,
- Volunteer Information Services (VISs) in areas not served by a volunteer centre,
- a number of national volunteer-supporting organisations - Volunteer Ireland, Young Social Innovators, and Boardmatch.

Delivery

The Department allocated some €3.5 million to Volunteer Centres and national organisations including Volunteer Ireland in 2020. In addition a further €0.5m has been allocated to support the work of the Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland in their response to the Covid 19 emergency.

Current position:

Expenditure Summary

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	3,470	3,500
Capital		

Total	3,470	3,500
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Volunteering Strategy:

The draft National Volunteering Strategy is currently being finalised. The final public consultation phase closed on 31st January 2020. The responses are currently being compiled and a final draft will be put forward for approval by the National Advisory Group on Volunteering (NAG) before submission to Government.

Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans:

The Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2018 included the provision of funding in 2019 for upgrading the Volunteering Information Services (VISs) to full Volunteer Centres (VCs) in order to provide a consistent level of volunteering infrastructure nationwide.

One new Volunteer Centre (Cavan VC) was established in late 2019 and arrangements are being made for the remaining 7 VISs (in Laois, Leitrim, Offaly, Roscommon, Waterford, Kilkenny and Wexford) to be upgraded to full Volunteer Centres in 2020.

In addition, provision was made in the Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2018 to increase the funding levels for those Volunteer Centres receiving less than the minimum level recommended in the 2017 McLaughlin report (€121,000) to this minimum level. This additional funding was provided in 2019 and will be continued in 2020.

Challenges to delivery:

Funding for the new Volunteer Centres and those existing Volunteer Centres receiving less than the minimum amount recommended in the McLaughlin report is currently being sourced from the Dormant Accounts Fund. In order to provide greater clarity and certainty, it is important that these funding streams are mainstreamed within the Department's budget under the annual Estimates process.

The implementation of a National Volunteering Strategy, if approved by Government, will require additional funding also.

Communications:

Volunteering Strategy: Final date for submissions from the public was 31/01/2020. The NAG was scheduled to convene in February 2020 to examine these returns and to agree on a final draft for submission to Government. This meeting will be rescheduled to a later date.

Seniors Alert Scheme

Subhead: B3.2 Supports for Community & Voluntary Sector

Budget 2020: €2.3 million – Current
(Additional funding of €3 million will be made available in 2020 to meet increased demand under this scheme through Dormant Accounts)

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

Programme Outline

The Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind.

Delivery:

Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of a personal alarm or pendant and is administered on the Departments behalf by Pobal.

Current position

There is a €2.3 million provision in 2020 with another €3 million being secured from Dormant Account Funding.

It was agreed that a procurement process would be carried out by Pobal to continue the scheme to October 2022, with an option to extend for an additional two years.

A review of the scheme, including looking into the greater inter-departmental approach on future adaptive technology programmes and the potential inclusion of the senior alert scheme, has begun.

Challenges to delivery:

Following a review, a new version of the scheme came into effect on 1 November 2017. A number of changes were introduced under the new scheme including the provision of free monitoring for the first year and a revision of the living alone requirements. The revised scheme has been a resounding success with unprecedented levels of demand for the new package. The success of the scheme in the past two years has entailed administering funds from the Dormant Accounts fund to supplement the programme budget.

Total Participants Approved	Jan-Dec 2017	12,609
Total Participants Approved	Jan-Dec 2018	19,228
Total Participants Approved	Jan-Dec 2019	19,108

Communications:

The Department has begun interdepartmental consultations to investigate the potential for exploring the inclusion of complementary schemes / reviews / projects already in place in other departments surrounding assistive technologies.

Scheme to Support National Organisations & Social Pillar Funding

Subhead: B3.3 Supports for Community & Voluntary Sector

Budget 2020: €6.486 Million Current

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

Programme Outline

The overall objective of the Department's White Paper Supports for the Community & Voluntary Programmes is to provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. There are two schemes provided for under this subhead:

The **Scheme to Support National Organisations** in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO) is a key element of the Department's support for the role of the sector in contributing to the development of strong and vibrant civil society and in improving outcomes for those most disadvantaged. The scheme provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national organisations in the sector, with a focus on organisations that provide supports to those who are disadvantaged.

The **Community and Voluntary Pillar** is funded by the Department to allow members to contribute to policy making as part of the social dialogue process. The 17 members of the Pillar provide input into various consultation processes into Department strategies, both collectively and individually. The Pillar and the Department meet formally twice a year. It is intended to review this funding stream in 2020 and this was signalled to the pillar last year. Terms of reference for the review are currently being drafted.

Scheme to Support National Organisations

Delivery

The overall aim of the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector is to provide multi-annual funding towards the core costs of national organisations to assist them to operate and fund core staff positions.

Current position

A new iteration of the SSNO Scheme, commenced on 1 July 2019. The current scheme is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Minister. The scoring process was simplified and consisted of three criteria:

- demonstration of need for funding;
- the capacity of the organisation to meet output targets; and
- provision of value for money.

Performance indicators were also agreed with each successful applicant to measure the impact of the Scheme more accurately.

Challenges to delivery:

An increased allocation to the scheme was announced in 2019, and this will be met through identified savings elsewhere in the Department's budget.

Expenditure Summary

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	6,474	6,486
Capital		
Total	6,474	6,486

Community & Voluntary Pillar Funding Scheme

In recognition of the challenges faced by the member organisations of the C&V Pillar in contributing to the social dialogue process, the Department invites the member organisations of the C&V Pillar to submit applications for funding towards costs directly related to their contribution to policy-making in the social partnership process that was not funded by any other sources.

A review of the Pillar funding scheme has commenced.

Communications:

The Department has written to all Pillar members informing them of the review to be conducted in 2020.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

Subhead: B.4 – SICAP - Local/Regional Development Supports³

Budget 2020: €44.065m - Current
€39.168m allocated to frontline SICAP supports, this represents a 3% increase on 2019 funding.

The remaining €4.9m funds SICAP Programme related costs, and other social inclusion measures including a grant to Saint Vincent de Paul.

The Unit also has access to Dormant Accounts Funding in 2020 of €822k for various social inclusion measures.

Unit: Social Inclusion and Communities

³ The subhead also includes €100,000 for dog control. That area is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this document.

Programme Outline:

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022 aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality by supporting communities and individuals using community development approaches, engagement and collaboration.

Funding is provided to Local Development Companies (LDCs), to allow them to carry out work locally to help disadvantaged individuals and the groups that represent those individuals.

This is the second iteration of the programme since it commenced in April 2015. The programme is managed at a local level by 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), with support from local authorities; and the SICAP programme is then delivered on the ground by LDCs.

SICAP is co-funded from the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

Delivery:

Spend in 2018 and 2019 was €38.027m in each year.

Outcomes for 2018 and provisional outcomes for 2019, relating to groups (KPI 1) and individuals (KPI 2) are outlined below. The information, which is provisional for 2019, shows that targets were exceeded each year.

Ref.	Key performance indicator (KPI)	2018 target	Actuals
1.	Total number of Local Community Groups assisted under SICAP (KPI 1)	2,219	2,558
2.	Total number of individuals (15 years upwards) engaged under SICAP on a one-to-one basis (KPI 2)	27,452	31,967

Ref.	Key performance indicator (KPI)	2019 target	Actuals
1.	Total number of Local Community Groups assisted under SICAP (KPI 1)	2,273	2,640

2.	Total number of individuals (15 years upwards) engaged under SICAP on a one-to-one basis (KPI 2)	27,293	30,281
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Current position:

The 2020 targets are in the table below:

Ref.	Key performance indicator (KPI)	2020 target
1.	Total number of Local Community Groups assisted under SICAP (KPI 1)	2,274
2.	Total number of individuals (15 years upwards) engaged under SICAP on a one-to-one basis (KPI 2)	27,112

Challenges to delivery:

SICAP is not delivered on the ground by DRCD staff. It is delivered by the Local Development Companies in each area. Any challenges regarding ensuring a consistent approach, with flexibility where needed, are dealt with by the Unit (with assistance from Pobal) engaging with LCDCs and LDCs regularly regarding the programme.

Communications:

The Unit plans to develop a communications strategy to increase awareness across government of the SICAP programme and to promote and demonstrate the impact of the programme.

Philanthropy and Fundraising

Subhead: B.4 Support for Philanthropy and Fundraising

Budget 2020: €300,000 Current

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

Programme Outline:

One of the Strategic Objectives of the DRCD is to *Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy.*

Delivery

The Department provides core funding to Philanthropy Ireland and Charities Institute Ireland to promote ethical and effective fundraising, appropriate regulation and to develop proposals for efficient tax and legal frameworks to encourage philanthropic giving.

Current Position

The Department recently conducted a Tender process for research to establish an overarching view of the philanthropic space to enable informed and effective policy development by the DRCD for the growth and development of philanthropy in Ireland. This contract has been awarded to Indecon Consultants, and this review has now commenced with a view to receiving a final report in July 2020.

Once the body of research has been complete, the next action will be to prepare a National Philanthropy Policy for Government approval.

Expenditure Summary

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	0,295	0,300
Capital		
Total	0,295	0,300

Challenges to delivery

The timeframe for delivery of the research report will inform the next steps towards policy development in the philanthropic sector.

Communications

DRCD has funding contracts with Philanthropy Ireland and Charities Institute Ireland (to end 2020) for which work plans and reporting mechanisms are agreed. Update meetings and attendance by DRCD at hosted events/information sessions by these bodies happen on a regular basis.

Local Community Development Committees Supports

Subhead: B.5 – Local Community Development Committees

Budget 2020: €2,405,000 - Current

Unit: Libraries Development and Community Policy

Programme Outline:

LECP/LCDC: DRCD has strategic responsibility for the local and community development governance structures introduced on foot of the local government reform process, namely the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). This involves supporting the operation of the LCDCs and the development and implementation of the LECPs on an ongoing basis.

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: The B.5 subhead also covers work relating to the implementation of the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland published in 2019.

Delivery:

2019 Budget of €1,905,000 included allocation of more than €1,845,000 to local authorities to employ additional staff (c.60) to deliver the community development function, as well as the provision of a LCDC Networking event,

the publication of the LCDC review, a pilot place based leadership training programme and the publication of the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy.

Current position:

LECP/LCDC: 2020 will focus on the continued implementation of the recommendations of the LCDC Review, including an LCDC Induction Day, the second annual LCDC Networking event; the issuing of a revised LCDC Membership Manual and drafting new LECP Guidance with the support of a Working Group as well as ongoing interaction with the regional networks of LCDC Chief Officers and the development of similar networks for the LCDCs Chairs.

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: In 2020 the Cross Sectoral Group overseeing the implementation of the five year *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* strategy has identified the following 5 priorities;

- Training Needs Analysis for the C&V Sector.
- The commencement of a review into the current model of Commissioning.
- Collaboration with DCCAE on the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Action to support communities to develop solutions at a local level.
- The hosting of a large national community and voluntary sector event in Q3/Q4 2020.
- The development of a values and principles document for partnership and collaboration with the C&V sector and beginning engagement with Government Departments and agencies to ensure the application of these principles and values when working with the C&V sector.

Challenges to delivery

Managing the expectations of the community and voluntary sector, securing cross-government commitment, ensuring sufficient resources. The timing of a diverse range of stakeholder interactions / consultations to support the

delivery of the strategy objectives including a large scale public event for the community and voluntary sector will have to be reconsidered in light of the current and any ongoing COVID 19 restrictions.

Communications

Early stage planning for national C&V event, aiming for broad engagement.

Supports for Disadvantaged Communities

Subhead:	B.6 – Supports for Disadvantaged Communities
Budget 2020	€6.5m in total: €5.233m Current and €1.267m Capital
Unit:	Social Inclusion and Communities

Programme Outline

Supports for Disadvantaged Communities provides funding towards the regeneration of the Dublin North East Inner City (NEIC). This helps to ensure that the recommendations of the Mulvey report are implemented.

The funding supports initiatives put forward by an NEIC Implementation Board (chaired by Michael Stone), with the required oversight provided through Cabinet Committee B. Some of the funded initiatives help families affected by addiction issues and drug related intimidation, others cover physical improvements to the NEIC area.

The investment also funds a pilot social employment scheme for 55 staff to work with childcare, youth-work, eldercare and other projects in the NEIC area, and a number of small grants towards projects in other disadvantaged areas

Delivery

In 2019 an allocation of €6.5m was fully spent.

Current position

There is an allocation of €6.5m for 2020.

Dormant Accounts Fund

Subhead: B.7 - Dormant Accounts Measures

Budget 2020: €12.57 million (€10.07 current; €2.5 million capital)

Unit: Finance and Evaluation Unit

Programme Outline

In addition to managing the overall operation of the Dormant Accounts Fund across Government, the Department also delivers a number of measures directly. As previously noted, the Dormant Accounts Fund can be used to support measures which address social, economic, or educational disadvantage, or to support persons with a disability.

The 2020 Dormant Accounts allocation for the Department is €12.57 million. This funds 8 measures across the Department, detailed in the table below. These measures are delivered by the relevant line units within DRCD.

Measure	2020 Allocation	Section
Social Innovation Fund Ireland	€5,500,000	C&V Supports and Programmes
Senior Alerts Scheme	€3,000,000	C&V Supports and Programmes
Supports for Volunteering	€653,100	C&V Supports and Programmes
Targeted Social Inclusion	€422,000	Social Inclusion and Communities Unit
Pre-social Cohesion Project	€150,000	Social Inclusion and Communities Unit
Social Enterprise measure	€2,000,000	Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise
Libraries - Reaching out to disadvantaged	€650,000	Libraries Development
Disadvantaged Community Enhancement S	€250,000	Social Inclusion and Communities Unit
Total	€12,625,100	

Current Position:

Within the Department delivery on Dormant Accounts measures is progressing well, with the funding available bringing significant benefits for individuals and communities right across the country.

Expenditure on Dormant Accounts measures within the Department has improved year-on-year. In 2017 spend was €4,178,000 and in 2018 it increased to €10,070,000. Last year expenditure increased again to €12,755,590.

A full spend of the 2020 allocation is expected again this year.

Specific measures under DAF:

Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI)

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

The Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) was established by Government in 2013 to provide growth capital to Ireland's best social innovations, investing in solutions to social problems in this country and creating jobs.

SIFI have partnered with companies such as Google, Medtronic, Mason Hayes & Curran and IPB Insurance, as well as SME's, trusts, families and individuals. Through the support of these philanthropic donors and the Department (from the Dormant Accounts Funds), SIFI have created 24 funds which address social issues relating to Tech For Good, Community Resilience, Climate Action, Social Enterprise Development, Education, Health, Mental Health and more.

Delivery

As a partnership between the private sector and Government, provision was made for SIFI to receive €5m in total from the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) over the period 2014 to 2017 to support its set up and development.

A second contract between the Department and SIFI was agreed in June 2018 which will run to end May 2021.

Negotiations for a new contract have commenced.

Current position:

An allocation of €5.5m has been made from the Dormant Accounts Fund for SIFI for 2020.

Expenditure Summary SIFI

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	4,771	5,500*
Capital		
Total	4,771	5,500*

*Allocation for SIFI specifically.

Challenges to delivery:

The success of SIFI has presented a funding challenge recently for the Department, as there are limited funds available under the Department's Dormant Accounts Fund to match increasing philanthropic donations and pledges. As a result, the Department is facilitating contact between SIFI and other Government Departments to explore the potential for utilising those Departments' Dormant Account Funds.

Communications:

The Department has begun engaging with other Departments to widen the possibility of funding of SIFI projects as part of their Dormant Accounts Fund allocations.

Training & Mentoring for Social Enterprise Pilot Scheme

Unit: Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise

Programme Outline

Social enterprises supported through capital expenditure grants to appropriate providers under the Dormant Accounts Fund to provide tailored training and mentoring programmes.

Delivery

In 2019 Training and Mentoring Pilot programme provided €800k in funding to 13 organisations to run training programmes for social enterprises.

Administration of the programme is being conducted by POBAL

Current position

The training provided for by the 2019 fund allocation is underway. It is planned that a review will take place later in the year.

Challenges to delivery

Too soon to say. Programme will be reviewed mid-year.

Communications

Responsibility for comms rests primarily with the providers.

Small Capital Grants Scheme for Social Enterprises

Unit: Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise

Programme Outline

Social Enterprises are supported with small scale capital expenditure grants of up to €15k.

Delivery

In December 2019 the Small Capital Grants Scheme provided over €1m in funding to 124 social enterprises. Funding is approved by Minister, programme is administered by 49 Local Development Companies nationwide.

Current position

An additional €1M in funding was announced in January 2020 with a further 106 social enterprises benefitting. No further expenditure under this scheme is foreseen for the time being.

Challenges to delivery

The scheme was significantly oversubscribed with over 1,300 organisations applying for funding looking for funding that amounted to over €11M.

Communications

Scheme was well-communicated by Local Development Companies and DRCD. No further comms anticipated.

Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE IV 2014 – 2020):

Subhead: B.8 – Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

Budget 2020: Capital: €650,000

Current: €6,317,000

Unit: Libraries Development and Community Policy

Programme Outline

PEACE IV is a cross- border programme co-financed by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The programme supports peace and reconciliation and promotes social and economic stability in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland of Counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo.

The total value of the programme is c. €270m (including Irish and UK match funding). It is 85% funded by the EU (€229m), with a matching combined contribution of €41m from the Irish and UK Governments (c. €9m IRE and €32m NI).

The programme is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), one of the North-South Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. The SEUPB manages the provision of funding to projects using advanced funding provided by EU and Irish/NI Departments. They conduct monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the programme is delivering its objectives. They have oversight of the project application process, monitor projects during implementation, verify project expenditure and make claims to the EU commission.

The Department is an ‘Accountable Department’ for PEACE IV and operates under a service level agreement with the SEUPB.

The Department’s primary role is to make available the funds required under the programme for the following programme measures –

- i. Local Authority Children and Young People,
- ii. Shared Spaces Capital Development,
- iii. Local Authority Shared Spaces Projects,
- iv. Shared Spaces Victims and Survivors,
- v. Building Positive Relations Local Authority Action Plans, and
- vi. Building Positive Relations Regional Projects.

The programme is prefunded by the Department to the SEUPB and so the Department must advance c.€39m to the SEUPB over the lifetime of the Programme but will be refunded c.€33m i.e. a net contribution c.€6 million, as outlined below. However, these figures may be subject to slight changes during the lifetime of the programme when requests are made to the PEACE IV Steering Committee to amend the spend under various categories.

Theme	Objective	Department of Rural and Community Development Contribution €m	EU Contribution €m	Total Allocated €m
Children and young people	Local Authority Children & Young People	0.95	5.41	6.36
Shared spaces and services	Shared Spaces Capital Development	1.72	9.73	11.45
	Local Authority Shared Spaces Projects	0.93	5.30	6.23
	Shared Spaces - Victims and Survivors	0.57	3.24	3.81
Building positive relations at local level	Building Positive Relationships - Local Authority Action Plans	1.14	6.49	7.63
	Building Positive Relationships - Regional Level Projects	0.53	3.01	3.54
	Totals	5.84	33.18	39.02

Delivery

While the programming period technically commenced in 2014 the PEACE IV Programme was not approved by the Commission until 2015 so the first payments relating to the implementation of PEACE IV only commenced in 2017 and are expected to continue until 2023. As an *Accountable Department* DRCD attends 2-3 Programme Monitoring Committee meetings, 3-4 Programme Steering Committee meetings and 3-4 Programme Financial Committee meeting per annum to monitor progress on the various projects approved under the programme.

Current Position

There are currently 80 projects supported under the different objectives, with the programme nearing full commitment. During 2020, DRCD will continue to provide funding to the SEUPB in respect of PEACE IV programme activity under the relevant measures and to consider applications under the various measures.

Funding of €13.289 million has been provided to the SEUPB, resulting in further payments of c. €26m committed to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for the remainder of the programme, to be drawn down by end 2023.

PEACE Plus 2021 - 2027

The European Commission has proposed as part of its proposals for the next Multi-annual Financial Framework to continue and strengthen cross-border support for peace and reconciliation in the border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland post 2020.

The estimated value of the proposed PEACE Plus Programme, which is an amalgamation of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes is c. €600m. The co-financing rate is expected to be 70% EU and 30% (UK/IRL).

DRCD is working closely with DPER, SEUPB and the NI Departments to develop the new PEACE Plus Programme. There is an expectation of a 50:50 split between the UK and IRL regarding the 30% but that decision will rest with

DPER/SEUPB/UK. The level of IRL involvement will lie with DPER and other Government Departments to agree in due course.

Challenges to delivery:

The €39m required from DRCD is not evenly spread over the programme period and as the programme is nearing full commitment the funding required from the Department has been increasing year on year. Securing adequate levels of funding under the estimates process can be a challenge. Expenditure under PEACE IV is expected to continue up to 2023 which will most likely overlap with expenditure requirements under the successor PEACE Plus programme which is expected to begin from 2021 but unlikely to require funding until 2022.

It is anticipated that restrictions due to COVID-19 will result in the delayed delivery of a number of the shared spaces capital projects and may also have a negative impact on programme activity during this emergency period.

Communications

In the main the SEUPB manages the communication plan for the PEACE IV and PEACE Plus programmes.

Libraries Capital Investment Programme

Subhead: B.10 – Library Development and Archive Service

Budget 2020: Capital: €6,099,000*

Current: €1,102,000

The Unit also has an allocation in the Dormant Accounts Fund of €650,000 for various social inclusion measures.

Unit: Libraries Development and Community Policy

** The original 2020 allocation of €7,049,000 was an increase of €1m from 2019. Subsequently €950,000 was vired out to support the COVID-19 community response.*

Programme Outline:

In 2016 the Library Capital Investment Programme was announced and was further extended in 2018. The Programme is currently committed to supporting 19 new library projects and the *My Open Library* initiative.

Capital Investment Programme Update

The programme provides a contribution towards the cost of new library builds and major refurbishments and has committed €30.2m to date.

Of that, €11.8m has been drawn down, six projects are complete with four projects currently on-site. Some projects are progressing slower than expected including Stillorgan, Donegal, Westport and Edenderry Libraries. There is a commitment under the new public library Strategy *Our Public Libraries 2022* to expand the Programme before end 2022.

My Open Library

Also funded under the Capital Programme is the *My Open Library* (MOL) initiative which provides self-service access to libraries that is additional to normal staffed hours. Library members can access a MOL library from 8.00-22.00, 365 days a year.

- 15 libraries are currently providing the *My Open Library* service with a further 20-25 to open in 2020.
- Our Public Libraries 2022 commits to extending *My Open Library* to at least 100 branches across the country by 2022.

Over the last number of years a number of other initiatives have been funded under the subhead including –

- €6m for the upgrade of the digital services and infrastructure in libraries.
- €1m for library leases.
- €250,000 for a national libraries promotion campaign (launched in January 2020).

- €670,000 was approved in 2019 for the provision of sensory facilities and equipment in public libraries that can help individuals with sensory impairments, special educational need, learning differences, and those on the Autism spectrum. Proposals in respect of this funding were approved in March 2020 and are expected to be complete by the end of 2020.

Delivery

The Department provides capital funding of c.€6m - 7m per annum directly to local authorities through the Libraries Capital Investment Programme. This funding is normally provided at a 75% rate of aid and matched the by local authorities.

Local authorities spend an estimated €150m per annum on libraries (staff, operating costs and some non DRCD capital works).

Challenges to delivery

Restrictions due to COVID has delayed the delivery of a number of the capital projects.

Ongoing discussions with Trade Unions in some local authority areas to progress the opening of new *My Open Library* branches.

Community Enhancement Programme

Subhead:	B.11 – Community Enhancement Programme
Budget 2020:	€4.5m Capital funding (€2.5m of this allocated to Covid-19 Emergency Fund)
Unit:	Social Inclusion and Communities

Programme Outline

The CEP provides small capital grants to community groups to improve facilities in their area. It is targeted at enhancing facilities in disadvantaged areas.

It supports a range of investment in all areas of communities, such as childcare facilities, playgrounds, recreational facilities, sports grounds, landscaping projects, and supports for the elderly.

The CEP was put in place for the first time in 2018 following a review of the recast RAPID programme and the Communities Facilities Scheme.

The CEP is administered by the LCDC in each LA area.

Delivery

In 2019 an allocation of €4.5m was fully spent⁴. Over 2,000 projects across the country were funded, all of them targeted at enhancing facilities in disadvantaged communities.

Current position

€2.5m of the original budget was utilised for a COVID-19 Emergency Fund.

The remaining budget is €2m. On 22 June 2020, details were announced of the 2020 Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) which highlighted the potential benefit of the Programme for local communities.

Typical enhancements under the Programme include the renovation of community centres and community amenities, improvements to town parks and common areas and spaces, and the purchase of equipment for community usage. The Programme has also supported energy efficient upgrades, development of community gardens, provision of defibrillators, CCTV, and sports and IT equipment.

LCDCs have been given freedom to set their own closing dates for the Programme, to be no later than 30 September 2020.

⁴ In 2019, an additional €0.5m from Dormant Accounts fund was allocated to a ring-fenced fund for Men's and Women's Sheds under the CEP, bring the total funding under the CEP to €5.0m.

Community Services Programme

Subhead:	B.12 Community Services Programme
Budget 2020:	Current: €46,890,000 (increase of €700k from 2019)
Unit:	Libraries Development and Community Policy

Programme Outline

The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports over 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. The CSP funding is a fixed annual contribution to the cost of an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions including a manager where warranted. The CSP is not aligned with the minimum wage and does not meet the full salary cost of the supported posts. It is a fixed annual contribution that must be co-funded by the organisations concerned from other sources, for example, from income generated from the use of facilities or services.

The Department currently provides an annual contribution of €19,033 for each FTE position and €32,000 for each manager position. The Programme focuses on communities where public and private sector services are lacking, either through geographical or social isolation or because of demand deficits. It supports a range of community business and social enterprises to deliver a diverse range of local services and employment opportunities.

Delivery

Pobal manages the programme on behalf of the Department. There are currently 416 organisations funded under the CSP programme providing employment to 319 managers and 1,700 FTE positions.

The Department provided €43.77m to Pobal during 2019, which included funding towards the CSP supported organisations of €42.63m, €1.14m towards the 2020 Support Fund and Pobal's service fee of €2.4m.

Current position

The CSP transferred from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to DRCD in 2018. In early 2019 the Department appointed Indecon International Economic Consultants to conduct an independent review of the programme.

A final report was received from Indecon in late January 2020 which will be the subject of a full submission to the Minister.

Challenges to delivery

A key priority for 2020 will be to agree and implement programme changes on foot of recommendations in the Indecon report. The Department will also have to ensure continuity of the programme during that process.

Restrictions due to COVID-19 on childcare facilities, public gatherings, etc., has resulted in the temporary closure of a number of CSP supported organisations during this emergency.

CSP supported organisations who are no longer in a position to provide their normal services during this time, may be considering the emerging needs within their communities and may be in a position to refocus their service to address some of these needs.

Indeed, some CSP supported organisations may be required to significantly increase the level of services they are providing to meet new demands due to the crisis.

Communications

In the main, Pobal communicates directly with the CSP supported organisations on behalf of the Department. During 2020 the Department will have a more direct role in consulting and communicating changes being implemented on foot of the Indecon report.

Social Inclusion Units

Subhead: B.13 Social Inclusion Units

Budget 2020: €550,000 Current

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

Programme Outline

A funding allocation has been set aside to support Social Inclusion Units in a number of Local Authorities. There are currently 13 social inclusion units funded. This funding was previously provided for under the Local Government Fund, but since 2018 is now an individual subhead of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Delivery

Activities undertaken by the Social Inclusion Units include:

- the development of local anti-poverty strategies and profiles
- the development of internal social inclusion strategies
- the provision of diversity and social inclusion training for staff
- the preparation of information booklets
- ensuring social inclusion is a core value and action embedded in the corporate plans and
- work with particular target groups including Travellers and Lone Parents.

Current position

Following a pilot established in 7 local authorities in 2001, these units were placed on a permanent footing in 2006 and the programme was extended to 16 units in 2007. There are currently 13 Social Inclusion Units, 3 having closed, and there have been no expressions from other LAs to be included in the scheme.

Expenditure Summary

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	0.531	0.550
Capital		
Total	0.531	0.550

Challenges to delivery

A review of the effectiveness of and impact of funding of the social inclusion units is ongoing.

Communications

Local authorities have been contacted regarding the review of social inclusion units.

Public Participation Networks

Subhead: B.14 Public Participation Networks

Budget 2020: €2.45 Million Current

Unit: C&V Supports and Programmes

Programme Outline

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are now established in all local authority areas following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. Their main function is to enable the public to take an active formal role in

relevant policy making and oversight committees of the local authority, such as LCDCs and SPCs.

This funding supports the on- going support and development of the network of 31 PPNs nationally, as well as the on-going development of the national PPN Advisory Group established in May 2016 to monitor and evaluate PPNs regularly in line with best practice.

Delivery

Since 2015, funding of up to €50,000 per annum has been allocated by the Department to each PPN, supplemented by a minimum of €30,000 per annum from each local authority's own resources. Funding is ring-fenced and only used for the purposes of developing and maintaining the PPN. Primarily this is used for employing a Resource Worker for each PPN, office accommodation and training.

Current position

In 2019 additional funding of some €25,700 was secured by the Department for each PPN to employ a Support Worker to support the Resource Worker. All local authorities were requested by the Department to provide an additional financial contribution of €5,000 to their PPN in 2019 towards the cost of this Support Worker. This funding commitment by the Department and local authorities has continued for 2020.

Expenditure Summary

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	2,206	1,750
Capital		
Total	2,206*	1,750

*Additional funding of €656,000 (sanctioned by DPER with virements) was provided in 2018, €400,000 from B.12 CSP and €256,000 from B.6 RAPID.

Challenges to delivery

As PPNs have been established in all local authority areas since 2016, it is proposed to commence a comprehensive structural review of PPNs in 2020 to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose. Current structures and in some cases relations with Local Authorities and within the PPN themselves, pose challenges to development and growth. Work is also underway on a new PPN Handbook to assist all stakeholders by providing a practical resource with a number of standard templates etc.

Communications

It is proposed to develop a comprehensive PPN communications strategy in 2020 to increase awareness of the existence and benefits of PPNs, highlighting their potential.

6 Rural Development and Regional Affairs Division

RURAL STRATEGY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE UNIT

Principal Officer: Andrew Forde (Dublin)

Based: Trinity Point

Staff: 7

Role of unit:

The Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit is focused on two principal strands of work which cut across all of the core objectives of the Department:

1) Rural Development, and 2) Social Enterprise.

- In relation to Rural Development, a new whole-of-Government *Rural Development Policy 2020-2025* will serve as the Department's blueprint for the next five years, working across Government to ensure a series of measures are delivered for the benefit of people who live and work in rural areas.
- The Social Enterprise strand of the Unit's work is guided by the *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022*, which provides a framework to support and cultivate the development of a strong and vibrant Social Enterprise sector in Ireland. A priority for 2020 is to develop an Awareness Strategy to promote better public understanding of social enterprises and their impact on social, economic and environmental issues.

Inputs into wider government work:

- Just Transition / Transition Teams (D/Taoiseach)
Rural policy, social enterprise and social inclusion elements are particularly relevant in this context

- Regional Enterprise Action Plans (DBEI)
Rural policy/balanced regional development, digital technologies
- Bioeconomy Implementation Group (DCCAIE)
Rural policy, balanced regional development, diversification of rural economies and social enterprise are all relevant here.
- New Islands policy (D/CHG)
Rural policy/balanced regional development.
- European Commission Expert Group on Social Economy GECES
(European Commission)
Social Enterprise
- OECD Rural Development Working Party (OECD)
Rural Policy
- Future Jobs Ireland
Employment in rural areas/diversification of rural economies.
Role of social enterprise in broadening the entrepreneurship base.

LEADER POLICY & OPERATIONS UNIT

Principal Officer: Dympna Harney (Acting)

Based: Ballina

Number of staff in unit: 17

Role of unit:

- Manage the implementation of the 2014-2020 LEADER programme
- Support Local Action Groups (LAGs) in programme delivery.
- Provide payments based on ongoing delegated accreditation status.
- Input into negotiations on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) legislative reform

- Develop and agree new LEADER programme for the period post 2020 as part of the drafting of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan
- Address legacy issues from the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme

Input in wider Government work:

- CAP Reform, development of new CAP Strategic Plan post-2020 (DAFM)
- LEADER projects support multiple Government objectives (e.g. sustainability, job creation, Rural Tourism, community development)

RURAL PROGRAMMES & POLICIES UNIT

Principal Officer: JP Mulherin

Based: Ballina

Number of staff in unit: 23

Role of unit:

The Unit is responsible for rural renewal/development programmes and related policy, as well as Outdoor Recreation strategy.

The rural development element includes the delivery of the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR and the Local Improvement Scheme, the management of the Tidy Towns and related competitions, and other initiatives supporting rural renewal. The Unit oversaw the Town Centre Living pilot initiative which will inform policy direction in this area in the coming years. Responsibility in the area of outdoor recreation policy includes supporting the work of Comhairle na Tuaithe (Countryside Council), including through the development of a new national outdoor recreation policy; the advancement of a national indemnity scheme or comparable initiative for upland areas; and the expansion of the Mountain Access initiative. The Unit also delivers the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and the Walks Scheme.

Reviews:

Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) Scheme

Description: Under the REDZ pilot initiatives, grant funding was provided in 2016 and 2017 to Local Authorities for projects that supported the revitalisation of small towns and villages across the country in order to improve the living and working environment of rural communities and to increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future. REDZ are functional, rather than administrative geographic areas, that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activities and development processes. This review is intended to examine and to draw conclusions on the effectiveness and impact of the REDZ model.

- **Expected completion:** The original closing date for tenders was 29th January 2020. No responses were received by that date and the Unit has re-advertised the tender more widely on e-Tenders, with a mid-May closing date. Tenders have been assessed and the successful bidder will be notified shortly.

Review of CLÁR – (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais)

Description: The current designation of CLÁR areas is based on the level of population decline between 1926 and 2006. A review of CLÁR has been initiated to examine the designation of the current CLÁR areas, update the underlying data with reference to the 2016 Census and consider whether there are any factors, other than population decline, that should be taken into account in designating areas for eligibility under CLÁR.

The Department is working with the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) in NUI Maynooth in relation to this Review.

Expected completion: It is expected that the review will take a number of months and may be followed by a wider stakeholder consultation to consider the types of capital supports most appropriate to reinvigorate and support rural areas of disadvantage and depopulation. It is expected to have these pieces of work completed in time to significantly influence the nature of the scheme launched in 2021.

Review of the Walks Scheme

Description: A review of the Walks Scheme is planned for the coming months. The terms of reference include:

- examining how the scheme is currently delivered,
- considering the role of the Rural Recreation Officers and their resourcing, and
- informing the strategic expansion of the Scheme to increase its size from 39 to the planned 80 walks.

A Request for Tenders for the review has been completed and the successful bidder informed. The recommendations of the review, when completed later in 2020, will inform decisions on the further strategic expansion of the scheme.

Expected completion: Q4 2020.

Inputs into external/interdepartmental groups

The work of the Rural Programmes and Policies Unit feeds in to a number of policies, including:

Tourism, through the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme Town and, to a lesser extent, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The Department also has developed strategic partnerships with Fáilte Ireland and Coillte in the last number of years.

The **National Planning Framework**, supporting the National Strategic Outcome of achieving Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities, and also contributing to the repurposing of vacant town centre properties for residential occupancy through the Town Centre Living initiative.

The Unit's activities also contribute to **job creation** and retention.

Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council)

Status: Advisory Council, meets 4x times per year approximately

Policy outline: Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) was established in February 2004 with a primary focus on the priority areas of:

- access to the countryside,
- developing a countryside code and
- developing a countryside recreation strategy.

Comhairle na Tuaithe is made up of representatives from farming organisations, recreational users of the countryside, and state bodies with a responsibility or interest in the countryside. The Department of Rural and Community Development acts as Secretariat to Comhairle na Tuaithe. It is chaired by Dr. Liam Twomey (since June 2019).

Since the inception of Comhairle na Tuaithe, there has been significant growth in the numbers engaging in outdoors recreation across a wider range of activities in more remote and fragile environments and through a variety of new formats such as adventure races.

On 6 June 2019, a new mandate was delivered to Comhairle na Tuaithe by Minister Michael Ring. The new mandate strengthens the role of Comhairle in advising the Minister on the sustainable development of outdoor recreation, particularly in the open countryside. Comhairle will also identify opportunities to develop rural enterprises based on outdoor recreation activity, and to consider the scope for the development of a new National Strategy for Countryside Recreation, taking account of recent developments and investments across the sector.

The Council has convened a Working Group to bring forward the development of this Strategy

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION UNIT

Principal Officer: Stjohn O'Connor

Based: Dublin

Number of staff in unit: 7.5

Role of Unit:

The Unit has three primary objectives:

- To have a transformative impact on the use of digital technologies within rural and regional communities, businesses and the primary education sector.
- To embed the Atlantic Economic Corridor concept nationally and internationally in order to further stimulate economic activity within the nine AEC counties and attract investment into the region.
- Oversight of the Western Development Commission.

2020 is likely to see the Unit's work evolve over the course of the year as the National Broadband Plan rolls out and projects come on stream under the AEC Taskforce. The main work streams under the Unit's remit are as follows:

- Broadband Connection Points (BCP's) initiative;
- Deployment of the WiFi4EU funding;
- Embedding phase 2 of the Atlantic Economic Corridor;
- Commencing a new direction for the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce; and
- Provision of logistical, technical and administrative support for Broadband Officers.

Inputs into wider Government work

- National Broadband Plan
- National Digital Strategy
- National Planning Framework/Regional Development (AEC)
- Future Jobs (remote working)
- Regional Enterprise Action Plans (led by Dept. of Business)

7 Community Development Division

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITIES UNIT

Principal Officer: Paul Geraghty

Based: Ballina

Number of staff in unit: 15

The key areas of work completed by the Unit and described below relate to:

- The B.4 subhead which relates to the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and Local/Regional Development Supports.
- The B.11 subhead which relates to the Community Enhancement Programme.
- The B.6 subhead named 'Supports for Disadvantaged Communities' which relates to funding for the Dublin North East Inner City.
- Policy and legislative work on Dog Control.
- Legislation regarding Burial Grounds.
- Governance of Pobal.

Inputs into wider government work:

The Social Inclusion and Communities Unit (SICU) feeds into a number of interdepartmental strategies related to social inclusion. These include:

- The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion
- The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)
- The Migrant Integration Strategy
- Connecting for life - a national strategy for suicide prevention
- The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020
- The National Drugs Strategy
- The National Strategy on Children and Young People

Separately, the work completed related to the Dublin North East Inner City is relevant to many departments, including the Department of the Taoiseach.

LIBRARIES DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY POLICY UNIT

Principal Officer: Finola Moylette

Based: Ballina

Number of Staff: 13

Role of Unit:

Community Policy

Leading cross-government coordination of local development and community development including Local and Community Development Committees (LCDCs), Local Economic and Community Plans, and the implementation of Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

Libraries Development

Leading on the implementation of the public libraries strategy *Our Public Libraries 2022* and supporting delivery of public library services by local authorities, including developing and implementing appropriate policy and funding frameworks to underpin these services.

Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation

Managing the Department's *Accountable Department* role under the PEACE IV Programme and contributing to the development of the successor PEACE PLUS 2021-2027 Programme.

Community Services Programme

Management of the Community Services Programme (CSP) which supports community-based organisations to provide social, economic and environmental services through a social enterprise model, and which is delivered by Pobal.

Inputs into wider government work:

- Bilateral engagement with DCCAIE on raising awareness of Sustainable Development Goals.
- Objective in the Community and Voluntary Strategy around supporting capacity in C&V organisations and Local Government around Climate Action that ties into commitments in the National Climate Action Plan. DRCD will be working with DCCAIE in this context.
- Liaising with IHREC (institutional accountability to the Houses of the Oireachtas) on raising the profile of Public Sector Duty.
- Collaboration with the Dialogue Forum with Voluntary Organisations in the Department of Health established on foot of the Report of the Independent Review Group (IRG) (Day Report). Ties in with commitments in the Community and Voluntary Strategy.
- Engagement with Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding the LECP preparation process and how it may be impacted by Covid-19

- Libraries are an important element of a number of key Government policy documents and initiatives including –
 - DCYA’s First 5s Strategy
 - Draft National Digital Strategy
 - DES Action Plan for Online Safety
 - DES Action Plan for Education 2020
 - Creative Ireland
 - National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy
 - Healthy Ireland Initiative
 - Decade of Centenaries

- We are also progressing discussions with the Irish Prison service and the Irish Probation Service on library supports and CSP placement for ex-offenders.
- Chair of the National [Right to Read](#) Committee on literacy development and the [Work Matters](#) Committee.

National Steering Group Children and Young Peoples Services Committees (CYPSC) – (DCYA)

DRCD Involvement: Input relating mainly to cooperation between CYPSCs and LCDCs at a local level.

Healthy Cities and Counties Network - (D/Health)

DRCD Involvement: The aim of the National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland Network is to develop a structure to support Local Authorities to implement the Healthy Ireland Framework. DRCD involved on the basis that Healthy Ireland is implemented at a local level by LCDCs.

Healthy Ireland at your Library – (D/Health)

DRCD Involvement: Healthy Ireland is the national strategy to improve health and wellbeing, placing a focus on prevention, individual awareness and keeping people healthy for longer. Public libraries are currently delivering the nationwide Healthy Ireland at Your Library programme that establishes libraries as a valuable source within the community for health information. DRCD also co-funds this initiative (€200k).

COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY SUPPORTS AND PROGRAMMES

Principal Officer: Ciara Bates

Based: Dublin

Number of Staff: 12

Role of Unit

The Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes unit are responsible for the management and delivery of a number of funding programmes, aimed at supporting and developing local communities.

Funding Programmes include the Seniors Alert Scheme, the Scheme to Support National Organisations, funding and development of the Volunteering

infrastructure and the management of the Social Innovation Fund of Ireland. The unit is also charged with developing policy on promoting and achieving greater levels of active citizen participation through the Public Participation Networks as well developing policy on volunteering and philanthropy. The section also supports the work of the Community and Voluntary Pillar and is responsible for a number of Departmental initiatives under the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The section has responsibility for corporate governance oversight of the Charities Regulatory Authority and Water Safety Ireland and the development of these sectors in line with current governance requirements including the delivery of statutory legislation to support the work of these organisations.

Reviews:

Review of method of distribution of funds to Volunteer Centres

Description: The method of distribution of funding to Volunteer Centres has developed organically since the original establishment of these centres. While a limited exercise was carried out in 2017 to review the methodology for funding, further work needs to be carried out to ensure that the Volunteer Centre funding system is efficient and effective and best meets the needs of the centres. C&V section intends to invite tenders for this work in 2020

Expected completion: Quarter 4

Structural Review of PPNs

Description: It is proposed to undertake a comprehensive review of PPNs to assess the operation of the network to date, identify opportunities for further strengthening and enhancing PPNs and make recommendations as to how to build on existing strengths and support the future development of PPNs. C&V section intend to invite tenders for this work in 2020

Expected completion: Quarter 4 2020/Q1 2021

PPN Communications Strategy

Description: It is proposed to engage Consultants to develop and implement a PPN Communications Strategy to raise awareness and inform the public about the role and operation of PPNs.

Expected completion: Quarter 4

The Landscape of Philanthropic Giving in Ireland (2020)

Description: To conduct research leading to a landscape analysis of philanthropic-giving in Ireland and to complete an independent report. It is intended that this report will provide an overarching view of the philanthropy sector which will enable informed and effective philanthropy policy development.

Expected completion: Quarter 3

Inputs into wider government work:

Staff from the C&V unit work directly with a number of Departments on those project areas that encompass our supports and programmes including:

- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Education
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Department of Health
- Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
- Department of Justice and Equality
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
- Department of the Taoiseach

The unit also also represents the Department on the following Interdepartmental groups:

- Working Group for Housing Options for our Ageing Population (Depts of Housing and Health leading)
- Decade of Centenaries Inter-Departmental Working Group (D/CHG)

8 Corporate Affairs and Strategic Development

FINANCE AND EVALUATION

Principal Officer: Kenneth Jordan (Dublin)

Based: Trinity Point.

Staff: 9

Role of Finance Unit

The Finance Unit is responsible for overall financial management of the Department's budget and managing the Dormant Accounts Fund.

This includes the following activities:

- Financial Management
 - Managing the annual estimates process for DRCD Vote;
 - Oversight and development of financial systems and controls;
 - Management and administration of daily expenditure process;
 - Managing payments, which are physically processed through the Department of Justice Financial Shared Services offices in Killarney;
 - Monitoring, oversight and reporting on overall Departmental expenditure;
 - Preparation of the annual Appropriation Account, which is audited by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General;
 - Co-ordination of material for Minister's appearances at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Rural and Community Development i.e. Estimates (Oct/Nov of each year) and mid-year review of expenditure (generally July/Sept of each year).

- Administration of the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Role of Evaluation Unit

The Evaluation Unit within the Department has been established to develop our capacity to evaluate our programmes through progress across a number of areas, including:

- complete reviews/assessments of specific programme areas;
- support implementation of the public spending code across the Department;
- improve and develop statistics and key performance indicators for the rural and community development areas; and,
- co-ordinate, support and advise on evaluation/policy analysis work in units across the Department.

The evaluation unit is part of a broader approach to evaluation and research across the Department which includes reviews and policy analysis carried out by individual units, and a research partnership with the ESRI. The initial focus of this ESRI research partnership is to assist in developing our evaluation capacity, and to help develop statistics and indicators that can be used for monitoring rural and community development. A likely future focus is on completing case studies, in particular with regard to our capital investment, focusing on the socio-economic impact of this investment.

A review of aspects of the Dublin North East Inner City programme was completed in October 2019 as part of DPER's annual spending review process. A Focused Policy Assessment of the Local Improvement Scheme is currently in progress and will be completed in the first half of 2020.

A three-year Evaluation Strategy for the Department is currently in preparation. This broad work area, both within the Department and in partnership with the ESRI, will be important in terms of building the evidence base for the return on investment in the rural and community development areas.

Inputs to wider Government work

Finance Officers Network

This network is currently focussed on the future move to accruals accounting and the delivery of a single shared financial management system/service for all Government Departments. It meets on a quarterly basis.

Steering Group for the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES)

This group meets quarterly and seeks to co-ordinate and drive evaluation work across Government Departments.

Interdepartmental Group on Dormant Accounts Fund

DRCD chairs this group, which meets twice yearly and seeks to ensure effective ongoing administration of the Fund, and to share information with regard to measures operating across different Departments.

CORPORATE POLICY AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Principal Officer: Clodagh McDonnell (Ballina)

Based: Trinity Point and Ballina

Staff: 6

Role of unit

- Oversight of the Department's Corporate Governance Framework, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, GDPR.
- Provides secretariat to Risk Management and Audit Committees
- Co-ordination of the Department's response to cross-Departmental requests (ie Parliamentary Questions, representations, programme for government) and all corporate matters
- A range of whole of Government policy areas such as Brexit and Climate Action and Sustainable Development Goals
- Development of strategic policy documents such as Statements of Strategy and Annual Reports. A key priority for 2020 will be the publication of a new Statement of Strategy for the Department.

Internal Departmental Groups

- The Unit chairs meetings of informal groups on Records Management and Climate Action.

Inter-Departmental Groups

- The Unit represents DRCD on the following interdepartmental groups:
 - Brexit coordinators (DFAT)
 - Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (DCCAIE)
 - North-South Coordinators (DFAT)
 - Freedom of Information (DPER)
 - Protected Disclosures Network (DPER)
 - Data Protection Officer Network (rotating)
 - Inter-Departmental Group on Children First

HUMAN RESOURCES

Principal Officer: Clodagh McDonnell (Ballina)

Personnel Officer: Jennifer Billings (Dublin)

Based: Trinity Point and Ballina

Staff: 9

Role of Unit

The work of our Department is hugely important to communities throughout Ireland. We deliver this work with the commitment and professionalism of all our staff. Our first HR strategy, 'Our People Strategy 2019-2021' was launched in 2019 and highlights our commitment to our staff and is aimed at enabling us all to fulfil our potential in the workplace and to deliver collectively on our strategic objectives.

Our People Strategy Key Priorities

- 1. To be an Employer of Choice**
 - Enabling meaningful staff communication and engagement

- Promotion of staff health and wellbeing
- Support for staff learning and career development

2. To Build our Future Workforce

- Embedding strategic workforce planning
- Supporting diversity and inclusion in our workplace
- Encouraging innovation and continuous improvement

3. To Grow our Leaders and People Managers

- Fostering a high performance culture
- Nurturing leadership at all levels
- Strengthening people manager expertise

Investing in our People

In 2019 the Department provided 500 plus training days over a complement of circa 125 training courses. The Learning and Development Unit currently supports 10 staff via the Refund of Fees Scheme 2019/2020.

The HR Unit introduced an informal Mentoring Programme aimed at supporting staff of the Department to maximise their potential and to cultivate skills and competency, with a view to further enhance workplace performance.

Culture and Values

We continue to work with staff to build a culture and awareness of the importance and benefits of employee wellbeing by promoting staff involvement in the workplace. A range of health and wellbeing initiatives are provided on an ongoing basis in the Department, focusing on both knowledge sharing and personal growth.

These include:

- Provision of flu vaccine and health screening for all staff

- Activities to promote awareness of mental health, disability and equality issues, and wellbeing, such as workshops, information sessions and fitness classes.
- Formation of Ciorcail na Gaeilge to promote Irish language development

Inputs into wider government work

The Human Resources Unit recognises the importance of contributing to the wider civil service strategic HR agenda through participation in key interdepartmental and Civil Service HR working groups such as:

- HR Managers Network
- HR Business Partnering Network
- HR Business Planning Working Group
- Civil Service HR Operating Model
- Civil Service Industrial Relations Network
- Civil Service Employee Engagement Workshops

FACILITIES, ICT, INNOVATION AND BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Principal Officer: Eddie Forsyth (Dublin)

Based: Trinity Point

Staff: 5

(Part of Rural Fund and Corporate Support Unit)

The Department currently has two primary office locations, in Dublin and Ballina. Dublin staff moved to occupy two floors on the Trinity Point building in Dublin 2 in August 2018, which are leased on our behalf by the Office of Public Works. Ballina staff are based in Government Buildings, which is shared with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Role of Unit

- Management of the Department's accommodation needs, including purchasing office consumables, furniture, ICT consumables and assets.
- Liaison with building management in Trinity Point (Dublin), and the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government in Ballina.
- Safety matters within the Department.
- Energy Efficiency, Recycling and Green issues within the Department, reporting to the Minister on these efforts.
- ICT Strategy and Policy, including liaison with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), who are the main IT provider for the Department.
- Co-ordination of ICT policy towards the Public Service, including the Civil Service ICT Strategy, Public Service Data Strategy, Digital Government.
- Innovation activities within the Department.
- Business Process Improvement Demonstration Project for the Department.

Key issues

- A Safety Statement for Trinity Point was finalised in 2019, along with the Lone Worker Policy and the formation of the DRCD Safety Committee
- A GEO Committee was formed in 2019 to look at Green, Energy Efficiency and Organisation issues. A Resource Efficiency Action Plan (REAP) was developed and will be implemented as part of the Green Government Initiative for DCCAE.
- An initial Business Process Improvement Project has been established. External support has been procured for the project and briefings held with the target business unit. Implementation of identified process improvements will lead to consideration of future initiatives.
- Liaising with the Office of Public Works (OPW) on growing accommodation requirements for the Department.
- An ICT and Data Strategy is to be developed for the Department.

Internal department structures:

The Facilities Management Team are responsible for managing the following structures within the Department:

- The Geo Committee (Green, Energy Efficiency, Organisation issues)
- The DRCD Safety Committee
- The Business Process Improvement Project Board

External departmental structures:

Staff from the Facilities Management Team represent the Department on the following structures:

- The Public Service Innovation Network
- The Open Data Liaison
- The Public Service Project Managers Network
- The Civil Service ICT Advisory Board
- The Digital Champions Group (National Digital Infrastructure)

COMMUNICATIONS

Principal Officer: Eddie Forsyth (Dublin)

Head of Communications: Mark Ryan

Press Officer: Ronan Corley

Based: Trinity Point and Ballina

Staff: 5

(Part of Rural Fund and Corporate Support Unit)

Role of Unit:

The Communications Unit was established in 2018 and is based across the Dublin and Ballina offices. It coordinates all external Departmental

communications activity and ensures that internal awareness of this activity is maintained. The unit's work covers the following:

- Liaise with Minister's Press Adviser
- Issue Press releases / diary notices / social media content / book photographers
- Respond to Departmental press queries / monitor media and create daily media book
- Provide support at Ministerial events / launches / announcements / media opportunities
- Manage content on gov.ie and intranet
- Develop proactive media opportunities
- Coordinate Department's presence at National Ploughing Championships
- Plan and deliver awareness campaigns and coordinate cross-Government communications priorities with GIS and other Departments

Website: www.gov.ie/drcd

Twitter: @DeptRCD (approx. 3,400 followers)

Communications highlights in 2019:

- Rural Opportunity Campaign – This campaign involved case study videos backed by a series of regional stakeholder events. The intention was to raise awareness of the range of rural supports available across Government. More info: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/ruralopportunity/>
- Transition to gov.ie - This Department was the third to migrate all of its web content to the gov.ie website. Homepage: www.gov.ie/drcd
- Emergency Planning Framework – This framework ensures that the Department can continue its core functions during a national emergency. (Internal restricted document available upon request)
- National Ploughing Championships (NPC) exhibit – The Government of Ireland presence at the 2019 NPC was delivered through thematic exhibits rather than Departmental ones. The Communications Unit

managed and delivered the 'Community: Rural & Gaeltacht Supports' exhibit which included units from this Department and approximately nine other agencies.

- Libraries Ireland advertising campaign - Developed in coordination with the DRCD Libraries Development Unit and the Local Government Management Agency. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of the library service and increase membership. The campaign went live in January 2020.
- Rural and Community video series – 10 case study videos were developed with six already posted to @DeptRCD. The videos were of projects funded by this Department through rural and community schemes.
- The Communications unit also supported other awareness initiatives that were led by other sections such as the 'National Community Weekend' and the 'Help Hands' community information events.

2020 Priorities

- Completion and implementation of Departmental Communications Strategy – a draft communications strategy for the Department has been submitted to Management Board and an internal consultation process begun.
- Maintain and increase DRCD content on gov.ie and intranet
- Embed plain language style and ensure communications focus is on citizen
- Formalise and develop stakeholder management protocols to increase external understanding of Department's work
- Increase social media output and explore new communications channels
- Plan and deliver thematic exhibit at the National Ploughing Championships

Inter-departmental groups:

Staff from the Communications Unit represent the Department on the following interdepartmental groups:

- Brexit Communications (D/FAT and Government Information Service)
- Climate Action Communications (D/Taoiseach)
- Departmental Press Officers – weekly (D/Taoiseach)
- Head of Communications – monthly (GIS)
- Government Task Force on Emergency Communications (D/HPLG and GIS)

INSPECTION AND COMPLIANCE

Principal Officer: David Dalton (Ballina)

Based: Regionally in Athenry, Limerick, Wexford, Navan and Tullamore.

Staff: 8 (2 Regional Inspectors, 5 District Inspectors, 1 AO Vacancy), inspectors are seconded from Department of Agriculture

Role of Unit:

The Unit provides assurance that public funding managed by the Department is spent by recipients as it should be. It implements an EU accredited inspection system for the LEADER Programmes 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, as well as an inspection programme for other DRCD Exchequer-funded programmes. The Unit supports business units by providing policy and compliance advice and direction to programme managers.

The unit provides quarterly updates to Management Board on activity and issues of note.

Planned Activity 2020

1. **An agreed inspection programme** for the following schemes managed by the Department, reporting findings and recommendations (including funding to be recovered) directly to relevant line units and funding recipients, and undertaking follow-up action as required.

PROGRAMME	PROJECTED INSPECTIONS 2020	INSPECTIONS 2019
LEADER 0713 (2020 is final year of inspections)	19	62
LEADER 1420	120	83
CLÁR	18	21
Town and Village Scheme	27	6
Local Improvement Scheme	32	16
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme	12	-
Rural Regeneration and Development Fund	10	-

2. Scope **expansion of the inspection programme** for the following schemes in 2020 and 2021.

Libraries funding (non-building programme spend)
LCDC Support Programme (staff resources)
Community Enhancement Programme (small grants)
Small Capital Grants for Social Enterprise

3. Continued **development of a DRCD compliance function** to inform and support programme management by business units.
4. **Carry out ad hoc inspections/investigations** as requested by management, including leading on and liaising with relevant authorities in respect of any suspected irregularities, fraud, etc.

Key Challenges for 2020

The primary challenge is to ensure compliance with strict EU requirements on inspection of LEADER activity – LEADER remains the Unit’s priority given minimum inspection thresholds prescribed by EU and potential financial disallowances by the EU for failing to fully meet EU requirements.

INTERNAL AUDIT UNIT

Head of Internal Audit: David Yeomans

Based: Trinity Point

Staff: 1 (plus one vacancy)

Role of unit

The Internal Audit Unit undertakes an annual programme of six audit assignments per annum. In addition, spot-checks are performed on staff expenses, payroll and procurement. This programme is approved by the Audit Committee comprising of the following members:

- Gerry Kearney (Chair)
- Tony Burke
- Bernadette Costello
- Stjohn O'Connor (DRCD)
- Pat Smyth

The Audit Committee meets 4-5 times per annum and reviews all audit reports. The Committee also receives a status report on previous audit recommendations.

The Head of Internal Audit also attends the Risk Committee as an observer.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform hold quarterly meetings of all Heads of Internal Audit where matters of mutual concern are discussed.

9 Legislative Programme Proposals

The Department is currently progressing legislation in the following areas:

SCHEME TO INDEMNIFY PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

[Introduction of a Scheme to indemnify private landowners in upland areas against claims for compensation by recreational users.]

Unit: Rural Programmes & Policies Unit

Status: Heads of Bill being explored.

- The aim is to introduce a scheme to indemnify private land owners, particularly in upland areas, with regard to the use of their lands for recreational purposes.
- The aim of the scheme would be to lessen the fear of having to defend such a claim by the private land owners who are making their land available to recreational users.
- This is a complex issue. An indemnity scheme such as has been proposed would appear to require amendment to a number of separate pieces of legislation.
- In light of the complexity involved in the establishment of such a scheme, [it has been under consideration for some 10 years] other options are being considered that might be available to address the matter as an interim measure. Department officials have been making enquiries into alternative options in respect of purchasing an insurance policy, and will continue to work to find a solution that meets the concerns of landowners who provide access to their lands for recreational purposes.

ARTICLE 48 CHECKS (LEADER)

Unit: LEADER Unit

Status: Appropriate legislation being identified for amendment/updating to enable Heads of a Bill to be explored.

Legislation is planned to enable Local Authorities to statutorily conduct certain verification checks on projects under the LEADER programme.

Currently the verification checks are carried out under Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the Local Authorities on an administrative basis, but legal advice has suggested that this should be underpinned by primary legislation.

CHARITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

[Amendment to the Charities Act 2009]

Unit: Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes

Status: Draft Memorandum for Government

Other issues: [REDACTED]

Background:

- The principle primary legislation governing the operation of charities in Ireland is the Charities Act 2009, which intended to provide a definition of charities, their operation and reporting requirements, and also the establishment of the Charities Regulatory Authority ('the Regulator').
- Following public consultation and the experience of the Charities Regulator once operational, a number of amendments to the 2009 Act were identified to allow for the Regulator to operate as intended.

Summary of Key Issues Arising:

- The Charities Regulator drafted *Charity Accounting and Reporting Regulations* during 2015, which would provide a specified format for the submission of Annual Reports and Accounts by charities to the Regulator.
- An issue of concern arose in relation to the applicability of these regulations to charities that are incorporated due to the introduction of the Companies Act 2014. This is of particular concern as 60% all registered charities are incorporated (generally as companies limited by guarantee), meaning that the draft Regulations would only apply to 40% of charities.
- A number of other necessary changes have been incorporated into the proposed Charities Amendment Bill, including provisions to bringing the duties of trustees of charities in line with best practice of trustee duties, as well as allowing for the exchange of information between the Regulator and other bodies such as Revenue and the Companies Registration Office.
- [REDACTED]

DOG CONTROL

Unit: Social Inclusion and Communities Unit

The Department is responsible for the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 – 2014, including the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010.

The DRCD is progressing the Dog Breeding Establishments (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Amendments to the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 and the Control of Dogs Acts. (Primary legislation)

Status: Heads of Bill currently being drafted. It is proposed to include the Heads of Bill in the Government’s autumn legislative programme.

Statutory Instruments

Review and amend (if required) the Control of Dogs Regulations, S.I. No 442/1998 (Restricted Breeds). The Unit undertook a public consultation on a review of measures in relation to the control of dogs in Ireland in 2019. The outcome of the ongoing review of the approximately 1,000 submissions received may determine that S.I. No. 442/1998 should be amended.

10 Bodies under the aegis of the Department

THE CHARITIES REGULATOR & THE CHARITIES APPEALS TRIBUNAL

Unit: Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes

Function:

Charities Regulatory Authority (the ‘Charities Regulator’)

The CRA is an independent statutory body which was established on 16 October 2014 pursuant to the Charities Act 2009.

The key functions of the Regulator are:

- To establish and maintain a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland, the first formal record of charities in the history of the State, and
- To ensure their compliance with the Charities Acts. There are currently in excess of 10,000 registered charities on the register.

Charities Appeal Tribunal (CAT)

The function of the tribunal is to hear and adjudicate on appeals against certain decisions of the Charities Regulator, under Section 45 of the [Charities Act 2009](#). The Tribunal is independent in the performance of its statutory functions. The C&V Unit provides the secretariat function for the CAT. Section 79 of the Charities Act provides that the tribunal may make its own rules of procedure (with the approval of the Minister for Rural and Community Development).

Budget 2020: €4.606 Million

Key staff:

CRA: Helen Martin (CEO), Patrick Hopkins (Chair)

CAT: Pat O’Connor (Chairperson)

Board:

There are currently 12 members on the Board, with no vacancies. The Male to Female ratio is 7:5.

Objectives:

- Strengthening public trust and confidence in charities, including the promotion of compliance of charity trustees with their legal duties and ensuring the accountability to of charities to donors, beneficiaries and the public.
- Promoting compliance with the Charities Governance Code and working with charities to support them in its implementation.
- Monitoring compliance by charitable organisations with charity law and conducting investigations as required.

Challenges/Issues:

Operational:

- Resource issues: currently operating with 38.5 full time staff when the compliment should be 53; one higher level vacancy exists presently, Head of Legal.
- Powers and Responsibilities: The CRA is unable to operate fully as envisaged due to lack of clarity on certain powers and responsibilities which the proposed Charities (Amendment) Bill is intended to provide for.

Review:

- The CRA is due a Periodical Critical Review in 2020.
- Oversight Agreement to the end of 2020 has been agreed.

WATER SAFETY IRELAND

Unit: Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes

Budget 2020: €1.124million

Function

The core functions of Water Safety Ireland are educating the public on water safety and raising awareness of water safety issues.

Key staff: John Leech (CEO), Martin O’Sullivan (Chair)

Board:

There are currently 13 members on the Council of WSI, with no vacancies. The Male to Female ratio is 8:5.

Programme Outline

Water Safety Ireland is the statutory body established to promote water safety in Ireland. It operates under the aegis of the Department seeking to educate people in water safety best practices and develop public awareness campaigns to promote necessary attitudes, rescue skills and behaviour to prevent drownings and water related accidents.

Delivery

The Department oversees the governance of the body and also provides funding of €1m towards its operating costs and for targeted initiatives aimed at raising the awareness of, and promoting, water safety issues generally.

WSI activities in 2019 included teaching swimming and lifesaving techniques and through its classes people can qualify as pool and beach lifeguards.

It also holds lectures and demonstrations to members of the public and other interested parties and publishes literature to promote water safety and target at-risk groups.

Current position:

Expenditure Summary:

	2018 Outturn €,000	2019 Allocation €,000
Current	1,254	1,118
Capital		
Total	1,254	1,118

Challenges

There is ongoing consideration regarding the premises of WSI, which is unsuitable for current use and precludes expansion of the organisation. The Department is assisting WSI in this matter.

The Department is also assisting WSI in meeting its governance obligations. In this regard, the Department has a number of concerns relating to current arrangements and is making specific arrangements for an audit of HR practice in the organisation. A more detailed briefing will be provided to the Minister on the issues arising.

Communications

WSI has a significant marketing, media and online presence in keeping with its information and education remit. The Department actively assists this where appropriate.

Review

- Oversight Agreement which is currently being reviewed.
- Periodic Critical Review due to commence in late 2020.

POBAL

Unit: Social Inclusion & Communities Unit

Budget 2020: Pobal receive administration fees annually from the agencies/departments for whom it administers programmes. For examples, €1.415m was allocated to Pobal for administering the DRCD's SICAP programme in 2020.

Function:

Pobal is a not-for-profit company which works on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU in managing programmes that contribute to social inclusion, equality and reconciliation.

Pobal, initially known as Area Development Management Ltd (ADM), was established by the Irish Government in 1992 and is a national body governed under public law. It is a company limited by guarantee and without share capital; it is also a registered charity. The Company does not have a statutory basis or any grounding legislation setting out its role. Pobal is analogous to a public administrative body as it is a body governed by Public Law.

The company expanded its service provision to government and it was renamed Pobal in 2005. Pobal is required to comply with all relevant Department circulars, guidelines and public financial procedures, issued by the Irish Government.

Pobal currently employs over 500 staff. In 2019 Pobal distributed €743m to beneficiaries across circa 31 programmes.

Key staff:

- Dr Deiric O'Broin, Chair
- Anna Shakespeare, Chief Executive
- Jerry Murphy, Deputy CEO

Contact details:

- Pobal, Ormond Building, 31-36 Ormond Quay, Northside, Dublin 2.
- Telephone: 01-5117000 and 01-5117981.
- E-mail: enquiries@pobal.ie

Board:

The full complement of the Board is 16, as provided for in the company's Articles of Association. There are currently 15 members on the board and there is one vacancy. Under Pobal's Memorandum and Articles of Association, a rotation of Board members must take place annually at its AGM. The Board has recently reviewed these provisions and will be submitting proposals for change in that regard for the Minister's consideration shortly.

Objectives: The objective of Pobal is to work with Government and local and community organisations to combat social exclusion and to improve outcomes for communities, families, individuals and children.

Review:

Periodic Critical Review

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) places certain obligations on parent Departments in respect of agencies under their remit. One of these obligations requires that a Periodic Critical Review of such agencies be carried out 'no later than every five years'. The Unit is currently putting arrangements in place to carry out this work in respect of Pobal in 2020.

The review will focus on the ongoing business case for the entity, its performance, efficiency and effectiveness and its governance arrangements. The project will be overseen by a Steering Group made up of representatives from the DRCD as well as from other relevant Departments.

WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION:

Unit: Regional Development and Innovation Unit

Budget 2020: €2.049 million current expenditure under the A.3 Subhead for the staffing and overhead costs of the Western Development Commission.

Key staff:

- Tomás O Síochain, Chief Executive
- Deirdre Garvey, Chair

Function:

The aim of the Western Development Commission (WDC) is to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region, which covers counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare.

It encourages the development of the Western economy based on sustainable development of the Western Region's strength and resources.

The WDC operates the Western Investment Fund (WIF) which contributes to the development of the region by investing through equity or loans (but not grant aid which is prohibited by the WDC Act) in business start-up, growth-oriented small and medium enterprises and in community-based measures to encourage enterprise development.

The WDC has invested just over €52 million in 156 SMEs, Micro and Social Enterprises in the Western Region, and currently has approximately €47 million available for reinvestment.

The WDC also plays a central coordinating role for the Department in relation to the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. Significant operational capacity has been developed within the WDC to support this role.

Board:

12 members provided for under the WDC Act 1998. Currently 11 members appointed. The term of office of 10 of the 11 members (including the current

Chair) expires in August 2020. The Public Appointments Service has received 111 Expressions of Interest for positions on the Board. The Minister also has the option to re-appoint some of the outgoing members who have only completed one term of office.

Challenges/Issues:

Operational

The number of staff in the WDC has increased over the last few years in line with the Agencies expanded remit. This has led to an accommodation shortage in head office in Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon. This issue is being addressed by the provision of hotdesk facilities in Sligo and Galway.

The WDC is also considering how it can use the resources available to it to support a targeted approach to new strategic investment areas through the WIF fund.

Governance

An Audit of the Agency was undertaken by the Department's Internal Audit Unit in 2019. The recommendations that emerged from that Audit are in the process of being implemented.

Review:

- A Periodic Critical review is to be carried out by Department commencing in 2020.