# Minister of State Briefing

## November 2025

An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais agus Comhionannais
Department of Children, Disability and Equality

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 OVERVIEW

This brief covers the existing legal responsibilities and functions of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE).

**Areas of responsibility under these areas include:**

**Community Based Disability Services**

- the coordination and steering of whole-of-Government disability policy and strategy.
- funding, policy, and oversight of specialist community-based disability support services

**Child Policy and Tusla Governance**

- Child welfare, rights and protection policy, legislation, operational standards and performance, including for children in the care of Tusla.
- Oversight and development of Tusla, The Child and Family Agency; and Oberstown Children's Detention Centre.
- Family and parenting support, prevention and early intervention policy and initiatives, interagency working and leading on crosscutting innovations to support outcomes for children, young people, families and communities.
- Development and coordination of the implementation of Young Ireland, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023, including coordination of Ireland's response to the EU Child Guarantee.

**Early Learning and Care and School Age Care**

- Operational, policy and legislative developments relating to improving access to high-quality and affordable Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare and for First 5, a whole of Government, 10-year strategy for babies, young children and their families.

**Equality**

- Development of policy on equality (including Traveller and Roma and LGBTIQ+ issues), gender equality, human rights, family leave, adoption, and child and youth participation.
- Management of legislative projects on equality, gender equality, family leave and LGBTIQ+ issues.
- Management of funding schemes for Traveller and Roma and LGBTIQ+ communities, for women's organisations and on gender equality.

- Management of the national children and youth participation structures, including the National Youth Assembly, Dáil na nÓg and Seanad na nÓg.

**Mother and Baby Homes**

- Leading the Government response to the final report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes.
- Driving implementation of the Government *Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions*.
- Supporting the Special Advocate for Survivors.
- Leading development of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance.
- Implementing the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme.
- Overseeing the independent Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam.

## 1.2 FINANCIAL PROVISION

This Department was subject to two transfers of functions in 2025. Post transfer, the Further Revised Estimate 2025, provides for a gross Budget of €6.128 Billion comprising €6.028 Billion current expenditure and €99.5 Million in capital funding.

In November, the Department also agreed the need for a Supplementary Estimate for 2025. Assuming approval of this Supplementary Estimate, the gross allocation for 2025 will grow to €6.342 Billion (€6.265b current / €76.9m capital).

The table below outlines the largest spending subheads categorised by Division. These areas account for 97% of the total Budget.

**Largest Spending Areas:**

| Division | Subhead | FREV Allocation | % of the Total Budget Allocation | Supplementary Estimate (SE) Allocation | % of the Total SE Allocation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Disability Division** | Specialist Community Based Disability Services (D11 & D12) | €3.239 billon | 53% | €3.506 billon | 55% |
| **Child Policy and Tusla Governance Division** | Child & Family Agency (Tusla) (A03 & A06) | €1.200 billion | 20% | €1.260 billion | 20% |
| **Early Learning and Care and School age Children Division** | Early Learning Childcare Programmes and Supports (B03, B04, B05 & B10) | €1.385 billion | 23% | €1.359 billion | 21% |
| **Mother and Baby** | Mother and Baby | €103 million | 2% | €35 million | 1% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Homes, Finance and Research Division** | Institutions (C09) | | | | |

## 1.3 STAFFING

The Department has a staffing complement of 612.7 Full Time Equivalents (FTE).

| Division/Unit | FTE |
|---|---|
| **Child Policy & Tusla Governance Division** | **54.85** |
| **Disability Division** | **69** |
| **Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Division** | **125.1** |
| **Equality, Rights and Participation Division** | **50.75** |
| **Mother and Baby Homes, Finance and Research Division** | **125.4** |
| ***-Special Advocate for Survivors*** | **1** |
| **Office of the Secretary General (Management Board and Internal Audit Unit)** | **12** |
| **Organisation and Strategy Development Division** | **158.1** |
| ***-Guardian ad Litem National Service*** | **12.5** |
| ***-Disability Appeals Office*** | **4** |
| **Total** | **612.7** |

## 1.4 OFFICE LOCATIONS

Address: Block 1, Miesian Plaza, 50 – 58 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2, D02 XW14

Website: www.gov.ie/dcediy

Email: contact@equality.gov.ie

Phone number: +353 1 647 3000

## 1.5 AEGIS BODIES

- The Bodies under the Aegis of the Department are:
- Tusla
- Oberstown Children Detention Campus
- The Adoption Authority of Ireland
- The National Disability Authority
- The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- The Ombudsman for Children's Office
- The Office of the Director for Authorised Intervention

See more details at appendix 1 below.

## 1.6 MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

The Department has recently published its new Statement of Strategy covering 2025-2028. The Strategy was approved by the Minister and Cabinet, was framed by the new Programme for Government and was drafted following engagement with all key stakeholders.

The Statement of Strategy sets out the Department's vision as:
A fair and inclusive Ireland where people's rights are realised and where everyone is supported to reach their potential.

It outlined the following mission for the Department as:
Our Mission is to fund and deliver services supported by policy and legislation that realise people's rights, promote equality, celebrate diversity and that maximise opportunity to participate in society, particularly by children, disabled people and those experiencing inequalities.

The Strategy also set out the following high level values for the Department:
**In doing our work the following are the Values which guide us and influence our behaviours and actions: -**

a. **People and Society Centred -** We are motivated to make a positive impact on society and keep the people we serve at the centre of our thinking and decision making.

b. **Equality, Fairness -** We work to ensure that policy and services are underpinned by values of equality and fairness and that rights are advanced particularly for those who are least advantaged.

c. **Listening, Hearing, Engaging and Responding-** We reach out to those we serve and with whom we work, promote participation, build open and transparent partnerships and collaborate for solutions.

d. **Impartiality, Integrity and Commitment -** We set high standards for ourselves and others, and we hold ourselves accountable to those standards.

The Department publishes an Annual Report each year detailing progress it has made against the goals and objectives in the Statement of Strategy. The 2024 Annual Report is near completion.

## 1.7 REPORTING ON PROGRESS AGAINST PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Department's Corporate Governance and Strategic Coordination Unit along with the Minister's office is collaborating across the Department and overseen by Management Board to track and report on the Department's progress on its Programme for Government Commitments.

# 2. Organisational Chart

## 2.1 ROLE OF THE MINISTER

The Department is led by the Minister for Children Disability and Equality and is assisted by the Minister of State for Disabilities.

The Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924, as amended, provides that each Minister shall be the responsible Head of the Department under his/her charge and '…shall be individually responsible to Dáil Éireann alone for the administration of the Department or Departments of which he is head…'.

The Minister bears political responsibility under the Act of 1924 for all actions within his/her Department. This Ministerial responsibility, a central element of the structure of Government, ranges from significant political decision-making on major policy issues to routine administrative responsibilities discharged by civil servants on the Minister's behalf.

The Minister of State for Disabilities has been designated a range of functions by the Minister related to the Disability Act 2005, the Assisted Decision-Making Capacity Acts, Irish Sign Language Act 2017 and he National Disability Authority Act 1999.

The key Ministerial Responsibilities include:

- Bringing Memoranda to Government on legislative and a range of policies issues;
- Attend Cabinet and relevant sub-Cabinet meetings;
- Manage Private Members Business;
- Leading the passage of legislation through the Oireachtas;
- Presenting to Oireachtas Committees and responding to questions from Committee members;
- Consider submissions and briefings from officials in the Department;
- Answering Parliamentary Questions, written and oral;
- Approving Topical Issues and Leaders Questions briefing;
- Making certain appointments to State Boards of Bodies under the Aegis of the Department on foot of a selection process managed by the Public Appointment Service;
- Approve the Department's Statement of Strategy and Annual Report;
- Provide leadership to the Department, attend regular meetings with the Secretary General, Management Board and officials.

## 2.2 ROLE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL AND MANAGEMENT BOARD

The function of the Department is to advise and support the Minister and give effect to the Minister's decisions and policies.

The Department's Management Board is led by the Secretary General, Kevin McCarthy. The Management Board also comprises six Assistant Secretaries. The Management Board meets regularly to consider and progress all key issues affecting the work of the Department including objectives outlined in the Statement of Strategy, the Department's Finances and its capacity and capability.

The Secretary General has regular formal and informal meetings with the Minister. The Minister also meets with the Management Board on a periodic basis.

Each Assistant Secretary leads a Division in the Department and is supported by teams led by Principal Officers.

# 3. Management Board Responsibilities

## 3.1 SECRETARY GENERAL

| **Secretary General** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Kevin McCarthy<br> | Kevin.McCarthy@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

The Secretary General is the senior civil servant and non-political head of the Department and is accountable to the Minister for the discharge of his/her duties.

He is a member of the Civil Service Management Board.

His responsibilities include:

- leading and directing the Department's Management Board,
- the effective and efficient management of the Department including particular financial responsibilities,
- non-political strategic planning and direction,
- providing policy advice to Ministers on all matters within the remit of the Department,
- delivering outputs and outcomes,
- addressing cross-cutting matters involving the Department,
- being accountable before Oireachtas Committees as required.

The Secretary General for the Department is also its Accounting Officer. As Accounting Officer, he is personally responsible for the safeguarding of public funds and property under his or her control; for the regularity and propriety of all the transactions in each Appropriation Account bearing his/her signature; and for the efficiency and economy of expenditure. The Accounting Officer can be called to appear before the Committee of Public Accounts of the Dáil to give evidence about the Appropriation Account, and in relation to any other account the Department is required to prepare.

## 3.2 DISABILITY DIVISION

| **Assistant Secretary:** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Colm Ó Conaill<br> | Colm.OConaill@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

The Disability Division has responsibility for:

- developing policy,
- delivering legislation,
- securing investment, and
- overseeing a range of specialist disability services delivered by the HSE and voluntary service providers to around 80,000 people with disabilities.

Implementation of the comprehensive *Action Plan for Disability Services* and the rollout of the *Children's Services Roadmap* will critically underpin this work.

Disability Division also coordinates, facilitates and steers national policy development on disability.

The new National Disability Strategy will advance Ireland's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Strategy will be implemented on a mainstream first basis, where the needs of people with disabilities will be integrated into decision-making across Government and the wider public sector.

## 3.3 CHILD POLICY & TUSLA GOVERNANCE DIVISION

| **Assistant Secretary:** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Lara Hynes<br> | Lara.Hynes@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

**Key Areas of Responsibility:**

Child Policy and Tusla Governance Division is responsible for

- policy, legislative developments, operational standards and performance relating to child welfare and protection.
- alternative care, including foster care, residential care, special care and aftercare.
- Departmental governance, oversight and development of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and Oberstown Children's Detention Centre.
-

As part of its child welfare policy responsibilities, the Division also has responsibility for parenting support, prevention and early intervention initiatives, and leading on cross-cutting innovations to support outcomes for children, young people, families and communities.

In addition, the Division leads on the implementation of Ireland's response to the European Child Guarantee to address child poverty.

The Division is also responsible for the development, monitoring and implementation of Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People and engagement on matters pertaining to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

## 3.4 EARLY LEARNING AND CARE AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE DIVISION

| **Assistant Secretary:** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Anne-Marie Brooks<br> | AnneMarie.Brooks@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

**Key Areas of Responsibility:**

The Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Division is responsible for ensuring access to high quality and affordable Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare. This includes the development of policy and legislation; the administration of a range of schemes and the associated budgetary, governance and compliance functions; regulation of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare sector; and a number of initiatives to develop the workforce and improve the quality of services.

The Division is also responsible for overseeing and reporting on the implementation of First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028).

## 3.5 EQUALITY, RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION DIVISION

| **Assistant Secretary:** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Carol Baxter<br> | Carol.Baxter@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

Equality, Rights and Participation Division is responsible for funding, oversight, reform and policy development of youth work services and ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard in decision-making in relation to issues which impact their lives.

It has responsibility for developing and implementing policy in relation to equality including gender equality. It has policy responsibility for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission which is independent in the performance of its functions. The Division also has responsibility for developing policy on human rights, Traveller and Roma issues and LGBTQI+ rights. It develops and coordinates a series of whole-of Government strategies in these areas – the National Strategy for Women and Girls, the Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and the National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy and the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making Action Plan 2024-2028. It is also responsible for developing policy and legislation on family leave and on flexible working.

The Division is responsible for the development, implementation and review of policy and legislation in relation to adoption and birth information and tracing. It works with the Departments of Health and Justice on the development of legislative provisions in relation to surrogacy and human assisted reproduction. It has corporate governance and financial oversight responsibility for the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

The Legal Unit is responsible for delivering high quality, impartial legal advice to assist in the delivery of Ministerial priorities and in the performance by the Department of its functions. The Unit provides legal advice and assistance to all Divisions and units on request. It also engages with the Office of the Attorney

General on significant legal issues as required, in recognition of the Attorney General's constitutional role as legal adviser to the Government.

The EU and International Unit is responsible for coordinating the Department's international role and engagements. This includes representing the Department's remit within the Council of the EU, and its preparations for Ireland's upcoming EU Presidency. It also engages with relevant international bodies, supporting the implementation of Ireland's relevant reporting obligations.

## 3.6 MOTHER AND BABY HOMES, FINANCE AND RESEARCH DIVISION

| **Assistant Secretary:** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Laura McGarrigle<br> | Laura.McGarrigle@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

**Key Areas of Responsibility:**

Mother and Baby Homes, Finance and Research Division is responsible for leading the Government response to the final report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. This includes driving implementation of the Government *Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions*; supporting the Special Advocate for Survivors; leading development of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance; implementing the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme; overseeing the independent Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam; as well as related policy and legislative responsibility.

Programme for Government commitments relevant to this area of responsibility are the Government commitments to:

- Continue to deliver the Action Plan for Mother and Baby Homes Survivors.
- Build the National Centre for Research and Remembrance."

The Division also leads the finance, research, evaluation and data functions within the Department.

With regard to the finance function, the Division is responsible for overall management of Department expenditure and supports individual line units in ensuring the optimisation and effective management of resource allocation for the Department and the agencies under its remit. It is also responsible for ensuring that the financial transactions of the Department are carried out correctly and accounted for accurately, in accordance with agreed accounting standards. This involves working closely with the budget holders, where responsibility for implementation and adherence in relation to the various requirements rests.

With regard to research and data functions, the Division is responsible for a number of flagship research and statistical initiatives, including the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study and the Care Experiences Programme, as well as the State of the Nation's Children and the series of Statistical Spotlights.

## 3.7 ORGANISATION AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS CAPABILITY DIVISION

| **Assistant Secretary:** | **Contact Details:** |
|---|---|
| Sheenagh Rooney<br> | Sheenagh.Rooney@dcde.gov.ie<br>[redacted] |

This Division is responsible for ensuring that the Department has the full capacity and capabilities required to deliver its strategy effectively now and into the future with a focus on Programme for Government commitments.

The Division oversees the Department's operation (people/ systems/ processes/ facilities/ outreach) and its continuous development.

Co-ordinating the Department's engagement with the parliamentary process (Committees/ Parliamentary Questions) and other relevant Government departments, and governance of aegis bodies is also a key function of this Division, collaborating with colleagues.

The Division leads the Department's organisational development process, including dedicated support for future organisation design, business capability development, development of strategic foresight function, driving cohesive Departmental strategy, as well as leading on communications and stakeholder engagement.

It is responsible for maintaining appropriate governance arrangements that support strong performance and ensure our actions are aligned with Programme for Government objectives.

The Division oversees the functioning of the Ministers' and Secretary General offices (including constituency office) ensuring that all requirements are met and advisors are in place. Risk Management, Climate Action, Business Continuity Planning and Health and Safety also fall under the remit of this Division.

The next phase of the organisation development of the Department has a focus on building greater alignment of strategy between divisions of the Department and building the capability required for a best practice organisation of the future.

# Appendix I

## AEGIS BODIES:

List of Contacts in Policy Units for Aegis Body Matters

| *Aegis Body* | *Unit & Key Officials* |
|---|---|
| **Adoption Authority of Ireland:**<br><br>*The Adoption Authority of Ireland ensures the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the lifelong adoption process, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount objective.* | **Adoption Policy Unit**<br><br>**PO:** Seosamh Mac Cárthaigh |
| **Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission:**<br><br>*Ireland's national human rights and equality institution, which protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland and builds a culture of respect and intercultural understanding in the State.* | **Equality & Gender Equality Unit**<br><br>**PO:** Una Ni Dhubhghaill |
| **National Disability Authority:**<br><br>*The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent statutory body, providing evidence-based advice and research to Government on disability policy and practice and promoting Universal Design.* | **Disability Equality Policy Unit**<br><br>**PO**: Jane Ann Duffy |
| **Oberstown Children Detention Campus**<br><br>*Oberstown Children Detention Campus provides care and education for young people referred by the courts on detention or remand orders, supporting them to address their* | **Children's Detention Schools Unit**<br><br>**PO:** David Byrne |

| | |
|---|---|
| *offending and return successfully to society.* | |
| **Office of Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam**<br><br>*The Office of the Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam (ODAIT) was established in March 2023 to oversee the excavation, recovery, identification (if possible) and reburial, in a respectful and appropriate way, of the remains of the children at the site of the former Mother and Baby institution in Tuam.* | **Memorialisation & Historic Burials Unit**<br><br>**PO:** Gráinne Morrissey |
| **Ombudsman for Children's Office:**<br><br>*The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) investigates complaints about services provided to children by public organisations. The service is free and independent. The OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland.* | **Corporate Governance & Strategic Coordination Unit**<br><br>**PO:** Mary Rogerson |
| **Tusla:**<br><br>*The Child and Family Agency is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services undertaken in Ireland* | **Tusla Governance & Performance Oversight Unit**<br><br>**PO:** Andrew Patterson |