



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Organisational Capability Review

Office of Public Works (OPW)

November 2023

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of Organisational Capability Reviews is to employ a defined and robust assessment to identify the critical gaps and opportunities between the current and desirable future capability and performance of an organisation. More specifically, Organisational Capability Reviews serve to identify the specific measures that are needed to enable State organisations to strengthen their capability to meet the challenges of the future, and deliver public services underlined by the core concepts of resilience, versatility and sustainability.

This Organisational Capability Review Report sets out the key findings and recommendations arising from a capability review of the Office of Public Works (OPW). The Office of Public Works (OPW) was established as an office of State by legislation passed in 1831 entitled '*An Act for the Extension and Promotion of Public Works in Ireland*'. This Act provided for the establishment of three Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland (the Board of Commissioners). This structure remains to the current day with all statutory powers and responsibilities under subsequent legislation pertaining to the OPW vested in the Board of Commissioners. The OPW is a scheduled office (defined as an office or branch of the Public Service) under the Public Service Management Act 1997, which sets out arrangements for the management of departments and offices and the specification of individual responsibilities and accountability at a senior level.

Since its establishment, the OPW's role has evolved significantly and now covers the following three broad areas:

- Management of the State's property portfolio;
- Flood risk management;
- The maintenance, preservation and presentation of Ireland's built heritage.

Similar to any organisation, the OPW has demonstrated areas of strength, coupled with areas requiring focus and development, thus providing opportunities for tangible capability building for the future. Specific areas requiring focus which the Management Board of the OPW should now prioritise are:

- 1). Further Development of Organisational Strategic Capability;
- 2). Enhanced People Development Strategies;
- 3). Further Development of a Central Corporate Spine.

## **1) FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC CAPABILITY**

Strategic planning and business planning, and the sustained execution of both, are critical in anticipating and responding to the increased complexity and challenges currently facing government organisations. The OPW is no exception in this regard with consistent feedback from this review pointing to the challenges for the organisation in balancing short-term priorities with longer term strategic planning. While this is not an easily remedied dilemma, adopting streamlined strategic and business planning processes, together with mobilising and harnessing internal resources, will assist the OPW in finding the correct balance between those demands competing for time and resources.

In addressing this issue the following areas require consideration:

- (i) Strategic and Business Planning Processes:** The Management Board should further refine the structure of the next Statement of Strategy to set out high level goals linked to the four strategic themes, supported by clear objectives (5/7) under each goal against which progress will be

measured. This revised Statement of Strategy should inform an Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities that will capture each objective under the four strategic themes and list detailed and time-scaled actions and sub-actions under each objective. This Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities, to which the Minister of State should have input and sign-off, should be published at the commencement of each year.

The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should inform the annual Operational Plans of each unit, and in turn the Goal Setting Forms for individual staff members, thus creating vital linkages between organisational priorities and performance management. It should also serve as the template for monthly reporting by each business unit for review at the recommended Minister of State/Management Board meetings at which the Minister should be updated on progress achieved and challenges arising. It is very important that in future Management Board members, and the Principal Officer cohort as appropriate, should have greater opportunities to develop strong working relationships with the Minister.

The OPW should also consider if the recently implemented three-year business plan model at divisional level is adequately supporting business planning across the organisation, or whether a standard one-year approach would serve to further streamline and simplify the process. In addition, consideration should also be given to the most appropriate scheduling structure for board meetings to facilitate a greater focus on strategic matters, together with ensuring that data gathered during the business planning process can be analysed centrally and utilised to inform strategic planning deliberations. Finally, the Management Board should commence planning for the longer term through the articulation of a long-term strategic vision supported by horizon scanning for future threats and opportunities.

**(ii) Leadership Team Engagement:** Engagement between the Management Board and the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff cohort should be strengthened by restructuring the quarterly Leadership Team meetings to move away from a downward information sharing dynamic to a more purposeful, interactive structure to advance the work agenda, set organisational priorities and address challenges facing the organisation. Formal Management Board engagement with the PO and Equivalent network also needs to be prioritised.

**(iii) Staff Networks:** The Terms of Reference of the Principal Officer and Equivalent network should be strengthened to clearly set out how the network will support the strategic objectives of the OPW and to position all Senior Managers in the OPW as co-creators, co-owners and co-leaders in shaping the future direction of the organisation. The Terms of Reference of the Assistant Principal Officer network should also be similarly reviewed and the network expanded to include the Assistant Principal Officer equivalent grades. Management Board members, together with POs in the case of the Assistant Principal Officer and Equivalent network, should engage formally with the fora to identify how the work of both grades could be supported, whilst demonstrating and fostering opportunities for greater internal collaboration.

## **2) ENHANCED PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

The OPW's ability to build organisational capability and deliver on its strategic and operational goals across its broad range of responsibilities is inextricably linked with the approach of the organisation to the development of its most important resource, its people. While there are some positive people development initiatives evident in the organisation, the issue requires a significantly more co-

ordinated and strategic focus by the Management Board as a matter of priority. In progressing this, the following areas require consideration:

- (i) **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy:** Organisations in their entirety benefit when they embrace and value the diversity of thoughts, ideas and ways of working that people from different backgrounds, experiences and identities bring forward. There is no Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy or Gender Policy in place in the OPW. This is an area that requires urgent focus.
  
- (ii) **Staff Health and Wellbeing Strategy:** A Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme, supported by a Health and Wellbeing Strategy requires immediate prioritisation by the OPW. Such a Programme, in line with guidance set down in the Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework, should be led by the HRM function and focus on the specific health and wellbeing needs of the OPW across the key areas of the Physical Working Environment; Health Resources and Psychosocial Working Environment. The HRM function should also play a key role in working closely with the Management Board to ensure that investment in staff health and wellbeing is prioritised, in addition to enabling and supporting managers to value the health and wellbeing of their staff through ensuring relevant training is provided and equipping managers with the tools to identify changes in the behaviour and performance of their staff.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy should complement the OPW Health and Safety Strategy. This is another area requiring urgent focus, with a Health and Safety Strategy, supported by an Implementation Plan, required as a matter of priority. This strategy should clearly articulate the organisation's health and safety objectives, targets and actions formulated through extensive consultation and consideration of legal and mandated requirements.

- (iii) **Learning and Development Strategy:** This is a strategic area that has not been attended to by the OPW until now. While a Learning and Development Strategy has been prepared by the organisation, the approach would benefit from significant refinement. Such a strategy should form an integral component of the overall strategic planning of the organisation and should reflect the OPW business strategy at corporate and business levels, and align with the HRM Strategy. The OPW Learning and Development Unit is required to position itself, through its strategy, as the organisational strategic leader in attracting and retaining talent; developing people capabilities in line with organisational needs; building an employer brand, and motivating and engaging staff. The Learning and Development Strategy should demonstrate how learning and development needs have been identified, what consultations/data gathering took place in building the strategy and crucially how the strategy will be implemented, clearly detailing roles and responsibilities, objectives, actions, indicators and roll-out in a manner that supports the implementation of business strategy. The current OPW Learning and Development Strategy is also silent on the disparity between learning and development opportunities for the administrative and operational staff cohorts and how this will be addressed.

- (iv) **Staff Development Programmes:** Building the capabilities of individuals and staff groups should be supported by a robust Learning and Development Strategy that articulates how this objective will be met. Key to this objective are the opportunities for staff to participate in

development programmes such as mentoring and coaching. There are examples of informal mentoring of staff within the OPW, together with both a new Leadership Programme (of which peer coaching is a component) and a new Coaching Programme currently under development. The Learning and Development Strategy should clearly set out the alignment between the various programmes and clarify access routes for staff at the various grades. The OPW should also assess the benefits of the introduction of a staff mentoring programme that aligns with both the Learning and Development Strategy and the HRM Statement of Strategy. All staff development programmes should embody the core aim of continuously fostering a whole-of-organisation and whole-of-government view amongst all staff, in particular manager grades, and intentionally capability building in support of same.

**(v) Development Opportunities for Operational Staff:** Learning and development is managed differently for the administrative and operational staff cohorts. Administrative staff have access to the Civil Service learning and development platform, OneLearning, whereas learning and development opportunities for operational staff does not include access to this platform, with training budgets held locally by individual business units who assess the training needs of staff based on business needs. The low PMDS completion rates by operational staff in 2022 effectively eradicates the PMDS system as a vehicle for professional development, performance management and the identification of staff training needs on an annual basis. It is noted that further work is being done by the Learning and Development Unit in collaboration with relevant business units to structure L&D Interventions for operational staff that are better aligned with the arrangements for established staff via the One Learning platform. While this is a very welcome initiative, as stated later in this report, the development and implementation of a suitable ICT solution requires progression, with clear roll-out timelines articulated, as a matter of priority.

**(vi) Staff Mobility:** Mobility opportunities are key to enable staff to develop their skill base, enhance their corporate knowledge, build their career potential and enrich their work experience. Affording staff internal mobility opportunities is an important contributor to the overall health of an organisation. In tandem with other staff development initiatives, internal mobility results in raising the skills base of the organisation, improving both levels of staff motivation and the potential pool of staff available for advancement to more senior roles with a consequent positive impact on the organisation's capacity to achieve its strategic goals. While the OPW participates in the Civil Service Mobility Scheme the organisation does not have a recent Internal Mobility Policy in place. While some internal mobility does take place, there appears to be a lack of associated transparency, with staff unsure as to the process. A revised Internal Staff Mobility Policy should be put in place that is informed by and complements the HRM Statement of Strategy and the HRM Strategic Workforce Plan, and applied consistently and transparently organisation-wide.

### **3) FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF A CENTRAL CORPORATE SPINE**

In our post-pandemic environment expectations for delivery of government services have shifted dramatically. Given the key role of the corporate function in shaping and safeguarding the excellence and value agenda set by senior leaders and executed by business units, there is an onus on organisations to clearly define, articulate and structure their corporate function to align with overall business objectives. Defining and developing a coherent central corporate spine, aligned to the

organisation's overall purpose, is a priority requirement for the OPW. Having regard to the wider public sector operating environment, with evolving public and political expectations of how services should be delivered, the central corporate spine of the OPW will require strong leadership of significant experience and expertise to drive the development of the function and to further contribute to the strategic management of both the OPW operating environment and OPW resources.

### a) Leadership of the Corporate Spine

The OPW Management Board has gone through a significant period of change with a high turnover of Board members and restructuring of responsibilities, both of which will take time to bed in. Currently, the corporate function is represented at Management Board by the Head of Corporate Services at Director grade. Responsibilities attached to the Head of Corporate Services role are broad, with responsibility for a wide range of business support functions (of which six are headed by Principal Officers) including:

- Human Resource Management;
- Financial Services;
- ICT Unit;
- Communications Unit;
- Health and Safety Unit;
- Governance and Risk Unit (GRU),
- Policy, Innovation and Reform Unit;
- Government Publications and Elections Services.

Some, and elements of some, of these business support units are dispersed across the organisation, supported by different operating systems, policies and practices rather than grounded in a centralised corporate structure. One such example is the split system for HRM across the administrative and operational staff cohorts, with HR for administrative staff managed centrally and supported by appropriate ICT systems and HR for operational staff managed locally, with no comprehensive ICT system in place, little supporting ICT technology available and no central oversight. In addition to holding the above responsibilities, the Head of Corporate Services also acts in a number of critical organisational roles including but not limited to Chief Risk Officer; Procurement Officer; Chair of Corporate Governance Committee and Chair of the Partnership Committee.

In building an organisation for the future, and re-defining and re-structuring a coherent central corporate spine, the OPW must conduct an analysis of the current breadth of responsibilities attached to the Head of Corporate Services role, ascertain precisely the key business support functions that should constitute the corporate spine of the future organisation and consider whether the role requires leadership at a more senior level than currently in place. If that analysis confirms a more senior leadership requirement, engagement should then be progressed as appropriate with the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform to discuss the viability of such a proposal, while clearly demonstrating the added strategic and operational value to the organisation. The Head of Corporate Services should be assigned solely to that role in order to have the capacity to mobilise the function as a critical enabler of the organisation, through the strategic management of both the OPW operating environment and OPW resources. The Head of Corporate Services role will need to be fundamentally supported by strong, strategic and robust leadership at Management Board level in order to ensure the new structure is embraced organisation wide and maximum value realised.

## **b) Strategic Management of the OPW Operating Environment**

The diversity and complexity of the environment in which the OPW operates was a recurring theme throughout this review, with the organisation responsible for the delivery of a very broad range of public services, programmes and projects nationwide involving a multiplicity of stakeholders, client organisations and customers. In balancing such competing delivery responsibilities under policy frameworks such as the National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 (Project Ireland 2040); the Programme for Government; Climate

Action Plans 2021 – 2023 and Heritage Ireland 2030, in addition to Estate Management and Property Maintenance; Management of the State Art Collection; delivering Brexit Infrastructural and flood risk management projects, and responding with agility to often unforeseen national priorities, it is crucial that the OPW is structured corporately to be in a position to respond and adapt to the external environment while transforming the internal environment to ensure that it can continue to meet a constantly evolving value and excellence delivery agenda.

Corporate functions requiring consideration in the context of the centralised strategic management of the OPW operating environment include those that will strengthen the key areas of governance and compliance; organisational development and change, legal and regulatory, and communications:

- (i) Procurement Management Office:** Notwithstanding the complexity and scale of procurement activity in the OPW, a largely decentralised procurement system is currently in operation, with each business unit undertaking its own procurement processes. It is therefore recommended that the OPW establishes a centralised, specialist Procurement Management Office, led by the Head of Procurement for the organisation (Principal Officer level). The Procurement Management Office should have full strategic, operational support and governance responsibility for procurement within the OPW and should work in close collaboration with individual business units and the Programme Management Office.
- (ii) Programme Management Office:** In tandem with developing a centralised Procurement Management Office, the Management Board should prioritise the establishment of a centralised Programme Management Office to provide consistency and rigour in driving programme and project delivery across the organisation. The Programme Management Office should be led at Principal Officer level, by a specialist with requisite skills and experience in programme and project management. The Head of the Programme Management Office should be supported by a similarly skilled team who will engage with project teams at business unit level to guide projects and programmes from concept to conclusion, utilising the agreed OPW Programme Management framework, processes, procedures and systems. The responsibilities of the Programme Management Office should span the operational, strategic and governance spheres, including input into the assessment of training needs and the design of appropriate training interventions in close collaboration with the Learning and Development Unit.
- (iii) Centralised Appraisal and Evaluation Unit:** The OPW manages significant procurement and investment programmes however it lacks a centralised appraisal unit, with appraisals, including capital appraisals, currently carried out at individual business unit level, supplemented by extensive use of consultants. Similarly, while there are separate post-project review/evaluation processes in place for the Estate Management and Flood Risk Management programmes, there is

inconsistency in the undertaking of evaluations. In order to build internal expertise and bring consistency of approach to the appraisal and evaluation processes across all functions of the organisation it is proposed that the OPW should establish a central appraisal and evaluation unit. The unit should be led by an appropriately qualified specialist with a reporting line to the Head of the Finance Unit and serve as a resource to all business areas, formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and systems for the appraisal, prioritisation, evaluation and governance of projects.

**(iv) Organisational Development, Reform and Innovation:** Organisational development, reform and innovation in the OPW needs to be driven from the centre, prioritising active engagement and two-way communication across all staff grades, functions and business areas. A particular focus is required on the continued fostering of an active culture of innovation across the OPW. Such a culture should not be driven by a standalone Innovation Strategy, but rather should be driven by the full suite of OPW strategies and policies, monitored by the Innovation Steering Group and robustly supported by the Management Board.

**(v) Communications:** Given the diverse remit of the OPW and the public importance attached to its service delivery, organisational capacity in communications is crucial. Strategic communications need to become core to the functions of the OPW, with buy-in for the importance of communications at the most senior level crucial. While significant work has been undertaken in this area in recent months, a primary focus is now required on enhancing communication with external stakeholders and the development and implementation of a coherent Website and Social Media Strategy that will consolidate the OPW footprint and deliver a coherent message across social media platforms. Improvements in internal communication need to be supported by the immediate roll-out of smartphones to all staff nationwide to include access to an online meeting platform. Such technology should be employed as a component of business as usual to facilitate engagement between senior management and staff nationwide, particularly those in remote locations.

### **c) Strategic Management of OPW Resources**

The strategic management of resources and capabilities has been identified as a particular challenge for the OPW in the context of complex and competing delivery responsibilities on a national basis. The critical challenge for the OPW in strengthening the corporate spine of the organisation to strategically manage its resources, will be to maximise the value of their internal resources while simultaneously harnessing the broader network of resources across the civil and public service system and beyond. Developments in this area will require consideration of the following core corporate functions, supported by a strategic resource management approach:

**(i) Human Resources:** A strong and committed workforce is critical to the OPW achieving its priorities and progressing its strategic objectives. The HRM Statement of Strategy is a vital component of the strategic planning process of the organisation, with the current iteration needing to be urgently updated to better reflect the contribution that HRM is expected to make to the achievement of the OPW's strategic objectives. Such HRM strategy development requires extensive staff consultation to ensure maximum engagement, buy-in and ownership organisation-wide. Strategic HRM is an area requiring strengthening in the OPW, with Management Board support needed to facilitate the transition from a transactional to a more strategic HRM function. While work undertaken to date is acknowledged, there is an urgent requirement to progress the introduction of a comprehensive

HRM ICT system for all OPW operational staff thereby creating capacity for the HRM Unit to engage in priority strategic HRM work.

The primary strategic HRM areas requiring focus include the development of a more comprehensive

Strategic Workforce Plan, based on recent HRM data, that addresses recruitment, retention; career development, planning for and management of the retirement cliff and skills management organisation-wide; development of a Gender Policy and Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Strategy; development of a Staff Health and Wellbeing Strategy; supporting performance management; the further development of the HRM Business Partner Approach, development of a current Internal Staff Mobility Policy; and ongoing review of the Blended Working Policy.

**(ii) Technology Resources:** The OPW is a highly geographically dispersed organisation with ICT users spread across some 130 sites. The ICT Unit provides a range of services to support the OPW's operational and strategic business functions ranging from the provision of advice to senior management on ICT issues to the provision and maintenance of office equipment. The organisation would benefit from formalising the post of Chief Information Officer (CIO) to continue to lead the ICT function and oversee the current and future operational and strategic ICT and digitisation needs of the organisation. The Management Board in the OPW is required to be responsive to the changing environment in which the organisation operates and to note the importance of digital offerings to customers and stakeholders alike. In this regard, digitisation of services across the full range of OPW operations should be strongly and consistently driven from the centre. A coherent, organisation-wide approach to the delivery of digitised services through the articulation of a future facing Digital Transformation Strategy is in need of prioritisation. This strategy will require the allocation of appropriate skilled resources, should combine and balance external and internal needs, and prioritise capability building measures relating to governance and stewardship of corporate data resources. On a more basic level, the Management Board need to urgently progress the roll-out of technology to all operational staff to strengthen senior management engagement with staff, improve internal communications and facilitate appropriate performance management and staff training and development.

**(iii) Financial Resources:** The current OPW financial management system is outdated and will be out of support in Q1 2024. While this system performs the core financial activities of the OPW, some additional financial activities are conducted through MS Excel which can be labour intensive for staff and is not recommended to continue. The Management Board will need to proactively monitor the progression of the migration of the organisation to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) under Phase 3 which is not due to take place until late 2024, ensuring consistent and detailed engagement between both parties at as early a stage as possible.

**(iv) Information and Knowledge Resources:** The OPW needs to mobilise to establish structures that will support the organising, capturing, sharing and utilising of the collective knowledge, information and expertise of the organisation to improve its performance and achieve its goals. In progressing this, there is an urgent requirement for the development of a Knowledge Management Strategy, Records Management Strategy and Data Management Strategy. The impetus for these developments should come from the central corporate spine with robust leadership and support at Management Board level.

## CONCLUSION

The OPW operates in a demanding and complex environment, balancing multiple priorities across a national brief, with a multitude of stakeholders and customers. It is thereby of crucial importance that the organisation strives to consistently build organisational capability and embed a strong organisational culture of continuous improvement. Timely implementation of the recommendations set out in this report will support the OPW in meeting these objectives and will enable the organisation position itself for the challenges of the future.

In preparing an Action Plan as a follow-up to this review process, the OPW should consider the findings and actions of the seven Organisational Capability Reviews conducted to date. The recommendations forming the basis for the OPW's Action Plan are set out at the end of each chapter in this report, differentiating between those viewed as critical and important.

### OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS

The Office of Public Works (OPW) was established as an office of State by legislation passed in 1831 entitled *'An Act for the Extension and Promotion of Public Works in Ireland'*. This Act provided for the establishment of three Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland (the Board of Commissioners). This structure remains to the current day with all statutory powers and responsibilities under subsequent legislation pertaining to the OPW vested in the Board of Commissioners. The OPW is a scheduled office (defined as an office or branch of the Public Service) under the Public Service Management Act 1997, which sets out arrangements for the management of departments and offices and the specification of individual responsibilities and accountability at a senior level.

On inception, the OPW assumed responsibility for functions previously performed by the Directors General of Inland Navigation, the Fisheries Commissioners, the Postmaster General and the Civil Buildings

Commissioners, in addition to administering loans for public works projects. The responsibilities of the OPW continued to expand and develop throughout the intervening years to the current remit of management of the State estate portfolio, flood risk management and conservation of the State's heritage sites.

The primary legal framework within which the OPW operates and which guides the core activities of the organisation includes:

- Public Works (Ireland) Act 1831
- State Property Act 1954
- Arterial Drainage Acts 1945-1995
- Coastal Protection Act 1963
- National Monuments Acts 1930 -2004
- State Authorities (Development and Management) Act 1993
- Commissioners of Public Works (Functions and Powers) Act 1996
- European Communities (Energy End-Use Efficiency and Energy Services) Regulations 2009 – Statutory Instrument No. 542/2009
- European Communities (Assessment and Management of Flood Risks) Regulations 2010-2015
- Public Service Management Act, 1997
- The Comptroller and Auditor General Acts 1923 - 1993

### ORGANISATIONAL FUNCTIONS AND PRIORITIES

The mission of the OPW, as set out in its Statement of Strategy 2021-2024, is *'to manage the State property portfolio, Ireland's flood risk, and our State national heritage – all in a sustainable manner.'* The breadth of the role of the OPW is reflected in the Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, which sets out numerous commitments that can only be effectively implemented by an agile, responsive and innovative OPW. This is reflected in the purpose of the OPW, as documented in the Statement of Strategy 2021-2024, *'to provide the Government and the public with versatile, innovative and specialist services.'*

The primary functional areas of the OPW include:

- (i) **Estate Management:** The OPW manages a significant volume of the State's property portfolio with responsibility for approximately 2,500 properties, including the provision of accommodation for government departments and agencies (approximately 530 offices) and over 680 properties for An Garda Síochána. The range of OPW services deployed in the estate management function include architectural, engineering, valuation, quantity surveying, project management and facilities management, and property management/asset management. The OPW also has a lead role in the delivery of significant Brexit infrastructure projects, in addition to the Ukrainian Rapid Build Homes Programme working with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).
- (ii) **Flood Risk Management:** The OPW co-ordinates the government's approach to flood risk management across three strategic and policy areas - prevention, protection and preparedness, with the organisation currently progressing 150 flood relief schemes under the National Development Plan as an element of Project Ireland 2040. OPW civil engineers are involved in the assessment and mapping of flood risk, the design of flood protection measures and embedding adaptation for climate change across the functional area. They also manage an extensive hydrometric network and the maintenance of approximately 12,000 kilometres of river channels and 800 kilometres of embankments under the provisions of the Arterial Drainage Acts.
- (iii) **Heritage Services:** The OPW holds national responsibility for the conservation and preservation of cultural and heritage properties including Ireland's 2 World Heritage Sites, 30 National Historic Properties, 780 National Monuments and over 5,000 acres of gardens and parklands. The organisation also provides visitor services at historic properties, parklands and monuments under its remit.

Other functions of the OPW include the State/Principal Architect's Office; the strategic management and maintenance of the State Art Collection including implementation of the government's 'Per Cent for Art' Scheme; involvement in the preparation for and delivery of State Events; and management of the Government Publications Office.

## **ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDPDR) is assigned as the Minister with responsibility for the OPW. The organisation is led by the Chairman (Secretary General) and is structured across six divisions:

1. State/Principal Architect's Office
2. Estate Management
3. Heritage Services and Capital Works Delivery
4. Planning and Climate Adaptation
5. Corporate Services
6. Flood Risk Management

The responsibilities of each division are set out in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Divisional Structure of the OPW (at October 2023)**

State/Principal Architect's Office	Rosslare Europort (previously Brexit Unit); Major Projects; National Investment Office; Civil and Structural Engineering Services
Estate Management	Property Management (Owned Properties); Property Management (Leased Properties); Property Management (Portfolio Planning); Property Maintenance; Mechanical and Electrical Engineering*
Heritage Services and Capital Works Delivery	National Monuments Conservation and National Historic Properties (outside Dublin); Conservation of Dublin Historic Buildings and National Cultural Institutions; National Monuments and Visitor Services; National Historic Properties; Intermediate Projects
Planning and Climate Adaptation	Flood Risk Management Policy; Flood Risk Management and Climate Adaptation; Planning and Climate Adaptation; Estate Planning; Quantity Surveying Services
Corporate Services	Human Resource Management; Financial Services; ICT Unit; Communications Unit; Health and Safety Unit; Governance and Risk Unit (GRU); Policy, Innovation and Reform Unit; Government Publications and Elections Service
Flood Risk Management	FRM Data Services and Flood Relief Design; Flood Projects Management; East Region Drainage Maintenance & Construction; West Region Arterial Drainage Maintenance and Construction and Environment; South West Drainage Maintenance and Construction and Capital Projects; Mechanical Engineering Field Services and Procurement; Environment Section
Chairman's Office	Internal Audit; Data Protection; Art Management

\* Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Services provided for both owned and leased properties

The OPW Head Office is located in Trim, Co. Meath, supplemented by an office at George's Quay, Dublin 2 which opened in 2021. The OPW has in excess of 130 permanent workplaces nationwide, including offices, heritage sites and depots, engineering and building maintenance depots, parks and gardens. A full list of all OPW office and site locations is presented in Appendix 3. In addition to permanent workplaces, OPW staff are employed at other outdoor workplaces such as national monument sites, rivers and parks as and when required.

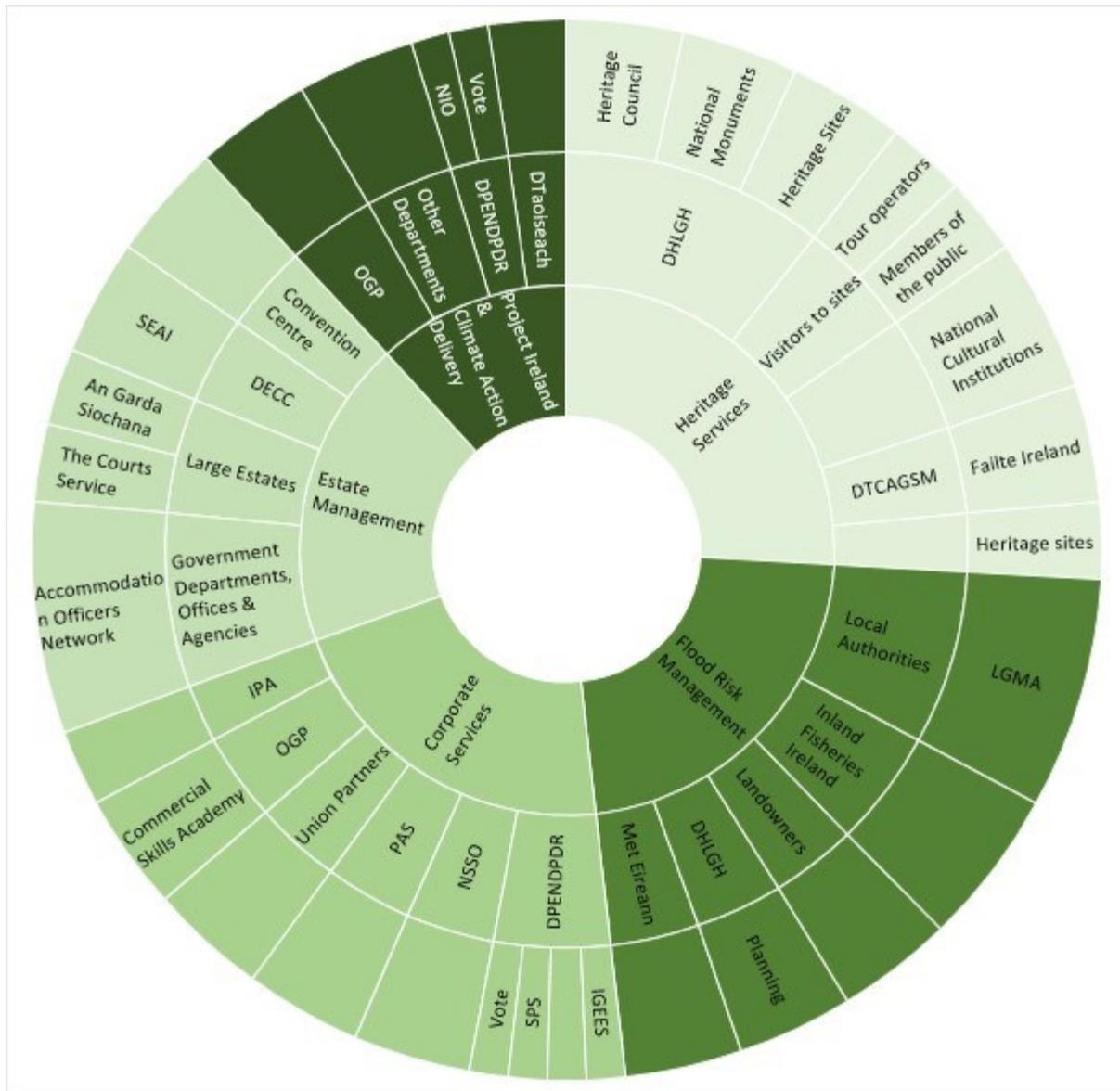
The number of staff employed by the OPW at the end of Q1 2023 was 2,195, comprising 901 administrative civil servants and 1,294 operational staff<sup>1</sup>. Staff numbers in the operational areas can fluctuate during the year with the employment of seasonal staff in the heritage (tour guides) and flood risk management (general operatives) areas. The OPW administrative civil servant numbers include general civil service grades as well as a wide range of professional and technical staff in equivalent grades including Assistant Principal Architect, Senior Architect, Architect, Architectural Assistant, Assistant Chief Engineer, Engineer Grade 1/2/3, Valuation and Property Advisory Services, District Inspector and

<sup>1</sup> DPENDPDR Databank

Engineering, Technical and Quantity Surveyor Grades. The professional and technical staff cohort accounts for approximately 43% of the administrative civil service staff numbers. For the purpose of this report, the term ‘administrative staff’ refers to general Civil Service grades and professional and technical staff, while ‘operational Staff’ refers to industrial/non-established staff.

The following chart illustrates the current reach of the OPW across its core delivery areas by reference to its range of primary external stakeholders:

**Chart 1: External Primary Stakeholders of the OPW**



**OVERVIEW OF FUNDING**

The Revised Estimates 2023 provides for a gross budget of €617.011 million which comprises:

- Programme A - Climate Responsive Flood Risk Management €126.174 million (€46.178 million current and €79.996 million capital expenditure)
- Programme B - Estate Portfolio Management €490.837 million (€300.833 million current and €190.004 million capital expenditure)

All income received by the OPW from sources such as ticket sales, admission fees and sale of properties is surrendered to the exchequer unless sanction is sought within any given year to fund property purchases through sales proceeds. The Chairman of the OPW acts as both Head of the Office (Secretary General) and the Accounting Officer, and is thereby responsible for the economic and efficient use of the OPW's resources, its internal control environment and the safeguarding of OPW assets.

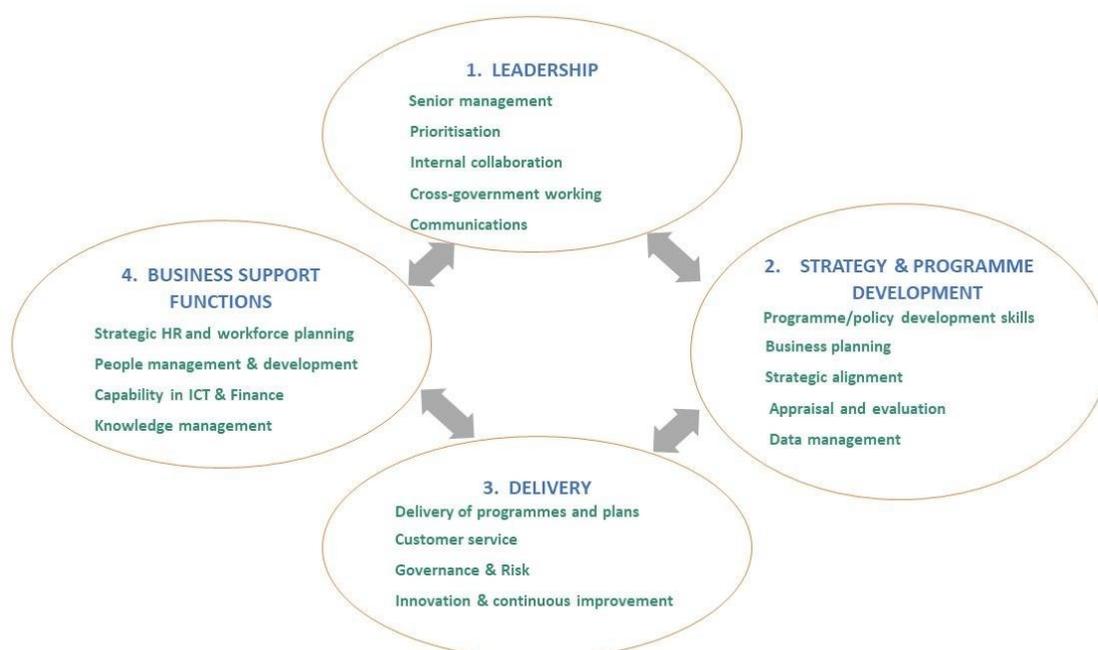
The Organisational Capability Review Programme commenced in 2016, on foot of Action 20 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (2014)<sup>2</sup>. This action provides for the implementation of a programme of organisational reviews, the purpose being: *“To embed a culture of regular and objective assessments of the capacity and capability of each Department to achieve its objectives and take the necessary action to close any gaps.”*

There have been seven reviews completed to date<sup>3</sup> with the OPW selected for this review after consultation with the Organisational Capability Review Programme Steering Group and the Civil Service Management Board. Each review is undertaken by the Organisational Capability Review Team (CRT), based in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDPDR), supported by an External Review Panel, and assisted by a Departmental Liaison Officer (DLO) nominated from the organisation under review.

### REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This review was guided by a structured standards based methodology template that measured the OPW’s capability against a series of best practice statements under the themes of:

- Leadership
- Strategy and Programme Development
- Delivery
- Business Support Functions



<sup>2</sup> [Civil Service Renewal Plan](#)

<sup>3</sup> A Synthesis Paper was published in January 2021 outlining the main findings of the first six reviews undertaken and is available along with all of the reviews undertaken to date on [gov.ie](#).

## TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE OPW REVIEW

The Terms of Reference agreed with the OPW Management Board for this review were:

*“To review the organisational capability of the Office of Public Works (OPW) to deliver on its mission, vision and purpose statements and organisational objectives as set out in its Statement of Strategy, 2021-2024. In that respect, the review will make recommendations on its organisational capability by reference to leadership, strategy development, delivery and corporate support. The review will give particular attention to capability in delivering the various strategies, programmes and schemes under the aegis of the OPW, with a particular emphasis given to efficiency and effectiveness.”*

## GOVERNANCE OF THE OCR PROCESS

The Organisational Capability Review team carried out this review. The team was supported by a Liaison Officer from the OPW who provided vital support and assistance, scheduled and attended interviews and workshops, provided research support, and participated in the drafting of the final report.

The team report to an External Review Panel whose role was ‘to review, validate, edit and finalise the report prepared by the team’. The panel comprised:

- Mr. John McCarthy, former Secretary General, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
- Ms. Philomena Poole, former CEO Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and Louth County Councils □  
Professor Joe McDonagh, Trinity College Dublin

The Organisational Capability Review Programme is overseen by a Steering Group comprised of:

- Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú, formerly Secretary General, Department of Education
- Mr. Mark Griffin, Secretary General, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Ms. Shirley Comerford, Assistant Secretary, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform
- Ms. Oonagh McPhillips, Secretary General, Department of Justice
- Mr. Joe Hackett, Secretary General, Department of Foreign Affairs

## REVIEW PROCESS

Evidence gathering for this review involved both desktop research and interviews and workshops aimed at assessing the capability of the OPW from internal and external perspectives. The majority of interviews/workshops took place online with a small number conducted in person. Internal evidence gathering comprised interviews with members of the OPW Senior Management Team (subsequently renamed the OPW Leadership Team) and 41 staff workshops. External evidence gathering comprised 22 interviews with the OPW’s main stakeholders, including a number of Local Authorities, the Accommodation Officers Network<sup>4</sup>, and a number of government departments and agencies that work closely with the OPW. The review was executed over an extended timeframe due to the gradual

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<sup>4</sup> A network comprised of Accommodation Officers within each government department and agency who act as the point of contact with the OPW on accommodation and maintenance matters.

unwinding of pandemic-related restrictions, resourcing issues now resolved, and a changing work environment as organisations adapted to new working arrangements (remote working and blended working).

**Table 2: Overview of Interviews and Workshops Conducted**

Category	Number of Engagements	Number of Participants
Minister of State	1	1
Senior Management (incl. Secretary General)	7	7
PO and PO Equivalents Workshops	8	24
AP and AP Equivalents Workshops	6	57
HEO/AO and HEO/AO Equivalents Workshops	5	41
EO Workshops	7	43
Clerical Officer Workshops	5	35
Service Officer Workshops	1	6
Operational Staff Workshops	9	94
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>308</b>
External Stakeholders *	22	
<b>Total number of engagements</b>	<b>71</b>	

\* A list of external stakeholders consulted is set out in Appendix 2

### STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is structured in line with the four themes against which OPW capacity was measured:

- Leadership
- Strategy and Programme Development
- Delivery
- Business Support Functions

Each chapter includes a list of the main findings and concludes with a list of recommendations. A comprehensive list of the review recommendations can be found in Appendix 1.

## CHAPTER 1. LEADERSHIP

This first chapter deals with leadership by the OPW Leadership Team (the Management Board and the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff cohort) and considers the strength and capacity of the Leadership Team; the extent to which prioritisation between strategic and immediate aims is achieved; the quality of cross-divisional cooperation within the OPW; the degree to which the OPW influences and collaborates on a cross-government basis; and the quality of OPW communications, both internally and externally.

### 1.1 LEADERSHIP BY SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The Leadership Team of the OPW comprises the Management Board, general service Principal Officers and Principal Officer Equivalent professional and technical staff. The Public Works (Ireland) Act, 1831 provides for the establishment of a Board of Commissioners, comprising three Commissioners of Public Works. Whilst the Board of Commissioners retains statutory obligations and decision-making responsibility in accordance with certain legislation, directives and regulations, it delegates responsibility for operational and strategic matters to the Management Board. The Board of Commissioners is comprised of the Chair of the OPW and two other Commissioners who traditionally are also members of the Management Board. The primary features of the OPW management structure and its effectiveness are set out as follows:

**1.1.1 Management Board:** The Management Board, which recently commenced meeting weekly rather than fortnightly, is comprised of the Chairman (also Chairman of the Board of Commissioners), the Principal/State Architect (Commissioner), three Assistant Secretaries (one of whom is also a Commissioner) and two Directors.

**Table 1.1: Composition of the Management Board**

Position	Grade
Chairman	Secretary General/Commissioner
Head of Estate Management	Assistant Secretary
Head of Planning and Climate Adaptation	Assistant Secretary/Commissioner
Head of Heritage Services and Capital Works Delivery	Assistant Secretary
Principal/State Architect	Deputy Secretary/Commissioner
Head of Flood Risk Management	Director
Head of Corporate Services	Director

There has been significant turnover at Management Board level in recent times with five new members joining since the start of 2022, two of whom hold Acting positions. Currently, just two board members have been in role for longer than 5 years. An induction process for new members to the Board has recently been put in place. A restructuring of Management Board responsibilities took place in 2022 which included the creation of the Planning and Climate Adaptation Division and the

restructuring of the Estate Management Division which brought the property maintenance, property management and mechanical and electrical engineering units under the management of a single Management Board member.

Considering the size and scale of the OPW and the complexity of its functions, it is noteworthy that the Head of Corporate Services is a Director position with responsibility for a range of business support functions (of which six are headed by Principal Officers) including:

- Human Resource Management;
- Financial Services;
- ICT Unit;
- Communications Unit;
- Health and Safety Unit;
- Governance and Risk Unit (GRU),
- Policy, Innovation and Reform Unit;
- Government Publications and Elections Service

In general, the Management Board works well together with a good sense of collegiality and a willingness to engage in robust deliberations as required. The arrival of new board members is seen as providing an additional opportunity for increased cohesiveness and collaboration. Furthermore, the appointment of two female members to the Management Board since 2022 is welcomed in the context of maintaining appropriate gender balance.

**1.1.2 Board Decision-Making:** The Board has demonstrated that it performs well in addressing crises such as responses to flooding, the delivery of Brexit infrastructure, the COVID-19 pandemic and a willingness to support DCEDIY in the provision of accommodation as a component of the government’s humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. While a number of strategic documents have been endorsed at Management Board level including the Report on Coastal Change Management Strategy, Climate Adaptation with respect to Flood Risk Management and the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme (CFRAM), there is a sense among some Management Board members that the Board is overly focused on operational matters to the detriment of longer term strategic deliberations.

**1.1.3 Board Self-Reflection:** In August 2021 the OPW commissioned the IPA to review the effectiveness of the Management Board, with the aim of prompting discussion and self-reflection amongst board members regarding its operation and overall effectiveness. The report was submitted to the Board in March 2022 and contained a number of recommendations for consideration. These covered a range of areas including a greater focus on strategic issues; enhanced communications with stakeholders; changes to the structure of Management Board meetings and committees; and the induction of new board members. The majority of the recommendations were accepted by the Management Board with a number of ‘away-days’ having been held to date to facilitate their progression. Three of these recommendations involving setting of the meeting agenda, timely circulation of papers and induction for new members are noted as complete. A number of the IPA findings and recommendations are also reflected in this capability review.

The IPA review was one of a series of reviews that have taken place during 2021, 2022 and 2023, the majority of which were undertaken by the OPW (Table 1.2). These reviews considered long-term

planning, areas of strength, and the identification of areas requiring further development for consideration by the Management Board and senior management. Three of the reviews address specific areas within the OPW while the rest have a broader perspective.

**Table 1.2. Reviews Undertaken 2021 - 2023**

Year	Name	Undertaken by
2021	Management Board Effectiveness Review	IPA
2021	Review of OPW Commitments under the National Development Plan	OPW
2022	Review of Capital Programme Delivery Capability <sup>5</sup>	OPW
2022	Corporate Risk Register Review	External Consultant
<b>Division-Specific</b>		
2021	Review of Project Appraisal for Expenditure in Flood Risk Management	OPW
2022	Property Maintenance: Structure, Capacity and Capability Review	OPW
2023	Capability Review of Heritage and Conservation	OPW

It is noted that the recommendations arising from the reviews have been endorsed by the Management Board and some have been operationalised through the organisation’s business planning process. It is understood that the review of the corporate risk register has resulted in an improvement in the recording and assessment of risks. Enhanced reporting mechanisms on the digital platform utilised for the risk register better facilitates discussion at the Management Board on key strategic risks in particular. This has enabled the Board to take better informed and earlier decisions on how to address organisational challenges.

Restructuring of the organisation, in response to Climate Adaptation Challenges, and to support the delivery of the National Development Plan (NDP) has also been undertaken on foot of the reviews.

**1.1.4 Principal Officers and Equivalent:** There has been approximately 38% turnover at Principal Officer and Equivalent level for the period October 2020 to September 2023 primarily due to retirements, promotions and mobility<sup>6</sup>. This turnover has resulted in a loss of experience and corporate memory, with significant time involved in both recruiting and inducting new staff. Notwithstanding this, the calibre of the Principal Officer and Equivalent grades is considered by Management Board members to be good.

Data gathered for this review indicates mixed views on Principal Officer decision-making capability by staff at Assistant Principal Officer and Higher Executive Officer level; with some Principal Officers regarded as effective, decisive and responsive to staff needs whereas others were viewed as slower in decisionmaking. The high turnover of staff at Principal Officer level, in addition to factors such as lack

<sup>5</sup> This review was undertaken following publication in January 2021 of the EY report “*Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability Review*”. Departments were asked by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform to assess their delivery capabilities and identify any capability gaps.

<sup>6</sup> At present, the Civil Service PO mobility scheme does not apply to professional/technical grades

of resources and busy workloads, were seen as negatively impacting on Principal Officer decision-making capability.

**1.1.5 Principal Officers and Equivalent Network:** A Principal Officer network, unusually termed the Senior

Management Team (SMT), was established in 2022, meeting for the first time at the end of 2022 with a further 5 meetings taking place within the first 6 months of 2023. Membership is comprised of all staff at Principal Officer and Equivalent level. The Terms of Reference for the network sets out its objectives including:

- The creation of networking opportunities and sharing of experience/knowledge/skills/insights across the OPW Business Units;
- The proposal and discussion of policy/corporate initiatives and contribution to the strategic direction of the OPW;
- Developing and enhancing the culture of the OPW;
- Supporting open, two-way communication between the Management Board and Senior Managers and between Senior Managers and staff

The intention is for the members to meet monthly every 6 weeks for half-day sessions, with meetings jointly chaired by two Senior Managers from different business units on rotation. The OPW Policy, Innovation and Reform Unit acts as secretariat and is the point of contact for the network with the Management Board, via the Head of Corporate Services.

**1.1.6 Leadership Team (LT):** The OPW Leadership Team is comprised of the Management Board and Principal Officers and Equivalent<sup>7</sup>. It meets on a quarterly basis with the aim of facilitating networking and information exchange, as well as providing opportunities to share ‘lessons learned’ across divisions.

There is however a need for clarity on the purpose of Leadership Team (LT) meetings. A number of Principal Officers and Equivalent note that in its current format there may be too much emphasis on the provision of information by the Management Board, rather than on discussion, debate and an open exchange which could draw on the full expertise of the LT. Suggestions from the Principal Officer and Equivalent cohort for enhancement of LT engagement include the selection of a LT member to chair meetings and the creation of sub-groups to progress priority work areas outside of the formal meeting structure. Despite the requirement for a realignment and restructuring of the LT meetings, there was consensus on the importance of the LT structure in facilitating formal engagement between the Management Board and the Senior Manager cohort.

**1.1.7 Ministerial Engagement:** The Chairman meets with the Minister of State on a weekly basis. While at the time of drafting this report there were no structured meetings between the Minister of State and other Management Board members, individual engagement on specific issues did take place and Management Board members reported a good working relationship. However, a more structured engagement between the Management Board and the Minister of State would be useful to keep the Board updated on current and emerging political priorities, assist in the further development of a

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<sup>7</sup> There were 34 Principal Officer and Equivalent based on staff data provided by the OPW on 27 September 2023

shared political/administrative understanding of work programmes and timelines, and support effective monitoring of progress on key areas of work.

## **FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP BY SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

F1.1 The OPW Management Board has gone through a significant period of change in terms of new members and restructuring of responsibilities, both of which will take time to bed in. The recent development of a structured induction process for new Management Board members will support this bedding in period into the future. The structure of the Management Board is also uncommon in that the Board of Commissioners, provided for in The Public Works (Ireland) Act 1831, operates as a parallel legal structure, with separate meetings provided for and specific responsibilities attached to the Commissioner role, vested in a subset of Management Board members.

F1.2 Management Board membership includes the Head of Corporate Services (Director Grade) who has responsibility for a range of critical business support functions. There is an urgent requirement for the strengthening of the corporate function of the OPW, with a clear focus on both the corporate management of the OPW operating environment and the strategic management of OPW resources and capabilities.

F1.3 The Management Board is largely viewed as exhibiting a greater focus on operational matters and decisions compared to strategic deliberations. The Board must balance the delivery of strategic priorities, such as capital commitments linked to government national priorities, with reactive responses to unexpected events, thus requiring the allocation of resources for short-term actions and long-term goals. This requires a responsive Management Board which ensures that the urgent does not overwhelm the important. In this context, the scheduling of Management Board meetings to facilitate timely consideration of both operational and strategic issues requires review.

F1.4 The Leadership Team (LT), comprised of the Management Board and the Principal Officer and Equivalent cohort, currently meet on a quarterly basis, however there is considerable scope to strengthen the meeting structure to move away from a downward information-sharing session towards a format that will facilitate discussion, debate and an open exchange, drawing on the full expertise of the LT. The LT model would also benefit from a rotational Chair drawn from the wider LT group and the use of subgroups to progress priority work areas outside of the formal meeting structure.

F1.5 Notwithstanding a significant turnover of staff at Principal Officer and Equivalent level in recent years, the calibre of this staff cohort is considered by Management Board members to be good. However, Principal Officer decision-making capability is viewed by staff at AP and HEO level as mixed.

F1.6 While a Principal Officer network was established in 2022, strengthening the Terms of Reference will provide an opportunity to build a more creative and innovative network of senior managers.

F1.7 While the OPW Chairman meets with the Minister of State on a weekly basis there is scope for greater structured engagement between the Management Board and the Minister to review both the progress and challenges in meeting agreed organisational priorities.

## **1.2 PRIORITISATION**

The Management Board of the OPW, similar to many other government departments and organisations, faces the challenge of striking an appropriate balance between long-term goals, short-term actions and responding to unforeseen emergency response situations.

**1.2.1 Balance between short and long-term goals:** A recurring topic during this review was the challenge the OPW faces in balancing the achievement of long-term goals with the pressure to deliver short-term actions and respond to unforeseen emergency situations. While considerations in this regard inevitably involve the management of staffing and resourcing issues, a further fundamental aspect is the need for the Management Board agenda to facilitate a greater focus on strategic issues and decisions on a regular and structured basis, ensuring that adequate time and space is given for collective deliberation of the more complex, long-term challenges facing the organisation. The capital allocation provided through the National Development Plan agreed by government will provide budgetary certainty to support such longterm planning.

A further management tool to support the balancing of short and long term goals is the articulation and documentation of organisational priorities on an annual basis, cascading from the Statement of Strategy, with monthly joint review by the Minister of State and the Management Board. This issue will be addressed in detail in Section 2.1.1.

**1.2.2 Resourcing priorities:** The Brexit Infrastructure project is a clear example of strong leadership and prioritisation by the OPW in the collaborative delivery of a high priority inter-agency project with challenging deadlines (see Section 3.3.3 for an overview of the project). The success of this project was underpinned not least by the recognition of the need for adequately skilled and resourced teams, with the right people in the right place, as a critical success factor. While the OPW recognises the need to assign the requisite quantity and mix of resources to priorities, the organisation is facing a considerable challenge in both attracting and retaining the required skillsets to achieve project delivery. There is a significant professional and technical cohort within the OPW (over 40% of the non-operational staff) with clear evidence that maintaining this cohort at this level will prove challenging due to the increased demand for these skills within the wider labour market.

**1.2.3 Management Board and Leadership Team Prioritisation:** The current structure of engagement between the Management Board and the PO and Equivalent staff cohort does not facilitate joint consideration of long-term organisation and sector priorities. While a Principal Officer network is now established which will provide an opportunity for the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff cohort to share experience and insights and to discuss policy initiatives and the strategic direction of the OPW, how this network will interact with the formal LT structure will require further consideration by Management Board in collaboration with the PO and Equivalent staff cohort.

## **FINDINGS: PRIORITISATION**

**F1.8** The OPW is regarded as a flexible organisation that is good at crisis management. There is however scope for the Management Board to strengthen prioritisation and devote more time to long-term strategic planning. There is also significant potential for more structured and regular engagement with the wider Leadership Team to facilitate joint consideration of broader organisational and sectoral challenges and priorities.

F1.9 The development of a process to articulate and document OPW organisational priorities on an annual basis will support prioritisation and the balancing of short and long-term goal across the organisation.

(This will be addressed in more detail in Section 2.1.1).

### 1.3 CROSS-DIVISIONAL WORKING

This section assesses the extent to which the internal business divisions and their constituent business units collaborate with one another; whether this collaboration has a structural and systemic basis and the degree to which multi-disciplinary teams are established on shared interest programmes and projects.

#### 1.3.1 Collaborative Culture and Structures

There is a general recognition amongst management and staff that, due to the diverse nature of the organisation, some areas of the OPW more readily lend themselves to collaborative working than others. Some staff members suggest that the OPW comprises a number of separate organisations under the one name rather than a cohesive unit with streamlined practices and processes, which may in turn result in the development of a silo structure and culture in some areas. Staff feedback indicates that collaborative working within the OPW relies more on personal relationships than on structures and business needs. While this can be positive in terms of relationship-building and collegiality, it is reliant on the working style and preferences of individual staff members. Moreover, it can prove challenging for new staff who need time to build relationships, and for the organisation as a whole during a time of significant staff movements. This is exacerbated by the increase in blended working which can impede the organic development of collaborative relationships. These issues underline the breadth of the challenge facing OPW management in developing a collaborative culture across the organisation and reducing the risk of a silo culture occurring.

While staff report positive experiences of joint project work when the opportunity arises, the good coordination and collaboration that is evident *within* divisions is not reflected *across* divisions. In addition, the various divisions have different procedures in place for some of the same tasks signalling an opportunity for greater shared learning towards consolidation which will add not only to enhanced collaboration but also to the overall efficiency of the organisation.

The nature of the work of the OPW is such that a client may be engaging with different divisions of the organisation on any one project, hence the need for a collaborative structure and standardised approach in the execution of business is paramount from the client's perspective. It is noted that efforts are underway to promote better collaboration and linkages internally, with the thematic approach adopted in the OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024, the cross-divisional working group on the Ukrainian Modular Homes Programme and the recently established Biodiversity Group and Climate Action Coordination Group positive developments in that regard.

#### 1.3.2 Staff Networks

Staff networks, such as the Assistant Principal Officer network and the Principal Officer network, offer the opportunity for improved collaboration, relationship-building and knowledge-sharing. Although the Principal Officer network includes the professional and technical equivalent grade, which can help to foster inclusivity, sharing of experience, and relationship development organisation-wide, the

Assistant Principal Officer network currently does not (although the terms of reference note plans to do so in the future). The articulated staff interest in the creation of networks for other grades will also improve awareness of the work of other areas and provide opportunities to identify areas for enhanced collaboration and the building of professional relationships. The OPW has indicated that the establishment of a Higher Executive Officer/Administrative Officer network is under consideration in the context of a development programme being rolled out for that grade within the organisation. Such staff networks however, need to clearly articulate how they will function in order to deliver added value and both progress and support the operational and strategic objectives of the organisation.

### 1.3.3 Team Approaches

An increased use of multi-disciplinary teams and shared resources and learning will improve and facilitate collaborative working within the organisation, both across the administrative and operational functions. This will however require the support of the Leadership Team and line management to foster collegiality and ensure the allocation of staff and resources.

## FINDINGS: CROSS-DIVISIONAL WORKING

F1.10 The diverse and complex nature of the work of the OPW may mitigate against natural crossdivisional collaborative working, however senior management recognise the importance and significant added value to be derived from the establishment of structures to support strong internal collaboration, multi-disciplinary working and shared learning. Efforts are being made to promote better collaboration and linkages internally, for example the thematic approach adopted in the OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024, the cross-divisional working group on the Ukrainian Modular Homes Programme and the recently established Biodiversity Group and Climate Action Coordination Group.

F1.11 The establishment of the Assistant Principal and Principal Officer networks is regarded as positive. However, there is a need to strengthen the Terms of Reference for both networks in order to adopt exemplary practice in network formation and functioning to ensure the outputs of the network are contributing to and driving the operational and strategic objectives of the OPW. Other development needs include the expansion of the Assistant Principal Officer network to include the professional and technical equivalent staff cohort.

## 1.4 CROSS-GOVERNMENT AND CROSS-SECTOR WORKING

The broad remit of the OPW necessitates significant cross-government and cross-sectoral working, with the OPW providing advice and services to, and working in partnership with, local authorities, government departments, agencies and organisations including the Courts Service, An Garda Síochána, DCEDIY, the Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland, among others. The requirement for this level of engagement is reflected in the 2021 EY Report<sup>8</sup> on National Development Plan delivery capability which recommends that the OPW provide an external advisory service to other public bodies responsible for the delivery of NDP capital projects.

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<sup>8</sup> *Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability Review Report* (EY, 2021)<sup>9</sup>  
Section 5.1 c of the Public Service Management Act, 1997

#### 1.4.1 Relationship with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDPDR)

While the Minister of State in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform has responsibility for the OPW, the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform is the voice of the OPW at Cabinet, has a consenting role in relation to flood relief schemes (the Arterial Drainage Act 1945, as amended), and is responsible for bringing Memos to government and for approving the OPW Statement of Strategy<sup>9</sup>.

It is noted that good support is provided to the OPW by DPENDPDR-led groups such as the HRM Managers Network, which was of critical importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other examples of bilateral engagement at senior management level across both organisations include:

- Strong involvement with the National Investment Office (NIO), based in DPENDPDR, on the implementation of the National Development Plan, particularly in engagement in committees and subgroups to support delivery.
- Structured engagements, briefings and meetings on VOTE issues and with IGEES and the NSSO.

#### 1.4.2 Cross-Government Engagement

The OPW engages across central government and local government systems in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. The primary engagements include:

##### (i) Interdepartmental

The OPW is represented on a wide variety of inter-departmental working groups including:

- Supporting Excellence Action Team (supporting delivery of the NDP);
- Senior Officials Group on Humanitarian Response to the Ukrainian Crisis;
- Senior Officials Group on Housing for All;
- Climate Action Plan 2023 Public Sector Working Group;
- National Climate Adaptation Steering Group;
- Brexit Infrastructure Working Group;
- Accommodation Officers Network;
- Inter-departmental Flood Policy Coordination Group (OPW Chair);
- Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Coordination Group (OPW Chair);
- National Floods Directive Coordination Group (OPW Chair);
- Inter-departmental Group on National Coastal Change Management Strategy;
- National Emergency Co-Ordination Group;
- National Flood Forecasting and Warning Steering Group (OPW Chair);
- Water Policy Advisory Committee;
- Land Use Review Technical Working Group;
- National Framework for Climate Services Steering Committee;
- Phoenix Park Transport and Mobility Steering Group;
- Inter-departmental Corporate Services Assistant Secretary Network;
- Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce;
- Government Construction Contracts Committee;
- Digital Leaders Public Service Management Group (PSMG) Subgroup;

- Heat and Built Environment Delivery Taskforce;
- The Government Communications Network

(ii) Engagement with Local Authorities, Agencies and Other Bodies

Working relationships between the OPW and local authorities, agencies and other bodies are generally good, however feedback from both OPW staff and external stakeholders indicates room for increased engagement and collaboration, along with improved communication.

- a) **Local Authorities:** The degree of engagement and systemic collaboration between the OPW and local authorities varies, in part due to the structure and capacity of individual local authorities and differing interpretations as to responsibilities. In the area of flood risk management, individual Project Steering

Groups for flood relief schemes provide for structured engagement between the organisations, facilitating the resolution of issues as they arise. There is evidence of good engagement, supported by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and the City and County Management

Association giving some clarity on the roles and responsibilities in flood relief scheme delivery. Areas requiring greater clarity on respective roles and responsibilities include the ongoing maintenance of flood relief schemes, planning and flooding from urban drainage systems. Such clarification on respective roles and responsibilities could be met through the introduction of Service Level Agreements as appropriate.

- b) **Met Éireann:** Interactions between the OPW and Met Éireann primarily focus on flood forecasting and are supported by a Service Level Agreement that specifies Met Éireann responsibility for the operational aspect of the National Flood Forecasting and Warning Service (NFFWS), while the OPW chairs the NFFWS Steering Group. The relationship between the OPW and Met Éireann continues to evolve at an organisational level, although there are positive relationships evidenced at an individual level. Met Éireann recognises the significant expertise within both organisations and would support increased collaboration and communication to fully utilise that expertise in the delivery of shared outcomes.

- c) **The Courts Service and An Garda Síochána:** Both the Courts Service and An Garda Síochána have large estate portfolios. The Courts Service owns the majority of its properties, with the OPW providing ongoing maintenance services. The OPW is represented on the Courts Service Building Committee, which is responsible for the long-term planning of the Courts estate. The Courts Service does not have a client manager within the OPW centrally, instead working with regional OPW offices and a range of OPW contacts for specific purposes (e.g. leasing/purchasing; major projects; maintenance).

The picture is slightly different for An Garda Síochána (AGS), with the in excess of 700 properties in the AGS estate owned and maintained by OPW<sup>9</sup>. While there was previously a specific AGS Estate Management Section in the OPW, this changed in line with OPW's transition to a maintenance/intermediate projects/major projects approach to estate management. There is a significant workload associated with the AGS estate including both capital works and ongoing maintenance.

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<sup>9</sup> [Circular 1/13](#) sets out arrangements and responsibilities relating to the maintenance of State property assets

- d) **Accommodation Officers in Government Departments:** In terms of estate management, whilst there is a history of dedicated Accommodation Officers in each government department and agency who act as the client point of contact for the OPW on accommodation and maintenance matters, this system has only recently been replicated on the OPW side and will require monitoring over time. There is also room for improved, regular engagement which could address concerns such as the provision of advance notice of maintenance work by the OPW to departments and the need for regular progress updates on accommodation requests made by departments to the OPW.

While DPENDPDR is responsible for the development of guidance on blended working policy, the OPW is tasked with playing a lead role in the management and implementation of blended working solutions in its public sector accommodation portfolio. The OPW views its role in this area as one of facilitation, working with organisations to deliver accommodation solutions that will meet their specific needs once those needs have been defined by the relevant organisation. While the OPW has had high-level involvement on policy related aspects of blended working, there are varying levels of awareness amongst government departments of the OPW's proposed approach to the development of blended working solutions. While some departments have had initial discussions in this regard with the OPW, stakeholders have suggested that a forum would be useful for discussions and knowledge-sharing in the development of blended working solutions.

#### 1.4.3 Cross-Sector Engagement

The primary cross-sector engagements by the OPW include:

- (i) **Tourism:** The OPW, through its role in heritage sites, historic properties, national monuments, gardens and parklands, is a significant provider in the tourism sector in Ireland. The organisation also contributes to the tourism agenda through a number of industry groups and forums including the Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartland.
- (ii) **Heritage:** There is regular engagement and ongoing positive collaboration and cooperation between OPW Heritage Services and external stakeholders including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (national monuments and built heritage), the National Parks and Wildlife Service (biodiversity), and City and County Councils (heritage sites). A strategic partnership has been in place since 2017 between the OPW, Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to deliver a pipeline of capital investment in the national heritage estate. The OPW provided input into the development of the Heritage Ireland 2030 Strategy and will play a key role in its implementation, although implementation structures have yet to be established.
- (iii) **Climate Action:** The issue of climate action is emerging as one of the highest priorities both nationally and globally. This challenge increasingly requires the design and provision of energy efficient buildings and the retrofitting of existing buildings to mitigate against its impact. Programmes of work to upgrade the building fabric, eliminate fossil fuel heating and increase the energy efficiency of the

OPW's estate portfolio supports the climate action targets of government. In terms of Flood Risk Management, the Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Flood Risk Management was published by the OPW in 2019 and requires the preparation of a Climate Adaptation Plan for all future flood relief schemes.

- (iv) **National Development Plan:** The OPW is a key agent of government in the delivery of the NDP with particular responsibility for Flood Risk and Estate Management, including Heritage. Capital investment managed by the OPW spans a diverse portfolio of projects and programmes including large flood protection infrastructure and property development.
- (v) **National Flood Forecasting and Warning Service (NFFWS):** The OPW chairs the NFFWS Steering Group and is also a member of the Government Taskforce on Emergency Planning which co-ordinates and oversees the emergency planning activities of all government departments.
- (vi) **Convention Centre Dublin:** The OPW represents the State's interests, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, on this Public Private Partnership Project. The stakeholders include the senior management team of PPPCo, who are responsible for the day to day management of the centre, the Dublin Convention Bureau and the NDFA who act as the OPW's advisers and support the implementation of the Project Agreement governing the operation of the Centre.
- (vii) **Rapid Build Housing Programme:** The OPW plays a central role in the ongoing delivery of a Programme of Rapid Build homes as an element of the State's humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine.

#### **FINDINGS: CROSS-GOVERNMENT AND CROSS-SECTOR WORKING**

F1.12 There is evidence of good OPW engagement and collaboration through inter-departmental and cross-sector working groups, particularly in relation to flood risk management at local authority level, and the committees and subgroups supporting the implementation and delivery of the National Development Plan.

F1.13 OPW relationships with government departments, agencies, local authorities and other bodies are generally positive, although the recent move to a more client-led approach to estate management will require ongoing monitoring and review. There is however a requirement for greater clarification on the respective roles and responsibilities of the OPW and local authorities in some areas of flood risk management.

F1.14 The OPW views its role in the implementation of blended working as that of a facilitator, working with organisations to deliver accommodation solutions that will meet their specific needs. Given varying levels of awareness among government departments about the ongoing roll-out of blended working across the public sector, the OPW may need to take a more proactive role in supporting organisations as they develop their blended-working accommodation solutions.

## 1.5 COMMUNICATION

Good communications are critical for the effective operation of any organisation, particularly one of the scale and scope of the OPW. Effective communications are required to support and complement the OPW's Statement of Strategy, articulate priorities to stakeholders, ensure that stakeholder engagement is paramount, and enable the OPW to achieve its organisational goals through engaging, concise and targeted messaging.

### 1.5.1 Communications Unit

A dedicated Communications Unit was established in 2019, with a Principal Officer with communications expertise appointed in February 2023 to manage both the Communications and Press Office Teams. Both teams collaborate on strategic communications planning for internal and external audiences, with the objective of facilitating proactive and reactive communications for the utilising a more streamlined, holistic and consistent approach. The Unit has been supported in some of its work by an external communications company, however it is crucial that resourcing in this area, including the recruitment and retention of specialised communications staff, remains a priority for the organisation.

### 1.5.2 Communications Strategy

A Communications Strategy 2021-2024 has been published, reflecting the four themes approach adopted in the OPW Statement of Strategy. While viewed as a living document and aiming to develop structures and practices to improve communications and engagement both internally and externally, a formal review of the success of the Strategy to date in meeting those objectives would be appropriate.

### 1.5.3 Internal Communication

The national spread of the OPW's workplaces and staff renders effective internal communication particularly challenging, with experiences of staff varying from one location to another depending largely on manager style and access to technology for the staff cohort working on remote sites. For the approximate 40% of staff primarily undertaking office-based work, access to emails and electronic communication is part of a normal working day, however the 60% of staff working on the operational side have more limited access to email, and experience different communication challenges.

In Summer 2023, the OPW Communications Network was established, encompassing a representative sample of employees from across the organisation with the objectives of progressing better engagement across divisions, breaking down silos and building relationships with the communications team.

Senior management grades in the organisation have a significantly more positive impression of internal communication than those in the more junior cohort. However, it is viewed that in general internal communications have improved in recent years.

The main issues arising relating to internal communications include:

- (i) **Staff Meetings:** In common with other departments there is a mixed approach to staff meetings across the OPW; some take place regularly, others more rarely, if at all. Section/unit meetings occur more regularly than divisional meetings. In general, the regularity of staff meetings is dependent on the size of teams, location, the type of work, and the management and

communication style of individual managers. As staff meetings are crucial in ensuring effective internal communications, the variable quality and scheduling of these meetings may contribute to information deficits among staff in relation to decisions of the Management Board and current OPW challenges, successes and initiatives. It is noted that the introduction of online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic should support the regular scheduling of meetings, with staff location no longer a prohibitive factor once the requisite ICT infrastructure is in place. Interactions between operational staff and their managers tend to be informal and focus on the practicalities of the work at hand. For some operational staff, in particular those working out of depots, weekly 'Tool-Box Talks' take place which allow for the sharing of information. Staff working at heritage sites note the challenge of regular meetings for guide staff who may not be onsite at the same time due to shift patterns.

- (ii) **Corporate Communications:** The introduction of the SWIFT intranet site is regarded as positive by staff with the site considered to be useful and informative. However, feedback from staff at all levels is that the volume of internal emails is overwhelming, much of it generated by notifications from SWIFT, some of which are duplicates. This increases the risk of important emails, such as communications from the Management Board or learning and development opportunities, being missed. SWIFT communications are not tailored to recipients, with a low level of awareness among staff of the option to set up filters to manage notifications. At present SWIFT is managed by the OPW ICT team, and lacks the necessary support from the Communications Team.

Currently, some operational staff, primarily field-based staff, rely on their direct line managers for the provision of updates as they do not have access to email. This is being addressed by the rollout of smartphones with email access for operational staff (Section 4.7.4). This initiative is welcomed by staff, however they would like the rollout to be accompanied by support and training to assist them with adapting to the new technology.

The cascade of information from Management Board to staff can be supported through the timely availability of minutes of Management Board meetings on the intranet, coupled with structured downward feedback through the various line management grades. Attention should be given also to ensuring that upward feedback is facilitated.

- (iii) **Staff Partnership Charter:** The OPW Staff Partnership Charter 2021-2023 outlines details of the staff partnership structure, membership and issues appropriate for discussion. It clearly defines partnership within the OPW as an active relationship between management, union and staff representatives and as a forum for the sharing of ideas and the resolution of problems. Reflecting the geographical spread of the OPW, it provides for a central partnership committee alongside two regional committees. There is a degree of awareness of the Partnership Committee among staff but more limited awareness of the Staff Partnership Charter. Central and regional partnership meetings take place quarterly and are chaired by the Head of Corporate Services, with the Head of Human Resource Management also in attendance. An update on issues addressed through these fora was unavailable at the time of writing this report.

- (iv) **Visibility:** Visibility at Management Board and Principal Officer and Equivalent level at workplaces nationally is always going to prove challenging in an organisation as geographically

dispersed as the OPW. The issue of visibility of senior management was raised in particular among the operational staff cohort. This issue was reflected in the results of the most recent Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey where only 42% of OPW staff who participated in the survey agreed that senior management are sufficiently visible. This was in contrast to the overall civil service result of 54%.

#### 1.5.4 External Communication

There is a deep sense of pride among OPW staff about the work they undertake, however the data gathered for this review indicates that, as an organisation, the OPW could do more to effectively communicate the breadth of its role, activities and successes to the general public.

- (i) **Raising the Profile of the OPW:** Strategic communications should be culturally 'core' to the OPW so that it can communicate externally with purpose, clarity and consistency. While examples of positive external communications do exist, such as a selection of television programmes outlining OPW work, and more recent communications in the social media sphere, these were largely initiated in individual divisions such as heritage, rather than forming a component of an overall communications strategy for the organisation as a whole. Staff note that greater emphasis on the positive impact of flood management and estate management work could help to provide a more rounded picture of the OPW for the general public. It could also act as a counter-balance to more negative narratives, such as the environmental impacts of flood risk management and value for money/project cost over-runs, and also serve as a positive advertisement for the OPW as an 'employer of choice', particularly for the professional and technical sector and craft-workers (Section 4.4.4).
- (ii) **Communication with External Stakeholders:** While examples of positive communications with external stakeholders were evident, some external stakeholders report scope for improvement in communications by the OPW, for example, advance notice of scheduling of works and advance sight of work plans.
- (iii) **OPW Website:** Like all government bodies, the OPW's online presence plays a vital role in communicating and engaging with its customers, stakeholders and the general public. The OPW has an extensive website presence, maintaining some 19 separate websites for individual heritage sites, a number of sites relating to its flood management work, the main OPW pages on gov.ie and the Heritageireland.ie website. The OPW also hosts the government publications website, [irisoifigiuil.ie](http://irisoifigiuil.ie). However, there does not appear to be an overall coherent website strategy or central responsibility for all websites. The OPW Communications Strategy notes the multiplicity of websites and has a stated aim of '*consistent digital identity with easy to access information*' but does not include steps as to how this will be achieved or progress monitored. Stakeholders on the heritage side suggest that there are opportunities for partnerships with organisations with expertise in marketing and communications to promote heritage sites more widely.
- (iv) **Social Media:** The OPW currently maintains a social media presence across 5 social media platforms and 93 social media accounts<sup>10</sup>. Overall staff generally have a positive view of the OPW social media presence but believe that it could be utilised to even greater effect to

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<sup>10</sup> Source: Office of Public Works Social Media Strategy 2021-2024 (p.6)

promote the OPW brand and highlight the positive work of the OPW. However, managing so many social media accounts is challenging for staff, fraught with risk and resource intensive hence the need to consolidate the current level of social media accounts to ensure they are consistent with an overarching OPW brand is priority. It is understood that a new Social Media Policy is currently under development and will recommend action in this regard.

## **FINDINGS: COMMUNICATION**

F1.15 Strategic communications need to become core to the functions of the OPW, with buy-in for the importance of communications at the most senior level crucial. If communications are to be effective, senior managers must understand the role that communications can play in progressing their goals and objectives, as well as the overall strategic objectives of the OPW.

F1.16 Considerable work has been undertaken in developing the OPW communications function in recent years. There is however scope to strengthen and develop it further in order to raise the public profile of the organisation as a whole, and to further develop communication processes with staff and stakeholders. A review of the effectiveness of the Communications Strategy to date with a view to incorporating the recommendations of this review in the next iteration will assist endeavours in this regard.

F1.17 The quality and extent of communication between the Management Board and OPW staff can vary, depending on the regularity of staff meetings and the individual communication style of managers.

Improved awareness among OPW staff of Management Board decisions and current OPW challenges, successes and initiatives should be supported by the timely publication of the minutes of Management Board meetings. In addition, a formal policy on staff meetings within the OPW should be introduced to ensure consistency and the setting of minimum standards that will support more effective internal communication.

F1.18 The development of the SWIFT intranet is regarded by staff as a positive initiative, which could be further enhanced through the use of a tailored approach to SWIFT communications and increased awareness amongst staff of the tools to manage SWIFT notifications.

F1.19 Communications with operational staff nationwide are currently impacted by the lack of access to smartphones or laptops. The rollout of smartphones to all operational staff is ongoing and should be prioritised. Such rollout would also provide the opportunity to enhance interactions between senior management and staff in geographically remote areas through the use of online platforms, thus addressing concerns expressed regarding the visibility of senior management at sites nationwide.

F1.20 The OPW has an extensive online presence but does not have a coherent website strategy. Although the Communications Strategy includes an objective to 'develop a consistent digital identity with easy to access information', this needs to be more clearly articulated with clear milestones set out against which progress can be measured.

F1.21 The development of a Social Media Policy is positive and there is an extensive social media presence. However, the scale of the OPW footprint across social media warrants refinement and increased coherence.

### 1A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1.1 Strengthening the OPW Corporate Spine:** The OPW should urgently focus on articulating and structuring a coherent central corporate spine, aligned to the organisation's overall purpose, with strong leadership of significant experience and expertise. In doing so, an analysis of the current breadth of responsibilities attached to the Head of Corporate Services role should be undertaken and the key business support functions comprising the corporate spine of the future organisation clearly identified, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations of this review.

The Head of Corporate Services should be assigned solely to that role in order to have the capacity to mobilise the function as a critical enabler of the organisation, through the strategic management of both the OPW operating environment and OPW resources. The role should also be fundamentally supported by strong, strategic and robust leadership at Management Board level in order to ensure the new structure is embraced organisation-wide and maximum value realised.

**R1.2 Board of Commissioners:** The OPW should review the existing legislative framework for the organisation to ascertain if the provisions of The Public Works (Ireland) Act 1831, specifically regarding the requirement for a Board of Commissioners, aligns with the requirements of a streamlined, modern day civil service organisation. In doing so the Board should consider the fit between the Board of Commissioners and Management Board structures to ascertain if a realignment or restructuring is required.

**R1.3 Strategic Planning – Management Board:** The Management Board should consider the most appropriate scheduling structure for meetings to facilitate a greater focus on strategic matters. The Board should consider and agree if this objective is best met through alternating operational and strategic meetings, combining a strategic and operational Management Board agenda weekly, or meeting on agreed strategic issues on a set rotational basis.

**R1.4 Ministerial Engagement – Management Board:** Monthly meetings between the Management Board and the Minister of State should be scheduled as a component of the OPW governance structure to review the progress of the agreed priorities of each Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities which is recommended (Recommendation 2.2) to sit under the Statement of Strategy in the strategic and business planning process.

**R1.5 Leadership Team Engagement:** Engagement between the Management Board and the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff cohort should be strengthened by restructuring the quarterly Leadership Team meetings to move away from a downward information sharing dynamic to a more purposeful, interactive structure to advance the work agenda, set priorities and address challenges facing the organisation. The introduction of a rotational Chair from the wider Leadership Team should be pursued together with the use of subgroups to progress priority work areas outside of the formal meeting structure. Formal Management Board engagement with the PO and Equivalent network also should be prioritised.

**R1.6 Staff Networks:** The Terms of Reference of the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff network should be strengthened to clearly set out how the network will support the strategic objectives of the OPW and to position all senior managers in the OPW as co-creators, co-owners and co-leaders in shaping the future direction of the organisation. Consideration should be given to the further development of the network through the assignment of a Chair and Vice-Chair on a six-month rotational basis, with provision for the Chair to contribute corporately through attending Management Board meetings in an observational capacity. The Terms of Reference of the Assistant Principal Officer network should also be similarly reviewed and the network should be expanded to include the Assistant Principal Officer equivalent grades. Management Board members, and Principal Officers in the case of the Assistant Principal Officer network, should engage formally with the fora, to identify how the work of both grades can be supported, whilst demonstrating and fostering opportunities for greater internal collaboration.

## **1B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1.7 Cross-Divisional Working:** Standardised processes and procedures should be introduced across all divisions for management of duties common to the organisation as a whole, with learnings shared and adopted centrally. This undertaking, coupled with strengthened systems for internal communications and collaboration, will assist in the requirement to strengthen cross-divisional working within the organisation. The roll out of the Integrated Work Management System (Section 4.7.5) and the thematic approach of the OPW Strategy Statement 2021-2024 should also be harnessed as opportunities in this regard.

**R1.8 Role Clarification OPW/Local Authorities:** The roles and responsibilities of the OPW and Local Authorities in the area of flood risk management should be agreed nationally, and documented with the introduction of Service Level Agreements.

**R1.9 Communications Strategy:** The Communications Strategy should be reviewed in line with the findings and recommendations of this review, with the next iteration including objectives on enhancing communication with external stakeholders and the development and implementation of a coherent Website and Social Media Strategy that will consolidate the OPW footprint and deliver a coherent message across social media platforms.

**R1.10 Internal Communications:** Communications and senior management engagement with geographically dispersed staff should be treated as an issue of utmost importance. Online platforms should be employed as a practical method for staff engagement nationwide, particularly in remote areas, with the roll out of the required technology prioritised and utilised. All OPW staff should have access to email whether office or site-based, and training should be provided to all staff utilising the SWIFT intranet system. Improved awareness amongst OPW staff of Management Board decisions and current OPW challenges, successes and initiatives should be supported by the timely publication of the minutes of Management Board meetings. In addition, a formal policy on staff meetings within the OPW should be introduced to ensure consistency and the setting of minimum standards that will support more effective internal communication.

## **CHAPTER 2. STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT**

This chapter considers the OPW's business planning process, strategic alignment with national policies and frameworks, and capability in programme development, project appraisal and evaluation.

## 2.1 STRATEGIC AND BUSINESS PLANNING

Strategic planning is the process by which an organisation defines its vision for the future and identifies its goals and objectives. The process includes establishing the sequence in which those goals should be realised to ensure the organisation can reach its stated vision. Business planning can be viewed as a crucial support to strategic planning, linking the Statement of Strategy to a consolidated work plan for the organisation and in turn to the business plans of individual units. These plans should drive the operation of individual business units and inform the goal setting stage of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) process.

The strategic and business planning process in the OPW has a number of components including:

### 2.1.1 Statement of Strategy

The OPW's current Statement of Strategy<sup>11</sup> covers the period 2021-2024. A SWOT and PESTLE analysis of both the internal and external factors likely to impact on the OPW in the coming years informed the development of the strategy. There was also an extensive internal and external consultation process that included workshops for OPW staff and senior managers, and consultation with client departments and agencies. The Statement of Strategy is structured across four themes:

- Our Clients;
- Sustainability;
- Climate Action; □ People and Processes.

Notwithstanding the disparate roles across the OPW, the aim of adoption of this theme-based approach was to strengthen a collaborative approach within the OPW and with client organisations and customers. Each Management Board member has a collective and individual responsibility for aspects of each theme, however these responsibilities require refreshed clarification in light of recent significant churn at Management Board level. The Client, Sustainability and Climate Action themes apply across all aspects of each Management Board member's responsibilities. The People and Processes theme, led by the Head of Corporate Services, also has an operational impact on all business areas. A new set of OPW organisational values was also prepared as part of an upwards initiative led by the HRM function with staff.

The Statement of Strategy lists one strategic objective under each theme but is not explicit in defining how these objectives will be measured and translated into actions annually across the life of the strategy. The strategy does clearly set out that it will feed into the three-year Business Plans for each business unit which will in turn inform the annual Operational Plans. However, the Statement of Strategy does not provide for a centralised Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities that would set out annual work priorities across the organisation and would facilitate monthly review of organisational work priorities between the Minister of State and Management Board members.

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<sup>11</sup> [Statement of Strategy 2021-2024](#). At the time of drafting this report a revised Statement of Strategy for the period 2023 -2026 was being developed on foot of the re-appointment of Minister of State O'Donovan in December, 2022

The current strategy also does not provide for a section on the key strategic partners of the organisation.

While there was an acknowledgement by staff of the opportunity to input into the development of the strategy, a mixed level of engagement was reported. Some staff describe difficulty in aligning their work with the current strategic themes, which are viewed as having more relevance to some business areas than others.

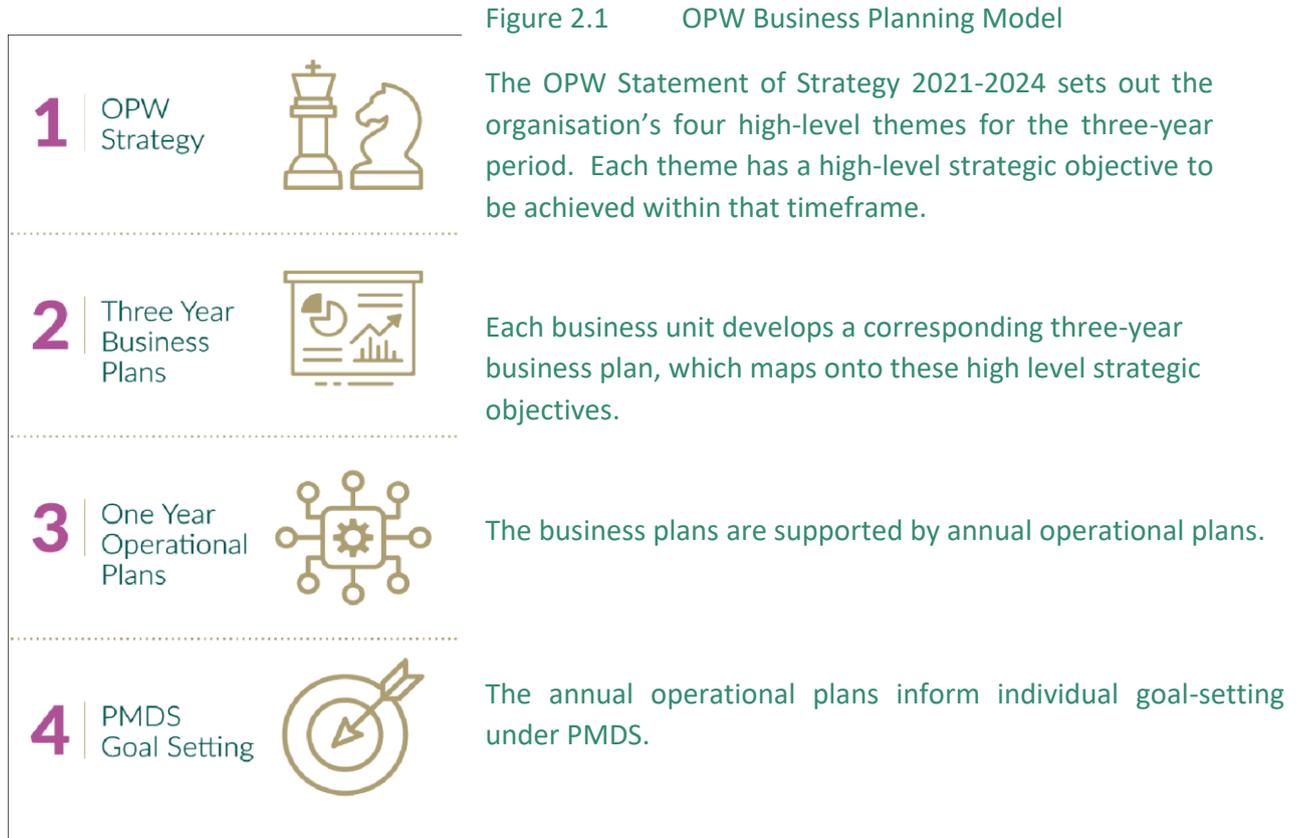
Management grades in the OPW acknowledge that implementation is the primary strategic challenge. A

Strategy Implementation Tracker, a detailed spreadsheet that maps the progress of actions at Business Unit level against relevant high level objectives and Statement of Strategy themes, has been created to facilitate reporting to the Management Board. Quarterly updates on the high-level actions outlined in the three-year Business Plans are provided by all senior managers and collated into the Strategy

Implementation Tracker by the Policy Innovation and Reform Unit<sup>12</sup>. This is submitted to the Management Board for consideration. At present the tracker is accessible by senior management only.

### 2.1.2 Business Planning Model

The OPW business planning model includes the development of three-year business plans to support the implementation of the three-year Statement of Strategy as outlined in Figure 2.1.



<sup>12</sup> The Policy, Innovation and Reform Unit forms part of Corporate Services Division, reporting to the Head of Corporate Services. Its remit is to provide a central point within the Office to co-ordinate activities that relate to the OPW as a body corporate. It also provides support for internal structures such as the Leadership Team and Partnership

Source: Graphic taken from OPW Business Planning Template, 2022

A standard template was developed for all three-year unit business plans capturing information about:

- Resources (financial and staffing) available to each section/business unit for delivery;
- Staff skills and learning and development required to support delivery;
- The requirement, if any, for external contractors/services to assist with delivery;
- Objectives of the business unit;
- Actions required to support the objectives;
- Stakeholders and associated risks.

A review of a sample of the three-year unit business plans was conducted as part of this review process. While the template developed by the OPW is progressive there is currently some lack of consistency across the organisation in the manner in which they are completed, the level of specific detail and measurable actions listed, and the setting of timelines. Due to this there is significant risk that the unit business plans do not consistently reflect the organisational priorities committed to.

Annual Operational Plans for each business unit are also developed to support the delivery of the business plans and to inform the PMDS process at an individual level. While there is a template in place, the extent to which the template is fully utilised and the quality of the content can also vary across business units<sup>13</sup>.

The adoption of the three-year unit Business Plan is a relatively new approach within the OPW, hence it is not yet clear whether it will contribute to the achievement of strategic outcomes in a more efficient or cost effective manner compared to the more standard annual business planning approach. The plans are used for bilateral discussions between the HRM function and Business Units on recruitment and learning and development initiatives. However, this process could be developed further to encompass a centralised, whole of organisation analysis of the plans that could inform the allocation of resources within the organisation related to:

- Workforce planning, including recruitment and skills-matching;
- The identification of opportunities which may exist for creating centralised support services for activities that are common to multiple areas (e.g. programme/project management; procurement);
- The procurement of external contractors/services;
- The identification and provision of appropriate learning and development opportunities.

### 2.1.3 A Long-Term Vision for the OPW

The OPW is well recognised for being highly responsive to government priorities which often present in a context of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit related infrastructure priorities and the Ukrainian Modular Homes Programme. Responding positively and effectively to immediate and urgent priorities has an impact however on an organisation's capacity to adopt a long-term strategic view. Looking towards the future the OPW will be required to continue to respond to an ever rapidly changing environment, while developing and delivering high quality services to the public and other

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<sup>13</sup> Based on the sample of annual operational plans provided for review by the OCR team

stakeholders. While a broad vision is articulated in the Statement of Strategy, there is little evidence available regarding the OPW's longer term strategic planning (5-10 years), involving horizon-scanning or strategic workforce planning, which would guide and support the organisation in meeting the challenges of the future.

## **FINDINGS: STRATEGIC AND BUSINESS PLANNING**

F2.1 The success of business planning in the OPW will depend on a streamlined process that garners buyin from all grades across the organisation. It is clear that the OPW has made significant efforts in developing its strategic and business planning processes, including the adoption of a thematic approach in the Statement of Strategy and the introduction of three-year Business Plans and annual Operational Plans. However, there is scope for increasing organisational capability in strategic and business planning along with strengthening the reporting and monitoring of progress under the Statement of Strategy.

F2.2 The three-year Business Plan template requires business units to include data that can inform planning at an organisational level relating to resources (financial and staffing), staff skills, learning and development and the requirement for external contractors/services for the delivery of business unit activities. There is however no evidence of centralised, whole of organisation analysis of the business plans which could inform key issues such as strategic workforce planning, centralised processes and procedures, budget allocations and staff development/training options in the organisation.

F2.3 The Business Plan and Operational Plan templates developed by the OPW as part of their business planning process are progressive, however, there is currently some lack of consistency across the organisation in the manner in which they are completed, the level of specific detail and measurable actions listed, the setting of timelines and the consistent articulation of agreed organisational priorities.

F2.4 While a broad vision for the OPW is articulated in the current Statement of Strategy, there is no comprehensive document setting out the long term vision which would incorporate horizon scanning, the potential for increased demands and the impact on the work of the organisation into the future.

## **2.2 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS**

While the OPW has been appointed as the lead agency to co-ordinate the whole of government policy on flood risk management, the focus of the organisation is primarily operational and as such it does not have an extensive lead role in policy development. The organisation does however contribute to the development and delivery of a number of national policy frameworks such as the National Development Plan, the Climate Action Plans 2021-2023 and Heritage Ireland 2030, among others. Therefore, it is vital that there is appropriate strategic alignment between the OPW's strategies, programmes, plans and projects and these national frameworks.

As noted, the OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 structures its work across four themes: Our Clients; Sustainability; Climate Action; and People and Processes. Aligning its objectives by strategic theme, rather than by functional area, highlights the OPW's significant role and contribution to meeting government commitments and national priorities.

### 2.2.1 OPW Programmes and Plans

In order to deliver on its responsibility to give effect to centrally-designed policies and investment decisions, the OPW must develop and deliver a wide range of programmes and plans, supplemented by initiatives, campaigns and reforms in related areas.

Some examples of this include:

Estate Management
<p><b>Optimising Power at Work Campaign</b></p> <p>The OPW has been running a state-wide staff energy conservation campaign, ‘Optimising Power @Work’, in central government buildings since 2008. The core principle of this campaign is working with staff to encourage behavioural change with regard to energy usage, with the overall aim of identifying and eliminating energy wastage. The programme has achieved average annual savings of 25% across 300 participating buildings, making it the largest and most successful campaign of its kind in Ireland.</p>
<p><b>Reduce your Use Campaign</b></p> <p>Reduce your Use Campaign is a joint initiative of the SEAI and the OPW which supports public bodies to run a winter energy awareness campaign for staff and to undertake recommended actions on heating, lighting, operating hours and audit checks.</p>
<p><b>The Public Sector Pathfinder Programme</b></p> <p>The OPW is a partner in the SEAI Pathfinder Programme which aims to retrofit and de-carbonise public buildings, and adopts a holistic approach to improving the energy performance of public bodies and sectors.</p>
<p><b>Justice Sector Infrastructure:</b> The recently completed Forensic Science Laboratory and Military Road projects provide key infrastructure to support the administration of Justice in the State and highlights the OPW role in supporting the Department of Justice and the organisations under its aegis.</p>
<p><b>Strategic Alignment: These programmes contribute to the achievement of the 2030 emissions targets for the public sector as set out in the Climate Action Plans 2021-2023, and actions in the National Development Plan 2021-2030 under ‘Other Public Investment Sectors’.</b></p>

Heritage Services
<p><b>National Cultural Institutions Capital Investment Programme</b></p> <p>The OPW aims to deliver an extensive programme of major capital projects for the State’s Cultural Institutions. Investment of €468million is planned and approved in the National Development Plan for a number of major redevelopment projects at institutions including, among others, the Crawford Art Gallery Cork, National Gallery of Ireland and National Museum of Ireland.</p>

### Tourism Capital Investment Programme

A Strategic Partnership was established in 2017 between Fáilte Ireland, the OPW and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to deliver a pipeline of capital investment in the national Heritage estate focused on improved interpretation and new visitor experiences. Examples of projects under this programme include the redevelopment of Unesco Brú na Bóinne visitor centre, and the refurbishment and re-development of the Céide Fields and the Blasket Visitor Centre.

### National Heritage Estate - Conservation and Capital Projects

The OPW delivers a range of capital works projects to continuously invest in the protection and presentation of the national heritage estate for visitors to enjoy. This work is funded by the OPW Vote, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

**Strategic Alignment: All three programmes directly contribute to the delivery of specific programmes and actions in the National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NSO 3 Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities and NSO 7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage).**

## Flood Risk Management

### Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs)

The OPW leads a whole-of-government approach to the management of flood risk that takes the potential impacts of climate change into account, across three strategic areas: prevention, protection and preparedness. The OPW FRMPs adopted by government, and the output from the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme launched in 2018 provide a roadmap for the delivery of flood risk management measures that, combined with existing flood relief schemes, will provide protection to approximately 95% of the properties assessed to be at significant flood risk.

### Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan

The OPW published a revised Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Flood Risk Management<sup>14</sup> in 2019, prepared under the National Adaptation Framework. It sets out a range of actions in flood risk prevention, protection and preparedness, as well as further research and capacity building.

### Environmental Impacts

The OPW Arterial Drainage Maintenance Service has carried out a significant volume of environmental research, in conjunction with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and other NGOs, to increase knowledge and identify methods of operation that are both environmentally sensitive and effective for drainage and flood relief purposes.

**Strategic Alignment: These programmes contribute to the delivery of National Strategic Objective 8:**

**Climate Action under the National Development Plan, as well as the Climate Action Plans 2021-2023.**

## Coastal Change Management

<sup>14</sup> [Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Flood Risk Management](#)

### National Coastal Change Management Strategy

It is proposed that the OPW will be designated as the national lead co-ordinating body for the assessment of coastal change hazards and risks, and the assessment of technical options and constraints required to underpin policy and planning decisions for managing coastal change.

The OPW and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage are jointly chairing the InterDepartmental Group on National Coastal Change Management Strategy. This group has been tasked with scoping out an approach for the development of an integrated, whole of government Coastal Change Management Strategy and reporting back to government with its findings and recommendations. The Group is also supported by a Technical Working Group.

**Strategic Alignment: This will deliver on the relevant adaptation action (AD23/6) from the Climate Action Plan 2023.**

The OPW also supports the delivery of other cross-government policies and initiatives including:

- **Biodiversity:** In May 2022, the OPW launched a Biodiversity Strategy<sup>15</sup> which includes a range of actions to embed biodiversity across all areas of responsibility and support delivery of the National Biodiversity Strategy;
- **Remote Working:** The National Remote Work Strategy<sup>16</sup> includes commitments relating to the provision of remote and home working for public sector employees. The OPW is working with departments and offices to deliver accommodation solutions that will meet their specific blended working needs.
- **Response to Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis:** In consultation with the Construction Industry Federation, the OPW developed the standards for the modular homes provided for in response to the Ukraine humanitarian crisis, with which modular providers must comply. Their learnings and expertise in this regard are being shared across relevant government departments and local government.
- **Brexit:** The OPW played a central role and continues to deliver under the Government Brexit Infrastructure Project, established to ensure that the State could continue to operate effectively in a post-Brexit era.

### 2.2.2 Challenges Associated with Strategic Alignment

The need for strategic alignment is a challenge faced by all government departments and agencies, with active engagement and coordination required from all parties on an ongoing basis. Government departments and agencies, including the OPW, thereby need to seek out and take full advantage of opportunities for increased collaboration.

Examples of challenges in strategic alignment from the OPW perspective include:

- While essential work on rivers may be required as an element of arterial drainage legislation and flood risk management policy, the work informed by environmental assessments can have

<sup>15</sup> [Biodiversity Action Strategy 2022-2026](#),

<sup>16</sup> [National Remote Work Strategy](#)

an adverse impact on local biodiversity, and potentially run counter to the National Biodiversity Strategy. This issue is being addressed through the implementation of the OPW's Biodiversity Strategy.

- The need to secure earlier engagement during the negotiation and transposition of EU Directives to allow for timely consideration of the practicalities of implementation by the OPW and the impact of EU Directives on the development of programmes and plans.
- The requirement to prioritise estate portfolio capital projects, consistent with the policy objectives articulated in the Climate Action Plan, and provided for in the built environment sectoral emission ceilings that yield significant benefits on the decarbonisation of the sectoral building stock.

### 2.2.3 Alignment at a Regional and Local Level

The strong regional and local knowledge of OPW staff is recognised by external stakeholders.

Notwithstanding this, achieving alignment of OPW programmes and plans with regional and local plans and initiatives can be a challenge.

Some views expressed by external stakeholders in this regard include:

- A perception that the OPW may focus on the conservation and interpretation of heritage sites with a greater tourism appeal compared to smaller local sites, leading to the prioritisation of tourism over conservation. While the work that the OPW carries out in the area of protection and preservation is executed to a high standard some stakeholders hold the view that more investment may be needed in smaller sites;
- A need for increased collaboration between the OPW and local authorities in relation to the potential impact of flood risk management works on the historic built environment;
- The need for a structured approach to engagement with other bodies operating at regional and local levels, such as Inland Fisheries Ireland, to ensure consistency and good practice across the regions.

## FINDINGS: STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

F2.5 The OPW is a significant actor in the development and delivery of a number of national policy frameworks. Continued engagement in cross-government structures, and the development and maintenance of strong collaborative relationships will support the delivery of the work of the OPW in a manner that is coherent and aligned with wider relevant government policies.

F2.6 Notwithstanding the strong regional and local knowledge of OPW staff, achieving alignment of OPW programmes and plans with regional and local plans and initiatives can present challenges.

## 2.3 PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT CAPABILITY

The effective development of plans and programmes requires the appropriate skillsets coupled with capability in areas such as sectoral knowledge and stakeholder engagement.

### 2.3.1 Sectoral Knowledge

Good sectoral knowledge is recorded amongst staff across the three main programme areas of the OPW – Estate Management, Heritage and Flood Risk Management, with significant experience developed over many years. However, there is a concern that elements of this knowledge are being

lost due to staff churn, primarily retirements. The development of a Knowledge Management Strategy which addresses succession planning and job documentation will help to address this issue (Section 4.9.1). There is however capacity for staff to develop new skillsets in emerging areas such as BIM and Life Cycle Cost Assessments.

### 2.3.2 Stakeholder Engagement

There is evidence of good stakeholder engagement by the OPW in the development of programmes and plans including:

- Early engagement with stakeholders including the various local authorities, the National Monuments Service, agencies such as National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency, utility providers, and public and local level organisations in the development and design of flood risk management projects.
- Strong stakeholder engagement with local community groups, local authorities and other government agencies in relation to the management of National Monuments.

An example of such positive engagement is illustrated in the case study outlining public consultation on the Phoenix Part Transport and Mobility Options Study:

**Case Study: Public Consultation on Phoenix Park Transport and Mobility Options Study** A multi-agency Steering Group was established in 2020 to develop a coherent framework to help shape and inform a vision for how visitors will access, experience, and move within the Phoenix Park while protecting its character and biodiversity, and enhancing the overall visitor experience. A public consultation took place on the findings of a transport and mobility options study carried out by external consultants.

A variety of methods were employed to provide information and publicise the project. A mixture of online and traditional media was used to allow stakeholders to access information including newspaper and radio adverts, posters on entrance gates in the Park, and online methods such as social media posts and advertisements on social media platforms. The Project Team held twelve meetings with elected representatives and key stakeholders and a virtual consultation room received almost 7,000 visitors.

Nevertheless, some external stakeholders note that a more collaborative approach to consultation and stakeholder engagement would be useful, such as working with local authorities and other bodies to agree joined-up communication plans for projects and programmes, and keeping all stakeholders fully informed of progress.

### **FINDINGS: PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT CAPABILITY**

F2.7 There is good sectoral knowledge among staff across the three main programme areas of the OPW – Estate Management, Heritage and Flood Risk Management, however the risk of loss of corporate knowledge through staff churn is an ongoing issue of concern. There is capacity for staff to develop new skillsets in emerging areas such as BIM and Life Cycle Cost Assessments.

F2.8 While there is evidence of good stakeholder engagement in the development of programmes and plans there is scope for improvement in collaborations with stakeholders on joint communication plans and keeping stakeholders up to date at all stages of programme development.

## 2.4 APPRAISAL CAPABILITY

Appraisal can be described as the ex-ante or forward-looking assessment of an investment proposal, and is a critical link between programme and project management. It can provide a strong foundation for the realisation of intended benefits but, when not done well, it can result in a raised risk profile and poor project and programme outcomes. When committing public finances, it is vital to ensure that resources are employed in a manner that will deliver an optimal solution to the presenting need. The appraisal capability of an organisation is therefore a highly important aspect of successful programme delivery and accountability.

### 2.4.1. Appraisal Skills, Process and Oversight

#### (i) Appraisal Skills

There is currently no specialist appraisal unit in place within the OPW, with extensive use of consultants to conduct appraisals noted. Appraisals of project proposals, including capital appraisals, are carried out at individual Business Unit level<sup>17</sup> for the Estate Management and Flood Risk Management programmes. The rationale for this is to ensure that appraisals are informed by the relevant specialist and professional knowledge. However, while skills needs should be identified through the PMDS process, the precise level and extent of appraisal skills within the OPW is unclear. It is noted that cost-effective analysis/cost-benefit analysis skills are currently being developed in-house in the Estate Management Division.

While the EY Capital Project and Programme Delivery Review Report<sup>18</sup> found that the OPW does have inhouse skill to conduct appraisals, this view was not supported consistently across the Management Board, with significant concern expressed regarding the loss of corporate memory and skills due to retirements in recent years.

#### (ii) Appraisal Process

For the purposes of appraising and delivering public investment, the Guide to the Public Spending Code 2019<sup>19</sup> makes a distinction between the two administrative roles of Sponsoring Agency and Approving Authority:

- The Sponsoring Agency has primary responsibility for evaluating, planning and managing public investment projects within the parameters of the Public Spending Code. The Sponsoring Agency may be a government department, local authority, state agency, higher education institute, cultural institution or other state body. The Sponsoring Agency must obtain the necessary approvals from the Approving Authority at each point in the process and ensure that the project proceeds along the lines approved by the Approving Authority.

<sup>17</sup> OPW Leadership and Governance 2022 (internal working document). Section: OPW Programme Management Organisation for Capital Works Delivery

<sup>18</sup> [‘Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability Review Report’ \(EY, 2021\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> [A guide to evaluating, planning and managing public investment, December 2019](#)

- The Approving Authority has ultimate responsibility for the project. It is responsible for granting approval for a project or programme to proceed under the management and oversight of another body. It assesses the proposal at the key decision gates in the project lifecycle and is responsible for funding and ensuring the project or programme is delivered as approved.

#### (a) Estate Management and Heritage Capital Projects - Appraisal Process

In the Estate Management and Heritage divisions, appraisals are conducted internally by business units. Appraisal of capital projects includes the preparation of:

- A Strategic Assessment Report;
- A Preliminary Business Case; and
- A Final Business Case

Projects undertaken by the OPW can have different governance arrangements, depending on the source of funding. Where a client Department is funding a project and the OPW is acting as a contracting authority, appraisal and approval responsibilities can rest with the funding Department. The final business case can incorporate a Multi-Criteria Analysis and Cost-Effectiveness Appraisal/CostBenefit Analysis, depending on the scale of the project. Projects are submitted to the Project Oversight Group (POG)<sup>20</sup> for assessment and, where appropriate, observations are provided by the POG to the Chairman or Principal Officer within the Delivery Unit acting in the role of project sponsor.

Estate Management projects under €500,000 are approved by the relevant Principal Officer and Management Board member in line with business plans and long-term maintenance and upgrade plans. Projects, where the costs increase during the development lifecycle to exceed the POG €500,000 threshold, are subsequently submitted to POG for assessment on progressing to the next Public Spending Code decision gate.

#### Estate Management Non-capital Projects – Appraisal Process

The acquisition of leasehold accommodation within the business area of Property Management currently relies on adopting a nuanced approach to the broad parameters of the Public Spending Code (PSC). While the central updates to the Public Spending Code in 2019 focused on project appraisal for capital works guidance on appraisals for current expenditure projects is expected in 2024.

#### (b) Flood Risk Management Capital Projects – Appraisal Process

The Flood Risk Management division has different delivery models in place depending on whether the scheme is local authority led or led by the OPW.

The majority of such projects (88%), both major and minor<sup>21</sup>, are local authority led with the relevant local authority as the Sponsoring Agency and the OPW as the Approving Authority. While the OPW has ultimate responsibility for each project, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the project is delivered in accordance with the OPW approvals. Under this model, the relevant local authority, as the Sponsoring Agency, is responsible for the preparation of the Project Appraisal/Cost-Benefit Analysis as set out in the Public Spending Code and ensuring the timely presentation of up to

<sup>20</sup> The POG is an internal decision-making group which supports effective governance within estate management

<sup>21</sup> Major projects are those with a value >€.75 million where minor projects are those with a value <€.75 million

date appraisals at key project milestones for approval by the OPW. For the remaining 12% of projects that are not local authority led, the OPW acts as both the Sponsoring Agency and Approving Authority.

In the role of Sponsoring Agency, project appraisals undertaken at business unit level in the Flood Risk Management Division incorporate both a:

- **Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA):** In line with the Public Spending Code, flood relief schemes must meet the criteria of a detailed economic assessment before progressing. For FRM capital projects with a value greater than €0.75m a full Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) is undertaken, while capital projects with a value below €0.75m involve application of the Minor Works Scheme appraisal criteria. The Flood Risk Management Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan includes an action to review the potential increases in flood damages as part of the economic Cost-Benefit Analysis for inclusion in the appraisals process for future flood relief schemes.
- **Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA):** The OPW currently requires that a Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) be carried out for flood relief schemes, with MCA listed as a requirement under the OPW Multi-Criteria Analysis Framework developed under the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme<sup>22</sup>. This Framework provides for a systematic approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative assessments to score potential flood risk management options against technical, economic, social and environmental criteria.

### Flood Risk Management (FRM) – Review of Appraisals

A review of capital project appraisals in the Flood Risk Management division was undertaken in 2021<sup>23</sup> resulting in a number of recommendations including:

- Provision for the potential impacts of climate change in the appraisal process;
- Incorporation of broader, cross-sectoral benefits such as public realm, amenity, biodiversity;
- Review of the hierarchy of appraisal, making use of other approaches such as cost-effectiveness analysis or multi-criteria analysis for mid-sized projects; and □ Integration of carbon-costing into appraisal processes.

The OPW developed an implementation plan for the majority of the review recommendations. An interim guidance note, updating the previous guidance provided to local authorities and consultants, reflecting the short-term recommendations of the review was developed and published in 2022, with an update including minor editorial changes published in January 2023. This guidance note addressed some of the key issues raised in the review and, in addition to publication on the OPW website, was circulated to local authorities and to all project Steering Groups. Further work is ongoing with regard to the medium and longer-term recommendations from the review.

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<sup>22</sup> Technical Methodology Note: Option Appraisal and the Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) Framework” (September 2018)

<sup>23</sup> ‘Options and Recommendations for the Economic Appraisal of Capital Flood Relief Schemes’, Mott MacDonald, June 2021

The Flood Projects Management Section has also recently designed template documents for use by the local authorities (as Sponsoring Agencies) for each Public Spending Code decision gateway.

### (iii) Appraisal Oversight

There are separate oversight structures in place for the Estate Management/Heritage capital projects and the Flood Risk Management capital projects:

#### (a) Estate Management and Heritage Capital Projects – Appraisal Oversight

Capital projects in the estate management and heritage programmes are informed by:

- The Estate Management Strategy (Office Accommodation) 2020-2025;
- The Climate Action Plans 2021-2023;
- The National Development Plan (Heritage Programmes).

Estate Management and Heritage capital projects in excess of €500,000 are overseen by the Project Oversight Group (POG). Projects under €500,000 are approved at Principal Officer or Management Board level as appropriate. In addition, for certain large-scale projects undertaken by the Office of the State Architect within the OPW, appraisal responsibility sits with the relevant government department.

**The Project Oversight Group (POG):** The Project Oversight Group (POG), established in 2017, is a subgroup of the Management Board with the following Terms of Reference<sup>24</sup>:

“To support effective project/programme governance in Estate Management so that:

- The State achieves best value for public money being invested in Estate Management;
- The objectives of each project are identified, evaluated as consistent with strategic objectives and approved;
- Adequate resources, whether internal or externally procured, are available to and allocated to each project; and
- Overall performance on the delivery of projects and programmes are monitored against budget, timelines and objectives”.

Completion of business case templates aligned to the Public Spending Code is required for all projects submitted to the Project Oversight Group (POG) for consideration. The POG is supported in its work by the Estate Planning Unit (EPU).

#### **The Estate Planning Unit (EPU)**

The Estate Planning Unit (EPU) has responsibility for supporting the development of strategic estate plans, including supporting budgeting and multi-annual forecasting, coordinating the OPW’s REPowerEU estate portfolio projects; and ensuring alignment of Estate Management projects to the Climate Action Plans and requirements of the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate. It also manages the operation of the Estate Management Capital Project Pipeline and provides data

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<sup>24</sup> Terms of Reference for POG are currently under review

analysis to support the Management Board and inform decisions on the prioritisation of projects for delivery and the management of resources (financial and human) within the OPW.

The Estate Planning Unit (EPU) sits within the Planning and Climate Adaptation Division. Submissions to the POG are made via the Estate Planning Unit in a standard format, based on the appraisal methodology required under the Public Spending Code. In addition, architects in the EPU provide professional advice to Property Management, on request, in relation to Property Management’s assessment of options.

The OPW is currently considering the possible evolution of the Estate Planning Unit into a Programme Management Office for the organisation, encompassing both the Estate Management Capital Programme (including Heritage projects) and the Flood Risk Management Capital Programme.

### (b) Flood Risk Management Capital Projects – Appraisal Oversight

The National Catchment-Based Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme (CFRAM) was completed in 2018 and informed the development of 29 Flood Risk Management Plans for delivery under the National Development Plan. As detailed earlier, the majority of Flood Risk Management capital projects (both major and minor) are local authority-led with the relevant local authority as the Sponsoring Agency and the OPW as the Approving Authority. Under this model, the OPW has responsibility for:

- The provision of project funding;
- Project approvals at key milestones including for economic appraisal;
- Project budgets and changes in scope of project or to budgets; and
- Approval of procurements and tender reports prior to award of contracts to the scheme’s main consultant and contractor.

The local authority is required to seek approval from the OPW prior to (i) submission of the project for statutory planning processes, (ii) seeking tenders and (iii) awarding of contracts, with the OPW required to ensure that its approvals are in accordance with the Public Spending Code at each decision gateway.

The Project Oversight Group (POG) does not have oversight responsibility for Flood Risk Management capital projects. However, similar to POG, these projects are approved as follows:

Flood Relief Scheme: Project Value	Approving Authority
Estimated capital cost <= €2m	Management Board member with responsibility for delivery of Flood Relief Schemes
Estimated capital cost >€2m but <€10m	Management Board member with responsibility for delivery of Flood Relief Schemes and Chairman of the OPW
Estimated capital cost >€10m but <€200m	Chairman of the OPW
Estimated capital cost >€200m	Government approval required

### 2.4.2 Environmental Assessment

Environmental impact is an important consideration in the provision of consent for flood relief schemes by the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform or through An Bord Pleanála<sup>25</sup>.

Environmental assessments also are required to inform the OPW statutory role in relation to maintenance of completed schemes. The OPW Governance Framework notes that ‘assessment of the environmental impact of flood relief schemes forms part of the options for and the design of all flood relief schemes and is central to the planning and confirmation process’ (p.8). The scale of environmental assessments required to inform the OPW statutory maintenance requirements and delivery of flood relief schemes means that there is a reliance of external consultancy. The oversight role required by the OPW also had a gap in skills and capacity in the areas of ecology and environmental assessment although this has been mitigated somewhat with the recent recruitment of ecologists. Some additional capacity has been identified towards the objective of being better able to translate lessons learned into OPW guidelines that will support a more consistent approach.

### FINDINGS: APPRAISAL CAPABILITY

F2.9 Ex-ante assessments of project proposals, including capital appraisals, are carried out at individual Business Unit level supplemented by extensive use of consultants. There is currently no specialist appraisals unit in place, with the level and extent of appraisal skills within the OPW unclear.

F2.10 There are separate systems in place for the appraisal and approval of the estate management (including heritage) and flood risk management capital projects. In both systems template documents have been developed, aligned to the Public Spending Code, for use by the relevant Sponsoring Agency as part of the appraisal process. Updated guidance for current projects is due in 2024.

F2.11 There is a lack of skills and capacity within the OPW in the areas of ecology and environmental assessment which has led to a reliance on external consultancy. While the recent recruitment of ecologists has assisted in addressing this area of skills deficit, it is likely that the OPW will still need to procure such services externally, given the volume and type of projects being managed by the organisation.

## 2.5 EVALUATION CAPABILITY

The ex-post or retrospective assessment of an investment programme, project or scheme, more commonly referred to as ‘evaluation’ can provide insight on the dynamics of past performances including features of best practice or shortcomings. The evaluation process can inform future programmes, helping to strengthen decision-making and improve the design of similar initiatives.

### 2.5.1 Ex-Post Evaluations

There is awareness within the OPW of the need for ex-post reviews, their requirement under the Public Spending Code and their beneficial nature for learning and good practice. As with the

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<sup>25</sup> Under section 7E of the Arterial Drainage Act Regulations 2019, the Minister can make an order confirming a flood risk management scheme, refuse to confirm the scheme or refer the scheme back to the Commissioners for revision in specified respects

appraisal/approval process, there are separate post-project review/evaluation processes in place for the Estate Management/Heritage and Flood Risk Management programmes.

#### (i) Estate Management/Heritage Capital Projects

A project completion template has been developed for all Estate Management/Heritage projects over €500,000, to be completed by the relevant delivery unit and submitted to the Estate Planning Unit (EPU) for collation and consideration by the POG.

#### (ii) Flood Risk Management Capital Projects

For Flood Risk Management capital projects, a project completion template and associated guidance has been developed and is being implemented by the Flood Project Management section. The template is similar to that which is used in other OPW divisions but is customised for particular relevance and suitability to the delivery of flood relief schemes. In accordance with the principle of proportionality outlined in the PSC, the template currently applies to all major flood relief schemes. It is anticipated that Project Completion Reports relating to flood relief schemes will be submitted to the OPW Management Board for information purposes.

There are examples of good practice of evaluations across the organisation including:

- The development of processes and procedures for the disposal of surplus properties by the Property Management team, based on a 'lessons learned' exercise;
- 'Lessons learned' reviews undertaken by Engineering Services when closing out a project;
- Post-project evaluations undertaken by National Historic Properties;
- Learning from the first phase of the Brexit Infrastructure project is informing project planning and delivery of the project's second stage.

However, while the OPW has taken steps to embed post-project reviews within the organisation, their completion has not yet become standard practice. A report from the Project Oversight Group (POG) to the Management Board in late 2021 showed that post-project reviews were available for only three out of fourteen completed projects across the Estate Management/Heritage programmes. It is also unclear how learnings from the reviews to date have been incorporated into practice to inform future project planning. It is intended that Project Completion Reports, when available, will facilitate continual improvement in the management of flood relief schemes. To this end, a high-level summary of Project Completion Reports received will be made publicly available on a periodic basis. Lessons learned from reports received will be extracted and documented by the OPW and will be shared both internally and with local authorities to inform future Flood Risk Management capital projects. It is intended that a similar approach will be undertaken in respect of the Estate Management/Heritage area.

### 2.5.2 Spending Reviews

Spending reviews are a key form of ex-post evaluation and an important aspect of evidence-based policy making. Since the introduction of the Spending Review Programme by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in 2017, some 165 reviews in total have been completed. Spending reviews are undertaken by the relevant department/organisation, the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) or the relevant Vote Section in DPENDPDR, either working separately or collaboratively.

There have been three Spending Reviews to date on aspects of the OPW's work:

- (i) An Analysis of OPW Spending on State Rents was completed by staff in the OPW Vote in DPENDPDR in July 2018. The paper aimed to establish a baseline of information regarding State rents, to allow for assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the State's expenditure in the future.
- (ii) Analysis of Covid Impacts on Commercial Office Market - Potential Implications for State Leases, was completed by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) and published in October 2020. This was a high level overview of emerging trends in the office rental market pre and post the onset of COVID-19, and the potential impact of remote working on the demand for office accommodation in the Civil Service.
- (iii) An assessment of the balance of current and capital expenditure: OPW Estate Management Portfolio was published by the OPW in August 2022. This paper sets out an overview of the OPW Estate Portfolio and considers the balance between current and capital investment in providing office accommodation.

Spending reviews to date, whether completed internally or externally, have focused on the Estate Management programme with no reviews undertaken in the Heritage or Flood Risk Management areas.

#### **FINDINGS: EVALUATION CAPABILITY**

F2.12 There is awareness within the OPW of the need for post-project reviews. However, there are separate post-project review/evaluation processes in place for the Estate Management/Heritage and Flood Risk Management programmes, with clarity required on how the ex-post reviews are monitored and learnings implemented. The evidence suggests that reviews are undertaken in an ad hoc manner, although there is also evidence of good practice in some areas. The OPW Governance Framework, while referencing compliance with the Public Spending Code in broad terms, does not specifically provide for the completion of ex-post evaluations.

F2.13 While the OPW has engaged in the Spending Review process since its introduction in 2017, just three papers from a total of 165 across government have been produced to date, with the focus solely limited to the Estate Management area.

### 2A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**R2.1 Statement of Strategy:** Building on work to date, the Management Board should further refine the structure of the next Statement of Strategy to set out high level goals linked to the four strategic themes supported by clear objectives (5/7) under each goal against which progress will be measured.

**R2.2 Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities:** This revised Statement of Strategy should inform an Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities that will capture each objective under the four strategic themes and list detailed and time-scaled actions and sub-actions under each objective. This Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities, to which the Minister of State should have input and sign-off, should be published at the commencement of each year. As there is scope for strengthening the reporting and monitoring of progress under the Strategy, the Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should guide the recommended monthly meetings between the Minister of State and the Management Board (Recommendation 1.4) and act as a monitoring tool of progress achieved. The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should replace the Strategy Implementation Tracker, thereby streamlining the business planning process across the organisation.

**R2.3 Business Planning:** The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should inform the Annual Operational Plans of each unit, and in turn the Goal Setting Forms of individual staff members, thus creating vital linkages between organisational priorities and performance management. These annual documents should both align with the three-year Statement of Strategy and three-year unit Business Plans. The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should also serve as the template for monthly reporting by each business unit for review at the recommended Minister of State/Management Board meetings at which the Minister should be updated on progress achieved and challenges arising.

Integral to this process is the need for the OPW to put in place systems to ensure that Business and Operational Plans are completed to a consistent standard organisation-wide, to include detailed actions, appropriate timelines and regular review and reflect agreed organisational priorities. The OPW should also consider if the recently implemented three-year Business Plan model is adequately supporting business planning across the organisation, or whether a standard one-year approach would serve to further streamline and simplify the process.

**R2.4 Strategic Planning:** The Management Board should commence planning for the longer term through the articulation of a long-term vision supported by horizon scanning for future threats and opportunities.

**R2.5 Centralised Appraisal and Evaluation Unit:** The OPW should establish a central appraisal and evaluation unit in order to build internal expertise and bring consistency of approach to the appraisal and evaluation processes across all functions of the organisation. The unit should be led by an appropriately qualified specialist with a reporting line to the Head of the Finance Unit and serve as a resource to all business areas, formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and systems for the appraisal, prioritisation, evaluation and governance of projects. In progressing this, the OPW should liaise with the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) to determine potential

available supports and should review approaches adopted by other public sector organisations, including local authorities.

Finally, the requirement to complete ex-post reviews should be specifically set out in the OPW Governance Framework.

## **2B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R2.6 Utilisation of Business Planning Data:** The Management Board should examine how data gathered during the business planning process can be analysed centrally and utilised to inform key issues including strategic workforce planning, centralised processes and procedures, budget allocations and staff development/training options in the organisation.

**R2.7 Strategic Alignment:** The OPW should conduct a strategic alignment mapping exercise across its suite of programmes and policy initiatives to ensure alignment with national policy frameworks, identify gaps arising and lead on the implementation of appropriate solutions. Such solutions should include a focus on greater collaboration as required, and enhanced joint communication plans with stakeholders where appropriate. In addition, the Statement of Strategy should include a section specifically illustrating the breadth of strategic partners of the organisation.

**R2.8 Spending Review Programme:** The OPW should proactively consider areas within the organisation that may benefit from inclusion in the new Spending Review programme being developed by DPENDPDR for the three-year period 2024-2026.

## CHAPTER 3. DELIVERY

The OPW is a key service provider to the government, leading on the delivery of large and complex projects and programmes including managing the government's estate portfolio, maintaining and presenting Ireland's built heritage, and managing Ireland's flood risk<sup>26</sup>. This chapter considers the effectiveness of arrangements in place to support the efficient delivery of programmes and projects across the range of OPW responsibilities, including programme and project management frameworks, governance, procurement; customer service, risk management and innovation and continuous improvement.

### 3.1 OPERATING ENVIRONMENT AND DELIVERY DRIVERS

The OPW operates in a highly diverse environment, responsible for the delivery of a very broad range of public services, programmes and projects involving numerous stakeholders, client organisations and customers. The primary drivers for delivery by the OPW include:

#### 3.1.1 National Development Plan 2021-2030 (Project Ireland 2040)

The OPW is a key delivery organisation under the National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 with key programmes for delivery including:

- **Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs)** - The OPW leads a whole-of-government approach to the management of flood risk, taking the potential impacts of climate change into account, across the three strategic areas of prevention, protection and preparedness. The OPW FRMPs, launched in 2018, are the output from the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme provide a roadmap for the delivery of 150 additional major flood schemes that, combined with completed flood relief schemes, will provide protection to approximately 95% of properties assessed to be at significant flood risk.
- **National Coastal Change Management Strategy** - It is proposed that the OPW will be designated as the national lead co-ordinating body for the assessment of coastal change hazards and risks and the assessment of technical options and constraints required to underpin the policy and planning decisions for managing coastal change.
- **National Heritage Estate - Conservation and Capital Projects** - The OPW delivers a range of capital works projects to continuously invest in the protection and presentation of the national heritage estate.
- **National Cultural Institutions Capital Investment Programme** – The OPW is tasked with the delivery of an extensive programme of major capital projects for the State's Cultural Institutions. Investment of €460m is planned and approved in the National Development Plan for a number of major redevelopment projects at institutions including, amongst others, the Crawford Art Gallery Cork, the National Gallery of Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland.
- **Tourism Capital Investment Programme** - A Strategic Partnership between Fáilte Ireland, the OPW and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to deliver a pipeline of capital investment in the national Heritage estate focused on improved interpretation and new visitor experiences is in place. Examples of projects under this programme include the redevelopment of Unesco Brú na Bóinne visitor centre, and the refurbishment and re-development of the Céide Fields and the Blasket Visitor Centre.

<sup>26</sup> Extract from the OPW Procurement Plan 2022-2024, p.4

- [The Public Sector Pathfinder Programme](#) - The OPW is a partner in the SEAI Pathfinder Programme which aims to retrofit and de-carbonise public buildings and adopts a holistic approach to improving the energy performance of public bodies and sectors.
- [Optimising Power at Work Campaign](#) - The OPW has been running a state-wide energy conservation campaign, 'Optimising Power @ Work', in central government buildings since 2008. The core principle of this campaign is working with staff to encourage behavioural change in energy usage, with the overall aim of identifying and eliminating energy wastage.

The OPW was a member of the 'Supporting Excellence Action Team' which was convened by the National

Investment Office in DPENDPDR, to support the implementation of the recommendations set out in the 2021 EY Report 'Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability'<sup>27</sup> and to configure the central infrastructure of services to support public sector construction and capability development<sup>28</sup> in line with the provisions of the National Development Plan. A Supporting Excellence Leadership Group (SELG) was established in November 2021. This group submitted a report to the Project

Ireland 2040 Delivery Board in Q4 2022 in line with Action 34 of the Supporting Excellence Action Team

Report. A subgroup of the Supporting Excellence Leadership Group prepared the Skills and Competency Framework, published in February 2023. Any outstanding work of the Supporting Excellence Leadership Group is now to be subsumed into the work of the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board.

The Supporting Excellence Advisory Service is in the process of being established within the Office of the State/Principal Architect to provide a service to government and state agencies for building and property needs, including the care of Heritage buildings owned and occupied by the State. This unit is headed by an Assistant Principal Architect (APA), a registered architect and qualified project manager. The multidisciplinary team has been recruited through internal promotions and mobility, with additional staff currently being recruited through the Public Appointments Service. There is significant experience within the unit in the delivery of major and mid-range projects, with all technical and professional staff also holding a project management qualification. This experience, combined with the established quality management system within the OPW will provide assistance to government departments and agencies in areas where the experience of project delivery is less mature.

Analysis has been undertaken of the NDP projects to assess areas where the OPW can provide support to specific departments and state agencies. A suite of relevant templates and checklists that capture the stages and decision gates of the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF) and Public Spending Code is being assembled to assist others departments in managing NDP project delivery. There is also a necessity to maintain a delivery function within this unit in order to ensure that the service provided is relevant. To meet this objective a key project will be selected to act as an exemplar in the delivery of NDP targets.

### 3.1.2 Programme for Government

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<sup>27</sup> [Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability \(2021 report\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Strengthening Delivery Capability for Project Ireland 2040: report from the Supporting Excellence Action team](#)

The Programme for Government includes the government's commitment to progress a national policy on managing flood risk, including from climate change. This is being achieved by the implementation of the Flood Risk Management Plans, launched in 2018, which provide the evidence to support government investment in some 150 additional flood relief schemes to protect those communities, households and businesses at most significant risk from flooding. The delivery of this capital programme will help to provide the opportunities, across all regions, for wider economic and social benefits outlined in the Programme for Government. The design of all flood relief schemes is informed by the best available evidence on the current and future flood risk from climate change scenarios, and schemes are designed and constructed to be adaptable to climate change and to the standard of protection required by the Insurance Industry.

### 3.1.3 Climate Action Plans 2021-2023

A Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Flood Risk Management 2019-2024 has been prepared by the OPW and a range of energy efficiency programmes are being delivered by the Estate Management division to effectively mitigate the potential impacts of climate change. The OPW is also participating, as a sectoral lead, in the work required under the Climate Action Plan to develop an approach to costeffectively retrofitting the public sector building stock to 2030. These initiatives have contributed to the preparation for wider delivery of climate action commitments within the Programme for Government. The Climate Action Plans will also drive the current work being undertaken on the development of the National Coastal Change Management Strategy, under which it is proposed that the OPW will have a lead role (Section 3.1.1).

### 3.1.4 Heritage Ireland 2030

The OPW is leading on, or contributing to, the delivery of 53 actions out of 159 identified in this national plan relating to visitor experience, education, community engagement, access, interpretation, research, conservation, maintenance, heritage data, promotion, partnerships, training, heritage craft skills and biodiversity. Ongoing conservation and operations support the implementation of actions in the Built and Archaeological Heritage Sectoral Climate Adaptation Plan.

### 3.1.5 Brexit Infrastructure Projects

The OPW played a central role and continues to deliver under the Government Brexit Infrastructure Project, established to ensure that the State could continue to operate effectively in a post-Brexit era. The Brexit Unit, a dedicated multi-disciplinary team, was established within the OPW and works in close collaboration with a range of stakeholder departments and state agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Transport, Health, Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners to deliver sufficient inspection facilities to cater for the increase in customs, health, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) checks and controls on trade.

The complex programme of work involved the completion of 28 projects across 24 individual sites, with total construction costs of €70.5m. Phase two of the project is underway and will see the delivery of a new terminal in Rosslare Europort to ensure Ireland can effectively manage the new requirements for checks and controls on trade with the UK.

### 3.1.6 Response to the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis

In consultation with the Construction Industry Federation, the OPW developed the standards for modular homes to bring providers to a defined standard in the provision of single-storey homes.

### 3.1.7 Estate Management

The OPW manages a significant volume of the State's property portfolio with responsibility for 2,500 properties, including the provision of accommodation for government departments and agencies (approximately 530 offices) and 680 Garda properties. The range of OPW services deployed in the estate management function include architectural, engineering, valuation, quantity surveying, estate planning and property and facilities management.

### 3.1.8 Art Management

The OPW has responsibility for the most widely distributed public art collection in the State with over 90% of artworks on display in client locations nationwide. The Art Management Office (AMO) within the OPW also acts as a consultant to other government departments, cultural institutions and public bodies advising on art related policies including the delivery of public art projects, and the acquisition, commissioning, care, display, and valuation of historic and contemporary art works.

## FINDINGS: OPERATING ENVIRONMENT AND DELIVERY DRIVERS

F3.1 The OPW has significant delivery responsibilities under the National Development Plan 2021 – 2030, the Programme for Government, Climate Action Plans 2021-2023 and Heritage Ireland 2030 in addition to Estate Management and Property Maintenance, the Ukrainian Modular Homes Programme, Management of the State Art Collection, Brexit Infrastructural Projects and responding with agility to national priorities.

## 3.2 GOVERNANCE

The OPW's governance model comprises the following primary features:

### 3.2.1 Corporate Governance Framework

The OPW Governance Framework<sup>29</sup> (September 2023) provides an overview of the governance structures, processes and responsibilities within the organisation in keeping with the governance standards set out by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in 2015. The framework is reviewed as required by the Governance and Risk Unit (GRU) and the Corporate Governance Committee, most recently in 2023.

### 3.2.2 Corporate Governance Committee

The Corporate Governance Committee assists the OPW in respect of the review and revision of both the OPW Governance Framework and the OPW Compliance Framework. The Committee comprises representatives at senior management level and meets at least four times per year. The Committee is chaired by the Head of Corporate Services, who reports to the Management Board on governance issues.

### 3.2.3 Role of Accounting Officer

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<sup>29</sup> OPW Governance Framework, 2023

As Accounting Officer, the Chairman is responsible for the safeguarding of public funds and property under the control of the organisation; for the regularity and propriety of all the transactions in the appropriation account; and for the efficiency and economy of administration of the OPW. Through the completion and signing of the annual Statement of Internal Financial Control as part of the OPW Annual Appropriation Account, the Chairman acknowledges responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal financial control is maintained and operated by the Office. The Chairman also acknowledges that any system of internal financial control can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, transactions authorised and properly recorded, and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or would be detected in a timely manner. Maintaining the system of internal financial controls within the OPW is a continuous process and the system and its effectiveness are kept under ongoing review.

### 3.2.4 Programme and Project Governance

Depending on the work in question, the OPW can act as a service provider (estate management services), a funding provider (flood risk management) or a project/programme collaborator (flood risk management; heritage projects). In many cases a range of services are provided to an organisation by different sections within the OPW. This raises the question of whether formal structures, such as Service Level Agreements (SLAs), should be consistently in place to manage the relationship between the OPW and external stakeholders. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are in place between the OPW and local authorities for flood risk management projects that are local authority-led.

There are mixed views amongst external stakeholders about the value of SLAs and/or MOUs, with some suggesting that the OPW's statutory obligations, and EU directives and regulations, provide sufficient clarity as to the OPW's responsibilities. However, SLAs/MOUs could provide enhanced clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of both the OPW and the stakeholder organisation, and serve to formalise existing arrangements. This approach could be underpinned by additional supports such as:

- Account Managers within the OPW to help provide clarity around prioritisation and advance notice of work, and service level monitoring;
- A dynamic asset management system to track and monitor assets (buildings, sites, drainage and flood risk systems) and help predict when refurbishment or reinvestment is required;
- Regular meetings between the OPW and external stakeholders to discuss short and medium-term project planning and long-term programme planning.

The establishment of a centralised Programme Management Office in the OPW (Section 3.3) would play a crucial role in providing clarity on governance requirements and setting consistent governance standards for all programme and project delivery across the organisation as a whole.

### 3.2.5 Public Spending Code (PSC) Compliance

There are separate systems in place for monitoring PSC compliance for the OPW capital programmes across Estate Management, Heritage and Flood Risk Management. For Estate Management and Heritage Programmes, the Project Oversight Group has developed templates (such as business case submissions and post-project reviews) to allow for monitoring of compliance for those projects which come within its remit (projects with a value exceeding €500,000). As noted however, compliance with post-project reviews within the OPW is low (Section 2.5.1). In the Flood Risk Management

Programme, there is a clear system for the approval of flood relief schemes at each of the four key PSC approval gateways with templates provided for the supporting documents required. There are also plans to have PSC gateway approvals discussed at Management Board meetings as this will ensure that all of the Management Board team will have visibility of larger projects, however a timeline for this was not available at the time of drafting this report.

The OPW reports challenges in meeting PSC requirements, particularly for work that has very short turnaround times or is urgent, contending that the PSC structure does not cater for the degree of flexibility required for some aspects of OPW work, particularly emergency responses. In addressing this, the option is available to the OPW to tailor existing PSC templates to its specific responsibilities, as has been done by other government departments.

The Governance and Risk Unit is responsible for compiling information provided through senior manager returns in the annual Quality Assurance Report<sup>30</sup> as set out under the Public Spending Code which includes a requirement for these reports to be published by government bodies. The reports are produced by the OPW but are not published outside of the organisation.

### **FINDINGS: GOVERNANCE**

F3.2 The OPW has a Governance Framework in place which is reviewed on a regular basis by the Governance and Risk Unit and the Corporate Governance Committee.

F3.3 The OPW can be a service provider; a funding provider or a project/programme collaborator and may provide a range of services to any one organisation. This raises the issue as to whether formal structures such as service level agreements/memoranda of understanding are required to govern the relationship between the OPW and external stakeholders.

F3.4 The OPW Governance Framework refers to the need for a quality assurance process to assess whether compliance with the Public Spending Code is being achieved. There are approval systems in place for Estate Management, Heritage and Flood Risk Management projects to ensure such compliance, however, the current lack of a centralised Programme Management Office results in a missed opportunity to utilise programme and project management systems and standardised processes and procedures organisation-wide to more effectively govern programme delivery and manage the roles and responsibilities of all involved stakeholders.

F3.5 The OPW produces Quality Assurance Reports as required under the Public Spending Code. These reports are not publicly available.

## **3.3 DELIVERY OF PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS**

The OPW is a key service provider to the government, delivering capital projects and programmes of work in the management of the government's estate portfolio; maintaining Ireland's built heritage; managing Ireland's flood risk; leading on the co-ordination for the assessment of coastal change hazards and risks; and responding as required to national priorities such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit Infrastructural Projects and the State's humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine.

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<sup>30</sup> An annual report on how an organisation is meeting its Public Spending Code obligations.

An overview of the breadth and scale of capital projects and work programmes progressed by the OPW in 2022 includes:

- **Flood Risk Management:** Capital investment in flooding projects associated with flood risk management (FRM) measures and programmes was €54.6m for 2022. Two major flood relief construction projects were substantially completed in Ashbourne, Co. Meath and in Douglas, Co. Cork. The OPW continued to fund local authorities under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme, with approximately €2.7m expended under the scheme in 2022.
- **Estate Management – Property:** A number of significant projects were progressed throughout 2022 including:
  - A deep retrofit of Tom Johnson House that will significantly reduce the energy use of the building thus contributing to the achievement of ambitious Government targets to reduce the State’s carbon footprint by 51% by 2030;
  - Work on the Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) Laboratory - a three-story building including laboratories, offices and ancillary accommodation located within the Backweston Campus;
  - Placement of a construction contract for a government data centre at Backweston Campus;
  - The opening of Walter Scott House, the new Garda Síochána Head Quarters in Dublin.
- **Estate Management - Heritage Services:** Significant developments to the heritage portfolio aimed at preserving historic buildings and sites were achieved in 2022. This included the public opening of the 190-acre historic estate, with 30 acres of renowned gardens, at Anne’s Grove, Co. Cork and a new state-of-the-art audio-visual exhibition at the Céide Fields, Co. Mayo.
- **Response to National Priorities:** In collaboration with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), a pilot programme delivering 700 modular homes on sites around Ireland was commenced as an element of Ireland’s humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. The work of the Brexit Unit and the delivery of Rosslare Europort Terminal 7 continued with work ongoing on this site to deliver critical post-Brexit infrastructure.

### 3.3.1 Programme and Project Management Structures

The OPW currently employs different approaches to the management of its two main capital programmes: Estate Management Programme and Climate Responsive Flood Risk Management Programme, including different approaches to project appraisals, project approvals and governance, project management and project evaluation:

- **Estate Management Programme:** Projects under the Estate Management Programme are managed by the relevant business units and overseen by the Project Oversight Group (POG), supported by the Estate Planning Unit (EPU)<sup>31</sup>. The OPW has put in place a number of structures in recent years to support programme and project delivery, not all of which have resulted in streamlined programme management. For example, the Project Oversight Group (POG), supported by the Estate Planning Unit (EPU) manages project approval and governance for the Estate Management Programme only.

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<sup>31</sup> More information on the Estate Planning Unit can be found in Section 2.4

- **Flood Risk Management Programme:** A re-structuring of the management of Flood Risk Management Programmes over the past twelve-month period has created two distinct work areas led by Principal Officers and Assistant Chief Engineers. The first relates to Flood Projects Management, Minor Works and Arterial Drainage Maintenance with sub-teams led at Assistant Principal Officer, having project delivery and management-specific roles and responsibilities. The second relates to Flood Programme Governance and Information Development with sub-teams again led at Assistant Principal Officer level, having programme-level roles and responsibilities including Procurement; Programme Oversight; Information Development; Operations; Maintenance; and National Contract Management.

### 3.3.2 Skills Gap Analysis

The delivery of the work agenda of the OPW requires a diverse skillset to drive programmes and projects from concept to conclusion. Existing skillsets should be supplemented and/or further developed to meet the demands of current and future projects, particularly at regional level. Skills relating to the delivery of programmes and projects that are considered to be under-represented within the OPW include legal; quantity surveying; valuation; environmental assessment; ecology; contract management (including claims); and programme and project management.

While there has been some analysis of skills on an ad hoc basis in the OPW, most recently in the Heritage Division, a central, co-ordinated and comprehensive strategic workforce planning exercise across all delivery objectives of the organisation remains outstanding and should be prioritised. This exercise, which should be a continuous rather than once off activity, will position the HRM function to identify workforce needs associated with the future goals of the OPW to ensure the organisation has the right mix of skills and experience to meet changing organisational needs. It will also be fundamental in assisting the OPW to compile a comprehensive skills register, appropriately match staff skills with delivery objectives, and identify learning and development requirements across the full staff cohort (Section 4.4.4).

#### (i) Programme Management Skills

The 2021 EY Report on the capability of the Irish Government to deliver the NDP capital programme<sup>32</sup>, identified the OPW as having “a specialism in Capital Programmes and working across sectors” (p.13). The report recommended that the OPW should be one of a small number of public bodies to provide advice and support to other public bodies responsible for the delivery of National Development Plan (NDP) capital works programmes.

On foot of this recommendation, the Supporting Excellence Advisory Service (SEAS) is being established by the OPW and will provide guidance to delivery bodies for a programme of work over a 10-year period. Based in the State/Principal Architect’s Office, a key project will be selected to act as an exemplar in the delivery of the National Development Plan. The use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) along with the tracking and the recording of lessons learned on the project will be captured and disseminated during its life cycle. The continued provision of sufficient and appropriate resources will be critical for the success of the Supporting Excellence Advisory Service (SEAS) and the

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<sup>32</sup> [NDP Capital Programme](#)

delivery of National Development Plan (NDP) projects. In addition, senior staff have attended the OGP Commercial Skills training programmes relating to Capital Works Management.

Notwithstanding this, given the scale of programme and project delivery across the OPW, the reporting requirements associated with the delivery of the National Development Plan 2021-2030, and commitments under the Climate Action Plans 2021-2023, a co-ordinated and structured approach to programme management within the OPW is required. It is noted that the OPW has recently advertised for a Programme Manager role (Principal Officer), in conjunction with DPENDPDR, the Public Appointments Service and the Civil Service Project Management Network, informed by the Project Management Competency Framework. It is expected that the role will be filled during 2023. As noted in Section 2.4.1, the OPW is also considering the possible evolution of the Estate Planning Unit into a Programme Management Office (PMO) for the organisation. Building on this approach, the OPW should consider the benefits of a centralised, co-ordinated programme management framework that would encompass both the Estate Management/Heritage Capital Programmes and the Flood Risk Management Capital Programme. Such a framework would set and maintain standards for programme management throughout the organisation, improve efficiencies, ensure consistency of approach, support programme and project planning, decision-making and governance, and contribute to the sharing of 'lessons learned' organisation-wide.

The core purpose of a centralised Programme Management Office in the OPW will require clear communication organisation-wide, supported by strong leadership from the centre, robustly driven at Management Board level. The PMO will act as the key organisational structure supporting the practice of programme management in the OPW. It will act as the central point of co-ordination and oversight for all project activity to ensure that all projects are on track and working to achieve the goals of the wider programme and agreed organisational priorities. The PMO is not a centralised project control structure that adds bureaucracy and impedes progress or a redundant project management effort focusing on day to day business activities<sup>33</sup>.

## (ii) Project Management Skills

The OPW has made significant contributions to the development of project management as a professional discipline within the Public Service, as set out in Action 10 'Embed Programme and Project Management' in [Our Public Service 2020](#). This includes:

- Contributing to the development of the Public Service Project Management Handbook;
- Ongoing engagement with the Project Management Training Steering Group;
- Active engagement with the Project Management Network;
- Contributing to the development of the Project Management Competency Framework<sup>34</sup>;
- Development of a one-year Level 8 Professional Diploma in Project Management in conjunction with the IPA (rollout of this course is included in the Supporting Excellence Action Team plan for improving capital project delivery under the NDP – Action 23).

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<sup>33</sup> Practical Programme Management – Driving Public Sector Reform, DPER, 2015

<sup>34</sup> The [Project Management Competency Framework](#) sets out a standard and recognised approach to defining competencies applicable to each Project Management job profile, along with the appropriate skills, knowledge and education relevant to that profile.

Despite such positive contributions, there is scope for greater consistency and standardisation across the breadth of projects delivered by the OPW. Significant efforts have been made to address this in recent times, most notably the development of a pilot Professional Diploma in Project Management in conjunction with the IPA, as an element of the development of a Project Management Skills Development Programme by the OPW Learning and Development Unit. The Programme aims to identify, develop, and implement a suite of skills-development activities to support the learning needs of both administrative and professional and technical staff involved in project management.

Previously, various project management training courses were available to staff which did not deliver a consistent skill set but drew on different approaches depending on the course provider. The new IPA course is cognisant of the public sector and National Development Plan context, and of the supports provided through other training initiatives such as the OGP Commercial Skills Academy, the Project Management Network and OneLearning.

Since its introduction in the 2021/22 academic year, 52 OPW staff have undertaken the IPA Diploma Programme (participant numbers are limited by course capacity) and it is hoped that greater numbers will be facilitated from the 2023/24 academic year subject to tutor availability within the IPA. The course is also available to staff from other government organisations which will allow for the facilitation of shared learning. In addition to formal training, increased awareness and use of the Public Service Project Management Handbook and the development of a Project Managers Network within the OPW, which could leverage existing skills and experience, could help foster a culture of project management excellence within the organisation.

### 3.3.3 Delivery at Design Stage

External stakeholders report positively on the knowledge, skill and expertise of the OPW in their design work, although there can be some variation in quality if this is out-sourced to a third party. The OPW's regional and local knowledge, an appreciation of the unique requirements of organisations such as the Courts Service and An Garda Síochána, and engagement by OPW architects during the project design stage in Estate Management are particularly noted.

The Brexit Infrastructure Project is highlighted as a strong example of positive delivery at design stage, with the OPW taking on board the requirements of all agencies involved and keeping them informed of the expected delivery timelines of project phases.

#### **Case Study - The Brexit Infrastructure Project**

As a consequence of the UK's decision to withdraw from the EU (Brexit), substantial infrastructure was required in Irish ports and airports to facilitate the new requirement for customs controls and food safety checks on goods coming from the UK. A dedicated multi-disciplinary team, the Brexit Unit, was established within the OPW in response to the government's requirement to develop these facilities. Throughout the project, which was overseen by the Secretaries General Brexit Infrastructure Group, the Unit worked in close collaboration with a range of stakeholder departments and state agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Transport, Health, Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The complex programme of work involved the completion of 28 projects across 24 individual sites, with total construction costs of €70.5m. The provision of these critical state facilities led to the OPW being awarded the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award in 2021 in the Excellence in Innovation Category.

Learnings from Phase 1 of the Brexit Project are informing Phase 2 - the current development of a new facility within Rosslare Port to ensure full compliance with EU legislative requirements.

### 3.3.4 Barriers to Delivery

The main barriers to efficient delivery of projects and programmes in the OPW, which are similar for all government departments and agencies delivering capital projects, include:

#### (i) Planning Process Delays

Delays in the planning process, including from challenges to projects due to judicial reviews, were highlighted by some local authorities and OPW staff. Such delays impact significantly on project delivery programmes and costs, especially in a hyperinflationary market. Examples noted severe delays to projects due to changes in processes, Ministerial consent, hyperinflation and environmental assessments, which in some instances have resulted in the successful contractor eventually withdrawing from the contract.

New and emerging requirements in planning submissions, including heritage, biodiversity, carbon footprint and water quality, that are not programmed at the start, or can at the moment run concurrently, can add additional time to project planning and delivery when implemented. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage recognise the complexity of the planning process and note the importance of programming work in such a way that allows for the integration of environmental considerations at an early stage of the project in order to address concerns which may arise.

#### (ii) Recruitment and Retention of Key Skill Sets

The 2021 EY Report 'Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability' notes the challenges faced by the public sector in attracting, retaining and developing talent to deliver the capital programme across the National Development Plan lifecycle. This is an area of particular challenge for the OPW with its 2022 Review of Capital Programme Delivery Capability under the NDP noting the need for sufficient professional, technical and administrative resources to match the workload envisaged, along with the upskilling of the current workforce, in part to reduce dependence on scarce external resources.

While the OPW has recently developed a resourcing plan as an element of a Strategic Workforce Planning exercise that focuses on the recruitment of architectural, engineering, administrative and other specialist roles, Strategic Workforce Planning is an area that requires significant focus and further development in the OPW (Section 4.4).

#### (iii) Contract Types

The contracts utilised by the OPW can cause undue delays, arbitrations and claims, particularly in a changing economic environment where uncertainty surrounds supply availability, material costs, and on the ground logistics that cannot be foreseen on projects that can span at least seven years.

## **FINDINGS: DELIVERY OF PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS**

F3.6 The OPW currently employs different approaches to the management of its main capital programmes across Estate Management and Climate Responsive Flood Risk Management, resulting in

a priority need to implement a coordinated and structured approach to both programme and project management in the OPW to drive projects and programmes from concept to conclusion.

F3.7 The OPW has made significant contributions to the development of project management as a professional discipline within the Public Service. However, until recently, the OPW lacked a consistent approach to project management training, resulting in the use of disparate project management approaches across divisions. The introduction of the IPA Professional Diploma in Project Management reflects the organisation's recognition of the need for a standard project management training tool across the organisation, which will facilitate the transfer of skills across divisions. Increased awareness and use organisation-wide of the Public Service Project Management Handbook is required together with consideration of the merits of establishing a Project Managers Network.

F3.8 In addition to upskilling the current staff cohort, there is evidence of a need to recruit and retain staff with specialist programme and project management skills. While this is currently being progressed with the recruitment of a Programme Management post at Principal Officer level, this should be supported by a fully comprehensive Strategic Workforce Planning exercise which will identify skill gaps organisationwide, both currently and over the next seven-year period, and set out options to address same.

F3.9 Positive feed-back was received from stakeholders regarding the OPW design service.

### 3.4 MANAGEMENT OF PROCUREMENT

Procurement is an essential aspect of the work of the OPW, with staff involved in procurement of a wide range of goods and services, from small purchases under €5,000 to procurement involving capital works frameworks, some of a highly specialised nature and thereby considered high risk, reaching values of €20M. The reactive nature of some aspects of OPW work, in particular where addressing emergency government priorities, can also result in the need for procurement at short notice.

#### 3.4.1 OPW Corporate Procurement Plan 2022-2024

The OPW Corporate Procurement Plan 2022-2024<sup>35</sup> sets out the OPW's strategic approach to procurement detailing:

- The largely decentralised procurement system in place, with each business unit undertaking its own procurement processes;
- Availability of support and advice for undertaking procurement in the Governance and Risk Unit (GRU), which sits within the Corporate Services Division;
- Role of the OPW Procurement Officer<sup>36</sup> who is at Management Board level and also the Head of Corporate Services Division;

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<sup>35</sup> [OPW Procurement Plan 2022-2024](#)

<sup>36</sup> The Procurement Officer should be the organisation's first point of contact with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) for procurement-related issues. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/923ad-procurement-officer-role-january-2019/>

- The OPW Procurement Network, which was established in late 2021 and is comprised of representatives of key business units who provide input and feedback on OPW procurement strategy and policy.

### 3.4.2 Procurement Support

#### (i) Governance and Risk Unit (GRU)

The OPW Governance and Risk Unit (GRU) provides a limited procurement advisory service to staff on compliance with procurement rules; monitors compliance and performance; and enhances engagement with the OGP to deliver effective procurement and use of frameworks. The GRU also manages the provision of procurement resources on the OPW intranet.

##### **Governance and Risk Unit (GRU)**

The GRU reports to the Head of Corporate Services and is primarily responsible for:

- The management of, and evaluating compliance with, the Governance Framework;
- The provision of assistance to OPW divisions on good governance principles;
- The further development and implementation of Risk Management within the organisation; □ The provision of a procurement advisory and oversight service to the organisation.

In respect of procurement matters, the GRU developed the OPW Corporate Procurement Plan, in conjunction with the OPW Procurement Network and leads or co-leads on c. 75% of the actions in the Plan, subject to the availability of staff resources. The GRU also manages the approval process for noncompetitive procurement under Circular 40/02, manage the eTenders platform for OPW users, maintains the OPW contract register, prepares non-compliant procurement returns for inclusion in the Appropriation Account and is responsible for the preparation of the annual Quality Assurance Report under the Public Spending Code.

The OGP highlighted the importance of the GRU's oversight role in helping to reduce the duplication of work and achieve value for money, particularly for contracts for common services within the OPW such as cleaning and security.

#### (ii) Conservation Procurement Unit (CPU)

The Conservation Procurement Unit (CPU) is responsible for procurement solutions, bespoke frameworks, and identification and utilisation of appropriate OGP frameworks to support OPW's work in conservation and heritage more broadly. This team also manages the governance and administration around the National Cultural Institutions Investment Programme, ensuring compliance with both procurement regulations and the Public Spending Code.

#### (iii) The Flood Projects Management Procurement Unit

This Unit provides a dedicated procurement service to the Flood Risk Management Division of the OPW through supporting FRM Business Units with individual procurement competitions, by coordinating a planned approach to procurement, and through developing procurement capacity. A Procurement Project

Pipeline was established to facilitate a planned approach to procurement activity each year. The Procurement Unit liaises within the OPW, the OGP and other state bodies in respect of using or

establishing Frameworks and Dynamic Purchasing Systems. The Procurement Unit manages a proportion of individual procurement processes through the Tender Competition Phase of the Procurement Cycle. The Floods Projects Management Procurement Unit liaises with the Learning and Development Unit to arrange and develop procurement training for staff.

#### (iv) OGP Engagement

Overall the OPW has a good relationship with the OGP with the latter noting good participation by OPW staff in training days and information sessions for public sector staff. However, engagement with the OGP varies across the OPW, with OGP frameworks used more for areas such as legal consultants, engineers, surveyors and ICT goods/services over €5m, and less for the bespoke work requirements. Due to the OPW's size and significant expenditure, a Key Support Manager within the OGP has been assigned.

#### 3.4.3 Procurement Management and Governance

The OPW faces a challenge similar to many departments with regard to the management and governance of procurement in a diverse operational organisation. In particular, staff noted the complex nature of the procurement process including the use of eTenders; the introduction of new frameworks; the increasing number of single tenders; and the need for intricate bespoke procurement for some OPW projects. Within the Flood Risk Management area, procurement has been centralised to some degree resulting in a more efficient tendering service. While the role of the Governance and Risk Unit (GRU) in procurement is a positive step, the role of the Conservation Procurement Unit (CPU) in conservation and heritage works appears to add complexity to the structure.

There is thereby clear scope for the development of a centralised, specialised Procurement Unit within the OPW, led at Principal Officer level, who will assume the role of Procurement Officer and will lead on procurement policies and supports for the organisation as a whole, with strategic, operational support, governance and communications responsibilities that include:

- Building organisational capacity and capability in procurement, including supporting the Learning and Development Unit in the preparation of a detailed procurement and contract management training needs analysis to inform the design and delivery of procurement training initiatives across the organisation;
- Reviewing and revising the OPW three-year Corporate Procurement Plan, preparing an Annual Procurement Operational Plan, and acting as the OPW point of contact with the OGP;
- Identifying opportunities for higher levels of compliance and efficiency, cost savings and risk minimisation including spend/supplier analysis;
- Providing central oversight and performance measurement of all OPW procurement activity including procurement specific risk assessments;
- Providing guidance and support to the Programme Management Office (PMO) and business unit managers;
- Developing a collaborative procurement communications strategy with business unit managers;
- Submitting quarterly reports on to the Management Board on procurement performance and compliance; and preparing reports as required in line with obligations set out in the Public Spending Code (PSC).

- In collaboration with the Learning and Development Unit, overseeing the development of a comprehensive training programme in procurement for key staff as appropriate, including bespoke, step-by-step advice.

#### 3.4.4 Building Information Modelling (BIM) Deliverables

The OPW is keen to ensure that Building Information Modelling (BIM) deliverables are incorporated into procurement processes for selected services such as the acquisition and lease of property. There is currently a mixed awareness about BIM and its application to the procurement process among senior and middle management. Overall there is a sense that while BIM has potential as a tool, and has been an organisational objective for a number of years, its use within the OPW is still in the early stages. This is an issue that will require consideration by the current BIM team and the aforementioned specialised Procurement Unit.

#### 3.4.5 Contract Management

Contract management is not addressed in the OPW Corporate Procurement Plan. There is a centralised contract register in place and business units are responsible for uploading contracts. The register, which is currently being reviewed, is administered by the Governance and Risk Unit (GRU). There is evidence that a standardised approach to contract management would be beneficial.

There can be a greater focus on procurement over contract management in the OPW, which can mean that learning from the latter is not being captured and fed back into the procurement process for future projects. Staff spoke of the challenge of regional contract management and of guaranteeing quality in the delivery of services by external contractors.

With regard to contract management by the OPW, external stakeholders note:

- For specialised work (such as conservation) there is a risk of contractors taking on too many projects from a number of organisations (of which the OPW is only one) which can affect delivery;
- There is a need for the OPW to be more explicit about the standards expected from third party contractors in areas such as environmental standards, to ensure that their work is of a similar standard to that provided by the OPW itself;
- Where maintenance/repair work is contracted out and managed by OPW District Inspectors or Regional Architects, the quality of contract management can be dependent on the person managing it.

#### 3.4.6 Procurement and Contract Management Expertise and Training

Knowledge of procurement varies across the organisation with staff in more junior grades noting that 'on the job' training in procurement is the norm, rather than formal training. A recent analysis of skills undertaken across the Estate Management function has identified procurement as one of the priority development areas.

A cross divisional working group on procurement training has recently been established and is expected to report before the end of 2023. The group's remit includes a comprehensive evaluation of the level of procurement training needed across various units and roles within the organisation to inform recommendations on improving the OPW's knowledge base in this important area of

expertise. It is understood that the group is also considering the design of a modular programme of procurement training as a potential means of meeting the requirements involved.

Similar to other government departments and agencies, the OPW needs to strengthen its contract management capability. While the OGP provides contract management templates, it is the responsibility of individual organisations to actively manage contracts. There is no evidence that formal training in contract management is provided to OPW staff, rather upskilling relies on on-the-job training, with coaching provided by more experienced staff. This approach however is reliant on individual business areas having sufficiently skilled and experienced staff in place, with the capacity to ensure comprehensive knowledge transfer to colleagues. Formal training would therefore be beneficial, particularly for large contracts<sup>37</sup>.

As set out in Section 3.4.3, the specialised Procurement Unit would build on the outputs of the cross divisional working group on procurement training, and support the Learning and Development Unit in consistently conducting a comprehensive training needs analysis in the areas of procurement and contract management, and in the design and delivery of necessary training organisation-wide.

### **FINDINGS: MANAGEMENT OF PROCUREMENT**

F3.10 The OPW operates in a complex, high-risk procurement landscape, having a need for the procurement of common goods and services across the organisation, in addition to a need for bespoke procurement, particularly for conservation and major capital projects.

F3.11 The OPW has a Corporate Procurement Plan in place, setting out its strategic approach to procurement, together with an OPW Procurement Network, providing input and feedback on OPW procurement strategy and policy. The Governance and Risk Unit (GRU) provides a limited procurement advisory service to business units undertaking procurement, while the Conservation Procurement Unit (CPU) and the Flood Risk Management Procurement Unit both support work programmes across their respective areas. The current OPW Procurement Officer is the Head of the Corporate Services Division and a member of the Management Board. Given the extent and complexity of procurement activity in the OPW it is more appropriate to establish a centralised, specialised Procurement Unit, led at Principal Officer level, with procurement responsibilities at a strategic, operational support and governance level.

F3.12 There is mixed awareness across the OPW of Building Information Modelling (BIM) as a business tool and its use is at an early stage within the organisation.

F3.13 There is evidence that a standardised approach to contract management would be beneficial to the OPW, with existing on-the-job training enhanced by formal training.

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<sup>37</sup> The OGP Commercial Skills Academy includes contract management in its training programme for Public Capital Works Projects. The OPW is a member of the Commercial Skills Academy Advisory Group (established to review training proposals, make recommendations on training, and promote CSA training programmes) and the CSA Construction Technical Group (formed to provide advice and make recommendations regarding the content, structure and delivery of CSA training relating to works projects).

## 3.5 CUSTOMER SERVICE

The breadth of the role of the OPW in service delivery renders customer service a significant consideration for their multiplicity of stakeholders across government departments, local authorities, client organisations and the general public. The main considerations with regard to customer service in the OPW are as follows:

### 3.5.1 Customer Charter and Action Plan

The OPW Customer Charter<sup>38</sup> sets out the standard of service it will provide to its customers, while the most recent Customer Service Action Plan, which dates back to 2017-2019, outlines the OPW's principles of quality customer service. Both the Plan and the Charter are currently being updated and are due to be published by Q4 2023. The OPW has a Quality Customer Service Network with membership comprised of representatives from all business units. While the Network does not have terms of reference, it has responsibility for a number of related matters including customer surveying; formal reporting responsibilities for customer service issues; liaison with the OPW Partnership Committee in relation to the Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter; the Official Language scheme; and OPW representation at the wider Public Sector Quality Customer Service Network.

### 3.5.2 Customer Service Ethos

There is a strong customer service ethos within the OPW. Staff at all levels across the organisation display a deep understanding of the importance of their work and its contribution to Irish life and society, and speak of their pride in working for the OPW. This supports the findings on 'Citizen Impact' from the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey which showed that 77% of operational staff and 71% of administrative staff felt their work had a positive impact on the public.

Approximately two-thirds of the OPW workforce is engaged in customer-facing work and hence are the 'de facto' public face of the OPW. Operational staff are keenly aware of the importance of relationshipbuilding with stakeholders at ground level, coupled with the need to be customer-focused. Staff note the challenge of dealing with customer complaints, particularly in person, and the need for good communication and conflict resolution skills. Operational staff would benefit from customer service training as many note they rely on knowledge-sharing and informal training from colleagues, and the development of customer service skills through experience.

### 3.5.3 Customer Feedback

The Customer Charter and Action Plan recognise the importance of customer feedback and set out a customer complaints process. As part of the development process for its three-year Customer Action Plans, the OPW carries out a survey of a selection of its customers in order to evaluate its performance against the actions set out in the preceding plan, with survey participants drawn from a cross-section of business customers and visitors to heritage sites. An external customer service survey was conducted in 2019, however the survey results have not been published. Aside from this, there does not appear to be a system in place to gather, analyse or evaluate customer feedback on a regular basis. In addition, the OPW does not routinely gather and analyse customer feedback from third party online providers (such as TripAdvisor) or from tour-operators on an organisation-wide basis, with feedback from tour-operators dealt with on a case by case basis at individual heritage

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<sup>38</sup> [OPW Customer Charter](#)

sites. There is evidence from external stakeholders that it can be sometimes difficult to find the appropriate person within the OPW to deal with a particular issue. This can be due to overlapping responsibilities both internally and with other organisations, such as local authorities.

#### 3.5.4 External Stakeholder Feedback

The OPW's provision of support and advice to the Accommodation Officers Network for the development of site-specific COVID-19 Response Plans for the safe return to offices was deemed of significant quality and was included in the 2020 Our Public Service Report 'Excellence in Customer Service Case Studies'<sup>39</sup>. However, the evidence also suggests that learnings from external customer feedback could help inform and improve the service provided, with the following examples provided by external stakeholders:

- The provision of improved information to landowners about drainage/flood management works and programmes, particularly advance notice, could explain and help to allay concerns over why work is or is not taking place;
- Consultations and discussions with external stakeholders, such as Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, could identify common goals and best practice;
- Customer service at heritage services could build on learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic experience e.g. moving guide staff out of visitor centres and onto sites, and looking at the site more from a visitor's perspective.

#### **FINDINGS: CUSTOMER SERVICE**

F3.14 The Customer Charter 2017 – 2019 and Customer Service Action Plan are currently being updated with a delivery timeframe of Q4 2023. There is a Quality Customer Service Network in place, however Terms of Reference are unavailable.

F3.15 A significant amount of the work of the OPW is customer/public facing, with a strong customer service ethos evident amongst staff. Given the public-facing nature of their role, operational staff in particular are keenly aware of the importance of relationship-building with stakeholders at ground level, and the need to be customer-focused. There is no co-ordinated approach to customer service training for operational staff.

F3.16 Formal and/or structured feedback mechanisms (e.g. customer satisfaction surveys) against which customer service can be measured and improved are not common in the OPW. A survey of a selected cross-section of the organisation's customers is undertaken as part of the development process for the three-year Customer Action Plan but otherwise, customer feedback is not gathered on a regular basis. In addition, the OPW does not routinely gather and analyse customer feedback about its heritage sites from third party online providers (such as TripAdvisor) or from tour operators. This is an area that should be prioritised by the Communications Unit.

F3.17 There is scope for enhancement in OPW engagement on customer service issues with external stakeholders to improve service planning and delivery.

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<sup>39</sup> [Excellence in Customer Service Case Studies](#)

## 3.6 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management within the OPW is complex, ranging from organisational/corporate risk, to risk at individual project level, to health and safety risks on individual sites. The issue of reputational risk is also a consideration, particularly in relation to project costs and large high-visibility projects such as the Brexit

Infrastructure Project. The OPW has undertaken considerable work on risk management in recent times.

### 3.6.1 Risk Management Model

There is a Risk Management Policy in place within the OPW, in addition to the OPW Governance Framework setting out an overview of the key risk management responsibilities in the organisation. Having considered the Civil Service Build to Share 'eRisk' software as not suitable for its requirements, the OPW utilises an alternative risk management software programme, 'Decision-Time', as its corporate risk register tool to record both high-level strategic and operational risks. Project-level risks are generally managed at business unit level. The role of Chief Risk Officer is fulfilled by the Head of Corporate Services, while the Risk Co-ordinator role is fulfilled by the Head of Governance and Risk Unit (GRU). A Risk Appetite statement was put in place in 2021.

In November 2021, an external company was engaged to provide risk management consultancy services to the OPW, including support and advice to the Governance and Risk Unit (GRU) and the OPW Risk Management Committee on their respective roles.

#### (i) The OPW Risk Management Committee

The Risk Management Committee meets at least four times per year and is chaired by the Head of Corporate Services (Chief Risk Officer), who reports to the Management Board on risk management. The main objective of this committee is to assist the OPW in the implementation of the risk management process, which includes the identification, assessment, monitoring, mitigating and reporting on risk in the operations of the OPW. The Committee comprises representatives with expertise in risk and/or the operations of the organisation.

Given the scale and diversity of activities within the OPW's remit, there are a number of committees in place that also have a role in risk management including:

- The ICT Steering Committee, which provides oversight on ICT governance and risk within the OPW;
- The Audit and Risk Committee, which provides proactive oversight of risk management;
- The Project Oversight Group (POG), which manages organisational risk within the estate management area.

#### (ii) Management of Risk at Business Unit Level

The OPW three-year unit business plan template includes a specific section on risk management for each high level objective. Individual Heads of Unit, as risk owners for their own area, are responsible for ensuring that operational and/or strategic risks are recorded on the OPW Risk Register. Risk assessors within each business unit are responsible for regularly updating the risk register to ensure that new risks are identified and existing risks are monitored. All risks (both strategic and operational)

are reviewed each quarter, at a minimum, with reviews of risk controls and actions carried out by risk owners at business unit level.

### (iii) Management of Risk – Flood Risk Management

The Flood Risk Management division has developed NSAI standards that are audited annually against their construction, hydrometric and maintenance activities. These are central to the management of both risk and Health and Safety within flood risk so that employees have safe and healthy working conditions in carrying out their responsibilities in relation to:

- (a) The Arterial Drainage Acts,
- (b) National Flood Management Policy, including the Flood Relief Programme; and
- (c) Coastal Protection

The OPW is committed to eliminating hazards and reducing risks in order to prevent work-related injury and ill health. This is achieved by operating an NSAI accredited Integrated Management System in accordance with the requirements of ISO 9001:2015 (Quality) and ISO 45001:2018 (Health and Safety). The system assists in providing consistency and continual improvement in service delivery and employee protection, and ensuring compliance with all relevant health and safety legislation. All employees within the Flood Risk Management division are responsible for quality, health and safety. Employees operate the Integrated Management System and are actively encouraged to participate in developing and continually improving the system.

### 3.6.2 Risk Awareness

There is evidence of risk awareness amongst managers, as well as the need for active risk management on a regular basis. There is also a strong sense from staff members that risk at project level, particularly for large capital projects, is managed well, with individual project risk registers in place. The recent appointment of risk assessors at business unit level and an increase in the number of discussions about risk at business unit level are viewed as positive developments. Risk management training has been provided to the risk assessors.

### 3.6.3 Internal Audit

The OPW has a designated Internal Audit Unit in place. The Internal Audit Unit is responsible for the independent assessment of the adequacy of the internal control environment and reports any significant control weaknesses to the Chairman. It assists the organisation in accomplishing its objectives by bringing a systematic approach to the evaluation and improvement of risk management, control and governance processes in the OPW. The annual internal audit plan, approved by the OPW Audit and Risk Committee, takes account of the top level corporate risks and functional area risks on the risk register. Systems and areas of high risk are prioritised for audit review unless alternative sources of assurance are available on the management of risk. The Head of Internal Audit reports directly to the Chairman and on a quarterly basis to the Audit and Risk Committee. The Internal Audit Unit is also represented on the Corporate Governance Committee and the Risk Management Committee.

### 3.6.4 ICT Risk Management

The ICT Steering Committee, chaired by the OPW Chairman, ensures that ICT security and data protection risks are factored into the management of ICT systems and the planning and delivery of ICT projects (Section 4.7.1). The Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 sets out specific ICT risks and related

mitigation factors. The ICT Steering Committee meets up to three times per year, with the ICT Risk Register and security updates a standing item on the agenda. While it does not have a formal reporting relationship with the OPW Risk Management Committee, the ICT Steering Committee may consider issues that inform the OPW organisational risk register and are considered by the Risk Management Committee.

### 3.6.5 Management of Health and Safety

The Commissioners of Public Works hold primary responsibility for safety, health and welfare within the OPW and for ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place for the ongoing implementation of statutory provisions relating to safety, health and welfare at work. All senior managers assume responsibility for health, safety and welfare in their functional areas and health and safety risks are identified at Business Unit level. Where these risks are common or significant, they are included in the organisational risk register. A Safety Management Advisory Committee (SMAC) is appointed by the OPW Management Board and is currently chaired by the Head of Flood Risk Management. This Committee acts as a forum to oversee uniform implementation of safety, health and welfare legislation throughout the OPW. A Principal Officer has recently been appointed as Head of Health and Safety, Internal Facilities and Business Continuity and the appointment of a Senior Health and Safety Adviser is nearing completion.

While a Corporate Safety Statement is in place there is currently no Health and Safety Strategy, or supporting Implementation Plan available for the organisation. This will require immediate focus by the Health and Safety Team.

### 3.6.6 Business Continuity Planning

The OPW views business continuity planning as a core part of risk management and has a Business Continuity Framework in place. The Framework, which is updated annually, aims to minimise the effects of any negative incident which may impact on the operations of the OPW and in doing so maintain operations to an acceptable level, whilst working to restore normal service delivery. It outlines the business continuity plans for each business unit including critical business impacts, mitigation actions and contact details for responsible officers. The Business Continuity Management team, which meets quarterly, is chaired by the Head of Corporate Services, with membership comprised of personnel from Corporate Services, Flood Risk Management, Estate Management and Heritage divisions.

## FINDINGS: RISK MANAGEMENT

F3.18 The OPW has undertaken significant work on risk management in recent times. There is a Risk Management Policy in place, with risk management reflected in key corporate governance documents and embedded in the three-year business plans for each unit.

F3.19 There is evidence of strong risk awareness amongst managers, including the need for active risk management on a regular basis. Risk assessors have been appointed at business unit level and have received risk management training.

F3.20 While a Corporate Safety Statement is in place there is currently no Health and Safety Strategy, or supporting Implementation Plan available for the organisation. This will require immediate focus by the Health and Safety Team.

F3.21 A Business Continuity Framework is in place and is reviewed annually.

F3.22 There is a designated Internal Audit Unit in place, with regular interaction between the Unit and key OPW governance and risk committees.

### 3.7 INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Innovation and continuous improvement within an organisation can be viewed as positive indicators of flexibility and adaptability. In the OPW context, an Innovation Steering Group was established in 2019, chaired at Management Board level, with four sub-groups aligned to the four Statement of Strategy themes and membership drawn from a cross-section of staff throughout the organisation. Terms of Reference for the Innovation Steering Group and sub-groups were drawn up in 2022. While the OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 provides for the development of an Innovation Strategy, there is currently no timeline for its development.

#### 3.7.1 Culture of Innovation and Staff Inputs

Overall, staff across the organisation express interest and support for a culture of innovation but there are mixed views regarding the degree of innovation within the OPW. While some staff highlight innovative approaches in areas such as ICT and biodiversity, others question whether the organisation is more responsive than innovative. This is reflected in the OPW results of the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey which found that only 49% of staff believed that there was an innovative climate in the OPW (Section 4.1.4). It is notable that, when discussing innovation, the majority of staff refer to ICT or digital improvements, with almost no mention of innovation in other areas, for example, processes, crossdivisional working or information and knowledge sharing.

An 'Ideas Box' is available on the OPW intranet to which staff can submit ideas. These ideas are then reviewed by the four subgroups under the Innovation Steering Group, who research them and discuss with the relevant business areas. There is a general lack of knowledge amongst staff of the review process and a lack of data on the numbers and substance of ideas implemented to date.

#### 3.7.2 Public Service Innovation Strategy

The OPW Innovation Week, timed to coincide with the Public Service Innovation Week, allows for a focused annual promotion of innovation within the organisation. The OPW Excellence and Innovation Awards highlight innovation and expertise within the OPW, with selected projects submitted to the shortlisting stage of the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards.

The OPW 'Optimising Power at Work' project was shortlisted for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards in 2019. A second project, 'Brexit Infrastructure' was shortlisted and subsequently won under the Excellence in Innovation category in 2021.

#### 3.7.3 Automation and Standardisation

Some automation and standardisation has taken place within the OPW, including the automation of invoice management within the Finance Unit and the introduction of the Integrated Workplace Management System (IWMS) across the property management areas (Section 4.7.5). Significant work is also being undertaken within the Heritage area, including a review of the visitor digital infrastructure; the introduction of a pilot online booking system which also generates automated

figures for visitors and financial reporting; and the use of electronic counters at parks, gardens and unmanned national monument sites.

### **FINDINGS: INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

F3.23 The OPW is supportive of innovation through its own Excellence and Innovation Programme and the submission of OPW projects to the wider Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards. While the OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 refers to the development of an Innovation Strategy, this has not been progressed to date. In addition, a mechanism for reviewing innovative ideas submitted by staff members has been put in place with the establishment of an Innovation Steering Group and related subgroups, however there is a general lack of knowledge among staff of the internal review process for this initiative together with a lack of clarity on whether any of the ideas are implemented.

F3.24 Staff across the organisation express interest in and support for a culture of innovation. It is notable when discussing innovation that the majority of staff refer to ICT or digital improvements, with generally no mention of innovation in other areas such as processes, cross-divisional working, or information/knowledge sharing, hence demonstrating the scope for further focus on this issue.

F3.25 There is evidence of some automation and standardisation within the organisation most notably the automation of invoice management within the Finance Unit and the introduction of the Integrated Workplace Management System across the property management areas. Significant work is also underway within the Heritage area to improve the visitor digital infrastructure and progress the automation of collection and collation of visitor data at heritage sites.

## **CHAPTER 3 RECOMMENDATIONS - DELIVERY**

### **3A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R3.1 Programme Management Office:** The Management Board should prioritise the establishment of a centralised Programme Management Office (PMO) to provide consistency and rigour in driving programme delivery across the organisation. The Programme Management Office should be led at Principal Officer level, by a specialist with requisite skills and experience in programme management, supported by a similarly skilled team. The PMO should be positioned as the key organisational structure supporting programme management in the OPW, acting as the central point of co-ordination and oversight for all project activity to ensure that all projects are on track and working to achieve the goals of the wider programme and agreed organisational priorities. The responsibilities of the Programme Management Office should encompass governance and oversight; planning and reporting; benefits management; stakeholder management and communications; risk management; and programme support. The core purpose of such a centralised Programme Management Office in the OPW should be clearly communicated organisation-wide, supported by strong leadership from the centre, robustly driven at Management Board level.

**R3.2 Procurement Management Office:** Given the complexity and scale of procurement activity in the OPW, the Management Board should establish a centralised, specialist Procurement Management Office.

This office should be led by the Head of Procurement for the organisation (Principal Officer level). The Procurement Management Office should have full strategic, operational support and governance

responsibility for procurement within the OPW and should work in close collaboration with individual business units and the Programme Management Office.

**R3.3 Innovation and Continuous Improvement:** A focus is required on fostering an active culture of innovation across the OPW. Such a culture should not be driven by a standalone Innovation Strategy, but rather should be driven by the full suite of OPW strategies and policies, monitored by the Innovation Steering Group and supported by the Management Board. In this regard, Terms of Reference for the Innovation Steering Group and related subgroups should be available to all staff. Innovative ideas submitted by staff should be evaluated and, if approved, implemented within a reasonable timeframe, with positive outcomes from the process communicated and promoted across the organisation.

**R3.4 Health and Safety:** A Health and Safety Strategy, supported by an Implementation Plan, is required as a matter of priority in the OPW. This strategy should clearly articulate the organisation's health and safety objectives, targets and actions formulated through extensive consultation and consideration of legal and mandated requirements.

### **3B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R3.5 Project Management Skills:** The IPA Professional Diploma in Project Management, if assessed as effective in meeting the business needs of the OPW, should become the standard Project Management training tool across the organisation, with all staff engaged in project management encouraged to upskill as required. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a Project Managers Network.

**R3.6 Strategic Workforce Planning:** Recruitment and retention of staff with specialist programme and project management skills requires focus and should be supported by a fully comprehensive Strategic Workforce Planning exercise that will identify skill gaps organisation-wide, both currently and over the next seven-year period, and set out options to address same (Section 4.4).

**R3.7 Programme Delivery:** The OPW should investigate the consistent use of structures such as Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to formalise existing arrangements with relevant external stakeholders. This would be supported by the establishment of the centralised Programme Management Office that will formalise structures and provide oversight and support in programme delivery organisation-wide.

**R3.8 Publication of Governance Documents and Reports:** The OPW Quality Assurance Reports produced under the Public Spending Code requirements should be published online as specified in the Code.

**R3.9 Customer Service Charter and Action Plans:** The OPW should ensure that the Customer Service Charter and Action Plans are updated on a timely basis.

**R3.10 Quality Customer Service Network:** Terms of Reference should be developed.

**R3.11 Customer Service Training:** The OPW should ensure that customised customer service training, including communication and conflict resolution skills, is provided to operational staff as an element of their induction process and available as refresher training as appropriate.

**R3.12 External Stakeholder Engagement on Customer Service Issues:** A programme of regular engagement on customer service issues with external stakeholders should be developed to improve service planning and delivery.

**R3.13 Customer Feedback:** The OPW should develop a structured approach, led by the Communications Unit, to the collection and evaluation of customer feedback, tailored to the work of individual units, as a means of measuring and improving customer service.

## CHAPTER 4. BUSINESS SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

This chapter explores the extent to which the corporate functions of the OPW are capable of servicing and supporting its business needs across the range of business support drivers, processes and functions including organisational identity, culture and values; human resource management, strategic human resource planning; people management; people development; ICT; finance; data management and knowledge management.

### 4.1 ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY, CULTURE AND VALUES

#### 4.1.1 OPW Vision, Culture and Values

The OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 sets out a clear vision of ‘Our Built and Natural Environments in Harmony’ and strategically frames the work of the organisation around the four themes of:

- *Our Clients* - Strengthening Outward Facing Service
- *Sustainability* - Embedding Sustainability in Decisions
- *Climate Action* - Mitigating and Adapting to the impact of Climate Change
- *People and Processes* - Enhancing Organisational Capability

In recognising the disparate roles, functions and specialisms within the OPW, this theme-based approach to the Statement of Strategy aims to strengthen collaboration both internally in the OPW, and externally with its client organisations and customers. In developing the strategy, the core values of the OPW were reviewed and redefined to ensure they remain relevant to the organisation’s current and future work programmes while being aligned with those of the wider Civil Service. The overarching values adopted by the OPW are:

- Expertise – that all OPW staff strive to become expert at their work and continuously grow expertise;
- Respect – that all staff are considerate in their behaviour towards people;
- Excellence – that all staff take pride in their work and aim for high levels of effectiveness and client satisfaction with quality, timely results;
- Collaboration – that partnerships and teams will be developed based on honesty and openness, with different perspectives embraced and consensus built;

- Sustainability – that the work of the OPW is built to last, acting for climate resilience and pledging future generations a continued legacy of the resources that have been safeguarded, along with the accrued knowledge and wisdom to protect them.

The professional standards that all staff are expected to adhere to are set out in the OPW Governance Framework and are aligned with the standards reflected in the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour promoting a culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money.

#### 4.1.2 Organisational Identity

One of the strategic priorities in the OPW HRM Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 is to develop a ‘One OPW’ mind-set and identity across the organisation. The issue of organisational identity was raised during staff engagements for the purpose of this review with a perception amongst operational staff, in particular, that the sense of connection with the OPW is more ‘local’ than with the ‘wider OPW family’, with some staff noting that the challenges of their roles are not fully understood or appreciated centrally, leading to a sense of isolation or disconnect from OPW Head Office.

#### 4.1.3 Staff Morale

Staff morale is mixed across the OPW’s 130 work locations nationwide, however, there is strong evidence that many staff enjoy working for the OPW, are satisfied with their jobs and are proud of what they do. This is reflected in the results of the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey which show that 94% of OPW operational staff and 86% of OPW administrative staff who participated in the survey agreed with the statement: “I am proud of the work that I do”. There is also evidence of positive impacts on morale for some staff during the pandemic period, where staff worked together under challenging circumstances to ensure continued service delivery.

Where staff morale is reported as low, some underlying causes that emerged as factors were:

- The challenge in filling vacancies, especially professional/technical posts, resulting in increased pressure on existing staff.
- Lack of promotional/career opportunities for certain grades;
- Staff, in particular operational staff, sometimes feeling that they are not valued and that the Management Board may not understand or recognise the extent of the work they undertake;
- The COVID-19 pandemic having had a negative impact on some staff, with new staff having to forge connections remotely, coupled with uncertainty on the new blended working model;
- A perception of a lack of collaborative working across the organisation, coupled with heavy workloads, a perceived lack of resources, and issues in aligning resources to business priorities;
- A perception amongst some staff that senior management may not take their views into account.

#### 4.1.4 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020

Due to the lack of a HRM ICT system for operational staff, the OPW used different methods for the administration of the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, with administrative staff participating in the online survey option and operational staff using a paper-based method. This reflects issues arising from the dual HRM ICT system currently in place within the OPW with separate systems for administrative and operational staff (Section 4.2.4).

Participation rates for the 2020 OPW Employee Engagement Survey varied significantly across administrative (96%) and operational staff (31%) grades, with the overall participation rate of 55% lower than the Civil Service overall of 65%.

**Table 4.1: Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020: OPW Participation Rates**

2020	No's Serving	Responses	% Response Rate
Administrative Staff	848	815	96
Operational Staff	1483	458	31
<b>Total OPW</b>	<b>2331</b>	<b>1273</b>	<b>55</b>

The top five positive results (by theme) from the 2020 Survey are outlined below. They are similar to the

OPW's top five results from the 2017 Survey and are in line with, if not marginally better than, the overall 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey results. It should be noted that all percentages relate to those staff who participated in the survey, rather than all OPW staff. This is of particular relevance for the operational staff cohort as less than one third participated in the survey.

**Table 4.2: Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020: OPW Top Five Positive Results by Theme and Civil Service Overall Result for Each Theme**

Theme	Op. Staff	Admin. Staff	OPW Total 2020	Civil Service Total 2020
<b>Competence</b> Our belief in our ability and skills to carry out the work required in our roles	87%	78%	81%	79%
<b>Employee Engagement</b> The sense of energy, connection and fulfilment we have with our work	84%	75%	78%	75%
<b>Well-Being</b> The extent to which we feel we can realise our own potential and cope with the normal stresses of life	82%	75%	77%	76%
<b>Meaningfulness</b> The extent to which we feel our work has value, meaning and purpose	79%	70%	73%	69%
<b>Citizen Impact</b> The extent to which we feel our work has an impact on the public	77%	71%	73%	73%

Source: OPW Employee Engagement Surveys 2020 Highlight Report

The five most challenging results from the 2020 Survey are illustrated below. Four of the five <sup>40</sup> have evidenced some improvement on the 2017 results with increases ranging from 2 to 7 percentage points. While the overall OPW scores are in line with Civil Service averages, those for the operational staff are lower<sup>42</sup> suggesting that further work is needed with this cohort in particular.

**Table 4.3: Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020 - OPW Top Five Most Challenging Results by Theme and Civil Service Overall Results by Theme**

Theme	Op. Staff	Admin. Staff	OPW Total 2020	Civil Service Total 2020
<b>Involvement Climate</b> The extent to which we feel that we are involved openly in decision making in the OPW	38%	42%	41%	41%
<b>Innovative Climate</b> The extent to which we feel the OPW supports and encourages us to be innovative.	47%	50%	49%	55%
<b>Performance Standards</b> The degree to which we feel that performance standards are high and that underperformance is managed effectively	48%	50%	49%	53%
<b>Career Development and Mobility</b> The extent to which we feel there are sufficient opportunities for career development, learning, mobility and promotion in the OPW and/or in the Civil Service.	50%	51%	50%	53%
<b>Civil Service Renewal Awareness</b> The extent to which we are aware of the impact of the Civil Service Renewal Plan	49%	52%	51%	51%

Source: OPW Employee Engagement Surveys 2020 Highlight Report

#### 4.1.5 OPW Employee Engagement Action Plan

Based on analysis of the detailed OPW Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey reports, the OPW has developed an Employee Engagement Action Plan. This plan sets out a series of new and ongoing actions for delivery under four themes:

- Leadership;
- Involvement Climate;
- Innovation Climate; ➤ Coping with Change.

The plan also details the lead OPW business unit responsible for each action. The OPW provides periodic updates on progress to the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, most recently in October 2022.

<sup>40</sup> excluding the Civil Service Renewal theme which was not part of the 2017 survey <sup>42</sup>

[Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020](#)

Actions contained in the plan are aligned with and mirrored in other strategies and business actions across the OPW. Actions are monitored and measured in their relevant business areas in the course of standard business plan and goal delivery review mechanisms.

## **FINDINGS: ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY, CULTURE AND VALUES**

F4.1 The OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 very articulately sets out the vision, mission, culture and values of the organisation. However, there is a sense of disconnect between some staff cohorts, particularly operational staff, and the organisation as a whole.

F4.2 There is strong evidence that many staff enjoy working for the OPW, are satisfied with their jobs and are proud of what they do. However, staff morale varies across the organisation's many work locations nationwide.

F4.3 Participation rates for the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey were significantly different for administrative and operational staff, with the overall participation rate slightly lower than for the Civil Service overall. While operational staff had higher scores than administrative staff for the top 5 positive results, their scores were lower in the 5 most challenging results. While it is noted that the OPW is responding to these issues through an Employee Engagement Action Plan which is currently being progressed, its implementation will require continued focused attention.

### **4.2 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (HRM) FUNCTION**

The HRM Unit comprises 54 staff members based in Dublin and Trim. The work of the Unit is resourced through HRM - Operational Staff (27); HRM - Administrative Staff (15); Equality and Engagement (4); Learning and Development (8).

#### **4.2.1 Quality of Service**

In general, the HRM Unit is considered responsive and helpful when contacted; however, some feedback suggests that improvements could be made on both accessibility and visibility. The lack of a detailed organisational chart for the HRM function leads to confusion regarding contact points for specific issues, which is compounded by confusion regarding the roles of local HRM and PeoplePoint. While a generic HRM mailbox is in place, the HRM Unit would benefit from setting out more clearly the specific areas of responsibility for individual staff members. Operational staff note an improvement in HRM support and communications in recent years, such as a recent series of staff welfare roadshows, however there is a tendency amongst operational staff to contact their union representative or line manager in the case of a HRM query<sup>41</sup> that should be directed to the HRM Unit.

#### **4.2.2 Professional Capability**

The role of Head of HRM is a specialised position at Principal Officer level. As a means of further professionalising the function, two Assistant Principal Officers with HRM backgrounds and a Head of Learning and Development, again at Assistant Principal Officer level, have joined the Unit in the last year. In addition, a number of staff in the Unit now undertake Continuous Professional Development in the area of HRM, with specific learning and development priorities for HRM staff identified as a component of the business planning process.

The OPW has a qualified, trained and focused team leading on Employee Relations (ER) and Industrial Relations (IR) issues, with an Employee Relations Manager post at Assistant Principal Officer level

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<sup>41</sup> Note: This does not relate to general HRM issues such as leave approval etc. which are dealt with by local managers.

recently created and filled. The OPW has a proactive approach of early intervention in employee relations issues through the Departmental and Joint Industrial Councils and on-going engagement with Union representatives. Investment is being made in the continued development of line managers to provide them with the necessary tools to recognise and address such cases at an early stage where feasible. This is supported by regular communication of employee centred policies such as Dignity at Work, across the organisation.

#### 4.2.3 Business Partnering

A HRM Business Partner approach is being adopted with the assignment of a HR Business Partner at Assistant Principal Officer level in May 2023. While informally operational in pockets of the organisation over the last two years, this is effectively a new HRM approach for implementation organisation-wide over the coming period.

#### 4.2.4 HRM Shared Services

The move to the Civil Service HRM Shared Service structure (PeoplePoint) led to an expectation that, in line with other departments, opportunities would arise to redeploy HRM staff to more strategic HRM functions. However, as PeoplePoint does not facilitate OPW operational staff, the provision of HRM services for this cohort (which is roughly twice the size of the administrative cohort) remains with the OPW HRM Unit, and can be challenging given the range of roles and responsibilities nationwide. The OPW Strategic Workforce Plan 2019-2022 (Section 4.4.1) acknowledges that, as a result, there has been limited scope to secure any real savings in staff numbers within the HRM Unit.

### FINDINGS: HRM FUNCTION

F4.4 The HRM function is considered to be responsive and helpful by staff, however there is scope for improvement in increasing accessibility and visibility, with clarity required on the breakdown of role responsibility within the Unit.

F4.5 The professional capacity of the HRM Unit has been enhanced in recent years with the appointment of staff with professional HRM backgrounds, and a focus on Continuous Professional Development among HRM staff.

F4.6 In line with the OPW HRM Statement of Strategy 2019-2022, the HRM Unit is adopting a Business Partner approach. This is effectively a new HRM approach for implementation organisation-wide over the coming period.

## 4.3 STRATEGIC HRM PLANNING

### 4.3.1 Human Resource Management Strategy

The OPW Human Resource Management (HRM) Statement of Strategy, 2019-2022 sets out how the HRM Unit can support the capability needs of the OPW and its current and future challenges, and provide the framework to support organisational change and transformation. Development of the Strategy was informed by the Civil Service Renewal Plan commitment to build strategic HRM capability in the Civil Service and by the People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017-2020.

The Strategy identifies three strategic priorities under which a number of strategic objectives have been agreed:

- Develop a 'One OPW' mind-set;
- Build organisational capability;
- Develop Corporate Services as a collaborative key business partner.

These objectives support the delivery of the OPW Statement of Strategy, in particular the 'People and Processes' theme which aims to strengthen organisational capability through the effective development of staff and optimised, innovative processes. The objectives are also reflected in the Human Resource Management 3-year Business Plan 2021-2023.

A new HRM Statement of Strategy is currently under development and will again be aligned with the 'People and Processes' theme of the revised OPW Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2024<sup>42</sup> and the objectives of Civil Service Renewal 2030. There are also role and reporting changes in progress within the HRM function to optimise delivery of its strategic objectives over the period 2023-2026. To achieve maximum impact, the new HRM Strategy should be co-created from the outside-in and from the ground-up. Such a strategy formulation approach will maximise engagement, buy-in, and ownership organisation-wide, while supporting swifter Strategy execution.

The OPW is a large organisation, with a national geographical spread and staff employed in a wide range of roles. Given the varied staff profile of the OPW, HRM implementation can be challenging. This is reflected in the structure of the HRM Unit which has separate teams for administrative staff (including professional and technical) and operational staff.

Implementation of the HRM Statement of Strategy is reviewed by the Head of Corporate Services on a quarterly basis. Evidence collected for the purpose of this review however suggests a low-level of awareness among OPW staff generally of the HRM Strategy.

#### 4.3.2 HRM ICT System for Operational Staff

Operational staff are not accommodated by the standard Civil Service HRM systems such as PeoplePoint or the OneLearning platform. As such, a parallel paper process is in place in order to ensure the same information and opportunities are provided to all staff, for example, participation in PMDS and the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.

A HRM ICT system for operational staff (PeopleXD) has recently been developed, with initial roll-out having commenced in January 2023. This system is currently comprised of a centralised database which is available to those operational staff who have an email address (approximately 1086), enabling them to view payslips and update personal details. Reporting functionality is also live. A HRM App has also been piloted in one location with full rollout to operational staff due to take place once the migration of the payroll function is completed (Q4 2023), further staff training has taken place and all staff are issued with smartphones. While longer term plans include the roll-out of platforms such as Travel and Subsistence, Performance Management and a Learning Management System (LMS) to operational staff, timelines are currently not specified. In addition, any such roll-out will depend on the supply of laptops/tablets to all operational staff. This is an issue requiring urgent focus and prioritisation at Management Board level.

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<sup>42</sup> At the time of drafting this report a revised Statement of Strategy for the period 2023 -2026 was being developed on foot of the re-appointment of Minister of State O'Donovan in December, 2022

### 4.3.3 Management Board Deliberations

Specific strategic HRM challenges for the OPW include the recruitment, retention and career progression of all staff but of professional and technical staff in particular. While data from weekly reports from the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) and the Civil Service Data Bank informs strategic resource planning by the HRM Unit, strategic HRM matters, such as workforce planning and HRM data, need to be considered by the Management Board on a more structured and regular basis, with clear actions agreed and monitoring systems in place to support HRM Strategy implementation.

## FINDINGS: STRATEGIC HRM PLANNING

F4.7 The successor to the OPW HRM Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 is under development, with role and reporting changes underway within the HRM function to optimise delivery of its strategic objectives over the period 2023-2026. There is a low level of awareness of the current HRM strategy or its contents among OPW staff.

F4.8 At present the HRM Unit has separate teams for administrative and operational staff, as the shared service HRM system (PeoplePoint) does not accommodate operational staff. A new HRM ICT system (PeopleXD) for operational staff has been developed with initial roll out to a pilot site having commenced in January 2023. This current phase facilitates operational staff interaction with the payroll system only and roll-out will not be completed until Q4 2023. While longer term plans include the roll-out of platforms such as Travel and Subsistence, Performance Management, and a Learning Management System (LMS), timelines are currently not specified. In addition, any such roll-out will depend on the supply of laptops/tablets to all operational staff. This is an issue requiring urgent focus and prioritisation at Management Board level.

F4.9 Operational HRM matters are considered by the Management Board, however a more strategic, prioritised and structured approach is required, supported by consideration of real-time data, clear action points and monitoring systems to support HRM Strategy implementation.

## 4.4 STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

A strategic workforce planning approach allows organisations to plan and grow for the future, manage workforce requirements to meet evolving business and public needs more efficiently and effectively, and address the challenges of staff turnover, including retirements into the future.

### 4.4.1 Strategic Workforce Planning Policy

The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2026 was developed in collaboration with the Management Board and Leadership Team and involved the identification of existing vacancies and new roles required for the delivery of key OPW projects. Informed by the OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024, the Strategic Workforce Plan builds on the work of the Strategic Resourcing Plan which was developed and agreed by the OPW in late 2022 and set out plans for the filling of some 45 engineering, architectural and administrative positions in 2023. The Strategic Workforce Plan sets out resourcing plans for 2023 on a quarterly basis and annually for the following 3 years to 2026.

The Strategic Workforce Plan includes some high level analysis of staff data, however the data presented focuses very heavily on administrative and professional & technical staff to the detriment of the operational staff cohort, which comprises some 60% of the overall OPW staff headcount. While

the OPW reports a significant increase in staff resources over the past 12 months, the data presented in the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2026 dates back to January 2022. The Plan would benefit from more detailed analysis across all three staff cohorts (administrative; professional & technical; and operational) drawing on current data and addressing broader strategic planning issues, supported by a comprehensive Action Plan.

#### 4.4.2 Workforce Planning for Capital Programme Delivery

In the 'Review of Capital Programme Delivery Capability' in 2022 the OPW notes the risk to delivery of its National Development Plan commitments as a result of staffing constraints, in particular due to the age profile of administrative staff and continuing levels of staff churn. It also notes the need for additional staffing resources, over and above the replacement of existing staff, in order to effectively deliver the extensive and complex programme of NDP projects.

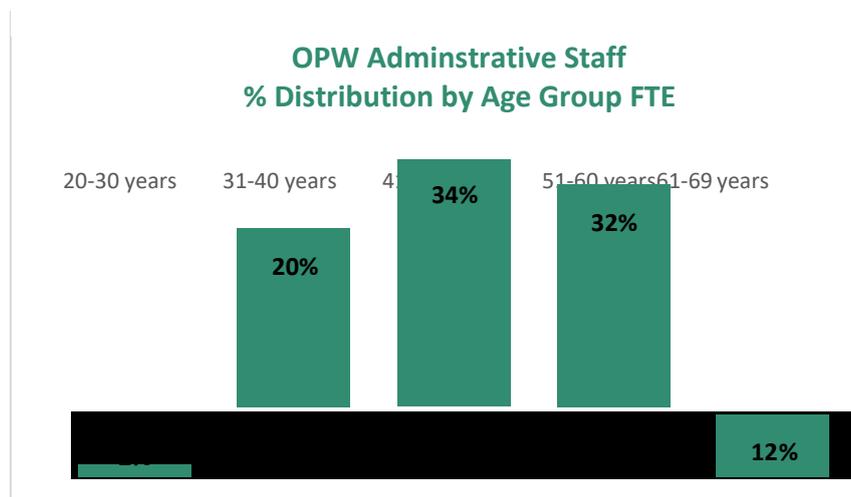
The three-year area business plans set out staff levels and vacancies for each business unit, however there is a view amongst OPW staff that there can be challenges in the alignment of staffing resources and business priorities within the organisation. There is a perception that the HRM Unit lacks understanding of the staff resources required to deliver business activities, including the delivery of capital programmes. However, significant challenges are also reported in Management Board prioritisation of resources, coupled with inconsistency in approach which impacts on workforce planning and work programmes.

A notable exception to these issues was the Brexit Infrastructure Project where a team of experienced and skilled staff was drawn from other OPW business areas to deliver a high-priority project within a tight timeframe. However, this also highlights the reactive nature of the work of the OPW which can result in the reassignment of staff from other projects without replacements available in a timely manner.

#### 4.4.3 The OPW Retirement Cliff

The OPW, similar to many other government departments and agencies, faces a highly significant challenge in planning effectively for the management of retirements over the next decade across both the administrative and operational staff grades. This retirement trend has already commenced, with data for the period January 2021 to April 2023 showing 48 retirements for administrative staff and 113 retirements for operational staff. Analysis of administrative staff data provided by the OPW in September 2023 indicates that 44% (FTE=423) of all staff are aged 51 or over, with only 2% (FTE=24) falling within the 20-30 years age group. The age distribution of administrative staff is set out in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: Distribution of OPW Administrative Staff by Age Group (%)**



Source: OPW HRM Unit, September 2023. N= 854

A percentage breakdown of administrative staff by age group and grade as of September 2023 is set out below. This shows that 67% of Principal Officers, Equivalent and higher are above 50 years of age; for Higher Executive Officers and Equivalent that figure is 59%, for Executive Officers and Equivalent 51% and for Service Officers 90%.

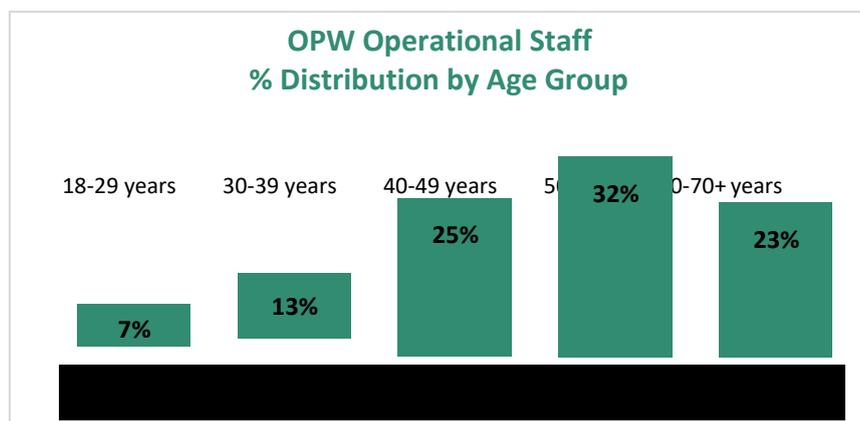
**Table 4.4: Age Profile of OPW Administrative Staff by Grade (%)**

	SVO	CO	EO	AO	HEO	AP	PO & above
20-30 years	0	8%	3%	2%	0	0	0
31-40 years	10%	18%	19%	34%	10%	21%	0%
41-50 years	0	29%	27%	35%	30%	45%	28%
51-60 years	60%	28%	37%	23%	43%	26%	56%
61-69 years	30%	17%	14%	6%	16%	7%	11%

Source: OPW HRM Unit, September 2023

The retirement profile across operational staff indicates that 55% of operational staff (n= 878) are aged 50 or over, with only 7% (n=93) under 30 years of age. The age distribution of operational staff is set out in Figure 4.2 below.

**Figure 4.2: Distribution of OPW Operational Staff by Age Group (%)**



Source: OPW HRM Unit, September 2023. N=1,541

#### 4.4.4 Workforce Planning: Recruitment, Career Progression and Skills Matching

The OCR Programme Synthesis paper (2021) highlighted the main challenges facing organisations with large numbers of staff due for retirement. These include knowledge management; business continuity; retirement clusters and recruitment.

These challenges are particularly relevant for the OPW given its capital projects delivery commitments, ambitious programmes of work and significant number of specialist professional and technical staff (44% of the administrative staff cohort<sup>43</sup>). It is therefore imperative that future OPW HRM Strategic Workforce Plans should comprehensively provide for recruitment, career progression, and skills matching, with implementation supported by knowledge management planning (Section 4.9), succession planning (Section 4.9.2) and a comprehensive Learning and Development Strategy (Section 4.6).

##### (i) Recruitment

The resource requirements to deliver the OPW's programme of work over the coming years and the age profile of OPW staff (administrative and operational) indicate the importance of a planned programme of staff recruitment.

Staff within the OPW are recruited in a variety of ways with administrative, professional & technical staff recruited through the Public Appointments Service (PAS), and operational staff recruited via the OPW website, social media and local media channels. There is a view among staff that the OPW could be more proactive in advertising vacancies and running recruitment campaigns for operational staff nationwide. Recruitment processes are reported as protracted, regardless of the role or means of recruitment, leading to extended periods of unfilled vacancies. The OPW announced a recruitment campaign in Q4 2022, on foot of increased funding secured under the National Development Plan 2021-2030, which presented an opportunity to pilot more streamlined recruitment processes across the operational staff cohort. In progress this, the HRM Unit restructured to establish a dedicated resourcing unit, trained and upskilled the team resulting in exceptional results, with 380 new staff hired and on boarded in 2023<sup>44</sup>.

There is evidence that vacancies for professional and technical roles are often difficult to fill, in particular for engineering grades where there is a relatively low number of engineering graduates in

<sup>43</sup> "Review of Capital Programme Delivery Capability' OPW (2022)

<sup>44</sup> Source: OPW HRM Unit

civil engineering. This reflects similar issues across the public sector and is without doubt linked to the wider issue of the buoyant recruitment market, particularly in the construction sector, where the OPW and the wider public sector must compete with the private sector where higher salaries are available. This can in turn increase dependency on the engagement of external consultants. Some external stakeholders articulated the view that the minimum requirements set by the OPW for recruitment of professional and technical grades, such as membership of a professional body, may be too high, thus reducing the pool of suitable applicants. While there is an understanding of the need for the recruitment of skilled staff of a suitable calibre, targeted development programmes, incorporating on-the-job mentoring and ongoing professional development could be considered as a means of upskilling less experienced new recruits to an acceptable standard. More recently the OPW has obtained a recruitment licence from the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) which will allow for improved flexibility in the timing of recruitment of specialist roles.

### (ii) OPW Apprenticeship Development Programme

There has been a renewed impetus to drive the Apprenticeship Development Programme in 2023, with HRM staff assigned to management of the programme which is implemented in conjunction with Solas. The programme offers apprenticeships in trades such as carpentry, stonemasonry and joinery. These are usually four-year programmes offering a mix of on-and-off the job training with positions available across the organisation, and an Advanced Certificate Craft<sup>45</sup> awarded on successful completion. The Apprentice Programme aimed to have 55 apprenticeships in place by 2025 with over 40 recorded at this current time. A number of new programmes have been implemented such as arborist and civil engineering, with other new areas under active consideration. Further development of the programme, including addressing the retention of apprentices, should continue in conjunction with Solas and the Department of Further and Higher Education and Skills. A more proactive approach to engaging with schools and third level institutions to promote and advertise the Apprenticeship Programme is also now underway.

### (iii) Career Progression

Career progression is a factor for consideration in addressing staff retention issues in any organisation. Some professional and technical, and operational staff are of the view that they currently have a narrow career path within the OPW, which if addressed would encourage them to remain in the organisation, thus impacting positively on retention of skills and corporate knowledge. Operational staff and Service Officer staff in particular also cite a lack of support from managers when applying for promotion.

### (iv) Skills Management

a) **Skills Matching:** Delivery of the OPW work programme requires an understanding of the necessary skills for current, new and emerging roles. The practice of matching skills and experience with roles in the OPW is described by some staff as extremely limited, with a perception that the focus is on the filling of vacancies. However, despite this perception, the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey for the OPW found that 86% of operational staff and 63% of administrative staff felt they were well-matched to their jobs.

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<sup>45</sup> Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications and an internationally recognised qualification

There is also evidence of good practice in skills matching in some business areas of the organisation, such as the completion of a Skills and Training Audit for all new architects, and the identification of new competency areas for the delivery of architectural professional services. The OPW has also undertaken some work in the alignment of the Principal Officer/Assistant Principal Officer and Equivalent grades with the Public Service Project Management Competency Framework<sup>46</sup>. While the particular skills, qualifications and previous experience of an individual may be taken into account when assigning a staff member to an area, there is no evidence of the systematic use of staff training and development data (from the OneLearning system, CPD training, Refund of Fees scheme etc.) to inform staff assignment decisions.

b) **Skills Register:** Although a highly skilled organisation, there is currently no skills register in place in the OPW. Therefore, the organisation does not have a fully developed centralised picture of the skills base across the organisation, thus impacting negatively on the strategic workforce planning process and hindering its capacity to deploy that skills base to optimum effect or to ensure that relevant skills will be in place for new and emerging roles.

#### 4.4.5 Gender, Equality and Diversity Policy

The OPW Statement of Strategy includes respect as one of its core values, and sets out that equality and engagement supports are central to employee relations within the organisation. There is a Dignity at Work Policy in place that provides protection to staff under the nine grounds of discrimination, which was the subject of a country-wide promotional campaign in 2022. However, there is no Gender Policy or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in place in the OPW.

In December 2022, the OPW published a Gender Pay Gap Report <sup>47</sup> which found that while female employees predominated in the Clerical Officer grade (76%), the opposite was the case in professional and technical roles (26%), at Senior Management team (34%) and at Management Board level (14%<sup>48</sup>). The picture is similar for operational staff, with female employees accounting for 24% of the total operational staffing numbers. In addition, female employees make up only 15% of full-time permanent operational staff, with higher participation in temporary seasonal roles (44%) which are in the lower quartile pay band. The report outlines measures to improve gender representation and reduce the gender pay gap within the organisation which include:

- The development and implementation of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy;
- A review and rethink of job profiles and definitions, especially at a more senior level. The OPW has already reviewed its policy to permit reduced work patterns for newly promoted staff;
- A review of leadership development opportunities available to female staff with a view to ensuring equality of progress across the organisation;
- The embedding of a flexible working culture across the organisation and promotion of a supportive environment for work life balance. OPW's Blended Working Policy offers increased work life balance opportunities for staff in roles deemed suitable for blended working patterns;
- The continuation of the process whereby female operational staff attain promotion to higher grades;

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<sup>46</sup> OPW Leadership and Governance 2022 (internal working document). Section: OPW Project and Programme Managers

<sup>47</sup> [OPW Gender Pay Gap Report](#)

<sup>48</sup> Currently 28%

- The need for more to be done to attract females to other operational grades which have traditionally been male dominated.

The report does not include actions or timeframes for the delivery of the measures. While work has not yet commenced on the development of an OPW EDI Strategy, aspects of EDI have been developed and implemented through component policies, procedures and practices governing related matters such as recruitment, dignity at work, disability supports, partnership models and customer charters.

## **FINDINGS: STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING**

F4.10 A Strategic Resourcing Plan was developed and agreed in late 2022, encompassing plans for the filling of some 45 engineering, architectural and administrative positions. More recently a Strategic Workforce Plan 2024-2026 was developed in collaboration with the Management Board and Leadership Team. However, the Plan would benefit from significant further development informed by current data across all staff cohorts, adopting a significantly broader approach to the strategic workforce planning process. While there are currently some areas of good practice, the evidence indicates that strategic workforce planning is not currently an area of strength in the OPW and requires attention.

F4.11 The OPW has highlighted the risk to the delivery of its commitments under the National Development Plan as a result of staffing constraints, with feedback also highlighting challenges within the organisation in the alignment of staffing resources and business priorities. The Brexit Infrastructure Project was a good example of the rapid deployment of a team of experienced and skilled staff but also highlighted the impact that the reactive nature of some OPW work can have on workforce planning due to vacancies arising from staff transfers to the project.

F4.12 The OPW, similar to many other organisations, is facing a retirement cliff across the administrative and operational staff cohorts, which is now in the early stages. 44% of administrative staff are aged 51 or over, which includes 67% of the Principal Officer/Equivalent and higher grade. Across the operational staff cohort, 55% of staff are aged 50 or over.

F4.13 There is evidence that vacancies for professional and technical roles can be difficult to fill, which may be linked to the wider issue of the buoyant recruitment market, and competition with the private sector amongst other factors. This may be leading to an increased dependency on external consultants. The acquisition by the OPW of a recruitment license from the CPSA indicates a proactive approach to recruitment.

F4.14 The OPW Apprenticeship Development Programme offers apprenticeships in trades such as carpentry, stonemasonry, and joinery. The organisation has demonstrated a renewed impetus to drive the Programme in 2023, with a number of new programmes implemented, higher participation levels and a more proactive approach to engaging with schools and third level institutions to promote and advertise the Programme also now underway.

F4.15 Concerns about career progression within the OPW were raised by some professional & technical and operational staff, with limited opportunities cited by both groups and a perceived lack of support by managers cited by some staff.

F4.16 Delivery of the OPW work programme requires an understanding of the necessary skills for current, new and emerging roles together with an awareness of the existing skill base across the organisation. While the OPW is a highly skilled organisation, it currently does not have a skills register in place which would support better skills-matching when assigning staff to roles.

F4.17 The Gender Pay Gap Report, published by the OPW in December 2022, is noted as positive, however the measures outlined to improve gender representation and reduce the gender pay gap in the organisation do not include detailed actions or timeframes for delivery. There is no Gender Policy or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in place in the OPW.

## 4.5 PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

This section focuses on the areas of performance management, blended working, grade-drift and staff mobility.

### 4.5.1 Performance Management

The ePMDS system is in place for administrative staff, with 82% of that staff cohort fully completing the PMDS cycle in 2022. In common with other government departments, there are mixed views among staff regarding the quality of the PMDS process in the OPW:

- Some staff regard PMDS as a good opportunity to identify goals and training needs for the year and as a means to give structured feedback, while others see it as a ‘box ticking’ exercise;
- The occurrence of face-to-face meetings varies from section to section and there is recognition from managers that PMDS should not be used as a replacement for one to one engagement with staff, and that on-the-job regular communication is essential in managing staff;
- Underperformance is seen as an issue and while the perception is that some support in managing underperformance is available from HRM, the formal Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) approach is not typically followed through as the procedures are regarded by some managers as onerous. As such, the perception amongst staff is that underperformance is often dealt with informally by managers or not at all. This is reflected in the OPW results of the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey which show that only 15% of administrative staff and 20% of operational staff think that poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the OPW. The comparable Civil Service figure is 20%.

For operational staff, the PMDS process is carried out manually using a paper-based system. While the new HRM ICT system for operational staff (PeopleXD) will have capacity to host a solution for performance management there are currently no timelines in place for implementation and roll out will depend on the supply of laptops/tablets to all operational staff nationwide. PMDS completion rates for operational staff are currently very low, which in turn impacts significantly on performance management and identification of learning and development needs. In addition, when annual PMDS meetings take place with those operational staff who complete the PMDS process, the perception is that the training needs agreed rarely materialise, indicating a weak link between the manual PMDS system and learning and development opportunities.

### 4.5.2 Blended Working

A Blended Working Policy Framework for the Civil Service<sup>49</sup> was published in March 2022, with the OPW Blended Working Policy introduced in September 2022. This policy provides for the right of an employee to apply to work remotely, for a maximum of 3 days per week at an alternative workplace to their designated work premises. Due to the nature of the work, the blended working policy will apply primarily to the administrative staff cohort (including professional and technical staff).

The general view within the organisation is that remote working was positively adapted to during the pandemic. In common with all public sector bodies, the impact of blended working on both people management and on the delivery of business priorities over time will require assessment.

#### 4.5.3 Grade Drift

There is a perception that there are elements of grade drift across the OPW. Among administrative staff, upward grade drift is more prevalent at lower grade levels where the lines between Clerical Officer and Executive Officer work are sometimes blurred, with lower grades subsequently expected to work upwards. While grade drift is not as evident at Assistant Principal to Principal Officer level, there is some evidence of grade drift from Principal Officer to Assistant Secretary and Management Board level. Some aspects of this may be related to autonomy levels, for example low thresholds for some financial approvals can result in approvals being escalated upwards. Other contributing factors to grade drift can include a lack of clearly defined roles and procedures for some jobs; promotion 'in situ'; and recruitment issues resulting in long term vacancies, particularly for professional and technical staff.

#### 4.5.4 Staff Mobility

Mobility opportunities are key to enable staff to develop their career potential and enrich their work experience. The OPW participates in the Civil Service Mobility Scheme<sup>50</sup>, but does not have a recent Internal Mobility Policy<sup>53</sup> in place. Internal mobility is not specifically addressed in either the HRM Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 or the OPW Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2026. While some internal mobility does take place, there appears to be a lack of associated transparency, with staff unsure as to the process.

Operational staff outline challenges relating to both temporary and permanent mobility, including reassignment to a new location with little advance notice and a lack of mobility opportunities for guide staff at heritage sites. This perspective is reflected in the results of the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey where only 33% of operational staff and 27% of administrative staff, who participated, agreed with the statement "I have opportunities to be moved around various positions so that I can learn a broad range of skills", compared to overall Civil Service figure of 42%. The percentages that disagreed were 45% and 44% respectively, compared to the overall Civil Service figure of 33%.

Due to the geographical spread of OPW offices and sites, location is seen by staff as the most significant impediment to mobility. In addition, the Civil Service Mobility Scheme does not apply to professional and technical grades.

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<sup>49</sup> The Central framework provides direction to individual organisations in the Civil Service to develop tailored policies on 'blended working' that are appropriate to their business needs.

<sup>50</sup> <https://hr.per.gov.ie/en/corporate-pages/career/mobility/> <sup>53</sup>  
The most recent internal mobility policy was introduced in 2012.

## FINDINGS: PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

F4.18 Performance management is not assessed as a strength of the OPW. The application and effectiveness of PMDS as a performance management tool raises mixed views among staff. It is currently not applied consistently, with a very low completion rate across the operational staff cohort in 2022. While the newly developed HRM ICT system for operational staff will facilitate access to a performance management solution there is currently no time line for roll-out available. This development will also depend on the supply of laptops/tablets to all operational staff nationwide.

F4.19 The OPW Blended Working Policy was introduced in September 2022. Due to role suitability issues for operational staff, the primary beneficiaries of the new policy will be the administrative staff cohort.

F4.20 Some degree of grade-drift has been reported, which may be due to a number of factors including lack of job/role definition; promotion 'in situ'; grade-based levels of autonomy; and delays in the filling of vacancies.

F4.21 The OPW participates in the Civil Service Mobility Scheme, however the Internal Mobility Policy requires review, coupled with more consistent and more transparent application.

### 4.6 PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

The OPW operates in a diverse environment, requiring staff at administrative, operational, and professional and technical grades who present with a wide range of Learning and Development (L&D) needs. This section will consider different aspects of people development, including learning and development strategy, continuous professional development; the identification of training needs, access to training, staff well-being and induction and mentoring.

#### 4.6.1 Learning and Development (L&D) Strategy

A Learning and Development Strategy for 2022-2025 has been finalised and sets out how the L&D Unit can support the development of OPW staff capability. Prior to the development of the Strategy, the L&D Unit had mainly been operating in a transactional manner with the core focus on systems training and refund of fees for individual training. It is noted that funding has recently been prioritised for learning and skills development.

There are elements of good L&D practice within the organisation, most notably:

- Continuous Professional Development programmes for professional and technical staff;
- Involvement of the OPW in the development of the IPA Professional Diploma in Project Management and programmes in the OGP Commercial Skills Academy;
- The provision of 'industry-wide' training for operational staff such as mandatory health & safety training e.g. 'safepass', and manual handling.

The new L&D Strategy however, while a positive first step, would benefit from significant refinement. Such a Strategy should form an integral component of the overall strategic planning of the organisation and should reflect the OPW business strategy at corporate and business levels, and align with the HRM Strategy. The OPW Learning and Development Unit is required to position itself, through its Strategy, as the organisational strategic leader in attracting and retaining talent;

developing people capabilities in line with organisational needs; building an employer brand, and motivating and engaging staff. The current OPW Learning and Development Strategy is also silent on the disparity between learning and development opportunities for the administrative and operational staff cohorts and how this will be addressed.

There are potential rich sources of data on learning and development needs at business unit level gathered through the three-year business plan process, along with training needs requirements identified through the PMDS process. However, there is no evidence to date to indicate that this data has been collated or analysed by the Learning & Development Unit to inform a 'whole of organisation' L&D Strategy. It is noted that the Strategy does recognise the need, going forward, to prioritise the use of data to drive informed decision-making and to research and implement a single system for storing and analysing data to provide insights in the learning and development needs of the organisation.

#### 4.6.2 Learning and Development (L&D) Team

The OPW Learning and Development team is a function of the HRM Unit and currently has a staff of 8 people, led by a HRM Specialist at Assistant Principal level. The L&D Team is highly regarded and viewed by staff as both supportive and responsive.

There are however differing approaches to the management of learning and development for administrative and operational staff. Learning & development needs at individual level for administrative staff are identified via the PMDS process with training generally provided through the Civil Service OneLearning platform. The increased availability of online OneLearning courses is seen as particularly helpful for staff based in decentralised areas, with 876 attendances at such courses by OPW staff across 69 courses in 2022. Operational staff do not have access to the OneLearning platform, with training budgets held locally by individual business units who assess the training needs of staff based on business needs. Operational staff however can apply for the Refund of Fees Scheme for third level studies and can also apply to attend in-house courses that are available to all employees. While the L&D Unit plans to engage with operational managers in order to identify local needs that will feed into organisation-wide training opportunities, the organisation of technical training will remain the responsibility of budgetholders at local level.

There are mixed views amongst the operational staff cohort regarding access to learning and development opportunities, with some reporting good access to training opportunities, whereas others hold the view that operational staff are not afforded the same opportunities as administrative staff. Time constraints due to the seasonal nature of work was cited by some operational staff as a reason for training needs not being met.

As previously noted, improved engagement with the PMDS process is likely to result in increased identification of training needs and improvements in provision of training for operational staff. In addition, given the significant customer-facing aspect of their work, the provision of customer service training (including conflict resolution skills) for operational staff requires attention (Section 3.5.2).

#### 4.6.3 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Professional & technical staff in the OPW undertake Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which is mandatory and embedded into their work, the extent of which is dependent on the requirements of each profession's governing body. CPD is also necessary for retention of ISO standard

accreditation by the organisation. While the OPW L&D Unit provides funding for CPD courses, responsibility for course attendance rests with individual staff. Quarterly reports setting out key areas of CPD opportunities undertaken are submitted to the L&D Unit. There is a perception that overall, a more structured approach to CPD is needed for other OPW professional staff such as valuers and those working in ICT, HRM, Finance and Communications.

The OPW Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2026 refers to the development of a Continuous Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) programme for all staff to capture the required skillsets and competencies for each business area and establish related learning and development programmes. Currently, the L&D Unit considers requests for study relevant to individual roles for operational staff. Where such training is only available via OneLearning and there is a clear business/personal development need for operational staff, the L&D Unit will endeavour to source a comparable training programme, seminar or webinar.

#### 4.6.4 Staff Health and Wellbeing

Currently in the OPW Staff Health and Wellbeing is not a specific function or responsibility of the HRM Unit centrally rather it is shared by all managers and employees in the organisation, supported by the HRM function. There is no documented Health and Wellbeing Programme supported by a Health and Wellbeing Strategy that addresses the specific challenges faced in the organisation together with interventions that are both evidence informed and reviewed regularly, targeted specifically at improving health and wellbeing outcomes for staff. In line with the guidance of the Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework<sup>51</sup> together with employees having a responsibility to proactively manage their own health and wellbeing, senior leadership sponsorship of and buy-in to the health and wellbeing programme of the organisation are vital in ensuring that a culture of health and wellbeing is successfully embedded organisation-wide.

The Framework sets out the particular roles and responsibilities of the HRM function in steering the health and wellbeing agenda of the organisation. Of key priority is the requirement for the HRM function assessing the presenting health and wellbeing issues and developing a Staff Health and Wellbeing Strategy to address organisational needs that is subject to regular review and evaluation. The HRM function should also play a key role in working closely with the Management Board to ensure investment in staff health and wellbeing is prioritised, in addition to enabling and supporting managers to value the health and wellbeing of their staff.

Notwithstanding the above, the OPW is proactive in terms of the promotion and provision of information on staff wellbeing, including the availability of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS). A range of wellbeing courses is provided but some staff report that finding the time to participate can sometimes be an issue. Less awareness of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) was reported by operational staff, however, the HRM Unit undertook a series of Welfare at Work days across the OPW in 2022, which included information about the CSEAS and other supports and should assist in addressing this issue.

Overall, staff report that there is a good sense of support from managers; that the OPW is a fair organisation to work for; and that staff health and wellbeing is adequately supported, particularly so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, this finding is somewhat at odds with the results of the

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<sup>51</sup> [Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework](#)

2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey under the heading of ‘Organisational Support’ where just 50% of administrative staff and 57% of operational staff who participated in the survey agreed with the statement “The Office of Public Works cares about my wellbeing.” This result is broadly in line with the Civil Service overall score of 50%.

#### 4.6.5 Mentoring and Induction

The OPW Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 references the importance of developing managers as coaches and mentors. Some staff have undertaken certified leadership courses provided by the Irish Management Institute (IMI). However, there are mixed views as to its success in terms of participation rates, and the level of management support for the programme. Some OPW senior managers have availed of personal and professional development provided by the Senior Public Service (SPS) through their talent development programmes. Directors at Management Board level have undertaken a Chartered Director Programme, a formalised qualification for Directors and strategic business leaders, while a new Leadership Programme is currently under development for staff which will be delivered as a blend of development approaches including masterclasses, tiered development programmes and peer to peer coaching support.

There is evidence of informal mentoring within the organisation, with staff providing support to new colleagues in particular, and mentoring of graduates within the professional & technical cohort. It is noted that the L&D Unit is currently scoping the development of a coaching programme for all OPW staff.

Delivery of induction for new staff members moved online during the pandemic, with the HRM Unit providing a mix of online induction courses, information packs and a pre-recorded webinar. As a result, some staff report mixed experiences of induction, with some noting that they had not yet received induction. Those who did receive induction noted that it provided a good overview of the organisation and its history. Staff also noted the importance of support from colleagues and on-the-job training when settling into new roles or areas of work. With the return to more office-based work, the induction process has been adapted to include online group induction, accompanied by a personalised induction schedule involving in-person meetings with management and peers, and one-to-one interactions between new employees and the L&D Unit.

#### **FINDINGS: PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT**

F4.22 The upskilling of the workforce has been identified as critical to ensure sufficient capability and capacity within the OPW to deliver on its programmes of work. While there are elements of good Learning & Development practice within the organisation, with a Learning & Development (L&D) Strategy for 2022-2025 now in place, this document requires significant further review and refinement.

F4.23 Learning & Development needs for administrative staff are identified via the PMDS process. However, the OneLearning platform is not available to operational staff and the link between the identification of training needs through PMDS and the provision of training for this cohort is not functional given the low PMDS completion rates across the operational staff cohort.

F4.24 Professional & technical staff undertake Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which is mandatory and embedded into their work. There is a perception that overall, a more structured

approach to CPD is needed for other OPW professional staff in areas such as of those working in ICT, HRM, Finance and Communications.

F4.25 While the OPW is generally proactive in the promotion and provision of information on staff health and well-being there is no articulated organisational Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme supported by a Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

F4.26 There is evidence of informal mentoring within the OPW, particularly for new staff members and for new graduates within the professional and technical cohort. The L&D Unit is considering the introduction of a formal mentoring programme. The OPW induction programme for new staff takes a blended approach with online group induction accompanied by in-person meetings with management and peers.

## 4.7 CAPABILITY IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The OPW is a highly geographically dispersed organisation with ICT users spread across some 130 sites. The ICT Unit provides a range of services to support the OPW's operational and strategic business functions ranging from the provision of advice to senior management on ICT issues to the provision and maintenance of office equipment.

### 4.7.1 ICT Strategy, Governance and Capability

(i) **ICT Strategy:** The OPW Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 is aligned with the OPW Statement of Strategy and includes a detailed list of strategic actions to support the delivery of the latter. It sets out how ICT can support the current business needs and future challenges of the OPW, with staff reporting that they had good opportunities to input into the development of the Strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy is reviewed on an ongoing basis by the ICT Steering Group and progress reports are published. Webinars have taken place to keep staff informed of progress and case studies allow staff to present on their own specific ICT progress.

One issue worthy of consideration in the development of the ICT Strategy is the need for continued focus on the heritage area. While a pilot project is underway to automate the recording of visitor numbers to heritage sites, one central system across all heritage sites will be required, together with a full overview of ICT requirements in the Heritage function, and a time-lined implementation plan. The Heritage function is also not provided for in the development of the Integrated Work Management System (IWMS), an issue which will be addressed in more detail in Section 4.7.5.

(ii) **ICT Governance:** The ICT Steering Committee is chaired by the OPW Chair, with membership comprised of senior management from business units across the organisation. The Committee meets 3-4 times per year, with its primary functions, as set out in its Terms of Reference, to:

- Oversee the information technology investment priorities for the OPW;
- Provide direction and governance in respect of the management of the ICT function within the OPW; and
- Formulate and approve the OPW ICT Strategy.

The ICT Steering Committee is focused on strategic issues only and does not consider ICT staffing, budgeting and other operational ICT matters. The Terms of Reference for the ICT Steering Committee also set out the project approval and governance procedure for all new ICT projects and initiatives in excess of €100,000, which must be submitted to the ICT Steering Committee for approval. The business unit that will act as the sponsor for any proposed project throughout its life-cycle is required to submit a business case for consideration and also formally present the proposal to the Committee. Once approved, the Committee considers progress reports of ICT projects on a regular basis. Details of all approved ICT projects are submitted by the ICT Steering Committee to the Management Board for information.

In common with other Public Sector Bodies, as part of an annual submission, ICT projects over €25,000 in value require approval from the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). In line with the requirements of the OGCIO, these projects require the preparation of a business case by the sponsoring OPW business area. Although some of these projects (those with a value of under €100k) do not require formal approval by the ICT Steering Committee, a list of such projects, once submitted to OGCIO, is forwarded to the Committee for information.

The ICT Steering Committee is required to provide the OPW Management Board with a report on an annual basis that reviews project progress for the previous fiscal year and sets a priority list of ICT projects for the coming fiscal year.

(iii) **ICT Skills:** The ICT Unit sits within the Corporate Services Division and is based in both Trim and Dublin. The Unit has 26 staff including a Business Analyst at Higher Executive Officer level, and is led by a Principal Officer and two Assistant Principal Officers (all three are specialist ICT posts). Currently, there is no provision in the OPW for the role of Chief Information Officer (CIO). An additional 14 staff are contracted to provide ICT Helpdesk support. Specific learning and development priorities for ICT staff are identified and set out in the Unit's three-year Business Plan with staff participating in training and seminars to keep up to date with ICT developments and new technologies. It is noted that there may be less of a focus on continuous professional development amongst OPW ICT staff compared to contract ICT staff.

The ICT Unit in the OPW is viewed as positive and responsive, working proactively with business owners in the provision of ICT solutions. Staff across the organisation highlight the seamless changeover to online working and the ongoing support from ICT during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other examples of the responsive approach of the ICT Unit include:

- Introduction of the new Intranet (SWIFT);
- The development of a new case management system for HRM;
- Work undertaken with the Finance Unit on the roll-out of a pilot robotics project (Section 4.8.2);
- The introduction of software (Tableau) to develop management reporting dashboards;
- Increased provision of equipment (laptops, mobile phones) and communication platforms which have allowed for a more flexible approach to work; and
- Recognition of the need to develop a policy for the use of drones in the delivery of OPW work.

#### 4.7.2 Build-to-Share Applications

At present ePQs, eFOI and eCorrespondence are utilised in the OPW. Concerns have been expressed about the suitability of eDocs as a records management system as it does not facilitate the storage of drawings which are used by staff from a number of areas within the organisation including architects, engineers and maintenance teams. The issue of license costs for Sharepoint software was raised during this review as an issue for consideration given OPW staffing numbers. As mentioned in Section 3.6.1, the OPW does not use eRisk (the Build to Share risk management application), instead sourcing a separate software package more suited to the needs of the organisation.

#### 4.7.3 ICT Business Continuity Planning

The ICT Unit has compiled a Business Continuity Framework which sets out a business continuity plan in the context of critical elements of ICT delivery. The framework is a living document which is assessed and updated on a regular basis. A cloud-based system is in place for ICT disaster recovery.

#### 4.7.4 ICT Service Support

(i) **Customer Service:** The ICT helpdesk has high satisfaction rates amongst staff, with staff feedback loops post-engagement facilitated. Helpdesk support outside of standard office hours has been an ongoing concern. As ICT staff are based in two locations (Trim and Dublin), the issue of regional ICT support was also raised.

(ii) **Wi-Fi and Phones:** Due to the geographical spread of the various OPW sites, Wi-Fi coverage when using official devices can be unreliable. This can cause difficulties for staff working in a range of areas, and may require use of personal phones. Other examples of issues caused by unreliable Wi-Fi coverage include:

- The negative impact on the customer experience at heritage sites, such as availability of digital bookings for visitors and connectivity of credit card machines;
- Difficulties in accessing the OPW unified communications platform/phone system which is used by staff and customers when contacting offices/sites;
- Slow internet access speeds for staff working on some heritage sites;
- Poor Wi-Fi availability for staff working on some flood risk project sites.

The ICT Unit is engaged in a process to roll out smartphones to operational staff. This is welcome but the rollout needs to be completed as a matter of priority and accompanied by support and training to assist staff in adapting to the new technology.

#### 4.7.5 Development of New ICT solutions

Two key ICT projects, both of which are outsourced and not under the remit of the ICT Unit, are currently under development to support OPW business needs:

(i) **HRM System for Operational Staff:** As noted in Section 4.3.2, roll-out of a pilot for the newly developed online HRM system for operational staff commenced in January 2023. This system is currently comprised of a centralised database which is available to those operational staff who have an email address (approximately 1086), enabling them to view payslips and update personal details. A HRM App has also been piloted in one location with full rollout to operational staff due to take place once the migration of the payroll function is completed (Q4 2023), further staff training has taken place and all staff are issued with smartphones. While longer term plans include

the roll-out of platforms such as Travel and Subsistence, Performance Management and a Learning Management System (LMS), timelines are currently not specified. In addition, any such roll-out will depend on the supply of laptops/tablets to all operational staff. This is an issue requiring urgent focus and prioritisation at Management Board level.

(ii) **Integrated Work Management Systems (IWMS):** An Integrated Workplace Management System (known as TRIRIGA) is currently being rolled-out to provide functionality for all aspects of the property management function within a single technology platform. The system will hold property and property-related data for internal operational use and is being delivered as a three-phase programme:

- Phase 1: Maintenance Management covering the operation of the national helpdesks for properties owned and/or maintained by the OPW;
- Phase 2: Property Management which will manage key workflows associated with property leases and licences;
- Phase 3: Capital Project Management which will provide functionality associated with the OPW's multi-annual capital project programme and complement the OPW's Building Information Modelling (BIM) and Common Data Environment (CDE) systems.

The IWMS project is being delivered by the Estate Management System Unit, under the Corporate Services Division, in conjunction with the relevant property business units. IWMS integrates directly with OPW's current financial system, providing a fully auditable system for payments arising from leases/licences entered into by OPW. It is unclear at this stage how it will integrate with the new Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS)<sup>52</sup>.

Further to the delivery of Phase 1 Maintenance Management there has been some frustration amongst staff regarding the slow progress of the rollout, with some staff also reporting poor communication about the new system coupled with a lack of access to training materials. Phase 2 (A) 'Lease - Accounts Payable' was rolled out to Property Management in June 2022 and was accompanied by staff training. Phase 2 (B) 'Lease Accounts Receivable and State Owned Properties Non-office' is scheduled to go live in late 2023/early 2024. Ongoing training is provided to business unit staff as required with training materials accessible on the business unit Alfresco document-sharing site. However, the varied quality of data held on the system has been noted which may be due to inconsistencies in data input from business units that have not yet been resolved.

#### 4.7.6 Digitised Services

The importance of delivering public-facing services through online solutions has become increasingly evident in recent years. The OPW facilitates the delivery of some online services primarily in the heritage area, such as the provision of online booking for some heritage sites and the option to purchase Heritage Cards<sup>53</sup> online.

External stakeholders refer to the changing environment within the tourism and heritage sectors and note the importance of improving digital offerings to visitors, which can include interpretive information, virtual guided tours, 'tap to donate' options and updated information on websites. They

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<sup>52</sup> FMSS is scheduled for implementation in the OPW in 2024.

<sup>53</sup> Heritage cards provide unlimited access to over 45 sites and visitor attractions

recognise the expertise and knowledge of the OPW guides working on sites and the challenge of marrying the in-person and digital experience, in particular the investment required over the short and long-term.

The issue of digitised services is being addressed in a somewhat piecemeal fashion in the OPW, with the impetus coming from the divisions, for example a recently completed review of digitisation in the Heritage area and a review by the Flood Risk Management division of its online presence, rather than centrally. While the OPW Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 addresses various aspects of digital services currently provided by the organisation, it does not include a specific plan for a Digital Transformation Programme. A coherent, whole-of-OPW approach to the delivery of digitised services would help to ensure that a modern, accessible service is provided to the full range of OPW customers, both corporate and members of the public.

#### **FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN ICT**

F4.27 The OPW operates in a highly complex environment with multiple stakeholders across a multitude of sites nationwide, thus demanding an agile, resourced and forward facing ICT response. While the OPW Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 comprehensively sets out how the ICT unit can support the current business needs and future challenges of the OPW, there are some further areas requiring development including the articulation of a Digital Transformation Programme for the organisation, provision for the role of Chief Information Officer (CIO) who will oversee the current and ongoing operational and strategic ICT and digitisation needs of the organisation, and the urgent development of a comprehensive HRM system for operational staff that will facilitate access to the same platforms currently available to administrative staff.

F4.28 The Heritage function requires particular focus from an ICT perspective. The function is not provided for in the development of the Integrated Work Management System (IWMS). Other issues requiring ICT attention include the roll out of laptops to operational staff in preparation for the implementation of the HRM system PeopleXD, in addition to an out-of-hours ICT customer help-desk and the addressing of Wi-Fi issues, particularly for operational staff.

### **4.8 CAPABILITY IN FINANCE**

This section of the review considers the capability of the finance function in meeting current and future needs of the OPW. The OPW's relationship with the relevant Vote section in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform is addressed in Section 1.4.1.

#### **4.8.1 Finance Function**

(i) **Finance Unit:** The Finance Unit is fully decentralised and based in Kilkenny. The Unit is led by a Principal Officer with a staffing complement of 51 people across a number of teams responsible for:

- Financial governance and leadership;
- Financial planning;
- Financial information for decision making;
- Financial and performance reporting;
- Financial monitoring and forecasting;
- Financial operations including payments and payroll.

The Unit sits within the Corporate Division and works closely with the Governance and Risk Unit (GRU).

The Unit is highly regarded across the organisation and readily available to offer assistance when needed.

(ii) **Professionalisation and Skills:** The staffing complement of the Finance Unit includes three qualified accountants. Specific learning and development priorities for staff are set out in the Unit's three-year Business Plan, with opportunities available for staff to develop skills and knowledge over a wide range of competencies.

The Head of the Finance Unit is relatively new to the role, having joined the OPW in 2022. He recognises the importance of developing a collaborative working relationship with the relevant DPENDPDR Vote Team, including regular structured meetings to continue to support mutual understanding of each other's priorities. However, some external stakeholders who receive property maintenance services from the OPW note some challenges with account management, namely the quality of financial reporting and overly complex procedures such as the use of suspense accounts.

(iii) **Management Reporting:** The Finance Unit provides a monthly financial update to both the OPW Chairman and the Head of Corporate Services, and the Head of Finance presents an update on OPW finances to the Management Board on a quarterly basis. In addition, an Expenditure Monitoring Committee meets monthly, chaired by the Management Board member responsible for the area under discussion. While senior management note the need for improved and more intuitive financial reporting, a data reporting tool, Tableau, was rolled out in 2022 to enable better access to financial data and data analytics to inform financial and management planning, and is regarded as a positive first step.

#### 4.8.2 Financial Systems

The current OPW financial management system (Integra) is viewed as easy to use but is outdated and will be out of support in Q1 2024. While this system performs the core financial activities of the OPW some additional financial activities are conducted through MS Excel which can be labour intensive for staff. The OPW is scheduled to migrate to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) under Phase 3 which is not due to take place until late 2024. In the interim the OPW will need to upgrade to the next version of Integra as support for the current version is due to cease in Q1 2024. While some initial discussions have taken place with the FMSS allowing the OPW to set out its unique business needs, more detailed discussions regarding the transition will be required. This is an area that will require ongoing monitoring at Management Board level.

As mentioned in Section 4.7.3 the current financial management system integrates directly with the Integrated Workplace Management System, which is being rolled out for the property management and maintenance areas.

A project for the automation of invoice management within the Finance Unit (described as the Robotics Project) has been undertaken to replace the current system for invoice processing. This will automate the processing of up to 90,000 invoices per year and, once fully implemented, will allow for the reassignment of staff to other areas of work within the Unit.

## FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN FINANCE

F4.29 The Finance Division is professionalised and highly regarded. There is active monitoring of expenditure at programme level through the weekly Expenditure Monitoring Committee meetings, monthly financial reporting to the OPW Chair and the Head of Corporate Services and quarterly presentations to the Management Board by the Head of the Finance Unit. The rollout of Tableau, the data reporting tool, is providing improved access to financial data and data analytics to inform financial and management planning and will support Management Board deliberations.

F4.30 The current financial management system is near 'end of life' but will be replaced in the coming years with the transition to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) under Phase 3 of the FMSS programme. Detailed discussions on this transition are required between the OPW and the FMSS programme team, with ongoing monitoring of developments at Management Board level also a necessity.

### 4.9 CAPABILITY IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The success of knowledge management in an organisation depends on a comprehensive knowledge management system that facilitates the sharing of experience, information and knowledge to inform decision making and reduce the requirement to rediscover knowledge. This section examines policies and procedures relating to the OPW's approach to knowledge management and records management.

#### 4.9.1 Knowledge Management Strategy and Records Management Policy

A Knowledge Management Strategy is best understood as a plan for organising, capturing, sharing and using the collective knowledge, information and expertise of an organisation to improve its performance and achieve its goals. A Records Management Policy acts as a formal document that sets out an organisation's procedures for managing its records and addresses how records are created, stored and accessed as well as how they are destroyed or archived. The OPW currently does not have either a Knowledge Management Strategy or Records Management Policy in place.

There is a mixed approach to records management across the organisation, with evidence of best practice in those areas with ISO accreditation. It is recognised that, as a diverse organisation, a 'one size fits all' solution may not exist, particularly in the context of the storage of historical data, drawings and maps. Regarding the latter, concerns have been expressed about the suitability of eDocs as a records management system as it does not facilitate the storage of drawings.

Other issues in relation to records management include:

- While some sections use file management software for electronic records, there is no organisation-wide system in place, and duplication of electronic files and documents can be an issue;
- There is ongoing use of paper files in a number of areas. While a registry database is in place, paper files can get misplaced or lost;
- Different areas maintain their own reference numbers for the same building, rather than assigning one unique reference number to allow for identification of all records for that building throughout its lifecycle;

- There is currently no specialist staff or archivist in place to ensure the effective management of historical records.

The OPW Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 acknowledges that a Records Management Policy would provide a governance structure for the management of OPW records and includes a strategic action to develop same. This is reflected in the three-year business plan for the ICT Unit with a delivery timeframe of Q1 2023 for the delivery of the Strategy and related implementation plan. It is understood that this timeframe has recently been revised, with work on the Records Management Strategy now due to commence in Q4 2023.

#### 4.9.2 Succession Planning and Job Documentation

The HRM Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 acknowledges that succession planning is a key challenge for the OPW due to the high turnover of staff arising from retirements, mobility and a competitive external environment. In this context a Knowledge Management Strategy addressing succession planning and job documentation is a vital tool for harnessing corporate knowledge, particularly of specialist staff.

(i) **Succession Planning:** Mechanisms that ensure seamless continuity of service delivery arising from staff departures, either planned or unplanned, are a baseline requirement to minimise organisational risk and maximise effectiveness. There is some evidence of job handover or shadowing taking place within the technical grades (engineers, architects) in the OPW, but generally there is no overlap or job handover when staff are being replaced. This may be due to delays in recruitment, which can be outside the control of the OPW.

While a Strategic Workforce Plan 2024-2026 has recently been developed, succession planning will continue to be a priority requirement for the OPW and should be undertaken complementary to the broader strategic workforce planning exercise. Succession planning will require a focus on the identification of critical positions and associated capabilities in the OPW, together with the creation and implementation of succession plans that will outline the steps required to ensure that staff churn is optimally managed.

(ii) **Job Documentation:** There is evidence of a mixed approach to job documentation both across the organisation and within the administrative and operational staff cohorts, with no official policy in place. In terms of the administrative staff, there are job guides and procedure manuals in some areas, primarily those which involve transactional work such as facilities management and accounts. However, staff report a reliance on PMDS role profile forms from the previous incumbent for information on their role and where job procedure manuals do exist, they can be out of date.

On the operational side, staff report that there can be clear documentation regarding the health and safety aspects of their work. While job contracts set out the work that is expected, staff can find that the actual job tasks are different. Where operational staff move to new sites or buildings, there is little crossover to allow for knowledge transfer about the specifics of a site or building. For staff working in heritage sites, job guides are not usual practice and, where they are in place, they are usually provided by the staff themselves rather than driven by a central organisational policy.

## FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN KNOWLEDGEMENT MANAGEMENT

F4.31 The OPW does not currently have a Knowledge Management Strategy or Records Management Policy in place however work is scheduled to commence on the latter in Q4 2023. There is currently a mixed approach to records management across the organisation with a centralised, more structured approach required. The organisation currently does not employ an archivist to ensure the effective management of historical records.

F4.32 The HRM Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 acknowledges that succession planning is a key challenge for the organisation. Work on this should be complementary to, and supportive of, work in the area of strategic workforce planning. There is evidence of a mixed approach to job documentation across the organisation for both administrative and operational staff. Both succession planning and job documentation require attention and articulation in a Knowledge Management Strategy for the organisation.

### 4.10 CAPABILITY IN DATA MANAGEMENT

Data management, if leveraged appropriately, is a very effective tool in planning and delivery as well as in policymaking, monitoring and evaluation. This section considers policies and procedures in relation to data management in the OPW.

#### 4.10.1 Data Management Strategy

The OPW currently does not have a Data Management Strategy in place. The OPW Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 describes data management as fragmented and siloed, with no specific unit in the OPW assigned responsibility for the management, interrogation and analysis of datasets. As a consequence, apart from some examples of good practice set out below in Section 4.10.4, data is significantly underused as a business tool, with senior management acknowledging that data held by the OPW is not employed to its optimum and that better data management and analysis would add significant value to the planning and delivery of programmes, inform decision-making and enable better business planning and strategic workforce planning.

The OPW Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2024 includes an objective for the creation of a Data Management Strategy that will enhance analytics and decision-making and deliver improved management reporting. A timeframe of Q1 2023 for its development was set out in the ICT Unit business plan, however it is understood that this timeframe is under revision, with a working group due to be created to consider how best to advance a Data Management Strategy within the organisation.

#### 4.10.2 Open Data and Data Sharing

Progress has been made in the area of open data and data sharing in some areas of the OPW. The most significant example is in the area of flood risk management with websites/portals<sup>54</sup> in place which make flood information available to the public, professionals, local authorities and other agencies. This data is of particular importance to inform spatial planning and development management and in the management and response to extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. The OPW has an Open Data Officer in place and has processes in place to deal with Open Data, AIE and FOI requests within the mandated timeframes. These are linked from the OPW home page on [gov.ie](http://gov.ie). Much of the

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<sup>54</sup> [waterlevel.ie](http://waterlevel.ie), and [floodinfo.ie](http://floodinfo.ie)

flood risk management data is available as open data on the national open data portal, [data.gov.ie](https://data.gov.ie). At present there is no property management or heritage data made available as open data, however, the OPW Digital and ICT Strategy notes that the creation of a Data Management Strategy will allow for the identification of data suitable for publication as open data. A Data Catalogue and Data Release Policy have been put in place in Flood Risk Management to centrally manage key datasets. There are currently 305 datasets included in the Data Catalogue with 37 published to data.gov.ie. Recent developments in the Axiel Collections database, Trirega and Library system will facilitate publication of Open Data.

There is no central data repository within the OPW, which makes data sharing between divisions challenging. It can also be difficult for divisions to ascertain what data exists within the organisation that might be of use or relevant to their work. There is also evidence that data sharing with stakeholders can sometimes be poor, with delays reported in the provision of data.

#### 4.10.3 Data Protection

The OPW has a Data Protection Officer and a Data Protection Unit in place to ensure the OPW meets its statutory obligations relating to data protection and in particular GDPR. There is also a Data Protection Policy<sup>55</sup> in place, with training available to staff, and information on data protection available on the OPW intranet site.

The OPW report that over 240 staff completed a programme of online data protection courses between July 2021 and the end of October 2022 and that 29 'in-person' data protection training courses took place in 2022.

#### 4.10.4 Data as a Business Tool

There is evidence of some good practice in the use of data as a business tool in the OPW including:

- The Integrated Workplace Management System (IWMS) which includes property and propertyrelated data;
- A number of Business Units have ISO accreditation which includes standards for records management;
- A data hub has been created in the flood risk management area which contains information on all flood relief projects and is currently being adapted for Intermediate Projects;
- Information Management Systems have been developed for Arterial Drainage and Environment, Hydrometric and to allow staff to search for and download mapped data;
- A digital data pipeline is in place for Hydrometric data which includes measurement, publication, verification and transfer to the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS) and Met Eireann Flood Forecasting Division;
- The development of the Building Information Modelling (BIM Level 2) Framework in line with Public Sector mandates to deliver data and information in standardised formats, to support the entirety of OPW project and asset management activities, including conventional project management processes and future climate objectives. This project related digital information will reside within a Common Data Environment which will take the form of integrated system of desktop and cloud software populated with templates for generation of data rich modelling

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<sup>55</sup> [Data Protection Policy](#)

and document sets at a suitable level of detail for all built assets and projects. Procurement for this project is time-lined for Q4 2023;

- A pilot project to automate the recording of visitor numbers at heritage sites to replace the manual system currently in place. This project will be reviewed and re-tendered in Q4 2023 with additional process improvements and operational efficiencies for sites to be included in specification for either current contract renewal or a new system.

These examples highlight the broad range and varied nature of OPW data and the complexity associated with the development of a Data Management Strategy for the organisation.

#### 4.10.5 Data Analytics Capability

While the OPW has data analytics capabilities in a number of areas, such as Flood Risk Management where a dedicated Data Management Team is in place which provides analytic dashboards for a number of functions, and the Finance Unit who use data analytics to monitor expenditure patterns, there is a need to further develop data analytics capability across the organisation. An impending review will include an assessment of existing data analytics skill levels and the need for additional training for staff.

#### **FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN DATA MANAGEMENT**

F4.33 The absence of a Data Management Strategy in the OPW is a significant gap in terms of a business tool. While the initial delivery timeline of Q1 2023 has been revised, work is underway to address this deficit, with a Working Group due to be formed to consider how best to advance the issue.

F4.34 Progress has been made in the area of open data and data sharing for Flood Risk Management data but open data is not available for either the Estate Management or Heritage areas. It is expected that the creation of a Data Management Strategy will allow for the identification of data suitable for publication as open data.

F4.35 Data sharing between business areas internally and stakeholders externally is not supported by any structured technical system. There is significant scope for development in this area to deliver both essential efficiencies and strategic and business planning capability to all parties.

F4.36 The OPW has a Data Protection Officer, a Data Protection Policy and a Data Protection Unit in place, with training ongoing and information available to staff on the OPW intranet.

F4.37 While the OPW has data analytics capabilities in a number of areas, there is a need to further develop this capability.

#### 4A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**R4.1 HRM Statement of Strategy:** The HRM Statement of Strategy is a vital component of the strategic planning process of the organisation. The current Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 needs to be updated and further developed through extensive staff consultation to ensure maximum awareness, engagement, buy-in and ownership organisation-wide. In addition, future HRM Statement of Strategy documents should be prepared prior to the expiration of previous iterations.

**R4.2 HRM Strategic Workforce Planning:** A more comprehensive Strategic Workforce Plan should be put in place incorporating all staff cohorts and drawing on datasets including current employee profiles; staff turnover; skills and capabilities; talent profile, location and the external labour market. It should also address workforce segmentation, identify the roles most critical to meeting the OPW's strategic and organisational priorities, and consider multiple time horizons - short (1 year); medium (3-5 years) and long term (10+ years). The Strategic Workforce Plan should be supported by an Action Plan that will consider strategies including but not limited to sources of recruitment; remodelling of roles; opportunities for joint delivery with partners; retention of key talent; greater job flexibility; remote working; process redesign and improvement; increasing learning and development opportunities; re-skilling and up-skilling, career progression and productivity improvement. Both the Strategic Workforce Plan and Action Plan should be subject to regular review and updated as required. The Strategic Workforce Plan should also be included as a regular agenda item at Management Board meetings, thus reinforcing the strategic aspect of the process and garnering ownership across the Board in its entirety.

**R4.3 Staff Health and Wellbeing:** A Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme, supported by a Health and Wellbeing Strategy requires immediate prioritisation by the OPW. Such a Programme, in line with guidance set down in the Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework, should be led by the HRM function and focus on the specific health and wellbeing needs of the OPW across the key areas of the Physical Working Environment; Health Resources and Psychosocial Working Environment. The HRM function should also play a key role in working closely with the Management Board to ensure that investment in staff health and wellbeing is prioritised, in addition to enabling and supporting managers to value the health and wellbeing of their staff through ensuring relevant training is provided and equipping managers with the tools to identify changes in the behaviour and performance of their staff.

**R4.4 Gender Policy/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy:** A plan setting out how the recommendations of the Gender Pay Gap Report will be implemented, accompanied by delivery timelines, should be progressed and published. Drafting of a Gender Policy and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy should be prioritised.

**R4.5 Learning and Development (L&D) Strategy:** The recently published Learning & Development Strategy should be strengthened to demonstrate how learning and development needs have been identified, what consultations/data gathering took place in building the strategy and crucially how the strategy will be implemented, clearly detailing roles and responsibilities, objectives, actions, indicators and roll-out in a manner that supports the implementation of business strategy. It should also address the learning development needs of operational staff.

**R4.6 Performance Management:** There is an urgent need for significantly improved participation in the PMDS process by OPW operational staff, and greater consistency in the application of the tool across other staff cohorts. This is vital, not only for performance management, but also in facilitating the identification of development and training opportunities organisation-wide. In supporting this recommendation, training for managers should be prioritised with monitoring of PMDS compliance at both Divisional and Management Board level also requiring prioritisation.

**R4.7 HRM ICT System for Operational Staff:** The complete roll-out of the new HRM ICT system to operational staff to provide access to platforms including Performance Management and Learning Management requires urgent prioritisation, with clarity on timelines, to facilitate staff development opportunities and support effective performance management organisation-wide. The current low rates of completion of PMDS across the operational staff cohort must act as a driver in this regard. Supporting technology (laptops/tablets) for operational staff should also be prioritised.

**R4.8 Digital Transformation Programme:** The OPW should develop a coherent, organisation-wide approach to the delivery of digitised services through the articulation of a future facing Digital Transformation Strategy that combines and balances external and internal needs and prioritises capability building measures relating to governance and stewardship of corporate data resources and capabilities. Such a Strategy will ensure that a modern, accessible service is provided to the full range of OPW customers, both corporate and members of the public.

**R4.9 Chief Information Officer (CIO):** The OPW should formalise the post of Chief Information Officer (CIO) to continue to lead the ICT function and oversee the current and future operational and strategic ICT and digitisation needs of the organisation. Regular scheduled reporting by the CIO to Management Board should be provided for.

**R4.10 Data Management Strategy:** The OPW should prioritise the development and publication of a Data Management Strategy, to include plans for the identification and publication of open data for all areas of the organisation and improved processes for data analytics and data sharing internally between business areas and externally with stakeholders. In progressing this recommendation, the Management Board should consider the establishment of a time-specific internal cross-divisional team to support the development of the Strategy, so as to ensure that cross-divisional data needs and the longer term needs associated with the goals and targets of the National Development Plan and the Climate Action Plans are represented. Opportunities to increase data analytics capabilities in the OPW should also be considered.

**R4.11 Knowledge Management Strategy:** A Knowledge Management Strategy that sets out how the collective knowledge, information and expertise of the OPW will be organised, captured, shared and used should be progressed in order to support the organisation in meeting its strategic and operational goals and objectives. The strategy should also clearly set out protocols and procedures for succession planning and the development and maintenance of job documentation, thus also supporting the implementation of the HRM Strategic Workforce Plan.

## **4B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R4.12 Transition to the Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS):** The OPW should engage consistently with the NSSO in preparation for the transition to the new FMSS to ensure that it is compatible with the bespoke requirements of the OPW.

**R4.13 ICT – Heritage Function:** A comprehensive review of ICT requirements across the Heritage function should be progressed with a view to determining the most appropriate ICT systems for Heritage sites nationwide. Consideration could be given to the development of one central system across all heritage sites in this regard.

**R4.14 Skills Register/Skills Matching:** The HRM Strategic Workforce Plan should inform and complement the development of an organisation-wide skills register which will enable a greater focus on identifying skills needs and gaps, as well as skills-matching when filling vacancies. The register should draw on available data sources such as records of CPD attendance; the OneLearning skills register and qualifications funded under the Refund of Fees scheme.

**R4.15 Records Management Policy:** Work on the development of a Records Management Policy for the OPW, should remain a priority for delivery in Q4 2023. Consideration should be given to engaging a professional archivist to assist in identification and preservation of historical records.

**R4.16 HRM Business Partnering Approach:** The rollout of a Business Partner approach organisation-wide should be progressed as a matter of priority.

**R4.17 Staff Mobility:** A revised Internal Staff Mobility Policy should be put in place which articulates the opportunities that can arise from blended working balanced with the business needs of the organisation. The policy should be informed by and complement the HRM Strategic Workforce Plan and should be applied consistently and transparently organisation-wide.

**R4.18 Apprenticeship Development Programme:** The OPW should continue to focus on the development of the Apprenticeship Programme to include ongoing engagement with schools and third level institutions to promote and advertise the various apprenticeship programmes available.

**R4.19 Grade-Drift:** In order to address any increased potential for ‘grade-drift’ the OPW should examine appropriate options which may include financial authorisation levels for senior managers, and ensuring the articulation of clear job and role descriptions as part of the annual PMDS process.

**R4.20 Mentoring Programme:** The introduction of a formal mentoring programme in the OPW should continue to be prioritised and made available to all staff.

**R4.21 HRM Roles and Responsibilities:** The OPW should take steps to ensure that staff are aware of the relevant points of contact on specific HRM matters within the HRM function, as well providing clarity on those functions falling within the remit of PeoplePoint.

**R4.22 Staff Engagement:** The HRM function, supported by the Management Board, should consider and implement the measures required to increase greater staff participation, particularly amongst operational staff, in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.

**R4.23 ICT – Customer Service:** An out-of-hours ICT helpdesk should be established as a matter of priority.

## Appendix 1: List of Recommendations

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### CHAPTER 1 RECOMMENDATIONS - LEADERSHIP

#### 1A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1.1 Strengthening the OPW Corporate Spine:** The OPW should urgently focus on articulating and structuring a coherent central corporate spine, aligned to the organisation's overall purpose, with strong leadership of significant experience and expertise. In doing so, an analysis of the current breadth of responsibilities attached to the Head of Corporate Services role should be undertaken and the key business support functions comprising the corporate spine of the future organisation clearly identified, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations of this review.

The Head of Corporate Services should be assigned solely to that role in order to have the capacity to mobilise the function as a critical enabler of the organisation, through the strategic management of both the OPW operating environment and OPW resources. The role should also be fundamentally supported by strong, strategic and robust leadership at Management Board level in order to ensure the new structure is embraced organisation-wide and maximum value realised.

**R1.2 Board of Commissioners:** The OPW should review the existing legislative framework for the organisation to ascertain if the provisions of The Public Works (Ireland) Act 1831, specifically regarding the requirement for a Board of Commissioners, aligns with the requirements of a streamlined, modern day civil service organisation. In doing so the Board should consider the fit between the Board of Commissioners and Management Board structures to ascertain if a realignment or restructuring is required.

**R1.3 Strategic Planning – Management Board:** The Management Board should consider the most appropriate scheduling structure for meetings to facilitate a greater focus on strategic matters. The Board should consider and agree if this objective is best met through alternating operational and strategic meetings, combining a strategic and operational Management Board agenda weekly, or meeting on agreed strategic issues on a set rotational basis.

**R1.4 Ministerial Engagement – Management Board:** Monthly meetings between the Management Board and the Minister of State should be scheduled as a component of the OPW governance structure to review the progress of the agreed priorities of each Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities which is recommended (Recommendation 2.2) to sit under the Statement of Strategy in the strategic and business planning process.

**R1.5 Leadership Team Engagement:** Engagement between the Management Board and the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff cohort should be strengthened by restructuring the quarterly Leadership Team meetings to move away from a downward information sharing dynamic to a more purposeful, interactive structure to advance the work agenda, set priorities and address challenges facing the

organisation. The introduction of a rotational Chair from the wider Leadership Team should be pursued together with the use of subgroups to progress priority work areas outside of the formal meeting structure. Formal Management Board engagement with the PO and Equivalent network also should be prioritised.

**R1.6 Staff Networks:** The Terms of Reference of the Principal Officer and Equivalent staff network should be strengthened to clearly set out how the network will support the strategic objectives of the OPW and to position all senior managers in the OPW as co-creators, co-owners and co-leaders in shaping the future direction of the organisation. Consideration should be given to the further development of the network through the assignment of a Chair and Vice-Chair on a six-month rotational basis, with provision for the Chair to contribute corporately through attending Management Board meetings in an observational capacity. The Terms of Reference of the Assistant Principal Officer network should also be similarly reviewed and the network should be expanded to include the Assistant Principal Officer equivalent grades. Management Board members, and Principal Officers in the case of the Assistant Principal Officer network, should engage formally with the fora, to identify how the work of both grades can be supported, whilst demonstrating and fostering opportunities for greater internal collaboration.

## **1B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1.7 Cross-Divisional Working:** Standardised processes and procedures should be introduced across all divisions for management of duties common to the organisation as a whole, with learnings shared and adopted centrally. This undertaking, coupled with strengthened systems for internal communications and collaboration, will assist in the requirement to strengthen cross-divisional working within the organisation. The roll out of the Integrated Work Management System (Section 4.7.5) and the thematic approach of the OPW Strategy Statement 2021-2024 should also be harnessed as opportunities in this regard.

**R1.8 Role Clarification OPW/Local Authorities:** The roles and responsibilities of the OPW and Local Authorities in the area of flood risk management should be agreed nationally, and documented with the introduction of Service Level Agreements.

**R1.9 Communications Strategy:** The Communications Strategy should be reviewed in line with the findings and recommendations of this review, with the next iteration including objectives on enhancing communication with external stakeholders and the development and implementation of a coherent Website and Social Media Strategy that will consolidate the OPW footprint and deliver a coherent message across social media platforms.

**R1.10 Internal Communications:** Communications and senior management engagement with geographically dispersed staff should be treated as an issue of utmost importance. Online platforms should be employed as a practical method for staff engagement nationwide, particularly in remote areas, with the roll out of the required technology prioritised and utilised. All OPW staff should have access to email whether office or site-based, and training should be provided to all staff utilising the SWIFT intranet system. Improved awareness amongst OPW staff of Management Board decisions and current OPW challenges, successes and initiatives should be supported by the timely publication of the minutes of Management Board meetings. In addition, a formal policy on staff meetings within the

OPW should be introduced to ensure consistency and the setting of minimum standards that will support more effective internal communication.

## CHAPTER 2 RECOMMENDATIONS – STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

### 2A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**R2.1 Statement of Strategy:** Building on work to date, the Management Board should further refine the structure of the next Statement of Strategy to set out high level goals linked to the four strategic themes supported by clear objectives (5/7) under each goal against which progress will be measured.

**R2.2 Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities:** This revised Statement of Strategy should inform an Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities that will capture each objective under the four strategic themes and list detailed and time-scaled actions and sub-actions under each objective. This Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities, to which the Minister of State should have input and sign-off, should be published at the commencement of each year. As there is scope for strengthening the reporting and monitoring of progress under the Strategy, the Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should guide the recommended monthly meetings between the Minister of State and the Management Board (Recommendation 1.4) and act as a monitoring tool of progress achieved. The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should replace the Strategy Implementation Tracker, thereby streamlining the business planning process across the organisation.

**R2.3 Business Planning:** The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should inform the Annual Operational Plans of each unit, and in turn the Goal Setting Forms of individual staff members, thus creating vital linkages between organisational priorities and performance management. These annual documents should both align with the three-year Statement of Strategy and three-year unit Business Plans. The Annual Statement of Organisational Business Priorities should also serve as the template for monthly reporting by each business unit for review at the recommended Minister of State/Management Board meetings at which the Minister should be updated on progress achieved and challenges arising.

Integral to this process is the need for the OPW to put in place systems to ensure that Business and Operational Plans are completed to a consistent standard organisation-wide, to include detailed actions, appropriate timelines and regular review and reflect agreed organisational priorities. The OPW should also consider if the recently implemented three-year Business Plan model is adequately supporting business planning across the organisation, or whether a standard one-year approach would serve to further streamline and simplify the process.

**R2.4 Strategic Planning:** The Management Board should commence planning for the longer term through the articulation of a long-term vision supported by horizon scanning for future threats and opportunities.

**R2.5 Centralised Appraisal and Evaluation Unit:** The OPW should establish a central appraisal and evaluation unit in order to build internal expertise and bring consistency of approach to the appraisal and evaluation processes across all functions of the organisation. The unit should be led by an appropriately qualified specialist with a reporting line to the Head of the Finance Unit and serve as a resource to all business areas, formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and systems for the appraisal, prioritisation, evaluation and governance of projects. In progressing this, the OPW should

liaise with the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) to determine potential available supports and should review approaches adopted by other public sector organisations, including local authorities. Finally, the requirement to complete ex-post reviews should be specifically set out in the OPW Governance Framework.

## **2B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R2.6 Utilisation of Business Planning Data:** The Management Board should examine how data gathered during the business planning process can be analysed centrally and utilised to inform key issues including strategic workforce planning, centralised processes and procedures, budget allocations and staff development/training options in the organisation.

**R2.7 Strategic Alignment:** The OPW should conduct a strategic alignment mapping exercise across its suite of programmes and policy initiatives to ensure alignment with national policy frameworks, identify gaps arising and lead on the implementation of appropriate solutions. Such solutions should include a focus on greater collaboration as required, and enhanced joint communication plans with stakeholders where appropriate. In addition, the Statement of Strategy should include a section specifically illustrating the breadth of strategic partners of the organisation.

**R2.8 Spending Review Programme:** The OPW should proactively consider areas within the organisation that may benefit from inclusion in the new Spending Review programme being developed by DPENDPDR for the three-year period 2024-2026.

## **CHAPTER 3 RECOMMENDATIONS – DELIVERY 3A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R3.1 Programme Management Office:** The Management Board should prioritise the establishment of a centralised Programme Management Office (PMO) to provide consistency and rigour in driving programme delivery across the organisation. The Programme Management Office should be led at Principal Officer level, by a specialist with requisite skills and experience in programme management, supported by a similarly skilled team. The PMO should be positioned as the key organisational structure supporting programme management in the OPW, acting as the central point of co-ordination and oversight for all project activity to ensure that all projects are on track and working to achieve the goals of the wider programme and agreed organisational priorities. The responsibilities of the Programme Management Office should encompass governance and oversight; planning and reporting; benefits management; stakeholder management and communications; risk management; and programme support. The core purpose of such a centralised Programme Management Office in the OPW should be clearly communicated organisation-wide, supported by strong leadership from the centre, robustly driven at Management Board level.

**R3.2 Procurement Management Office:** Given the complexity and scale of procurement activity in the OPW, the Management Board should establish a centralised, specialist Procurement Management Office.

This office should be led by the Head of Procurement for the organisation (Principal Officer level). The Procurement Management Office should have full strategic, operational support and governance responsibility for procurement within the OPW and should work in close collaboration with individual business units and the Programme Management Office.

**R3.3 Innovation and Continuous Improvement:** A focus is required on fostering an active culture of innovation across the OPW. Such a culture should not be driven by a standalone Innovation Strategy, but rather should be driven by the full suite of OPW strategies and policies, monitored by the Innovation Steering Group and supported by the Management Board. In this regard, Terms of Reference for the Innovation Steering Group and related subgroups should be available to all staff. Innovative ideas submitted by staff should be evaluated and, if approved, implemented within a reasonable timeframe, with positive outcomes from the process communicated and promoted across the organisation.

**R3.4 Health and Safety:** A Health and Safety Strategy, supported by an Implementation Plan, is required as a matter of priority in the OPW. This strategy should clearly articulate the organisation's health and safety objectives, targets and actions formulated through extensive consultation and consideration of legal and mandated requirements.

### **3B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R3.5 Project Management Skills:** The IPA Professional Diploma in Project Management, if assessed as effective in meeting the business needs of the OPW, should become the standard Project Management training tool across the organisation, with all staff engaged in project management encouraged to upskill as required. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a Project Managers Network.

**R3.6 Strategic Workforce Planning:** Recruitment and retention of staff with specialist programme and project management skills requires focus and should be supported by a fully comprehensive Strategic Workforce Planning exercise that will identify skill gaps organisation-wide, both currently and over the next seven-year period, and set out options to address same (Section 4.4).

**R3.7 Programme Delivery:** The OPW should investigate the consistent use of structures such as Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to formalise existing arrangements with relevant external stakeholders. This would be supported by the establishment of the centralised Programme Management Office that will formalise structures and provide oversight and support in programme delivery organisation-wide.

**R3.8 Publication of Governance Documents and Reports:** The OPW Quality Assurance Reports produced under the Public Spending Code requirements should be published online as specified in the Code.

**R3.9 Customer Service Charter and Action Plans:** The OPW should ensure that the Customer Service Charter and Action Plans are updated on a timely basis.

**R3.10 Quality Customer Service Network:** Terms of Reference should be developed.

**R3.11 Customer Service Training:** The OPW should ensure that customised customer service training, including communication and conflict resolution skills, is provided to operational staff as an element of their induction process and available as refresher training as appropriate.

**R3.12 External Stakeholder Engagement on Customer Service Issues:** A programme of regular engagement on customer service issues with external stakeholders should be developed to improve service planning and delivery.

**R3.13 Customer Feedback:** The OPW should develop a structured approach, led by the Communications Unit, to the collection and evaluation of customer feedback, tailored to the work of individual units, as a means of measuring and improving customer service.

## **CHAPTER 4 RECOMMENDATIONS – BUSINESS SUPPORT FUNCTIONS**

### **4A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R4.1 HRM Statement of Strategy:** The HRM Statement of Strategy is a vital component of the strategic planning process of the organisation. The current Statement of Strategy 2019-2022 needs to be updated and further developed through extensive staff consultation to ensure maximum awareness, engagement, buy-in and ownership organisation-wide. In addition, future HRM Statement of Strategy documents should be prepared prior to the expiration of previous iterations.

**R4.2 HRM Strategic Workforce Planning:** A more comprehensive Strategic Workforce Plan should be put in place incorporating all staff cohorts and drawing on datasets including current employee profiles; staff turnover; skills and capabilities; talent profile, location and the external labour market. It should also address workforce segmentation, identify the roles most critical to meeting the OPW's strategic and organisational priorities, and consider multiple time horizons - short (1 year); medium (3-5 years) and long term (10+ years). The Strategic Workforce Plan should be supported by an Action Plan that will consider strategies including but not limited to sources of recruitment; remodelling of roles; opportunities for joint delivery with partners; retention of key talent; greater job flexibility; remote working; process redesign and improvement; increasing learning and development opportunities; re-skilling and up-skilling, career progression and productivity improvement. Both the Strategic Workforce Plan and Action Plan should be subject to regular review and updated as required. The Strategic Workforce Plan should also be included as a regular agenda item at Management Board meetings, thus reinforcing the strategic aspect of the process and garnering ownership across the Board in its entirety.

**R4.3 Staff Health and Wellbeing:** A Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme, supported by a Health and Wellbeing Strategy requires immediate prioritisation by the OPW. Such a Programme, in line with guidance set down in the Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework, should be led by the HRM function and focus on the specific health and wellbeing needs of the OPW across the key areas of the Physical Working Environment; Health Resources and the Psychosocial Working Environment. The HRM function should also play a key role in working closely with the Management Board to ensure that investment in staff health and wellbeing is prioritised, in addition to enabling and supporting managers to value the health and wellbeing of their staff through ensuring relevant training is provided and equipping managers with the tools to identify changes in the behaviour and performance of their staff.

**R4.4 Gender Policy/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy:** A plan setting out how the recommendations of the Gender Pay Gap Report will be implemented, accompanied by delivery timelines, should be progressed and published. Drafting of a Gender Policy and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy should be prioritised.

**R4.5 Learning and Development (L&D) Strategy:** The recently published Learning & Development Strategy should be strengthened to demonstrate how learning and development needs have been identified, what consultations/data gathering took place in building the strategy and crucially how the strategy will be implemented, clearly detailing roles and responsibilities, objectives, actions, indicators and roll-out in a manner that supports the implementation of business strategy. It should also address the learning development needs of operational staff.

**R4.6 Performance Management:** There is an urgent need for significantly improved participation in the PMDS process by OPW operational staff, and greater consistency in the application of the tool across other staff cohorts. This is vital, not only for performance management, but also in facilitating the identification of development and training opportunities organisation-wide. In supporting this recommendation, training for managers should be prioritised with monitoring of PMDS compliance at both Divisional and Management Board level also requiring prioritisation.

**R4.7 HRM ICT System for Operational Staff:** The complete roll-out of the new HRM ICT system to operational staff to provide access to platforms including Performance Management and Learning Management requires urgent prioritisation, with clarity on timelines, to facilitate staff development opportunities and support effective performance management organisation-wide. The current low rates of completion of PMDS across the operational staff cohort must act as a driver in this regard. Supporting technology (laptops/tablets) for operational staff should also be prioritised.

**R4.8 Digital Transformation Programme:** The OPW should develop a coherent, organisation-wide approach to the delivery of digitised services through the articulation of a future facing Digital Transformation Strategy that combines and balances external and internal needs and prioritises capability building measures relating to governance and stewardship of corporate data resources and capabilities. Such a Strategy will ensure that a modern, accessible service is provided to the full range of OPW customers, both corporate and members of the public.

**R4.9 Chief Information Officer (CIO):** The OPW should formalise the post of Chief Information Officer (CIO) to continue to lead the ICT function and oversee the current and future operational and strategic ICT and digitisation needs of the organisation. Regular scheduled reporting by the CIO to Management Board should be provided for.

**R4.10 Data Management Strategy:** The OPW should prioritise the development and publication of a Data Management Strategy, to include plans for the identification and publication of open data for all areas of the organisation and improved processes for data analytics and data sharing internally between business areas and externally with stakeholders. In progressing this recommendation, the Management Board should consider the establishment of a time-specific internal cross-divisional team to support the development of the Strategy, so as to ensure that cross-divisional data needs and the longer term needs associated with the goals and targets of the National Development Plan and the Climate Action Plans are represented. Opportunities to increase data analytics capabilities in the OPW should also be considered.

**R4.11 Knowledge Management Strategy:** A Knowledge Management Strategy setting out how the collective knowledge, information and expertise of the OPW will be organised, captured, shared and used should be progressed in order to support the organisation in meeting its strategic and

operational goals and objectives. The strategy should also clearly set out protocols and procedures for succession planning and the development and maintenance of job documentation, thus also supporting the implementation of the HRM Strategic Workforce Plan.

#### **4B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R4.12 Transition to the Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS):** The OPW should engage consistently with the NSSO in preparation for the transition to the new FMSS to ensure that it is compatible with the bespoke requirements of the OPW.

**R4.13 ICT – Heritage Function:** A comprehensive review of ICT requirements across the Heritage function should be progressed with a view to determining the most appropriate ICT system for Heritage sites nationwide.

**R4.14 Skills Register/Skills Matching:** The HRM Strategic Workforce Plan should inform and complement the development of an organisation-wide skills register which will enable a greater focus on identifying skills needs and gaps, as well as skills-matching when filling vacancies. The register should draw on available data sources such as records of CPD attendance; the OneLearning skills register and qualifications funded under the Refund of Fees scheme.

**R4.15 Records Management Policy:** Work on the development of a Records Management Policy should remain a priority for delivery in Q4 2023. Consideration should be given to engaging a professional archivist to assist in identification and preservation of historical records.

**R4.16 HRM Business Partnering Approach:** The rollout of a Business Partner approach organisation-wide should be progressed as a matter of priority.

**R4.17 Staff Mobility:** A revised Internal Staff Mobility Policy should be put in place which articulates the opportunities that can arise from blended working balanced with the business needs of the organisation. The policy should be informed by and complement the HRM Strategic Workforce Plan and should be applied consistently and transparently organisation-wide.

**R4.18 Apprenticeship Development Programme:** The OPW should continue to focus on the development of the Apprenticeship Programme to include ongoing engagement with schools and third level institutions to promote and advertise the various apprenticeship programmes available.

**R4.19 Grade-Drift:** In order to address any increased potential for ‘grade-drift’ the OPW should examine appropriate options which may include financial authorisation levels for senior managers, and ensuring the articulation of clear job and role descriptions as part of the annual PMDS process.

**R4.20 Mentoring Programme:** The introduction of a formal mentoring programme in the OPW should continue to be prioritised and made available to all staff.

**R4.21 HRM Roles and Responsibilities:** The OPW should take steps to ensure that staff are aware of the relevant points of contact on specific HRM matters within the HRM function, as well as providing clarity on those functions falling within the remit of PeoplePoint.

**R4.22 Staff Engagement:** The HRM function, supported by the Management Board, should consider and implement the measures required to increase greater staff participation, particularly amongst operational staff, in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.

**R4.23 ICT – Customer Service:** An out-of-hours ICT helpdesk should be established as a matter of priority.

## **Appendix 2: List of External Stakeholders Interviewed**

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Accommodation Officers Network

An Garda Síochána

Cork County Council

Courts Service

Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

Department of An Taoiseach

Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform – Vote Section and National Investment Office

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Donegal County Council

Fáilte Ireland

Heritage Council

Houses of the Oireachtas

Inland Fisheries

Mayo County Council

Met Éireann

National Cultural Institutions

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

Office of Government Procurement

Office of the Revenue Commissioners

Public Appointments Service

### Appendix 3: Location of OPW Offices and Sites

1GQ Dublin	Charles Fort	Garden of Remembrance	Parkes Castle
Altamont Gardens	Claregalway	Garnish Island	Pearse Cultural Centre
Anne's Grove, Co Cork	Claremorris	Glebe House	Pearse Museum
Aras an Uachtarain	Clonmacnoise	Glendalough Visitor Centre	Phoenix Park Visitors Centre
Arbour Hill Cemetery	Collins Barracks	Grangegorman Military Cemetery	Portlaoise District Office
Ardee Depot	Cork District Office	GSA Publications	Portumna Castle
Ardfert Cathedral	Corlea Trackway		Portumna Depot
Ardfert Depot	Corrib Depot	Headford	Rathfarnham Castle
Ardoilean (High Island)	Custom House	Heywood Gardens	Red House, Collins Barracks
Arklow District Office	Derrynane House	Hill of Tara	Reginalds Tower
Athenry Castle	Desmond Castle	Iveagh Gardens	Rock of Cashel
Athenry Depot	Desmond Hall	Jerpoint Abbey	Roscommon Gov Offices
Athlone District Office	Donegal Castle	JFK Arboretum	Roscrea Heritage Centre
Aughnanure Castle	Donegal Town	Kells Priory	Ross Castle
Ballina District Office	Doneraile Park	Kilkenny Castle	Royal Hospital Kilmainham
Ballyhack Castle	Dromahair Depot	Kilkenny Depot	Scattery Island
Barryscourt Castle	Dublin Castle Apartments	Killarney Depot	Shanaglish
Battle of the Boyne	Dublin Castle Architecture	Killarney District Office	Skellig Michael
Blaskets Centre	Dublin Castle Art Mgt.	Kilmacurragh Arboretum	Sligo Abbey
BMS - Four Courts	Dublin Castle Conference	Kilmainham Gaol	Sligo District Office
BMS - Garda Kevin St	Dublin Castle EMU	Knockreer House	St Audoens Church
BMS - Iveagh House	Dublin Castle NHP	Knowth Depot	St Marys Church
BMS - Oireachtas	Dun Aonghasa	Letterkenny District Office	Stephens Green Park
Boyle Abbey	Dundalk District Office	Lifford Depot	Swiss Cottage
Bru Na Boinne	Dungarvan Castle	Listowel Castle	The Main Guard Clonmel
Cahir Castle	Dunmore Cave	Listowel Depot	Tintern Abbey
Carrowmore Tombs	Dwyer McAllister Cottage	Mallow	Tipperary District Office
Cashel Depot	Emo Court	Maynooth Castle	Trim Castle
Casino Marino	Ennis Friary	Mellifont Abbey	Trim Depot
Castlebar District Office	Farmleigh	Mullingar Depot	Trim Headquarters
Castlebridge Depot	Ferns Castle	Mungret	War Memorial Gardens

Castletown House	Fota Arboretum	National Botanic Gardens	Waterford District Office
Ceide Fields	Foxford Depot	Newmills	Whitefields
Central Engineering Workshop Inchicore	Galway District Office	Ormond Castle	