



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

Annual Report

2017



Contents

Minister's Foreword	3
Secretary General's Statement	4
1 Who we are and what we do	5
2 Functions of the Department	8
3 2017 Spending	10
4 The Department by Numbers in 2017	12
5 Key Achievements in 2017	13
Strategic Development and Corporate Services Division	13
Community Division	18
Rural Division	31
6 Bodies under the Aegis of the Department	42
Western Development Commission	42
Irish Water Safety	42
Charities Regulatory Authority	42
Pobal	43
7 DRCD Going Forward - 2018	44

Minister's Foreword

I am delighted to be able to share this comprehensive first annual report from my Department. The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19 July 2017. I was honoured to have been given the responsibility to lead this new Department in its mission to promote rural and community development and to help build vibrant, sustainable communities across the country.



Part of my Department's remit is to make Ireland an even better place in which to live and work by creating new opportunities, improving connectivity, and by protecting and enhancing services in the community. The information provided here in the annual report highlights the ongoing work of my Department in delivering the programmes and services under our remit throughout the considerable challenges faced during the establishment of a new Government department.

I want to thank the staff and management team of my Department for their ongoing commitment and diligence, with special thanks to be given to Minister of State Sean Kyne T.D. for his invaluable contributions to the functions under his remit.

This report gives a comprehensive overview of the excellent work that has been done by everyone in the Department and the bodies under its aegis in 2017 and the continuing effort that is being made to improve upon this and fulfil our mission into 2018 and beyond.

Michael Ring T.D.
Minister for Rural and Community Development

Secretary General's Statement

I am very pleased to present this first annual report of the Department of Rural and Community Development. This annual report covers the initial phase of the Department's establishment and operations in the period to the end of 2017, following the announcement of the creation of the new Department by the Taoiseach on 14 June 2017.



The period in question was one of significant early organisational effort in achieving the formal establishment of the Department, in assuming functions from three existing Departments and in putting necessary structures, systems, functions and people in place to support the Department's work. Substantial progress was made over that time, thanks to the very considerable contributions of all of the staff involved, some of whom were newly recruited and many of whom were assigned with the transferring functions. It was a time of challenging change for all concerned and I want to express my sincere appreciation to everyone involved.

The ongoing co-operation and practical support of the transferring Departments in the transition period was also essential and is gratefully acknowledged. I want to also particularly acknowledge the leadership of Elizabeth Canavan throughout the second half of 2017 in her role as Acting Secretary General of the Department.

While meeting the considerable start-up challenges over the period, the new Department also achieved continuity of delivery on the schemes and programmes that came within its remit. This report highlights a number of delivery achievements across 2017, including the ongoing implementation of wide-ranging actions under the Action Plan for Rural Development, the re-opening of schemes such as RAPID and the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS), and ongoing activities across a range of other programmes and supports that are making a real difference in supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.

I want to thank Minister Michael Ring T.D., Ireland's first Minister for Rural and Community Development, and Minister of State Sean Kyne T.D. for their strong leadership of our work in 2017. I also want to thank our agencies and partner organisations who support us in our work.

The progress made in 2017 provides a very strong basis for us to build from as we continue to deliver on our mandate in 2018.

Kevin McCarthy
Secretary General

1 Who we are and what we do

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established following a decision announced by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, to Dáil Eireann on 14 June 2017, and an amendment to the Ministers and Secretaries Acts of 1924 to 2013, passed by the Oireachtas on 19 July 2017.

Rural Development and Regional Affairs functions of the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Community functions of the former Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government were transferred to the new Department.

In addition, oversight of the Charities Regulator was transferred from the Department of Justice and Equality.

The new Department oversees a gross expenditure in excess of €220 million in 2018, and at the end of 2017 had a staff complement of over 160 across locations in Dublin, Ballina and other regional centres.

The Department's role is to facilitate economic development in rural areas through a range of programmes, and to support communities, in urban and rural areas, to become sustainable and desirable places to live, work and raise families.

In March 2018 the Department published its Statement of Strategy 2017 – 2020 setting out our mission, vision, values and strategic goals and objectives.

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

Our vision is that all communities will have the opportunity to grow and develop economically and socially. To help bring this about, the Department will work across Government to:

- Create the conditions to support increased economic opportunities and local employment in all areas of the country
- Deliver schemes and programmes that support the revitalisation of towns and villages
- Improve access to services and social networks that ensure a high quality of life
- Enable communities disadvantaged by location or social issues to reach their full potential now and in the future
- Support all communities to be able to have a voice in shaping their own futures and addressing their common goals

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

- Work across Government to advance the economic and social development of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life for people who live in rural Ireland.
- Contribute to enhanced regional development, with a view to strengthening the potential of all regions to contribute to economic recovery.
- Support local communities to develop, empowering them to identify their needs and aspirations and providing them with the opportunities, skills and confidence to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes which affect them.
- Support the Community, Voluntary and Charity Sector to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society and support the growth and development of philanthropy

CO-ORDINATION OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY POLICY

Rural and community development is a Government priority that involves work being undertaken by a large number of Departments and State agencies.

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

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

SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The Department's Management Board consists of the Secretary General, and three Assistant Secretaries, responsible for the Rural Development and Regional Affairs, the Community Development, and the Strategic Development and Corporate Services Divisions respectively.

Further details on the Department's structure and management tiers is available on www.whodoeswhat.gov.ie

2 Functions of the Department

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND CORPORATE SERVICES DIVISION

The Strategic Development and Corporate Services Division is comprised of three units, the Finance Unit, the Corporate Services Unit, and the Human Resources Unit. The staff in this division are split between both Departmental locations of Dublin and Ballina.

This Division is responsible for leading and growing the Department's strategic policy development capacity and enhancing policy co-ordination within the Department and with other Departments as required. The Corporate Services team within the Department aims to follow best practice in its delivery of corporate services in line with the public sector reform agenda. Corporate services includes the oversight of human resources and organisational development; finance and procurement; internal audit; communications strategy and ICT and infrastructural supports. Key to delivering on the Department's strategy, this Division is responsible for building the research and evaluation functions within the Department. This Division also leads on the delivery of the relevant Project Ireland 2040 elements of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan which are under the Department's remit.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

The Community Development Division encompasses three separate units; the Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes Unit based in the Dublin office, the Social Inclusion and Communities Unit based in the Ballina office, and the Libraries Development and Community Policy Unit also based in the Ballina office.

The goal of the Community Development Division is to promote and support the development of vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities in both urban and rural areas, through implementing a coherent policy framework and strategy which supports the community and voluntary sector. A key objective is to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to publicly-funded local and community development interventions by further developing the role of Local Authorities through their Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) and the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs). A further objective is to encourage citizen engagement with Local Authority structures through the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and to support and encourage volunteering.

Other areas of this Division's remit include oversight of the Charities Regulator; Pobal; Irish Water Safety; Libraries Development; the development of Government's relationship with Philanthropy; administration and oversight of the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and a range of other funding schemes for community & voluntary groups, including CEP and the Seniors Alert Scheme.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

The Rural Division is comprised of five units, the Rural Policy and Schemes Unit based in Ballina office, the LEADER Unit based in Ballina, the LEADER Inspection Unit based in Ballina and in Regional offices, the Rural Strategy Unit based in Dublin, and the Regional Telecommunications Development Unit based in Dublin.

The main goal of the Department's Rural Development and Regional Affairs Division is to promote and facilitate long-term sustainable economic and social progress in rural parts of Ireland through a coordinated approach across Government. A key instrument to deliver this objective is the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development which contains a series of measures to unlock the potential of rural communities and enterprises through a framework of supports at national, regional and local level. Other areas of the Division's activities include the implementation of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, the delivery of a range of other schemes supporting outdoor recreation, town and village renewal, minor infrastructural works in rural areas, and the coordination of the Tidy Towns competition.

The Division is responsible for developing policy on social enterprise and also plays an important role in regional development, in particular through facilitating the development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor concept and supporting the rollout of high-speed broadband and telecommunications infrastructure across rural Ireland. The Division has oversight of the Western Development Commission.

3 2017 Spending

Vote 42 Rural & Community Development Appropriation Account 2017

		2017	
		Estimate provision	Outturn
		€000	€000
Programme expenditure			
A	Rural Development And Regional Affairs	80,364	54,873
B	Community Development	77,798	77,139
C	Charities Regulatory Authority	4,466	3,992
Gross expenditure		162,628	136,004
<i>Deduct</i>			
D	Appropriations-in-aid	15,886	21,662
Net expenditure		146,742	114,342

Surplus for surrender

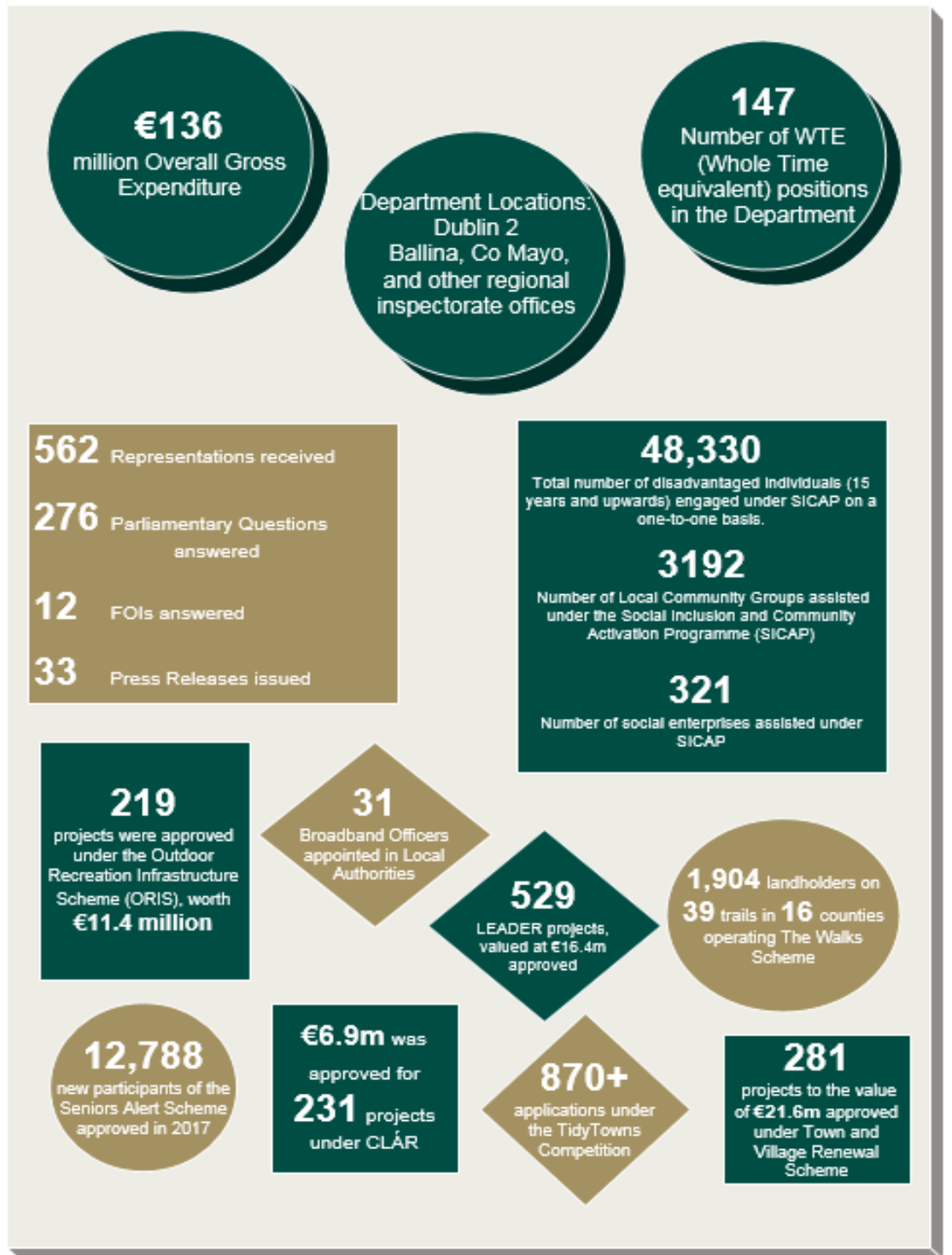
The surplus of the amount provided over the net amount applied is liable for surrender to the Exchequer.

		2017
		€
Surplus		32,399,966
Deferred surrender		(7,700,000)
Surplus to be surrendered		24,699,966

ESTABLISHMENT OF FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The creation of the Department in July 2017 created a range of challenges in relation to the Department's core corporate functions. In the case of the Finance function, the Department had to put in place an interim solution to allow it to carry on its operations, and to meet its obligations in the preparation of an Appropriation Account for 2017. The Department was greatly assisted in this by the support from the Department of Justice shared financial services function in Killarney, which was able to take on the Department, as a client, at very short notice. The Department subsequently transitioned both its non-pay transactions and payroll function to this new service.

4 The Department by Numbers in 2017



5 Key Achievements in 2017

There are three divisions in the Department; Strategic Development and Corporate Services, Community Development, and Rural Development and Regional Affairs. The following sections outline the key achievements under each area in 2017.

Strategic Development and Corporate Services Division

HUMAN RESOURCES

On 19th July, the President signed the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2017 (No. 18 of 2017), establishing the Department of Rural and Community Development. The following functions transferred to the new Department from existing Departments:

- From the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government – all of the functions encompassed by the three units in the Community Development Division (including Local Community Development Committees, Local Economic and Community Plans, Libraries, Control of Dogs Acts and Burial Grounds) with a total of 34 staff members;
- From the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht – all of the functions of the Regional and Rural Development Division, with a total of 55 staff members;
- From the Department of Justice & Equality – all of the functions regarding the Charities Regulator, with a total of 45 staff members;
- From the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment 2 staff transferred into the Department;

Staff transferred in from other Departments were predominantly in operational and policy areas. Therefore during quarters three and four of 2017 the main focus of recruitment was to build the “corporate spine” of the Department to create a stand-alone, fully-functioning Government Department in particular in the areas of Finance and Human Resources.

Overall a total of 136 staff transferred in from other Government Departments. In the latter half of 2017, the Department’s HR Unit worked closely with the Public Appointments Service to fill other posts and by year end, there was a total of 163 staff members in situ in the new Department.

From the establishment of the Department in July 2017 through to the appointment of the Secretary General in December 2017, an Acting Secretary General was appointed to oversee the set-up of the Department. At Senior Executive level a critical milestone in the Department was the appointment of the Secretary General in December 2017. In addition, Board appointments to the Board of the Charities Regulatory Authority took place in November 2017.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Building capability/capacity through the provision of relevant and appropriate training across all grades and Departmental locations is a priority. In 2017 the Learning and Development Unit developed and rolled out a Departmental focused Induction training. The Unit also began engagement with One Learning for provision of training courses for the Department.

ACCOMMODATIONS / ICT

While the new Department engaged in the process of working with OPW to secure permanent accommodation in Dublin city centre, staff moved into a temporary home on Clare St in Dublin 2 in September 2017. This allowed most staff coming from different Departments to come together in one location and provided the room for growth necessary to accommodate the contingent of new corporate staff joining the Department. Ahead of the Department's planned transition to the OGCIO (Office of the Government Chief Information Officer) network in early 2018, ICT services continued to be provided through platforms in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The Department also commenced roll-out of the Build-to-Share initiative in 2017. Build-to-Share is a key strategic objective in the Public Service ICT Strategy being developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This includes applications for managing and processing internal submissions (eSubmissions), Parliamentary Questions (ePQs) and document management (eDocs), departmental correspondence (eCorrespondence) and Freedom of Information (eFOI). The Department adopted the ePQs application in September 2017, with further systems lined up to go live in 2018.

NATIONAL SHARED SERVICE OFFICE (NSSO) MIGRATION PROJECT

The NSSO is responsible for delivering shared services within the Civil Service. PeoplePoint (HR and Pensions Administration Shared Service Centre) and the Payroll Shared Service Centre (PSSC) are the two shared service centres within the NSSO that make up Employee Services. As a newly established Government Department, DRCD was not a client of the NSSO and therefore, staff transferring (or joining) the new Department continued to be paid and have local human resource services by their transferring Departments.

Towards the end of 2017, a project team was put in place comprising representatives from DRCD, the NSSO and the four transferring Departments to prepare and implement the NSSO Migration Project. The NSSO Migration Project involved DRCD being set up as a client on NSSO in its own right. With the new structures put in place, all DRCD staff have been transferred to DRCD on PeoplePoint and PSSC thus allowing DRCD, as an organisation in its own right, to manage and deliver the oversight and governance of the Department's resources in their entirety.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Department is committed to the development and implementation of effective governance and control arrangements. An Audit Committee was established and held its inaugural meeting in December 2017. It is chaired by a former Secretary General of the former Department of Community, Equality, and Gaeltacht Affairs Mr Gerry Kearney with a majority of non-executive members.

The Audit Committee Charter outlines the role, membership and function of the Committee and is available on the Department's website.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) & ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT (AIE)

The Department processed a total of 12 Freedom of Information Requests in 2017. Of these, seven were granted or part-granted, one was refused and a further four were withdrawn or handled outside of FOI. In addition, there were two further requests pending at the end of 2017. No AIE requests were received by the Department in 2017.

CIVIL SERVICE RENEWAL

During the establishment phase the Department appointed a SPOC (Single Point of Contact) within the Department for disseminating information with regard to the Civil Service Renewal Plan, associated actions, and the Civil Service Awards. The newly formed Department's staff also took part in the 3rd Civil Service Engagement Survey in September 2017, the results of which will inform the Department's Renewal Plan in 2018.

IRISH LANGUAGE COMMITMENTS

The Department is committed to providing quality services in Irish and/or bilingually to its customers and began work in 2017 on developing its Irish Language Scheme for 2018 – 2021 to meet this commitment and the statutory obligations arising under foot of the Official Languages Act.

QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Department is committed to providing high quality, courteous and timely services to all its customers in accordance with the 12 Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service. Prior to end 2017 the Department began work on drafting a new Customer Service Action Plan to be published in 2018.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Department began work in establishing its Corporate Governance Framework in 2017, which was published in Q1 2018, in accordance with the Civil Service Renewal Programme.

PUBLIC SECTOR DUTY

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 places a responsibility on all public bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of its staff and customers alike. This responsibility is known as the Public Sector Duty and is a legal obligation.

STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

In 2017 work commenced on the Department's Statement of Strategy, including the incorporation of the responsibilities under the Act. The Statement of Strategy was published in Q1 2018.

SUPPORTING THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS¹

Parliamentary Questions 2017	
Questions Answered	276
Topical Issues Debates	
2 Submitted – 1 Selected	
Commencement Matters	
6 Submitted – 2 Selected	
Representations and Invitations	
Minister Michael Ring	523
Minister of State Sean Kyne	61

¹ Note numbers for PQs encompass only July – Dec 2017, from the inception of the Department.

Community Division

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS (PPNS)

PPNs have been established in all local authority areas, supported by dedicated funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the local authorities. In 2017, €50,000 was made available by the Department to each PPN (€1.55m), provided that this was matched by at least €30,000 from the relevant local authority, providing a total potential fund of €2.48m for PPNS.

During 2017, the Department continued to provide practical support to underpin the PPNS including the publication of a PPN User Guide to support all PPN stakeholders - member organisations, secretariats, Resource Workers and local authorities - in progressing a nationally consistent framework for PPNS. In addition the Department facilitated the continued roll-out and support of a Client Relationship Management database to all PPNS, funded by the Department.

The first National PPN Advisory Group, comprised of representatives of relevant stakeholders was established in 2016 and ran until September 2017. A second National PPN Advisory Group commenced its term of office in September 2017. The purpose of the Advisory Group is to advise and support the Department in the development and operation of the PPNS.

The first National PPN Annual Report in respect of 2016 was published in 2017. The report showed that in 2016, 11,338 organisations were members of 30 local PPNS. The Community and Voluntary sector represented the largest section with 78% of organisations registered, followed Social Inclusion at 19% and the Environmental sector coming in at just 3%. Membership had grown in all PPNS since 2015, with some PPNS almost doubling their membership in 2016, while others had grown by single digits.



The first National PPN Conference was held in October 2017 in Sligo. This was hosted by Sligo PPN in conjunction with the Department. The focus of the event was firmly on the progression of PPNs at local and national level, how they can influence policy, develop collaborations between PPNs and Local Government and strategize and build for the future. The Conference provided some excellent opportunities for networking and reviewing the strengths, challenges and opportunities encountered to date.

SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERING

The Department provides funding for Volunteer Centres in 21 areas, Volunteer Information Services in areas not served by a Volunteer Centre, as well as a number of national organisations such as Volunteer Ireland and Young Social Innovators. The funding of all these organisations is designed to strengthen and foster volunteerism in Ireland, building a support structure for volunteering locally from the bottom up. This is a key to the Department's citizen engagement objectives and supports the spirit of participation in communities. The Volunteer Centres play a central role in facilitating and supporting the development of volunteering in their areas.

€3.5m was provided for these supports in 2017, an increase of €300,000 over the 2016 budget. This additional funding was made available to all Volunteer Centres in 2017 based on the outcome of a study undertaken by Volunteer Ireland (funded by the

Department) to develop an outline model for the distribution of funding to Volunteer Centres.

The Department also provided funding to a number of specific initiatives in 2017 including:

- Sligo Volunteer Centre to fund the employment of a Project Officer in 2017 during Sligo's term as European Volunteering Capital in 2017.
- Updating the IVOL data base system used by Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland
- Payment of the cost of the IVOL system operated by Volunteer Centres, thus reducing the associated costs faced by the Volunteer Centres

PHILANTHROPY AND FUNDRAISING

The Department continued to provide funding to key organisations for their core costs, on a matched funding basis, in 2017.

The contract with Philanthropy Ireland committed €75,000 pa for 2017/2018.

Philanthropy Ireland, through networking events, research and collaboration with appropriate partners are targeting business professionals and potential leaders on giving. Its aim is to communicate the value and potential of philanthropy to key stakeholders, most particularly potential philanthropists, corporate and individuals.

Key Activities in 2017: Philanthropy Ireland

- provision of accurate baseline data and research on philanthropic giving in Ireland
- strategically targeting key cohorts of population to grow the level of giving in Ireland
- supporting long term policy development, both public policy and donor policy

The contract with the Charities Institute Ireland committed €220,000 pa for 2017/2018.

Charities Institute Ireland was established to improve the fiscal environment and infrastructure for giving and to develop fundraising capacity among not-for-profits and to

support and enable charities to create positive social change. Ireland's major charities are included in its membership.

Key Activities in 2017: Charities Institute Ireland

- Assisting charities to operate to high standards of practice in fundraising - transparent reporting and good governance underpinned by proportionate robust regulation.
- Developing tax policy that incentivises giving
- Providing reliable data on the current level of philanthropic giving in Ireland and the potential for growth over the next three to five years.
- Supporting and investment in fundraising education and training
- Advocacy for the Charity Sector e.g. the introduction of the Charities VAT Compensation Scheme introduced in 2018 Budget.

SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND IRELAND

Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) was incorporated in July, 2013 to support the establishment and growth of social innovations with the potential for transformative impact on critical social issues facing Ireland, including unemployment and the environment.

As a partnership between the private sector and Government, provision was made for SIFI to receive €5m in total from the Dormant Accounts Fund over the period 2014 to 2017 to support its set up and development. This arrangement was extended until May 2018, when Minister Kyne reaffirmed the Government's commitment to match private philanthropic donations raised by Social Innovation Fund Ireland for the following three years.

During 2017, SIFI backed 23 new social innovations, bringing the total number backed to date to 31. This was achieved by partnering with corporates and trusts such as Google.Org, Mason Hayes & Curran, Tomar Trust and Medtronic. Five issue-based funds operated during 2017 - THINKTECH, Engage & Educate, Resilient Communities, the *Animate* - Healthy Communities Fund and the Education Fund. €2.1m was provided by the Department to SIFI in 2017, to match the level of private philanthropic funding raised.

During 2017, SIFI also made plans to launch a €1.6m Social Enterprise Development Fund, which was developed in association with Local Authorities Ireland, and funded by

IPB Insurance and the Department of Rural and Community Development, as well two further funds to support organisations empowering young people through mental health and education.

SENIORS ALERT SCHEME

A new iteration of the scheme was launched by the Minister on 19 October 2017, coming into effect on 1 November 2017. The launch was accompanied by a strong media campaign to raise awareness of the Scheme. This campaign was well received and there has been a surge in demand. The funding allocated for administering the scheme in 2017 was €2.3m however, due to increased demand, the total spend was €2.683m. This was met from within the Department's overall resources in 2017.

The main features of the new scheme include:

- Age limit of 65 remains but self-declaration of limited means is now provided;
- those eligible no longer have to be living alone and now includes carers and those who spend most of the day on their own;
- free monitoring of the alarm service for the 1st year; and
- increase in administrative payment to Community Groups involved in rolling out the scheme.



SCHEME TO SUPPORT NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) provides multi annual funding to national organisations in respect of core costs associated with the provision of their services.

The current scheme commenced on 1 July 2016 and runs until on 30 June 2019. The current scheme is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Minister.

The allocation for the duration of the scheme 2016-2019 is a total of €16.7m and the total amount spent in 2017 was €6.452m. Funding has been allocated to 71 national community and voluntary organisations under the scheme.

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

In 2017 €565,200 was provided to the 17 member organisations of the C&V Pillar.

SOCIAL INCLUSION UNITS

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

An allocation of €550,000 was provided in 2017 with expenditure for the year amounting to €513,767.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITIES UNIT:

The Unit completed work related to the following Schemes and areas in 2017;

- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) including Local/Regional Development Supports, with a budget of €43.23m;
- The RAPID programme, with a budget of €5m;
- The Communities Facilities Scheme, with a budget of €2m; and,

- Dog Control, with a budget of €70,000.

The Unit also has responsibility for the oversight and governance of Pobal.

The Unit represents the Department on a number of interdepartmental fora, such as Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide and the National Drugs Strategy which are both led by Department of Health, and the National Traveller and Roma Strategy which is led by Department of Justice and Equality.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROGRAMME (SICAP)

Key achievements of the SICAP in 2017

48,330 = the total number of disadvantaged individuals (15 years upwards) engaged under SICAP on a one-to-one basis.

3,192 = the number of Local Community Groups assisted under SICAP.

321 = the number of social enterprises assisted under SICAP.

Research on the evaluation of the SICAP

Launch of a research report "*Kickboxing, Kindness & Going the Extra Mile*" which examined best practice in engaging with young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), and will support the development of a good practice quality toolkit of benefit to SICAP delivery bodies.

Continued engagement with the ESRI on the development of research and evaluation reports on elements of SICAP including profiling barriers to social inclusion in Ireland and an examination of the measurement of community development.

Suite of supports on the SICAP

Delivery of a significant suite of training supports including 20 training and support events with 995 attendees from both Local Community Development Committees and Local Development Companies, delivered by Pobal in conjunction with the Department including sessions on the new SICAP programme, IRIS training, Ethnic Data workshops and Local Community Development Committee regional support events.

Design and Implementation of a successor programme

A national consultation process was undertaken with stakeholders to inform the design of SICAP 2018–2022. This significant piece of work contributed to the design of the successor programme which responds to identified needs, creates more programme efficiency and reduces administration.

Co-ordination of a local procurement process for the implementation SICAP 2018 – 2022 which entailed engagement with and support to the LCDCs to ensure a robust process locally.

A number of supports were provided to disadvantaged communities.

The Department continued to play a leading role in supporting the victims of the Carrickmines tragedy, by participating on the Carrickmines Steering Committee and providing funding supports to assist the bereaved families.

Continued funding was provided for a Restorative Practice project for the Cherry Orchard area of Dublin. In addition continued funding was provided for the Cherry Orchard Equine Centre.

Annual funding was provided to Saint Vincent de Paul and Protestant Aid to continue their work with the families and communities.

SICAP 2018 - 2022
Top Ten Changes

- 5 Years** Longer funding commitment
- Greater focus on quality community development and more intense engagement
- Fewer indicators and targets
- New way to record the barriers that SICAP clients face
- No age limit
- Simple and flexible
- Down from 3 goals to 2
- Easier registration process
- More target groups, plus an emerging needs group
- Grants to support local community groups and individuals
- A new specialised SICAP tool to measure personal progression

SICAP 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and is co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020
 Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union

EUROPEAN UNION
 Investing in your future
 European Social Fund

Rialtas na hÉireann
 Government of Ireland

pobal
 government supporting communities

RAPID

The Programme for a Partnership Government gave a commitment to reactivating the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Planning) Programme, and the recast RAPID programme was launched on 2 November 2017 by Minister Ring and Minister Donohoe in North East Inner City Dublin.

The programme funding was for capital grants only and was aimed at funding projects in disadvantaged urban areas. In 2017 an equal allocation of €64,500 was provided to each of the 31 Local Authorities. The scheme had a total funding of €2m in 2017. Almost 300 projects, for example a 'fab lab', upgrading public lighting and making facilities more accessible, were funded by this programme in 2017.

In addition to the national recast RAPID programme, in 2017 the DRCD provided funding of €2.5 million from the RAPID subhead to the North East Inner City. This was used towards addressing specific community structural issues, including community engagement, social employment and community development, and to support local community and youth projects through complementing existing programmes such as SICAP.

COMMUNITIES FACILITIES SCHEME

The scheme was initiated in 2017 following a commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government. It was launched in March 2017. An equal allocation of €64,500 was provided to each of the 31 Local Authorities. Funding was for capital grants only and is targeted at small scale projects. The scheme had a total funding of €2m in 2017. Almost 3,000 projects, including sports equipment, CCTV and defibrillators, were funded by this scheme in 2017.

Note: In 2018, following a review of the recast RAPID programme and the Communities Facilities Scheme, they were amalgamated and a new Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) was launched May 2018

DOG CONTROL

Public Consultation on Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines

A public consultation on Guidelines that are in place for Dog Breeding Establishments closed on 28 February 2017. Following a review of all submissions received, a report which provides a summary of the submissions received and sets out the next steps in the process, was published on the Department's website in February 2018.

In 2017 there were 200,828 dog licences issued by local authorities, of which 814 were lifetime licences.

Detailed information on dog licenses and dog control measures in local authorities is available on the Department's website.

PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION 2014-2020 (PEACE IV)

PEACE IV is a cross-border Programme co-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund. It is managed by the SEUPB on behalf of the Irish and UK Governments and supports peace and reconciliation and promotes social and economic stability in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo) with a specific focus on actions that promote cohesion between communities.

The Total value of the Programme is some €270 million. It is 85% funded by the EU (€229 million), with a 15% contribution of €41 million by the Irish and UK Governments (c.€9 million and €32 million respectively).

The Department of Rural and Community Development is an 'Accountable Department' and, as such, provides funding under four core objectives – Shared Education; Children and Young People; Shared Spaces and Services; and Building Positive Relations.

Achievements of 2017

- Programme activity commenced in 2017 and supported the implementation of action plans by local authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as a number of 'shared spaces' initiatives by local authorities and other local and regional groups.

- Some €960,000 was provided by the Department during 2017.

LIBRARIES DEVELOPMENT UNIT

The Libraries Development Unit supports the strategic development and delivery of library services by local authorities. To this end, the Department works in partnership with the County and City Management Association (CCMA), local authorities, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Libraries Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021

- Some €2.75 million was provided by the Department under the Libraries Capital Investment Programme to five library projects including Athy (Kildare), Carrick-on-Suir (Tipperary), Kevin Street (Dublin), Wicklow Town, Ennis (Clare), and two mobile libraries for Kerry and Wexford.

Investment in Public Library Service Delivery Infrastructure

- The Department provided €3.4 million to support the continued modernisation of the library service, enhancing services for library users and paving the way for the launch of the new public library strategy in 2018. Funding supported new self-service technology, hot-desk facilities for the Work Matters business and employment supports programme, and book-stock for the Right-to-Read literacy support programme.

VISITS, LAUNCHES/EVENTS/NEW SCHEMES/PROGRAMMES IN 2017

- Athy Community Library Sod Turning, 3 May 2017
- Libraries Ireland: makes every library your local library service, 29 May 2017 –The new service provides a single access for library members to over 15 million items in the 333 library services across the country.
- Summer Stars Reading Programme, 29 May 2017
- Europe Direct National Soapbox Final, Tuesday 7 November 2017
- Public Libraries Funding Announcement, Thursday 9 November 2017 – €3.4m grant funding to support the introduction of a new library strategy due to be published in early 2018 comprising €3.75 million from the Department of Rural and

Community Development, supplemented by approximately €1.25 million from local authorities.

COMMUNITY POLICY UNIT

The Community Policy Unit has general policy responsibility for cross-government coordination of local and community development supports. It provides guidance and support to local authorities in the development and management of *Local Community Development Committees* (LCDCs) and *Local Economic and Community Plans* (LECPs). It is also responsible for developing and implementing the *Framework Policy on Local and Community Development*.

LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES

LCDCs have been established in each local authority to bring about a more coordinated approach to local and community development in their respective areas, while also planning and overseeing local and community development funding in that area. The primary means for achieving this is through the community elements of 6-year Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), which promote and support the economic development and the community and local development of their areas.

There are 33 LCDCs in total – one LCDC per local authority area, except Cork County where there are three LCDCs.

FRAMEWORK POLICY FOR LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development (2015) was approved by Government on 15 December 2015. The Framework Policy is implemented on a cross-government basis and seeks to secure a joined-up, collaborative and participative approach to local and community development at local level. It is intended that policies, programmes and other interventions will be developed and implemented by central and local government in line with the Framework Policy's core objectives.

ACHIEVEMENTS 2017

LCDC Review

- A review of LCDCs commenced in 2017 with a view to supporting their long-term development as the primary local structure for coordinating the broad range of public-funded local and community development interventions. The review will be completed in mid-2018.

LCDC Supports

- The Department provided almost €1m in 2017 to support the management of LCDCs, implementation of LECs and support the emerging community function local authorities as part of the local government reform and development process. This included a financial contribution towards the cost of 34 posts in 31 local authorities in 2017.

Framework Policy Implementation Plan

- A Cross-Sectoral Working Group was established to assist the development of an implementation plan for the Framework Policy for Local and Community Development and a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector. The group comprises representatives from key stakeholder sectors including community development, local development, and the community and voluntary sectors, as well as representatives from central and local government.

Rural Division

ACTION PLAN FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Realising our Rural Potential, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, was launched in January 2017. The Action Plan represents a significant development in providing a whole of Government pro-active approach to addressing the challenges facing rural Ireland. The Action Plan contains 277 actions for the delivery across Government, State agencies and other bodies over the next three years to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland. The actions are broken down across 5 thematic Pillars: Supporting Sustainable Communities; Supporting Enterprise and Employment; Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential; Fostering Culture and Creativity in rural communities; and Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity.

Progress on the implementation of the actions is overseen by a Monitoring Committee, chaired by Minister Michael Ring, which includes senior representatives of relevant Government Departments and key rural stakeholder interests. Progress Reports on the implementation of the Action Plan are published twice-yearly. The first Progress Report was published in August 2017 and reported on actions which were either due for delivery in the first half of 2017, or classed as ongoing with activity taking place in the first half of 2017. Of the 227 actions reported on, 220 were either completed on schedule or were in progress, representing a 97% delivery rate. The Second Progress Report was published in May 2018. All progress reports are available on the Department's website.

The Action Plan aims to address both the economic and social needs of our rural communities, recognising that our rural communities need to be places where people can live, work, and raise their families and have a good quality of life. The implementation of the measures in the Action Plan is having a real impact on rural Ireland: providing investment, driving job creation, facilitating better access to services, and making rural Ireland an even better place in which to live.

RURAL POLICY AND SCHEMES

The Department had the following 5 Schemes/ programmes running in 2017.

TOWN AND VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was first launched in 2016. The central aim of the scheme is to support the revitalisation of small towns and villages in order to improve

the living and working environment of their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future. Towns/villages with a population of 10,000 or less are eligible to apply for funding under the scheme.

In October 2017, under the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme, funding of €21.6m was allocated to support 281 projects across Ireland over a 15 month period.

The general objective of the 2017 scheme was to encourage projects that had a sustainable and visible impact on the town or village and could demonstrate significant economic or job creation potential.

A number of the projects approved under the 2017 scheme focus on the development of enterprise centres, digital hubs and food hubs which will have a positive impact on local economies, as well as public realm and village enhancement projects.

CLÁR

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation. The programme was originally launched in October 2001 but was closed for applications in 2010. The scheme was re-opened by Minister Ring in 2016 to support the development of remote rural areas through small-scale capital projects involving collaboration between Local Authorities and communities. In 2017 CLÁR supported 231 projects which enhanced safety in the vicinity of schools and community amenities, provided play areas in communities and provided equipment to voluntary first responders. The CLÁR programme has supported 900 projects across Ireland since 2016.

In 2017, 158 defibrillators were distributed under the CLÁR Programme and funding was provided for twelve emergency response vehicles for voluntary organisations including the Order of Malta and the South Eastern Mountain Rescue Association.

OUTDOOR RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE SCHEME

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor

recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. The scheme was implemented in 2016 and 2017 and has facilitated the development of greenways, blueways, walks and other trails across the country.

The 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme launched on 28th April 2017. A total of 219 projects across the country were funded to the value of €11.4m under the 2017 scheme. Full details of the projects funded are available on the Departments website.



WALKS SCHEME

The Walks Scheme represents an innovative response to facilitating the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's key walking trails. The key feature of the scheme is that it involves the landholders as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails, by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on the trails in line with agreed work plans.

The Walks Scheme is currently operating on 39 trails supported by 1,905 landowners and is being managed by 16 Local Development Companies around the country. Payments to these 1,905 participants are in the region of €1.8m per annum.

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME (LIS)

The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is a scheme for the repair of non-public roads which do not come under the normal remit of local authorities. The scheme is a lifeline for people living in many rural areas because it directly improves their access to and from their homes and farms.



Many people living and working in rural areas use these roads every time they enter or leave their home or farm, so the condition of their access road impacts significantly on them. Investing in the improvement of these roads makes a very positive impact on people's quality of life in rural areas.

The LIS Scheme was reintroduced with dedicated funding in September 2017 by Minister Michael Ring after a gap of several years. The reintroduction of the scheme has already made a huge difference for rural communities around the country.

The Department provided €17 million in funding for LIS roads in 2017, benefiting 700 road improvement projects.

TIDYTOWNS

The TidyTowns Competition has been running since 1958. It was originally launched by Bord Fáilte (now Fáilte Ireland). TidyTowns has become Ireland's most well-known and popular local environmental initiative. Right from the start, the primary focus of TidyTowns was to encourage communities to improve their local environment and make their area a better place to live, work and visit. The competition has been sponsored by SuperValu for 27 years.

The competition received 870 entrants in 2017. A consultation process on the future direction of the competition, involving information gathering workshops and an on-line survey, was carried out with TidyTowns committees nationwide in Q4 2017, with further work planned for 2018.

The National TidyTowns awards ceremony took place in The Helix, Dublin, on 25th September 2017 and approximately 1,000 TidyTowns volunteers attended the event. The winner of the 2017 competition was Birdhill in County Tipperary.

2018 will see the 60th Anniversary of the competition. In November 2017, the Minister announced a grant scheme to mark the 60th anniversary of the TidyTowns competition. This scheme allowed each local committee to apply for a grant of between €1,000 and €4,000 to support their work. In 2017, a total of 398 committees were paid grant funding totalling €606,000.

The winner of the TidyTowns competition is automatically entitled to enter the Communities in Bloom which is an international competition for national winners. It is held in Canada each year. Listowel, Co Kerry, participated in the 2017 Communities in Bloom competition.

Ireland's Best Kept is an all island competition. Eight towns from the South and six from the North entered the Ireland's Best Kept competition in 2017, with Rathbarry, Co Cork being named the winner of the Ireland's Best Kept 2017.

In addition, a number of towns were entered into the international Entente Florale Competition in 2017. Entente Florale is a European competition whereby 2 high achievers are nominated from the entrants to the national competition. In 2017 Glaslough, Co Monaghan and Abbeyleix, Co Laois won Gold and Silver respectively in the Entente Florale competition. Ireland is hosting the Entente Florale awards ceremony in 2018 to

coincide with the 60th anniversary of the SuperValu TidyTowns Competition. The ceremony will be held in Tullamore, Co Offaly on September 22nd 2018.



LEADER

LEADER Programme provides grant funding in rural areas for a wide range of investments including enterprise development, job creation, and the development of sustainable infrastructure and services. The total expenditure on the LEADER in 2017 was €14.3m.

Project approvals under the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme commenced in earnest in the second half of 2017. This followed the award of Funding Agreements to the majority of LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the latter half of 2016 and a period of engagement between the Local Action Groups and potential project applicants to develop project ideas and generate applications. A second LAG and Local Development Strategy selection process for part of County Galway was also completed in April 2017, thus ensuring that all of the rural areas in Ireland, as defined in Ireland's Rural Development Programme, are now covered by LEADER funding.

There were 592 LEADER projects approved for funding of €16.4 million by the end of 2017, with nearly 550 of these approved from July to December. In addition, a further 194

projects requesting €17.2m in LEADER Funding were at various stages of the project approval process.

The increased level of project activity in the latter half of 2017 was also driven by fundamental changes to the programme introduced following a Forum, hosted in May, which involved all of the stakeholders involved in the delivery of the programme. The Forum resulted in a commitment to complete 31 Actions, covering all aspects of the LEADER Programme, and involved significant simplification for the LAGs and project applicants. The Actions included:

- A 55% reduction in the level of paperwork to be submitted by LAGs as part of their monthly administration returns;
- Greater flexibility for Local Action Groups in the approach they take to seeking project proposals;
- Introduction of a standard application form for all LAGs to assist in streamlining the process.
- A single “Article 48” Administrative check of project applications to replace the current two stage process,
- A reduction in the number of questions to be completed by LAGs at application stage from 77 to 30;
- Revised and clarified procurement arrangements.
- Provisional approval prior to completing any procurement for a project
- Simplified application process for projects which have an impact on the built and natural heritage of the country.

The Department also continued a programme of capacity building with Local Action Groups in 2017. This included three themed workshops with the Local Action Groups focusing on Tourism, Procurement and Programme Evaluation.

ATLANTIC ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

The Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both contain a commitment to progress the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor. The Atlantic Economic Corridor stretches from Kerry to Donegal, and has the potential to

contribute to effective regional development by developing infrastructure, attracting Irish and multinational investment, and growing jobs in vibrant communities.

The region covered by the Corridor has a total population of 1.7 million people and encompasses a number of significant economic centres stretching along its length. The Atlantic Economic Corridor is already home to many successful businesses, ranging from multinational to indigenous Irish firms. The region boasts extensive infrastructure, with two international airports, major commercial shipping ports, and rail and road networks, all of which enable great access for international exports, logistics and both national and international travel. A number of Higher Education Institutes throughout the region produce a steady supply of highly skilled graduates across a wide range of industries.



The objective of the Atlantic Economic Corridor proposal is to maximise the strengths and assets of the economic hubs and communities along Ireland's western seaboard to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for those who live there. It is a collaborative initiative, driven by business representatives and communities and supported by national and local government and State agencies.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce was established in March 2017 to progress the proposal. Minister of State Seán Kyne chairs the Taskforce which includes senior representatives from the business sector, key Government Departments, other public bodies, and Third Level institutions. The Taskforce meets on a regular basis. A number of sub-groups of the Taskforce are also working to progress specific aspects of the overall proposal, such as examining infrastructure needs and enterprise property assets, and developing a communications strategy.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a commitment to developing a National Policy on Social Enterprise which will encompass the full range of activity in this important sector. The Department of Rural and Community Development is responsible for coordinating the development of this policy.

To progress this work in 2017 the Department partnered with the Social Finance Foundation (a joint venture between the Department of Finance and the banking sector to provide funding for the social and community sector) to conduct a research project that will support the development of the policy. The research covers a wide range of areas including, for example, reviewing previous research in the area, mapping out the supports available in Ireland, identifying gaps in supports, assessing impacts and developing insights into best practice.

This research work will be completed in 2018 and will be a key input into the policy development process. The National Policy on Social Enterprise will also be completed in 2018.

In addition to the above work on policy development, in 2017 the Department ran a Social Enterprise support measure using Dormant Accounts Funds. This measure, which was administered by Pobal, aimed to increase the impact of social enterprises by enhancing their capacity to deliver services and generate traded income through the provision of

small capital grants. In June 2017, 42 social enterprise projects were granted funding totalling €1.648m, with grants ranging from €16,000 to €82,000.

DORMANT ACCOUNTS FUND

The Dormant Accounts Act 2001, together with the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post) and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings.

Dormant funds or unclaimed life assurance policies which have not been reclaimed by the original accounts/policy holder or their beneficiaries are transferred each year by the holding institution to the Dormant Accounts Fund managed by the NTMA.

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

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

Since July 2017, the Minister for Rural and Community Development has statutory responsibility for decisions relating to the disbursement of moneys from the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2017 was published in July 2017 allocating funding of €40.4m to measures across seven Government Departments. Amongst the groups to benefit are carers and their families, victims of domestic and sexual violence, dementia sufferers and migrants.

REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT UNIT

The Regional Telecommunications Development Unit works with local authorities and key stakeholders to remove barriers to the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure in Ireland. In order to achieve this objective the Unit primarily works through the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Group and with local authorities via a Regional Action Group (RAG).

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, established in July 2016, identified solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigated how better services could be provided to consumers prior to full rollout of the National Broadband Plan. The Taskforce published its final report in December 2016, which set out 40 actions aimed at addressing the issues it identified.

In early 2017 an Implementation Group was established to oversee the timely delivery of all the actions of the Taskforce's report. In early 2018, the Implementation Group published a review of progress made during 2017, which also contained the 2018 Work Programme for the Implementation Group. Progress updates are published on the Department's website on a quarterly basis.

The main objective of the Regional Action Group (RAG) is to identify barriers that could delay the National Broadband Plan rollout and to agree and oversee actions that should be taken to address these barriers. It also works to put a standardised approach in place from the local authorities to specific processes and planning issues that are solely within the remit of the local authorities to address.

Under the remit of the RAG, a number of specific areas have been identified to be progressed by subgroups. These subgroups address issues such as co-development, environmental issues, development of Local Digital Strategies and prioritising bringing high-speed broadband to remote locations. The Department provides funding of €35,000 to each local authority to part-fund the appointment of the Broadband Officer.

6 Bodies under the Aegis of the Department

The Department has four bodies under its aegis, the below gives a brief outline of each.

Western Development Commission

www.wdc.ie

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). It ensures Government policy is directed at improving the social and economic situation in the region, through support for projects in a wide variety of sectors. It also manages the WDC Investment Fund to provide loans and equity to businesses and local communities in the West.

The Department contributed €1,412,000 to the WDC core costs in 2017.

Irish Water Safety

www.iws.ie

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

The Department contribution to core operating costs in 2017 was €507,000.

Additional funding of €150,000 was provided to IWS in 2016 and ring-fenced for drowning prevention measures. This was increased in 2017 to €500k per annum.

Charities Regulatory Authority

www.charitiesregulator.ie

The Charities Regulator was established as an independent Authority on a statutory basis in October 2014 in accordance with the 2009 Charities Act. The Regulator is responsible for the registration, regulation and protection of all charities that carry out activities in the Republic of Ireland.

Responsibility for the Regulator transferred from the Department of Justice and Equality to the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2017.

The Estimate spend for 2017 was €4.379m. Actual Expenditure was €3.989m.

Pobal

www.pobal.ie

Pobal operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development which has an oversight and co-ordination role in respect of the company. It is a company limited by guarantee and without share capital; it is also a registered charity.

Pobal is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. Members of the Board are appointed by Government, on the nomination of the Minister for Rural and Community Development, in line with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards.

The company operates on the basis of a framework agreement with the Department of Rural and Community Development and programme-specific service level agreements with individual Departments.

A total figure of just over €16.7 million went to Pobal covering core costs and programme funding across five streams, Seniors Alert Scheme, Scheme to Support National Organisations, SICAP, RAPID – Healthy Ireland Fund, Dormant Accounts, Tidy Towns Cap Grant, and LEADER in 2017.

7 DRCD Going Forward - 2018

The establishment of the new Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), in July 2017, underscores the Government's commitment to rural and community development, and demonstrates the priority Government places on both objectives. Significantly, the Government's decision to establish the new Department ensures that efforts across all of Government to support rural Ireland and to develop vibrant rural and urban communities will achieve the maximum impact.

To this end, the Department will deliver on the Government's commitment to bring a greater coordination to all the work across Government that impacts on rural Ireland and the development of vibrant sustainable communities. It will ensure a priority focus on rural and community matters, ensuring that tailored policy approaches are developed that will have a real and sustainable impact for rural and urban communities alike.

Key Priorities for 2018:

- The Department is working closely with other Government Departments that have a role in supporting the twin objectives of rural and community development to ensure cooperation and engagement across government.
- The ***Action Plan for Rural Development*** provides a whole-of-Government framework to support rural development through practical actions, with clear timeframes, for delivery by named Departments and agencies.
- ***The Framework Policy for Local and Community Development*** in Ireland sets out national priorities and a framework for a cross-government approach to improving engagement between national and local government and local communities in the planning, delivery and evaluation of policies and interventions that affect them. An implementation plan for the Framework Policy is in development.
- The launch of the new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in 2018 will promote rural renewal over the period of the National Development Plan 2018-2027
- The Department will work toward publishing a National Policy on Social Enterprise and oversee the implementation of the policy
- The Department aims to develop a robust policy framework for rural and countryside recreation
- A key focus will be in progressing the proposal for an Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) area along the western seaboard to attract private investment and enterprise and support the economic development of the region
- The Department will have oversight of the roll out of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022
- The Department will publish a Strategy for Libraries 2018-2022

- A review of the operation of the Community Services Programme following its amalgamation into the Department will be undertaken
- A review of the RAPID and the Communities Facilities Schemes will be undertaken with a view to optimising their effectiveness in addressing community needs
- The Department will commence a consultative process as a first step in developing a national strategy on volunteering
- Work has commenced in the Department on concluding a new contract for Social Innovation Fund Ireland
- Plans are underway to Celebrate 60 years of Tidy Towns in 2018
- The Department will continue to be committed to the process of ongoing Public Sector Reform, delivering required initiatives from the Civil Service Renewal Plan and the Public Sector Plan, Our Public Service 2020.
- Corporate Governance oversight of the Department and its agencies will continue to be reviewed in line with best practice requirements.
- Focus in 2018 shall be on strengthening the policy making capacity in the Department including strategically evaluating the work of the Department, ensuring decisions are evidence based and increasing monitoring and evaluation of programmes delivered in the interests of the public
- As a new Department a priority in 2018 will be on building further the organisation's capacity through continuing to invest in our people and devising a HR strategy to give effect to this.
- Communicating the Department's role and the importance of its mission externally and internally is key and the Department will seek to increase awareness of the importance of its work through a communications strategy