



# A Programme for a Partnership Government

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Annual Report 2017

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**May 2017**



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## **FOREWORD**

On May 6th 2016, the new Partnership Government was formed, comprising Fine Gael, the Independent Alliance and independent Deputies. Putting our differences aside to put Ireland first, we remain united in our belief that government is not about power per se, but rather what it can achieve for all the people of our country.

### **Brexit**

Since the formation of the Government we had the decision of the UK to exit the European Union. We recognise that Ireland is more exposed than any other country to the negative effects of Brexit. Since the referendum we have engaged in a major diplomatic campaign to ensure our priorities were properly understood by our European partners. These priorities are to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process, including through maintaining an open border; to continue the Common Travel Area with the UK; to minimise the impact on our trade and the economy; and very importantly to work for a positive future for the European Union. Our preparations have ensured that Ireland's unique concerns and priorities are reflected in EU's Negotiating Guidelines. We are only at the beginning of a long and complex process but in the meantime the priority of the Government is to help Irish businesses limit the fallout from Brexit by helping to open up new markets for Irish goods and services.

### **Making life better, easier**

This government has one objective: to make life better for all, easier for individuals, families and businesses in every part of Ireland. Since it is the people who created the recovery, we were and are determined they will experience its benefits where they need them most - in good jobs, first-class hospitals, excellent classrooms, safe communities, thriving local economies.

Today, Ireland remains the fastest-growing economy in the EU. Over 1,000 new jobs every week are putting our people back to work, slashing unemployment from a high of 15.2% down to 6.2%. That's two points down in the last year alone. This didn't happen by luck or chance. It happened because in government we were dogged in our attitude and actions to create jobs, boost investment, get people into work, with good salaries and better prospects. Yes, we are relentless in our efforts. But such effort is key to avoiding the damage of the past, from which people are only now recovering.

### **Economic recovery driving social recovery**

While the economic recovery has taken root, the attendant social recovery is only beginning. We're making every effort to nurture the social recovery at this crucial phase and are determined to remove disadvantage and exclusion across our society - rural to urban, young to old, all levels and kinds of ability, and access to affordable and high-quality childcare. In the last year, all of this has been a priority bolstered by supports for young families, our older people, reduction in the USC, increase in social welfare payments, reduction in prescription charges, significant investment in frontline public services for example 2,400 teaching posts, 1,200 more nurses and 800 more Gardaí.

## **Housing**

Housing is the biggest and most urgent government challenge. Our population is growing and because of the crash in 2008, in our house building we're almost 10 years behind. That's why we gave Housing its own ministry and Action Plan. Yes, we have a way to go, but in the eight months since the Action Plan's launch, the supply of homes is accelerating rapidly.

## **Psychological fragility**

We are especially determined to attend to the psychological and emotional fragility in people's lives. There is simply too much pain, isolation, loneliness and anxiety across counties and generations, manifesting itself in addiction, fear, desperation. We have put strong new initiatives in train to reach young and old, urban and rural and to build on priority investment over the last few years.

Just a year into our Partnership Government, we know we still have much work to do. For Ireland to thrive our social recovery must match the economic recovery. Making sure it does is what will drive us in the second and subsequent years. We thank the people of Ireland for their continued support.

Enda Kenny T.D.  
An Taoiseach

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## Key Highlights

### Jobs and the Economy

- 1,300 new jobs created every week during 2016
- Unemployment rate down to 6.2%, falling by 47,300 in the past year
- 2016 Action Plan for Jobs has delivered 93% of the 555 measures
- New Action Plan on Jobless Households to help the transition from welfare to employment
- IDA Ireland client companies recorded 18,627 new jobs in 2016, a net increase of 11,978 jobs
- Enterprise Ireland client companies created 19,244 new jobs in 2016, a net increase of 9,117 jobs
- Local Enterprise Office client companies created 7,883 jobs in 2016, a net increase of 3,679 jobs
- The value of goods exports in 2016 totalled almost €117bn, the highest annual total on record
- 12,500 Irish SMEs have benefited from €544m of Strategic Banking Corporation loans
- Credit Guarantee Scheme sanctioned 437 facilities of €69.8m to date supporting 2,800 jobs
- Microfinance Ireland approved 1,249 applications, totalling €18.2m to date -79% outside of Dublin
- Springboard+ programme evaluation shows 80% of participants moved off the live register
- Increased supports for those on Back to Education scheme
- Enterprise Ireland supported 229 start-up companies in 2016
- Start Your Own Business scheme is being extended for a further two years
- Earned Income Tax Credit increased by €400 to €950 benefitting over 147,000 self-employed
- €386m in funding has been secured from EU Horizon 2020 to date
- A new Employment Permits Online System launched in 2016 achieving a 95% take-up rate
- A record high of 9,584,400 overseas visits to Ireland in 2016 sustaining 220,000 jobs
- The national minimum hourly rate was increased to €9.25 in 2017
- Draft legislative proposals approved to tackle precarious work and zero-hour contracts
- New measures were announced to protect the future of Community Employment Schemes
- Ireland on track to eliminate the remaining deficit and achieve a balanced budget by 2018
- Budget 2017 allocated an extra €2.1 bn for investment in public services
- In 2016 Ireland's real GDP growth continued robustly at an overall 5.2%
- Independent expert appointed to undertake a review of Ireland's corporation tax code
- Budget 2017 reduced USC rates targeting those on lower incomes
- NAMA on track to redeem all €30.2bn guaranteed senior debt projecting a €2.3bn surplus

### Housing and Homelessness

- New Minister and Cabinet Committee to prioritise action on housing and homelessness
- Publication of Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness with 84 specific actions
- Supported by investment of €5.35bn to provide 47,000 new social housing units by 2021
- Quarterly progress and monthly Housing Activity being published on [www.rebuildingireland.ie](http://www.rebuildingireland.ie)



- €226m allocated for 34 strategic infrastructure projects to aid delivery of 23,000 homes by 2021
- Some 800 publicly owned sites identified with the potential to provide 50,000 new homes
- Social housing needs target exceeded with 19,055 households supported in 2016
- Housing Assistance Payments extended to all areas now supporting 20,700 households
- 248 unfinished developments resolved in 2016 delivering 2,000 homes for Social housing
- NAMA has funded the delivery of 2,546 housing units in 16 months to February 2017
- Planning reforms in place to fast-track planning applications for large developments
- New nationwide €32m Repair and Leasing Scheme targeting re-use of 800 vacant properties
- New €25m Buy and Renew scheme for purchase and renovation of units for social housing
- Housing Agency using €70m fund to purchase vacant properties from banks/investors
- New Working Group established to develop a National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy
- Planning authorities are now required to establish and maintain a register of vacant sites
- New Help-to-Buy Scheme supporting first-time buyers obtain a deposit for new builds
- Central Bank mortgage rules for deposits changed from 2017 to help First Time Buyers
- Mortgage interest relief is to be extended beyond December 2017 out to 2020
- Strategy for the Rental Sector to address the supply, cost and accessibility of rental accommodation
- Rent Pressure Zones designated to cap rent increases at 4% per annum for 3 years
- Threshold Tenancy Protection Service extended to urban areas with acute housing pressures
- New Housing Delivery Office set up to support local authorities and housing bodies
- Expert Group established look at developing a viable cost rental model for Ireland
- Tax relief maintained for landlords renting to tenants in receipt of social housing supports
- Living City Initiative for refurbishment of city properties expanded in Budget 2017
- The number in mortgage arrears fell further in Q4 2016 for the fourteenth consecutive quarter
- New changes to Mortgage to Rent Scheme to increase numbers of households benefitting
- New mortgage resolution service Abhaile providing free independent financial and legal advice
- Over 3,000 sustainable exits from homelessness during 2016
- Budget for homelessness was increased by 40%, to €98m for 2017
- 810 new tenancies were set up under the HAP Homeless pilot in 2016
- Extra 206 beds across three new homeless facilities for rough sleepers over Winter 2016

### **Rural Development**

- New Department and Cabinet Minister overseeing Regional Development and Rural Affairs
- Action Plan for Rural Development, Realising our Rural Potential published setting out 276 actions
- €20m funding over two years for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- Employment increased in all regions in 2016 under eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs
- 70% of total new jobs created in Ireland during 2016 were outside Dublin
- Updated High Speed Broadband Map published in April showing areas to be covered

- Formal dialogue started with 3 qualified bidders on fibre-to-home broadband solution
- Agreement with eir to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 rural premises by 2018
- Two Regional Broadband Action Groups covering all 31 Local Authorities to support rollout
- Mobile Phone and Broadband Access Taskforce identified 40 actions to improve service
- CLÁR funding of €8.24m allocated for 651 small infrastructural projects in rural areas in 2016
- 7.44m was approved under the 2016 Rural Recreation Scheme for 117 projects
- €6.14m for 47 projects under the REDZ economic development initiative for rural towns
- 80% of €9m to support arts and culture centres earmarked for rural areas
- Agreements signed in all 28 LEADER sub-regional areas opening access to €250m fund
- Delivery of 500 additional places on the Rural Social Scheme
- Four pilots to start in 2017 testing use of post offices as multi-purpose community space
- State contract renewed routing 35m payments amounting to €8bn through post offices
- Public consultation undertaken on a proposed new model of community banking
- Implementation Group in place to progress recommendations to support credit unions
- Grant-aid scheme for community-based CCTV systems
- Opening of a new IDA Advance Technology Building in Tralee
- Grant allocations of €2.77m were made in December for four regional Airports
- Legislation published to allow for the part/full de-designation of 46 raised bog NHAs

## **Health**

- All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Health Care to report by end May
- Budget 2017 delivered the highest ever Health budget of €14.6 billion.
- New medicines agreement signed to save up to €750m from drug companies
- Making Orkambi and Kalydeco available for adults and children with Cystic Fibrosis
- 99 Primary Care Centres in operation delivering better care close to home
- 70 new staff recruited in 2016 to deliver Speech and Language Therapy Services to children
- €5m allocated in 2017 to provide for counselling and psychological supports for children
- Targeted recruitment of 1,208 nursing and midwifery posts in 2017
- GP training intake on course to rise by 19% from 157 in 2015 to 187 places in 2017
- Next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is underway
- Improved measures put in place to support rural GP practices
- Construction of new National Children's Hospital to commence in coming weeks
- Work underway on a national Bed Capacity Review will inform the mid-term Capital review
- Funding for a Day-case waiting list initiative will see over 2,000 day-cases cleared by end-June
- 2017 Funding to Waterford Hospital to provide 2 additional cath lab sessions per week
- Implementation of the National Maternity Strategy supported by additional €6.8m in 2017
- Publishing the first ever HIQA Standards for maternity services

- Extension of child vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus started 2016
- Treatment Benefit scheme extended in March to 450,000 self-employed and dependants
- Legislation published to provide for supervised injection facility as part of the Drugs Strategy
- Legislation commenced providing for tobacco plain packaging from 30 September 2017
- National Patient Safety Office launched to lead on key patient safety policy initiatives
- Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 was launched in September 2016
- National Rare Disease Office has been established by the HSE
- New legislation published provide for periodic payments orders in catastrophic injury cases

### **Disability, Mental Health and Older People**

- Taskforce on Personalised Budgeting for people with disabilities established in 2016
- Report and implementation of measures on Making Work Pay for people with disabilities
- Medical card entitlement provided to 10,000 severely disabled children from June 2017
- New Access and Inclusion Model providing targeted support to children in childcare services
- Legislation published for ratification of UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities
- Extra €10m for day services & training programmes in 2017 to school leavers with disabilities
- Expert Evidence Review completed as first step towards a new policy for mental health
- National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health established in 2016
- Implementation of Connecting for Life, Ireland's national strategy to reduce suicide
- 6,500 individuals completed safeTALK suicide alertness training in 2016
- 28 specialist nurses delivering the clinical programme for self-harm in 20 Emergency Hospitals
- New Wellbeing programme will be introduced to first year students from September 2017
- National Dementia Awareness Campaign – Understand Together was launched in October
- State pension was increased by €5 per week from March 2017
- 10.57m home help hours supporting 47,800 people during 2016
- 16,450 people received Home Care Package during 2016
- 23,100 people were supported under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme in 2016
- Work has commenced on a new funding scheme and regulation of the home care sector
- Ireland's first National Positive Ageing Stakeholder Forum held to engage with civic society
- Over 8,000 households received housing adaptations to their homes worth €50m during 2016
- Carers now receive an extra 12 weeks allowance after the person moves into long-term care
- In 2016, 7,301 people were approved for alarms under the Senior Alert Scheme
- Reducing prescription charges for 390,000 people over 70 and their dependants

### **Children & Youth Affairs**

- Up to 127,000 children to benefit from ECCE expansion to include 2nd free pre-school year
- New childcare subsidies from September 2017 to benefit up to 70,000 families

- 2 weeks Paternity Leave for new fathers introduced from September 2016
- 3,100 instances of support to children with disabilities under the Access and Inclusion Model
- 18 expert posts for the Early Years Specialist Service providing over 5,000 visits to pre-schools
- Launch of an €8.25m scheme to provide free childcare to homeless families
- Childcare regulations introduced in June 2016 to improve quality standards in pre-schools
- Home Carer's Credit increased by €100 to assist one income families or the elderly at home
- Implementation Group established to ensure readiness for the Children First Act by year-end
- €4.5m secured for 2017 to ensure continuation of the 13 Area Based Childhood programmes
- €600,000 for a Youth Employability Initiative to improve disadvantaged youths employability
- Youth Strategy Lead Team established to monitor implementation of the National Youth Strategy
- €5.1m to develop new services for children and disadvantage young people
- Oversight Committee established to shape the development of the LGBTI Youth Strategy

### **Education & Training**

- 3 year Action Plan for Education published in 2016 with 139 specific actions
- €458m increase in Education & Training spend agreed in Budget 2017
- 50 major school projects delivered 15,290 additional permanent school places in 2016
- Announced plan to deliver 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030
- Provision for an extra 2,400 teaching posts with 1,000 extra special needs assistants secured
- New allocation model for special education teachers being introduced for schools in 2017
- School Admissions Bill published to end waiting lists and ban admission fees
- Commenced the provisions of fitness to teach so the Teaching Council can hear complaints
- Published the draft of a Bill to introduce a Parent and Student Charter into every school
- New subjects being introduced e.g. coding for primary schools and computer science for leaving cert
- Implementing the first ever Gaeltacht education strategy
- International Education Strategy commenced to bring the value of the sector to €2.1bn by 2020
- STEM Report published with 21 actions prioritised to make Ireland a world education leader in STEM
- A new DEIS plan commenced to support disadvantaged pupils, with 79 new schools included
- Apprenticeship and Traineeship Plan commenced to provide 50,000 places in schemes by 2020
- Ireland's 15-year-olds are among the best in OECD countries in reading
- Grants totalling €30m have issued to schools for the provision of ICT equipment
- 600 coaching hours provided to 400 school leaders annually under a new coaching service
- Extra supports announced in Budget 2017 for small primary schools
- Higher education sector funding up by €36.5m in 2017, the first significant increase in a decade
- National Skills Council launched in April 2017 to oversee research and advise on prioritisation
- Springboard+ 2017 has been expanded to include homemakers

## **Crime Prevention, Justice and Equality**

- An additional €55m allocated in 2016 to tackle gangland crime
- Establishment of the Special Crime Task Force and a dedicated Garda Armed Support Unit
- €46m under the Government's Capital Plan being invested in the Garda Fleet
- €330m to be invested in Garda ICT infrastructure over 2016-2021
- Work is proceeding in An Garda Síochána to identify 6 Garda stations for reopening on a pilot basis
- Criminal Justice Bill 2016 published to strengthen the operation of the bail system and provide for electronic tagging
- Preliminary consultations have commenced on the feasibility of a new Public Defender system
- President of the High Court will Chair a new group to reform the administration of civil justice
- Published the Domestic Violence Bill to improve protections to victims of domestic abuse
- Launched 'What would you do?' a campaign to increase awareness of domestic violence
- Enacted the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 to combat the sexual abuse of children
- Published the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Bill 2016 providing protections to crime victims
- €1.7m allocated to 58 organisations to provide information and support the victims of crime
- Provided extra powers to the CAB in response to the increased organised crime threat
- A new Grant-aid scheme launched to assist community groups establish community based CCTV
- €397,000 provided for Community Crime Prevention including Community Alert and Text Alert
- 519 programme refugees were received from Lebanon by end 2016
- 459 asylum seekers have been relocated from Greece with a further 630 expected by end 2017
- Government committed to take 200 unaccompanied minors formerly in the migrant camp at Calais
- Launched the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 to promote integration
- €500,000 to be made available in 2017 for community groups to promote integration
- Introduced the Single Application Procedure reducing the time spent in State accommodation
- Introduction of facilities to enable families in Direct Provision to cook for themselves
- €2m to support the humanitarian efforts of the Red Cross in areas such as Syria and Nigeria
- Provided State recognition to Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation
- Published the New National Women's Strategy 2017-2020 to improve services for women
- Introduced initiatives to improve gender balance
- €5.5m announced for projects to support women entrepreneurs
- Judge Pat MacCartan appointed to assess the assertion of new evidence by Stardust Relatives
- Publication of the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill is expected shortly

## **Agriculture and Marine**

- Agri-food exports valued at over €12bn supporting 173,000 jobs last year
- €1.2bn benefitting 128,000 farmers as part of the Basic Payment Scheme
- Increased the Farm Assistance Payment by €5 per week
- 500 extra places allocated to the Rural Social Scheme for farmers to examine off-farm income

- New income tax credit of €1,270 for fishermen introduced
- 330 farmers affected by flooding received compensation totalling €660k
- Launched an Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme providing low costs loans up to €150k
- Introduced the Grocery Goods Regulations to tackle unfair practices in the grocery trade
- Undertook a major agri-food trade mission to Asia focused on developing new markets
- Reached agreement to allow Irish sheep meat to Iran
- Enhanced access secured for Irish beef to Saudi Arabia
- Opening of the Turkish live cattle market, with 20,000 cattle exported by end-2016
- €3.75m Bord Bia campaign launched to promote Irish beef and lamb in China and Japan
- 90% of exports of Irish food, drink and horticulture by signed up members of 'Origin Green'
- Rural Development Scheme funding increased by 21% to €601m to support the agri-food sector
- Beef and Genomics Programme reopened to deliver genetic improvement in the national herd
- €500m EU Aid package agreed for dairy farmers to support market stabilisation
- €25m Sheep Welfare Scheme launched for sheep farmers with 21,900 applications approved
- €3.87m in grant aid awarded for the development of the commercial horticulture sector
- Rainwater harvesting systems are now included under the TAMS Scheme
- GLAS (Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment) Scheme reopened, with over 50,000 participants
- €3.27m paid under the Young Farmers' Capital Investment Scheme
- 6,500 hectares of new forests planted in 2016
- 11,000 persons employed in Irish fisheries with the sector worth over €890m
- Seafood exports worth €555m, a 50% increase from 2010 -2016
- €280m of fishing quotas have been secured for 2017, a 6% increase
- €28m announced for capital investment in Ireland's fishery harbours
- €12m funding for seven Fisheries Action Groups focussed on developing coastal communities

### **Climate Change and Renewable Energy**

- Ireland ratified the world's first comprehensive agreement on climate change in Paris 2016
- Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan to be published shortly
- National Dialogue on Climate Action announced in March to run for 2 years
- More than 24,000 households upgraded under the Better Energy Programme in 2016
- Over 6,700 homes in energy poverty were upgraded free of charge
- Over €22.5m spent retrofitting 11,303 social housing units in 2016
- First Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy 2017-2020 published in January
- Working group established to identify technology options post Moneypoint
- Inter-Departmental Low Emissions Vehicle Task Force established
- 11 major flood defence schemes underway and 26 at design or development stage
- Implementation plan agreed on establishing a National Flood Forecasting Service
- Voluntary Home Relocation Programme announced
- Review Report published in November on the response to winter flooding 2015/16

## **Investing in Society**

- Three year funding scheme of €16.5m supporting 71 community and voluntary organisations
- €100m invested in three year Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme to 2017
- Communities Facilities Scheme launched in March with €2m in funding
- Priority actions identified for regeneration of North East Inner City
- Revamped RAPID Programme to be ready shortly
- €5.1m Dormant Account Funding allocated for children and disadvantaged young people
- Independent review in 2017 to inform a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
- New round of Sports Capital Programme launched in January with €30m available
- National Sports Policy Framework under development
- New state-of-the-art Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena opened
- Luas Cross City project on track for delivery for end 2017
- New Phoenix Park Tunnel line services started
- 4.3m 'dublinbike' journeys taken in 2016 and the scheme is to expand in the summer

## **Ireland and the World**

- European Council negotiating Guidelines reflect Irish concerns on peace process, border and existing Ireland/UK agreements
- European Council states EU Treaties to apply to entire territory of a united Ireland, if realised under Good Friday Agreement
- Government's approach published in *Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union*
- Government preparing a further policy paper on economic policy issues in a Brexit context
- Strong engagement continuing through North South structures
- Supporting post-Assembly election talks and the formation of a new Northern Ireland Executive
- €1m disbursed by Reconciliation Fund to support 60 organisations working on peace and reconciliation
- 1916 Centenary Commemorative medals are being awarded to all Defence Forces personnel
- Recruitment campaign for Defence Forces launched to recruit between 850 -900 personnel
- 88 projects identified in the White Paper on Defence being implemented
- LÉ William Butler Yeats purchased under the Naval Vessel Replacement Programme
- New Trade and Investment Strategy, "Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World" launched
- 26 Minister-led visits to 66 cities in 27 countries over St. Patrick's Day period
- 299 iconic buildings and landmarks in 44 countries 'greened' for St. Patrick's Day
- 46 international ministerial-led trade events planned for 2017
- On-line application service for passport renewals launched in March
- 'Travelwise' app launched in summer 2016 with 14,000 downloads
- €190m provided for humanitarian assistance in 2016

- €10m increase to €651m for Overseas Development Assistance in 2017
- 'Creative Ireland' launched with 10 major initiatives for delivery in 2017
- €9m capital funding announced for arts and culture centres across the country
- Funding for Irish artists to stage events in 35 countries internationally
- Initial review of the National Heritage Plan commenced
- Action Plan advanced to support the language planning process in Gaeltacht areas

### **Making a Partnership in Democracy Work including Political and Constitutional Reform**

- Ceann Comhairle directly elected by secret ballot for the first time
- Cross-party Dáil Business Committee established
- Oireachtas Committee chairs appointed using the D'Hondt system
- Budget Oversight Committee set up to enhance role of the Oireachtas in the budget process
- Private Members Business slots increased to two per week
- Additional time provided for Leader's Questions and Parliamentary Questions
- Pre-Legislative Stage extended to Private Members Bills
- New rules facilitating multiple Technical Groups in the Dáil
- Votes now grouped on Thursdays to encourage a more family-friendly policy
- Revised Code of Practice published to improve oversight and governance of State bodies
- Review of the 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Board completed
- Judicial Appointments Commission Bill to be published shortly
- Citizens' Assembly voted on its first topic, the Eighth Amendment, in April
- Referendum signalled on the right to vote at Presidential elections by Irish citizen's abroad
- New Labour Employer Economic Forum established
- Public Service Pay Commission established in October
- Public Service Performance Report for 2016 published in April
- Work underway on a new Public Service Reform Plan
- All 25 headline actions in the Civil Service Renewal Plan initiated
- Open Government Partnership National Action Plan published in December
- Revised Guidelines on Consultation for Public Sector Bodies published





## Housing and Homelessness

Rebuilding Ireland – Ireland’s Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, published in July 2016 is seeking to address the many interacting structural constraints affecting housing supply in Ireland through 113 actionable and time-bound measures across the five key pillars of Address Homelessness, Accelerate Social Housing, Build More Homes, Improve the Rental Sector and Utilise Existing Housing.

The overall aim of the Action Plan is to more than double current levels of housing output to at least 25,000 new homes per annum by 2021 to meet current, pent-up and forecast demand. Implementation of the Plan is driven and overseen by a Government sub-committee chaired by the Taoiseach and is supported by an associated budget of €5.5bn out to 2021.

Some of the key measures already in place across the five pillar areas include:

- €5.35bn in funding is being made available to 2021 to deliver 47,000 social housing homes
- In 2016, 19,055 social housing supports were provided from a housing budget of €935m
- €1.3bn in funding has been made available for 2017 to deliver some 21,000 social housing supports
- Allocation of €226m for 34 strategic infrastructure projects under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to facilitate delivery of 23,000 homes by 2021 across 15 Local Authority areas
- Identification and prioritisation of 23 Major Urban Housing Development Sites, on both privately-owned and state-owned lands, with capacity to deliver 30,000 new homes
- A new, dedicated Housing Delivery Office has been established to support local authorities, AHBs and all stakeholders to increase and accelerate housing provision
- Planning reforms in place to facilitate fast-tracking of planning applications for large (100+ units) housing and student accommodation developments
- Rent Pressure Zones designated to cap rent increases at 4% per annum for 3 years in areas covering 57% of all tenancies nationwide
- Repair and Lease and Buy and Renew schemes in place as part of National Vacant Housing Strategy to bring vacant stock into use for social housing purposes
- Over 3,000 sustainable exits from homelessness during 2016 (up from 2,322 in 2015) and €98m in place to meet increased demand in 2017

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### Action Plan

- Ireland's first ever Minister for Housing was appointed and a new Cabinet Committee on Housing established to prioritise action on housing and homelessness.
- The Special Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness, established in April 2016, presented its final report on 17 June 2016. The Committee heard from over 35 groups and accepted over 80 written submissions from the public and interested stakeholders.
- Taking into account the Report of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness and the views of external stakeholders Rebuilding Ireland, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness was launched in July 2016 setting out actions under five pillars to increase housing supply by

25,000 new homes every year by 2021, as well as 47,000 new social housing units, through an investment of some €5.5bn.

- Detailed quarterly reports are published on the new dedicated website [www.rebuildingireland.ie](http://www.rebuildingireland.ie) outlining specific progress on implementation of each action. This site also includes new monthly Housing Activity Reports drawing together the most up-to-date data on housing market activity, including residential planning permissions, housing commencements and completions, and social housing output.

### **Increasing Supply**

- In overall terms, around 15,000 dwellings were completed in 2016 and connected by the ESB to the grid, representing an 18% year on year increase. The output for 2017 is expected to reach 18,000 homes.
- A new Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map has been published online, with details of over 700 local authority-owned sites; 73 sites owned by the Housing Agency; and 30 sites owned by Government Departments or semi-State agencies who have earmarked lands suitable for housing. These sites total c.2,000 hectares, with the potential to deliver 50,000 homes. The map will be updated regularly to record the development and use of these lands to ensure that the best possible information is publicly available.
- 34 public infrastructure projects across 15 Local Authority areas have been approved under the new €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund which was established to provide access infrastructure to facilitate the opening up of private development on major housing sites.
- Enabling infrastructure works are underway in Cherrywood, Dublin which will pave the way for the delivery of 7,000 homes, including 1,300 build-to-rent, 10% of which will be social housing units.

- A report on unfinished housing developments was published recently and shows that in 2016 some 248 developments were resolved with 2,000 homes being used for social housing. There are 420 developments remaining, down from 3,000 in 2010, representing an 85% decrease.

- NAMA has funded the delivery of some 4,700 units, exceeding its initial target to fund the delivery of 4,500 homes in the three years to end 2016. NAMA also undertook to facilitate and to fund, subject to commercial viability, the delivery of 20,000 units to end-2020 on residential sites securing its loans.

- 2,546 units were delivered from October 2015 to end February 2017 with construction underway to deliver another 1,833 units and planning permission secured for an additional 8,671 units.

- Measures to address land hoarding are being developed and will be proposed as amendments for inclusion in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 which is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

- With effect from 1 January 2017, planning authorities are required to establish and maintain a register of vacant sites in their functional areas. An information session was held for planning authorities and guidelines have issued in relation to the practical implementation of the levy provisions.

- The construction sector benefits from a reduced VAT rate of 13.5% compared to 23% in other sectors of the economy. The Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness which reported in June 2016 recommended that the Housing Agency make an annual audit of private construction costs, including VAT, and make recommendations to Government aimed at making private housing more affordable.

- The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provides for the fast-tracking of planning applications for large-scale housing developments (100+ units) and the submission of planning applications of same directly to An Bord Pleanála. The new arrangements are expected to come into operation in May 2017.
- A High-Level Implementation Group has been established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Organisational Review of An Bord Pleanála. The Terms of Reference and Plan for Implementation were published in November.
- Building regulations incorporate the national performance requirements for buildings and are reviewed on an on-going basis. Reviews in 2016 include the areas of drainage and waste water disposal; conservation of fuel and energy; and fire safety.
- A major public consultation was launched in February 2017 to inform the development of a new National Planning Framework 'Ireland 2040 - Our Plan'. The consultation discussed how to secure sustained, long-term and regionally balanced progress on social, economic and environmental fronts.

### Supports

- A Help-to-Buy Scheme was launched to assist first-time buyers obtain a deposit to purchase a new-build property or to build their own home. The scheme, which applies from 19 July 2016 to end 2019, provides a rebate of income tax paid of up to 5% of the value of a new home to a maximum of €20k. As of 12 April 2017, some 5,222 applications to the first stage were received. A total of 1,236 claims have been made, with 753 of these approved. In addition, 199 contractors have registered and been approved as 'Qualifying Contractors'.
- New Central Bank mortgage rules took effect on 1 January 2017 which means First Time

Buyers now only need a 10% deposit on the overall value of the property. The 20% deposit requirement still applies for all other buyers.

- As of 1 February 2017, new measures require mortgage lenders to explain to borrowers how their variable interest rates have been set, including in the event of an increase. The measures will also improve the level of information to be provided to borrowers about other mortgage products their lender provides that could provide savings for the borrower.
- In April 2017, the Central Bank published further research it undertook into mortgage switching. The review found that while those borrowers who switched their mortgage had a positive experience, lenders could be doing more to facilitate consumers who are thinking about switching. The Central Bank will publish a consultation paper later this year which will set out proposed measures to help any consumer who is considering switching.
- Mortgage interest relief is to be extended beyond December 2017 out to 2020, as announced in Budget 2017. The details of the extension will be set out in Budget 2018.

### Social Housing

- During 2016, just over 19,000 households had their social housing needs met, ahead of the target of just over 17,000 households set for the year. As part of this overall delivery some 5,300 homes were built, purchased or refurbished, exceeding the target for the year by over 1,000.
- Circa €200m was provided in 2016 under the Social Housing Investment Programme buying over 1,300 houses and apartments for use as social housing units by local authorities.
- In July 2016, eight sites located in Cork, Galway, Waterford, Clare, Kildare and Roscommon, were announced for development of social housing through Public

Private Partnership, with a capital value of approximately €100m.

- An additional 12,075 households were supported by the Housing Assistance Payment scheme in 2016, meeting the Rebuilding Ireland target. As of mid-April, over 20,700 households are being supported by HAP, of which some 7,000 households were previously in receipt of Rent Supplement. A target of 15,000 additional households has been set for 2017, with 4,110 additional tenancies supported in Quarter 1 2017.
- An allocation of €1.2bn was announced in Budget 2017 for social housing programmes, a 50% increase on 2016, which will meet the needs of 21,000 families in 2017. Measures include supporting the delivery of 4,450 units, and supporting an additional 15,000 households through HAP.
- Since 1 March 2017, HAP has been made available to all local authority areas with €153m provided for the scheme in 2017.
- A Social Housing Design, Approval and Delivery Process and Procedures Review has recently been completed and its recommendations are being implemented, including introducing a 'pre-approval' stage, exploring opportunities for the telescoping of the first two stages of the process, and undertaking further work to ascertain the reason for the low level of uptake on the one-stage approval process.
- A review of disparate systems of differential rents for social housing across local authorities is underway and a public consultation with key stakeholders was held earlier this year. The review is due to be completed in mid-2017.
- New regulations for credit unions introduced by the Central Bank in January 2016 include that investment by credit unions in projects of a public nature can include, but are not limited to, investments in social housing projects. The Central Bank is currently reviewing the investment regulations for credit unions and on completion of their review will undertake a public consultation in 2017.
- The credit union representative bodies have set out proposed means by which funding could be provided to Approved Housing Bodies, by credit unions, for the development of social housing. Officials from the Department of Housing and the Department of Finance have met with the Central Bank to provide information of a technical nature in relation to social housing funding arrangements. The proposals which have been put forward are currently being considered.
- Under the Buy and Renew scheme, €25m is being made available in 2017 to support Councils and Approved Housing Bodies purchase and renew housing units in need of remediation, and make them available for social housing use.
- A Working Group was established in September 2016 to develop a National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy. The Strategy is well advanced and will be published in the coming weeks.
- Over €24m has been allocated for the return of over 1,400 vacant local authority properties to productive use in 2017. A key priority of the Vacant Properties Programme is to rehouse homeless families to the fullest extent possible in homes that have been restored to an energy efficient condition.
- A Repair and Leasing Scheme has been introduced, targeted at owners of vacant houses. €32m will be provided in 2017 to fund the repair of up to 800 vacant properties and make them available as new homes for families on local authority waiting lists. The Scheme, which was initially introduced in Waterford and Carlow local authority areas, was extended nationwide on 23 February 2017.

- A one-stop-shop has been established within the Housing Agency to provide for enhanced cooperation between Approved Housing Bodies and local authorities to maximise potential yield from local authority lands.
- The Housing Agency has been active in utilising its €70m rolling fund to purchase vacant properties from banks and investment companies. To end-March, bids have been accepted on 373 properties with a total value of €61.58m. Contracts have been signed on 261 of these properties with 144 purchases closed. Bids are pending on a further 23 properties. The process of selling the properties on to Approved Housing Bodies is underway.
- The Strategy for the Rental Sector was launched in December to provide rent predictability in areas of unsustainable rental inflation, as well as containing a number of measures to support supply by encouraging new investment and bringing unused capacity to the market.
- A rent predictability measure came into effect on 13 December 2016 in the four Dublin Local Authority areas and in Cork city. It was extended in January to a further 23 towns and all of Galway city and in March to Cobh and Maynooth. In these Rent Pressure Zones, rent increases will be capped at 4% per annum for the next 3 years.
- An Expert Group has been established to explore the opportunities for developing a viable cost rental model for Ireland and a larger and more dynamic not-for-profit and Approved Housing Body sector. The group will examine the experience of other countries and develop a roadmap before the end of the year to grow new capacity for delivering cost rental options.
- The Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 has been signed and will come into force on 1 July giving effect to commitments under the Governments' Rental Strategy 2017.
- A review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme has been undertaken incorporating comprehensive data received from local authorities and a wide-ranging public consultation process. A report setting out findings and recommendations is currently being finalised.
- The tax relief for landlords who provide accommodation to tenants in receipt of social housing supports has been maintained.
- The Finance Act 2016 provides for the phased restoration of interest deductibility for landlords from 75% to 100% in increments of 5 percentage points per year. The deductible percentage for 2017 has been increased to 80%.
- The income ceiling under the Rent-A-Room Scheme was increased on 1 January 2017 by €2,000 bringing it to €14,000 per annum.
- A Working Group has been established to review the tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers. The Group has held a public consultation and will report on the potential for changes to tax measures in the coming months.
- As announced in Budget 2017, the scope of the Living City Initiative has been expanded to include landlords as well as removing the cap on maximum floor size.
- Measures included in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 to assist the increase in the delivery of student accommodation projects include, fast tracking planning applications to An Bord Pleanála for student accommodation projects of 200+ bed spaces, and facilitating low-cost funding availability from the Housing

Finance Agency to the Higher Education Institutes specifically for student accommodation projects.

### **Mortgage Arrears**

- The Central Bank review of Mortgage Arrears Solutions, published in December 2016, notes that progress on mortgage arrears is well established and clearly moving in the right direction. It also considers the range of restructures offered by banks to be broadly appropriate in balancing consumer protection imperatives, and maintaining a mortgage market for all borrowers, and a functioning banking system.
- The number of mortgage accounts for principal dwelling houses in arrears fell further in the fourth quarter of 2016, marking the fourteenth consecutive quarter of decline.
- The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission have commenced a study into the market structure, legislation and regulation of the mortgage market in Ireland and expects to produce its final report in May 2017.
- A Review of the Mortgage-to-Rent Scheme was published in February with significant changes to the Scheme announced that will facilitate more households in long-term arrears to remain in their homes.
- A new mortgage resolution service, Abhaile, was launched in October 2016 to provide free independent financial and legal advice, and assistance for people at risk of losing their homes due to mortgage arrears. An information campaign was launched in 2017 to raise awareness for the new service.
- Under the Abhaile service, by mid-April over 6,100 vouchers had issued for free financial or legal advice; MABS court mentors were present at all Country Registrar repossession lists nationwide; and duty solicitors were provided at nearly 300 repossession lists

nationwide to assist unrepresented borrowers in mortgage arrears.

- A public consultation on the thresholds and processes for Personal Insolvency Arrangements was published in March 2017. Submissions received will be reviewed and a report is expected to be published before year end.
- Dedicated new court arrangements for repossessions and the option of a system of specific court sittings for repossessions at specific venues on specific dates is being actively considered.

### **Homelessness**

- The 2017 budget for homelessness was increased by 40% from €70m to €98m, which will provide for 3,000 exits from emergency accommodation through a range of funding mechanisms.
- 810 new tenancies were set up under the HAP Homeless pilot in 2016, significantly exceeding the target of 550 tenancies. A target of 1,200 additional households has been set for 2017, with more than 400 tenancies put in place since January 2017.
- In 2016, over 3,000 households exited homelessness reflecting the significant on-going work being done to help households and individuals transition from homelessness to more permanent homes.
- Three new homeless facilities were put in place and fully operational over the Christmas period, as well as a further upgraded facility, providing an additional 206 beds for those who were sleeping rough and providing for additional capacity for anybody else who might require assistance.
- From 1 July 2016, the rent limits under the Rent Supplement and the Housing Assistance Payment schemes were increased in both urban and rural areas reflecting local rents.

- The Threshold Tenancy Protection Service has been extended to Galway City and Counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, the urban areas where the housing pressures are most acute. Since the introduction of this flexible approach, approximately 11,500 tenants have been supported through increased rent supplement payments.
- An Office of Government Procurement Framework Agreement has been put in place to facilitate accelerated delivery of rapid build homes during 2017 and 2018. At the end of 2016, a total of 350 rapid build homes were advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction.



## Creating a Social Economy - Jobs and the Economy

The priority is to protect our growing economy and in so doing ensure the gains of further progress are shared fairly across all of society and all regions of the country. It is accepted that higher levels of public investment in social and economic infrastructure, skills, childcare, and community empowerment are needed for more inclusive, fairer and sustainable patterns of economic growth.

Recovery is perhaps most clearly evident in the labour market with over 2 million people now at work in Ireland, the highest number of people at work since 2008. Since the first Action Plan for Jobs was launched in Quarter 1 2012 there are now 205,900 more people at work with about 1,300 new jobs a week created in 2016. The Action Plan for Jobs 2017 launched in February sets out 164 actions to create 45,000 jobs in 2017 and has a strong focus on addressing the immediate and medium-term challenges posed by Brexit, as well as a more volatile and changing global trading and investment environment.

In 2016 IDA Ireland supported clients delivered nearly 12,000 net new jobs with total direct employment by overseas companies in Ireland now standing at just under 200,000 people, the highest on record. In the indigenous sector, Enterprise Ireland clients have hit record jobs numbers in recent years and at the end of 2016, employment stood also at just over 200,000 including a net increase of over 9,000 over 2016.

The Local Enterprise Offices clients employ almost 35,000 jobs and in 2016 created over 3,600 net new jobs. Through its 'Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur' programme, the LEOs also encouraged over 1,800 young people to start or grow their own business. The LEOs will target a similar level of jobs and start up performance in 2017.

Ireland's prudent economic and fiscal policies implemented over recent years have facilitated the strong recovery in the public finances. In 2016 Ireland formally exited a seven-year period of economic scrutiny by the European Commission following reduction of the budget deficit to below the threshold of 3% of GDP. To further protect the public finances against external shocks, a contingency fund will be established known as a "rainy day" fund, where it is proposed to retain within the Exchequer about €1bn per annum from 2019 of the available fiscal space.

The 2017 Revised Estimates outlined a total allocation of €58.1bn which is consistent with expenditure to tax ratio of greater than 3:1 in favour of investment in public services exceeding the commitment of 2:1 and reflecting the Government's commitment to rebuilding and investing in public services. In Budget 2017 the Government was in a position to allocate significant additional resources to public spending with a €2.2bn increase in Gross Voted Expenditure compared to 2016. This level of investment allowed for the recruitment of additional nurses, doctors, teachers, Garda and special needs assistants which will improve public service delivery to citizens. It also funded the Action Plan for Housing, improvements in childcare funding and a number of increases to Social Welfare rates.

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- In December, the National Competitiveness Council published its Competitiveness Challenge 2016 report, outlining a range of actions designed to boost Ireland's international competitiveness.
- Ireland is on track to eliminate the remaining Government deficit and achieve a balanced budget by 2018. The European Commission assessed the 2017 Draft Budgetary Plan submitted in October 2016 as being 'broadly compliant' with its Stability and Growth Pact obligations.
- The progress made to date and the Government's ongoing commitment to the fiscal rules has been acknowledged by the markets in the continuing low yields achieved at bond auctions. Our debt level has fallen from a peak of almost 120% of GDP in 2012, to 75.4% of GDP in 2016 and is projected to reduce to 62.8% of GDP in 2021. A lower debt target of 45% of GDP will help to provide additional fiscal 'shock absorption' capacity to the public finances against potential external shocks, such as Brexit.
- The 2016 Summer Economic Statement allocated €5.74bn of the estimated fiscal space for 2017 to 2021 to expenditure and €2.54bn to tax reductions. A further €3bn was earmarked for the Rainy Day Fund, which will provide a further counter-cyclical buffer. A policy paper on this proposal is nearing completion which will form the basis for consultation with the Oireachtas.
- The nominal split in Budget 2017 between expenditure increases and tax reductions was over 3:1. In the draft Stability Programme Update for 2017, expenditure for 2021 is now projected to be €58.96bn, nearly €7.2bn more than 2016 which means more funding available to spend on delivering essential public services.
- In 2016 Ireland's real GDP growth continued robustly at an overall 5.2%. The draft 2017 Stability Programme Update forecasts real GDP growth for 2017 of 4.3% moderating to 3.7% in 2018 and 3.1% in 2019.
- An Income Tax Reform Plan was published in July 2016 providing detailed information on the Irish income tax system and how it compares internationally. It also set out economic and tax policy considerations for income tax reform including options for the winding-down of USC over time.
- The three lowest USC rates were reduced by half a per cent in Budget 2017. The ceiling of the band on the reduced 2½% USC charge was also raised to €18,772 to ensure that the salary of a full-time worker on the minimum wage will remain outside the top rates of USC.
- Budget 2017 provided for an increase of 50 cent on a packet of 20 cigarettes; and the Minister announced his intention to introduce a tax on sugar sweetened drinks in April 2018.
- In October 2016, Mr Seamus Coffey was appointed as an independent expert to undertake a review of our corporation tax code. A public consultation on the review was concluded in early April 2017 and Mr. Coffey is expected to submit recommendations in the coming months.
- To mid-April 2017, NAMA had redeemed €29.7bn (98%) of the €30.2bn guaranteed senior debt originally issued and expects to redeem the final €500m by year-end 2017, eliminating the State's contingent liability in its entirety. NAMA expects to redeem its subordinated debt of €1.6bn in March 2020. NAMA currently projects a surplus in the region of €2.3bn to be returned to the Central Fund once it completes its work.

### **Supporting Jobs and Enterprise**

- By end 2016, there were 66,100 additional people in employment with total employment in the State increased to 2,048,100. Quarter 4

2016 saw the 17th consecutive quarter of annual employment growth.

- The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.2% for April 2017, down from 8.4% in April 2016. The number of persons unemployed decreased by 47,300 when compared to April 2016.
- Implementation of the 2016 Action Plan for Jobs has seen 514 of the 555 measures (93%) completed with key measures delivered including the launch of the National Skills Strategy 2025, the establishment of the Regional Skills Fora, and IDA Ireland constructing advance technology buildings in Sligo, Castlebar and Tralee.
- The Action Plan for Jobs 2017, launched in February, sets out actions to create 45,000 jobs in 2017 and has a strong focus on addressing the immediate and medium-term challenges posed by Brexit, as well as a more volatile and changing global trading and investment environment.
- The Action Plan on Jobless Households which will be published shortly focuses on improving employment rates of households with children – both the traditional ‘nuclear’ family and the lone parent family. It sets out key policy initiatives/actions such as improving incentives and removing barriers including those linked to housing and childcare for people transitioning from welfare to employment and extending the Jobseeker Transition model to adult dependents on jobseeker claims.
- In 2016, Enterprise Ireland client companies created 19,244 new jobs, a net increase of 9,117 jobs with almost two-thirds of these new jobs outside Dublin. Over 201,000 people are now directly employed by EI supported companies, the highest in the history of the Agency. Significantly, over 130,000 (65%) of those 201,000 jobs are outside of Dublin.
- IDA Ireland client companies recorded 18,627 new jobs and a net increase in employment of 11,978 in 2016 and now employ almost 200,000 people across a range of sectors with every region of Ireland posting net gains in jobs in 2016.
- Local Enterprise Offices client companies created 7,883 jobs in 2016 and a net increase of 3,679, while the total number of people employed in LEO supported small businesses stood at 34,634 at the end of 2016.
- An additional €4m in capital funding has been provided for LEOs in 2017 bringing their total capital allocation to €22.5m, an increase of almost 22% over 2016.
- In 2016, a total of 559 new full-time jobs were created in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies. At the end of 2016 there were 7,963 jobs in Údarás supported companies, 7,348 full-time jobs and 615 part-time jobs.
- Enterprise Ireland’s new Strategy 2017 – 2020 looks to increase the reach of client company exports, with two-thirds of exports going beyond the UK, and assist clients create 60,000 new jobs. There will be a major focus on directing resources and expertise to the Eurozone markets, targeting a 50% increase in exports by 2020.
- Enterprise Ireland invested €32m in Irish start-ups in 2016 and supported a total of 229 start-up companies, the highest number to date in a single year.
- CSO figures show the value of exports in 2016 totalled almost €117.6bn, the highest annual total on record and an increase of €5.2bn (+4.7%) over 2015.
- By end 2016, over 12,500 SMEs, operating across all sectors of the Irish economy, have benefited from €544m of Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland loans.

- The Terms of Reference for the independent review of the Tender Advisory Service have been finalised following consultation with the SME Advisory Group and a competition is underway to appoint consultants to conduct the review.
- The Start Your Own Business scheme is being extended for a further two years to continue providing support to long term unemployed persons who wish to create new businesses.
- From 1 January 2017, the Entrepreneur Relief, Capital Gains Tax was amended so that the applicable rate on a lifetime limit of €1m was reduced from 20% to 10%.
- The Earned Income Tax Credit was increased by €400 to €950 in Budget 2017, benefitting over 147,000 self-employed individuals generating business activity across the country.
- A recent survey of self-employed PRSI contributors indicates that 75% would favour an option where they could choose to pay a higher rate of social insurance in return for additional benefits. The review along with the outcomes of an Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund will guide any new policy developments, including Budget 2018.
- Ireland ranks 9th out of 137 countries in the Global Entrepreneurship Development Index which was published in November, a rise of 3 places on last year. Ireland was also ranked 6th of the 41 countries assessed in the European Region.
- The SME Credit Demand Survey for April - September 2016 was published in December and shows 88% of SMEs report increased or stable trading conditions with 65% reporting a profit.
- The Credit Guarantee Scheme 2017 was announced in March and includes an expansion to the existing the Schemes. The new Scheme increases the level of risk the State may take (up to 80% of individual loans), extends the scope to cover other financial product providers, and extends the definition of loan agreements to include other financial products.
- In 2016, the Credit Guarantee Scheme sanctioned over €22.7m for 131 facilities. To end Quarter 1 2017, the credit Guarantee Scheme sanctioned over €69.8m for 437 facilities, supporting the creation and sustainability of over 2,800 jobs in the economy.
- Microfinance Ireland's Quarter 1 report 2017 shows that since its inception Microfinance Ireland has provided €18.2m in loan approvals, which supported 2,948 jobs. There was a strong regional spread with loans granted in all 26 counties with 79% of the loans provided to microenterprises outside Dublin.
- Ireland is on track to meet its €1.25bn drawdown from the EU Horizon 2020 Programme. Researchers and companies in Ireland won a total of €386m in funding from 2014 to February 2017. Higher Education Institutions accounted for €221m of the total and companies won €126m, of which SMEs received €78m.
- Enterprise Ireland announced two new €500,000 Competitive Start Funds (in June and September), to support start-up activity in the manufacturing & internationally traded services sectors, and the agricultural and manufacturing sectors.
- The Financial Times fDi magazine's, "global cities of the future" rankings published in December, sees Dublin move up one place to third, in a list of world cities for Foreign Direct Investment for economic potential and business friendliness.
- In December, the National Competitiveness Council published its Competitiveness

Challenge 2016 report, outlining a range of actions designed to boost Ireland's international competitiveness.

- An investment of €47.4m in 36 research infrastructure and facilities projects through the SFI Research Infrastructure Programme was announced in February 2017. Collaboration is a key focus of the Programme with over 40 companies' availing of the awarded infrastructure through collaborations with the research groups involved.
- In April 2017, funding of €4.6m was announced in 37 SFI funded research projects, which will facilitate the commercialisation of research across a range of disciplines in science, technology, engineering and maths.
- The Health Innovation Hub Ireland was launched in September 2016 to establish Ireland as a leading location for start-ups and expanding healthcare companies, allowing easy interaction with hospitals and primary care centres. The aim is to drive collaboration between the health service and enterprise, leading to the development of new healthcare technologies, products, and services.
- A new Employment Permits Online System was launched in September 2016 achieving a 95% take-up rate in the first two weeks, a take-up rate which has continued since then. Under the new system, the application to decision time can take as little as 5 -7 working days to complete, an excellent timeframe by international comparison.
- 2016 was a record breaking year with 9,584,400 overseas visits to Ireland (+10.9%). Total expenditure by overseas visitors (excl. fares) was €4.577bn (+8.8%) which helped to sustain over 220,000 jobs in communities across the country.
- Measures such as retention of the 9% VAT rate on tourism services and the maintenance of the Air Travel Tax at 0% have enhanced the competitiveness of the tourism industry.
- The process for the review of the Capital Plan has begun ensuring additional funding is allocated in line with national economic and social infrastructure priorities.
- The second report of the Low Pay Commission was published in July 2016. In line with their recommendation, Government agreed an increase in the national minimum hourly rate to €9.25 with effect from 1 January 2017.
- The Government has approved the priority drafting of legislation to address problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work. The legislation will address zero hour contracts, low hour contracts, banded hours and related matters, and will be targeted at low-paid workers in particular.
- Following the recent publication of an Analysis of the Community Employment Programme, new measures were announced to protect the future of employment schemes including widening the range of people who can take part, reducing the entry age to 21, giving a second opportunity to people who have already taken part, and securing the number of places at existing levels for the year ahead.
- An open Call for Submissions was issued in February 2017 on the approach proposed for the design of a Working Family Payment. The design is being guided by two principles - first, that it should ensure that work pays and that no family is better off on welfare than at work and second, that it has a positive effect on child poverty.
- An evaluation of the Springboard+ programme, published in December, shows that 80% of Springboard+ participants (2011 – 2015) are no longer on the live register. Over 30,000 course places were filled on 1,349 courses since 2011

and a further 5,825 place came on stream in autumn 2016.

- From September 2017, the rate of payment for young jobseekers under the age of 26 who participate in the Back to Education scheme will be increased. Participants will be entitled to receive the full maximum rate of jobseeker's payment of €193 per week, as opposed to the €160 which currently applies.
- From September 2017, a new €500 annual Cost of Education Allowance will also be made available to Back to Education scheme participants with children. This will help parents, including lone parents, to return to education.
- The 2016 review of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance published in February 2017, found that the scheme effectively supports jobseekers entrance to the labour market, as participants were twice as likely as non-participants to be off the Live Register both six and 18 months after the end of participation on the scheme. As of January 2017, the qualifying period for Back to Work Enterprise Allowance was reduced from 12 months to 9 months.
- The Category A Capital Acquisitions Tax Threshold that applies to inheritances/gifts from parents to their children has been increased by €30,000 to €310,000. Categories B and C thresholds were increased by 8%.

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Government has moved quickly to put in place strategies and measures to revitalise all of Ireland so that the benefits are felt in every community across all regions. The first step was the establishment of a new Department and Cabinet Minister with responsibility for Regional Development and Rural Affairs to provide greater political coordination and prioritisation of the work right across Government that impact on rural Ireland.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, *Realising our Rural Potential*, was launched on 23rd January 2017 setting out 276 actions for delivery within definite timescales by Government, State agencies and other bodies. Significant progress has already been achieved with a number of key actions already delivered, including:

- The delivery of 500 additional places on the Rural Social Scheme
- The launch of the €2m Community Facilities Scheme
- Grant-aid scheme for community-based CCTV systems
- Opening of a new IDA Advance Technology Building in Tralee
- €20m funding over two years for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- Launch of the €5m CLÁR Programme to support disadvantaged rural communities
- Funding of €1.75m from the Dormant Accounts Fund to support social enterprises
- New capital investment in our National Parks as part of a strategic partnership between the Department and Fáilte Ireland
- A programme of funding worth €9m to support arts and culture centres across the country with 80% of the centres to benefit from the funding will be in rural areas

The rollout of the €250m 2014-2020 LEADER programme will also continue to be managed by the Department, delivering funding to rural areas for projects under a diverse range of themes including enterprise development, rural tourism, social inclusion and the environment. Work involving the key Departments continues to drive implementation of the recommendations of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce and including liaising with local authorities to accelerate the delivery of telecoms infrastructure in rural areas.

The first Progress Reports prepared by the 8 Regional Action Plan Implementation Committees, covering the period to Quarter 2 2016, were published in December 2016. The reports show that good progress is being made in the implementation of the Regional APJs, with an implementation rate of over 90% reported in all regions. Over the past year employment has grown in all regions. 72% of all jobs created in the past year were created outside Dublin. The enterprise agencies are making a significant contribution to employment in the regions - 61% of new jobs by Enterprise Ireland firms in 2016 were outside Dublin and 52% of new jobs by IDA firms in 2016 were outside Dublin.

Rural communities will also benefit from a significant injection of policing resources provided by the Government and the concentrated anti-crime drive coordinated under Operation Thor, including special targeted patrols against criminals who are committing crime across rural Ireland.

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## Rural Action Plan

- On 6 May, the Taoiseach appointed a new Minister with responsibility for regional development and rural affairs. A new Cabinet Committee on Regional and Rural Affairs was also established.
- The Action Plan for Rural Development, 'Realising our Rural Potential', was launched in January 2017 containing over 270 actions. This is the first time a framework such as this has been developed to provide a co-ordinated approach across Government to the economic and social development of rural areas.
- The actions in the three year plan to be delivered over the period up to 2020 are spread over five thematic pillars aimed at:
  - 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.
- The first progress reports on the implementation of the eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs were published in December. Employment increased in all regions and 70% of the new jobs added in 2016 were outside Dublin. The fastest growing regions in terms of employment were the Mid-West (up 7.4%), the West (up 5.5%) and the South East (up 4.6%). County Councils are playing a key role in the delivery of the Regional Action Plans, with Chief Executives from every county represented on the Regional Implementation Committee for their own region's Action Plan.
- To support regional economic development, the IDA capital budget was increased in Budget 2017 by 22% enabling three more new regional Advanced Facilities to be progressed. Capital funding was also increased by 22% for Local Enterprise Offices.
- Funding Agreements have been signed in all 28 sub-regional areas designated for LEADER, opening access to €250m in funding for enterprise development, job creation and the development of sustainable community infrastructure across rural Ireland. Local Action Groups are currently concluding calls for proposals and finalising project applications.
- A new regional funding initiative of up to €60m will be launched in the coming months to support collaborative approaches to grow and sustain jobs across the regions.
- A Town Centre Revival Framework was published in April 2017 to support towns and address the challenges of creating a vibrant and viable town centre. The Framework includes an Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal which is intended to be a blueprint for towns and villages, guiding them through the stages of town centre renewal.
- €20m has been made available for an enhanced 2017 Town and Village Scheme. The scheme which was launched in April will focus on improving the economic development of our smaller rural towns and villages, and is expected to support up to 300 towns and villages over the next 15 months. This builds on the success of the €10m 2016 scheme which supported 170 towns and projects supporting smaller towns.
- In 2016, CLÁR funding of €8.24m was allocated for 651 small infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant depopulation. The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched in March with funding of €5m.
- Funding of €7.44m was approved under the 2016 Rural Recreation Scheme for 117 projects to facilitate the development and maintenance of new recreational facilities. The 2017 Scheme will be launched shortly.



- In 2016, €6.14m was approved for 47 projects nationwide under the REDZ initiative, which aims to stimulate economic development in rural towns and their hinterlands.
- In 2016, over €1.4m was allocated through the Rural Innovation and Development Fund supporting projects which promoted social farming, female rural entrepreneurs and agri-food tourism.
- The Wild Atlantic Way continues to be developed with the Derrigimlagh Signature Discovery Point opening in July 2016 and the Connemara Cultural Centre at Pearse's Cottage opened in November. Grants were also awarded in July for the development of the Connemara Greenway and towards Phase 1 of the development of new visitor facilities on the Great Blasket Island.
- Work is underway in developing a new Strategy on Greenways to underpin the future development and funding of greenways. In July 2016, over €3.6m in funding was announced for Greenway projects, with projects in Longford and Westmeath complete and the Waterford to Dungarvan Greenway opened in March 2017.
- Grant allocations of €2.77m were made in December for regional Airports - Donegal, Knock, Kerry and Waterford.

### **Rural Broadband**

- The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village, household and business in Ireland. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.
- An updated High Speed Broadband Map was published in April showing areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject

of the current procurement process. It is intended that all premises will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

- With the publication of the updated High Speed Broadband Map the State Intervention Area has now been finalised. There are 540k premises within the State Intervention Area. Formal dialogue has commenced with the 3 qualified bidders who have indicated they will propose a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solutions.
- A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.
- In April, a commitment agreement was signed with eir which will result in high speed broadband being rolled out to an additional 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis by the end of 2018.
- Two Regional Broadband Action Groups were established in 2016, with membership drawn from all 31 Local Authorities, to identify barriers that could delay the National Broadband Plan rollout and agree and oversee any mitigation actions.
- Funding for an officer with specific responsibility for broadband has been provided to all local authorities. 29 Broadband Officers are currently in place, with the remaining two positions in the process of being filled. Each Broadband Officer is acting as a single point of contact for telecommunications operators in respect of the roll out of

broadband and telecommunications infrastructure more generally.

- A Mobile Phone and Broadband Access Taskforce was established in July 2016 to identify tangible actions that can be taken to improve the quality of broadband and mobile voice services. The Taskforce published its final report in December setting out 40 actions to alleviate barriers to improved mobile reception and broadband access. Quarterly progress reports will be published, with the first report to be published in Quarter 2 2017. A comprehensive review will be undertaken after the first year.

### **Post Offices and Community Banking**

- The Post Office Network Renewal Implementation Group, independently chaired by Bobby Kerr, examined a number of issues relating to the post office network, including the number and spatial distribution of post offices, branch modernisation, the streamlining of products and services, and postmaster contracts. Mr. Kerr submitted his final report to An Post in December 2016.
- A Post Office Hub Working Group was established in July 2016 to examine how Post Offices could act as community hubs. The Working Group report has recommended piloting a Shared Value model in post offices, which would see local post offices act a multi-purpose space for the community. It is anticipated that four pilots would commence in 2017.
- The contract has been renewed with An Post to provide pensions, child benefit and other social welfare payments in cash at post offices. In 2016, more than 35 million payments amounting to some €8bn were made through post offices, with a similar number of payments expected to be made in 2017. Government policy was also reaffirmed whereby all new claimants for pensions, child benefit and most other social welfare

payments should be informed of the option to receive cash payments at their local post office.

- Work has commenced on a proposed new model of community banking. A public consultation was launched in March 2017 and a number of bilateral meetings have taken place, including with the representatives of the German Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation and Irish Rural Link.
- The Credit Union Advisory Committee's Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations in the Commission on Credit Unions Report was published in July 2016. An Implementation Group has been put in place to oversee and monitor implementation of the recommendations, which will support credit unions in many ways including in developing their business model.
- The Department of Finance has requested the Central Bank to review the continued appropriateness of the savings limits on Credit Union members.
- As of beginning of April 2017, over 100 credit unions, representing 222 credit union locations, have signed up as Personal Micro Credit scheme participants. The loan scheme provides low-cost loans to low-income families as an alternative to money-lenders.

### **Raised Bogs**

- The National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 2017-2022 is expected to be published in the coming months. The Plan will set out the approach to how the raised bog SACs (Special Areas of Conservation) are to be conserved and restored and how this is to be balanced with addressing the needs of stakeholders.
- The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill, published in July 2016, will reconfigure the Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network and allow for the de-designation of 39 raised bog Natural

Heritage Areas and the part de-designation of 7 raised bog NHAs.

- Domestic turf cutting on 36 raised bog Natural Heritage Areas ceased from 1 January 2017, unless consent is obtained to cut turf on a site on an individual basis. Compensation has been made available to affected turf cutters.

## Health

This Government is committed to developing a health service that puts patients firmly at the centre, one which cares for patients on the basis of medical need where people feel valued, respected and well cared for. We are striving to achieve a health service that promotes positive lifestyles, both physical and mental and one that values healthcare professionals, for their skills and for their views.

In this past year we have clearly demonstrated our commitment to achieving these goals underpinned by an unprecedented investment of €14.6bn in 2017 which will make a real difference to the service we can deliver and allow the health service to plan for the challenge of increasing demand from a growing and ageing population. Some of the progress we are making includes :

- Easing the burden on parents of children with a disability, by providing an additional 10,000 children in receipt of DCA with full medical cards
- Reducing the prescription charges for 390,000 people over 70 and their dependants.
- Negotiating a new three year deal on the cost of medicines, releasing hundreds of millions which will be reinvested in health and specifically in new and innovative drugs.
- Publishing the National Standards for Bereavement Care following pregnancy loss and perinatal death and the first ever HIQA Standards for maternity services.
- Planning for a statutory scheme for home help so we can turn the important wish of enabling people to grow old in their own home into a reality.
- Making Orkambi and Kalydeco available for adults and children with Cystic Fibrosis
- Publishing and commenced implementation of our first ever National Obesity Strategy.
- Introducing plain packaging for tobacco products in Ireland effective from this September.
- The launch of new National Cancer Strategy for the next decade, to be published shortly.
- The launch of the country's first ever National Patient Safety Office
- Implementation of the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management system and the roll out of our new electronic health record system
- Government approval for the investment required to award the construction contracts for the building of the new National Children's hospital

There is much more underway to improve and develop our public health service over the longer term. This requires shifting our model of care towards more comprehensive and accessible primary care and key to this being the negotiation of a new GP contract, which is underway. Also key is increasing health service capacity, in the form of physical infrastructure (a Bed Capacity review is underway) and staffing, to address unmet need and future demographic requirements. We must exploit the full potential of integrated care programmes and eHealth to achieve service integration and strengthen incentives for providers to effectively respond to unmet health care needs by ramping up Activity Based Funding. We must further develop Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations and empower the voice of the clinician and provide them with opportunities to contribute to the management of our health services.

- An All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Health Care was established in June to develop a 10-year plan for of the health service. The Committee published an interim report in January outlining areas of consensus including in particular the need for integrated care, and for the reorientation of services towards primary care. The deadline for completion of its final report has been extended to 31 May 2017.
- An additional €497m has been provided for Health in 2017 bringing total spending to €14.6bn which will help deliver new developments and services including for those on waiting lists, children with disabilities and older people.
- In July 2016, a new four-year agreement was signed with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association that will keep prices of medicines in Ireland on a downward trajectory and will save up to €600m in cumulative savings from IPHA companies over the period with potential for more than €150m in savings from non-IPHA companies.
- Funding of €5m has been allocated in 2017 for primary care services to provide for counselling and psychological supports for children under 18 years of age. 20 Staff Grade Psychologists for Children are in the process of being recruited in geographical areas where there are none or inadequate numbers of posts in place. Approval has also been given for the recruitment of approx. 114 Assistant Psychologist posts on a two-year pilot basis across the primary care psychology services.
- In July 2016, the GP training intake increased from 157 to 172 places and the HSE's 2017 National Service Plan envisages a further increase, to 187 places in 2017.
- Funding has been made available to enable the recruitment of 1,000 additional nurses in 2017.
- The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is underway and initial engagement with GP representative bodies commenced in January 2017. The aim is to develop a new modern GP services contract which will incorporate a range of standard and enhanced services to be delivered. These discussions will address a wide range of issues, including the role of GPs in delivering chronic care within the community.

### **Primary Care**

- The Government is fully committed to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. To date, there are 99 Primary Care Centres in operation with a number of further locations under construction or at an advanced stage of planning. 17 centres are expected to open in 2017 with a further 11 centres to open in 2018.
- €4m was made available in 2016 to recruit 83 new full-time staff in Speech and Language Therapy Services to specifically focus on speech and language therapy waiting lists in Primary Care and Social Care for children up to 18 years old. Nearly 70 have commenced with recruitment on-going.
- The agreement reached with the Irish Medical Organisation on rural practice is being implemented including changes in the qualifying criteria for rural support, an increase in the rural practice allowance and amending the special items of service.
- The recently enacted Health (Amendment) Act 2017 will provide a medical card to all children in respect of whom a Domiciliary Care Allowance payment is made, benefiting in the region of 10,000 children. These medical cards will be certified for use from 1 June 2017.
- The Clinical Advisory Group on Medical Cards is continuing its work on the development of

guidance on assessing medical card applications involving significant medical conditions. A framework for assessment and measurement of the burden of disease and appropriate operational guidelines for the medical card scheme has been completed and is being considered by the HSE.

### **Emergency and Acute Services**

- Implementation of Hospital Groups is continuing on an administrative basis. Hospitals are working together to support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care and ensuring that patients who require true emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals.
- Work is underway on a national Bed Capacity Review to examine key elements of primary and community care infrastructure in addition to hospital facilities. The Review will be advanced sufficiently to inform the mid-term review of the Government's capital programme later this year, and will be completed by the end of 2017.
- Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of the Government's key priorities. An additional €15m was allocated in Budget 2017, rising to €50m in 2018, to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to reduce waiting lists.
- In December 2016, approval was granted to the NTPF for a Day case waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2,000 Daycases will be managed through this process and patients started to receive their appointments in April.
- Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 are being developed in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services in order to reduce the numbers of long waiting patients, and are expected to be published shortly.
- While Patient Experience Times, which track the time it takes from when an individual attends an Emergency Departments to admission or discharge, have shown some improvement over the Winter Initiative despite increase in attendance, performance has been variable. €40m additional investment drove a number of initiatives to reduce overcrowding and waiting times in EDs and further measures to improve patient experience times are being examined for 2017.
- Work to deliver a full review of Medical Assessment Units, Urgent Care Centres, and Minor Injuries Clinics is at an initial scoping stage and will progress during 2017. It is important that the timing of this review fits in with other work on-going in relation to the Bed Capacity Review and the development of a model of acute care as part of an integrated model of care for the health service.
- In February, funding was announced to proceed to the design phase of a new Emergency Dept for University Hospital Galway. A submission has recently been made by Beaumont Hospital for the development of an Emergency Department. Further work on the proposal is on-going with engagement taking place between the HSE, the Hospital Group and Beaumont Hospital.
- Construction of the new children's hospital can commence within weeks following the Government's recent approval of the investment required to enable the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board to award the construction contracts. The contract will be for building the main children's hospital on the St James Hospital campus and the two Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centres on the Tallaght and Connolly hospitals campuses.
- As recommended in the Herity Report, an additional €0.5m in funding is being provided to University Hospital Waterford in 2017 to

enable the hospital to provide 2 additional cath lab sessions (8 hours) per week.

### **Creating a Healthy Ireland**

- Work on the new National Cancer Strategy is advanced and publication is expected shortly. Outcomes for those with a cancer diagnosis have improved and five year cancer survival is now at 61%. The new Strategy will aim to build on the significant improvements which have been made in cancer care in recent years and will provide the overall strategic direction for cancer control for the next decade.
- The National Women & Infants Health Programme, established in January 2017, is working on an implementation plan for the National Maternity Strategy, which is expected to be finalised by the end of June.
- €3m development funding was provided for maternity services in 2016 and included funding for additional staff, including 100 midwives, the development of specialist bereavement teams and for the implementation of the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management System. Increased funding of €6.8m being provided for maternity services in 2017 will allow for the continued implementation of the Strategy.
- The extension of the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus vaccines commenced 1 December 2016.
- The Treatment Benefit scheme was extended in March to some 450,000 self-employed people and their dependent spouses/civil partners or cohabitants for the first time. Self-employed people can now get the same regular dental and optical examinations, free of charge, that until now were only available to employees, as well as a grant for hearing aids of 50% of the cost, to a maximum of €500 per aid, every four years.
- In October 2017, the range of benefits under the Dental Benefit and Optical Benefits schemes will be extended, which will benefit over 2.5 million workers, including those who are self-employed.
- In December 2017, the self-employed will have access for the first time to the Invalidity Pension scheme. This will give the self-employed access to the safety-net of State income supports if they have a serious illness or injury that prevents them from working, without having to go through a means test.
- A Steering Committee, with an independent chair, has been established to advise on the development of the new National Drugs Strategy which will take effect in 2017. The Steering Committee is continuing with its deliberations with a view to presenting its final report shortly.
- The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016, enacted in July, amends and extends the law relating to the prevention of the misuse of certain dangerous or otherwise harmful drugs.
- The Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Bill 2017 which provides for the issue of a licence to operate a supervised injection facility was published in February and is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- The Commencement Order was signed in March for the remaining provisions of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act 2015. These remaining provisions in the Act will commence after six months meaning that all tobacco products manufactured for retail sale in Ireland from 30th September 2017 must be in standardised retail packaging.
- The European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 came into force 20 May 2016. The Regulations provide for more

stringent rules for tobacco and related products including measures for labelling and the regulation of electronic cigarettes.

- The National Patient Safety Office was launched in December to focus on leading key patient safety policy initiatives including progression of patient safety legislation, the establishment of a National Advisory Council for Patient Safety, and development of a model for Patient Advocacy Services. The first phase of the consultation process with key stakeholders on patient safety complaints and advocacy services commenced in March 2017 with a public consultation due to commence in May 2017.
- A cross-sectoral group was established in June 2016 to oversee implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan. An Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 – 2025 was also launched in September 2016 to reverse obesity trends, to prevent health complications.
- A National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland network was launched in November to develop a structure and provide supports at local level to implement Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025.
- An Interdepartmental group has been established to progress the Fit for Work Programme, 'Healthy You: Early Intervention'. A stakeholder forum was held in December to obtain views about the scope of the programme as well as identifying issues around its design and operation.
- The interim report on the implementation of the National Rare Disease Plan was published in March and a National Rare Disease Office has been established.
- The Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill was published in January 2017 and is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill

will provide for awards of damages in cases of catastrophic injury by way of periodic payments orders giving much-needed financial security to those who require life-long care. It will also support the open disclosure to patients of patient safety incidents.



## Disability, Mental Health and Older People

The Government is committed to continue to maintain and provide services to people with disabilities to empower them to live independent lives, experience easier access to their chosen services and allow them to tailor their own supports. To this end the Taskforce on Personalised Budgeting established in September 2016 will report by the end of 2017. Employment of people with a disability remains a high priority as is evidenced by the recent publication of the report Making Work Pay for people with disabilities and the implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. A medical card will be provided to some 9,800 children in whom a Domiciliary Care Allowance is paid. These cards will be in use from 1st June 2017. The needs of school leavers with disabilities who leave school in 2017 will be addressed. Continue, in full consultation with families, to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings to allow them to live independent community based lives.

This Government is fully committed to improving all aspects of mental health services and to implementing our mental health strategy 'A Vision For Change', prioritising mental health with additional Budget allocations of €35m in 2016 and €15m in 2017 (rising to €35m in 2018). Progress continues to be made in implementing the recommendations of A Vision for Change. A key focus has been approval of some 1,550 additional posts to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams; enhancing specialist community mental health and forensic services, increasing access to counselling and psychotherapy; and developing suicide prevention initiatives. Among the mental health priorities for 2017, as agreed in the HSE Service Plan, are improvement across Counselling services, enhanced Community Mental Health Teams, improved 24/7 response, and Liaison Services. Work is also on-going in areas such as Psychiatry-of-Later Life, Perinatal Mental Health, ADHD in Adults and Children, and Dual-Diagnosis of those with Mental Illness and Substance Misuse. The Department of Health recently commenced a policy review of A Vision for Change, beginning with an evidence-based expert review of international evidence of best practice and of existing service development. This was completed in February 2017 and will be published shortly. It will inform the next stage of the policy review process.

Promoting care in the community for older people so that they can continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible is a key health priority for the Partnership Government. Homecare is an increasingly important part of the supports on offer to older people with an estimated 20% of the over 65 population receiving some form of community-based support service annually from the State. A consultation process is to be launched shortly, to determine what type of home care scheme is best for Ireland, in relation to both regulation and funding.

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme with a Budget of €940m in 2017, continues to support over 23,600 people along with the 47,800 supported with home help. In the context of the National Positive Ageing Strategy, Ireland's first National Positive Ageing Stakeholder Forum took place recently to engage with civic society on these and other matters important to older people.

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## Disability Services

- The Disability/Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 was published in December towards the ratification of UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities. The Bill is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- A Task Force on Personalised Budgets was established in September to make recommendations on a personalised budgets model for people with a disability. In January, the Taskforce published a Work Plan for 2017 identifying seven work streams with timeframes.
- The “Make Work Pay” Report, designed to help people with disabilities overcome barriers to finding work, was published in April 2017. A number of the 24 recommendations have already been implemented including: people with a long-term disability payment who move off the payment to get a job will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years and a fast-track return to Disability Allowance or Invalidity Pension for people where employment does not work out.
- The forthcoming Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2017 will include provisions to remove the concept of rehabilitative employment from the Social Welfare code. This will have the effect of reducing the barriers faced by claimants of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension who wish to avail of the earnings disregards provided for in those schemes.
- An evaluation of EmployAbility service was completed in 2016 and made a number of proposals to improve the operation of the service. An event was held in August 2016 to consult with EmployAbility companies and meetings have been held with the EmployAbility Directors forum to advance recommendations of the report.
- In 2016, day services were provided to approximately 1,500 young people with disabilities leaving school and rehabilitative training programmes. An additional €10m in funding is being allocated for 2017 to ensure that appropriate services and supports will be provided.
- 73 people transitioned from institutional settings to community based living in 2016. The transition of further 223 people will be supported in 2017 in line with the policy as set out in “Time to Move on from Congregated Settings”.
- Two reports were published in February into matters relating to the care of individuals with a disability in a foster home in the South East. A Commission of Investigation is in the process of being established into the matters which are the subject of these reports.
- In May 2016, the Carer’s Support Grant was fully restored to its previous level of €1,700. The grant is an annual payment available to all carers providing full-time care and attention to an older person or a child or adult with a disability, regardless of their means or PRSI contributions.
- The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability has been extended to 2020 to continue to deliver on its aims and to guide and progress policy in the coming years. The Second Progress Report on the implementation of the Strategy was published in December and the Third Progress Report will be published in the coming months. Details of current and emerging need collated from City/County local Strategic Plans will also be published and it is hoped to develop the reporting mechanisms further in future years.
- New housing design guidelines for users with mental disabilities were launched in November with a focus on home design that improves independent living and better quality of life for people with mental health issues.

- An Access and Inclusion Model, which provides supports for children with a disability to access the ECCE programme, was introduced in June 2016 and has provided targeted support to children with a disability in over 3,100 instances since its launch.
- As part of the Access Inclusion Model scheme, 18 new expert posts are being recruited for the Early Years Specialist Service which provides expert advice, mentoring and support to pre-school providers. By mid-April, the service had provided advice and guidance in the course of over 5,000 visits to pre-schools.
- During 2016, approximately 6,500 individuals completed safeTALK suicide alertness training and 2,500 completed ASIST which has also become embedded into the new training programme for Gardaí in Templemore.
- 10 Jigsaw projects are currently in place nationally to support the provision of early intervention and psychological services for young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

### **Mental Health**

- An Expert Evidence Review, identified as the first step in determining the parameters of a revision of A Vision for Change, was commissioned in November 2016 to conduct an analysis of national and international best practice in the development and delivery of mental health services. The Review was completed in February 2017 and an Oversight Committee will be established by mid-May to oversee the development of a new policy for mental health, based on the outcome of the Expert Review.
- A National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health was established in August to identify improvements to emotional literacy when talking about mental health, better awareness of and access to services and supports, and improved alignment of services and supports across different providers. Since its establishment the Taskforce has commenced a series of consultations with young people, visited frontline services, and met with service users, parents and staff.
- The National Office for Suicide Prevention with a budget of almost €12m is supporting the cross-sectoral implementation of Connecting for Life, Ireland's national strategy 2015-2020 to reduce suicide with 69 actions spanning 23 lead agencies.
- 2016 saw the launch of the Model of Care and Standard Operating Procedure for assessment and Management of Patients Presenting to the Emergency Department following self-harm - 33.5 Clinical Nurse Specialist posts have been sanctioned and there were 28 CNS self-harm nurses employed in 20 of the 22 Emergency Departments identified to deliver the clinical programme for self-harm.
- The National Office for Suicide Prevention funded the 2016 LGBT Ireland Report, a ground-breaking study of the mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Ireland which will inform future practice.
- A new Wellbeing programme will be introduced to first year students from September 2017 as part of the new Framework for Junior Cycle. The programme will cross the three years of junior cycle and will include learning opportunities to enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students.
- Under the National Dementia Strategy, Dementia specific Intensive home care packages are being delivered to approximately 120 people to support them to continue to live at home. The PREPARED programme is delivering education and training to upskill GPs and primary care teams in dementia diagnosis and management.

- The National Dementia Awareness Campaign – Understand Together was launched in October as part of a 3 year campaign aimed at building awareness and understanding around dementia.
- A Recovery Education Project, funded by Genio, was launched for the Mid-West in November. The project will involve the development of courses on recovery in mental health that can be delivered across the region.
- A National Learning Set for Advancing Recovery in Ireland was launched in November to bring about organisational and cultural changes in mental health services to support those services in becoming more ‘recovery-oriented’.
- A joint North-South 'Concerned About Suicide' leaflet was launched in November to help to raise awareness and put people in contact with sources of support.
- The construction of a new 120 bed hospital in Portrane, to replace the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum, is well advanced. Additional funding of over €50m has been allocated for 2017 and signing of the construction contract for the new facility is expected shortly.
- In 2016, an additional €10m in new development funding for homecare (including home help and home care package provision) and €3.8m is being made available to support the increased cost of existing services.
- In 2016, over 23,100 people were supported under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal) and time spent on a placement list for funding did not exceed four weeks throughout the year. The Department is actively considering aspects of the Scheme in relation to the treatment of assets associated with small businesses and family farms.
- 90 public nursing homes are to be replaced or refurbished over the five-year period from 2016 to 2021. By end of 2016, refurbishment had been completed in respect of 14 public nursing homes with a further 12 public nursing homes scheduled to be refurbished by end-2017.
- Work has commenced on the development of a new funding scheme and system of regulation for the home care sector. In order to progress this work, a review was recently published which looked at the way home care services are funded and regulated in four European countries. A public consultation will now commence to allow people to express their views to help identify major policy options around regulation, financing, assessment and eligibility for a statutory home care scheme.

### **Older People**

- The State pension was increased by €5 per week from March 2017 and the Living Alone Allowance and Free Travel have been protected. In 2016, almost 873,500 people were in receipt of a free travel pass.
- In 2016, approximately 10.57 million home help hours were provided to 47,800 people. 16,450 people were in receipt of a Home Care Package and a further 190 people were in receipt of an Intensive Home Care Package.
- Budget 2017 provides for continuation of the additional €30m for homecare announced in
- Funding for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with Disabilities was increased by 10% in 2016 and over 8,000 households benefitted at a cost of over €50m. For 2017, the funding has been increased to €59m with 10,000 households expected to benefit.
- Since 2 January 2017, carers receive an additional 12 weeks allowance after the person for whom they are caring goes into long-term permanent care.

- The Home Carer's Credit was increased by €100 with effect from January 2017 bringing it to €1,100 per annum, further assisting one income families who care for children or the elderly in the home.
- In 2016, 7,301 people were approved for alarms under the Senior Alert Scheme, with a total spend of €1.8m. Some 568 organisations were also approved to support vulnerable older people. A review of the Scheme was completed in early 2017 which made recommendations for the future of the Scheme.
- Positive Ageing 2016, the first Positive Ageing National Indicator report was launched in November and presents findings from a wide range of existing resources on what matters for older people.
- Ireland's first National Positive Ageing Stakeholder Forum was held recently to engage with civic society in order to advance the National Positive Ageing Strategy, to hear about the issues important to older people and facilitate stakeholder collaboration.
- The Health (Amendment) Act 2017 reduced the prescription charge for medical card holders 70 years of age and over and their dependants. The new charge had been introduced on an administrative basis from 1 March 2017.
- The Rebuilding Ireland Universal Design Challenge 2017 has been launched to stimulate and encourage innovation in designing and delivering housing solutions for older people.
- Funding for the Community Alert Programme has been increased to €497,000 and incorporates the recently announced rebate scheme for local groups registered under the Garda Text Alert Scheme. The funding will also provide for the re-launch of the Crime Prevention Ambassador Scheme.

# Children and Youth Affairs

The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 – Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures – provides the context for the Government's efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people. We also intend that high quality early years care and education is accessible and affordable. To this end a range of key initiatives have been progressed in the past year including a second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme so that all children from age three will have access to high quality pre-school care and education. The Access and Inclusion Model of supports (AIM) was implemented in 2016 to ensure that children with disabilities can access and benefit from the ECCE scheme. Also new financial measures to deliver more affordable childcare to benefit up to 70,000 children and their families in 2017 have been agreed.

The Department is working to ensure child welfare and protection systems are effective and responsive. This entails proactive engagement with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. In addition, significant focus is being placed on ensuring that all stakeholders are prepared for implementation of Children First legislative requirements by the end of 2017. The practice of sending children to St. Patrick's Institution ended with the closure of St Patrick's Institution on 7 April 2017 with all future committals to the Oberstown Children Detention Campus.

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## Early Years and Childcare

- The significant expansion of the Early Childhood Care and Education programme from September 2016, providing 15 hours of free preschool per week for all children from the time they turn three until they go to school, will see the number of children benefiting raised from 67,000 to around 127,000 in a given programme year.
- A range of financial measures were recently announced that will see up to 70,000 children and their families benefit from childcare subsidies from September 2017. A new universal childcare subsidy of up to €80 a month, for children between six months and three years of age, will be provided alongside enhanced targeted childcare subsidies for low income families.
- Work is under way to replace these existing childcare schemes with a new, single Affordable Childcare Scheme with a fully automated online system which will ultimately be used to access and administer childcare supports. The General Scheme for the new Affordable Childcare Scheme Bill was published in January 2017.
- An Access and Inclusion Model, which provides supports for children with a disability to access the ECCE programme, was introduced in June 2016 and has provided targeted support to children with a disability in over 3,100 instances since its launch.
- As part of the Access Inclusion Model scheme, 18 new expert posts are being recruited for the Early Years Specialist Service which provides expert advice, mentoring and support to pre-school providers. By mid-April, parents have been provided with advice and guidance in the course of over 5,000 visits to pre-schools.
- An €8.25m scheme was launched earlier this year to provide access to free childcare for children of families experiencing homelessness and has been extended outside Dublin to nine other regions.
- New childcare regulations came into operation in June 2016 to underpin a number of key reforms to the sector to improve quality standards including, registration and inspection of a pre-school service,

management and staff, care of children, and safety including first aid provision.

- A request for tender issued in April 2017 to develop and pilot a measurement instrument(s) to assess the quality of early years provision, to establish a baseline for of the quality of early years provision and to conduct a first wave of data collection.
- Work has commenced on scoping an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare, with a view to commissioning the review during 2017.
- A Working Group has been established to make recommendations on reforms and supports for the child-minding sector in the short, medium and long term, and the feasibility and implications of the migration from voluntary to mandatory regulation. The Group is expected to produce a Report by the end of May 2017.
- The Report and Action Plan of the Working Group on School Age Childcare (SAC) was published in March 2017 and includes a number of recommendations and actions to assist in opening up accessible, high quality, affordable school age care for all children.
- The SAC Capital Funding programme was launched in March 2017 with €3m being provided in 2017 for major and minor capital grants to ensure sufficient access to high quality and affordable SAC. In addition, a Working Group was established in April 2017 to develop a comprehensive set of Quality Standards for SAC.

### **Protecting the Next Generation**

- A dedicated Prevention and Early Intervention Unit has recently been established in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to focus on early intervention policies that can improve the life outcomes of children in particular, as well as the quality of life of older

people dealing with long term conditions such as chronic illness.

- Two weeks paternity leave is now available for fathers with effect from 1 September 2016 supported by a new Paternity Benefit for eligible employees and self-employed people.
- The Home Carer's Credit was increased by €100 with effect from January 2017 bringing it to €1,100 per annum, further assisting one income families who care for children or the elderly in the home.
- The Statutory Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group has been established and intensive work is underway to ensure that all sectors are ready for commencement of the Children First Act 2015 by end 2017.
- The General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2017 has been approved and published. The Bill will reform guardian ad litem arrangements to ensure the service meets the needs of the children and young people for whom it is intended.
- Funding of €4.5m was secured for 2017 to ensure the continuation of the 13 Area-Based Childhood programmes to the end of the year. Additional funding of €37m was also provided to TUSLA.
- A new Youth Employability Initiative was announced in June with funding of €600,000 for 2016 for programmes targeting disadvantaged young people to improve their employability. Over 1,000 young people aged 15-24 participated in 28 projects. The projects have been completed and are currently being evaluated.
- A National Youth Strategy Lead Team was established in 2016 to co-ordinate, progress and monitor implementation of the National Youth Strategy. Additional funding of €5.5m

was secured in 2017 for youth work programmes.

- €5.1m has been allocated under Dormant Account Funding to the development of new innovative services for children and disadvantaged young people, €3m of which will be targeted at services which will prevent young people falling into trouble.
- An Oversight Committee with an Independent Chair has been established to shape the development of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy. Nationwide youth consultations are currently ongoing which will help inform the development of the Strategy along with consultations previously carried out with transgender identified children and young people.



## Education and Training

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 was launched in September 2016 with 139 actions and hundreds more sub-actions. The overall ambition is to make Ireland's education and training system the best in Europe by 2026. This means an ambition to be the best at delivering a learning experience to highest international standards; harnessing education to break down barriers for groups at risk of exclusion; equipping learners of all ages and capacities to participate and succeed in a changing world; leading in innovation and scientific endeavours and fostering strong relationships between enterprise and education.

Achievements in the first year of the Government include:

- Budget 2017 providing for an extra 2,500 posts in schools, and €36m in extra funding for third level (the first significant increase in a decade)
- Published the School Admissions Bill to end waiting lists and ban admission fees
- Commenced the provisions of fitness to teach so a complaint against a registered teacher can be brought to the teaching council for the first time
- Published the draft of a Bill to introduce a Parent and Student Charter into every school – ensuring better consultation between schools, parents and students
- Secured almost 1,000 extra special needs assistants
- Secured and started implementing new subjects, including coding for primary schools and computer science for leaving cert
- Implementing the first ever Gaeltacht education strategy
- Implementing the International education strategy to bring the value of international education to €2.1bn by 2020
- Published the STEM report, and accepted 21 actions to be implemented as a priority, to make Ireland a world leader in STEM education
- Announced plan to deliver 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030
- Launched and started implementing a new DEIS plan to support disadvantaged pupils, including 79 schools included in the scheme for the first time
- Launched and started implementing Apprenticeship and Traineeship Plan, aimed at providing 50,000 places in 120 schemes by 2020

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### Education Action Plan

- The Department of Education's Strategy Statement and Action Plan for Education was published in September 2016 with a particular focus on disadvantage, skills, and continuous improvement within the education service. An end of year review on the Action Plan for Education 2016 was published in February.
- The new updated Action Plan for Education 2017 was launched in February outlining hundreds of actions and sub-actions to be implemented throughout the year.
- In 2016, 30 new schools and 20 large scale extensions/refurbishments were completed providing 15,290 additional permanent school

places and 4,746 replacement school places. Under the Additional Accommodation Scheme, 182 projects were completed providing 6,998 additional permanent school places.

- The target for 2017 is to deliver in excess of 20,000 additional school places under the Large Scale Projects Programme and additional classrooms under the Additional Accommodation Scheme.
- In October, the EIB agreed a €200m investment loan which will support the construction, enlargement and modernisation of 71 schools over the next 4 years.
- In November 2016, €28.5m was issued under the Minor Works Grant to primary schools throughout the country. In May 2017, €47m was announced under the 2016 / 2017 Summer Works Scheme which will benefit 438 primary and post-primary schools nationwide.
- An additional €458m was provided in Budget 2017 to fund an extensive programme of recruitment in 2017. An additional 2,400 teaching posts will be met through 900 additional resource teachers and 1,500 mainstream teaching posts including 100 guidance counselling posts.

### **Education Inclusion**

- In November 2016, an additional 430 resource teachers were allocated to schools to support children with special needs. This brings the total number of resource teachers for the 2016/17 school year to 7,429 posts, an increase of 9% in twelve months.
- An additional 115 Special Needs Assistants post have been provided for from January to June 2017 bringing the total number of Special Needs Assistants to 13,015, an increase of 22% since 2011.
- The new model for the allocation of special education teachers is being introduced for

mainstream schools with effect from September 2017. Teaching resources to schools are now based on the profiled need of schools and will allow schools to allocate resources to pupils based on their individual learning needs as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of a particular disability.

- A review has commenced of existing Speech and Language services to map existing provision. When completed an implementation group will be appointed to develop proposals for consideration on the implementation of the specific commitments.
- The locations of ten additional psychologist posts have been agreed and it is envisaged that these psychologists will be in place by the commencement of the coming academic year.
- The DEIS Plan 2017 was published in February providing a roadmap to tackle educational disadvantage over the coming years. The Plan outlines over 100 Actions designed to improve learning outcomes in schools serving the highest concentrations of disadvantage. An additional €5m was provided in Budget 2017 to fund additional supports under the Plan.
- An additional 79 schools have been included in the DEIS programme for the 2017/18 school year, bringing the overall number of schools currently in receipt of supports to 904.
- The Interim Review of the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020) was published in February showing significant improvements in reading and mathematics over the period. New and ambitious updated targets have been set for 2017-2020 to keep the focus on the areas that need attention.

### **Promoting Excellence and Innovation**

- The latest OECD PISA results, published in January, show that in 2015, Ireland's 15-year-

olds are among the best in OECD countries in reading and are performing significantly higher than the OECD average in mathematics and science.

- The report of the review group on STEM education in schools was published in November setting out a programme to deliver on making Ireland a world-leader at providing STEM education.
- 44 projects were announced in February to receive up to €2.8m in funding to improve public understanding of science and technology, increase STEM uptake in education and improve diversity in STEM.
- Grants totalling €30m have issued to schools for the provision of ICT equipment under the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015- 2020, in respect of the 2016/17 school year.
- A new Post Graduate Programme in School Leadership has been announced for teachers aspiring to senior school leadership positions. The first intake of students will be in September 2017 and it will be open to approximately 200 participants annually.
- 4,600 coaching hours are being provided to 400 school leaders annually under a new coaching service by the Centre for School Leadership. Over 200 principals have engaged with the coaching service since its introduction in January 2017.
- To strengthen school leadership, additional deputy principal posts for schools with enrolments of 700 students and over, will be provided from September 2017, totalling 170 posts.
- The patronage of nine new post-primary schools was announced in November, eight of which will be multi-denominational, and will be established in 2017 and 2018. The patronage of four new primary schools was announced in May 2017, all of which will be multi-denominational.
- New plans were announced in January aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities.
- The commencement in July of the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 means that for the first time any person will be able to make a complaint to the Teaching Council about a registered teacher.
- The General Scheme of Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016 was approved and published in December. The Bill will require schools to publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter which will set out the principles that will guide how schools engage with parents and students.
- Looking at Our School 2016, a new quality framework for school self-evaluation was published in August 2016.
- The Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 was launched in October setting out how Gaeltacht schools will be supported to provide high-quality, Irish-medium education.
- Following a review of the staffing allocation for small primary schools, changes in Budget 2017 include one-teacher island primary schools, where they are the only school on the island, will be able to appoint a second teacher. Also one-teacher mainland schools will have the capacity to apply for an additional teacher in certain circumstances

### **Access and Choice**

- The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 was published in July to provide families with fairer access to their local schools.

- Following a review undertaken of the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme, it is not proposed to change the current charges. The review of the criteria and guidelines for the School Transport Appeals Board is being progressed. During the 2015/16 school year in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country.
- The Student Assistant Fund Review was published in October reaffirming that demand for student assistance remains strong and identifies future challenges. The Fund supports students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with ongoing needs for financial support.
- The report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education was published in July 2016 and has been referred to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills.

### **Meeting Future Skills Needs**

- Additional funding was secured in Budget 2017 for the higher education sector, the first significant increase in a decade. An additional €36.5m has been allocated for the sector in 2017 with €160m additional over the next three years .
- Additional funding was secured in Budget 2017 to support the implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019 and the development of a number of innovative new measures to support access to higher education by particular disadvantaged groups.
- A new Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund has been established to support the implementation of the National Access Plan. Funding announced in April which will be used for new initiatives to widen initial teacher education, is anticipated to result in more than 120 new teachers coming through the system from disadvantaged groups which traditionally have been under-represented in teaching.
- NUI Maynooth was engaged to review the obstacles to lone parents participating in and completing higher education. The review is currently being finalised but emerging findings informed the outcome of Budget 2017 and contributed to budgetary measures that will benefit lone parents.
- A public consultation paper on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training was issued in March 2017 with submissions received currently being assessed. A stakeholder consultation forum event is also scheduled for mid-May.
- The National Skills Council was launched in April 2017 to oversee research and advise on prioritisation and delivery of identified skills needs. The Council along with the nine Regional Skills Fora form a new skills architecture that will foster closer collaboration and develop structures to strengthen engagement between the education and training system and enterprise.
- Springboard+ 2016 was launched on 15 June 2016 and will provide for 5,825 free higher education courses across the country. Over 90% of the courses (excluding entrepreneurship courses) contain work placement elements.
- A call for course proposals to be funded under Springboard+ 2017 was issued in February 2017. The eligibility criteria for Springboard+ 2017 has been expanded to include: homemakers, and those in employment who wish to upskill or reskill to meet a specific emerging skills need in the Biopharma/Med Tech sector.

- The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeships and Traineeships in Ireland 2016 – 2020 was launched in January, aimed at delivering 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship registrations by 2020.
- Two new apprenticeships, the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship and the Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship, were launched in 2016 with a further 13 new apprenticeships due to launch later this year.
- 25 participants successfully graduated from the 10-week pilot Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme in August 2016. Following the favourable evaluation group report for the Scheme, two further iterations of the scheme are planned for 2017 – one in Limerick to begin in May and the other in North Dublin beginning in September.

## Crime Prevention, Justice and Equality

The Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. 2017 will see 900 trainees become members of An Garda Síochána. This will bring Garda numbers to about 13,500 by year end, real progress towards the target of 15,000. Furthermore funding has been provided to recruit 500 civilians during 2017 to support the wide ranging reform plan in An Garda Síochána. In 2016, some €10m was invested in new vehicles for the Garda fleet with 597 vehicles being allocated to the fleet.

A major priority is continuing the major programme of reform underway in relation to the oversight of An Garda Síochána and within An Garda Síochána itself. The Policing Authority has since 1 January 2017, assumed all of its statutory functions including in relation to the selection of senior members of An Garda Síochána. The Government in April agreed in principle to the establishment of an independent Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

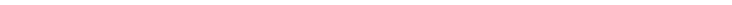
In addition to a commitment to supporting robust oversight, the Government has agreed a Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána that addresses both the implementation of the agreed recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate report ‘Changing Policing in Ireland’ and the Programme for Government commitments aimed at increasing visibility of policing. It is complemented by continuing substantial investment in facilities including critical ICT under the Capital Plan 2016-2021.

A high level Group has been established to review and reform the administration of civil justice in the State, with a view to improving access to civil justice in the State, promoting early resolution of disputes, reducing the cost of litigation, creating a more responsive and proportionate system and ensuring better outcomes for court users.

Progress continues to be made on the implementation of measures to assist victims across the criminal justice system including new legislation (Criminal Law Sexual Offences, Victims of Crime, Domestic Violence and Mediation Bills) and a sustained media over the next 6 years to increase the awareness of domestic and sexual violence and to activate bystanders with the aim of decreasing and preventing this violence.

The commencement of the single application procedure for protection applicants represents the single biggest change to the protection process in Ireland in over 20 years and will reduce the time that applicants spend in the Direct Provision system. The Government is implementing a range of improvements for those in the protection process to support independent living and self-catering in accommodation centres. We are working actively to speed-up our intake under the EU relocation and resettlement programmes.

A National Women’s and Girls’ Strategy, as well as a Migrant Integration Strategy, has been published. The Department of Justice will continue to promote equality and inclusion in Irish society through the development and implementation of strategies to address specific needs.



## Crime Prevention

- The Government has approved that by 2021 the Garda workforce should comprise a total of 21,000 personnel; to include 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.
- Funding was provided in Budget 2017 for the recruitment in 2017 of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.
- In 2016, an additional €55m was allocated to the Gardaí to tackle gangland crime with measures introduced including the establishment of the Special Crime Task Force to enhance the response to organised crime, and the establishment of a dedicated Garda Armed Support Unit which is fully operational since December 2016 providing armed cover on a 24 hour basis.
- Some €46m is being invested in the Garda Fleet under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In 2016, 597 vehicles were allocated to ensure that the Gardaí are mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.
- Some €330m, including €205m under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021 to enable the Gardaí to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime and will facilitate progress on further important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation.
- A new grant-aid scheme was launched in April 2017 to assist community groups establish community-based CCTV systems. The Scheme aims to enhance existing policing provision within the community; and assist in the prevention and reduction of local crime, disorder and anti-social activity. Funding is available to support at least 25 CCTV schemes.
- In 2016, €397,000 was provided for Community Crime Prevention, including Community Alert, Text Alert, and Crimestoppers which supports important crime prevention and awareness campaigns. A new cost rebate scheme for Text Alert Groups was also established. Funding for 2017 has been increased to €497,000.
- Work proceeding in An Garda Síochána to identify stations to be included in the pilot scheme to re-open six Garda stations.
- The Minister has requested the Policing Authority to oversee a review of the boundaries of police stations and dispersment of Garda stations. The review is expected to be complete by mid-2018.
- A review is being carrying out at the request of the Policing Authority, by the Garda Síochána Inspectorate of the dispersal and use of resources available to An Garda Síochána in the delivery of policing services to local communities.
- The Criminal Justice Bill 2016 was published in December and is before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill will strengthen the operation of the bail system with the aim of making the law as effective as possible in protecting the public against crimes committed by persons on bail including electronic tagging where requested by Gardaí.
- A Joint Strategy was launched in September for the enhanced management of offenders. The strategy implements a multi-agency approach to the management of crime, prioritises certain prolific offenders and develops specific initiatives that address their behaviour and reduce crime. Initial indications record significant success and the strategy is being evaluated on an on-going basis.

## **Courts and Law Reform**

- Preliminary consultations have been held with relevant State agencies and the advices of the Attorney General have been sought on the feasibility of a new Public Defender system. Previous reports in the matter have also been reviewed and the position in other jurisdictions is being examined.
- The President of the High Court, Mr Justice Peter Kelly, will chair a new group to review and reform the administration of civil justice in Ireland incorporating commitments in the Programme for Government relation to courts operations.
- The Domestic Violence Bill 2017 has been published. The Bill will improve the protections available to victims of domestic violence and aims to make the court process easier for victims. The Bill is also a major step towards Ireland's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).
- A national awareness campaign, "What would you do?" was launched in November to increase the awareness of domestic and sexual violence, and to activate bystanders with the aim of decreasing and preventing this violence.
- The recently enacted Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 enhances and updates laws to combat the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children and these provisions were commenced with effect from 27 March 2017.
- The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Bill 2016 was published in December and is before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill will give effect to EU Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, supports and protection of victims of crime.
- Over €1.7m has been allocated to fifty-eight organisations who work with victims of crime providing information, advice and support.

- The Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act 2016, enacted in June, provided additional powers to the Criminal Assets Bureau in response to the increased organised crime threat. An additional €0.5m was allocated to the Budget for the Criminal Assets Bureau in 2017.
- The draft General Scheme of the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Bill 2017, which provides for the reform of the criminal legal aid scheme, has been approved for consultations with agencies involved.

## **Immigration and Refugees**

- UN Agreement was reached in August on Irish-led negotiations on a Global Approach to helping Refugees and Migrants. The agreement has a strong human rights focus, with clear undertakings by UN member states to protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, regardless of status.
- Under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, Ireland committed to accepting 4,000 migrants. 519 programme refugees were received from Lebanon by end 2016 and almost all have been housed in the community. A further 520 refugees will arrive by end 2017. 459 asylum seekers have been relocated from Greece to date with a further 630 expected in the latter half of 2017. Resettlement of those who have received refugee status has commenced. The Government also committed to taking up to 200 unaccompanied minors from France who were previously resident in the migrant camp at Calais.
- A Migrant Integration Strategy 2017 - 2020 and a Communities Integration Fund were launched in February to provide a framework for Government action and to promote integration at local level. €500,000 will be made available in 2017 to local community based groups to promote integration in their area.



- The Single Application Procedure, provided for under the International Protection Act 2015, came into effect on 31 December 2016, streamlining the application process and reducing the time spent in State provided accommodation.
- Work is being progressed to improve the quality of living space for families in Direct Provision. The introduction of facilities within accommodation centres which will allow families to cook for themselves is continuing. The introduction of independent living at the Mosney Accommodation centre went live in January 2017 bringing immediate benefits to almost 700 people living there. Other centres will have dedicated or shared cooking facilities installed and available in the very near future.
- A range of initiatives including a target of 50/50 gender balance in senior appointments in the Civil Service were approved by Government in January to help improve gender balance in the Civil Service.
- EU funding of €5.5m was announced in September 2016 for projects to support women entrepreneurs and for initiatives targeted at women who are currently detached from the labour market, but wish to take up paid employment. Following an Open Call for Proposals, 18 projects have been awarded grants.
- An Oversight Committee with an Independent Chair has been established to shape the development of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy.

### **Equality**

- On 1 March, the Taoiseach made a statement in the Dáil confirming the State's recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation.
- A Traveller Counselling Service, 'Traveller Mental Health- Bridging the Gap through Partnership' was launched in October to address mental health issues facing the travelling community.
- The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy will be published shortly setting out a range of measures to improve outcomes for the Traveller and Roma communities in the areas of education, accommodation, health, employment and anti-discrimination.
- The new National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 was published recently with an overall goal to change attitudes and practices preventing women's and girls' full participation in education, employment and public life at all levels, and to improve services for women and girls, with priority given to the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes.
- The Government have appointed Judge Pat McCartan to conduct an assessment of the new evidence that the Stardust Relatives and Victims Committee assert that they have uncovered, in order to make a recommendation as to whether or not the establishment of a Commission of Investigation into the Stardust Tragedy of 1981 is warranted.

## Agriculture and Marine

The Government's primary focus in the agri-food and fisheries sectors is to maintain ambition for sustainable growth and creating a supportive environment for primary producers and industry to deliver on those ambitions. Foodwise 2025 aims to increase the value of exports in the agri-food sector to €19bn by 2025.

The focus is on devising a response to the more immediate trade and market challenges arising from Brexit and strategically informing and influencing Government's input at an EU level to deliver the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food and fisheries industries in Brexit negotiations. A dedicated Brexit unit has been established together with a Brexit Response Committee to co-ordinate all activities across the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine. In addition to his active engagement with counterparts on this issue, three All-Island Civic Dialogues have taken place for the agri-food and fisheries sectors in the past six months.

Underpinning this approach will be the continued rollout of the Rural Development (€601m in 2017) and Seafood Development Programmes and the delivery of schemes encouraging greater efficiency, profitability and sustainability. Budget 2017 delivered €1.47bn for the sector, as well as leveraging a €150m loan fund to provide low cost credit to farmers and a set of comprehensive taxation measures to help address income volatility.

Despite currency volatility and uncertainty in the market, 2016 saw the value of Irish agri-food and drink exports exceeding €12bn for the first time ever with employment in the agri-food sector growing to 173,000. The farming sector continues to be supported and 128,000 farmers have received their Basic Payment Scheme payment in respect of 2016 worth almost €1.2bn.

Following extensive negotiations at EU level in 2016, 233,500 tonnes of fish quotas secured, worth €280m for Irish Fishermen for 2017. Major agri-food trade missions were undertaken to Asia and North Africa during 2016, focussing on the development of new market opportunities in China, Vietnam, South Korea, Morocco and Algeria.

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### **Protecting Farm Incomes**

- The agri-food sector remains one of our strongest indigenous sectors with the value of primary product in 2016 at €6bn and the value of agri-food exports at over €12bn an increase of 2% on 2015. The sector supported 173,000 jobs last year.
- Steps To Success 2016, the first progress report of Food Wise 2025, was published in July 2016 with achievements including: market opening secured for beef in the USA, Canada, Iran (reopened), extension of market access for beef and sheep-meat in the Philippines: and roll-out of the Rural Development Programme.
- As of 12 April 2017, almost 128,000 farmers have received their Basic Payment Scheme payment in respect of 2016 with a total value of almost €1.2bn.
- Changes to the Farm Assist scheme were introduced through Budget 2017 including farm income and other income from off-farm self-employment being assessed at 70%, down from 100%, and the re-introduction of income disregards for children. From March 2017, the Farm Assist Allowance was increase by €5 per week.

- In January, 500 extra places were allocated to the Rural Social Scheme for farmers and fishermen, the first increase since 2006. The Scheme, which has been increased from 2,600 to 3,100 places, provides an opportunity to farmers and fishermen to make off-farm income in areas where there are few opportunities to do so.
- A number of measures were announced as part of the Budget to assist the farming and marine sector including, the extension of farm restructuring relief from end 2016 to end 2019; an increase in the farmer's flat-rate addition from 5.2% to 5.4%; a 'step out' of income averaging provision for farmers; the introduction of an income tax credit of €1,270 for fishermen.
- Under the Fodder Aid Scheme established to help farmers affected by flooding, 391 applications were received, of which 330 received compensation totalling over €660k.
- An Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme was launched in February making €150m available to farmers through low cost flexible loans of up to €150k for a term up to 6 years at a rate of 2.95%. The new Scheme was created to alleviate some of the pressures being caused by the current market difficulties including currency fluctuation in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.
- The Grocery Goods Regulations came into force 2016 to tackle unfair practices in the grocery trade and to rebalance relationships in the grocery goods sector in the interests of jobs, consumers and sustainable safe food.
- Preparations are underway for a public procurement competition for the approval of facilitators to liaise with groups of farmers who wish to organise into Producer Organisations, following the Commission's approval of Ireland's second amendment to the Rural Development Programme.
- Preliminary checks were introduced for on-line applications for the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme. A total of 102,000 applications were checked with 4,964 offered the opportunity to revise their claim. Almost 75% of these responded, which in many cases avoided penalties that would have applied in previous years.
- A new penalty regime which provided for a "Yellow Card" system for area over-declarations was implemented in 2016 which provides for a further reduction in the level of penalty to be applied where the area over-declaration is greater than 3% and not more than 10%.
- A new "Explanatory Handbook for Cross Compliance Requirements" has been issued to all farmers with the aim of reducing the number of errors and levels of penalty.

### **International Markets**

- Trade Missions continue to be critical to the development of new market opportunities to deliver more outlets for export of farm produce. A major agri-food trade mission to Asia took place in September 2016 focussing on the development of new market opportunities in China, Singapore, Vietnam & South Korea. A further trade mission took place in early November to Morocco and Algeria in North Africa .
- A number of significant advances were recently made in progressing beef access and restoring crab exports to China. Agri-food exports to China were almost €950m in 2016, making China the third largest market for Ireland's agri-food sector in value terms after the UK & US in 2016.
- Agreement has been reached in granting access for Irish sheep-meat to Iran, the second largest consumer market in the Middle East and North Africa.

- Enhanced access was secured for Irish beef to Saudi Arabia in March 2017 during a Ministerial-led trade mission to the Gulf States with a delegation of over 30 Irish agri-food and agri-tech companies. This follows the reopening of the Egyptian market to Irish beef in January.
- In June 2016, the Turkish live cattle market was opened and by end 2016 almost 20,000 head were exported. The overall live cattle export market for 2017 is looking positive with over 20,000 head exported in the first two months, up from 18,900 in the same period last year.
- A €3.75m Bord Bia campaign has been launched to promote Irish beef and lamb in China, Japan, and Hong Kong. An agricultural attaché has been appointed in Abu Dhabi and Bord Bia has opened new offices in Warsaw and in Singapore.
- Meat Technology Ireland, a €8.1m five-year investment co-funded by Enterprise Ireland, was launched in April. The technology centre will drive competitive advantage through addressing challenges such as BREXIT and opportunities such as the US and Chinese markets for Irish beef and sheep meat.
- During 2016, 98 companies became fully verified members of Origin Green, more than doubling the performance of previous years. There are now 236 verified members of Origin Green and 90% of exports of Irish food, drink and horticulture products are by signed up members.
- In 2016, new measures introduced to strengthen food traceability and safety include revised policies and additional measures in relation to Clean Livestock Policy and Food Chain Information, both in slaughter plants and in export control measures, for meat and other livestock products.

### **Farm Gate Investment**

- Funding under the Rural Development Programme has been increased by 21% to €601m for 2017 to further support the agri-food sector.
- A Mart Modernisation Scheme was opened in May 2016 which will primarily assist farmers in the purchase of breeding stock for participation in the Beef Data Genomics Programme.
- The Beef Data and Genomics Programme has been reopened for new entrant beef suckler farmers from 2017 - 2022 to deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the national herd and the improvement of its environmental sustainability.
- In August 2016, a €500m EU Aid package was agreed for dairy farmers, which is designed to support market stabilisation across the EU's dairy sector through voluntary supply reduction and exceptional aid.
- A new €25m Sheep Welfare Scheme was launched for Irish sheep farmers in January 2017 with 21,900 applications approved to date.
- The application process for Sheep Knowledge Transfer Groups is open with 212 groups registered with over 3,500 farmers.
- In 2016, €3.87m in grant aid was awarded under the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector facilitating capital investment of close to €10m in specialist buildings and equipment. The 2017 Scheme was opened in November and 164 applications were received with approvals currently being issued.
- Rainwater harvesting systems are included in the new Tillage Measure launched on 8 March 2017 under the TAMS Scheme.

- 694 applicants have been paid €2.08m to date under the 2016 Areas of Specific Constraint (Island Farming) scheme which supports the continuation of traditional farming methods and the maintenance of the natural landscapes on off-shore islands.
- Tranche 3 of GLAS (Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme) was opened in November 2016 and 14,000 applications have been received. Along with the 38,300 applications approved under the first two tranches, this brings the total number of GLAS participants to well in excess of the original target of 50,000 farmers.
- Over 1,500 applications have been approved under the Young Farmers' Capital Investment Scheme with payment claims submitted in 257 cases, 125 of which have been paid to the value of over €3.27m.
- Over 8,000 young farmers were successful under the Young Farmers Scheme in 2015 and 2016. The Scheme which provides a fund of over €24m each year is open for applications in 2017.
- A fund of €5m has been put in place for the National Reserve in 2017 and is open for applications from the two priority categories of Young Farmer and New Entrant to Farming.
- The restriction on hauling cattle without tachographs has been raised from 50 kilometres to 100 kilometres.
- 6,500 hectares of new forests were planted in 2016 and a draft promotion plan developed to be incorporated into Teagasc's 4 year promotion campaign for forestry. A mid-term review of the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 is also underway.

## **Fisheries and Seafood**

- The Irish fisheries sector employs some 11,000 persons in full-time and part-time jobs and the sector is worth over €890m. In 2016, seafood exports were worth €555m, with domestic market sales of €239. This reflects a 50% increase in the value of exports from 2010 to 2016.
- €280m of fishing quotas have been secured for Irish fishermen for 2017, a 6% increase on 2016. Implementation of the landing obligation/discard ban is being phased in over a number of years with full implementation by 2019.
- €28m was announced in February 2017 for on-going capital investment in Ireland's 6 fishery harbour centres and smaller harbours to support safety, maintenance and fisheries processing and development.
- €12m in funding is being provided for seven Fisheries Local Action Groups for the period of 2017 – 2021 and is focussed on local development in coastal areas and communities.

## Climate Change and Energy

The Programme for Partnership Government recognises climate change as the global challenge of our generation, requiring radical and ambitious thinking to respond to a changing global environment. Ireland's National Transition Objective envisages a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. This will require radical changes in how Ireland produces and consumes energy and the development of an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector which does not compromise Ireland's capacity for highly efficient sustainable food production.

This Government has already taken significant steps with the publication of Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan for public consultation in March of this year while plans are also underway to publish Ireland's first National Adaptation Framework for consultation later in 2017. These consultation processes are an integral part of the National Dialogue on Climate Action which is currently being established so as to provide for an inclusive process of engagement and consensus building across society towards enabling the transformation to a low carbon and climate-resilient future.

The Energy White Paper - Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030 –sets out a vision and a framework to guide Irish energy policy up to 2030 and its actions have been informed by a vision to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector by between 80% and 95% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050. It reaffirms the long-held core objectives of Ireland's energy policy which are competitiveness, security of supply and sustainability.

Ireland has a target of 20% energy efficiency improvement and 16% renewable energy by 2020. The renewable energy target is subdivided into a 40% renewable energy target in the electricity sector, a 12% target in the heating sector, and a 10% target in the transport sector.

To support the achievement of these targets, SEAI's budget for energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes has been increased by 42% in 2017. This increased funding will allow SEAI to expand existing successful energy efficiency schemes such as the Better Energy Programme and allow the creation of new schemes to better support individuals, communities and businesses that want to tackle their energy use. Other policy measures that contribute towards the achievement of these targets include the biofuels obligation scheme (which requires a renewable energy component in transport fuels) and the REFIT schemes (which support renewable electricity).

Further policy measures are being developed to contribute towards achieving the 2020 targets. These include a new renewable heat incentive, a new renewable electricity support scheme and potential further increases in the biofuels obligation.

The Clean Energy for All Europeans package of legislative proposals was published by the European Commission in November 2016. These proposals, which are currently under negotiation, will be a key determinant of Ireland's energy policies, including efficiency and renewable energy targets, up to 2030.

## **Climate Change and Renewable Energy**

- Ireland ratified the Paris Agreement, the world's first comprehensive agreement on climate change, in November 2016. A public consultation was undertaken in March and April 2017 on Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan with questions on how Ireland should position itself to take the key initial steps to achieve the national transition objective by 2050. The finalised Plan is expected to be submitted to Government shortly and published thereafter.
- The National Dialogue on Climate Action, which was announced in March 2017, will run initially for a period of two years. As part of the Dialogue, a National Climate Action and Awareness Programme has been launched in conjunction with Green Schools while current priorities are focused on establishing a Steering Group for the Dialogue and also putting in place arrangements for a Secretariat to provide administrative support to the process.
- In 2016, through the Ocean Energy Programme, capital expenditure of €3.58m funded various applied energy research and demonstration programmes and projects, including 18 offshore renewable energy projects and the continued development of energy test site infrastructure. 2016 also saw the ongoing commissioning and operation of the LIR National Ocean Test Facility in Cork.
- An economic assessment has been undertaken and a public consultation concluded to inform the final design and implementation of a Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme as part of Ireland's commitment to ensure that by 2020, 12% of our heating demand will come from renewable energy sources.
- €55m was spent on the Better Energy Programme in 2016, facilitating the upgrading of over 24,000 households. Of these, 6,743 homes in energy poverty received free upgrades under the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme. A further 37 community groups received funding for energy efficiency upgrades to 385 public, private and community buildings under the Better Energy Communities programme.
- The budget for energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes has been increased by 42% in 2017 which will allow SEAI to expand the Better Energy Programme and allow the creation of new schemes to better support individuals, communities and businesses that want to tackle their energy use.
- In 2016, over €22.5m was spent retrofitting social houses. 10,403 units were completed under Phase 1 works which targeted cavity wall insulation as well as attic insulation, while 900 units were completed under Phase 2 which involves more extensive and costly external insulation.
- The first Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy 2017-2020 was published in January providing new governance structures and enhanced supports to assist public sector bodies in achieving the energy efficiency target of 33% for 2020.
- A Working Group has been established to review existing studies and analysis and work already carried out on Moneypoint. A paper will be prepared for the National Dialogue on Climate Change on a range of issues including technology options, security of supply, competitiveness and sustainability. ESB, the plant owner, is carrying out studies on the potential for biomass as a replacement fuel, and also on the potential for all other technology options. Discussions with ESB and other stakeholders have taken place and further meetings are planned over the next quarter.

- A National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure in Transport is expected to be published shortly. A transition to alternatively-fuelled vehicles will be required to effect a substantial reduction in Ireland's overall transport emissions.
- An Inter-Departmental Low Emissions Vehicle Task Force has been established to consider the range of measures and options available to Government to accelerate the deployment of low carbon technologies.
- Intensive work is underway in finalising a targeted review of Wind Energy Development Guidelines in relation to the issues of noise, shadow flicker and proximity. The issues of community benefit and participation are being considered and developed as part of this process. The proposed new Guidelines will be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment before they are finalised by Government.
- An initial contribution of €2m was provided to the Green Climate Fund in December 2016.
- Contributions of €1m per annum have been made to the Least Developed Countries Fund for 2016 and 2017 as part of a multi-annual funding arrangement with the Global Environment Facility totalling €3m over three years.

### **Flood Measures**

- Under the €430m being provided for Flood Risk Management, there are 11 major flood defence schemes underway throughout the country, with a further 26 schemes at design or development stage.
- Following public consultation, all Flood Risk Management Plans are being finalised by the OPW.
- A Steering Group has agreed an implementation plan on establishing a National Flood Forecasting Service which comprises a number of phases. Given the complexities involved in establishing, designing, developing and testing this new service, it is anticipated that it will take at least five years before it is fully operational.
- During 2016, the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group identified a number of specific collaborative initiatives which include a pilot project on lowering water levels on the lakes, the assessment of identified “pinchpoints” and the development of a strategic maintenance programme.
- A major Review Report was published in November on the response to winter flooding 2015/16 which describes the preparedness and the response of the State Agencies to the severe weather events while also detailing the recovery measures that were put in place by Government to deal with the aftermath of the flooding.
- A review of the options that could improve availability of flood insurance was submitted for inclusion in the overall report of the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group which was approved by Government in November 2016.
- A voluntary Home Relocation Programme has been announced to assist those worst affected homeowners whose primary residences flooded during last winter and had flooded in previous years.
- Some €2m was provided under the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme to assist householders affected by the 2015/16 winter flooding. The Scheme provides income tested financial support to people who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, household items and in some instances structural repair.



- Funding has been provided to the Geological Survey of Ireland to undertake a survey of turloughs in Roscommon, Longford, Mayo, Clare and Galway over the next three years. The work has already commenced with the monitoring of current water levels within turloughs as well as historic analysis of rainfall and flooding.

## Investing in Society

Building on the recovering economy, the Government is committed to advancing policies and services that promote a fairer society and ensure that the recovery reaches everyone. Ireland remains among the best performing EU member states in reducing poverty through social transfers continuing with the Budget 2017 providing for an increase of €5 in weekly social welfare payments and pensions. Employment remains the single most effective means of moving families out of poverty and the Action Plan on Jobless Households will be published this week with measures to address household-level incentives and support people living in jobless households into employment.

The initiative for the North East Inner City, launched by the Taoiseach in 2016, recognised the profound challenges arising for communities struggling with economic and social deprivation in the midst of stark criminal and drug related activity. The recent report by Kieran Mulvey identified a number of key priorities for action to be supported by a strong community engagement process which will help establish a model that can be used in other similarly affected areas.

Tackling disadvantage and inequality is a key priority for Government by supporting and enabling individuals back into the workforce through education, activation and community supports. During the period 2015 to 2017, over €100m will be invested in communities through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme which aims to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, living in poverty or in unemployment through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration. Recognising the contribution of the sector to building a more just society, a range of community and voluntary organisations continue to be supported and a new RAPID programme to support the most disadvantaged areas is being developed for roll-out during 2017.

A number of major projects are being progressed as part of the €3.6bn allocation for public transport Capital Investment Plan. The Phoenix Park Tunnel Link opened in November 2016 and the Luas Cross City is scheduled to commence before end-2017.

Participation in sport at all levels remains a priority. 2016 saw a new €30m round of funding launched under the Sports Capital Programme and a new €39m Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena completed at Abbotstown.

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### **Community Supports**

- 71 community and voluntary organisations have been approved for funding under the 2016-2019 Scheme to Support National Organisations. The total funding of over €16.5m will be paid out over the 3-year lifetime of the scheme.
- A local development and community development policy forum was held in November 2016 as a first step in progressing
- implementation of the Framework Policy to support the community and voluntary sector. A Cross-Sectoral Working Group is being established to assist in the development of the implementation plan with the first meeting scheduled for May 2017.
- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme comes to an end in December 2017 and a consultation process was launched in March to help inform the next iteration of

the programme, which is due to commence in 2018. Over €100m will be invested in communities through SICAP from 2015 to 2017.

- The Communities Facilities Scheme was launched in March 2017 with funding of €2m to provide capital grants for community groups and organisations in disadvantaged urban and rural areas.
- A revamped RAPID programme is currently being designed and is anticipated to be rolled-out in the coming months. The programme will provide small-scale seed financing for capital and small-scale infrastructure projects of a regenerative nature in disadvantaged areas, including in provincial towns.
- The North East Inner City Dublin Report prepared by Kieran Mulvey was published in February, recommending a number of key areas for priority action including: tackling crime and drugs; maximising educational and training opportunities and creating local employment; creating an integrated system of social services; and improving the physical landscape. Work is underway to establish a new programme office and appoint an independent chair to lead the development of an implementation plan in consultation with the local community, business and statutory sectors.
- €5.1m has been allocated under Dormant Account Funding to the development of new innovative services for children and disadvantaged young people. Over €3m of the money will be targeted at the development of innovative services which will prevent young people falling into trouble.
- A further €1.75m in funding was announced in February 2017 under the dormant accounts scheme to support social enterprises which provide services to tackle social exclusion, unemployment and disadvantage.

- The annual Social Inclusion Forum took place on 14 September 2016 in Dublin, providing for wider public consultation and discussion on social inclusion issues and ensuring that people who are directly affected by poverty and social exclusion have a voice in the development of the policies that directly affect them. The 2017 Social Inclusion Forum will take place later this month.
- A tender is being prepared for an independent review of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017. The review which is expected to be completed by end 2017, will inform the drafting of the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.
- An Anti-Dumping Initiative 2017 has been launched with an initial allocation of €650,000 to provide funding for projects tackling illegal dumping and to target those who engage in this illegal practice.

### **Sport and Transport**

- A new €30m round of funding was launched in January 2017 under the Sports Capital Programme to develop sports infrastructure around the country for 2017. A record 2,320 applications were received and allocations will be announced later in the year.
- Work is underway on the development of a new National Sports Policy Framework which will provide a long-term framework for sport in Ireland and will set the strategic agenda for Sport Ireland. The Framework is expected to be published in mid-2017.
- A new state-of-the-art Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena opened earlier this year at the heart of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus and comprises a National Gymnastics Training Centre, National Indoor Athletics Training Centre and National Indoor Training Centre and is designed to accommodate over 20 sports.

- A number of major projects both with and requiring planning approval are being progressed as part of the Capital Investment Plan (CIP). In 2016, Transport Infrastructure Ireland spent €51.1m progressing national CIP projects (incl. 3 PPP projects) while a further €2.1m was spent on regional CIP projects.
- The Luas Cross City project is on time and within budget with operations scheduled to commence before end-2017. The project which will provide an interchange between the existing Red and Green Lines in the City Centre and serve the new DIT campus at Grangegorman, will provide for an estimated 10 million additional journeys per annum on the Luas network.
- Services on the new Phoenix Park Tunnel line have begun. Seven new morning peak trains and eight new evening peak trains now have a direct connection between stations in south-west Dublin and north Kildare and the central business district between Connolly and Grand Canal Dock.
- 21 new regular commuter bus services in the rural transport programme network were developed in 2016. Additional funding of €2.19m is being provided to the Programme for 2017 allowing for further improvement of existing services and the development of new services.
- €324m has been allocated for the 2017 road investment programme which will allow approximately 1980kms of regional and local roads to be maintained and 2035kms to be strengthened all over the country.
- 4.3m journeys were taken last year on dublinbikes and now has more than 68,000 annual subscribers. The scheme will be expanded further in summer 2017 with an expansion in the city that will include the Grangegorman catchment area, adding 15 stations to the network and an additional 100 bikes.

## Ireland and the World

Ireland is among the most globalised economies in the world. The small size of our domestic market means that exports of goods and services are more economically significant for Ireland than for other EU countries. Our geographic connection and the composition of our trade with the UK means that certain key sectors of the Irish economy will be heavily impacted by the UK's departure from the EU. Furthermore, increasing economic stability and prosperity has been an integral part of deepening peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland, with cross-border trade and the free movement of people on the island being fundamental to that positive change. The achievement of peace and the operation of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement have greatly facilitated the development of the all-island economy. Brexit presents critical risks for key sectors that operate on an all-island basis, including food, retail, tourism, fishing, and energy.

The Government has been clear on its Brexit priorities: minimising the impact on trade and the economy; protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process; maintaining the Common Travel Area; and influencing the future of the European Union. Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued access to the single market. While we want to see the closest possible trading relationship between the EU and the UK based on a level playing field, the Government has also been working to ensure that we are resilient and prepared for a variety of possible outcomes. This includes improving our business environment to be more competitive, with diversified markets and better infrastructure, and pursuing trade and investment opportunities that arise from Brexit. Now that the EU's initial negotiating position is clear, the Government will prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA in February 2017.

Ireland's new whole-of-government trade and investment strategy, *Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World*, was launched by the Taoiseach in March and sets out a vision and a plan to make Ireland the best place to do business, to visit, to work and to live. Our ambitious goal is to increase Irish indigenous exports by 26% by 2020. The dynamic world addressed by this strategy encompasses Brexit and changing tax regimes, disruptive technologies and changes in how the world trades – in it, we set out a plan for Ireland to continue on our path towards sustainable recovery by building a stronger, more diversified and resilient economy to ensure prosperity for our people.

Our trade promotion actions across Government include ministerial-led trade missions, which have increased substantially in number in recent years. These high level missions are led by a range of Ministers across all Departments, in conjunction with our Embassy network and agencies in-market, including Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Bord Bia, and Tourism Ireland. Over the St. Patrick's Day period in 2017, Ireland's overseas Embassy network supported 43 trade-focused visits, led by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Ministers to 66 cities in 27 countries to promote Ireland's trade interests.

## Northern Ireland and UK Relations

- The Government is continuing to engage with the British Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland to support the power-sharing institutions of the Good Friday Agreement, including through the post-Assembly election talks to address outstanding commitments from previous Agreements and support the formation of a new Executive.
- The Government is actively seeking the implementation of the comprehensive approach to dealing with the past under the Stormont House Agreement, taking account of its consultation with victims' groups North and South. The Government participated at the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreement Review Meetings held in June and December 2016.
- The Taoiseach attended the 23rd Plenary of the North South Ministerial Council in November where discussions included the implications of the UK Referendum for both jurisdictions, the overall economic picture North and South, a Report on Infrastructure Commitments in the Fresh Start Agreement and the North West Gateway Initiative.
- Support for the North West continues to deliver the objectives of the North West Gateway Initiative. The Government has provided €2.5m for the North West Development Fund while the inaugural meeting of the North West Strategic Partnership was held on 7 December 2016 and attended by senior officials from Government Departments. The A5 road project is proceeding through the Planning process in Northern Ireland and construction is planned to commence in 2017.
- In the second round of 2016 funding, €1m was announced for Reconciliation Networking Forum in December to support 60 organisations working on peace and reconciliation.
- The Garda Authorities continue as a priority to work closely with their police and security counterparts in Northern Ireland, including through the work of the interagency, cross-border Joint Agency Task Force, to target and disrupt the paramilitary groups and their criminal associates who are opposed to peace.
- Work is on-going to finalise legislation to provide for the Independent Reporting Commission under the Fresh Start Agreement that will underpin efforts to bring an end to paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.
- On 29 April, the European Council agreed Guidelines on the overall approach to the forthcoming Brexit negotiations. These Guidelines reflect Ireland's unique concerns regarding the withdrawal negotiations – to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the Peace Process, to avoid a hard border, and to protect the Common Travel Area.
- The Guidelines also recognise the desirability of moving on to discuss the future relationship between the EU and the UK once sufficient progress has been made on the withdrawal issues, as well as the likely need for transitional arrangements. The outcome is a major endorsement of the Government's approach and is a reflection of the government's focused campaign of strategic engagement with EU Member States and the EU institutions over the past 10 months which has seen over 400 engagements.
- The statement agreed by the European Council acknowledges that in the event of a united Ireland, brought about in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would legally be part of the European Union. This provides reassurance on this aspect of the Agreement, regardless of the status of the UK within the EU.

- The Government has published a comprehensive document reflecting the findings and outcomes of the extensive preparatory work and consultations undertaken to date and demonstrates how these will be brought to bear in Ireland's approach to the negotiations in the weeks and months ahead.
- Given that the EU's initial negotiating position is now clear, the Government will intensify its focus on the economic implications of Brexit, including on domestic policy measures to reinforce the competitiveness of the Irish economy, to protect it from potential negative impacts of Brexit, and to pursue all possible opportunities that might arise.
- Government will prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.
- The Government will continue to engage with EU partners and with stakeholders through regular on-going consultations, including the All Island Civic Dialogue process, to ensure that Ireland's concerns and priorities continue to be reflected in the EU's negotiating position as it evolves, and that we work towards a strong and constructive future relationship with the UK.
- A recruitment campaign for the Defence Forces was launched earlier in 2017 with plans to recruit between 850 to 900 personnel across all services. A range of specific measures are being implemented to encourage greater female participation in the Defence Forces including female prominence asserted in recruitment campaigns. A dedicated Gender Advisor has also been appointed to promote gender equality and training within the Defence Forces.
- The Naval Vessel Replacement Programme continued in 2016 with the addition to the fleet of the third ship purchased under the programme, the LÉ William Butler Yeats. In addition, agreement was also reached in 2016 for the provision of a fourth ship under the replacement programme to be delivered by 2018 at a cost of €67m.
- An initial presentation ceremony led by the President took place on 4 December to award a 1916 medal to a representative number of Defence Force Personnel. A further 12 ceremonies led by the Minister with Responsibility for Defence took place throughout the country during December 2016. Medal Parades are on-going and it is anticipated that all medals will be awarded by mid-2017.

## Defence

- The White Paper on Defence sets out Ireland's defence policy framework for the next decade based on a forward looking assessment of the security environment and challenges and the defence contribution to international peace and security. Implementation of the 88 projects identified in the White Paper on Defence is being carried out on a phased basis. Each of the actions that have been initiated is being managed by joint Civil/Military project teams.

## Trade

- A new Trade and Investment Strategy, "Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World", was launched in March to ensure that activities are strategically targeted and adaptive to our evolving trade and investment priorities providing an overarching framework to diversify into new markets and intensify growth in existing markets for Irish exports, inward investment, tourism and international education.
- The overall number of ministerial-led trade missions has increased substantially in recent years. For 2017, 46 international ministerial-

led trade events are planned by Enterprise Ireland with a focus on market diversification and intensification.

- In 2016, there was a focus on promoting Ireland's political, trade and economic relations with Ministerial-led trade missions including to Dubai, Beijing and Hong Kong, Paris, New York and San Francisco, Kenya, Warsaw, Vietnam, Shenzhen and Tokyo, the Gulf, India, North Africa, and the UK.
- Focus has also been on promoting Ireland as a location for international business and investment in the context of Brexit and other current global developments.
- Over the St. Patrick's Day period, there were 26 Minister-led visits to 66 cities in 27 countries, promoting Ireland and Irish business. The programmes included in excess of 128 business, economic and trade events, and 123 high-level political meetings.
- A record 299 iconic buildings and landmarks in over 44 countries around the world were 'greened' over the St. Patrick's Day period, enhancing Ireland's global visibility. Over 190 cultural events were organised and/or supported around the globe.
- A consultation phase has been undertaken to seek views on the proposed Asia Pacific Strategy and initial drafting is now underway. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be finalised over the coming months. Work is also well advanced on the Strategy for the Americas with a view to its adoption by Government during the second quarter of 2017.

### **Passport and Consular Services**

- An on-line application service for passport renewals was launched on 30 March providing for faster and more predictable turnaround times, greater convenience and the highest standards of security.

- A number of Passport Service customer service enhancements have been introduced including an enhanced on-line application tracking service, as well as a web-chat social media service to facilitate "real time" communication between the Passport Service and passport applicants.
- There have been 14,000 downloads to date of the 'Travelwise' app which was launched in summer 2016. The app facilitates users in registering their travel plans which helps local embassies during a potential consular crisis to identify citizens who may be in an affected area.

### **International Development**

- Some €190m was provided in 2016 for humanitarian assistance and new long term development programmes were approved for Uganda and Malawi. New programmes are being developed for Tanzania, Vietnam, Zambia and Mozambique.
- An additional €10m has been provided to Overseas Development Assistance for 2017 bringing the gross allocation to €651m. This is the second year running the Government has increased the overall allocation to the aid programme.
- Further core funding of €2m was announced for the International Community of the Red Cross to support their humanitarian work in areas of conflict such as Syria and Nigeria. The ICRC received a total of €14m in funding in 2016.

### **Arts and Heritage**

- The Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016, 'Creative Ireland' was launched in December inspired by the extraordinary public response to the successful Centenary Programme. The five year whole-of-Government initiative aims to improve access to cultural and creative activity in every county



across the country. Ten major initiatives will be delivered in 2017 including Cruinniú na Cásca, a new national day of culture and creativity, which took place throughout the country on Easter Monday.

- Details of more than €9m in capital funding for arts and culture centres across the country were announced in February 2017 as part of the Creative Ireland programme. Seven flagship projects will receive substantial funding allocations while a further 49 projects will receive funding ranging from €20,000 to €276,000.
- As part of the 2016 Centenary programme, commemoration events took place across the country including those in respect of the Battle of the Somme and Roger Casement. A programme of significant State commemorations will take place in 2017 including the Battle of Messines in Belgium in June.
- Increases in funding have been provided across a range of arts and heritage bodies and cultural institutions including: an additional €5m for the Arts Council, €2m for the Irish Film Board, €1m for the Heritage Council, and €2m for the National Gallery of Ireland and Killarney House, both of which will re-open in 2017.
- €1.76m has been allocated for the promotion of Irish arts worldwide. A total of 135 projects are being funded in 2017, which will allow Irish artists to stage events in 35 countries internationally.
- Work has commenced on an initial review of the National Heritage Plan with terms of reference established and a consultation framework agreed which will include formal engagement with key stakeholders and implementation partners.
- Funding of €850,000 has been announced to support the language planning process in

Gaeltacht areas under the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language. An action plan for the period 2017-2022 will be published in the coming months which will contain specified priorities for the next five years along with a timeline for their implementation.

## **Making a Partnership in Democracy Work including Political and Constitutional Reform**

The Programme for Government sets out a new and collaborative approach in doing business, not only including the partners of Government, but is inclusive of the Oireachtas and wider society. The Government is committed to maintaining the economic recovery and investing in services to help build a society and address the many challenges facing us as a nation.

In the past year, specific new whole-of-Government action plans have been put in place that are already delivering specific measures in relation to job creation, housing and homelessness and rural development. While the economy continues to grow, (an extra 1,300 jobs are being created each week and unemployment has fallen to 6.2%), there remains much to be done to ensure that the recovery is felt by every individual and family around the country. Government has also undertaken an extensive programme of work in preparation for the UK's exit from the European Union involving extensive internal analysis and external consultation and the All Island Civic Dialogue process to hear firsthand the views of stakeholders and representatives.

The new collaborative approach is already manifesting itself in new Cross -Party approaches in the areas of Dáil Reform, Housing and Homelessness, Water, Health and Budget Scrutiny. To date these have resulted in a series of reforms including how the Dáil plans its weekly business and Oireachtas engagement in the Budget process. A further new all-party Committee is being established to assess the recommendations emerging from the Citizens' Assembly on the Eighth Amendment.

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### **Oireachtas Reforms**

- In 2016, the members of Dáil Eireann elected the Ceann Comhairle directly by secret ballot, the first time ever in its history.
- All Oireachtas Committees were established and committee chairs appointed using the D'Hondt system. Under the new system, 13 of the 19 core Committees are chaired by Opposition members.
- An All-Party Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform issued a Report to the Dáil in May 2016 setting out a programme of reform for how the current Dáil will operate.
- A cross party Dáil Business Committee, chaired by the Ceann Comhairle, was established giving more power to parliament to plan its own business including agreeing the weekly agenda for the Dáil.
- A Parliamentary Liaison Unit was established in the Department of the Taoiseach to facilitate the enhanced relationship between the Government and the Oireachtas.
- More time is now provided in the Dáil for Leader's Questions, Questions to An Taoiseach & Questions to Ministers and the structure has been reformed to allow more TDs an opportunity to ask questions.
- The number of Private Members Business slots has been increased to two every week and an additional third weekly slot for Private Members Bills/Committee Reports selected by lottery.
- 134 Private Members Bills have been published since May 2016 compared to 59 Private Members Bills published in a similar period from June 2015.

- The Pre-Legislative Stage has been extended to Private Members Bills, allowing Oireachtas Committees to scrutinise these Bills after they have passed Second Stage in the Dáil but before the standard Committee Stage.
- Multiple Technical Groups can now be established in the Dáil consisting of a minimum of 5 T.D.s with Leader's Questions, Private Members Business and Priority Questions allocated on a proportionate basis to include such Groups.
- A number of Special All Party Oireachtas Committees have been established to review specific matters and report to the Oireachtas within a set timeframe including Special Committees on Housing & Homelessness, the Funding of Domestic Water Services, to Review the Citizen Assembly's Report on the 8th Amendment, the Future of Healthcare and the Withdrawal of the UK from the EU.
- Votes are now grouped on Thursday afternoons to encourage a more family-friendly policy.
- Since taking office on 6 May 2016, this Government has passed 24 Acts and published 36 Bills.
- The new Government recognises that a stronger and more participatory involvement of the Oireachtas in the Budget process is essential to making the functioning of Government more effective and transparent. As part of this process the Government circulated all Tax Strategy Group papers to the relevant Oireachtas Committees in advance of Budget 2017 and published them shortly after, helping to facilitate informed discussion.
- Further developments in the reformed budgetary process include the publication of a Mid-Year Expenditure Report, which presents the baseline for Departmental expenditure and provides the starting point for examination of budgetary priorities by the Oireachtas.
- A Budget Oversight Committee has been established to enhance the role of the Oireachtas in the budget process. This work is to be supported by the establishment of the Independent Budget Office by the Oireachtas.
- A half-day seminar was held for Departments in January providing a review of the concepts of equality and gender proofing and budgeting, and introducing the tools and other resources available to Departments implementing these processes.

### **Reforming the Budgetary Process**

- The 2016 Summer Economic Statement set out estimates of fiscal space for 2017 to 2021. The Statement formed the basis for political discussions on the revised budgetary process for Budget 2017, increasing transparency in the Government's approach to planning for the provision of key public services.
- This was followed by a National Economic Dialogue to facilitate an exchange among relevant stakeholders on how best to sustain and strengthen the economic recovery in the interests of all, while taking account of the competing economic and social priorities within the limited fiscal space.

- It also included an overview by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission of the duty on public bodies to have regard, in the performance of their functions, of the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights, introduced in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

### **Other Reforms**

- A revised and updated Code of Practice to improve oversight and governance of state bodies was published in August 2016. A review of the operation of the 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Board has also been completed and is being considered prior to its submission to Government.

- In January, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality held a pre-legislative discussion on the General Scheme of the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill. The Government approved the priority drafting of the Bill which is expected to be published in the coming weeks.
- A Citizens' Assembly has been established which is independently chaired by Ms Justice Mary Laffoy. The Assembly, which will consider a range of issues, concluded its considerations and voted on its first topic, the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution in April. The Assembly will now commence its considerations of the remaining topics as outlined in the Resolution.
- Justice Laffoy has indicated her intention to provide a report with the Assembly's recommendations on the Eighth Amendment to the Oireachtas by June 2017. On receipt of the report the Oireachtas will refer it for consideration by a Committee of both Houses and in turn the Committee will bring its conclusions to the Houses for debate.
- The Government announced its intention to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution to give the right to vote at presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State, including in Northern Ireland. In order to inform public discourse on the significant policy change proposed, the Government has published an Options Paper which sets out the range of options available to give effect to the recommendation of the Convention on the Constitution.
- A new Labour Employer Economic Forum has been established to bring together representatives of employers and trade unions with Government to discuss economic, employment and labour market issues. The inaugural meeting took place on 5 October and was chaired by An Taoiseach. A further meeting took place in February with another meeting scheduled for Quarter 2.
- In October 2016, a Public Service Pay Commission was established to provide, on an advisory basis, evidence based objective analysis in relation to public service pay. The Commission is giving consideration to a range of issues having received submissions from a range of interested parties on various aspects of public service employment and is scheduled to provide its first report in mid-2017.
- The Lansdowne Road Agreement provides a negotiated pathway for a phased partial unwinding of the FEMPI measures via partial restoration of the Public Service Pay and Pension payments focusing on the lower paid from 2016.
- A Public Service Performance Report 2016 was published in April 2017. The report which is the first of its kind, aims to strengthen the focus on what is being delivered with public funds and create an opportunity for meaningful dialogue between Ministers and Oireachtas Committees on Government performance, thereby providing increasing transparency and more effective parliamentary engagement with the budget process.
- Work is underway on a new Public Service Reform Plan which is being shaped as "Our Public Service 2020 - Development and Innovation Framework" and includes a strong focus on improving services for customers. A public consultation on the draft plan is planned to commence shortly.
- All 25 headline actions in the Civil Service Renewal Plan have been initiated with several actions completed including a new simplified PMDS rating system, the commencement of a programme of Organisational Capability Reviews, new mechanisms to improve project management capacity, launch of a new Disciplinary Code and new mobility scheme for staff.

- Ireland's Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018 was published in December 2016, setting out commitments to increase citizen engagement, promote open data and transparency, and strengthen governance and accountability.
- Revised Guidelines on Consultation for Public Sector Bodies have been published to improve the way Government Departments and other public bodies undertake public consultations, with an emphasis on real, meaningful, and targeted engagement. Work is advanced on developing an accessible portal to provide details of all public consultations and is expected to be launched in the coming months.

## APPENDIX 1

### Bills Enacted Since Government Came to Office on 6 May 2016

Electoral (Amendment) Act 2016	25/07/2016
Health (Amendment) Act 2016	26/07/2016
Water Services (Amendment) Act 2016	26/07/2016
Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act 2016	27/07/2016
Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016	27/07/2016
Commission of Investigation (Irish Bank Resolution Corporation) Act 2016	27/07/2016
Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016	27/07/2016
Energy Act 2016	30/07/2016
Finance (Certain European Union and Intergovernmental Obligations) Act 2016	26/10/2016
National Tourism Development Authority (Amendment) Act 2016	16/11/2016
Social Welfare Act 2016	19/12/2016
Appropriation Act 2016	20/12/2016
Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016	23/12/2016
Finance Act 2016	25/12/2016
Health Insurance (Amendment) Act 2016	26/12/2016
Statute Law Revision Act 2016	26/12/2016
Road Traffic Act 2016	27/12/2016
Courts Act 2016	28/12/2016
Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2017	16/02/2017
Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017	22/02/2017

Communications Regulation (Postal Services) (Amendment) Act 2017	15/03/2017
Criminal Justice (Suspended Sentences of Imprisonment) Act 2017	15/03/2017
Health (Amendment) Act 2017	31/03/2017
Knowledge Development Box (Certification of Inventions) Act 2017	12/04/2017

### **Bills Published Since Government Came to Office on 6 May 2016**

Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2016	05/05/2016
Water Services (Amendment) Bill 2016	17/06/2016
Paternity Leave and Benefit Bill 2016	20/06/2016
Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2016 [Seanad]	21/06/2016
Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Bill 2016 [Seanad]	30/06/2016
Commission of Investigation (Irish Bank Resolution Corporation) Bill 2016	01/07/2016
Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016	08/07/2016
Electoral (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2016	08/07/2016
Health (Amendment) Bill 2016 [Seanad]	08/07/2016
Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Hague Convention) Bill 2016 [Seanad]	21/07/2016
Criminal Justice (Suspended Sentences of Imprisonment) 2016 [Seanad]	21/07/2016
Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016	22/07/2016
Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016	05/08/2016
Finance Bill 2016	20/10/2016
Courts Bill 2016	26/10/2016
Knowledge Development Box (Certification of Inventions) Bill 2016 [Seanad]	04/11/2016

Social Welfare Bill 2016	04/11/2016
Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016 [Seanad]	08/11/2016
Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2016	10/11/2016
Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 [Seanad]	24/11/2016
Criminal Justice Bill 2016	08/12/2016
Appropriation Bill 2016	09/12/2016
Hallmarking (Amendment) Bill 2016	14/12/2016
Communications Regulation (Postal Services) (Amendment) Bill 2016	22/12/2016
Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill	23/12/2016
Courts (No. 2) Bill 2016	24/12/2016
Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Bill 2016	29/12/2016
Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017 [Seanad]	13/01/2017
Domestic Violence Bill 2017 [Seanad]	03/02/2017
Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Bill 2017	10/02/2017
Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2017 [Seanad]	13/02/2017
Mediation Bill 2017	13/02/2017
Health (Amendment) Bill 2017	02/03/2017
Diplomatic Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017	05/04/2017
Inland Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2017	06/04/2017
Companies (Amendment) Bill 2017 [Seanad]	06/04/2017