



Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

Monitoring Report 2023

Implementation progress of the RSES



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

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Director's Foreword

This is the second Monitoring Report of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly that presents the progress made in securing the overall objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), and marks four years since the finalisation of the RSES in June 2019.

The overall vision of the RSES is “To create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all”, and accordingly implementation progress of the RSES has never been more important as we look to support a sustainable recovery from the impact of the pandemic, respond to the ongoing cost of living crisis, and deal with the climate and biodiversity crisis.

The Report details the great progress that has been made by many since the last 2021 Monitoring Report and outlines RSES implementation, including specific actions and outcomes, across the three principles of the RSES of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. This Report specifically identifies the progress made in implementing the RSES by local authorities, public bodies and their agencies, and the Regional Assembly.

This Report has provided an opportunity to reflect on what is working well and areas that need further consideration. It is encouraging to note the numerous, positive examples of implementation progress documented in this Report as part of the table ‘Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices’. The Report also brings into focus areas where further consideration is required. Accordingly, a number of recommendations for consideration by NOAC, are provided in order to improve the implementation of the RSES. Furthermore, the Report provides an opportunity to examine the progress documented with a view to informing the next RSES for the EMRA.

The Assembly acknowledges the investment of time and resources from local authorities and many public bodies, in contributing to this Report, and consider this to have been extremely worthwhile and necessary. It is important to highlight the volume of information that was shared with the Regional Assembly in order to prepare this report and the Assembly wishes to express gratitude to the Chief Executives of the local authorities and their staff, and, to the public bodies and agencies that have supported the Regional Assembly in producing this Report.

It is also important to thank the elected members for their ongoing commitment to the Assembly and the RSES, and the staff of the Assembly for the valuable and extensive work that has been carried out to date.

The RSES process is complex with many stakeholders central to this, framed by a number of legislative and policy considerations. This Report will hopefully act as an important reference manual highlighting the strength of the RSES process when stakeholders come together to deliver.

Finally, it is important to highlight that work is continuing in order to deliver the RSES, providing certainty, sustainability and opportunity for the Region, and the Assembly looks forward to the ongoing work in driving regional development and to the implementation progress that will be made over the coming years.

Jim Conway,
Director



Cathaoirleach's Message

On behalf of the members of the Regional Assembly, it is my pleasure to present this Monitoring Report for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

This Monitoring Report marks the second edition since the publication of the RSES in June 2019, and demonstrates the substantial efforts undertaken to implement the policies and objectives of the RSES across the Region since the last 2021 Monitoring Report.

The objective of this report is to outline the advancements made in realising the overarching aims of the objectives of the RSES within our Region. This encompasses the progress achieved by relevant Government Departments, their affiliated agencies, and each local authority within the Eastern and Midland Region, totalling sixty organisations. The significant and comprehensive input from numerous stakeholders underscores the significant influence and pivotal role the RSES plays in driving the sustainable development of the Region, focusing on the key principles of the RSES; healthy placemaking, climate action and economic opportunity.

I welcome the detailed progress documented in this report and acknowledge the opportunity it affords in identifying areas warranting further consideration. I extend gratitude to my colleagues representing the 12 local authorities on this Assembly, who have embraced the RSES and made significant strides to ensure its delivery. This includes driving the implementation of the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) via the MASP Committee, and advocating critical matters such as a Just Transition for the broader Midlands area.

I would also like to express appreciation to the local authorities, Government Departments and agencies, and the numerous individuals who have supported the Regional Assembly during this time. Similarly, I am thankful for the diligence, commitment, and assistance provided by the staff of the Regional Assembly. In the immediate future, I welcome any forthcoming interactions with the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) regarding the realisation of the overall objectives of the RSES. As the implementation of the Strategy progresses in the coming years, I eagerly anticipate sustained collaboration with stakeholders, local authorities, Government Departments and agencies, and private and community sectors, to bring the vision of the RSES to fruition. This vision is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that nurtures the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, providing inclusive access to quality housing, transportation and employment opportunities for all.

Kate Feeney
Cathaoirleach



Acknowledgements

The production of this report has involved a number of organisations including local authorities, Government Departments and agencies.

EMRA is thankful to the staff of the twelve local authorities in the Region that provided information and updates that contributed to this monitoring report, namely Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council, Louth County Council, Meath County Council, Kildare County Council, Wicklow County Council, Longford County Council, Westmeath County Council, Offaly County Council and Laois County Council. It is acknowledged that this request came at a busy time for local authorities and their assistance in providing up to date information is greatly appreciated.

EMRA is also grateful to the public bodies that communicated with the Assembly on this report including The Minister for Education, The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, The Minister for Finance, The Minister for Rural and Community Development, The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Minister for Transport, The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, The Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Youth and Integration. Numerous agencies under the aegis of the aforementioned public bodies also took the time to respond to the Regional Assembly.

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Executive Summary

This report, known as a 'Monitoring Report', monitors progress made in implementing the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region (EMR) over the last two years. This is the second Monitoring Report prepared by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, following the making of the RSES for the Region in June 2019.

The purpose of the Report is to specify the progress made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region, including progress made by relevant public bodies and each local authority in the Regional Assembly area.

The report is a statutory report and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly are required to submit this Monitoring Report to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC). NOAC shall consider the Monitoring Report of the Regional Assembly and may make recommendations to the Minister in relation to relevant measures to further support the implementation of the RSES.

The information contained in this report is relevant to the Regional Assembly as it allows the Assembly to track the progress of the RSES over time. It is also relevant to the local authorities and public bodies, and indeed the wider public, in tracking progress relating to RSES implementation.

Detailed findings of this report are set out in Section 5, which documents RSES implementation progress by local authorities, public bodies and the Regional Assembly.

Overall, the twelve local authorities of the Region have shown progress through outlining their work related to;

- Planning Policy Alignment with the RSES
- Delivering the Spatial Strategy of the RSES
- Funding- the ambition and interaction of each local authority with Funding Mechanisms
- Local Economic and Community Plans

Twelve of the fourteen¹ public bodies submitted a response to the Regional Assembly outlining the progress they had made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES, through outlining;

- Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation
- Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES
- Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation
- Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation
- Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

¹ Responses were received from The Minister for Education, The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, The Minister for Finance, The Minister for Rural and Community Development, The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Minister for Transport, The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, The Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Finally, the Regional Assembly outlined the progress it has made over the last two years since the previous monitoring report was prepared in implementing the RSES through;

- Continuation of Governance Structures for RSES Implementation
- Ensuring Consistency with the RSES
- Dublin MASP Implementation
- Policy Development and Research
- Regional Development Monitor
- EU Projects
- ENCORE
- Just Transition
- EU Programming and Funding
- URBACT
- Irish Regions European Office
- Raising the Regional Profile

Numerous examples of progress over the past two years by local authorities and public bodies that are worthy of note. This includes, for instance, the work carried out by local authorities that ensures alignment of their planning policy with the RSES, as well as the ongoing work that has been undertaken across the Region by local authorities, in enhancing the designated Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns. Likewise, the work carried out to date of the MASP Implementation Group is significant in progressing the implementation of the Dublin MASP.

Furthermore, implementation progress of the public bodies is also noteworthy in securing the overall objectives of the RSES. This includes, for instance, the work of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and of the IDA whereby a 'Regions Pillar' has been included in IDA Ireland's Strategy 2021-2024 which assists in advancing regional development in line with RSES objectives. Likewise, the introduction from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage of policy measures and funding to promote compact growth and regeneration in order to reverse the stagnation or decline of town centres, including measures to reduce vacancy, re-use existing buildings and promote infill and area-based regeneration. This includes the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Town Centre First measures, for instance.

There are, however, always areas for improvement and Section 8.0 of this report provides a number of recommendations for consideration by NOAC, that the Assembly believes will improve the implementation progress of the RSES. Specifically, this includes recommendations to address the Assembly's concern that a number of key and relevant public bodies did not engage with this process, and the concern of the Regional Assembly with regard to the removal of the requirement for this Monitoring Report as set out in the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022.

The recommendations for consideration by NOAC are based upon the information requested and subsequently provided by local authorities and public bodies. They are provided for local authorities under the headings of Planning Policy Alignment, Delivering the Spatial Strategy, Funding Ambition, and Recommendations of the local authorities. Recommendations relating to public bodies are provided for under the heading Engagement with the Regional Assembly, and under the name of each public body that responded.

The highlight of this Report, however, is the message that 59 local authorities, government departments and state agencies have carried out activities that contributed to the delivery of the EMRA RSES over the past two years. The Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices clearly show how much has been achieved to date, through the coordination efforts of the Regional Assembly and buy-in from stakeholders. These implementation milestones and good practices are presented in the following table;

Implementation milestones and good practices

Local authorities

All 12 City and County Development Plans have been made, aligning national, regional and local policies. This is a critical milestone to realising convergence towards the RSES development scenario on the ground.

Significant work is underway in preparing plans for the Regional Growth Centres (RGCs) and implementation of related RSES policy to realise RGC status in Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda. In Athlone, for instance, significant implementation progress of the Athlone specific RPOs is noted, including that AIT has obtained Technological University Status and is now referred to as Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, and that work is progressing on the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme involving eight individual flood cells and the construction of flood defences in tandem with public realm enhancement works. The Athlone Urban Area Plan (AUAP) will be drafted by the end of Q4 2023 and the formal AUAP consultation process will commence in 2024.

Significant preparatory work has been undertaken including;

- An Economic Strategy prepared for Athlone in conjunction with Roscommon County Council, officially launched in February 2023
- Westmeath County Council (WCC) Our Services (westmeathcoco.ie)
- An Area Based Transport Assessment for Athlone has been prepared and is currently being finalised by both Councils.
- The preparation of the Athlone Urban Design & Regeneration Framework which will provide a roadmap for the regeneration of the town core together with more detailed proposals in respect of key regeneration sites, is nearing completion.
- A Strategic Issues Paper has been drafted to stimulate debate on the content of the forthcoming AUAP and will be placed on public display in July 2023.
- Consultants appointed to prepare the SEA, AA and SFRA of the AUAP.

All local authorities, despite resource limitations, have shown significant ambition to obtain funding for projects that support RSES Implementation across an array of funding streams. Many local authorities focused on regeneration initiatives through URDF funding such as the Bray Harbour Integrated Regeneration Project, the St. Nicholas Quarter and Backlands Regeneration Project in Dundalk, and the Flowerhill and Abbeylands Regeneration Project in Navan. Under RRDF, funding was obtained for projects such as the Barrow Blueway in Counties Laois and Kildare, and Pobal le Cheile in Ballymahon. There has been significant draw down of other Project Ireland 2040 funds including the Climate Action Fund, which invested €20 million to capture waste heat from the Dublin Waste to Energy Plant in Ringsend (DCC), and €4.4 million to establish district heating in the Tallaght area (SDCC). The Dublin Local Authorities (DLAs) have also benefitted from other funding streams that support implementation of the RSES, with approximately €259.3 million funding provided for 2022 and 2023 under the Active Travel Investment Programme for active travel in the Dublin Region. Other funding streams accessed by the DLAs include the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), the Large-Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) and Fáilte Ireland Water-Based Facilities grant.

All 12 local authorities are working to prepare their next LECPs and accompanying Implementation Plans.

Department of Rural and Community Development

- Over €7.5million in funding under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme has been allocated in 2022 to counties within the EMRA Region. The scheme funds a diverse range of projects including public realm improvement, community parks and infrastructure, digital hubs, in addition to the regeneration of derelict buildings and enhancement of tourism attractions.
- Under the Town Centre First Policy, the establishment of the National Town Centre First office and the appointment of Town Regeneration Officers in each of the local authorities to drive the rollout of the policy at a local level.
- The Department's preparation of the Dormant Account Funding (DAF) funded project on 'Engagement Marginalised Communities in Local Planning and Decision Making' which is aimed at building capacity and supporting the engagement of marginalised communities during consultation and decision making at a local level.
- The pending launch of the Peace Plus programme arising from the ERDF funded cross-border programme is a commendable programme to help foster cross-border co-operation, peace building and prosperity between Northern Ireland and border counties in the Republic of Ireland. Louth County Council in the EMRA region has been provided an indicative allocation of €4.6million aimed at delivering suitable community regeneration and transformation within the framework of the Peace Plus programme.
- The roll-out of the Broadband Connection Points initiative and Connected Hubs as key digital infrastructure that will assist balanced regional development through the access to high-speed broadband for remote working and education programmes.
- In addition to the above, the 2023 Community Centre Investment Fund for New Build Measures comprising of a €20million fund for brown/green field sites is a good example of progressing the highly successful 2022 measure for Improvement and Refurbishment of Existing Community Centres initiative.
- This will be important for the next iteration of the Eastern and Midland RSES.

RSOs Supported



Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

- Capital spending by the Department is aligned with population and economic projections, development patterns and spatial planning objectives as set out in the National development plan and National Planning Framework of Project Ireland 2040, for which the RSES is a key driver for regional and local implementation.
- The Government launched the new White Paper on Enterprise in 2022, setting out Ireland's approach to enterprise policy in the period to 2030. The approach set out ensures that Ireland continues to build on its economic strengths as an open economy with strong trade and foreign direct investment, a vibrant innovation hub, and a resilient labour market. The priority objectives and targets as set out in the White Paper reflect various elements for consideration set out in the RSES. Regional development is also a key consideration, with the White Paper committing to ensure regional unemployment does not exceed 1% of the national average rate.
- The objectives of the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 and the objectives and priorities set out in the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 are consistent with RSES objectives.
- A Regions Pillar has been included in IDA Ireland's Strategy 2021-2024 which assist in advancing regional development in line with RSES objectives.
- Publication of the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3) which facilitated assessment of competitive advantages, future market opportunities, solutions to societal challenges, as well as the effectiveness of the current suite of enterprise innovation supports in the Eastern and Midland Region in line with RSES objectives.
- Publication of Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 (done in parallel with the creation of Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3)) which build on regional strengths to strengthen the enterprise ecosystems.
- Ongoing implementation and work of the National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, the National Remote Work Strategy, Regional Enterprise Plans, Local Enterprise Offices and the Retail Forum (and supporting schemes) to ensure sustainable jobs growth across the region in line with RSES objectives.
- The establishment of the Construct Innovate Construction Technology Centre and the Enterprise Ireland Spotlight on Skills Workshops are contributing to the enhancement of skills, talent and innovation, and support of the development of sites where high-tech and high potential start-ups can thrive. Additionally, the National Institute for Bioprocessing, Research and Training (NIBRT) provides highly specialised training to provide skills to support the growing biologics sector in Ireland and globally.
- Explicit support for smart cities principles - utilising technology to enhance a cities services and amenities - in existing Enterprise and RDI programmes in line with the strong ambition of the RSES.
- Future proofing and anticipating economic structural change, technological and digital advances, and climate change with specific reference to the White Paper on Enterprise, Climate Action Plans, the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme and, Future Manufacturing Ireland.
- Ongoing roll out of climate action and energy supports for business including The Green Transition Fund and The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSLs).
- Continued successful roll out of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) which focuses on the development, deployment, and commercialisation of disruptive technologies to deliver new solutions through investment in the development and implementation of innovative products and services that will alter markets, or the way business operates. Disruptive technology innovation is central to the economic strategy of the RSES, with the DTIF recognised in the RSES a driver for resilient, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- Through the Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL), two European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) have been approved for the EMRA region and will commence operations in 2023 - FactoryxChange (FxC) led by Irish Manufacturing Research in Mullingar and CeADAR led by UCD. Funding for these hubs has been allocated to EI under the RRF to administer the EDIH network.
- Direct alignment between the work of Future Manufacturing Ireland and RSES RPOs.
- Establishment of the Digital Transition Fund as part of Ireland's NRRP to increase digitalisation of all businesses across products, processes, supply chains and business models in line with RSES objectives.

RSOs Supported



Sustainable Settlement Patterns



Compact Growth & Urban Regeneration



Rural Communities



Healthy Communities



Creative Places



Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion



Enhance Regional Connectivity



Collaboration Platform



A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise & Innovation

Department of Finance

- Launch by Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) of a 'Green Funding Product', designed to encourage the development of more environmentally sustainable housing, in line with RSES objectives for low energy buildings.
- To 31st December 2022, HBFI has approved 99 loan facilities across 21 counties.
- Delivery by NAMA of the majority of its new residential units in the EMRA region, with this delivery aligned with the RSES settlement strategy.
- Over 7,600 houses and apartments made available by NAMA to local authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing to end-March 2023 and 2,872 social housing units directly provided.
- Through its Active Land Management and Urban Regeneration Objectives - and in line with RSES compact growth principles and the Dublin MASP - NAMA has reported delivery of compact growth, with a focus on the regeneration of infill and brownfield sites and the promotion of mixed-use opportunity developments in the Dublin Docklands, Poolbeg West, Dunsink and Lissenhall.
- Alignment of ISIF investment programmes with the RSES settlement strategy and relevant RPOs. As at 30 June 2022, ISIF had committed a total of €6bn to Ireland, directly and indirectly through its investment partners.
- ISIF's investment activity is spread across its four key investment themes of climate, housing and enabling investments, scaling indigenous businesses, and food and agriculture, all of which are in line with RSES objectives.
- ISIF's Connectivity Fund investments include investment in Dublin Airport Authority's BOND issuances in 2016 and 2020 and a debt facility to Aer Lingus as part of ISIF's Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund.
- Acting as the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the NTMA provides financial advice to State authorities and procures and delivers Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects as requested by State authorities which is delivering homes in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow.
- The NDFA is providing financial advisory services to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in respect of the MetroLink project, which TII is procuring. The NDFA is also advising Iarnród Éireann in relation to its capital investment projects (including DART+) through participation in its Capital Investment Advisory Group. These activities support RSES objectives.
- The NDFA is delivering a programme of Exchequer Funded Schools on behalf of the Department of Education. During 2022, the procurement of the first bundle of a programme of Exchequer funded schools commenced, with tenders received in October 2022.
- NewERA provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of Bord na Móna, Coillte, EirGrid, ESB, Gas Networks Ireland and Uisce Éireann who all play a role in the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient, circular and environmentally sustainable economy in line with RSES objectives.

RSOs Supported



Sustainable Settlement Patterns



Compact Growth & Urban Regeneration



Rural Communities



Healthy Communities



Creative Places



Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy



Build Climate Resilience



Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion



Enhance Regional Connectivity



Collaboration Platform



Global City Region



A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise & Innovation

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

- Work has commenced on the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF) to ensure a more facilitative and supportive spatial planning framework for the delivery of increased onshore renewable electricity generation, to enable the delivery of Ireland's national energy and climate objectives, as set out in the CAP 23. The RESPF is due to be launched in 2023.
- Two Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auctions have been held, in 2020 and 2022. The Eastern and Midland Region accounted for 39% (2020) and 46% (2022) of the successful capacity in the auctions.
- Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) will play an important role in the transition to an electricity grid that is up to 80% powered by renewables by 2030. Therefore, from 2024 support for communities for the development of renewable projects will transition to the non-competitive Small-Scale Generation Scheme (SSGS), which is due to be launched in late 2023.
- The Department has published a draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II (ORED II) representing Ireland's first national-level spatial strategy for our offshore renewable energy (ORE) future. When finalised, it will provide a high-level framework to support and guide the long-term, sustainable and planned development of Ireland's immense offshore wind, wave and tidal resources.
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers a range of capacity-building supports including an information warehouse, trusted intermediary and advisor services, and financial grant supports, all of which are vital to support community-owned RESS projects in being built.
- The launch of the SEAI local authority Climate Action Plan dashboard that provides key up-to-date energy related data to assist local authorities preparing their own Climate Action Plans.
- The SEAI District Heat Map Platform is a valuable resource to help local authorities and CAROs identify towns and cities with the highest potential for developing Ireland's first district heating networks.
- The Micro-Generation Support Scheme (MSS) launched domestic and non-domestic grants in 2022 which provides support funding for the generation of electricity from renewable technologies including solar PV, micro-wind, micro-hydro and micro-renewable combined heat and power.
- In 2020 the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) sanctioned a €4 billion capital investment spend on the grid over the 2021-2025 period, reflecting Government's ambition to facilitate a low carbon future.
- EirGrid are preparing the document 'Shaping our Electricity Future 1.1', which is due to be published by the end of Q2 2023. This document will ensure the electricity grid is fit for purpose to underpin economic development and achieve energy and climate policy objectives, including decarbonisation.
- Inland Fisheries Ireland have developed an innovative National Energy Monitoring system that demonstrates what each of their properties is using in carbon emissions daily, weekly and monthly in order to make decisions and choices in reducing their carbon footprint.
- Ongoing work of Bord na Móna in their efforts to transition from a fossil fuel-based company to a climate solutions/renewable energy company with numerous renewable energy projects having been commissioned (including the 75 MW Cloncreen wind farm in Co. Offaly) with further projects in the planning pipeline.
- In 2021 Bord na Móna commenced the Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (PCAS) also referred to as EDRRS (Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation, Restoration and Decommissioning Scheme). This scheme encompasses the rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna peatlands on 82 bogs and funding for the scheme of €108 million is secured through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) (the key instrument at the heart of NextGenerationEU). At the end of April 2023, rehabilitation of over 13,500 hectares has been completed in 40 bogs with plans to commence rehabilitation on a further 16 bogs in Summer 2023.
- The Department are currently prioritising policy in relation to Private Wires, which is a commitment under CAP 23, and publication of a public consultation is due in Q4 2023. Private wires are private localised electricity grids which allow energy users to connect directly to the source of electricity generation, bypassing the national grid
- Energy Storage Policy, a priority under CAP 23, is progressing and will be published in 2023.
- A hydrogen strategy which will set out the need for a robust safety and regulatory framework to be in place for Ireland is being developed, with completion due in 2023.
- Implementation of the National Retrofit Plan for domestic energy upgrades, including the provision of grants in relation to this. In this respect a record €356 million in funding has been allocated to SEAI for residential and community retrofit for 2023 to support the delivery of 37,000 retrofits this year.
- The Heat and Built Environment Taskforce has been established to accelerate and drive delivery in relation to retrofitting, renewable heat, district heat, decarbonisation and overall energy use needs of the building stock.

- A draft Heat Policy Statement will be published for public consultation in the first half of 2023.
- A roadmap for the phase out of fossil fuel boilers in all buildings is currently being prepared.
- Geological Survey Ireland, a division of the Department, compiled and published a report on 'Green Metals: Demand Arising from Decarbonisation of Energy and Transport Sectors' in March 2023 and has also commenced a review of their operations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- In 2021, the Whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023 and Ireland's Circular Economy Programme (2021 to 2027) were published, promoting Ireland as a leader in Circular Economy, and promoting less resource usage and waste prevention which aids sustainable economic growth. The Strategy also resulted in the launch of the Circular Economy Innovation Grant (CEIG) scheme.
- A National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap was published in November 2022, which sets out priority actions to bring the focus on food waste prevention, across key sectors in the food supply chain, together in a coherent manner.
- Geophysical mapping surveys and geochemical soil sampling have been undertaken in the Region to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) is working on the Coastal Change Assessment project, which will produce shoreline change rates and coastal vulnerability mapping, with anticipated data releases for the Dublin Metropolitan area by Q4 2023 and the Eastern coastal counties (including Louth, Meath and Wicklow) by Q2 2024.
- A Policy Statement on Petroleum Exploration and Production in Ireland was published in August 2022, in order to reflect the current policy and legislative position of the Government on petroleum exploration and production.
- A draft Policy Statement on Geothermal Energy for a Circular Economy is due to be published in 2023. The development of the draft Statement is an important step in addressing the barriers to the development of geothermal energy in Ireland and will focus attention on its potential.
- A Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining-Critical Raw Materials for the Circular Economy Transition was published in December 2022.
- The Climate Action Plan 2023 was published in December 2022 by the Department.
- The Department has made progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through renewable electricity, hydrogen strategy, energy efficiency and Heat Policy Statement, and by the end of 2021 the Department had achieved savings of 47.1% towards the 2030 energy efficiency target.
- Ireland's first Territorial Just Transition Plan, launched in 2022, sets out the impacts on the region as a result of the ending of peat extraction for energy production and identifies the development needs and priorities for the territory in order to address these impacts. The Plan supports those most impacted by moving away from fossil fuels to leverage new economic opportunities presented by moving to an economic model based on Net Zero emissions, aligning with the Climate Action Plan. It will be targeted at counties in the Midlands most impacted by the cessation of commercial peat extraction.
- In 2021 the Department worked with the County and City Management Association (CCMA) to establish a more centralised approach to Strategic Noise Mapping and this involved the addition of the Roads Management Agency which has led to better co-ordination and resource sharing.
- New regulations have been signed by the Minister for noise health risk assessments to be used to estimate and communicate the risks to health of exposure to noise pollution in Ireland.
- Implementation of the National Broadband Plan and the provision of Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) in 74 locations in the Eastern and Midland Region and 113 school Strategic Connection Points (school SCPs) in the Eastern and Midland Region, providing high speed broadband services to communities.
- Under the Cities Mission, DECC is supporting the cities of Dublin & Cork in achieving the target of being net zero cities by 2030 working alongside relevant departments and agencies. Dublin City is poised to act as an experimentation and innovation hub, implementing cutting-edge and creative solutions across areas such as energy, transport, waste, infrastructure and buildings to reduce their environmental footprints.
- The Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP); €24 million is being provided to local authorities to support local communities to build low carbon communities in a considered and structured way. €3 million is being provided from the Shared Island Fund to support cross-border and all-island community climate action initiatives. A further €1.5 million committed for the second phase of the Creative Climate Action programme.

- Local authorities to carry out Acoustic Design studies on noise hotspots in order to reduce the noise levels & will take into account the targets laid down in the Zero Pollution Action Plan for 2050.
- A Public Sector Climate Action Mandate applies to public bodies covered by the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) decarbonisation targets, with the exception of local authorities, commercial semi state bodies, and schools. The Mandate supports the public sector’s climate ambition through a number of measures, for example: phasing out fossil fuel heating systems, promoting the use of active travel, phasing out the use of parking in buildings that have access to public transport, and procuring only zero-emission vehicles
- Funds made available by the Department to each local authority to carry out local communications activities on solid fuel and air quality (solid fuel enforcement pilots).
- Establishment of the local authority Funding Scheme (LAFS) to ensure local authorities process planning applications for the deployment of fibre in a timely manner which is vital to boosting the overall timeframe of the rollout of the National Broadband Plan.
- Funding secured from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the Warmer Homes scheme for the period 2022-2027 which will allow higher budget allocations to the scheme in the years to come.
- DECC supports schemes and initiatives for the public sector and enterprises through SEAI, which can assist these sectors in increasing their energy efficiency and lowering their carbon emissions.

RSOs Supported



Rural Communities



Healthy Communities



Biodiversity & Natural Heritage



Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy



Build Climate Resilience



Enhanced Green Infrastructure



Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources



Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion



Enhance Regional Connectivity



Collaboration Platform



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Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

- Publication of Food Vision 2030, an ambitious ten-year strategy focusing on the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the agri-food sector, which is clearly aligned with the key principles and relevant objectives of the RSES.
- Ongoing implementation of Food Vision 2030 with stakeholders of regional relevance and in line with the 2023 Climate Action Plan.
- Ongoing roll-out of DAFM's competitive research programme supporting research across themes of central relevance to the EMRA RSES including rural development, climate and environment research. EMRA participated in an evaluation panel for this research programme in 2023.
- Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations in 2022 and ongoing research undertaken through the Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP) focused on preventing nitrates contamination and nutrient losses to water, a key concern noted in the RSES.
- Targeted Agricultural Modernization Schemes (TAMS) and other schemes such as EIP-AGRI are improving the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of agriculture in line with RSES objectives.
- The Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 provides a key framework to support the sustainable development of Ireland's farming and food sector by supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness, by strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, and by contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels. The Assembly is represented on the CAP Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee which met first in December 2022.
- Ongoing implementation of Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (RDP) a vital support to the viability of Ireland's rural economy which is aligned with the economic strategy of the RSES.
- The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 is commencing its implementation with The Assembly represented on the Programme Monitoring Committee.
- Establishment of the Bioeconomy Implementation Group chaired by DAFM and DECC which will help to deliver RSES objectives relating to the circular bioeconomy.
- The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) has been established under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027. This will help to improve biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes in line with RSES objectives.
- Ongoing implementation of the Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan in line with RSES objectives.
- Appropriate policy, funding and administrative measures have been implemented by DAFM and its agencies to mitigate the potential impact of Brexit on agriculture, food and marine sectors including agriculture and food exports throughout the region.
- A number of schemes are being rolled out by DAFM as part of the EU Just Transition Fund for which The Assembly is the Managing Authority.
- Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Marine Institute Ireland and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority are all undertaking activities which are supporting the objectives of the RSES and key national and European objectives.
- The National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development 2030 is completed and is being prepared for publication.
- The programmes and plans of the Marine Institute support the overall strategic objectives of the NMPF (Economic, Environmental, and Social/Human Health), as well as providing specific data and evidence services to support the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the NMPF. As DMAPs (Designated Maritime Area Plans) are developed, data and evidence will be required at a more regional and local spatial scale. This work is currently being evolved in partnership with the policy owner: DHLGH - Marine Planning Unit. This will be important for the next iteration of the EM RSES.

RSOs Supported



Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

- The establishment of the Technological University of the Shannon in October 2021 has been a key driver and enabler of balanced regional development in the midland and mid-west region. The Athlone campus is highlighted as playing an integral role in educating and upskilling the local workforce in key areas of technological advancement and is very active in the area of apprenticeship both craft based and consortia led.
- The continued expansion of the Springboard + initiative to provide free and heavily subsidised upskilling and reskilling opportunities through higher education in areas of identified skills need. Such an initiative is a positive example of government led supports to support a targeting reskilling of the labour market to areas of skill shortages. Up to 100,000 people have benefited from a springboard course to date. The 2023/24 programme will offer 8,700 new places with approximately 4,700 of these by higher education providers in the EMRA region.
- The provision of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Research Centres that play a critical role in helping Ireland recover from and overcome global challenges such as Brexit, future pandemics and climate change. At the end of 2022, SFI Research Centres have signed 1,426 collaborative research agreements with 688 companies (366 of which are Irish companies).
- The government had set an ambitious target to retrofit 500,000 homes by 2030. Important steps in delivering this target are to increase numbers enrolling in NZEB courses and the establishment of the SOLAS Green Skills Programme Office. In 2022, the target to retrofit 27,000 homes was achieved and for 2023 the aim is to retrofit 37,000 homes. Within the EMRA Region, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards (ETBs) operate an NZEB Centre of Excellence at the National Construction Training Campus in Mount Lucas.

RSOs Supported



Healthy
Communities



Sustainable
Settlement
Patterns



Support the
Transition to
Low Carbon and
Clean Energy



Improve
Education,
Skills & Social
Inclusion



A Strong Economy
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& Innovation

Department of Education

- The use of Dormant Account Funding to tackle education disadvantage for Traveller and Roma communities, to support attendance, participation and retention among Traveller and Roma learners. It is noted that €400,000 of such funding was allocated in 2022.
- The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme with a fund of €180 million signifies the Department's commitment to addressing educational disadvantage where it arises. Since last September (2023) the scheme includes over 1,200 schools and supports 240,000 students (one in four students are now supported).
- Under the National Development Plan increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding will address ancillary accommodation requirements across schools, particularly to support the reform and modernisation of school curricula (e.g., STEM and PE) involving PE Hall and Laboratory build.
- To assist schools applying for improved school facilities projects, the Department has developed a suite of technical and school design guidance with a view to offering better guidance to school authorities and design teams. These are available on the Department's website and are continually reviewed and updated based on ongoing policy of research and feedback from reviews of recently built schools. The Department is also committed to ensuring that school building designs continue to incorporate the provisions of Universal Design.
- Ongoing work by the Department to carry out an annual demographic analysis for school planning purposes which takes into account multiple factors including the residential development activity, child benefit data and school enrolments to identify future requirements, and better support the appropriate timing of school accommodation provision in line with the pace of residential development. The Department indicate that the longer-term perspective is informed by the NPF, RSES and Development Plans as appropriate.

RSOs Supported



Healthy
Communities



Sustainable
Settlement
Patterns



Improve
Education,
Skills & Social
Inclusion

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

- The emphasis on measures to stimulate and support urban brownfield and public transport-led housing development at scale to facilitate convergence with the NPF development scenario.
- Evidence that compact growth goals of targeting a greater proportion (40%) of future housing development to be within and close to the existing 'footprint' of built-up areas is happening. In 2022, 84.1% of all new dwelling completions were in urban areas and the remainder in rural areas. At the beginning of the new dwelling completion series in 2011, 38% were in urban and 62% in rural areas.
- Policy Measures and Funding to promote compact growth and regeneration in order to reverse the stagnation or decline of town centres, including measures to reduce vacancy, re-use existing buildings and promote infill and area-based regeneration. This includes the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), Town Centre First measures, to regulatory measures such as the Residential Zoned Land Tax and proposed Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones legislation, simplifying requirements for change of use from vacant commercial to residential in town centres, and the Croí Cónaithe (Cities and Towns) Funds.
- The introduction of the Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme, in addition to promoting city focused and compact growth, seeks to increase the supply of owner occupier apartments and to provide those who wish to purchase a home with greater choice.
- A total of € 637,830,342.04 has been allocated to URDF projects across the EMRA Region.
- A focused 3rd URDF Call issued on the 30th January 2023, specifically designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across cities and towns, ensuring accelerated provision of residential accommodation in accordance with the Government's Vacant Home Action Plan 2023.
- The provision of financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structures Fund (HSF). The Community Monuments Fund (CMF) introduced this year is for conservation and other works at national monuments.
- NPWS awarded funding, through the Heritage Council, for the appointment of biodiversity officers in those EMRA counties which did not already have a biodiversity officer, namely Kildare, Offaly, Westmeath, Laois, Longford, Louth and Meath.
- The NPWS Farm Plan Scheme that supports landowners to deliver actions that benefit habitats and species in Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, to support farmland biodiversity more generally, and to provide a platform for trialling new conservation approaches which can be delivered on a wider scale. Farm Plans were delivered in counties Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois in 2021 and 2022.
- Ongoing investment in a number of the major waters services projects in the Region as identified in the RSES.
- The allocation of €98 million (2019-2024) to Uisce Éireann's 'Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme' to provide capacity primarily in wastewater treatment plants to cater for growth in smaller settlements that would not otherwise be provided for in the larger scale investment plan. The programme is directed at settlements with a population of less than 2,000 persons, with identified capacity constraints and where no Uisce Éireann capacity upgrade project is currently proposed, offering the potential for housing development in settlements in rural areas as an alternative to one-off development.
- Continued work by State Bodies and agencies to deliver the RSES such as the OPR training and research programme that strongly supports the implementation of RSES objectives by upskilling and informing staff, elected representatives and decision makers in local authorities and regional assemblies on the principles, policies and procedures that support the implementation of these policy objectives.

RSOs Supported

 Sustainable Settlement Patterns	 Compact Growth & Urban Regeneration	 Rural Communities	 Healthy Communities	 Creative Places
 Biodiversity & Natural Heritage	 Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy	 Build Climate Resilience	 Integrated Transport & Land Use	 Enhanced Green Infrastructure
 Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources				
 Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion	 Enhance Regional Connectivity	 Global City Region	 Collaboration Platform	 A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise & Innovation

Department of Transport

- Identification, under the Transport-Orientated Development Working Group, of fourteen key locations in Dublin that have the potential for the phased delivery of circa 130,000 residential units and other intensive mixed-use development that is close to existing or planned high-capacity public transport nodes.
- Implementation of the Masterplan 2040 for Dublin Port in order to ensure that the Port can provide for future sustainable growth and changes in facilitating seaborne trade in goods and passenger movements to and from Ireland and the Dublin region in particular.
- A policy statement on the facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by ports was published in December 2021, in relation to the provision of Offshore Renewable Energy facilities.
- A Railway Order application was submitted to An Bord Pleanála on 30th September 2022 for Metrolink which will be a fully segregated and mostly underground new rail line from the Swords area to Charlemont in the south of Dublin City.
- Planning applications have been submitted to An Bord Pleanála in respect of nine of the twelve Dublin Core Bus Corridor schemes under the BusConnects Dublin programme and applications for all remaining schemes will be lodged by the end of 2023. Dublin Bus is also preparing for the introduction of 134 electric buses into service.
- The detailed project brief for next-generation ticketing was approved by Government in March 2022 facilitating the commencement of competitive dialogue.
- The DART + programme, an expansion of DART services, is being progressed. This includes the purchase of 95 additional DART carriages for arrival in 2025 and the purchase of 90 new battery-electric multiple units to enter service in 2026; the lodgement of a Railway Order to An Bord Pleanála for DART+ West on 29th July 2022 which includes a new depot and Dublin city centre works on the Maynooth line; the lodgement of a Railway Order to An Bord Pleanála for DART+ South West on 22nd March 2023 which will extend DART services from Dublin city centre to Hazelhatch and Celbridge train station and includes four-tracking from Park West to Heuston.
- The submission by the NTA of a preliminary business case for the Luas Finglas project to the Department of Transport.
- New rail stations at Pelletstown, Kishogue (West Dublin), Woodbrook DART (Shankill) are either completed, under construction or are commencing construction and new stations are proposed for Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin and Kylemore in Dublin.
- The draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review report, which will inform the development of inter-urban/inter-regional rail, was published in July 2023 and it is anticipated it will be completed in Q4 2023.
- The development of the Enterprise Fleet Replacement Programme (EFRP) which includes the procurement of new Intercity trains for the flagship cross-border service between Dublin and Belfast.
- The new National Train Control Centre (NTCC) building at Heuston station was completed in March 2023. Full commissioning is expected by May 2026.
- The NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area was launched in January 2023 with a focus on Avoid-Shift-Improve (ASI) framework for transport sustainability to categorise all transport sector actions under CAP 23.
- The publication of the Rail Freight 2040 Strategy by Iarnród Éireann in December 2021.
- A draft Cycle Plan for the Greater Dublin Area was published by the NTA in 2023.
- Active Travel Teams have been established in all local authorities.
- Phase 1 of 'Connecting Ireland', the NTA's Rural Mobility Plan, was launched in 2022 with 38 new and enhanced services launched, and Phase 2 was launched in February 2023 with 69 new and enhanced services. The Plan aims to increase public transport connectivity in rural areas. Furthermore, there has been significantly increased funding for enhancing TFI Local Link services (the Rural Transport Programme).
- An increase in accessible infrastructure and services, including supports, to enable disabled people to travel independently on public transport.
- Implementation of actions under the National Sustainable Mobility Policy, published in April 2022, including progress on 35 projects under a Pathfinder Programme, centred around a shift to sustainable mobility.

- Implementation of a Climate Action & Sustainable Mobility Public Engagement Strategy, to help support and communicate the wider benefits of climate action in transport, and to support delivery on the scale of behavioural change required.
- The NTA has published an advice note, guidance on an Area Based Transport Assessment methodology, to assist local authorities in preparing Local Transport Plans
- Provisional political agreement on an Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) to reduce transport emissions on the TEN-T network was reached in March 2023
- Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (ZEV) was launched in July 2022 as a dedicated office charged with supporting consumers, the public sector and businesses to continue to make the switch to zero emission vehicles.
- The EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 was published in January 2023 regarding the delivery of a public EV charging network including the availability of a wide range of supports to incentivise the purchase of EVs.
- National Demand Management Strategy, providing mechanisms for increasing efficiency in the transport system by reducing travel demand, is currently being prepared. It is anticipated that a draft Strategy will be available for public consultation by Q4 2023.

RSOs Supported



Sustainable
Settlement
Patterns



Compact Growth
& Urban
Regeneration



Rural
Communities



Healthy
Communities



Integrated
Transport
& Land Use



Support the
Transition to
Low Carbon and
Clean Energy



Enhance
Regional
Connectivity



Global City
Region

Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

- Continued alignment of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) to form Project Ireland 2040 ensuring investment decisions are aligned, thus supporting the growth strategy of the RSES.
- Continued publication of Project Ireland 2040 Annual Reports since 2018, along with Regional Reports for each of those years to highlight achievements since the launch of the NDP and give a detailed overview of the public investments which have been made. Project Ireland 2040 Annual and Regional Reports for 2022 are planned for publication in July 2023.
- The publication and update of the capital investment tracker which contains information on individual projects and programmes; the update increased the coverage of projects and includes the ability to search the tracker by county with user-friendly dashboards.
- The publication of the myProjectIreland interactive map which includes search facilities allowing citizens to view projects in their regional area, by city, by county or by eircode.
- Government commitment to invest €165 billion in capital programmes and projects across a range of investment sectors, as set out in the NDP 2021-2030, ensuring investment continues to be made in areas such as housing, transport, education, enterprise, sport and climate action.
- Acknowledgement of the strength of Regional Assemblies in the delivery of EU funds in Ireland including the ERDF and EU JTF.
- Renaming and reconstitution of the DPENDR to specifically include NDP Delivery, has brought about a greater emphasis and mandate for the delivery of the NDP.
- The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform secured Government approval for a package of measures on 29th March 2023, which include:
 - Significant changes to reduce the administrative burden in delivering major capital projects; Minister now taking a direct role in overseeing delivery of the NDP through chairing the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board;
 - Capacity reviews of departments and agencies with significant delivery programmes to ensure that adequate resources for project delivery are in place;
 - Additional reforms to the Capital Works Management Framework, which sets out the contracts used for public capital projects;
 - Direct reporting to Government on NDP delivery on a quarterly basis throughout 2023 and 2024 will now also take place
 - Independent evaluation of NDP priorities and capacity will be conducted over the coming months.

RSOs Supported



Department of Foreign Affairs

- The commitment to achieving deeper North South co-operation and the support for InterTradeIreland that supports businesses trading on a cross border bases and Tourism Ireland which promotes Ireland to overseas tourists on an all-Ireland basis.
- The continued use of the Reconciliation Fund to provide supports for civil society organisations working to promote reconciliation and improved understanding for communities in Northern Ireland, North - South interaction and between Ireland and Britain.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

- The establishment of a permanent network of local authority Integration Teams (LAITs) to co-ordinate the provision of supports for applicants for international protection and programme refugees. This initiative satisfies a core objective of the RSES by helping to address social exclusion of such migrant populations.
- The 'Together for Better' funding initiative launched by the Department in September 2022 for Early Learning and Childcare provides significant improvement in supports available to the delivery of early childhood learning, quality and affordability for children, parents and families as well as stability and sustainability for service providers.
- The provision of €46.29 million in funding supports under the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme is an important initiative to provide out-of-school supports to marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable young people in the community to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential.

RSOs Supported



Healthy Communities



Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion



Enhance Regional Connectivity



Collaboration Platform



A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise & Innovation

RSOs Supported



Healthy Communities



Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion

EMRA

- Working with local authorities to ensure planning policy alignment with the RSES, including the finalisation of all City/ County Development Plans.
- Ongoing implementation of the Dublin MASP with stakeholders through the established governance structures of the MASP Strategic Planning Committee and the MASP Implementation Group, to enable coordinated delivery of policy and infrastructure relating to transport, housing, enterprise and water infrastructure, which provides RSES Implementation.
- Ongoing policy development and research carried out by EMRA to advance and facilitate RSES Implementation including a preliminary Research and Cooperation framework to drive implementation of the regional agenda, a Green infrastructure and Ecosystem Services Mapping Methodology, Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool, collaboration with the OECD to develop research on Regional Attractiveness, and contributor and steering functions on externally related projects.
- The Pathfinder 27 Project, the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Programme, is being delivered by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, for the Eastern and Midland Region. The project consists of a training, education and capacity building workshop programme to assist local authorities, councillors and public participation networks to design and implement smart and sustainable mobility projects.
- Preparatory work by the EMRA to develop a Regional Renewable Electricity Strategy to provide an effective structure through which EMRA can harness the market opportunities presented by its onshore renewable energy resources and supply sustainable development of carbon free onshore renewable electricity.
- The launch of the Regional Development Monitor to provide a much-needed evidence base to support decision making and policy formation, at a time when the planning and wider public sector is faced with many challenges such as housing, regeneration, placemaking, the environment, climate change, sustainable transport and renewable energy.
- Engagement with EU Projects to address complex RSES Implementation challenges, including the production of four policy briefs to inform policy makers in the area of Ecosystem Services and landscape governance for sustainability (PROGRESS), a Regional Digitalisation Roadmap to facilitate increased attractiveness of areas (Next 2 Met), and supporting economic and social transformation in rural areas through industrial innovation, with a particular focus on the agri-food sector (ORIGINN).
- Membership of ENCORE and hosting the 14th Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE) from Tullamore in September 2021 with a focus on Maintaining and enhancing Ecosystem Services, transitioning to a Circular Society, and Achieving Zero Emissions through Climate Action.
- EMRA's strategic role with regard to EU Programming and Funding, including the EU JTF and ERDF, strengthening alignment between policy formulation and delivery of the evidence based RSES, with EU Funding Streams, thus maximising benefits for the Region and creating tangible impacts where it matters.
- EMRA as the URBACT National Contact Point, helping to guide Irish towns and cities towards integrated sustainable urban development. In this way, EMRA is building up its own urban expertise and capacities in the realm of sustainable development which encompasses the three main objectives of the RSES - healthy placemaking, climate action and economic opportunities.
- Strengthening the relevance and applicability of the ongoing work of IREO for RSES Implementation, including through enhanced communication to stakeholders around engaging in EU Funding to facilitate delivery, and learning from the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) opinions to inform RSES Implementation.
- EMRA engaging with key stakeholders through the National SEA Forum and project involvement to enhance SEA monitoring and processes.

RSOs Supported



Sustainable Settlement Patterns



Compact Growth & Urban Regeneration



Rural Communities



Healthy Communities



Creative Places



Biodiversity & Natural Heritage



Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy



Build Climate Resilience



Integrated Transport & Land Use



Enhanced Green Infrastructure



Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources



Improve Education, Skills & Social Inclusion



Enhance Regional Connectivity



Global City Region



Collaboration Platform



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1.0

Introduction

This report, known as a ‘Monitoring Report’, outlines progress made in implementing the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region (EMR).

The purpose of the Report is to specify the progress made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region, including progress made by relevant public bodies and each local authority in the Regional Assembly area.

A Monitoring Report is prepared every two years. This is the second Monitoring Report prepared by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, following the making of the RSES for the Region in June 2019.

1.1

Previous Monitoring Report 2021

The first Monitoring Report of the RSES was prepared in 2021. It outlines numerous examples of progress between 2019 and 2021 by local authorities and public bodies that was worthy of note. This includes, for instance, the work carried out by local authorities to align their planning policy with the RSES and engage with the Regional Assembly in this regard, as well as ongoing work across the Region by local authorities, in enhancing the newly designated Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns. Likewise, work carried out of the MASP Implementation Group was noted as significant in progressing the implementation of the Dublin MASP.

Implementation progress of the public bodies was also documented as noteworthy in securing the overall objectives of the RSES. This included, for instance, the work of the Department of Rural and Community Development, through the use of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, to assist in the regeneration of rural towns and villages thus strengthening rural economies and communities. Likewise, the indication from the Climate Governance Division in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communities that the Climate Action Fund, was established on a statutory basis with effect from 1 August 2020, with a key objective of providing support for projects, initiatives and research that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets, and for projects and initiatives in regions of the State, and within sectors of the economy, impacted by the transition to a low carbon economy.

The Monitoring Report 2021 also documented areas for improvement, providing a number of recommendations for consideration by NOAC, to improve the implementation progress of the RSES. Specifically, this includes recommendations to address the Assembly's then concern that a number of key and relevant public bodies did not engage with this process. The recommendations for consideration by NOAC are stated to be based upon the information requested and subsequently provided by local authorities and public bodies. They are provided for local authorities under the headings of Planning Policy Alignment, Delivering the Spatial Strategy, Funding Ambition, and Recommendations of the local authorities. Recommendations relating to public bodies are provided for under the heading Engagement with the Regional Assembly, and under the name of each public body that responded.

As part of the Report, the Regional Assembly also outlined the progress it had made over the two years in implementing the RSES. This included the establishment of Governance Structures for RSES Implementation, Ensuring Consistency with the RSES, Dublin MASP Implementation, Policy Development and Research, Development of a Regional Development Monitor as Ireland's Regional Data Hub, National Funding Programmes, EU Projects, The Just Transition Process-EMRA's Role, EU Programming and Funding, and Raising the Regional Profile.

The Monitoring Report 2021 was submitted to NOAC in August 2021 and to date the Assembly has had no formal correspondence from NOAC relating to the Report.



2.0

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

2.1

What is a RSES?

A Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy is a planning and economic framework that considers the future development of the region for a period of not less than 12 years and not more than 20 years. It is made by a Regional Assembly in accordance with the provisions of Chapter III of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. A Regional Assembly is required to review the RSES every six years.

The objective of a RSES is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), as part of Project Ireland 2040, and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Region. The RSES is of critical importance for the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, given that it is the succeeding tier of policy delivery in Ireland.



2.2

Alignment with a RSES

Local authority City and County Development Plans (CDPs) are required to be consistent with the RSES. Similarly, Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) must be submitted to the Regional Assembly for consideration with respect to consistency with the RSES.

Public bodies are required to assist and co-operate as far as practicable with a Regional Assembly in supporting the implementation of the RSES. Furthermore, each public body is required to consult with a Regional Assembly, as appropriate, when preparing its own strategies, plans and programmes, to ensure that they are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

With respect to the Eastern and Midland Region, the RSES and Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) of the National Transport Authority (NTA), are also required to be consistent.



2.3

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region (EMR) was made in June 2019. The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunity for all. The vision is supported by 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) that are framed around three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. A primary statutory objective of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), the NDP, and thus Project Ireland 2040.

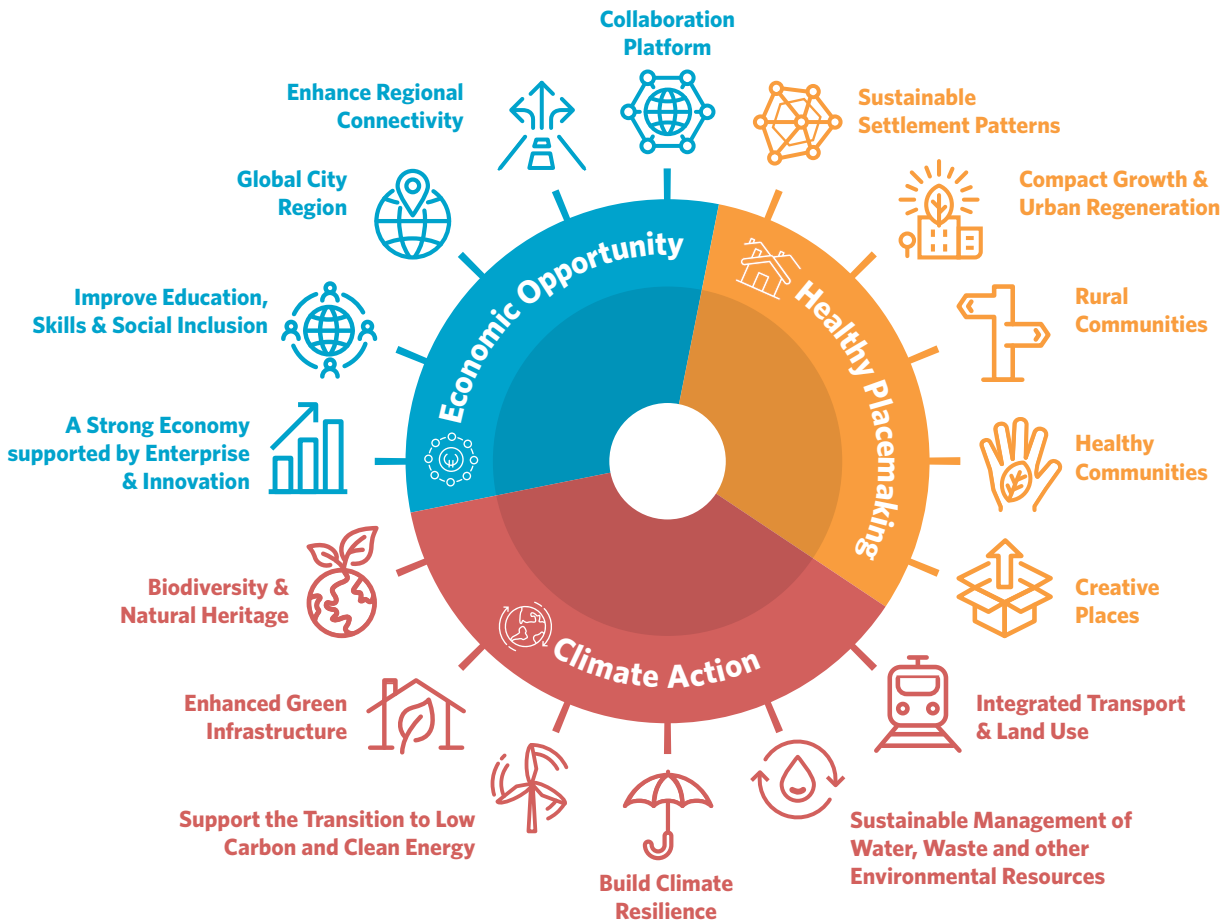


Figure 1: Key Principles and Regional Strategic Outcomes of the EMRA's RSES



3.0

Legislative Basis for this Report

This Report is prepared under Section 25A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act).

The Act outlines that, in respect of the regional spatial and economic strategy of a regional assembly, public bodies and each local authority within the regional assembly area shall, every 2 years, prepare and submit a report to the assembly setting out progress made in supporting objectives, relevant to that body, of the strategy.

In addition, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) shall, every 2 years, prepare a report (referred to as a monitoring report) monitoring progress made in implementing the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

The Monitoring Report shall provide an update on the overall progress being made in securing the overall objectives of the regional spatial and economic strategy since the last monitoring report was prepared in 2021, including any specific actions and outcomes, including actions specific to the public bodies.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is now required to submit its second RSES monitoring report to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC). The National Oversight and Audit Commission shall consider the Monitoring Report of the Regional Assembly and may make recommendations to the Minister in relation to relevant measures to further support the implementation of the RSES.

The public bodies for the purpose of this report are²;

1. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
2. The Minister for Rural and Community Development
3. The Minister for Finance
4. The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform
5. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
6. The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications
7. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
8. The Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
9. The Minister for Transport
10. The Minister for Health
11. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
12. The Minister for Education
13. The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
14. The Minister for Foreign Affairs

² The list of public bodies presented here are updated to reflect the current configuration of Government Departments. Section 22A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, outlines that a 'public body' means (a) the Minister, (b) the Minister for Finance, (c) the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, (d) the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, (e) the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, (f) the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, (g) the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, (h) the Minister for Health, (i) the Minister for Education and Skills, (j) the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade



4.0

Collaboration between Regional Assemblies

Interregional collaboration has and continues to be a core component of the workings of each of the Regional Assemblies. Each Regional Assembly recognises that some complex strategic objectives of their respective RSES can only be achieved through collaboration with adjoining regions that have similar objectives and priorities.

To date, good governance and leadership from the Regional Assemblies has contributed to the overall sustainability and viability of interregional and cross border initiatives. This includes;

- The Association of Irish Regions (AIR), which is a collaborative platform representing the three Regional Assemblies at both a political and executive level. This association is made up of the current and former Cathaoirigh of the three Regional Assemblies, supported by the Director of each Assembly. The AIR hosted its first regional seminar and training event in February 2023, to explore the role of regions in navigating present and future challenges including, among others, climate change, the energy transition and demographic shifts. The Seminar and Training event provided a platform to exchange and discuss regional perspectives for policy making, economic and spatial development and how the Regional Assemblies are a key delivery mechanism for strong regional development.
- Formal and Informal cooperation between Regional Assemblies not explicitly linked to the RSES, relating, for instance, to EU Regional Operational Programmes and the Committee of the Regions.
- Dedicated Strategic Planning Area (SPA) Committees made up of elected members, to provide a forum that progresses RSES Implementation, and, discusses issues which are common to similar localities, including peripheral areas of the Region and those with a cross border focus. A map of the EMR SPA areas is provided below at Figure 2.
- A dedicated RSES Network Group that provides a forum for the executive of the three Regional Assemblies to progress implementation of the RSESs and related policy and research. This is supported by an Assistant Director Forum made up of the Senior Planners of each Regional Assembly.
- The preparation of the Regional Development Monitor as Ireland's Regional Data Hub, by the three Regional Assemblies and led by EMRA, to monitor the performance of the RSES over its lifecycle and provide a wealth of spatial data for multiple stakeholders using free web-based access.
- Ongoing engagement focused on a bilateral and multilateral basis with key implementation stakeholders to advance RSES implementation across all Regional Assemblies.

It should be noted that the Regional Assemblies regularly assess these arrangements and where appropriate recommend measures to leading stakeholders of interregional collaborative actions to ensure efficiency, sustainability and success of their projects in achieving their objectives.

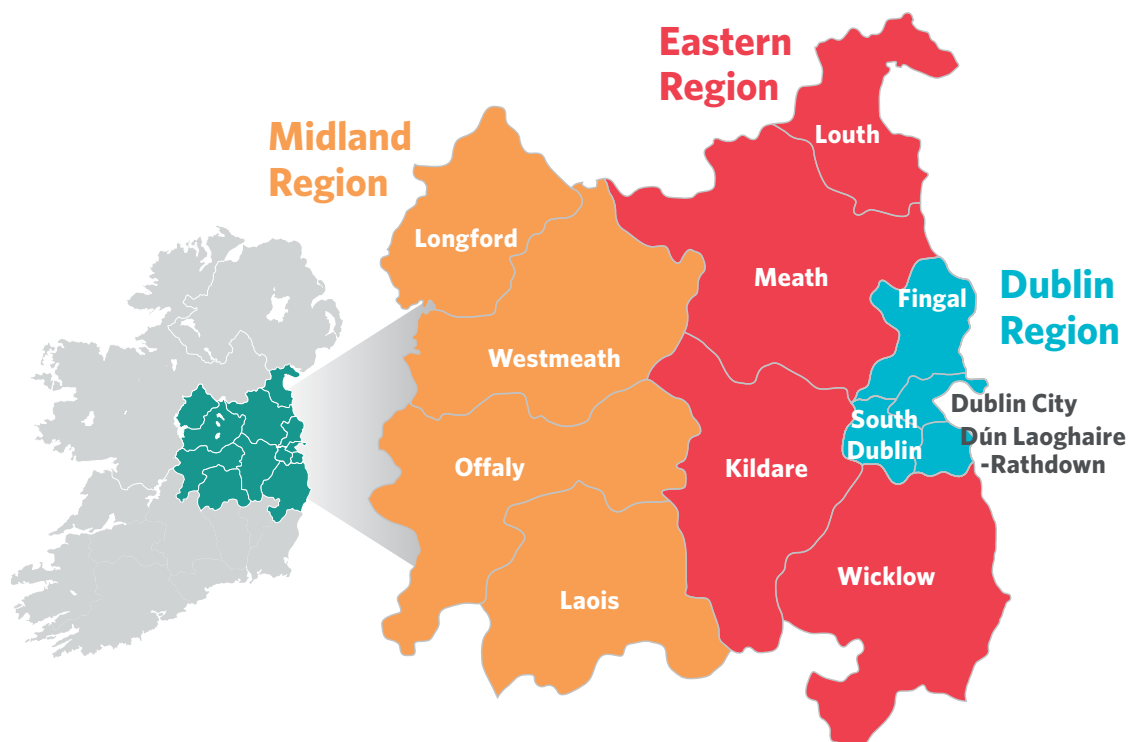


Figure 2: Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs) of the Eastern and Midland Region



5.0

Progress made by local authorities in implementing the RSES

This section of the Report will focus on progress made in implementing the RSES by local authorities as required by the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The report will specify the progress made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES, including any specific actions and outcomes.

5.1

Implementation progress made by local authorities

As identified above (Section 3.0), each local authority within the regional assembly area shall, every 2 years, prepare and submit a report to the assembly setting out progress made in supporting objectives, relevant to that body, of the strategy.

The Regional Assembly facilitated each local authority to fulfil this requirement by;

- Notifying each local authority of their requirement to prepare and submit a report to the Assembly, and;
- Enabling each local authority to action this requirement through the provision of a 'Request Form' which could be completed and submitted as their report.

The 'Request Forms' circulated requested detail relating to progress performance areas relevant to local authorities. These progress performance areas, chosen for this two-year review period (2021-2023), are reflective of the stage in the implementation cycle of the RSES period. The 'Request Form Template' can be found at Appendix A of this Report.

Local authorities were requested to outline progress relating to their County Development Plan (CDP), and Local Area Plans (LAPs). In addition, local authorities were requested to outline progress relating to their interaction with funding streams available, Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), and to provide any additional information that they would like to make with respect to their local authority and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that they consider would facilitate the implementation of the Strategy.

All 12 local authorities within the Eastern and Midland Region submitted a report to the Assembly setting out progress made in supporting objectives, relevant to that local authority, of the RSES. Please note that this Section should be read in tandem with Section 7.3 which documents Dublin MASP Implementation Progress by the relevant local authorities.

In order to monitor implementation progress of the RSES, a number of progress areas related to local authorities, have been chosen for this two-year review period. These progress areas are reflective of this stage in the implementation cycle of the RSES period.

They include progress related to;

- A. Planning Policy Alignment with the RSES
- B. Delivering the Spatial Strategy of the RSES by each local authority
- C. Funding- the ambition and interaction of each local authority with Funding Mechanisms
- D. Local Economic and Community Plans

In addition, this section of the Report also details local authority comments, recommendations relating to implementing the RSES and key milestones and good practices (documented at Sections E, F and G below).

A) Planning Policy Alignment with the RSES

The alignment of local authority planning policy with the RSES is considered to be a significant progress milestone in supporting objectives, relevant to the local authority, of the RSES. Consistency with the RSES will enable and progress the implementation of policy and objectives contained within the Strategy. Section 12 (18) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, explicitly states that a statutory obligation of a local authority in making a development plan includes the obligation to ensure that the development plan is consistent with the national and regional objectives specified in the RSES. Furthermore, Section 10 (1) A of the Act requires the core strategy of a development plan to show that the development objectives in the development plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and the RSES, and, Section 27. (1) requires that a planning authority shall ensure, when making a development plan or a local area plan, that the plan is consistent with any RSES in force for its area.

A) (i) County Development Plan Progress

By the end of April 2023, all 12 local authorities in the Region completed their development plan review process. The Assembly welcomes the completion of the development plan reviews which align planning policy at county and local levels with regional and national policy.

Table 1 outlines the completion dates and status of City and County Development Plans across the Region.

Local Authority	CDP	Made	Came into Effect	Direction	Comments
Dublin City	Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028	2nd November 2022	14th December 2022	None	
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Development Plan 2022-2028	2nd November 2022	14th December 2022	Ministerial Direction issued on 28th September 2022. Omission of O/O zoning (Killiney area) and omission of requirement for certain percentages of 3-bed apartments in B2R developments.	Judicial Review: Three applications to the High Court have been made for Judicial Reviews in relation to DLR's CDP 2022-2028. These relate to the Specific Local Objective to provide for education facilities at Stillorgan Industrial Estate / Benildus Avenue; the Institutional designation and rezoning of lands at Our Land's Grove, Goatstown to open space zoning objective; that 'residential' and 'residential institution' are not 'permitted in principle' or 'open for consideration' in Bulloch Harbour.
Fingal	Fingal County Development 2023 - 2029	22nd February 2023	5th April 2023	Ministerial Direction issued on 28th July 2023 in relation to the location of employment zoned lands, and noise standards in relation to aircraft noise.	
Kildare	Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029	9th December 2022	28th January 2023	None	Judicial Review: - On 9th February 2023, Cairn Homes PLC and Glenveigh Properties PLC have applied to the High Court for a Judicial Review of the new Kildare plan in relation to the core strategy housing allocations/growth strategy.
Laois	Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027	25th January 2022	8th March 2022	Ministerial Direction issued on 28th September 2022 in relation to set back distances in the wind energy strategy, amendments to wording of Objective CM RE 1 in the Renewable Energy Strategy, deletion of building height restrictions on greenfield sites and the reinstatement of land use zoning objectives.	
Longford	Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027	19th October 2021	30th November 2021	None	
Louth	Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027	30th September 2021	3rd November 2021	None	Louth County Council adopted Variation No. 1 to their CDP on 18/07/2022. This variation updated the CDP to take account of the methodology and housing projections as set out in the Section 28 Guidelines 'Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning' and the 'Projected Housing Demand by Local Authority Area 2020-2031 - ESRI NPF Scenario Housing Supply Target' provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in December 2020. This ensured that the Development Plan is consistent and aligned with national and regional policy.

Local Authority	CDP	Made	Came into Effect	Direction	Comments
Meath		22nd September 2021	3rd November 2021	Ministerial Direction issued on 28th January 2022 relating to changes to certain land use zonings.	Judicial Review: Drogheda (South Environs)- On 17th February 2023, the High Court gave its judgement on the Judicial Review case between Protect East Meath Limited and Meath County Council and Trailford Ltd, Shannon Homes Ltd, Rockmill Ltd, Glenveagh Homes Ltd, Neemats Ltd and J Murphy Developments Ltd. The court found against the removal of all phasings of residential zoning from relevant lands in the southern environs of Drogheda.
Offaly		10th September 2021	22nd October 2021	None	
South Dublin		22nd June 2022	3rd August 2022	Ministerial Direction issued on 18th November 2022 Omit the Enterprise and Employment zoning and the SLO which requires site-specific flood alleviation measures introduced as Material Amendments 2.20 and 9.4 from the lands to the north and east of the existing Greenogue Business Park and retain the Rural RU zoning objective. Amend the land use zoning objectives in tables 12.4, 12.8 and 12.10 to reinstate data centre use class as an 'open for consideration' use class in the REGEN, Enterprise and Employment (EE) and Major Retail Centre (MRC) zoning objectives.	Judicial Review: Two applications to the High Court have been made for Judicial Reviews in relation to SDCC's CDP 2022-2028. The first is in relation to the Ministerial Direction relating to the removal of 53ha of land zoned 'EE' (general employment) from lands at Greenogue. The second relates to an objective included in the CDP for a school in Ballycullen.
Westmeath		22nd March 2021	3rd May 2021	Ministerial Direction dated 28th September 2022	
Wicklow		12th September 2022	23rd October 2022	Ministerial Direction Issued on 21st February 2023 in relation to certain settlement boundaries and land use zonings.	Judicial Review: On 27th October 2022 Cairn Homes PLC and Glenveigh Properties PLC have applied to the High Court for a Judicial Review of the new Wicklow CDP in relation to the core strategy housing allocations/growth strategy.

Table 1: Stage of City and County Development Plan Reviews

A) (ii) Progress of Local Area Plans (LAPs) for Regional Growth Centres

As outlined in the National Planning Framework, local area plans are prepared for **Regional Growth Centres** within the Region. The Eastern and Midland Region contains three Regional Growth Centres. These are Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk

Regional Growth Centre LAP Progress

Athlone

Athlone straddles the administrative boundaries of Counties Westmeath and Roscommon, and the administrative boundaries of the Eastern and Midland and Northern and Western Regional Assemblies. Accordingly, a joint UAP is to be prepared.

The Athlone Urban Area Plan (AUAP) will be drafted by the end of Q4 2023 and the formal AUAP consultation process will commence in 2024.

- An Economic Strategy prepared for Athlone in conjunction with Roscommon County Council, officially launched in February 2023.
- An Area Based Transport Assessment for Athlone has been prepared and is currently being finalised by both Councils.
- The preparation of the Athlone Urban Design & Regeneration Framework which will provide a roadmap for the regeneration of the town core together with more detailed proposals in respect of key regeneration sites, is nearing completion.
- A Strategic Issues Paper has been drafted to stimulate debate on the content of the forthcoming AUAP and will be placed on public display in July 2023.
- Consultants appointed to prepare the SEA, AA and SFRA of the AUAP.

Drogheda

Drogheda straddles the administrative boundaries of Counties Louth and Meath and accordingly, a joint plan is to be prepared.

Both the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 and Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 have acknowledged the status of Drogheda as a Regional Growth Centre in the RSES and include the requirement to prepare a joint plan for the town.

There continues to be active engagement and cooperation between the local authorities and the Regional Assembly in this regard. An issues paper has been drafted and background studies and baseline preparation work has been ongoing on transportation and economic development issues. Consultants have been appointed to carry out environmental assessments.

SH OBJ 6, Chapter 3 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out that the existing southern environs of Drogheda Local Area Plan 2009 shall remain in place until it is replaced with the UAP.

The commencement of the UAP is currently paused pending the outcome of a judicial review case taken by Protect East Meath vs Meath County Council in relation to land use zoning in the Southern Environs of Drogheda.

Dundalk

Dundalk is identified as a Regional Growth Centre in the RSES and the Local Area Plan (LAP) is to provide a coordinated approach to infrastructure investment for the sustainable development and growth of the urban settlements and interconnections will be necessary to build greater levels of critical mass and facilitate the effective movement of people and goods.

On the 1st June 2023, Louth County Council commenced the LAP preparation process with the publication of the Pre-draft Issues Paper with a four week submissions period.

A) (iii) Progress of Local Area Plans (LAPs)

Local area plans shall be consistent with the objectives of the development plan, its core strategy, and any regional spatial and economic strategy that apply to the area of the plan. A local area plan may include objectives for the zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes, or such other objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, including the objective of development of land on a phased basis and, detail on community facilities and amenities and on standards for the design of developments and structures. Each planning authority within the Greater Dublin Area shall ensure that its local area plans are consistent with the transport strategy of the National Transport Authority.

Local area plans are to be prepared for the Key Towns of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Key Towns are large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.

Key Town LAP Progress

Dublin SPA

Old Connaught LAP

The Old Connaught area is identified as a 'New Plan to be prepared' in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Development Plan 2022-2028.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) County Council has commenced the plan-making process for Old Connaught. Pre-draft public consultation has been undertaken with respect to the Old Connaught LAP within DLR area, to facilitate mainly residential development as part of the westward expansion of the Key Town of Bray, with the pre-draft public consultation process undertaken between 8th May 2023 to 6th June 2023. Following on from the pre-draft public consultation process, a draft LAP will be prepared.

This preparatory research and background work includes;

- Infrastructure Capacity Assessment Study - work has commenced on this Study for the southeast area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and this Study will inform the LAP.
- Local Transport Plan - work has commenced on the Local Transport Plan (with Area Based Transport Assessment) for the LAP area.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) /Appropriate Assessment (AA) - Consultants have been appointed to undertake AA services and the tendering process is nearing completion to appoint a consultant to provide SEA services.
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment - work has commenced on the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the draft LAP.
- Bray and Environs Transport Study 2019 and 2021 - This Study was prepared by the NTA in conjunction with TII, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, and Wicklow County Council, and provides a strategic planning framework for the development of transport infrastructure both in the LAP area and the wider environs.
- Background work on a range of other topics is commencing including: baseline studies; socio-economic analysis; future residential community and placemaking; climate action; heritage and conservation; recreation and open space; and sustainable neighbourhood infrastructure requirements.

It is anticipated that the plan-making process for the draft LAP will proceed in 2023 and 2024, and the final LAP will be adopted circa Q2 2024.

Swords LAP

Fingal County Council has stated that a local area plan will be prepared for Swords, as a designated Key Town under the RSES, however, work has not commenced on this to date.

Eastern SPA

Bray LAP

The Bray LAP 2018 is the current LAP in place for the town. At present, there is no review currently scheduled with the earliest time to consider a review being in 2024 unless this is impacted by any new requirements set out in the new Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, when enacted..

Naas LAP

The Naas Local Area Plan 2021-2027 was adopted in November 2021. The local area plan was supported by a series of evidence-based documents including but not limited to the Naas-Sallins Transport Strategy, a Social Infrastructure Audit and a Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Assessment (in accordance with the requirements of Appendix 3 of the National Planning Framework).

Navan LAP

The Navan written statement and zoning map in the Meath CDP 2021-2027 replaced the previous Navan DP until such times as new Navan LAP is adopted.

Meath County Council has no timeframe confirmed yet for the preparation of a Navan Local Area Plan.

- Navan 2050 - A Vision for the town, completed April 2021
- Town Centre Public Realm Strategy- Navan 2030- Completed 2016
- Urban Design Framework Plan, Flowerhill Abbeylands Regeneration Plan - Completed November 2021.
- Report on socio-economic impacts of Navan Rail Project, April 2021.

Maynooth LAP

The Maynooth Local Area Plan 2013-2019 is the current LAP in place in County Kildare.

Maynooth Local Area Plan 2024-20230:

Kildare County Council and Meath County Council have commenced the preparation of a Joint Local Area Plan (LAP) for Maynooth and its environs. The Joint LAP will incorporate a framework for guiding the future development of transportation, housing, retail, heritage, employment, and social and community infrastructure in Maynooth.

A pre-draft issues paper was published on 30th September 2022 with a 6-week submissions period until 11th November 2022. The pre-draft stage included a public drop-in event in the Glenroyal Hotel in Maynooth on 12th October 2022. The pre-draft consultation stage has been completed and a draft plan is expected to be published in either Q3 or Q4 2023. There are ongoing monthly meetings of a working group comprising of planning staff from Meath and Kildare County Councils.

The plan will be supported by an Environmental Report, Natura Impact Report, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Statement of Character, Habitats Survey and Green Infrastructure Mapping, Social Infrastructure Audit, Infrastructure Assessment and a Maynooth Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA).

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, Volume 2 contains a written statement and land use zoning objectives map for Maynooth Environs which provides a policy framework for the area in advance of preparation of a joint plan.

Wicklow - Rathnew LAP

The current plan in place is the Wicklow-Rathnew Development Plan 2013.

A new Wicklow-Rathnew Local Area Plan is scheduled to commence preparation in 2023. The local authority is awaiting an ABTA study which has not commenced to date.

Midlands SPA

Longford Town LAP

The LAP review is currently at Pre-draft Stage. An Issues Paper was produced and out for consultation between 7th October – 18th November 2022 inclusive.

The statutory process has yet to commence and is dependent upon the completion of the draft Local Transport Plan. It is expected that the draft Plan will be ready for publication in June 2023 and therefore has an anticipated completion date of April 2024. Studies undertaken as part of the CDP that are informing the LAP include the following: core strategy, infrastructure assessment report, housing strategy, economic and retail strategy, Protected Structure Record, Battery Road Architectural Conservation Area report.

Also the LAP will include the following - Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and a Local Transport Plan.

Mullingar LAP

The Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020 (MLAP) has been extended until 2025, pursuant to Section 19 (1) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended). The Mullingar Local Area Plan will be drafted by the end of Q4 2023 and the formal consultation process will commence in 2024.

The following preparatory reports and assessments have been undertaken to inform the MLAP:

- Town Centre Health Check
 - Social Infrastructure Audit
 - Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy
 - Work is progressing on the preparation of an Area Based Transport Assessment to inform the MLAP.
 - Consultants have been appointed to prepare the SEA, AA and SFRA of the MLAP.
-

Portlaoise LAP

The Portlaoise Local Area Plan current plan period 2018-2024. The draft Portlaoise LAP is underway; publication of draft plan expected Q3 2023 with an expected completion date of Q1 in 2024. Progress to date includes the appointment of SEA/AA consultants, background research commenced (consultation meetings held with internal & external consultees), completion of the issues paper, statutory environmental bodies notified, pre-draft public consultation undertaken on 1st December 2022. The Portlaoise Local Transport Plan (LTP) is also underway with transport consultants appointed.

Tullamore LAP

Tullamore was a former Town Council and so it had a Town and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended to 2021) which expired on adoption of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. The CDP includes a zoning objectives map for Tullamore. It is proposed that the Tullamore Local Area Plan 2024-2030 will commence preparation by the end of Q3 / start of Q4 2023.

An ABTA is currently being prepared for consultants for Tullamore for completion of summer 2023.

Tullamore Area Based Transport Assessment: Consulting Engineers DBFL appointed to carry out a transport assessment in Tullamore to identify the appropriate transport solutions for the Tullamore area including traffic, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, permeability and accessibility, public transport and parking. The study is ongoing with surveys complete and public consultation and stakeholder engagement to commence.

This plan will support the new Local Area Plan (LAP) for Tullamore and incorporate a coherent cycling and walking network serving work, school, commercial, health and sports facilities within a compact area. The ABTA study will identify the cycling and walking network need, suitable routes, option selection and preliminary design to allow Offaly County Council progress to detailed design to co-exist with the already approved Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1.

The Tullamore Regeneration Framework, currently in preparation proposes a framework for delivering future integrated urban developments for Tullamore by both the public and private sectors. In line with the National Planning Framework's NPO (1, 4, 5, 7 & 8) and the RSES section on Tullamore Regeneration, the Framework will aim to assist by setting the vision for the development of a number of key opportunity sites, potentially to be primed by the public sector but delivered largely by the private sector. A strong suite of regeneration sites, delivered to complement each other will make for a strong town centre and the mainstay of a strong key town.

The Framework will deliver:

- Vision for Tullamore to 2040
- A Public Realm Framework for Tullamore
- A Regeneration & Renewal Framework
- Strategy for Sustainable Access & Permeability

Following public procurement OCC have appointed Brady Shipman Martin Consulting Architects for the project. Framework complete 2023 following public consultation.

The Tullamore Harbour Development Options, Viability Appraisal and Masterplan, is being prepared for Offaly County Council and Waterways Ireland. This will provide detailed economic analysis of development options identified, recommend preferred options, most appropriate models of delivery, and produce a Masterplan for preferred and agreed option.

The appraisal will be used to inform decision making by the partners on the future use or development of the property/lands that make up the site. The harbour site includes property within the freehold ownership of Waterways Ireland and a portion of land licensed by OCC to Waterways Ireland.

The Tullamore Harbour site is cited as an opportunity Site No. 1 in the current development Plan. It has potential as a transformational urban development site for Tullamore, encompassing a multiplicity of possible business, innovation, residential and amenity uses. Waterways Ireland is relocating which will result in the harbour site being potentially available for redevelopment.

Following public procurement Offaly County Council have appointed Grafton Architects for the project. Framework will be completed in 2023 following public consultation.



Local area plans may also be prepared for other settlements throughout the Eastern and Midland Region and will be determined by each local authority. As part of the returns from the local authorities, not all existing or future local area plans were listed by each local authority. This is reflected in the table below. It should be noted, however, that some local authorities prepare 'Settlement Plans' which are contained within the development plan and, as such, are not reflected as part of this table.

Other Settlements LAP Progress

Dublin SPA

Dublin City Council (DCC) Existing Plans

- Clongriffin / Belmayne LAP 2012 - Extended to December 2022
- Georges Quay LAP 2012 - Extended to July 2022
- Ashtown / Pelletstown LAP 2013 - Extended to December 2023
- Ballymun LAP 2017 - Extended to October 2027
- Park West-Cherry Orchard LAP 2019 - 2025
- North East Inner City LAP to commence in 2024
- Glasnevin (Dublin Industrial Estate and Environs) LAP - The preparation of this LAP has commenced and the LAP is at pre-draft stage of the LAP process.
- Naas Road Lands LAP 2013 - Extended to January 2023. The preparation of a new LAP has commenced and the local authority is currently undertaking background research.

Schedule of other proposed LAPS and Key Urban Villages (KUVs) to be commenced subject to resources

- Donaghmede Key Urban Village
- Northside Key Urban Village
- Phibsborough Key Urban Village
- Rathmines Key Urban Village
- Santry/Whitehall (incl. Omni Key Urban Village)
- Donnybrook
- Drimnagh
- Drumcondra
- Harold's Cross
- Kilmainham/Inchicore
- Liberties
- Ranelagh
- Ringsend/Irishtown



Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council (DLRCC) Existing LAPs

- Ballyogan and Environs LAP 2019-2025
- Stillorgan LAP 2018-2024
- Woodbrook-Shanganagh LAP 2017-2023 – Extended to 2027
- Blackrock LAP 2015-2021 – Extended to March 2025
- Kilternan/Glenamuck LAP 2013-2018 – Extended to 2023

DLRCC Proposed LAPs

- Dundrum LAP- The pre-draft public consultation exercise is complete. All components and processes involved in the preparation of the draft LAP are at an advanced stage and nearing completion. The draft LAP went on public display on 8th June 2023 to 21st July 2023, and it is anticipated that the final LAP will be adopted circa Q4 2023/Q1 2024.
- Kilternan/Glenamuck LAP- The background work is currently underway to inform the pre-draft public consultation stage. Work is due to commence in June 2023 on the Local Transport Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment, and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Work is also commencing on a range of other areas that will inform the LAP plan-making process including: baseline studies; socio-economic analysis; future residential community and placemaking; climate action; heritage and conservation; recreation and open space; and, sustainable neighbourhood infrastructure requirements. It is anticipated the pre - draft public consultation will commence in September 2023.
- Rathmichael LAP - Work has commenced on the Infrastructure Capacity Assessment Study for the southeast area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and this Study will inform the LAP. Work has also commenced on the Local Transport Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment, and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, for the Rathmichael LAP area. Furthermore, the Bray and Environs Transport Study 2019 and 2021 was prepared by the NTA in conjunction with TII, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, and Wicklow County Council, and this provides a strategic planning framework for the development of transport infrastructure both in the LAP area and the wider environs.
- Dún Laoghaire and Environs LAP – Preparatory work for the proposed LAP has not commenced.
- Glencullen LAP – Preparatory work for the proposed LAP has not commenced.
- Sallynoggin LAP – Preparatory work for the proposed LAP has not commenced.
- Deansgrange LAP – Preparatory work for the proposed LAP has not commenced.
- Ballybrack/Loughlinstown LAP – Preparatory work for the proposed LAP has not commenced.
- Clonskeagh/UCD LAP – Preparatory work for the proposed LAP has not commenced.

Fingal County Council (FCC) Existing LAPs

- Donabate LAP 2016 - Extended to March 2026
- Rivermeade LAP 2018
- Barnhill LAP 2019
- Kinsealy LAP 2019
- Dublin Airport LAP 2019
- Kellystown LAP 2021
- Lissenhall East LAP 2023

FCC Proposed LAPs

- Swords LAP
- Flemington (Balbriggan) LAP
- Coolquay LAP
- Bascadden LAP
- Ballymaddun LAP

South Dublin County Council (SDCC) Existing LAPs

- Tallaght Town Centre LAP 2020 - 2026 unless subsequently extended
- Ballycullen LAP 2014 - Extended until June 2024

SDCC Proposed LAPs

Clondalkin LAP 2024 - Public consultation commenced on the 28th March 2023 for the preparation of the draft Clondalkin LAP. It is anticipated that the draft LAP will be published in September 2024, following local elections. It is noted that the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, when passed, may amend the process.

Eastern SPA

Kildare

Athy LAP 2021-2027 – A new LAP for Athy was adopted by the members of the Athy Municipal District and came into effect on 13th September 2021.

Kildare Town LAP 2023-2029 - A draft Kildare Local Area Plan 2023-2029 was published in March 2023 with the deadline for public submissions ending on 3rd May 2023. The new plan is due for adoption in November 2023.

Newbridge - The current plan in place is the Newbridge LAP 2013-2021. A Local Transport Plan is currently being prepared to inform the LAP. A Social Infrastructure Audit and a Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Assessment is currently being progressed.

Current LAPs for Kilcullen 2014-2020, Kilcock 2015-2021, Celbridge 2017-2023, Clane 2017-2023, Leixlip 2020-2023, Monasterevin 2016-2022 and Sallins 2016-2022.

Louth

The operative Ardee LAP 2010-2016 will be reviewed will be reviewed post adoption of the joint Drogheda LAP and Dundalk LAP.

The operative plan for Dunleer is the Dunleer LAP 2017-2023 and will be reviewed post adoption of the joint Drogheda LAP and Dundalk LAP.

Meath

Meath County Council has been unable to progress its work programme for local area plans in the county due to a lack of resources in the Planning Department and ongoing judicial reviews on the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

For Navan there is a written statement and zoning map included in the Meath CDP 2021-2027.

For Maynooth, both Meath and Kildare County Council's have commenced the preparation work for a joint LAP with the pre-draft issues paper published on 30th September 2022.

Mandatory LAPs will be required for the following centres due to their population size (5,000+) Kells, Trim, Ashbourne, Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne, Ratoath and East Meath (Bettystown, Laytown, Mornington East & Donacarney). The timetable for the preparation of these LAPs has yet to be confirmed.

Wicklow

- Arklow LAP 2018-2024 has no review currently scheduled. The earliest time to consider a review being in 2024 unless this is impacted by any new requirements set out in the new Planning & Development Bill when enacted. An ABTA study has been commenced.
- Greystones-Delgany & Kilcoole LAP 2013-2019 is anticipated to commence a review in 2023. An ABTA study has commenced.
- Blessington LAP 2013-2019 is anticipated to commence a review in 2023,
- Volume 2 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 includes new town plan and land-use zoning maps for Baltinglass, Newtownmountkennedy and Rathdrum.

Midlands SPA

Graigucullen Joint Urban Area Local Area Plan 2018 – 20223; this is a joint LAP in collaboration with Carlow County Council. Publication of draft LAP is expected Q3 in 2023 with an expected completion date of Q1 in 2024. Progress to date includes the appointment of SEA/AA consultants, background research commenced, issues paper completed, pre-draft public consultation took place on 29th September 2022 & 6th October 2022. The Carlow Graigucullen Local Transport Plan (LTP) is underway and transport consultants have been appointed.

Mountmellick Local Area Plan 2018 – 2024; publication of draft plan expected Q1 in 2024 and to be completed by Q3 in 2024. Progress to date includes the appointment of SEA/AA consultants with the issues paper also underway. Mountmellick Local Transport Plan (LTP) underway with transport consultants appointed.

Portarlinton Joint Urban Area Local Area Plan 2018 – 2024; a joint local area plan by Laois and Offaly County Councils. Publication of draft plan expected Q1 in 2024 to be completed by Q3 in 2024. Progress to date includes the appointment of SEA/AA consultants, discussions between Laois and Offaly County Council with agreement reached in relation to timeframes, background research commenced and the issues paper underway. The Portarlinton Local Transport Plan (LTP) is also underway with transport consultants appointed.

The Birr Town and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016 (as extended to 2021); expired on adoption of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. The CDP includes a zoning objectives map for Birr. Birr Local Area Plan 2023-2029 proposed to be adopted on 15th May 2023.

A Rectory Lands Masterplan for the rectory lands in Birr is being prepared by a consultant which is expected to be finalised end Q3 2023.

Edenderry Local Area Plan 2017- 2023; expires October 2023. The Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029 is expected to be adopted in July 2023. It is currently at material alteration stage.

The Blundell Masterplan for the Blundell area of Edenderry came into effect in 2020.

3 Graigucullen/ Carlow is designated as a Key Town- given that the main urban area is Carlow in County Carlow and within the administrative area of the Southern Regional Assembly, it is stated here under 'Other Settlements', although its role as a Key Town is acknowledged.

Planning Schemes Progress

Dublin SPA

Existing Strategic Development Zones (SDZ) Schemes

- Poolbeg West SDZ 2019
- Grangegorman SDZ 2012
- North Lotts & Grand Canal Dock SDZ 2014– Proposed Amendment (Building heights) refused by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) in 2021
- Clonburris SDZ 2019
- Adamstown SDZ 2014 – Amendment (building height and density) approved by ABP in 2020
- Cherrywood SDZ 2014 (updated 2018) - Amendment (Beckett Road realignment) approved by ABP in 2021
- Hansfield SDZ 2006

B) Delivering the Spatial Strategy

The optimum spatial strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region combines the growth of Dublin and Regional Growth Centres with a selected number of Key Towns which have the assets and capacity to grow in a sustainable manner while minimising impacts on the receiving environment. This option offers the best opportunity to align services with population and economic growth, promote compact growth in urban settlements and make the best use of infrastructure including public transport thereby reducing transport emissions and improving regional accessibility. The delivery of this spatial strategy or settlement strategy is central to monitoring progress made in implementing the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.



B) (i) Progress of Regional Growth Centres

Progress of Regional Growth Centres

Athlone

Implementation Progress of the Policy Context;

Residential Development; Planning permission was granted by ABP for a Strategic Housing Development (SHD) of 576 dwellings at Lissywollen, Kilnafaddoge and Retreat, Athlone, ABP-309513 refers.

An Bord Pleanála granted a further SHD comprising of 122 residential units and 283 student bed spaces at Cartontroy, Kilnafaddoge, Lissywollen and Ardnaglud, Athlone.

Planning permission has been sought for a large scale residential development of 332 residential units at Cornamaddy, Athlone and is currently being assessed by the Planning Authority. PP23/60074.

Permission was granted for 75 units at Cornamaddy, Athlone, PP22/253.

Further information has been sought for an additional 70 units at Cornamaddy, Athlone and is currently at FI PP22/577.

Regeneration; Work is ongoing in relation to the development of public realm enhancement works encompassing an area of 0.6ha at Mardyke St, Pump Lane & Sean Costello St, Athlone.

Compulsory acquisition of strategic lands has been initiated in Athlone town core including the acquisition of the former O'Neills site at Mardyke Street.

Compulsory acquisition of abandoned/derelict residential units has been initiated at St Mary's Square and Connaught Street Athlone.

The preparation of the Athlone Urban Design and Regeneration Framework Plan is at an advanced stage of completion.

To date, the following tasks have been completed;

- Social Infrastructure Audit
- Town Centre Health Check
- Brownfield Site and Backlands Audit
- Public Consultation Survey
- Stakeholder Engagement Workshop
- Engagement Survey Analysis
- Pipeline Projects identified

'Economic Development; A number of planning applications have been granted for new and extensions to existing enterprise developments within Garrycastle Industrial Estate.

Permission has been granted for the construction of a part 7 and part 9-storey office building providing office space, meeting room, staff welfare, reception, service areas and all ancillary site development works at Cloghanboy(Homan and Cloghanboy (Strain) Athlone PP22/337 refers.

A feasibility study has been undertaken by Athlone Chamber of Commerce in relation to the establishment of an e-working hub at the Workhouse Building, Northgate Street, Athlone. It is envisaged that plans will be advanced for same in 2024.

The Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) is to break ground on a new multi-million-euro STEM facility at its campus in Athlone. The large-scale development, part of the first bundle of projects in the Government's Higher Education PPP programme, will span three-storeys and a floor area in excess of 6,000 sq m. It will create capacity for up to 1,300 students and 70 staff.

Tourism; Athlone is designated as a "Destination Town" within Ireland's "Hidden Heartlands" brand and will be promoted as such in the Westmeath County Tourism Strategy and the forthcoming AUAP. Westmeath County Council are collaborating with Offaly and Longford County Councils to support and develop joint initiatives such as the Pilgrims Way to Clonmacnoise/Shannon Bridge and proposed Greenway from Athlone to Ballyleague/Lanesborough.

The multi-million euro NCN cycle and pedestrian bridge which traverses the River Shannon in Athlone is nearing completion.

Waterways Ireland have developed a canoe trail within the Inner Lakes of Lough Ree.

Athlone Castle promotion and enhancement is ongoing with the preparation of a "Wayfinding & Interpretation Strategy" which seeks to improve the visitor experience in Athlone by improving signage, interpretation panels and public realm enhancement scheme around the environs.

River Shannon 'Discovery Points' currently being designed for Portlick Millennium Forest, Lough Ree viewing point at Ballykeeran and Siege of Athlone Site in Athlone Town.

Part VIII approval has been sought for Public Realm Enhancement and associated works in the vicinity of Athlone Castle which are projected to be completed by 2024.

Enabling Infrastructure; Uisce Éireann is currently progressing three major capital work streams to support economic and residential development in the Athlone area: The Athlone Water Supply Scheme (Phase 2) Upgrade (design stage), the Athlone Main Drainage Scheme (construction stage) and the Athlone Mains Rehabilitation Scheme (construction stage). The main drivers for these schemes are to improve water quality, reduce environmental pollution, improve infrastructure resilience of supply, and increase network capacities.

Athlone WTP will be upgraded to a capacity of 16.5MLD, which will address water quality and capacity issues for Athlone and surrounding areas for the short to medium term. The planned Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midland Region (WSP- EMR) – which is intended to pipe water from the lower Shannon to Dublin, with treated water made available to Midland communities along the route. The NDP states that such a water supply source is needed to support the forecasted population growth in the East and Midlands up to 2050. Public consultation for the EM Regional Water Resources Plan (RWRP) closed in March 2022 with a Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID) planning application to be submitted to An Bord Pleanála following another non-compulsory public consultation process.

In terms of wastewater, a €15m sewerage main drainage scheme in Athlone is currently undergoing construction with completion scheduled for Q4 2025. The scheme will address existing wastewater treatment shortcomings, reduce storm water overflows into the River Shannon, reduce environmental pollution and increase network capacity for future population growth.

Transport; The construction of the National Cycle Network multi-million euro pedestrian/cycle bridge in Athlone, which crosses the River Shannon and forms a critical component of the Dublin Galway cycleway is nearing completion.

The preferred route for the cycleway west of Athlone to Galway has now been identified.

Planning permission was granted for a new ESB Substation and Bus Éireann Electrical Building to facilitate the charging of new electric buses in Athlone. In January 2023 Bus Éireann launched the first all-electric bus fleet in the country in Athlone.

Funding to the value of €310,000 was awarded under the NTA Active Travel Investment 2023 Grants for a number of projects in Athlone such as Footpath & Cycleway Improvements for six strategic routes and works at Athlone Community School.

Implementation Progress of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs);

- Progress has been made across a number of the RPOs specific to Athlone;
- RPO 4.4: Preparatory reports and assessments have been undertaken to inform the AUAP. The AUAP Strategic Issues Papers will be placed on public display in July 2023.
- RPO 4.5: An Economic Strategy for Athlone was launched in February 2023.
- A new Masterplan is at an advanced stage of preparation in relation which provides for the comprehensive regeneration of Loughanaskin area in Athlone to become a highly sustainable and integrated new urban quarter adjoining the Town Centre of Athlone. The ambition of the Masterplan is to be catalyst for positive economic change in the area assisted by a mixed-use development approach. It will include a commercial zone with office space, residential and community development.
- RPO 4.6 AIT has obtained Technological University Status and is now referred to as Technological University Shannon.
- RPO 4.7 Athlone is designated as a “Destination Town” under Failte Irelands “Hidden Heartlands” brand.
- Part VIII approval has been sought for Public Realm Enhancement and associated works in the vicinity of Athlone Castle which are projected to be completed by 2024.
- A Tourism Strategy for Athlone has been developed under the Urban Design Regeneration Framework for Athlone.
- The NCN pedestrian / cycle bridge traversing the River Shannon is nearing completion.
- RPO 4.8 A town centre brownfield and backlands audit has been undertaken as part of the Athlone Urban Design & Regeneration Framework.
- RPO 4.9 Work is progressing on the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme involving eight individual flood cells and the construction of flood defences in tandem with public realm enhancement works. To date works have been completed at three of the flood cells. Works to an additional three flood cells are at an advanced stage of completion and works to the remaining two cells are at planning stage and are projected to be completed by Q1 2024. Progress update available at <https://www.athlonefas.ie/>
- RPO 4.10 An Economic Strategy for Athlone has been prepared and adopted by both Councils and an Area Based Transport Assessment for Athlone is currently being finalised. A Joint Retail Strategy for Athlone was prepared and adopted by both Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils.

Drogheda

Implementation Progress of the Policy Context;

Residential Development; There has been a number of residential applications approved on under-utilised or brownfield and/or infill sites that will contribute to achieving compact growth and which will contribute to place-making. During 2021, 46 housing units were completed and in 2022 167 housing units were completed. There are a number of active development sites with a mix of housing typologies in the town.

Regeneration; Drogheda – ‘Westgate Vision’ Public Realm Works/Regeneration Scheme has secured funding under URDF. Stage II of the project is to be submitted to An Bord Pleanála for funding.

Economic Development; With regard to economic development, Louth County Council is supporting the growth of this regional growth centre through sponsorship and board support for the Mill Enterprise Centre as a catalyst for enterprise development in the Drogheda region.

The build-out of the IDA Business Park, Donore road in the Southern Environs area (Meath County Council jurisdiction) is progressing with Amazon having developed a data centre on these lands with a separate planning permission sought to extend same. Other notable large scale commercial developments in South Drogheda include the construction of 4,746 sq.m of industrial floor space by Nature’s Best Ltd and a 3,246 sq m whiskey maturation warehouse by Boann Distillery.

Tourism; Louth County Council works in conjunction with Meath County Council to promote tourism in the Boyne Valley including the Boyne Valley Drive and the Boyne Valley Food Series. Numerous festival and events take place in Drogheda throughout the year including the Puca Festival at Halloween, Lú- Drogheda Festival of Light, International Festival for Irish Harp, Boyne Musical Festival and DRAWDA, and the Drogheda Urban Art Festival.

Enabling Infrastructure; Louth and Meath County Councils are jointly preparing an Area Based Transport Assessment for Drogheda to inform and support the proposed joint Urban Area Plan.

The Councils have also agreed to collaborate on developing and improving cycle facilities on the R132 in Drogheda. Louth County Council have appointed consultants for the stretch of the R132 between the Queen of Peace Bridge and the rail station. A proposal is to be sought from their consultants to extend this to the Southgate shopping centre. If this proposal is acceptable, a Section 85 agreement will be entered into for Louth County Council to progress the design on behalf of Meath County Council.

Meath County Council are engaged as a consultee in the Dart+ Coastal North project. A rail order for this is due to be submitted in Q4 2023.

Significant further information has also been submitted on an application to An Bord Pleanála in 2022 for the proposed Boyne Greenway, pedestrian and cycleway linking Drogheda Town in Co. Louth to Mornington Village in Co. Meath.

Port Development - The delivery of the PANCR (Port Access North Cross Route) remains a high priority for Louth County Council. The North Drogheda Development Contribution Scheme was adopted on 19th September 2022 to provide for the necessary public infrastructure and facilities to facilitate development between the R132 (former N1) to the West and the Dublin-Belfast Railway Line. A contractor has been appointed and works have commenced for the section of road R132 to the Ballymakenny Road including upgrades to the Ballymakenny Road and Twenties Lane. Stream works have now been completed and earthworks are ongoing. Works are also ongoing on the installation of a 450mm diameter watermain along the route for and ducting for ESB and telecom.

The north quays continues to be a working port handling smaller vessels. In the long term, Louth County Council is working with Drogheda Port to consolidate port activities at the deep water facility at Tom Roe’s Point.

Implementation progress of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs);

Progress has been made across a number of the RPOs specific to Drogheda. This includes; Preparatory reports and assessments to inform the Drogheda joint UAP are underway with the formal UAP process to commence following completion of the judicial review case on the Meath CDP 2021-2027.

Dundalk

Regeneration

The local authority indicated that there had been progress made in regeneration within Dundalk.

Louth County Council has been successful in securing funding under the URDF for St. Nicholas’ quarter and backland regeneration phase 1 & 2 in Dundalk town centre. This transformative project will stimulate the development of high-quality higher density residential schemes and a rejuvenated urban quarter. The rejuvenation scheme to reinvigorate the Long Walk area to establish a new living and working quarter at the heart of Dundalk town centre has progressed with URDF funding secured. This scheme will support street improvement and upgrade, creation of improved public spaces and promotion of café culture and incorporation of public art whilst promoting compact growth in Dundalk

Furthermore, it is indicated that the Dundalk LAP will commence in 2022 following the adoption of the CDP. Similar to Drogheda, the Council will collaborate with the NTA with regards to the preparation of Local Transport Plan in tandem with the LAP and which prioritises modal shift.

B) (ii) Progress of Key Towns

Progress of Key Towns

Dublin SPA

Bray (DLR)

Residential Development; Old Connaught, within the administrative area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, is primarily a residential extension of Bray and is not currently serviced.

Regeneration; The former Bray Golf Club and Harbour lands are designated under the RSES for high density new mixed-use development with improved town centre functions. Part of the former Bray Golf Course lands are located within the administrative area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. Permission was granted in 2021 for a total of 234 residential units - with 112 of the permitted units located within the DLR administrative boundary. This residential scheme at the former Bray Golf Course lands commenced construction in Q1 2023. A subsequent planning application has been lodged with An Bord Pleanála pertaining to the same lands at the former Bray Golf Course (DLR and Wicklow County Councils) for a 586 unit residential scheme. A decision on the scheme is pending.

Enabling Infrastructure; Future development in Old Connaught is contingent upon the timely delivery of supporting infrastructure. The infrastructure is discussed in more detail below.

Water Supply; The Old Connaught-Woodbrook Water Supply Scheme involves the provision of two new high-level reservoirs at Ballyman and the installation of approximately 13km of new trunk supply water mains to serve the developing areas of Woodbrook-Shanganagh, Old Connaught and Fassaroe (Wicklow County). The project will provide a more reliable water supply for existing homes and businesses while also providing additional capacity for future growth of up to 12,000 homes. The Scheme commenced construction in July 2022 and has a delivery date of Q4 2024.

Foul Drainage; The Old Connaught-Woodbrook Sewerage Scheme will address the foul drainage needs of the Old Connaught area and the wider environs and is being advanced by Úisce Eireann (ÚE). ÚE are finalising a Drainage Area Plan (DAP) for the area which is looking at high level solutions and concept designs to connect to the Bray / Shanganagh catchment. ÚE are investigating the possible long-term solution of a foul pumping station with a motorway crossing. Foul sewerage from the prescribed area will drain to the Shanganagh Wastewater Treatment Works which has surplus capacity to cater for the foul drainage requirements of the Old Connaught LAP area. The DAP is due for completion in Q3 2024.

Transport; The Old Connaught LAP area is currently poorly served both in terms of (i) the adequacy of what is, effectively, a local rural roads network, and (ii) any meaningful public transport infrastructure. Given the scale of residential development proposed at Old Connaught it is imperative that an appropriate layer of both new and upgraded transport infrastructure is put in place to facilitate ease of movement to and from the developing community. The Bray and Environs Transport Study 2019 and 2021 was prepared by the NTA in conjunction with TII, DLR County Council and Wicklow County Council and sets out the long-term transport objectives required to support the development of Bray and Environs, which includes the residential zoned lands at Old Connaught. The Study establishes a preferred approach and identifies a number of local transport infrastructure projects to serve both Old Connaught and Rathmichael.

This includes:

- Upgrade of Ferndale Road and local roads to facilitate bus, pedestrian and cycle.
- A new link road from Ferndale Road to Dublin Road at Shanganagh.
- Cherrywood to Rathmichael Link Road.
- The phased introduction of bus services in line with increased demand.

The Study sets out a timeline for implementation of the preferred approach and projects in Phase A (2019-2027) and supports the delivery of a bus service from Sandyford to Bray DART station via Rathmichael and Old Connaught until the Luas Green Line extension to Bray is advanced.

DLR Infrastructural Capacity Assessment Study (ICAS); Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council are currently progressing a high-level strategic Infrastructural Capacity Assessment Study to inform the proposed Old Connaught and Rathmichael Local Area Plans in the south-east area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. The overarching purpose of the DLR Infrastructural Capacity Assessment Study is to:

- Establish the existing context and capacities in the proposed LAP areas, identifying constraints/challenges/opportunities;
- Indicate the proposed high-level strategic enabling infrastructure required to facilitate plan-led development of the two proposed LAP areas; and,
- Provide a high-level implementation plan, to include a phasing programme which would set out the strategic infrastructural and service requirements for each successive phase of development in both proposed LAP areas.

A Local Transport Plan (which involves an Area Based Transport Assessment) comprises an integral component of the ICAS Study and will inform the high-level strategic infrastructure and transport and mobility objectives to be incorporated into the draft LAP for Old Connaught.

Swords

'Sustainable Swords' is a place-making strategy for the strategic regeneration and compact development of Swords. This Strategy emerged as a result of 'Your Swords - An Emerging City - Strategic Vision 2035' which focused on consolidating the historic town centre, and the Fingal County Development Plan 2017-2023. The Strategy aims to co-ordinate investment and decision-making across multiple stakeholders, including the private sector.

The key objectives for Sustainable Swords are to:

- Enhance the identity of the town centre through the development of Swords Civic Centre and Cultural Centre, implementation of the conservation plan for Swords Castle and an enhanced accessible child friendly public realm.
- Create a new street /pedestrian walkway fronting the river walk to the west of Main Street opening up 'backlands' and infill development on strategic sites along Main Street and North Street.
- Promote core recreational and amenity spaces, utilising Ward River Valley Park, Swords Cultural Quarter including Town Park, Ward River Walk west of Main Street area.
- Explore the potential of establishing a Swords Business Improvement District (BID).
- Expand upon the recommendations in the Swords section of the South Fingal Transport Study and develop a multi-modal transport strategy for Swords.
- Support community cohesion measures including, for example, a collaborative approach to promoting safer neighbourhoods and reducing antisocial behaviour for improved quality of life.
- Measures to enable regeneration of lands to enable rejuvenation of the town centre and activation of land for compact development.
- Establish a prioritised programme of measures and 'pipeline' projects that can be funded as part of future Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF).

The Strategy was agreed by the Elected Members in December 2022. Under the Strategy, sixteen priority projects under five themes were identified. These are listed below:

Theme	Proposed Projects
<p>Theme 1: Swords Main Street Transformation.</p> <p>This significant project will see Main Street, the heart of Swords, transformed and enhanced into a more attractive and vibrant place, encouraging people to stay longer and enabling a more enjoyable experience.</p>	1 Swords Main Street Transformation
<p>Theme 2: Reimagining Our Public Realm.</p> <p>This envisages a step change in the quality of the urban realm of Swords town centre. The focus is upon a phased enhancement of the urban realm that provides space for all.</p>	2 Swords Liveable Laneways Strategy 3 Swords Key Local Streets Enhancement 4 Enabling Shopfront Enhancements 5 Swords Smart Streets
<p>Theme 3: Improving Access, Permeability and Connectivity.</p> <p>Enabling ease of movement and more active travel is critically important with regard to reducing private car-use which in turn will have a positive impact on the environment, physical health and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These interventions will seek to showcase Swords rich natural and built heritage and capitalise on investment in Metrolink, BusConnects, The R132 and the Ward River Valley Park.</p>	6 Swords Cycle Network 7 Swords Greenway Network Initiative 8 Swords Quietways & Home Zones 9 Swords Safe Routes to School/School Zones 10 Swords Western Distributer Road
<p>Theme 4: Protecting and Promoting Our Heritage.</p> <p>The built heritage of Swords provides the basis for the story of the evolution of the town. The projects included here enhance and protect that heritage for future generations as well as providing a basis for encouraging increased tourism spend in the town.</p>	11 Swords Cultural Quarter 12 Swords Stories Study 13 St Columba's Church and Round Tower Visitor Experience Feasibility Study
<p>Theme 5: Supporting and Celebrating a Sustainable Community.</p> <p>Swords has a thriving community. The aim is to support this community and position Swords as the best place to live, work and visit in County Dublin.</p>	14 Swords Community Forest 15 Swords Sustainable Community Initiative 16 Swords Promotional and Branding Initiative

Eastern SPA

Bray

Regeneration; The development of Bray Central (Florentine Centre) is a long-term strategic objective aimed at regenerating Bray's Main Street. URDF funding has been secured for the development of Bray Harbour.

Residential Development; Population growth in Bray has been modest compared to other settlements as expansion of the town is constrained by the coast to the east, Bray Head/Sugarloaf mountains to the south and the N/M11 to the east. In terms of new residential development, 450 residential units have been completed in Bray since 2016. In addition, there are currently 350 units under construction, with extant permissions in place for 1,730 units. It should also be noted that 1,375 new residential units await a decision from An Bord Pleanála as strategic housing developments (SHDs).

Economic Development; Bray has a highly concentrated and diversified employment base and provides employment for its residents and surrounding towns as far as Wicklow, Arklow and Gorey. Due to Ardmore Studios, the town has been at the centre of the Irish Film Industry for 60 years. The town aims to attract major employment generating investment in the retail, services and industrial sectors with a particular focus on promoting Bray as a destination for high value investment in people-based industries, at accessible locations to public transport. There is also scope for employment growth at Fassaroe to improve the local employment base in Bray.

The completion of the Bray Central Development will also represent a significant economic stimulus for Bray, acting as a catalyst for further economic regeneration and activity in the town centre.

Enabling Infrastructure; Bray has access to high quality public transport including DART services and is at the terminus of the proposed Luas Green Line extension, with excellent potential to promote sustainable mobility and achieve the vision of 'walkable' communities. The development of a new centre at Fassaroe is largely dependent on the delivery of transportation infrastructure including upgrades to the N/M11 and the delivery of high-quality public transport connections to Bray. The development of Bray-Fassaroe should be undertaken in collaboration between Wicklow County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and the transport agencies to ensure the delivery of roads and public transportation infrastructure to support the westward expansion of the town. In relation to Dart+ works this will include the closure of level crossings and ancillary works arising. The Bray Dart forecourt improvement scheme is scheduled for construction in Q3 2023. The works will include improvements to the area in front of the station and provision for improved bus interchange with the Bray DART. In relation to BusConnects infrastructure, a radial route from Dublin City Centre to Bray town will be provided with bus priority and dedicated cycle lanes. This proposed application is scheduled to be submitted to An Bord Pleanála in Q3 2023. New bus stops will be provided across Bray. Furthermore, as regards EV charging points, EasyGo contract for 26 locations across Co. Wicklow including Bray.

Services and Amenities; It is a strong active town that provides higher order services, including tertiary education, health, cultural and leisure facilities and is a major retail and shopping destination, attracting people from the surrounding towns and villages.

Maynooth

Regeneration (RPO 4.36); Opportunities exist for the Canal Harbour regeneration lands to connect to the main street and onto Carton Avenue and the St Patricks College Campus. Kildare County Council in conjunction with Meath County Council are progressing opportunities for town centre expansion areas as well as public realm works under URDF Funding (Call 2 - 2021).

Residential Development (RPO 4.35); The town has experienced significant levels of new residential development both in private housing and student accommodation over the past 5 years and with extant permissions and pipeline developments, will see these levels continue for the next 3 years. New housing development on the Dunboyne, Celbridge and Dublin Roads provide for an additional 1,400 units and the proposed new neighbourhood at Railpark which will be facilitated by the LIHAF (Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund) funded Maynooth Eastern Relief Road will deliver up to 1,000 new housing units. There is further potential for the consolidation of the town through the redevelopment of a number of town centre sites. The delivery of these additional units will result in a significant increase in housing stock over a relatively short period of time. Kildare County Council is cognisant that while the town is served by high capacity public transport which will continue to improve with the electrification of the railway line over the next 6 to 8 years, future growth must be carefully balanced with the delivery of supporting infrastructure, primarily social. To ensure this, a Social Infrastructure Audit will be carried out to inform the new Maynooth Local Area Plan (2024)

Economic Development (RPO 4.34); Opportunities to further develop the development of the Maynooth University campus including the research and technology element of this is ongoing and will be borne out through the economic development strategy set out in the joint Local Area Plan for Maynooth which will be underpinned by the guiding principles of the RSES.

Services and Amenities (RPO 4.33); Town Centre public realm improvements will be evident over the short to medium term with the progression of the Maynooth Town Centre Renewal - Strengthening the Grid URDF funded project which will link many of the broader town centre amenities such as the canal and harbour and Carton Avenue areas, through the Main Streets. Other amenity projects such as the Harbour Field Redevelopment and the Royal Canal Greenway will all contribute towards an overall improved public realm and amenity for the town.

Enabling Infrastructure; Planned upgrades to the M4 from Maynooth to Leixlip will undoubtedly provide respite in terms of congestion for the town, particularly the M4 Eastbound Bus Priority Measures Pilot Project (Bus Priority Measures between Junction 7 Maynooth and Junction 5 Leixlip). Other significant transport interventions such as the delivery of the DART+ West Project, the North-South Cycleways Project.

Naas

Regeneration; The Urban Regeneration and Development Strategy, underpins the Naas Local Area Plan 2021-2027 has been developed to address the challenges affecting the future development of Naas and to respond directly to the requirements of RPO 4.50 of the RSES.

The overall strategy has a set of clearly defined outputs, each of which aims to address particular issues of identified weaknesses in the town. The Urban Regeneration and Development Strategy seeks to realise the stated long-term vision of Naas by expanding on the seven core themes outlined in Chapter 2 of the LAP to direct the spatial and economic development of the town and to strengthen and consolidate its urban structure. This is supported by specific urban design principles that are intended to provide improved outcomes in the quality and experience of the built environment in Naas. The regeneration element of the strategy focusses on the rejuvenation of the identified Core Regeneration Areas (CRAs) within the town centre. The strategy also makes provision for other area specific plans for sites identified as Key Development Areas (KDAs) and for the lands with the Northwest Quadrant (NWQ), and a Public Realm Strategy for Naas. Additional objectives and actions throughout the LAP support the enhancement of the urban structure in Naas, for example, the development and enhancement of connectivity within the town with the provision of enhanced walking and cycling routes. The Core Regeneration Areas (CRAs), Key Development Areas (KDAs) and the Northwest Quadrant (NWQ) lands have been identified for regeneration, consolidation, infill and urban expansion. Each area shall be the subject of integrated design schemes that allow for sustainable, phased and managed development of each identified area during the plan period and beyond and is subject to a series of policies, objective and actions for the plan period. Kildare County Council were successful (in 2019) under Call 1 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) to undertake a comprehensive masterplan for the Canal Quarter lands and under Call 2 for Naas Town Renewal Masterplan. Significant preparatory work has been undertaken with respect to the CRA's and other KDAs. It is anticipated that a masterplan for the NWQ will be initiated in Q3 2023.

Residential Development; Overall, there is a high level of commencement and construction of planning permissions across the plan area and the town has performed significantly in meeting the County's housing targets and it is estimated that ca 1,346 residential units were constructed in Naas since Census 2016. In the new Kildare CDP 2021-2027 Core Strategy, Naas was allocated as having a requirement for 2,394 units in the period up to 2027.

Economic Development;

The Naas LAP economic development strategy identifies several areas within the town to capitalise on economic growth such as the development of Corban's Lane Shopping Centre to provide significant retail and commercial functions. The strengthening of the local employment base through the completion of the Mid Eastern Region Innovation Think Space (MERITS) is also a highlight and enhancing the technology environment in the region is also identified as a key priority. The potential for high-quality, high-density indigenous and Foreign Direct Investment within Millennium Park in the Northwest Quadrant has also been identified along with the re-intensification of industrial lands in the northeast of the town in proximity to the Maudlins Interchange. The Economic Strategy for the region, was based on several aspects: smart specialisation, clustering, placemaking, orderly growth and future proofing. The key challenge for Naas is in ensuring that the conditions for the creation of an environment of enterprise and innovation are embraced and developed. The development of Core Regeneration Areas as part of the LAP within the commercial core of the town, coupled with an emphasis on technology and the supporting of business start-ups will ensure that these objectives for the development of the economy can be achieved

Services and Amenities; The capacity of Naas to accommodate future development and remain a competitive location is dependent on the capacity and delivery of infrastructural support. The availability of high-quality physical infrastructure networks and environmental services is critical to securing investment, creating sustainable and attractive places, ensuring health and well-being while also safeguarding the environment. Naas is currently served by the Poulaphouca Regional Scheme which is serviced by Ballymore Eustace Water Treatment Plant to Naas via Dowdenstown Reservoir. However, the future supply will be fed from a combination of the Barrow (Srowland) and the Ballymore Eustace Scheme. Uisce Éireann indicates that there is adequate water supply to cater for the future demands generated during the lifetime of this Plan. Wastewater from Naas is treated at Osberstown Wastewater Treatment Plant which ties into the Upper Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme (ULVSS). This scheme is currently being upgraded under what is referred to as Contract 2b. This involves the upgrading of various elements of the scheme, including gravity sewers, pumping stations, storm handling facilities and rising mains. The upgrade and expansion to capacity of the existing wastewater collection network will cater for existing and proposed development within the Plan area. There is sufficient capacity within the Osberstown Plant to cater for the population growth of Naas.

The completion of the Potato market project in the town centre has been transformational in attracting the Naas Farmers Market back in to the historic core and further phases of this are underway. The completion of the Kerdiffstown Park (located to the north of Naas) will provide a park extending to 31.3 ha with two full size astro-turf pitches that will be available for rugby, soccer or gaelic, three astro-turf 5 a side pitches, a small running track, changing room facilities, a playground, paths around the park which will also be marked for Park Runs) in addition to the progress regarding access to the Oldtown Demesne lands and the delivery of pathways and facilities to enable the use by the public of these parklands as a future park adjacent to the route of the canal and the Sallins to Naas greenway will also be a significant boost to the amenities of the town and its hinterland.

Tourism; Naas as an historic town has several built heritage assets that would expand the town's tourism offering; its historic centre, St David's Castle, Leinster Mills and Jigginstown Castle, all of which are being actively pursued by the Council. Sites along with the Canal Harbour have been identified in the over-arching development strategy for the town as Tourism Opportunity Sites.

Enabling Infrastructure (RPO 4.48);

The completion of the M7 upgrade and Junction 9a has undoubtedly had a positive effect on traffic movements in and around the town of Naas. The Naas-Sallins Transportation Strategy (published in 2021) represents a comprehensive analysis of the current transport situation in Naas (Sallins), outlines the impact of future proposed land development on transportation and presents potential solutions to improve conditions for active modes, public transport and private vehicles in accordance with RPO 4.48 of the RSES. The Strategy which informed the LAP provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the town over the next two decades aligning with the vision for Naas to 2031 and beyond. The focus is on revitalising the town centre, improving the transport functionality by facilitating a significant modal shift from vehicular traffic to public transport, in addition to increasing walking and cycling. The LAP incorporates the recommendations of the strategy as it relates to active travel and a series of interventions based on a Permeability Strategy which seek to create convenient, efficient routes to key trip attractors and reduce walking trip distances to give non-motorised modes a competitive advantage over private cars. There are numerous physical and natural issues affecting permeability in Naas such as boundary walls, canals, railways or motorways. Baseline catchment areas were assessed to identify barriers which lengthen walking distances to key trip attractors such as schools, bus stops and the train station. Particular focus was placed on facilitating direct routes along desire lines between homes and key destinations for work, retail, education and recreation.

Navan

Regeneration;

Meath County Council is implementing a programme of ongoing regeneration in Navan as follows:

- Navan 2030 Public Realm Plan for Navan Town Centre with the implementation being funded by the NTA,
- Flower hill Abbeylands to the north of the town centre, and;
- Spicers Bakery/Andy Brennan Park to south of town centre. This accords with RPO 4.43.

Residential Development; A number of residential proposals are currently in the planning process. The Council's Active Land Management Project which received URDF funding is also likely to provide some residential development in the town centre. Meath County Council has also identified a significant quantum of vacant and idle lands within Navan as part of the Residential Zoned Land Tax process which should encourage the activation of more lands for development.

Economic Development; An additional strategic employment site has been designated in Navan at Trim Road in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. This accords with RPO 4.46 and RPO 4.47. There have been a number of large commercial warehousing applications granted permission with 20,849 sqm of floorspace permitted at Liscarton Industrial Estate (22/866), 7,198 sqm floorspace permitted at Ferganstown (22/1421) and 2,525 sqm floorspace at Mullaghboy Industrial Estate (22/884). A large mixed use scheme has also been permitted on a brownfield town centre site at Academy Street/Circular Road/Bridge Street which includes 2,334 sqm of office floorspace (22/1421).

Services and Amenities and Enabling Infrastructure;

The Navan 2023 scheme to introduce a new bus interchange in Kennedy Road and improve pedestrian facilities and the public realm in Railway Street, Ludlow Street, Bridge Street, Market Square, Kennedy Road, Trimgate Street, Abbey Road, Church Hill, Fairgreen and various laneways has seen significant progress. Contract 3 which includes the completion of the bus interchange is due to be completed in Q4 2023.

- The tender to construct a 1.4km stretch of road between the Kells Road and Rathaldran Road (LDR4) with dedicated facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and Public Transport will be published in Q2 2023. It is expected that this road will be built and complete within 2 years of awarding of tender.
- A process of public consultation was carried out in Q1 2021 around proposed route options for the Boyne Greenway between Navan and Oldbridge Estate, Drogheda. Atkins consulting are currently assessing route options and carrying out flood and ecological studies. A preferred route option will be announced in the coming months. This greenway is supported by RPO 4.45.
- Completion of the public toilets/changing facilities in Blackwater Park.
- An overview document and update of progress on all 11 Masterplans in Navan has been created by the Planning Authority and is available to EMRA, if required.
- The development of the cycle network in Navan is also progressing well. This is supported by RPO 4.42.
- A €7M scheme to construct dedicated cycle tracks on Railway Street and the Trim Road between the Solstice and Beechmount Shopping Centre has commenced.
- Planning approval has been obtained for two sections of the R147 between Martha's Bridge and Circular Road and Watergate Street to Blackwater Retail Park. Tender documentation for the former is being prepared.
- In relation to public realm improvements and cycling facilities on Flowerhill, Meath County Council are currently assessing options with a view to commencing the Part 8 process in Q4 2023.
- A circa 8km Stretch of the Navan to Kingscourt Greenway between the Rathaldran Road and Wilkinstown has opened.
- Tenders have been received for a Bike Rental Scheme in Navan.
- Cycling proposals on convent lane have been formalised.

Wicklow

Regeneration;

Wicklow County Council has focused on the following regeneration projects in Wicklow/Rathnew;

- Fitzgerald Square: The objective of this URDF scheme is to create a multi-functional space within Wicklow Town that would improve accessibility, enhance the presentation and public realm of the Town Centre at Fitzwilliam Square. The works are now completed and was officially opened in August 2021.
- Abbey Grounds (the development of the Abbey Grounds into a public garden will include a new high quality outdoor performance area which will create a tourism attraction in the setting of Abbey Grounds. The project aims to establish Wicklow town as the Tourism Destination Town that can function as a tourism base for visitors to explore Wicklow Town. The Part 8 planning process has been completed along with archaeological investigations.
- Wicklow Murals Project: This connectivity project will seek to reanimate and revitalise the important links between Main Street, South Quays, Harbour and Market Square of Wicklow town. Through the creation of maritime inspired murals, it will highlight Wicklow Towns heritage and historical links to the Irish Sea.
- Market Square: Awarded funding under the Failte Ireland Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme 2021. The square is now a vibrant part of the town with a range of coffee shops, pubs and restaurants close to the popular Wicklow Historic Gaol. The space is now provided with seating with canopies allowing the area to be used as an outdoor dining space to benefit the nearby hospitality business.
- Wicklow Library: Development of a new library, exhibition space and archives for Wicklow Town. The development is now completed and has been transformation for Wicklow Town. In addition to state of the art library facilities it includes study areas, a heritage area and exhibition space. The library also offers genealogical services and a purpose built archive space. The library is a landmark building overlooking the harbour which serves to add to the regeneration of the town by linking the Market Square to the South Quay increasing footfall.

Residential Development; Redevelopment and opportunity sites within the core areas of Wicklow-Rathnew will be promoted in the first instance for new residential development, with sites close to transport infrastructure, recreational and education amenities and employment being prioritised thereafter. Since Census 2016 approximately 1,150 residential units were completed in Wicklow Town & Rathnew with circa 570 units under construction. There are extant planning permissions for 690 units.

Economic Development;

Wicklow Town plays a significant role in the provision of administrative services, delivering the functions of local government from Wicklow County Council, the provision of tertiary educational facilities at the Wicklow County Campus at Rathnew (in conjunction with Carlow IT) and higher order health facilities at Knockrobin Primary Health Centre. There is potential for the town centre to strengthen and promote economic development associated with retail and commerce, the expansion of port and harbour activities and the nearby Ashford Studios. Wicklow Port is well positioned to become a hub for the service of the off-shore wind energy sector in particular. There is potential to develop Wicklow-Rathnew as a recreation and tourism hub due to its attractive coastal location and its proximity to key destinations. Wicklow County Council have also outlined the following in relation to economic development in the town;

- Town Centre regeneration projects resulting in economic stimulus, providing enhanced linkages through the town and cumulatively impacting positively on activity and vacancy levels.
- A Masterplan for the development of the Clermont campus is currently under preparation.
- Screen Content Creation Hub delivered
- Crew Training Academy established
- Funding application for the development of a Food Incubation Hub prepared
- Exploring the options for renewable energy training at Wicklow County Campus.

Services and Amenities:

The Council is progressing work for the development of Wicklow Library. Conservation Management Plan for Wicklow Head is also currently ongoing.

Enabling Infrastructure;

Significant investment has occurred with construction of the port access and town relief roads and a new wastewater treatment plan, with planned infrastructure upgrades on the M11 from the M50 to Kilmacanogue. While there are good pedestrian and cycling facilities on new roads, there is potential for further investment in walking and cycling within the town and to enhance connections to surrounding urban centres and regional trails.

The Council has also highlighted the following future infrastructure improvements;

- Improved bus services under BusConnects – new 131 service complementing existing 133 service to provide bus service every 30 mins from Wicklow town.
- DART to Wicklow town – ongoing engagement with Irish Rail/NTA on the provision of an hourly electrified DART service to Wicklow town (initially using Battery units)
- Ongoing engagement with developers of Tinakilly lands to ensure provision of Rathnew Inner Relief Road including provision for bus services, segregated cycle lanes and pedestrian priority.
- Harbours team progressing a number of small enhancements with BALAMI funding which will increase capacity.

Midlands SPA

Longford Town

Regeneration;

Longford has recently appointed a Vacant Homes Officer and Town Regeneration Officer to address issues relating to vacancy and dereliction. The Longford Connected project has been completed, a €4m URDF project aimed to enhance connectivity within the town between the shopping centre and Market Square, encouraging movement through the town centre. The Camlin Quarter project €13.3m seeks to promote placemaking, inward investment and connectivity within this priority area of the town – a preliminary business case has been submitted and is currently awaiting further updates from the Department. The delivery of residential development within the town settlement is a core objective and actions are underway to deliver new projects and to target vacant and derelict properties within Longford Town, the local authority has established a CPO working group and the newly appointed Vacant Homes Officer and Town Regeneration Officer are central to the progression of these ongoing projects

Economic Development;

Longford town has a particularly high ratio of jobs to resident workers with significant in-commuting and employment in sectors such as advanced Med-Tech, Food Processing and Engineering. The larger companies in the Longford Town catchment area have all been involved in significant expansion over the last while both in terms of physical infrastructure and jobs. For example, Companies such as Abbott, Technimark, Panelto, Glennons and Avery Dennison have all completed building and technology upgrades over the last period that have resulted in increased numbers of employment positions available in the town. Other sectors are starting to emerge, in particular the off-site construction sector with a number of key employers locating in Longford Town.

The micro-enterprise sector remains robust and while many of them are delivering locally based products or services, some have more of a national or international reach and all small firms are supported in their development ambition by the Local Enterprise Office.

The majority of industrial stock in and around Longford Town is now occupied thanks in part to a local authority Business Incentive Scheme that helped attract industry to Longford. In addition, the IDA is committed to the construction of an Advanced Building Solution and is investigating the optimum site available for its delivery. A key objective for the local authority remains the acquisition of suitably zoned landbanks to facilitate further inward investment in the Town.

County Longford is a key stakeholder in the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024, collaborating with partners in Westmeath, Laois and Offaly on strategic objectives and agreeing actions in three main areas, namely: Climate action - transition to a zero-carbon economy; Capitalising on strengths of the Midlands through smart specialisation and digitalisation; and Positioning the Midlands as the destination of choice to live, work, visit, invest and learn.

The local authority continues to actively engage with local business networks and associations, with its diaspora and with all parties looking to bring economic benefit to Longford Town. The newly designated university TUS in Athlone also reach out to local companies offering standard and specially designed courses and module to assist with employees retaining and upskilling.

The development of a creative and innovation hub and co-working space on the Main Street offers a further opportunity to drive enterprise development and entrepreneurship in the town. There is also potential to build on significant investment in the nearby flagship Centre Parcs holiday village and the investment by the local authority in tourism and recreational infrastructure. The proposed UNESCO Lough Ree Biosphere project represents a key project for the County and the wider region and is being actively progressed with support from neighbouring and adjoining Council's. The Upper Shannon Erne Future Economic Project, which is a collaboration between the Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon local authorities with ESB and Bord na Móna, provides the opportunity to deliver cross regional economic projects.

Enabling infrastructure;

Longford is strategically located on the N4/M4 from Dublin to Sligo, with national roads including the N55 to Athlone, N5 to Castlebar and N63 to Roscommon. Planned infrastructure upgrades include the N4 from Mullingar to Roosky, and N55 Athlone to Ballymahon. There is further potential to provide for enhanced rail service on the Dublin to Sligo rail line. The rollout of the broadband network is complete in Longford Town. Potential exists to stimulate economic development through existing broadband and energy networks in the Town. A number of Active Travel projects and programmes are currently underway within the town including projects on the key arterial routes in Longford Town at design and construction stages. Delivering on Longford's walking and cycling strategy will improve sustainable travel and provide links to national and cross regional walking and cycling trails, including the Royal Canal.

A dedicated Active Travel Team was established in Longford County Council in September 2021. The National Transport Authority is the main funding approver for Active Travel projects in Longford but other funders include the Tii and Slainte care. Suitable projects are selected for funding approval from the NTA based on their strategic priority in the development of County Longford's core cycle network, addressing specific local permeability needs and improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

There are currently 25 individual projects currently under Active Travel in Longford, 12 of which have been completed from 2022 to present with the remainder to be delivered over 2023 to 2024.

The following table lists the projects worked on in Longford Co. Council from 2022 to present.

ACTIVE TRAVEL PROJECTS - Longford				
Project	Funding Stream	2022 Allocation	2023 Allocation	Current Status
Longford Town Mobility Plan	NTA	€90,000	€39,000	Public Consultation Q2 2023
Harbour Row/Killashee Rd. Footpath scheme	NTA	€100,000	N/A	Completed
Royal Canal Link Farranyoogan	NTA	€20,000	€5,000	Completed
R198 Battery Road Pedestrian and Cycle Scheme	NTA	€250,000	€400,000	At tender Assessment, Expect construction to commence July 2023
Aghafad Pedestrian and Cycle scheme	NTA	€200,000	€278,000	Statutory Processes, Part VIII planning
Ballymahon Pedestrian and cycle Scheme St. Matthews to Moigh road	NTA	€200,000	€304,400	Preliminary Design
Granard Market St. to Barrack Lane Pedestrian and Cycle scheme	NTA	€200,000	€137,600	Feasibility and Preliminary Design
Granard R194 Longford Rd. Granard Footpath scheme	NTA	€120,000	€150,000	Preliminary Design
N63 Ballinalee Rd. Longford Pedestrian and Cycle Scheme	NTA	€350,000	€250,000	Out to Tender April 2023, Expect construction to commence July 2023
Footpath Scheme Cloone Road Drumlish	NTA	€120,000	N/A	Completed
Light Segregation Cycle Schemes at Legan, Granard Road Edgeworthstown. And Lower Battery Road Longford	NTA	€142,000	N/A	Completed
Ennybegs Pedestrian and cycle facilities	NTA	€330,000	€300,000	Construction works ongoing Q1-Q3 2023
Completion of Drumlish to Monaduff walkway	NTA	€30,000	N/A	Completed
Low Cost Junction tightening schemes at: Mall entrance, Longford, Auburn Park and Marian Avenue Edgeworthstown.	NTA	€100,000	€10,000	Completed
N63 Majors Well Road Pedestrian and cycle Safety scheme	Tii	N/A	N/A	Completed
Ballyminion Cycle Scheme from N63 to Health Centre.	Slainte Care	€70,000	N/A	Completed
Low Cost Permeability Link, Fee Court, Longford.	NTA	€50,000	€45,000	Construction Works ongoing Q1/Q2 2023
Safe Routes to School Scoil Mhuire Newtownforbes	NTA		€150,000	Construction June 2023
Safe Routes to School Templemichael College, Longford	NTA		€160,000	Detailed design, construction subject to agreement with key stakeholders
Safe Routes to School, Scoil Mhuire, Clondra	NTA		N/A	Expect construction Summer 2024
Safe Routes to School, St. Teresa's NS Clontumpher	NTA		N/A	Expect construction Summer 2024

Implementation Progress of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs)

Progress has been made across a number of RPOs specific to Longford as follows;

- RPO 4.59: To enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town centre by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities.
- A number of Active Travel projects and programmes are currently underway within the town including projects on the key arterial routes in Longford Town and are at design and construction stages. Projects include the new cycle lanes along the Battery Road (R198); project approved in 2021 and is currently under construction. N63 Ballinalee Road project approved in 2022 and currently under construction. Further proposed projects include a detailed scheme for the Main Street in Longford and a scheme for Park Road providing improved access to the Royal Canal footpath and linking into the new park proposed for the former dog track along Park Road.
- RPO 4.60: Support the development of Longford as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key tourist destinations in the Region including Center Parcs, and proximity to natural amenities, recreational opportunities and the town's location on the Rebel Longford Trail
- The Council is continuing to support and build upon the tourism facilities and infrastructure in the County. The proposed expansion and extension of the Center Parcs complex at Ballymahon is seen as a key project along with the development of other tourism facilities. The natural and recreational amenities of the county are also being developed and this includes the investment in the development of a network of cycling and walking tracks. The proposed UNESCO Lough Ree Biosphere project represents a key project for the County and the wider region and is being actively progressed with support from neighbouring and adjoining Council's including Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon and National Parks and Wildlife Services.
- RPO 4.61: Support social inclusion measures including the revitalisation of areas by physical regeneration, planning, investment and community development and measures to improve educational attainment levels, up skilling in key competencies and skills acquisition.
- The active regeneration programmes of the Council are being progressed across the County and the Council is working proactively to coordinate the activities of numerous state agencies and bodies to support the regeneration of key settlements of the County. The enhancement of the public realm through parts of the town core improves connectivity and enhances mobility. Certain laneways throughout the town, including Breadan's Lane and Garvey's Yard were enhanced to revitalise these areas of the town, and support local communities in those areas. Public Realm improvements have been delivered at the shopping centre, Ardrum Court and Grafton Court and at Market Square in front of Longford Town Council. Specific areas of vacant and derelict land are being actively targeted in order to secure the physical improvement and regeneration of key areas.
- The Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) is actively engaged in the County and is working to support a number of key projects locally to support the upskilling and skill development of our local residents. Further, the newly designated university TUS in Athlone also reach out to local companies offering standard and specially designed courses and module to assist with employees retaining and upskilling.
- RPO 4.62: Support the plan-led development and regeneration of publicly owned land banks in the town for residential, employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities and the consolidation of the town centre and the enhancement and linking of brownfield and outlying sites to the town centre, with a focus on the regeneration of underused buildings and strategic sites.
- The Camlin Quarter Urban Design and Economic Framework has informed the delivery of the URDF Camlin Quarter application. The elements of the URDF Camlin Quarter proposal contain and connect major residential, educational, recreational/amenity, public services and economic functions, building on the Camlin Quarter Framework.
- The Council has purchased key sites including the former dog track in Longford town and has undertaken detailed planning for the creation of a new public park, skate park and public amenity space within the town centre. This project has included extensive public consultation and community engagement and it is hoped that the project will be developed in 2024.
- The County Development Plan and the new revised LAP (in pre-draft form) are actively seeking the promotion of development within the town core, compact growth and the promotion of the 10min town centre. A key focus of the plans is the regeneration of key sites including brownfield sites. The newly appointed Vacant Homes Officer and Town Regeneration Officer will be taking a proactive role in identifying vacant and derelict sites in the town and seeking plans for their active re-use and development.
- RPO 4.63: Support Longford Town as a strategic portal to the northwest and south in recognition of its location at the junction of the N55; M4/ N4 Dublin/Sligo and N5; due to its proximity to the regional growth centre of Athlone; and support its role as a strategic employment centre.
- Longford is strategically located on the N4/M4 from Dublin to Sligo, with national roads including the N55 to Athlone, N5 to Castlebar and N63 to Roscommon. Planned infrastructure upgrades include the N4 from Mullingar to Roosky, and N55 Athlone to Ballymahon.

Other Relevant Information;*Climate Action Team*

The Climate Action Team has been established in the Council and a number of key projects are being progressed in relation to the Climate Action Plan and a number of key projects in Longford Town. On Energy the Council has recently committed to €1m match funding over 3 years for the SEAI Pathfinder programme. Projects are related to energy efficiency measures for local authority facilities. Energy Audits to identify energy efficiency measures on all Council facilities have been completed.

Decarbonisation Zone;

Longford Town has been nominated as the key area and baseline emissions inventories have been completed. During 2023/24 the Council will develop actions for the Decarbonization Zone and the local authority Climate Action Plan with a view to having a draft plan for public consultation at the end of August 2023. SEA/AA consultants have been appointed.

The Council has commenced a trial Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) trial for the heating of County Hall.

Town Centre First Team

Longford has recently appointed a Vacant Homes Officer and Town Regeneration Officer to address the key issues relating to vacancy and dereliction within the town. A number of already identified residential vacant and derelict sites are being identified for action which will include the registering of properties on the vacant/derelict sites register and potential compulsory purchase order as appropriate.

Active Travel Team

Longford has appointed an Active Travel Team - 'travelling with a purpose, using your own energy'. The Active Travel Team is working on a series of projects within the town including projects on the key arterial routes in Longford Town and are at design and construction stages. These projects are seeking to improve the cycling and pedestrian routes within the town centre and to provide and connect to wider strategic routes including the Royal Canal greenway and other county and regional walking and cycling routes. The Active Travel Team has delivered on a number of key projects since 2021 and has a programme of additional projects.

The National Transport Authority is the main funding approver for Active Travel projects in Longford but other funders include TII and Slainte Care. Suitable projects are selected for funding approval from the NTA based on their strategic priority in the development of County Longford's core cycle network, addressing specific local permeability needs and improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists. There are currently 25 individual projects currently under Active Travel in Longford, 12 of which have been completed from 2022 to present with the remainder to be delivered over 2023 to 2024.



Mullingar

Implementation Progress of the Policy Context

Residential Development; Two SHD applications for 130 dwellings at Ballinderry and 212 residential units at Rathgowan, Mullingar are under consideration by ABP: ABP-313099-22 and ABP-313973-22 refer.

S.247 consultation has been held in relation to two Large-scale Residential Development (LRD) applications for 213 residential units at Rathgowan and 245 units at Petitswood, Mullingar.

Planning permission was granted for an LRD application for 213 units at Rathgowan, Mullingar, PP 22/515 refers. The scheme is currently under construction.

A S.247 consultation has been undertaken with the Planning Authority in relation to a proposed LRD of at the Ardmore Road, Mullingar.

Regeneration;

Work is well advanced on the preparation of a Masterplan for the Canal Avenue area. The plan when implemented seeks to comprehensively redevelop and rejuvenate this area by creating a highly sustainable and integrated residential quarter which supports and encourages economic, social and community development, maximises connectivity to and enhancement of both the River Brosna and the Royal Canal.

A masterplan is in preparation for the regeneration of a 2ha site brownfield site at Blackhall, Mullingar. It will provide for the provision of a new urban design and economic led regeneration masterplan for Blackhall Place and will be transformative for Mullingar, particularly as it will constitute the first purpose built large-scale mixed-use scheme within the town's commercial core.

Economic Development;

Planning permission has been granted for an international Film Studio Campus comprising of a floor area of 26,000 sq m on a 7-hectare site at Lough Sheever Mullingar, PP22/261 refers

Manufacturing facilities with a combined floor area of circa 13,000 sqm have been granted at the National Science Park, Mullingar,

Planning permission has been granted for a new light manufacturing building with a floor area of 4,700 sqm at IDA Ardmore Business & Technology Park, Mullingar.

An extension to the Lidl Distribution Centre consisting of 18,000 sqm of additional floor space has been recently constructed at Lough Sheever, Mullingar.

Support has been provided to businesses in establishing water-based tourism activities at Mullingar Canal.

Services & Amenities;

The Holy Family Primary School was constructed at Ardmore Road, Mullingar.

A Special Needs School was granted planning permission within the ground of St Finians College, Mullingar.

Part VIII was secured and works completed on a Linear Recreational Park along the Royal Canal at Grange South, Mullingar with links to the Royal Canal Way and the Old Rail Trail Greenway.

A 1.2 hectare Dog Park was completed along the Royal Canal Way at Newbrook, Mullingar.

A new 5 screen cinema has recently been constructed at Harbour Road, Mullingar.

Active travel project consisting of new pedestrian/cycle link along the Ardmore Road, Mullingar is complete.

CPO process has been initiated in relation to the provision of a new pedestrian/cycle bridge at Saunders Bridge, Mullingar.

Tourism;

Mullingar Greenway link to Lough Owel complete along Feeder Canal to Levington with a roadway connection to Lough Owel and the Sailing club. Greenway cycleway link from Irishtown to Lough Owel currently under construction.

Tenders have been sought for the appointment of multi- disciplinary team to redesign and develop the Westmeath Way from Kilbeggan to Mullingar town. Greenway 2023 funding to the value of €400,000 awarded to the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway project.

Tenders have also been invited for a feasibility study in relation to the provision of a greenway link from Mullingar to Lough Ennell.

Mullingar will host Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann again in 2023. In 2022 visitor numbers at the week long event exceeded 500,000 and generated a revenue boost to the local economy of €50m. <https://fleadhcheoil.ie/>

Enabling Infrastructure;

Funding to the value of €1.65m was awarded under the NTA Active Travel Investment 2023 Grants for a number of projects in Mullingar such as:

- Active Travel Schemes at Grange South to Orbital C-Link, Harbour Road, Ardmore Road and Dublin Road
- Mount Street Lower Pedestrian Interventions
- Marlinstown Roundabout to Royal Canal Pedestrian & Cycling Improvements
- Sundays Well/Lynn Road - Auburn Road/Millmount Road Pedestrian & Cycling Improvements

Implementation Progress of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs)

Progress has been made across a number of the RPOs specific to Mullingar;

RPO 4.65 - The Council has been in consultation with the Land Development Agency in relation to the regeneration of the former Columb Barracks site, Mullingar. The LDA have appointed Consultants to prepare a proposal for approximately 100 houses at Columb Barracks.

<https://lda.ie/projects/columb-barracks-mullingar>

RPO 4.66: A 616sqm ground floor extension has recently been constructed at the Regional Hospital, Mullingar comprising of an MRI Unit and extensions to the Emergency and Radiology Departments.

Planning permission was granted for a 1741 m2 two storey out-patients department (OPD) together with an adjacent free-standing 28m2 plant room. The development will consist of medical consulting rooms, admin offices, storerooms, toilets, staff facilities and ancillary accommodation. PP 22/68 refers.

Westmeath - Other Relevant Information

Moate is one of the first towns in Ireland to be awarded funding by the Government to prepare a Town Centre First Masterplan. The Town Centre First policy has commenced delivery in Moate in conjunction with the recently formed Moate Town Team. The 'Emerging Ideas' consultation brochure was placed on public display and comments were invited on the emerging design proposals in advance of the preparation of the Moate TCF Concept Masterplan.



Portlaoise

Implementation Progress of the Policy Context

Regeneration;

Strategies & Masterplans:

- Completion of the "Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy 2040 And Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise" focused on improvements to the public realm through a programme of infrastructural works.
- Completion of the Portlaoise Decarbonisation Zone and Carbon Footprint Study
- Completion of the Tyrells Land Masterplan
- Portlaoise Local Transport Plan – Underway

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund:

- €9.06m funding secured under Call 1 of the URDF in respect of the development of a new Cultural Quarter in Portlaoise and also the development of initiatives which will see Portlaoise becoming the first Low Carbon Town in Ireland.
- The development of the Cultural Quarter has focused on a number of landmark buildings relating to the town's establishment in the 16th century, including the Fort Protector, The River Triogue; and the Ridge Burial Ground. The 'Call 1' works that have been delivered with respect to the Low Carbon Town include the delivery of cycle routes, EV charging points and low energy lighting.
- 'Placemaking for a Low Carbon Town' - €9m secured under Call 2 of the URDF. Public realm works to improve connectivity between the old town of Portlaoise and the New Town were the subject of this application.

Other

- The new County Library on Main Street, open to the public summer 2023, will form a significant part of the Cultural Quarter development.
- Free public wi-fi has been rolled out in Portlaoise under the WiFi4EU programme
- The Vacant Commercial Property Incentive Scheme is a pilot scheme which was launched in Portlaoise in collaboration with Laois Chamber Alliance and the Local Enterprise Office, in March 2022. This scheme offers business owners who are interested in leasing or renting vacant premises a potential package of up to eleven different grants, supports and incentives. The scheme has been launched to encourage the uptake of vacant premises in the Town Centre by new and potential businesses.
- A full-time Vacant Homes Office was established in Laois County Council in 2022. Key functions include securing vacant property refurbishment grants under the Croi Conaithe Fund, Repair and Lease Scheme, CPO of vacant properties and vacancy surveys

Residential Development; Extant Planning Permissions

- Former Presentation Convent and school: Development of 51 residential units by Sophia Housing – At tender stage and due to commence in Q3 2023
- Planning permission granted for 50 residential units at Mountmellick Road (pl. ref. 19/670)
- Planning permission granted for 12 apartments at Coote Street (pl. ref. 20/15)
- Planning permission granted for 9 dwellings at Beechfield House (pl. ref. 18/61)
- Planning permission granted for 23 dwellings on the Borris Road (pl. ref. 18/302)
- Planning permission granted for 72 residential units on the Borris Road (pl. ref. 18/791)
- Planning permission granted for 74 residential units on the Mountrath Road (pl. ref. 20/583)
- Part VIII granted for 12 houses at Clonroosk
- Part VIII granted for 54 houses at Heburn Court

Development Commenced

- Foxburrow: The development of 144 residential units is underway (partially occupied) (pl. ref. 22/182)
- Dublin Road: The development of 36 residential units is underway by CoOperative Ireland (pl. ref. 20/146)
- Planning permission granted for 141 residential units on the Mountrath Road (pl. ref. 16/257)
- Planning permission granted for 91 residential units at Summerhill (pl. ref. 19/727)

Development Complete / Substantially Complete

- The Maltings site: phased residential development of 161 residential units & a 101-bed nursing home substantially complete
- Former CBS lands: Development of 67 residential units by Cluid Housing at Railway Street, Portlaoise – Due to be completed in 2023
- Planning permission granted for 48 residential units on the Mountrath Road (pl. ref. 19/389)

Large Residential Developments

- Centrepoint – Formal LRD discussions have taken place
- Dublin Road – Formal LRD discussions have taken place

Masterplan

- In 2022, a Masterplan (prepared by urban designers LUC) was finalised for the Tyrrells Landbank on the Stradbally road which will deliver residential, open space, amenity and community infrastructure for the town. This masterplan will be incorporated into the forthcoming Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029.

Economic Development;

Continued expansion has taken place in J17 National Enterprise Park with the sale of sites to two new businesses who join the existing operators in this large-scale Enterprise Park located just off the M7. All 79 acres of the Laois County Council owned lands have now been sold to a number of companies across many sectors including; food & drink production; pharmaceutical products; engineering; furniture manufacturing; heat & ventilation and hi-tech services.

Since the adoption of the J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan, a number of planning applications have been approved to deliver the overall vision. Recently approved developments include:

- The development of a Manufacturing Campus (pl. ref: 22/40);
- The construction of a warehouse / light industrial manufacturing factory facility (pl. ref: 21/221);
- Glanbia Cheese EU Limited have completed development and are now operating (pl. ref. 18/502).
- A Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, known as 'The Cube', officially opened on Church Street in March 2023. It is the first dedicated low carbon facility in the region and will support and stimulate the creation of 260 jobs over the next 10 years. The 10,000 square foot Low Carbon Centre of Excellence, a dedicated centre for the development of new business and economic activity, will in turn support and assist a transition to a low carbon economy. This exemplar low carbon facility is the first of its kind in the region and is located in the heart of Portlaoise's Cultural Quarter. It will support and stimulate the development of enterprise and jobs locally, regionally, and nationally.
- In October 2022, the IDA purchased a substantial landbank (45 acres) adjacent to the Business and Technology Park in Portlaoise.
- Portlaoise Enterprise Centre offers fully accessible co-working spaces, small offices, industrial units, training and meeting room facilities in Portlaoise. It currently has the following occupancy rates:
 - Co-working spaces – 60%
 - Small offices – 87%
 - Industrial units – 100%
 - Re-launch of Laois Chamber

*Services and Amenities;***Portlaoise Cultural Quarter**

- The new County Library on Main Street will open to the public in the summer of 2023. The new facility will be universally accessible, welcoming and inclusive to all communities as well as providing study space, meeting rooms, sensory library services and a dedicated Local History and Studies reference and reading room.
- An Outdoor Performance and Event Space within the Fort Protector has been approved. The venue will have capacity for 500 people with a stage, weather-proof awning & new access gateway.
- The refurbishment of Scoil Mhuire to facilitate Music Generation Laois and the Laois School of Music has been completed.
- Education; The Department of Education has approved €24.5m for the construction of a permanent school building for Dunamase College in Portlaoise. The Laois and Offaly Education Training Board's plans are in design stage.
- Kolbe school granted planning permission to construct a new school on Block Road (pl. ref. 21/395).

Amenities;

- Triogue Blueway: Triogue Way Phase 1 was officially opened in March 2022. Laois County Council constructed a pedestrian and cycle route from the Portlaoise Southern Circular Road to The Portlaoise Peoples Park. This forms part of the overall Triogue Blueway project that will see a 3m wide, fully lit and largely off-road pedestrian/cycle way from the Schools Campuses on Portlaoise Southern Circular to Greenmill Lane. This project specifically supports and promotes a safe cycling and walking culture in the urban environment whilst bringing additional amenity value to the town.
- Portlaoise Leisure Centre: Extensive upgrade work carried out in 2021
- Play facilities: New accessible play space completed and opened in June 2022

Other

- Portlaoise Courthouse: Site identified for the provision of a new Courthouse

Enabling Infrastructure;

- The following are the key infrastructure projects which are either completed or are actively being progressed:
- The Togher link road from the J17 National Enterprise Park to the Clonminam Business Park opened summer 2021. In accordance with the Masterplan, it is envisaged that this new link road will open up Laois and Portlaoise for new jobs and economic development.
- Phase 4 of the J17 works are currently under construction & due to be completed October 2024.
- Southern Circular Road opened November 2019
- In November 2022, 6 new charging points were provided by the Council in the Town centre and a further 20 will come into service at the new commuter carpark at Portlaoise Railway station in early summer 2023.

Implementation Progress of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs)

Progress has been made across a number of RPOs specific to Portlaoise as follows;

- RPO 4.71: Support delivery of the Portlaoise Regeneration and Development Demonstration Project and assist the local authority in seeking funding opportunities for delivery of regeneration development
 - The "Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy "2040 And Beyond: A Vision For Portlaoise" - Ongoing
 - Urban Regeneration and Development Fund:
 - 9.06m funding secured under Call 1 of the URDF in respect of the development of a new Cultural Quarter in Portlaoise, and also the development of initiatives which will see Portlaoise becoming the first Low Carbon town in Ireland. The development of the Cultural Quarter has focused on a number of landmark buildings relating to the town's establishment in the 16th century, including the Fort Protector, The River Triogue and the Ridge Burial Ground. The 'Call 1' works that have been delivered with respect to the Low Carbon Town include the delivery of cycle routes, EV charging points and low energy lighting.
 - 'Placemaking for a Low Carbon Town' - €9m secured under Call 2 of the URDF. This project includes public realm works to improve connectivity between the old town of Portlaoise and the New Town:
 - - The completion of the Cultural Quarter.
 - - Public Realm Work- - Market Square and Main Street.
 - - Pedestrianisation on Lower Main Street and upgrade of the Public Realm along Main Street from Market Square.
 - - Enhancing the streetscape on James Fintan Lalor Avenue to prioritise pedestrian access, cycling and public transport.
 - - Creation of urban development sites along James Fintan Lalor Avenue that are consistent with the principles of compact urban growth
 - Key Regeneration Sites:
 - Significant development/progress has taken place on a number of key regeneration sites in Portlaoise:
 - - The construction of a new library in the heart of the Main Street
 - - The provision of 67 new homes and commuter facilities at the Former CBS lands near Portlaoise railway station; due to be completed in 2023
 - - New apartments on the site of the former County Hotel; at design stage
 - - The provision of 161 new homes and a new nursing home on the once derelict Maltings Site; substantially complete
 - - Provision of 51 new homes at the former Presentation Convent and school; at tender stage & due to commence in Q3 2023
 - - The transformation of a building at Tower Hill into a low carbon innovation hub centre of excellence - Opened March 2023
 - - The reimagining of the old Fort Protector site to cater for music tuition and outdoor festivals.
 - RPO 4.72: Support transition of Portlaoise to a low carbon town centre by reducing car use and promoting walking and cycling and improving the mix of uses within the town centre
 - Various developments have been both approved and commenced to support and promote more sustainable forms of transport and to enhance permeability and accessibility in and around Portlaoise Town Centre. These include:
 - - N77 Abbeyleix Road Rehabilitation & Enhancement Scheme
 - - Vulnerable Road User improvements on Father Browne Avenue
 - - Vulnerable Road User improvements on the Dublin Road
 - - New footpath and pedestrian crossing at Rathleague, Portlaoise linking the N80 to Portlaoise GAA Club
 - - Installation of approximately 50 cycle stands at locations throughout the town.
 - Triogue Way Phase 1 was officially opened on 31st March 2022 and is Phase 1 of a project that will see a 3m wide, fully lit and largely off-road pedestrian/cycle way from the Schools Campuses on Portlaoise Southern Circular to Greenmill Lane.
 - Laois County Council received an allocation of €3.5m in 2021 from the National Transport Authority for the delivery of Active Travel projects. In 2021 delivery of a number of projects commenced: Triogue Blueway Portlaoise, Phase 1; Portlaoise Cycle Parking; Pedestrian crossing at Summerhill Lane, Portlaoise.
 - The National Transport Authority in conjunction with Laois County Council is in the process of developing a new bus network to serve Portlaoise town centre. Tendering and the construction of bus stops is expected in Q4 2023.
 - Cycling Officer appointed at Laois County Council
 - School cycle bus in operation
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RPO 4.73: Support the vision and objectives of the J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan, where appropriate, which aims to deliver a viable economic zone within Portlaoise which will accommodate a range of potential businesses and industries whilst having regard to spatial planning, infrastructural, environmental and transportation requirements and compatibility with adjoining land uses. This is subject to compliance with the requirements of the SEA, Habitats and Floods Directive.

The J17 National Enterprise Park Masterplan was adopted in 2018. The vision for the Masterplan is to deliver a viable economic zone, as a National Enterprise Park, focused particularly on heavy, light and ICT industry, distribution, logistics and other uses associated with the transport industry

Works completed over the last two years include the installation of public lighting; the completion of footpaths and cycle paths connecting the park to Clonminam Business Park; enhancement works to improve the appearance of the National Enterprise Park with the installation of gateway features at both entrances and landscaping throughout the park.

All 79 acres of the Laois County Council owned lands have been sold to a number of companies across many sectors including: food & drink production; pharmaceutical products; engineering; furniture manufacturing; heat & ventilation and hi-tech services.

The J17 National Enterprise Park has been a success for the County, with a number of high-profile employers announcing plans at the Enterprise Park in recent years, including Glanbia, Greenfield Global, Kirby Group Engineering and Midland Steel Reinforcement Supplies. Laois County Council will continue to support these companies through the planning process.

RPO 4.74: Support the development and expansion of the Midlands Regional Hospital at Portlaoise

Planning permission was granted for a major extension to the Midlands Regional Hospital which included the provision of a new Respiratory Assessment Unit and the extension of the existing Paediatric Unit (pl. ref: 21/756)

Initial discussions have taken place in relation to a masterplan for the HSE landbank where the Midlands Regional Hospital is situated.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION;

Active Travel Team

- N77 Abbeyleix Road Rehabilitation & Enhancement Scheme: Ongoing TII scheme involving the reallocation of road space for pedestrian and cyclist facilities. Project to be completed this year.

The following are updates regarding active travel schemes funded through the NTA under their active travel programme:

- A School Sustainable Travel Study for Portlaoise was completed by An Taisce in 2022. Many of the measures identified in this report are being actioned in 2023.
- Triogue Way: Phase 1 is completed and was officially opened in March 2022. Works on Phases 2 & 3 are ongoing. These will run from the Peoples Park and will finish at the Western Orbital Road.
- Beladd Cycle Scheme, Portlaoise: Shared pedestrian/cycle track across HSE lands at Beladd which will link the Stradbally Road and Dublin Road. This scheme is still at early stages and agreements are to be reached with the HSE.
- Dublin Road, Portlaoise - This scheme can be split into 2 parts:
 - - Part 1: Starts near Grenville estate and runs to the Kilminchy roundabout. The scheme proposes the removal of right turning lanes and central medians, and the reallocation of the road space to cycling infrastructure. Detailed design has been completed following Part 8 approval a number of years ago. Delivery expected within 2 years.
 - - Part 2: Formalisation of the painted cycle lanes on the Dublin Road from Grenville estate to St. Mary's Hall. Delivery expected within 2 years.
- Father Brown Avenue, Portlaoise: Removal of right turning lanes and central medians, and the reallocation of the road space to cycling infrastructure. Part 8 approval secured in December 2022. Delivery expected within 2 years.
- Portlaoise Cycle Parking: Installation of approximately 50 cycle stands at locations throughout the town.
- Junction Tightening Works: Works took place at Liogard and Beechfield estates in 2022. Priority now given to pedestrians and provides benefits to wheelchair users, mobility impaired, visually impaired.
- Safe Routes to School: Maryborough NS was selected under Round 1 of the SRTS Programme. This will include works on the Portlaoise Southern Circular Road roundabout. Scheduled to take place in 2023.
- Rathleague Footpath Scheme: New 3m wide shared pedestrian /cycle track with additional public lighting and pedestrian crossing installed at Rathleague, Portlaoise linking the N80 to Portlaoise GAA Club - completed in 2023.
- Rapid Deployment Scheme, R445 Mountrath Road: Formalisation of painted cycle lanes on the Mountrath Road. The scheme will ensure the continuity of off-road cycle facilities from the Western Orbital Road to Knockmay Road. Delivery planned for 2023.
- Stradbally Road, Portlaoise: A review of cycling infrastructure on the Stradbally Road from its roundabout junction with the Southern Circular Road to the Tyrrells landbank is proposed. Subject to approval, the scheme is planned to be delivered within 3 years.

Town Centre First Team

The Town Team in Portlaoise was established in 2017. Since then, the Town Team has advised, led and enabled multiple Tidy Towns projects, initiatives with local business groups, Low Carbon Town projects, heritage initiatives, street art and public realm enhancements. It has recently reviewed its action plan and has identified 9 key objectives for the period 2023-2026. This action plan will be fundamental to the development and regeneration of Portlaoise going forward and enabling funding opportunities to be availed of.

Climate Action Team

- Portlaoise has been identified as a National Decarbonization Zone Demonstration Project in both the Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework and in Action 165 of the National Climate Action Plan 2019.
 - The "Portlaoise Public Realm Strategy "2040 And Beyond: A Vision For Portlaoise" envisages the transformation of the town into Ireland's first "Low Carbon Town Centre".
 - In March 2021, Laois County Council launched the Carbon Footprint report for Portlaoise. This is the first Carbon Footprint report of its kind for a county town in Ireland and was commissioned by Laois County Council as part of the Low Carbon Town initiative supported by Government in Project Ireland 2040. It provides Laois County Council with a detailed assessment of its existing Carbon footprint and the potential to reduce its impact through identifying suitable reduction. A baseline emissions inventory of Portlaoise and environs and an Energy Master Plan of the town will be prepared in 2023. These will include energy audits of community and commercial buildings.
 - To advance the concept of a Low Carbon Town, the Council established a Low Carbon Implementation Group to address implementation challenges and opportunities. The group is comprised of representatives from the public and private sector including academia, energy, health, retail and transport. The Group functions as a delivery and implementation network with agreed actions thereby demonstrating leadership at a local level.
 - Refurbishing and repurposing derelict buildings impacts positively on low carbon commitments. In the past five years, plans have been developed and construction has commenced on a number of key derelict and vacant sites across the town, including:
 - New library on Main Street;
 - Refurbishment of the old convent on Church Avenue for homes for the elderly;
 - Transformation of a building at Tower Hill into a low carbon innovation hub centre of excellence known as 'The Cube';
 - Provision of new homes on the once derelict Maltings Site;
 - Design of new apartments on the site of the former County Hotel;
 - Reimagining of the old Fort Protector site to cater for music tuition and outdoor festivals.
 - The Council is determined to increase cycling in Portlaoise through a programme of awareness and physical development work in the Town. It is committed to extending on-road and off-road cycleways and extending the Triogue Way (see section on Active Travel).
 - On Energy Use the Council has retrofitted 2,500 existing streetlights in Portlaoise with energy-saving LED lighting and has provided additional lighting to poorly lit areas.
 - Solar powered compactor litter bins in the town have increased from 30 to 50.
 - In November 2022, 6 new charging points were provided by the Council in the Town centre and a further 20 will come into service at the new commuter carpark at Portlaoise Railway station in early summer 2023.
 - Decarbonizing efforts of other groups within Portlaoise including local sporting organisations must be acknowledged:
 - O' Moore Park has become a Green GAA Stadium. All flood lights were retrofitted to LED, rainwater harvesting, recycling bins were provided throughout the stadium and biodiversity initiatives have been embraced with the planting of wild flowers and native trees.
 - Portlaoise Rugby Club recently unveiled a major plan to 'go green'. Among the proposals are the development of hedgerows and trees to provide shelter for playing pitches, LED lighting, solar panels, electric vehicle charging points, bicycle parking and pollinator-friendly flowerbeds.
 - Portlaoise Tidy Towns recently launched "a town in a Garden project" that includes pollinator friendly native wildflower planting, meadow management and planting of over 200,000 pollinator friendly bulbs in 2023. Other examples include New Pollinator Friendly Roundabouts and road verges.
 - The 10,000 trees for Portlaoise Project was progressed in 2022. Planting of over 3,000 new whips and trees are scheduled in 2023.
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Tullamore

Implementation progress of the Policy Context

URDF Call 3 is specifically designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across URDF cities and towns which will align with the Government's Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023.

The fund will be available to cover the acquisition costs of a property or site and also any civil or design works which may be required to de-risk or improve the site/building to make it more attractive for reuse, development by others or onward sale. The intention is that the fund would be replenished from the proceeds received from the end use/user, thereby allowing the local authority to put in place a rolling programme to tackle long term vacancy and dereliction without recourse to borrowing and the associated financial risk. An application has been submitted to the Department for over 30 properties in excess of €6m.

Residential development; The Offaly County Development Plan provides a core strategy table. In accordance with RPO 4.26, the core strategy table makes provision for a 30% increase in Tullamore's population, and in addition compact growth is planned for through the identification of Opportunity sites at brownfield locations. These opportunity sites include the sites listed in the RSES relating to Tullamore (e.g. Texas site, Grand Canal Harbour, Tanyard, Coen site, former rail yard).

Economic development:

The Offaly County Development Plan includes a zoning map for Tullamore. It identifies two strategic employment zones and accompanying policy in accordance with RPO 4.27. Co-working hub set up in Axis Business Park.

Services & Amenities:

The Arts Centre 'Esker Arts' opened in Tullamore 2023 which involved the substantial extension and refurbishment of a town centre building. The Grand Canal Greenway is now almost fully in place from Edenderry in the east of the county to Lough Boora Discovery Park in the west, including a spur to Kibbeggan, Co. Westmeath. The 'Tullamore Urban Stretch' will be delivered during 2023 and the final stretch to Shannon Harbour will be delivered by mid-2024. This entire project will be 77 kms in Offaly. The 'Midlands Cycling Destination - Offaly' has identified approximately 300kms of walking trails throughout the county with potentially 15 external links to 7 other counties. The recently announced Strategic Partnership between the Department of Rural and Community Development and Bord na Mona will be a vehicle to deliver some of these routes under the EU Just Transition Fund.

Lloyd Town Park, Tullamore owned and managed by Offaly County Council, is an established local amenity and community resource in the capital town of Offaly. The park was established in 1987 and officially open to the public in 2008 following extensive refurbishment. The Park, an area of 5 hectares, has been rejuvenated throughout the years providing sports and recreation facilities for children and youths including a playground, skate park and basketball court and a place to walk, run and exercise including adult gym equipment and a tranquil and beautiful area to relax and socialize for the wider community.

Lloyd Park has been awarded the Green Flag each year since 2016 and is a source of pride in the community. OCC received funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media for the Outdoor Public Space Scheme 2021 to upgrade the Toilets and water feature in the park and install a bandstand. This funding along with Tullamore Municipal District allocation will see the installation of a new caretaker's office and toilets, a new bandstand and the repair and upgrade of the water feature in 2023.

Esker Arts: The Arts Centre in Tullamore was a collaboration between Tullamore Community Arts Centre Ltd. Established as a partnership between Offaly County Council, Tullamore Town Council and the local community.

Offaly County Council purchased the former Kilroy's Shop in High Street, Tullamore and subsequently, a design team headed Kenny Lyons and Associates, Tullamore were appointed to design and project manage the build project. The construction of the new Centre was completed in late 2022 to a very high standard. With the completion of the fit out, the Centre was opened in April 2023. Offaly County Council, in consultation with Tullamore Community Arts Centre Ltd, established a new company, Esker Arts CLG, which has been tasked with managing the operation and governance of the Centre into the future.

Enabling Infrastructure;

Uisce Eireann are carrying out preliminary examinations on a southern interceptor sewer for Tullamore which is necessary to allow further development in the southern part of the town.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund Call 1 Tullamore Street Enhancement

The Works, completed in 2020, comprised of enhancement works to Tullamore Public Realm which included improvement works to High Street, Bridge Street, William Street, Columcille Street, Millennium Square and O'Connor Square Co. Offaly. The works within O'Connor Square included for the provision of new surface paving, new Street and feature lighting, new car parking and road layouts with Street furniture elements and proposed semi mature tree planting.

The works to High Street, Bridge Street, William Street and Columcille Street involved the undergrounding of the existing overhead wires together with the removal of existing poles. The existing Street lighting was replaced with new feature light poles. The existing path from Tara Street to Harbour Street were widened where possible.

The existing concrete paths were replaced with new granite paving and granite kerbs. The bus stop was relocated to Columcille Street with a new paving build out and a controlled pedestrian crossing. Works included the design & installation of a new pedestrian bridge to link the Dunnes Stores car park to Millennium Square.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund Call 1 Urban Greenway

Offaly County Council proposes to construct a 2m wide footpath along the towpath of the Grand Canal and shared vehicular and cycling route on the carriageway of Convent View for a distance of 315m. The route of the shared facility is from the eastern end of Convent View, Tullamore to Kilbeggan Bridge, Tullamore. The proposal will connect the Grand Canal Greenway at Convent View on the east to join the urban Greenway at Bury Quay to and Srah Road and Srah Bridge, on the west of Tullamore.

Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) Call 2

The Tullamore Urban Regeneration and Development Fund 2020 (URDF 2) Project, preliminary approval for funding in 2021, incorporates six individual projects building on the successful completion of the Tullamore Street Enhancement project funded under URDF 1. Each of the six projects, as listed below, are straightforward and deliverable in the short to medium term however will bring advantages to the town beyond their individual scope and represent value for money and a good return on the investment.

- O'Connor Square to Church Street, Urban Garden, Church Street RWH (Tender for Consultants Q2 2023)
- High Street to Tanyard New Street Link (Tender for Contractor Q2 2023)
- Meath Lane Civic Space (Tender for Contractor Q2 2023)
- Tullamore Regeneration Framework Entire Town Centre (BSM appointed; Framework in progress)
- Tullamore Harbour Development Masterplan (Grafton Architect appointed; Masterplan in progress)
- Acres' Folly Enhancements (Tender for Contractor Q2 2023)

Active Travel:

Offaly County Council is committed to the sustainable development of Tullamore town, to provide both for the resident population and visitors the necessary road infrastructure, cycling and smarter travel opportunities for improved access to the town centre and for commuting journeys for work and education. Offaly County Council has a number of schemes ongoing in Tullamore as part of the NTA Active Travel programme.

Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1: Consulting Engineers Aecom appointed to carry out the design of phase 1 of the cycle network. Phase 1 is for the proposed design and construction of cycle lanes linking Collins Lane residential hub with Sragh Business and Technology Park, Axis Business Park, Arden View, school campus, Educate Together school (off Collins Lane), Sports Link Sports Field and Tennis Club and the Midland Regional Hospital. Cycle lanes in each direction are proposed over a length of approx.. 2600m.

Routes such as Clonminch Road, Bachelors Walk, the train station to the town centre link and the Collins Lane, Arden View network as identified above will be included in the ABTA. The Tullamore Cycle Network Phase 1 is the first project to progress to detailed design and construction.

Implementation Progress of Regional Policy Objectives

Progress has been made across a number of RPOs specific to Tullamore;

RPO 4.68 (regarding Tourism destination town & Midlands Cycling destination): The Grand Canal Greenway is completed from Edenderry to Lough Boora Discovery Park, passing through Tullamore. The enhancement works referred to above serve to improve the quality of place and attract more visitors.

RPO 4.69 (regarding strategic development sites and employment centre): See above in relation to economic development. In addition, many enterprise related policies are provided for in the Offaly Development Plan 2021-2027 pertaining to Tullamore.

RPO 4.70 (regarding third level outreach education): The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 includes the following relevant policy, Ref ENTP-37; It is Council policy to support the examination of a need for complementary third level outreach facilities in Tullamore, particularly with regard to support for Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore and where appropriate, its continued development as a Teaching / University Hospital, together with potential for linkages to existing and new med-tech businesses and research facilities.

Graigecullen

Regeneration; Sites are being considered and identified for regeneration

Residential Development; Planning permission was granted for a mixed-use development including 214 residential units, a nursing home and a creche (pl. ref. 21/887 – under appeal). Planning permission was also granted to erect 19 apartments (pl. ref. 21/45 – under appeal).

Economic Development; Laois County Council continue to support existing businesses

Planning permission granted for a 1,260 sq.m. retail warehouse in (6 units) at Barrowside Business Park (pl. ref. 20/198)

Services and Amenities;

Planning permission granted for extension to St. Fiac’s school to include 4 general classrooms, Central Activities area and secure outdoor play space (pl. ref. 22/330). Planning permission granted to construct new astroturf playing facilities and clubhouse (St. Fiacc’s F.C) (pl. ref. 2360007). Planning permission was granted and construction underway of a new school (Saplings) (pl. ref. 20/548).

Enabling Infrastructure; Transport consultants have been appointed and the Carlow Graigecullen Local Transport Plan is currently underway.

RSES REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE PROGRESS**RPO 4.75**

Regular discussions taking place between Laois and Carlow County Councils who have reaffirmed their commitments to work together on the Joint Urban Area Local Area Plan for Carlow Graigecullen.

In conjunction with Carlow County Council, a review of the JULAP is currently being carried out. Pre-draft public consultation has taken place (29/09/2022 and 06/10/2022) and preparation of the draft JULAP is underway. Publication of the draft JULAP is expected in Q2 2023.

Transport consultants have been appointed and the Carlow Graigecullen Local Transport Plan is underway.

RPO 4.76

Laois County Council continue to liaise with Carlow County Council in relation to the Barrow Blueway

C) Funding Ambition

(C)(i) Interaction with Funding Streams

This section identifies the engagement levels of each local authority with specific funding streams that enable the implementation of the RSES. The Assembly Request Form specifically referenced the four Project Ireland 2040 funds which are, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), Climate Action Fund, and the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund.

Full details of each local authority's engagement with funding streams can be found at Appendix C.

Interaction with Funding Streams

Dublin SPA

All of the Dublin local authorities (DLA) have engaged with Project Ireland 2040 funding streams with the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) the most accessed fund providing c. €440 million across 2 calls to 21 projects in the Dublin Region.

Under 'Call 1' of the URDF the Dublin Region was awarded €7 million for 4 projects that were 'ready to go' in 2019 including funding for Stillorgan public realm works (DLR), Cherrywood Public Parks, Greenways and Attenuation (DLR), Rutland Street NEIC (DCC) and Tallaght Town Centre Civic Plaza/Link Roads (SDCC), and a further c.€2.5million for 9 projects that require further development. In 2021 the Dublin Region was awarded €430 million in provisional funding under 'Call 2' of the URDF for the following 8 regeneration projects;

- North Inner City Concept Area 1 (Dublin City Council) - €121.3 million
- South Inner City Concept Area 2 (Dublin City Council) - €53 million
- Cherrywood Public Access, Permeability and Amenity (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council) - €40.4 million
- Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Hub (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council) - €4 million
- Balbriggan Rejuvenation (Fingal County Council) - €25.4 million
- Dunsink Feasibility Study - Transportation and Surface Water Assessments (Fingal County Council) - €41,250
- Clonburris - supplementary strategic infrastructure for the SDZ (South Dublin County Council) - €186.3 million
- Adamstown - supplementary strategic infrastructure for the SDZ (South Dublin County Council) - €9.9 million

There has been significant draw down of other Project Ireland 2040 funds including the Climate Action Fund, which invested €20 million to capture waste heat from the Dublin Waste to Energy Plant in Ringsend (DCC), and €4.4 million to establish district heating in the Tallaght area (SDCC). Applications have also been made under the current Expressions of Interest call in 2020 to DCCAE.

The DLAs have also benefitted from other funding streams that support implementation of the RSES, with approximately €259.3 million funding provided for 2022 and 2023 under the Active Travel Investment Programme for active travel in the Dublin Region. Other funding streams accessed by the DLAs include the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), the Large-Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) and Fáilte Ireland Water based facilities grant.

Eastern SPA

The local authorities in the Eastern SPA have attracted significant funding in the implementation of the RSES, with funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) proving to be the most successful.

The Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk have benefitted from funding under the URDF scheme including the following;

	Funding Proposal	Amount Awarded	Status of Project
Dundalk	St. Nicholas Quarter and Backlands Regeneration Phase 1 & 2	€7.49m URDF funding out of a total fund of €9.98m.	Stage ii (b) – Consultants appointed. Detailed design stage for Phase 1.
Drogheda	Westgate Vision – Public Realm Works/Regeneration Scheme	€476,000 URDF Funding giving a total of €660,000.	Stage ii – Project to be submitted to An Bord Pleanála for approval.

The Key Towns across the eastern region have also been a particular focus with significant projects supported;

- Bray Public Transport Bridge €3.45m
- Bray Harbour Area Integrated Regeneration €7.14m
- Maynooth Town Centre Masterplan €1.9m
- Naas Town Centre Masterplan €3.49m
- Navan - Flowerhill and Abbeylands Regeneration Navan €7.6m
- Railway Street, Navan, Regeneration and County Archive €187,500
- Wicklow town Library €1.626m

These projects have all benefited from support in the RSES and area implementing RPOs under the key towns policies in the RSES.

Meath County Council was also successful in securing 6.376m towards the Ashbourne Road and Public Realm Improvement scheme under URDF. The project includes significant public realm improvements and enhancement of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure in the town.

There have been significant projects under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) which have focused on regeneration of other towns in the region such as Baltinglass, Newtownmountkenegny, Blessington, Arklow, Nenwbridge, Kildare Town, Trim, Kells, Enfield, Athboy, Dunshaughlin, Oldcastle, Ardee, Carlingford and Omeath.

In the implementation of Greenways and Blueways within the region there has been funding awarded for the delivery of the Drogheda to Navan Greenway and navigation channel, the Bray-Arklow Blueway, the Grand Canal Greenway (phase 1 Aylmer bridge to Sallins) and the Athy Barrow Blueway (46km).

Under the Climate Action fund, in Wicklow there are proposals for a Decarbonisation Zone in Arklow and the Upper Avoca River Project (both awaiting funding). Arklow has been selected as Wicklow's low-carbon demonstrator town and will see the implementation of a range of measures for climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity actions in the coming years.

In Louth, an application has been made in March 2023 for an Urban Food Sanctuary (a project to highlight food security in County Louth in the face of changing weather patterns as a result of climate change). Funding award yet to be determined.

Midlands SPA

All of the local authorities within the Midlands have readily engaged with funding streams that progress the implementation of the RSES. The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) have proved to be the most accessed funding streams by the local authorities.

Westmeath County Council

Fund	Funding Proposal (name and brief description)	Date of Funding Application	Amount Sought (€)	Amount Awarded (€)	Status of Project and Next Steps
URDF Fund	Wes004 Blackhall Mullingar Masterplanning Active land Mgt	Sept 2018	2,452,500	2,452,500	Master Planning Stage
	Wes003 Athlone Tourism Cultural Quarter Masterplanning Active land Mgt	Sept 2018	4,500,000	750,000	Athlone Urban Design and Regeneration Framework Plan to be completed by Q3 2023
	Wes005 Athlone Town Centre Regeneration and Enhancement Planning & Design Active land Mgt	Sept 2018	3,740,000	750,000	Design and Business Case approved
	Wes001 Loughanaskin Masterplanning Active land Mgt	Sept 2018	2,500,000	750,000	Final draft of Loughanaskin Regeneration Plan received; Launch of Plan June 2023 Active land Management - acquisition of derelict properties progressing.
	Wes002 Canal Avenue & Environs, Mullingar Regeneration Project Masterplanning Active land Mgt	Sept 2018	1,706,250	1,706,250	Canal Avenue Regeneration Masterplan progressing. Projected completion date Q3 2023 Active land Management - acquisition of derelict properties progressing.
	Wes006 Athlone Town Centre Regeneration & Enhancement Construction	May 2020	4,125,000	4,125,000	At Construction
RRDF Fund	RF_0080 Kinnegad Project (Category 2) Library	2018 and 2020	720,000	720,000	Design and Business Case approved
	RF 0134 Castlepollard Regeneration (Category 2)	Feb 2020	311,250	311,250	Design and Business Case approved
	RRDF 0164 Kinnegad Regeneration (Category 2) Library	Dec 2020	8,171,780	8,171,780	At Construction Part VIII approval in place for the provision of a Town Park.
	RF 0134 Castlepollard Regeneration (Category 1) Market House & Town Park	April 2022	4,357,384		Awaiting conclusion of DRCD Verification Process. Part VIII approval in place for the refurbishment of the Market House

Offaly County Council

Fund	Funding Proposal (name and brief description)	Date of Funding Application	Amount Sought (€)	Amount Awarded (€)	Status of Project and Next Steps
URDF Call 1 2018	Tullamore Street Enhancement incl Millennium Bridge	2018	€6,500,794	€2,561,851 (+ €1,500,000 ERDF)	Complete
	Meath Lane			€200,250	Complete
	Urban Greenway			€1,759,849	Tender for Contractor Q2 2023
	Harbour Street & Store Street			Preliminary Approval	Detailed Design
URDF Call 2 2020	Project A(i) O'Connor to Church Street Link and Urban Garden	2020	€820,928	€820,928	Gate 2 Approval due; Tender for Design Consultants
	Project A(ii) Church Street RWH	2020	€375,000	€375,000	Gate 2 Approval due; Tender for Design Consultants
	Project B High Street to Tanyard New Street Link	2020	€263,479	€263,479	Gate 2 Approval due; Tender for Contractor
	Project C Meath Lane Link and Civic Space	2020	€186,000	€186,000	Gate 2 Approval due; Tender for Contractor
	Project D Tullamore Regeneration Framework	2020	€150,000	€150,000	BSM appointed; Framework ongoing
	Project E Tullamore Harbour Development Masterplan	2020	€150,000	€150,000	Grafton Architect appointed; Masterplan ongoing
	Project F Acres' Folly Enhancements	2020	€120,000	€120,000	Gate 2 Approval due; Tender for Contractor
	Project Manager	2020	€180,000	€180,000	Ongoing claims & payments
URDF Call 3	URDF Call 3 Revolving Fund Dereliction & Vacancy	2023	€6,547,200	Pending	Forthcoming
RRDF	Edenderry - Blundell Masterplan; New Library and Community building.				
	Banagher - Masterplan for the marina area.				
Other Funds (please specify)	TVR Covid 2020 Tullamore Millennium Sq enhancement	2020	€40,000	€40,000	Complete

Longford County Council

Fund	Funding Proposal (name and brief description)	Date of Funding Application	Amount Sought (€)	Amount Awarded (€)	Status of Project and Next Steps
URDF	Camlin Quarter - promoting placemaking and inward investment, responding to connectivity issues in this area.	May 2020	€13.3m	€13.3m	Preliminary Business Case submitted, awaiting further update from Department
	Longford Connected - Public realm regeneration works including Market Square, Grafton Court/ Retail square	2019	€2.99m	€2.99m	Project completed
	URDF III (Vacancies)	2023	Forthcoming		Awaiting outcome
RRDF	RRDF 2018 Granard Motte Heritage Tourism Project - development of flagship tourism project	2018	€2.8m	€2.8m	Tender out for consultants, next steps preparation of construction tender package
	RRDF 2018 Edgeworthstown Community Library and Public Realm - completion of library and enhancement of public realm	2018	€1.27m	€1.27m	Project complete
	RRDF 2019 Yard Hub Abbeyshrule - development of a rural working hub and enterprise space	2019	€841,974	€841,974	Project complete and officially opened April 2023
	RRDF 2020 - Enhancement of attractiveness of Lanesborough as a tourism destination	2020	€468,750	€468,750	Submission for element 1 for statutory consent in Q2 2023
	RRDF 2020 - Pobal le Cheile Ballymahon - creation of a cluster around provision of social services, while enhancing connectivity and public realm.	2020	€6.6m	€6.6m	Consultants appointed, detailed design and community consultation ongoing, going to tender for construction Q3 2023
	RRDF 2021 Category 2 Granard Destination Town	2021	€1.15m	€1.15m	Project moving to commencement stage

Laois County Council

Fund	Funding Proposal (name and brief description)	Date of Funding Application	Amount Sought (€)	Amount Awarded (€)	Status of Project and Next Steps
URDF Fund	Portlaoise - Cultural Quarter	Call 1 Nov 2018		€9,000,600 (total call 1)	Works substantially complete
	Portlaoise - A Low Carbon Town	Call 1 Nov 2018			
	Portlaoise - Placemaking for a Low Carbon Town	Call 2 March 2021		€9,000,000	Awaiting final approval
RRDF Fund	Emo Court - major upgrade of the Emo Court Estate	1st Call - Round 1 - Nov 2018		€1,200,000	Phase 2 commenced
	International Mountain Biking Project (Slieve Blooms and other projects nationally)	1st Call - Round 2 - 2019		€10,262,900	Officially opened 2022 and works continuing
	Barrow Blueway, 46km (Laois and Kildare)	2nd Call - Nov 2019		€5,067,941.00	Officially opened and works continuing
	Portarlington - Restoration and reuse of Market House, to provide a range of public and community uses	3rd Call - April 2021		€1,094,880	Works tendered. Due to commence in summer 2023
	Borris-In-Ossory - Renovation and re-use of the historic courthouse building for the benefit of the local community	3rd Call - Jan 2022		€265,415	Integrated Design team appointed in Quarter 4 2022
	Durrow Community Enterprise Hub	4th Call - Nov 2022		€1,456,983.00	

D) Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs)

This section identifies progress that has been made with respect to LECPs across the Region. Regional Assemblies are required to adopt a statement on draft LECPs for consideration by the elected council of that local authority relating to consistency with the RSES. Consistency with the RSES will enable and progress the implementation of policy and objectives contained within the Strategy.

Local Economic and community Plans

Dublin SPA

The Dublin local authorities (DLA) provided detailed information relating to the ongoing implementation of their current LECPs as part of a collaborative approach between elected members and staff in the respective local authorities, Local Community and Development Committees (LCDCs), and Public Participation Networks (PPN), and engagement with several public, private and research partners to progress delivery of key objectives in the current plans.

The LECP Guidelines, prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, were published in November 2021.

The Dublin local authorities, as a result, have commenced the preparation of the new LECP for each respective local authority. The local authorities are progressing with appointing consultants, drafting High Level Goals and draft Socio-Economic statements, and engaging with stakeholders. It is anticipated that the new LECPs will be adopted in Q4 2023.

Eastern SPA

The Eastern local authorities provided varied information on the progress achieved to date on implementing their current LECPs. All four local authorities have indicated that work has commenced on the preparation of the new six-year LECPs which are following the LECP Guidelines (2021) methodology. All local authorities anticipate the adoption of their new LECPs by the end of 2023.



Midlands SPA

Westmeath County Council

Westmeath LCDC continues to deliver actions contained in the LECP under the following headings/areas:

LEADER Programme for Rural Development

Of the overall LEADER project budget of €7,454,636.45 (inclusive of 2014-2020, Transitional, EURI & Co-operation), €7,422,339.37 has been approved to date by the LAG. A total of €5,759,125.97 has been paid to project promoters with an additional 7 claims currently being processed through the system.

Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

With a budget of €1,011,337 in 2022, which includes funding towards a Ukrainian support programme, the SICAP programme operated under two goals and fourteen actions with targets set each year which capture progression of groups and individuals involved in the programme.

In 2022 all programme targets were exceeded by the Implementing Partner, which included:

- 70 (target 63) Local Community Groups, (LCG's), were supported under SICAP in 2022;
- 1,133 (target 681) individuals assisted with progression towards employment with:
 - 202 achieving part time/full time employment;
 - 51 clients successfully entered self-employment for the first time

Ukrainian Community Interventions

In excess of 100 sessions have been held since March in 14 host locations. As each host welcomed their Ukrainian guests WCD SICAP staff provided weekly sessions for the first 4 to 6 weeks and monthly support clinics thereafter. The initial supports generally dealt with linking children with REALT for school positions, DSP for payments, child benefit, and supporting clients to complete medical cards applications.

The SICAP programme worked with in excess of 1,100 clients in 2022 from the Ukrainian community with over 400 registering as individual beneficiaries of SICAP. Sicap also hosted an information session for all service providers to identify challenges and barriers to accessing services and supports, these were then fed into SICAP Ukrainian plan.

Employment and CV supports were offered to those who wished to progress to employment with over 70 supported to access fulltime or part time employment in 2022.

Urban & Rural Support Schemes

Westmeath County Council continues to deliver rural regeneration under a number of nationally funded programmes such as Town & Village Renewal Schemes, CLAR, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS).

The LCDC also continues to support community development in the county through schemes such as Community Support Fund and Community Activities Fund. LCDC is also responsible for oversight of ongoing schemes in the area of health improvement under the Sláintecare Healthy Communities and Healthy Ireland Programmes.

Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

The LEO continues to deliver business and enterprise improvement programmes under the following schemes:

Financial Assistance Grants, Schools, Mentoring, Business Training Supports & Initiatives, Trading Online Voucher, Women in Business Networking Event, County Enterprise Awards, Engenuity Engineering Network, Export Programmes, Shopfront Enhancement Grant Scheme, Remote Working Marketing Measure, E-Working Centre Mullingar, Business Promotion Fund.

Tourism

The Tourism offering continues to be promoted and developed through the following programmes and actions:

Marketing General, Holiday World Show, development of the draft County Tourism Strategy 2023-2027, Meitheal 2023 and the International Buyers Guide, Greenways & Trails Marketing and Development, Regional Festivals Funding and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2022 & 2023.

Climate Action

The Council is commencing the first stage of the public consultation process for development of the new Climate Action Plan alongside the public consultation phase of LECP.

The draft Socio-economic Statement has been developed, by the Advisory Steering Group leveraging the best-available data to develop six High Level Goals. The Statement will be presented for approval at the forthcoming Economic Development Enterprise and Tourism Strategic Policy Committee and the Local Community Development Committee.

Subject to these approvals, the Socio-economic Statement will then be available to the public to help inform the development of objectives and outcomes. There will be a four-week period allocated for the public consultation process, to be completed on 30th June 2023.

The Final draft LECP will then be prepared and submitted to Municipal Districts, Regional Assemblies for input along with the SPC and the LCDC for approval. It is expected that this will take place in July 2023 followed by implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Longford County Council

The purpose of the County Longford Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is to promote economic and Community Development in the County of Longford for the next 6 years, and affects everyone who lives, works, does business and visits County Longford. The previous LECP was formally adopted in 2016 and was for the period 2016-2022, the key objectives and actions have been tracked and monitored and progress on their delivery will inform the development of the new LECP for the County. Longford Council and the Longford Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) are currently preparing for the Longford Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023-2029. To this end a Socio-Economic Profile report was produced in 2022 (2022-2028) which will be used to inform and help shape the new LECP and identify the High Level Goals for the County.

Laos County Council

The current LECP 2016-2021 was reviewed in 2022 as part of the preparatory phase of the development of the new LECP. The preparation of the LECP 2023-2028 has commenced. The High Level Goals have been drafted and public consultation has taken place on same. Public consultation workshops are taking place at present over a two-week period. The next step in the process will involve the drafting of the LECP Objectives and Action with final approval of the LECP 2023-2028 expected by September 2023.

Offaly County Council

The current LECP 2016-2021 has been completed and was reviewed and agreed by Offaly LCDC in September 2021 and by the Offaly Land Use, Planning and Economic Development SPC in October 2021. The Offaly LECP Advisory Steering Group (ASG) was established in May 2022 and has met quarterly since then. The ASG has agreed a set of draft High Level Goals. A Socio-Economic Profile, Socio Economic Statement and High Level Goals were completed on 3rd May 2023 and has issued for public consultation. A number of in-person consultation events are planned from 18th May 2023 and it is envisaged that the new LECP will be finalised and adopted in Q3 2023.



E) Recommendations and Comments of the local authorities

Additional comments were submitted by Dublin local authorities (DLAs) highlighting progress in terms of delivery along strategic transport corridors as set out in MASP, with details outlined in Section 5.2.3.3 of this report, with regard to the implementation of the RSES in the Dublin MASP area.

Other comments by the DLAs relate to an analysis of employment lands within local authority administrative areas and the contribution of this analysis to preparing future Development Plans.

The Eastern local authorities commented that whilst they are striving to ensure coordination and cooperation occurs at the highest level and that consistency is achieved across all spatial and economic plans, their ability to deliver on an increasing plethora of issues and requirements from the top down and bottom up is difficult and very much resource dependant. Additional supports, resources and skillsets should be made available to local authorities to enable the extensive programme of work to be completed in a timely fashion.

Other comments relate to unsuccessful funding applications and the desire to achieve meaningful regeneration of towns and villages increasing economic opportunity and delivering more sustainable forms of transport. It is further recommended by the local authorities that further resources be made available to assist in the preparation of bids for funds and in the management and delivery of that funding.

The local authorities of the Midlands SPA indicated that the implementation of the RSES could be advanced through;

- a. Additional Resources to implement objectives within the local authority in relation to the changing priorities at National and Regional Level. Regeneration and the promotion of the Town Centre first approach is extremely welcome but requires significant resources to implement it in practice. This is a challenge particularly in rural local authorities where resources are prioritized towards fulfilling the legislative requirements involved in development management and enforcement.
- b. Coordinated spatial planning across county boundaries in areas such as renewable energy provision. Local authorities have a responsibility, but national and regional authorities can lead on this in terms of direction on spatial coordination.
- c. Establishment of a steering group with representatives from each of the constituent LAs to progress regional projects in collaboration with EMRA.
- d. The LECP process should complement and be consistent with the County Development Plan process and run concurrently, where possible. There is a risk of confusion being created between the two and consultation exhaustion. Communities need to be very clear on the purpose of the LECP and the impact it will have on their lives.
- e. The need for additional resources to implement objectives within the local authority in relation to the changing priorities at National and Regional Level. Regeneration & promotion of the Town Centre First approach is a welcome development & is enshrined within planning policy but requires significant resources to implement it in practice. This is a challenge particularly in rural local authorities where resources are prioritized towards fulfilling the legislative requirements involved in development management and enforcement.
- f. Need to coordinate spatial planning across county boundaries in areas such as renewable energy provision. local authorities have a responsibility, but national and regional authorities can lead on this in terms of direction on spatial coordination.
- g. Establishment of a steering group with representatives from each of the constituent LAs to progress regional projects in collaboration with EMRA.

F) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

This section of the Report outlines a response and where appropriate recommendations of the Regional Assembly, to the findings of the local authority progress areas, which have been selected for this two-year review period. These progress areas are documented above, reflective of this stage in the implementation cycle of the RSES period and include, Planning Policy Alignment with the RSES, Delivering the Spatial Strategy of the RSES by each local authority, Funding- the ambition and interaction of each local authority with Funding Mechanisms, and Local Economic and Community Plans.

Planning Policy Alignment with the RSES

The Regional Assembly welcomes the efforts of the 12 local authorities within the Region to ensure that city, county and local level planning policy is aligned with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. Since early Q2 of 2023 all local authorities in the Region have reviewed their City/ County Development Plans to be consistent with the objectives of the EMRA RSES. The local authorities are currently in the process of reviewing their local area plans in accordance with statutory requirements. EMRA will be engaging with the local authorities to ensure consistency with the RSES, particularly in relation to regional growth centres and key towns in the region, and any statutory variations of city and county development plans that are proposed.

The Urban Area Plans (UAPs)/ Local Area Plans are to be prepared for the Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk and these are at varying stages. Preparatory work is well underway for the joint Athlone UAP and the Assembly has assisted Louth and Meath County Councils with the progression of the Drogheda UAP. The Pre-draft Issues Paper for the Dundalk LAP was on public consultation in June 2023.

Having regard to the above, the Regional Assembly makes the following recommendation to NOAC for consideration;

- In consultation with local authorities, additional supports should be identified and provided to enable local authorities to deliver planning alignment with the RSES through Urban Area Plans/ Local Area Plans for the Region's Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns.

Delivering the Spatial Strategy of the RSES by each local authority

From the information submitted, the Regional Assembly welcomes the demonstration of the local authorities to deliver the spatial strategy of the RSES that combines the growth of Dublin and Regional Growth Centres with a selected number of Key Towns which have the assets and capacity to grow in a sustainable manner while minimising impacts on the receiving environment. The Assembly is satisfied that the implementation of RPO 3.1 of the RSES which states that 'Key stakeholders including local authorities in the Region shall, through their policies and objectives including Development Plans, commit to the delivery of the Growth Strategy as detailed in the RSES', is ongoing. This is particularly apparent by local authorities through ensuring that appropriate and consistent policy frameworks are in place.

Notwithstanding this, the Assembly notes the variation of implementation progress across the local authorities in terms of the role they have played in actively enabling RSES implementation in a tangible way, through delivery of policy and RPOs related to Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns across the Region.

Having regard to the above, as a first step, the Regional Assembly makes the following recommendation to NOAC for consideration;

- In consultation with local authorities, research is undertaken to identify mechanisms which enable the implementation of the RSES by local authorities. Without further consultation with specific local authorities, it would be premature for the Regional Assembly to provide an opinion as to how this should be carried out at this stage.

Funding- the ambition and interaction of each local authority with funding mechanisms

The Regional Assembly welcomes the ambition shown by local authorities related to obtaining competitive funding, particularly given that this is a relatively new concept introduced to support the delivery of Project Ireland 2040 and accordingly the RSES. Successful funding applications have enabled the implementation of the RSES throughout the Region, particularly through the URDF and RRDF, and are most welcome. The Regional Assembly also notes the increased activity in this area across the local authorities since the previous Monitoring Report published in 2021.

The Assembly notes, however, that the level of interaction with potential funding streams is extremely varied across the local authorities of the Region and consider that mechanisms are needed to provide balance in this regard, in order to support the delivery of the spatial strategy as set out in the RSES.

Accordingly, the Regional Assembly makes the following recommendations for NOAC to consider;

- Enhance the position and ability of local authorities to prepare successful funding applications. In recent years, it has become clear that the ability of local authorities to prepare successful applications for funding have mainly become resource-dependent, with funding being distributed in a manner that is not wholly aligned to the spatial objectives of the NPF and the RSES. It has been noted in discussions with our stakeholders that local authorities may be in a better position to achieve the opportunities available, particularly the national funds, if the requisite resources were available to prepare comprehensive applications for funding under the current competitive process.
- That local authorities are supported in engaging with EU programming and funding with a national approach to budgeting for matched funding.

Local Economic and Community Plans

All 12 local authorities in EMRA have submitted varying levels of detail in relation to the implementation of their current LECPs. All local authorities in the Region are also currently in the preparation stages of the next 6-year LECP for their area in accordance with the methodology set out in the 2021 LECP Guidelines published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. It is expected that by the end of 2023 the majority of the LECPs in the Region will be adopted by each local authority.

Recommendations and Comments of the local authorities that are considered would facilitate the process

The Regional Assembly recognises the work that the local authorities went to in contributing to this report. The efforts of the local authorities in implementing the RSES is extremely welcome and is to be applauded, particularly following a substantial period of transition over recent years that has seen the publication of the National Planning Framework, the publication of the RSES, the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator, and the requirement to prepare development plans. It is noted that there is united comment from the local authorities highlighting the challenges to achieving meaningful implementation, with particular reference to the availability of resources.

Having regard to the above comments, the Regional Assembly makes the following recommendation for NOAC to consider;

That consideration is given to identifying and, where appropriate, implementing measures that enable local authorities to engage in meaningful implementation of the RSES in their administrative area, including increased resourcing of the planning sector.

That consideration is given to enhancing the implementation role of Regional Assemblies, including statutory mechanisms, in light of the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, in order to progress RSES Implementation and in particular regional spatial and economic planning across county boundaries. In the interim, the EMRA will consider the establishment of implementation working groups to progress key issues.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of local authorities.

- All 12 city and county development plans have been made, aligning national, regional and local policies. This is a critical milestone to realising convergence towards the RSES development scenario on the ground.
- Significant work is underway in preparing plans for the Regional Growth Centres (RGC) and implementation of related RSES policy to realise RGC status in Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda. In Athlone, for instance, significant implementation progress of the Athlone specific RPOs is noted, including that AIT has obtained Technological University Status and is now referred to as Technological University Shannon, and that work is progressing on the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme involving eight individual flood cells and the construction of flood defences in tandem with public realm enhancement works. The Athlone Urban Area Plan (AUAP) will be drafted by the end of Q4 2023 and the formal AUAP consultation process will commence in 2024. Significant preparatory work has been undertaken including;
 - * An Economic Strategy prepared for Athlone in conjunction with Roscommon County Council, officially launched in February 2023
 - * An Area Based Transport Assessment for Athlone has been prepared and is currently being finalised by both Councils.
 - * The preparation of the Athlone Urban Design & Regeneration Framework which will provide a roadmap for the regeneration of the town core together with more detailed proposals in respect of key regeneration sites, is nearing completion.
 - * Strategic Issues Paper has been drafted to stimulate debate on the content of the forthcoming AUAP and will be placed on public display in July 2023.
 - * Consultants appointed to prepare the SEA, AA and SFRA of the AUAP.
- All local authorities, despite resource limitations, have shown significant ambition to obtain funding for projects that support RSES Implementation across an array of funding streams. Many local authorities focused on regeneration initiatives through URDF funding such as the Bray Harbour Integrated Regeneration Project, the St. Nicholas Quarter and Backlands Regeneration Project in Dundalk, and the Flowerhill and Abbeylands Regeneration Project in Navan. Under RRDF, funding was obtained for projects such as the Barrow Blueway in Counties Laois and Kildare, and Pobal le Cheile in Ballymahon. There has been significant draw down of other Project Ireland 2040 funds including the Climate Action Fund, which invested €20 million to capture waste heat from the Dublin Waste to Energy Plant in Ringsend (DCC), and €4.4 million to establish district heating in the Tallaght area (SDCC). The DLAs have also benefitted from other funding streams that support implementation of the RSES, with approximately €259.3 million funding provided for 2022 and 2023 under the Active Travel Investment Programme for active travel in the Dublin Region.
- All 12 local authorities are working to prepare their next LECs and accompanying Implementation Plans.



6.0

Implementation progress made by Public Bodies

This section of the Report will focus on progress made in implementing the RSES by public bodies as required by the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

The report will specify the progress made in securing the overall objectives of the RSES, including any specific actions and outcomes.

6.1

Implementation progress made by Public Bodies

As identified above (Section 3.0), public bodies within the Regional Assembly area shall, every 2 years, prepare and submit a report to the Assembly setting out progress made in supporting objectives, relevant to that body, of the strategy.

The Regional Assembly facilitated each public body to fulfil this requirement by;

- Notifying each public body of their requirement to prepare and submit a report to the Assembly, and;
- Enabling each public body to action this requirement through the provision of a 'Request Form' which could be completed and submitted as their report.

The 'Request Forms' circulated requested detail relating to progress performance areas relevant to public bodies. These progress performance areas, chosen for this two-year review period (2021-2023), are reflective of the stage in the implementation cycle of the RSES period. The 'Request Form Template' can be found at Appendix B of this Report.

Public bodies were requested to outline the progress that had been made by their department, and a number of agencies under the aegis of their department, with respect to related policy areas within the RSES. Each 'Request Form' was tailored to the specific public body in this regard.

In addition, they were also asked to provide details of any policy and funding initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to their organisation. This included detail related to funding programmes administered by their department, over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region. Finally, each public body was asked to provide any other comments that they would like to make with respect to their department (including any agencies under the aegis of their department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that they consider would facilitate the implementation of the Strategy.

All of the public bodies as listed at Section 3.0 of this report were notified of their obligations under Section 25A. of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act).

Twelve of the fourteen public bodies listed provided a response to the Regional Assembly. Please see the table below which documents same.



Responses Received



MINISTER FOR
**Enterprise, Trade
& Employment**



MINISTER FOR
**The Environment, Climate
and Communications**



MINISTER FOR
**Rural & Community
Development**



MINISTER FOR
**Agriculture, Food
& the Marine**



MINISTER FOR
**Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration
& Youth**



MINISTER FOR
**Further and Higher
Education, Research,
Innovation & Science**



MINISTER FOR
**Housing, Local
Government
& Heritage**



MINISTER FOR
**Public Expenditure,
NDP Delivery
& Reform**



MINISTER FOR
Finance



MINISTER FOR
Transport



MINISTER FOR
Education



MINISTER FOR
Foreign Affairs

Responses Not Received



MINISTER FOR
Health



MINISTER FOR
**Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht,
Sport & Media**

Table 1: Responses Received/ Not Received by public bodies

In order to monitor implementation progress of the RSES, a number of progress areas related to public bodies, have been selected for this two-year review period. These progress areas are reflective of this stage in the cycle of the RSES period. They include;

- A. Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation
- B. Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency
- C. Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation
- D. Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation
- E. Details of the funding programmes administered by each department, (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region
- F. Any other comments that were made with respect to each department, (including any agencies under the aegis of each department, and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process.

In addition, this section of the Report also details a response from the Regional Assembly to the returns received.

Whilst the Regional Assembly acknowledges the wealth of information that has been submitted by the twelve aforementioned public bodies, the lack of response from the outstanding public bodies undoubtedly hinders the ability to present a complete report with respect to progress made in implementing the RSES.

In addition to the above, the Assembly notes the proposed removal from the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, as set out in the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, of the provision whereby public bodies contribute to the monitoring report. The Assembly considers this to be a retrograde step, which will hamper the monitoring of RSES implementation progress and potentially undermine the importance of the role that public bodies play in enabling the delivery of the RSES.

In light of this, the Assembly makes three overarching recommendations to NOAC for consideration, in order to enhance the implementation of the RSES and better document progress;

1. It is recommended that, in any revised planning legislation introduced, it should be ensured that the provisions of Section 25A of the current Planning and Development Act, as amended, remain in place, including any proposed legislative amendments arising from the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, to secure the contribution of public bodies to the Monitoring Report.
2. It is recommended that mechanisms are put in place to ensure the fulfilment by public bodies of their statutory obligations under Section 25A. of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which require that public bodies shall, every 2 years, prepare and submit a report to the Assembly setting out progress made in supporting objectives, relevant to that body, of the strategy.
3. It is recommended that mechanisms are put in place to ensure the fulfilment by public bodies of their statutory obligations under Section 22A. of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which require that public bodies shall assist and co-operate as far as practicable with the Regional Assembly in the preparation of the strategy and thereafter supporting its implementation, and, that each public body shall consult with the Regional Assemblies, as appropriate, when preparing its own strategies, plans and programmes and so as to ensure that they are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and RSES.

6.1.1

Minister for Rural and Community Development

The mission of the Department of Rural and Community Development is “to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.” This is aligned to the RSES and in particular RSO 3 which supports sustainable rural development and strengthening of rural networks, economies and communities, and RSO 4 relating to the promotion of healthy communities.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included, for instance, progress related to housing (including serviced sites provision), regeneration, the rural economy, placemaking, vacancy, dereliction, transport, community development, a low carbon just transition and the role of digitalisation and broadband. As part of the response, it is indicated that progress has been and will be carried out through a number of funding programmes and schemes, and also through the newly published policy document ‘Our Rural Future’.

Through Our Rural Future, the Department will enhance public services in rural areas, in sectors such as public transport, health, and community safety. It is indicated that the provision of serviced sites is a commitment in the policy, to be delivered by local authorities and funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The policy also acknowledges the issue of water infrastructure for rural communities, with measures in the policy to be delivered by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

It is indicated that specific measures within the policy document will be dependent on a number of government departments and agencies for delivery, including the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine to support the sustainability of the Agriculture, Marine and Forestry sectors, over the policy’s five year lifetime; The Department of Transport and the National Transport Authority to support improvements in rural transport services, including bus, rail and Local Link services; and other policy commitments relating to regional job creation will be delivered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and relevant State Agencies, including IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

The Department indicated that the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) provides investment to support rural renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. The RRDF has a key role in delivering on the aims of the National Development Plan, in particular the National Strategic Outcome (NSO) of Strengthening the Rural Economy and Communities and seeks to promote balanced regional development, including reversing rural population decline and enabling population growth and development. The projects supported by the RRDF assist in the regeneration of rural towns and villages, positioning them for further growth through regeneration and town centre renewal. The types of projects supported by the RRDF include measures to address dereliction and vacancy and town centre residency projects.

The Department has also indicated that it has made progress in supporting the objectives of the RSES through a number of other programmes. This includes; the CLÁR programme which provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population in the past; the Town and Village Renewal Scheme including public realm improvement, community parks and infrastructure, digital hubs, as well as the regeneration of derelict buildings and enhancement works at tourism attractions and other important local amenities; The LEADER programme to guide the practice of community-led local development, providing rural communities and local enterprises throughout Ireland with an opportunity to respond to emerging challenges in their area by supporting measures that provide employment and job creation, as well as promoting the value of social capital and environmental protection; The Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) that provides funding for the development and enhancement of outdoor recreational infrastructure such as cycleways, walking trails, blueways and mountain access routes in rural areas. The Streetscape Enhancement Measure was introduced in 2021 with allocated funding of €2.6million in 2022 for nominated towns eligible for the scheme with works including painting, signage replacement, shopfront improvements, lighting and planting.

In relation to supporting a sustainable rural economy which can withstand economic shocks and sustain growth, the Department outline that the RRDF fund supports the development of key sectors including tourism, the bio economy and agri-business. Typical projects supported under the scheme including tourism related projects which improve infrastructure for existing tourism trails and amenities and those which seek to avail of opportunities including eco-tourism, marine and activity tourism. RRDF funding is also targeted towards projects that support the diversification of the agri-food sector in rural areas, including the development of production facilities to demonstrate the potential of the bioeconomy, provision of facilities to add value to agri-food products and to encourage innovation and collaboration in the sector.

Relating to the role of digitalisation and broadband, the Department indicated that Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the National Broadband Plan providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of May 2023, there are 290 BCPs live and operational. The Connected Hubs Voucher Scheme (June 2022) was designed to raise awareness of the ConnectedHubs.ie platform. On 24th November 2022 (less than 18 months after the launch of the ConnectedHubs.ie platform) the first ever National Hub Summit event took place in Athlone, Co. Westmeath. The development of a National Hub Strategy was a key focus of the event which brought together business, hub managers and policy makers, including representation from the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, to map out the future strategic direction of the National Hub Network. It is envisaged that the National Hub Strategy will be brought to Government in Q4 2023.

The National Hub Network Working Group led by the Department of Rural and Community Development has identified over 400 remote working hubs across the country and work is currently underway to map and survey the services offered by these hubs. This data will support the development of online services to support hub managers, including a publicly facing booking engine. The Connected Hubs Fund will expand existing hub facilities, providing additional hot desks, office spaces and meeting rooms for remote working.

In terms of community development, the Department are leading on a number of initiatives. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund supports projects that deliver essential community infrastructure in the centre of rural towns and villages including the co-location of community services. Projects funded under the RRDF will deliver a range of community infrastructure including libraries and community resource centres that will enable the integration and active participation of minority groups. Tidy Towns has become Ireland's most well-known and popular local environmental and sustainable initiative. It is voluntary-based and has provided opportunities for active participation for over sixty years, increasing pride of place and improving the environment in towns across the Country.

The Seniors Alert Scheme encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. A total of 31,231 participants from the East and Midlands region (Dublin, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois inclusive) have been approved as part of the Scheme to the end of 2020.

The public library strategy, 'Our Public Libraries 2022', aims to establish a modern, progressive library service which connects and supports communities and individuals and to increase the level of usage of public libraries across communities. Among other things, the strategy focuses on removing barriers to access and improving accessibility, with a specific focus on communities and individuals at risk of being socially excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged. The Department has provided Dormant Accounts Funding of €850,000 in both 2021 and 2022 for programming, equipment and resources in public libraries to support disadvantaged, marginalised and socially excluded communities.

Through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) the Department has provided funding to Local Development Companies to complete work in this area. €190m of funding has been provided nationally over the five years from 2018 to 2022. A procurement competition will take place this year for the next iteration of SICAP, 2024-2028.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are a cornerstone of meaningful participation in decision making and community development at a local level. LCDCs are groups established in each local authority area on foot of Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government and the Local Government Reform Act of 2014, and draw on the expertise and experience of public and private people and organisations in each local authority area.

The LCDC Review, published in 2019, made recommendations in relation aimed at strengthening the role and effectiveness of LCDCs. These recommendations were echoed in the 2019 policy document, Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. DRCD are currently implementing the strategy, with current work focusing on a comprehensive training needs assessment of the sector and its supporting structures, including LCDCs. The outputs of the assessment will inform the design of supports to assist the sector and its supporting structures including LCDCs and PPNs, to build capacity, and to strengthen their role - with the ultimate objective of better outcomes for communities and the individuals who live, work in and enjoy them.

Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP) represent an important element of the local planning process detailed in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and is linked with broader national and regional planning processes. Given the imminent launch of new LECPs in all local authority areas, it is imperative that they set out the objectives and actions that will be needed to promote the economic, local and community development of the relevant area, both by the local authority directly and in partnership with other relevant economic and community development stakeholders. A key function of LCDCs is to ensure consistency and alignment with existing policies, strategies, priorities and be agile in order to respond to emerging needs. These are particularly important in the development of relevant, aligned and effective LECPs. A full public consultation will be undertaken by each local authority to support the development of the next iteration of LECPs.

The Department are leading a Dormant Account Funded (DAF) Project on 'Engagement of Marginalised Communities in Local Planning and Decision Making' which seeks to build capacity, as well as providing resources and toolkits to support the engagement of marginalised communities in consultation and decision-making processes at a local level. There are a number of elements to this project including two national events targeted at LCDCs, local authority staff and other relevant local stakeholders, aiming to build capacity and share information on principles of good consultation and meaningful engagement. Furthermore, four pilot projects have been selected to develop and test engagement strategies as part of the LECP process, to inform the development of adaptable toolkits/resource packs that can be scaled up and used in a variety of consultation and engagement processes undertaken by local and central government along with the development of toolkits and resources. There is potential for follow on actions informed by the findings and emerging issues (training for example). The first national event was held on 4th May 2022 - Speakers included Galway City Traveller Movement, Independent Living Movement Ireland, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, Pavee Point, LGBT Ireland, Community Work Ireland, the ILDN and local authorities themselves. Following an expression of interest process, four LCDCs were selected to lead the pilots - Fingal, Galway City, Wicklow and Clare. The resource guide, entitled 'A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making' was launched on 2nd February 2023. The guide will be reviewed and revised later this year, building on lessons learned through the pilots and any feedback received. Training workshops are also currently being delivered.

The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports over 2,000 positions in more than 420 community organisations to provide a vast range of local services through a social enterprise model. The CSP supports a range of services and activities that enhance the quality of life of specific disadvantaged groups including older people, persons with disabilities, Travellers, and those most vulnerable within communities to support them to live independently. The CSP contribution is not aligned to the minimum wage and does not meet the full salary cost of supported posts. A redesigned CSP was introduced from January 2023 with a new funding rate allocation model, to replace the previous flat rate model. An open call was recently announced with funding of €1M available under this new call. The purpose of this funding is 1) to support social enterprises and community/voluntary organisations that address a local priority and evidenced need, particularly for those most disadvantaged in their community, 2) that clearly demonstrate that their services or activities are inclusive and are responding to the needs of those most marginalised or disadvantaged within their community, 3) deliver tangible and practical benefits for those most disadvantaged in their community, and 4) are moving towards a sustainable social enterprise business model through trading.

The Department highlight that the PEACE Plus (2021-27) programme, will also be launched shortly, with a value in excess of €1billion. This is a special new ERDF cross-border cooperation programme, supported by the EU with co-funding provided by Ireland and UK Governments. The Programme aims to foster cross-border cooperation and build peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, including Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. It represents an opportunity to continue to fund peace building interventions alongside activities which help to make the region a more prosperous, healthier place to live through funding areas of mutual interest on a cross-border basis. PEACE Plus will fund projects across six thematic areas including 1) Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities, 2) Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation, 3) Empowering and Investing in Young People, 4) Healthy and Inclusive Communities, 5) Supporting a Sustainable and Better Connected Future, and 6) Building and Enhancing Partnership and Collaboration. Under the PEACE Plus programme the co-designed local authority Community Action Plans will have an indicative allocation of €110 million of which an indicative €28m will be allocated to the 6 border local authority areas, with the indicative allocation for Louth local authority amounting to just over €4.6m, however, the level of funding allocated will be based on an appraisal of the applications received under the programme. The purpose of this funding is to facilitate local community regeneration and transformation by enabling local authorities and local communities to co-develop and delivery priority projects on an inclusive cross-community basis, within the framework of the PEACE Plus Programme.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

No further information provided

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future is the new whole-of-Government policy for the sustainable development of rural Ireland for the period 2021-2025. It contains more than 150 commitments for delivery across Government on publication, with more than 20 additional commitments added since then, and is the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in Ireland for decades.

The policy supports the delivery of other key Government policies and objectives, including Project Ireland 2040, the revised National Development Plan, the Climate Action Plan, the National Remote Work Strategy, Food Vision 2030, and the Town Centre First initiative.

In terms of High-Level Outcomes, Our Rural Future provides a framework for balanced regional development across the NUTS regions. It also seeks to get more people living and working in rural areas, to revitalise our towns, to ensure people benefit from the transition and to ensure that communities can play an active role in shaping their futures. Amongst the measures for delivery are commitments aimed at supporting sustainable rural development, the regeneration of town centres and rural areas, meaningful career opportunities in the green and circular economies, access to public services (including rural transport links), local amenities and facilities for all cohorts, and enhanced community participation in rural development.

Progress is being monitored by twice yearly progress reports, with annual work programmes outline the priorities and commitments for the forthcoming year.

The Town Centre First Approach

The Town Centre First Policy is a major cross-government policy that aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres. It supports the Our Rural Future vision for a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development.

A key aim of both the Town Centre First, and the Our Rural Future Policy is addressing vacancy and dereliction in rural towns and villages across the country, and ensuring that the policies and schemes in place directly address and tackle these issues. This complements other national policies such as Housing for All and the National Planning Framework which also aim at tackling vacancy in rural towns and villages as well as supporting local communities.

The National Town Centre First Office has been established which will drive the implementation of the Town Centre First policy and coordinate stakeholder engagement at a national level and across the local government sector.

Town Regeneration Officers (TRO) are continuing to be appointed in 26 rural local authorities and will be instrumental in driving the rollout of the policy at local level. TROs are being appointed in all counties under EMRA's remit, with the exception of Dublin.

The Department announced funding of €2.6 million in 2021 for the completion of Town Centre First Masterplans in 26 rural local authorities. These plans are being completed by Town Teams, supported by Town Regeneration Officers, and will help identify potentially viable projects which may be supported through the wide range of Governmental funding streams. These initial plans will be completed in June, with a further call of the Town Centre First Plan initiative expected in the coming months. This initiative includes all counties under EMRA's remit, with the exception of Dublin.

The Department of Community and Rural Development co-chairs the National Oversight and Advisory Group for the policy with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This Group seeks to oversee the delivery of the policy and ensures there is clear stakeholder visibility in relation to implementation. The Group met for the first time in December 2022 and held its second meeting in April 2023. The Group will meet 3 / 4 times a year.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

The Fund supports the delivery of the Town Centre First approach through supporting projects which help address vacancy and dereliction in town and village centres, activating these areas for residency and other uses.

New LECP Process

The Department highlights that new LECP Guidelines were issued in November 2021 that are designed to support a participative and consultative process to develop a Local Economic and Community Plan that is appropriate for each local area. The development of the guidelines was supported by an experienced advisory group and included a broad consultation process.

The Guidelines provide an outline of the process to be carried out in order to develop a fully integrated LECP at a local level which can support the sustainable development of each county. As the framework for the economic development and local/community development of the local authority area, the LECP should also be the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies that have a local remit. The LECP process has been revised based on feedback from the first iteration of LECPs and now consists of two parts including; a) the development of an overall LECP framework detailing the High-Level Goals and Sustainable Community and Economic Objectives and b) The development of Implementation Plans to detail the inputs, actions and resources required for that implementation plan period as well as relevant specific key performance indicators to facilitate evaluation.

Following the launch of the new guidelines, the Department of Rural and Community Development in collaboration with Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, provided further support to local authorities for the development of the LECPs through a series of four thematic webinars. The first webinar had a theme 'Getting Started'. More than a hundred people attended the webinar, where presentations included Key First Steps and an inside look at the experience of one LCDC with reviewing the existing plan and setting up an LECP Advisory Steering Group.

The second Webinar with a theme of Economic/Local Enterprise was hosted by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The third LECP Support Webinar, on climate/environment, featured presentations from Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communications members and local representatives. The final webinar covered topics on community/social aspects of the LECP. These sessions are intended to equip the LCDCs with the required knowledge and skills for the preparation of the LECPs, and were designed and delivered in partnership with other relevant Departments/Stakeholders.

National Social Enterprise Policy 2019-2022 and new policy

Ireland's first National Social Enterprise Policy was launched in July 2019. This represented a watershed moment for social enterprise and demonstrated the commitment on the part of Government to support social enterprise in Ireland. The Policy creates an enabling environment for social enterprise to grow and contribute to Ireland's social and economic progress by outlining 26 commitments on the part of Government spread over several Government Departments for the period 2019 to 2022 under three key objectives: Building Awareness; Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise and Achieving Better Policy Alignment. Progress on implementation is monitored by a National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group.

Since the policy's introduction the Department has implemented a multitude of measures to grow and strengthen social enterprise including €2.3m via the social enterprise measure of the Dormant Accounts Fund, funding for schemes including: the Training and Mentoring Scheme, COVID-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme, Small Capital Grants Scheme for social enterprise, Awareness Raising Initiative for Social Enterprise (ARISE), and a Start-Up Scheme for fledgling social enterprises. The Department also supports social enterprises through a number of other programmes including Community Services Programme (CSP), SICAP and LEADER. DRCD continues to raise the profile of social enterprise including through an awareness raising strategy to promote understanding of the critical work social enterprises undertake, and by establishing an Annual National Social Enterprise Conference which attracts considerable attendance by the sector.

Under the policy, the Department continues to expand the breadth of engagement on social enterprise internationally through engagements with the OECD, EU, the British Irish Council (BIC) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This has been complemented by national engagement with other Government Departments. DRCD also promotes the consideration of social enterprise in procurement in the Office of Government Procurement's Strategic Procurement Advisory Group.

A new National Social Enterprise Policy is under development which will succeed the current Policy. As with the first National Social Enterprise Policy, DRCD has adopted a partnership approach to its development, and ongoing communications, engagement and consultations with stakeholders (internal and external) have been a key principle. Multiple engagements were held with key social enterprise networks, and six regional stakeholder consultations took place in Donegal, Waterford, Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Galway. Consultation with other Government Departments and agencies will also be key.

The new policy will be informed by two important pieces of research. The OECD carried out an in-depth international review of the implementation of the National Social Enterprise policy with a report due for publication imminently, which will provide the Department with an international perspective on the social enterprise in Ireland. A National Baseline Data Collection Exercise of Social Enterprise in Ireland commissioned by DRCD is due for publication shortly, and will provide valuable first of its kind baseline data on existing Social Enterprise in Ireland which will inform the policy. The new policy is expected to be more ambitious in scope than the first and will also focus on new areas of importance, for example climate action and the circular economy.

Drafting is at an advanced stage, and it is expected that a public consultation will take place mid-year. Following submission for approval by Government it is anticipated that the new policy will be published later this year.

Sustainable, Empowered and Inclusive Communities: a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019 - 2024

The Government's five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector, *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland*, was published in 2019. This is a whole of government strategy led by DRCD, which is implemented collaboratively with the sector through the Cross Sector Group on Local and Community Development.

On foot of these objectives, the Department has worked collaboratively with the sector through the Cross Sectoral Group to create and agree a document setting out Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership-working with the Community and Voluntary Sector, which was approved by Government in October 2022.

The publication of these Values and Principles copper-fastens the renewed relationship and partnership between Government and the Community and Voluntary sector, which has been central in addressing the crises of recent times. This initiative aims to support values such as social justice, and active participation along with principles like respect, collaboration and value for money. The Values and Principles will be used by central and local government, as well as state bodies, as a basis for their interactions with the community and voluntary sector in pursuit of the best outcomes for all communities.

Another key action in the strategy has been the above-mentioned 'A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision-Making', launched in February 2023. This new resource guide is aimed at ensuring that marginalised and disadvantaged communities have opportunities to engage and participate in local planning and decision-making.

Inclusive engagement with marginalised communities, and the organisations that represent them, will ensure that their views are reflected in local decision-making. The guide also aims to enable more sustainable development at a local level. Local authorities, public sector bodies, community groups or any organisation committed to inclusive local decision-making can use this plain English resource.

Another important objective of the strategy was the establishment of a Civic Forum for formal dialogue between the sector and local and central government. Following the very successful first National Community and Voluntary Civic Forum last November, the Department are currently working with the sector on the design of the 2023 Civic Forum, planned for Q4.

Finally, a Training Needs Assessment is currently underway to identify gaps and make recommendations on how best to build capacity in the Community and Voluntary sector.

The strategy identifies a need to upskill practitioners and all stakeholders involved in the community and voluntary sector. These include:

- Those involved in community work on a voluntary basis
- People employed, but not qualified, in community work to acquire qualifications
- Continuous professional development for qualified, employed community workers, and
- Other staff in organisations with a community development remit.
- Staff in structures with responsibility for supporting the community and voluntary sector

In this context three distinct research projects have been undertaken with the assistance of Pobal. The three phases are as follows:

- Assessment of the training needs of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in preparation for Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) reviews.
- Assessment of skills gaps of voluntary boards of mid-sized organisations.
- Assessment of skills gaps across smaller community & voluntary groups.

This research has been conducted in collaboration with the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Training and Capacity Building Sub-Group. Reports on the findings of this research are expected to be completed this year.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

The fifth call for Category 1 proposals to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will be announced later in 2023. Category 1 funding relates to large scale ambitious capital projects with all necessary planning and other consents in place and which are ready to proceed at the time of application. The minimum request from the Fund for Category 1 projects is €500,000.

2023 Community Centre Investment Fund - New Build Measure

The 2023 Community Centres Investment Fund - New Builds Measure with €20 million available for new build community centres on brown/green field sites builds on the highly successful 2022 Measure for Improvement and Refurbishment of Existing Community Centres.

The 2023 Community Centres Investment Fund - New Build Measure will invest in new build multi-functional community centres with a minimum grant of €1,000,000 up to a maximum of €6,000,000.

The 2023 Community Centre Investment Fund was launched on the 31st March 2023 and the closing date for completed application forms is 3rd July, 2023.

CLÁR

The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population in the past. There are designated CLÁR areas in all counties excluding Dublin, Kildare and Wexford.

Recognising the importance of the CLÁR programme to some of our most remote rural areas including our islands, an increase of €850,000 in funding was secured for the scheme this year, bringing the allocation up to €7.85 million for 2023. The 2023 CLÁR Programme was launched on 29th April 2023 and is targeted under 3 Measures:

The 2023 programme will be delivered through three separate measures as follows:

- Measure 1: Developing Community Facilities & Amenities
- Measure 2: Mobility, Cancer Care and Community First Responders Transport
- Measure 3: 'Our Islands'



Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme

The Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) provides funding for the development and enhancement of outdoor recreational infrastructure such as cycleways, walking trails, blueways and mountain access routes in rural areas. It also supports infrastructure at beaches and inland waterways. The scheme invests in physical infrastructure that underpins recreational activities based on the use of the resources of the countryside.

ORIS 2023 is due to be launched in late May 2023 with an indicative budget of €16 million. This reflects a €1 million increase in funding for the scheme in 2022.

The 2023 programme will be delivered through four separate measures as follows:

- Measure 1: For small scale projects requiring funding of up to €30,000;
- Measure 2: For medium scale projects with funding of up to €200,000;
- Measure 3: For large scale projects seeking funding of up to €500,000; and
- Project Development Measure: Funding of up to €50,000 for development costs for strategic large-scale projects.

The ORIS Scheme is central to Embracing Ireland's Outdoors, the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027, which is set to shape the future of outdoor recreation over the next five years. The Strategy will ensure that there is a joined up and coordinated approach to deliver maximum impact from the significant investment in the sector and to build on the natural advantages in place.

The Strategy was developed in collaboration with Comhairle na Tuaithe and is collaborative cross-Government, stakeholder-led strategy. It reflects the views of stakeholders, the public and the whole of Government and it sets the stage to strengthen and support the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland for years to come.

The Strategy also aims to increase the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups, and to foster a greater understanding of how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

Community Recognition Fund 2023 (CRF)

The Community Recognition Fund 2023 ('the Fund') which was launched on 24th January, 2023 with a closing date for application of 15th March 2023 aims to support the development of community infrastructure and facilities in recognition of the contribution being made by communities across the country in welcoming and hosting significant numbers of arrivals from Ukraine and other countries.

The funding is specifically targeted at projects that are located in communities, towns and villages that are hosting the Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection and/or International Protection Applicants ('new arrivals') including towns identified for the rapid build homes programme. The Fund aims to support the development of facilities that will be used in the future by all members of the community. It is separate in its objectives and scope to any other public funding streams which aim to support the development of public service needs arising from the significant number of arrivals from Ukraine.

€50 million is available under the Fund, and this is allocated between each local authority based on the number of new arrivals located there. €30m of the Fund will be available in 2023 and €20m in 2024. A minimum spend of 60% must be incurred by the local authorities in 2023 with the remaining 40% in 2024.

The Fund is being administered at a local level by the relevant local authority. A funding proposal, comprising of projects selected and prioritised locally, was submitted by each local authority to the Department of Rural and Community Development for final approval.

A key principle of the Fund was the need for local authorities to engage with impacted communities. The proposals submitted were developed based on direct engagement with impacted communities and in consultation with the Municipal Districts, Local Community Development Committee and the local Community Response Fora.

The types of eligible actions include:

- community or cultural facilities including play areas, walkways, parks, community gardens, allotments and recreational areas;
- local club and sports facilities including facilities such as community swimming pools, changing rooms, toilets, etc.;
- enhancement to openly accessible school/parish facilities;
- equipment for local clubs, festivals, community events and organisations;
- transport infrastructure such as the purchase of community vehicles etc; and
- purchase and refurbishment of buildings and/or the purchase of land for the development of community facilities.

All the funding proposals have now been assessed and the full €50 million has been applied for. Over 880 projects are included in the proposals and range in scale of less than €1,000 to €1 million. They are very varied in nature but include largescale multi-purpose sports facilities, upgrades to community facilities, equipment for sports clubs, walks, playgrounds, community buses and equipment for festivals.

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

SICAP addresses high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally-led approaches. It supports in need groups and communities and individuals including unemployed people, people living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on a low income, members of the Traveller and Roma community. This type of support will continue over the lifetime of the current programme, which runs from 2018 to 2023.

A procurement competition will take place this year for the next iteration of SICAP, 2024-2028. The programme design for the next iteration will be informed by the recommendations of the independent review of the current programme. Significant stakeholder consultation took place across 2022, the findings of which will be reflected in the new programme.

The PIN notice (Prior Indicative Notice) for the new SICAP programme procurement process went live on Thursday April 27th, which sets out an indicative timeline for the procurement process and provides some general high-level information on the new programme.

The formal Request for Tender is tentatively scheduled for 10th July 2023.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was first introduced in 2016. It is managed on behalf of the Department by the local authorities, and the programme is funded under Project Ireland 2040. The Scheme is targeted at towns and villages with a population of 10,000 or less and all projects funded under the Scheme must be completed within a 12 to 18 month period.

The 2022 Town and Village Renewal Scheme placed particular emphasis on projects addressing vacancy and dereliction as outlined in 'Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025'. The scheme also prioritised regeneration of town centres, parks and green spaces, and remote working. The Scheme supports these objectives and encourages more people to return confidently to town and village centres to work, shop and socialise. A total funding package of €28.5m was announced in 2022 across the various strands of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme to support a wide range of projects across rural Ireland. Preparations are currently ongoing for the 2023 Scheme.

The Building Acquisition Measure (BAM) which was introduced in 2022 is available again in 2023. On 27th March 2023, the Minister announced a €13m fund for BAM which is again designed to tackle vacancy and dereliction in rural Ireland. This year funding of up to €500,000 will be available to each local authority to purchase up to 3 vacant and derelict buildings under the Building Acquisition Measure. Applications to apply have now closed and the Department is currently reviewing proposals.

TidyTowns 2023

The Minister for Rural and Community Development launched the 2023 SuperValu TidyTowns competition in Trim on 23rd March with Trim being the current titleholders. The closing date for the 2023 competition was 10th May 2023. All entries received are being registered and the results will be announced on 6th October 2023.

Following an 'Our Rural Future' recommendation, a new award was introduced in 2021 to recognise the participation of young persons aged 16 to 24 in TidyTowns committees as well as on the TidyTowns work programme. This has featured again in 2023 along with other new awards.

The Minister announced a €1.5 million fund for TidyTowns groups in October 2022. Pobal will administer the distribution of these funds on the Department's behalf. This brings the total provided to TidyTowns groups since 2017 to €8.1 million.

2023-2027 LEADER Programme

The LEADER programme is a key intervention of Our Rural Future, the Government's Policy for rural development. LEADER is a multi-annual programme for rural development co-funded by the EU through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan (CSP).

The programme is based on a community-led approach to rural development and plays an important role in supporting communities and enterprises in progressing job creation, social inclusion and environmental projects at local level. As a community led local development (CLLD) approach, LEADER is a methodology that places the rural community at its centre. Groups of people representing defined geographical areas in the form of Local Action Groups (LAGs) are charged with identifying the challenges to development in their own communities and developing initiatives to address these challenges.

Through Local Development Strategies (LDSs), LAGs seek to facilitate participation by all parties who wish to contribute to this process, thus ensuring that each LDS is as representative of the community view as possible. Over the lifetime of their respective LDS, LAGs will support those initiatives they consider will have the greatest impact on their community's development. LAGs are responsible for selecting and awarding LEADER funding to projects within their own geographical area.

The programme is currently in a transitional period, which commenced on 1st April 2021 and will run until the end of August 2023, in so far as project approvals are concerned. The 2023-2027 LEADER Programme is due to commence in September 2023.

LEADER is supported through funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and will be delivered through the national co-financed CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) for the 2023-2027 period. LEADER supported actions will contribute to achieving the aims of the CSP Specific Objective 8, as per Article 6(1)(h) of EU Regulations 2021/2115: to "promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy..".

The 2023-2027 LEADER programme will fund projects under the following three Themes and Sub-Themes:

LEADER THEME	1: Economic Development and Job Creation	2: Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion	3: Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
SUB THEMES	The Green Economy Agricultural Diversification Rural Tourism & Recreation Enterprise Development Rural Food Production Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises	Rural Infrastructure Accessible Services Optimising Digital Connectivity Rural Youth	Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment Climate Change Capacity Building Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

The Department provided significant information for each of the local authorities situated within the Eastern and Midland Region of funding allocations under a number of schemes during the period 2021 to 2023. This included funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2022 and 2023, Community Centres Investment Fund (2023), Town & Village Renewal Scheme (2022), Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme, Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) Social Enterprise Capital Grants Scheme, DAR Awareness Raising, Initiatives for Social Enterprise (ARISE) Scheme, DAF Social Enterprise Start-Up Fund, DAF Scaling-Up Fund for Social Enterprise and LEADER Funding.

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

No further comment provided.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the detailed report received by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the DRCD have demonstrated that progress has been made in implementing the RSES and have carried out a number of specific actions that enable same. This includes the publication of a comprehensive, overarching policy document, 'Our Rural Future', which sets the road map for rural development and also a number of supporting funding programmes and schemes that enable rural and community development throughout the Region.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations to NOAC for consideration;

- The Regional Assembly should inform the implementation process and work programme attached to 'Our Rural Future' to ensure that regional development occurs in a sustainable manner, which is coordinated and prioritised in line with the spatial and economic strategy defined for the Eastern and Midland Region, thus supporting and delivering on Project Ireland 2040. It should be noted that the Regional Assembly are involved in supporting the review process of LECPs and the Town Centre First Approach.
- The Regional Assembly should inform the roll out of any future funding calls under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in order to focus the delivery of funding in a coordinated manner that ensures the delivery of the spatial and economic strategy for the Region.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices noted from the Department of Rural & Community Development's report;

- Over €7.5million in funding under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme has been allocated in 2022 to counties within the EMRA Region. The scheme funds a diverse range of projects including public realm improvement, community parks and infrastructure, digital hubs, in addition to the regeneration of derelict buildings and enhancement of tourism attractions.
- Under the Town Centre First Policy, the establishment of the National Town Centre First office and the appointment of Town Regeneration Officers in each of the local authorities to drive the rollout of the policy at a local level.
- The Department's preparation of the DAF funded project on 'Engagement Marginalised Communities in Local Planning and Decision Making' which is aimed at building capacity and supporting the engagement of marginalised communities during consultation and decision making at a local level.
- The pending launch of the Peace Plus programme arising from the ERDF funded cross-border programme is a commendable programme to help foster cross-border co-operation, peace building and prosperity between Northern Ireland and border counties in the Republic of Ireland. Louth County Council in the EMRA region has been provided an indicative allocation of €4.6million aimed at delivering suitable community regeneration and transformation within the framework of the Peace Plus programme.
- The roll-out of the Broadband Connection Points initiative and Connected Hubs as key digital infrastructure that will assist balanced regional development through the access to high-speed broadband for remote working and education programmes.
- In addition to the above, the 2023 Community Centre Investment Fund for New Build Measures comprising of a €20million fund for brown/green field sites is a good example of progressing the highly successful 2022 measure for Improvement and Refurbishment of Existing Community Centres initiative.
- The publication of the new LECP Guidelines 2021 is welcomed to assist the preparation and advancement of the next iteration of LECP plans nationally.

6.1.2

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The mission of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is to lead on sustainable economic development through the creation and maintenance of high-quality employment across all parts of our country. This is underpinned by strategic goals that closely align with Project Ireland 2040 and the content of the RSES (such as RSOs 12, 14 and 15) including championing enterprise; ensuring a competitive business base to incentivise work, sustainable enterprise, innovation and investment; strengthening global connections and trade; promoting fair and competitive markets, responsible business practice; as well as safe, flexible and decent workplaces through the regulatory and enforcement work of the Department, its Offices and its Agencies. The role of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is crucial in enabling the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic strategy of the RSES.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to your organisation

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included:

- a. *Detail progress related to ensuring spatial alignment of enterprise, trade and employment, and the spatial strategy of the RSES, which includes championing the Capital City of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient and global city region; Enhancing the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor; securing Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres, acting as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns and a network of multifaceted Rural Places.*

The Department noted in its response that capital spending across its activities is set out at a high-level as part of Project Ireland 2040. In particular, National Strategic Outcome of NSO 5 'A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills' drives the majority of DETE's activities. The alignment of capital investment in the National Development Plan with population and economic projections, development patterns and spatial planning in the National Planning Framework as a key feature of Project Ireland 2040, is therefore further reflected in DETE's capital programmes and embedded in the enterprise development agencies that deliver them.

In its response, the Department referenced its Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 which outlines its objectives and strategic intent, including the vision to "make Ireland the best place to succeed in business across all parts of our country, with vibrant enterprises, more high-quality employment, growing trade, fair workplaces and higher productivity". The objectives and strategic intent of enterprise policy is set out in the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030.

The White Paper sets out seven enterprise policy priorities to 2030 including:

- Integrating decarbonisations and net zero commitments
- Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy
- Advancing Ireland's FDI and trade value proposition
- Strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector
- Enabling locally trading sectors to thrive
- Stepping up enterprise innovation
- Building on strengths and opportunities

The White Paper Implementation will be driven by consecutive two-year Implementation Plans of cross-government activity, the first of which is due to be published in 2023.

- b. *Detail and progress on supports for the national economic agencies, Local Enterprise Offices, Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committees, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders, with their plans for job creation and enterprise development with an emphasis on; an enterprise base with increased productivity and more diversification (including diversification of their markets) with high levels of innovation, skills adaptability, and relatively low costs of doing business; and maintaining full-employment.*

The Department provided responses in relation to IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland the Local Enterprise Offices, Regional Enterprise Plans and Microfinance Ireland.

IDA Ireland's Strategy - Driving Recovery & Sustainable Growth 2021-2024

The Department's submission outlined that IDA Ireland's 2021-24 Strategy is centred around five pillars of 1) Growth, 2) Transformation, 3) Regions, 4) Sustainability and 5) Impact.

1. Under the Growth pillar, IDA endeavours win investment to support job creation and economic activity.
2. Under the Transformation pillar, IDA is building partnerships with clients for future growth in Ireland.
3. Under the Regions pillar, IDA is working to win investment to advance regional development.
4. Under the Sustainability pillar IDA is seeking to embrace an inclusive and green recovery agenda.
5. Under the Impact pillar, IDA is seeking to maximise FDI's positive impact on local businesses and communities.

The strategy identifies the opportunities for sustainable growth among IDA Ireland's established base of clients through a focus on transformative investments to increase the productivity of Irish operations and their workforce through investment in RD&I, digitisation, talent development and sustainability. It also maintains a focus on attracting the next generation of leading MNCs to locate in Ireland, further driving sustainable growth and maximising the impact of FDI in Ireland to 2024 and beyond. The submission noted that IDA Ireland's strategy is well aligned to the objectives of the Government's White Paper on Enterprise, the implementation of which the Agency will support in the coming years.

c. Detail on business and sectoral developments/opportunities that are relevant to the Region.

The Department provided responses in relation to the National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind and Smart Specialisation.

National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind

In its response, the Department indicated that it is developing a National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind in 2023 which will set out how Ireland can maximise the economic opportunity arising from the production of Offshore Wind Energy. The Strategy's primary objective will be to ensure that Ireland fully captures the value of both the supply chain to deliver an Offshore Wind sector at scale, and the routes to market for this renewable energy. Rural coastal communities, and their hinterlands, are expected to benefit from the development of an indigenous OWE industry, and the Strategy will seek to maximise that potential benefit. It is expected that the Strategy will be published in Q1 2024 and complement the suite of upcoming government policies led by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications.

Smart Specialisation

Smart Specialisation is a key principle underpinning the European Commission's Cohesion Policy for the period 2021-2027 in the Research, Technology, Development and Innovation (RTDI) priority. The existence of a Smart Specialisation Strategy is an enabling condition for EU Member States to access structural funding under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in this field.

In July 2022, DETE published the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3). The preparation of the S3 allowed for the assessment of Ireland's regional competitive advantages, future market opportunities, solutions to societal challenges, as well as the effectiveness of the current suite of enterprise innovation supports.

Accordingly, the S3 builds on identified regional and national strengths to ensure the creation of a supportive environment for innovation to flourish, new start-ups to emerge and businesses to scale. It puts a focus on the twin green and digital transformations needed across the enterprise sector while aligning our national innovation system to engage with this challenge. It embraces a regional approach to addressing Ireland's research, development and innovation (RD&I) challenge, providing an important 'bridge' between regional and national innovation strategy-building and decision-making.

d. Detail on business and sectoral supports for sectors including Retail, Tourism, Marine, Low Carbon and Circular Economy, and Agriculture, identified as labour-intensive economic activities which are of particular importance to the Region, given their sensitivity for job creation, maintenance, and sustainability.

The Department provided responses in relation to the Retail Forum; Local Enterprise Offices and the Enterprise Ireland Climate Action Fund.

Retail Forum

The Retail Forum was established by DETE in June 2014 and provides a platform for engagement between retail representative bodies, retailers, the public sector and ICTU on key concerns for the retail sector. The purpose of the Retail Forum is to allow key issues of relevance to the retail sector to be discussed, with a view to identifying practical actions which could be taken by Government, or by industry itself, to support the sector with particular emphasis on achieving sustainable jobs growth. It meets quarterly and is chaired by Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Secretariat is provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The membership list and minutes from Retail Forum meetings can be found on the Department's website.

Current priorities for the Retail Forum include

- Supporting the sector to deal with the increasing cost of doing business –Continued response to challenges and opportunities arising from disruptive changes including continuing to facilitate mutual engagement between the grocery retail and distribution sector (retail roundtable meetings chaired by Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail).
- Addressing relevant policy and legislation impacting on the retail sector.
- Implementation of the Retail Forum Work developed through collaboration with members in the Working Groups.

Local Enterprise Offices

The Local Enterprise Offices provide assistance to small businesses in understanding and addressing their carbon footprint through the Green for Micro programme. This is an initiative from the Local Enterprise Offices with support from Enterprise Ireland, that will help prepare small businesses for the low carbon, more resource efficient economy of the future. This programme offers free advice and technical support on resource efficiency, how to better understand their carbon footprint and how to implement an environmental management system to reduce costs and lower greenhouse gas emissions. It is designed to provide small businesses with tailored expert advice on how to drive sustainability. Qualifying SMEs will access two days of intensive mentoring including a sustainability audit and action plan, designed to help "green" their business.

Local Enterprise Office LEAN for Micro Programme, which is available to clients to help build resilience within small companies. Developed in collaboration between the LEOs and EI, this Programme provides consultancy support with a LEAN Expert (a qualified practitioner), who will work with the company to introduce lean principles, undertake a specific cost savings project and assist the company in benchmarking its performance.



Enterprise Ireland Climate Action Fund

Enterprise Ireland has launched the new Climate Action Enterprise Fund, a €10 million fund, to support client companies in the low-carbon transition. This was announced by Government as part of the Stimulus Package in response to the COVID-19 crisis in Ireland.

It will:

- Fund up to 850 companies at an early stage of exploring climate and sustainability to develop a high-level company action plan, which will enable them to measure their carbon footprint and identify projects leading to reduced emissions and greater resource efficiency (e.g., energy, water, materials). The plan will assess the company's operations, supply chain, market opportunities and challenges through a climate and sustainability lens.
- Fund up to 100 more advanced companies to develop comprehensive multi-annual business plans with climate change and sustainability actions integrated into the company's overall strategy.
- Support a small number of public/private partnerships working on high-impact feasibility projects that will enhance climate change and sustainability capabilities across Irish enterprise (e.g., R&D, new ways of working).

It comprises two separate streams of funding, to support the different aspects of the decarbonisation journey for Irish enterprises. These are:

Climate Planning Fund for Business – building company capability to develop plans for lower-carbon products, processes, and business models.

Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund – supporting capital investment and Research, Development & Innovation in decarbonisation.

Climate Planning Fund for Business

The Climate Planning Fund for Business (CPF) is targeted at companies of different sizes and at different stages of engagement in their decarbonisation journey. It comprises a range of offers to reflect the different levels of engagement and preparedness of companies. The offers being provided under the CPF will support companies to accelerate their awareness of decarbonisation opportunities, build capability and put in place sustainability plans.

Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund

Companies are at different stages of awareness, engagement and planning for the investments required to transform the sustainability performance of their business through decarbonisation. The Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund is targeted at companies of different sizes and stages of engagement in their decarbonisation journey: to put in place energy monitoring systems, thereby establishing the carbon footprint of their enterprise; to make investments in decarbonising their manufacturing processes; and to support Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) in low carbon products and processes.

- e. *Detail on enhancing placemaking, particularly town centre renewal, as a proponent of economic growth.*

In their response, the Department noted that the White Paper on Enterprise recognises the important role that locally traded sectors such as retail, construction, accommodation, arts, leisure and entertainment play in placemaking in regions across Ireland, contributing to the economic and social fabric of towns and villages.

The enterprise agencies, LEOs and Regional Enterprise Plans, and the supports they provide, play a significant role in strengthening the enterprise ecosystem across Ireland, positively contributing to placemaking.

- f. *Detail relating to the enhancement of skills, talent and innovation, and supports of the development of sites where high-tech and high potential start-ups can thrive, in conjunction with IoTs and Universities, to create collaborative and innovative growth.*

The response from the Department included detail relating to the Construct Innovate Construction Technology Centre and the Enterprise Ireland Spotlight on Skills Workshops.

Construct Innovate

The Department, with Enterprise Ireland, has established a new Construction Technology Centre, Construct Innovate to promote research and development and disseminate the best and most relevant innovations to the players in the construction value-chain in Ireland.

The Centre has initial funding of €5m over 5 years, and is a consortium hosted by University of Galway that also includes two partner institutions located in the EMRA region - Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin, as well as University College Cork and the Irish Green Building Council. Through the Housing for All Implementation Fund, the Department has secured an additional €0.5m in funding for Construct Innovate for 2023.

Enterprise Ireland - Spotlight on Skills Workshops

Investment in skills and human capital is critical to drive innovation, competitiveness, and diversification in Irish businesses. In partnership with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Enterprise Ireland is supporting client companies to identify and address their critical skills needs. Under this collaborative programme, Enterprise Ireland has designed regionally focused Spotlight on Skills Workshops (Spotlight on Skills is part of the Skills for Growth Initiative, which is led by DFHERIS).

The aim of the Spotlight on Skills Workshops is to assist client companies to identify their critical skills needs, and to support the growth of their businesses. The output from these workshops is as follows:

- Deepening Enterprise Ireland's understanding of the specific skills needs within EI client companies; and
- In collaboration with DFHERIS and the Regional Skills Fora managers, is informing engagement with the Higher Education, Further Education and other training providers to tailor future supports to assist client companies to meet their skill requirements.

The delivery of this programme moved online out of necessity due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and this has had the fortunate benefit of making access to the programme multi-regional in 2023, no matter where participants are located in Ireland they can access all workshops online.

g. Detail relating to SME development in the Region.

This is addressed primarily under Question 2, which details the activities of Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices in the region. Information in relation to the National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan is included at 3(e).

h. Detail relating to the progress of the 'Smart Cities' concept throughout the Region.

In their response, the Department explicitly supported the strong ambition in the RSES in promoting Smart City initiatives - utilising technology to enhance a cities services and amenities. These initiatives can add real value to the deployment of services, creation of employment and enhancing quality of life for citizens. DETE supports these objectives across its range of existing Enterprise and RDI programmes.

- i. Detail relating to supports, particularly for LEOs, to increase business innovation capacity, to create a distributed network of coworking hubs, to promote Ireland's Edge to strengthen linkages between Irish-owned enterprises and foreign owned enterprises, and to support existing Irish entrepreneurs and to attract overseas entrepreneurs.*

No specific response provided

- j. Detail relating to future proofing and anticipating economic structural change, particularly resulting from Brexit, technological and digital advances, and climate change, including Just Transition.*

In their response, the Department included detail on the White Paper on Enterprise, Climate Action Plans, the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme and, Future Manufacturing Ireland.

The White Paper on Enterprise

The White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 was published in December of 2022, and builds on the foundations set out in Future Jobs Ireland and Enterprise 2025 Renewed, in protecting the elements which make Ireland's economy globally attractive for investment while responding to risks and challenges to ensure a competitive Irish economy into the future. The White Paper articulates the vision for Irish-based enterprise to succeed through competitive advantage founded on sustainability, innovative and productivity, delivering rewarding jobs and livelihoods. Through seven policy priority areas, as well as 15 leading target indicators, the White Papers Implementation will be driven by consecutive two-year Implementation Plans of cross-government activity, the first of which is due to be published in H1 2023. Key themes set out in the White Paper include; supporting the enterprise sector to navigate the twin digital and twin transitions; promoting innovation, productivity and resiliency within the domestic sector; as well as achieving more balanced regional growth.

Climate Action Plans

Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, the Department has responsibility to reduce industry on-site emissions associated with manufacturing combustion and industrial processes by 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030, and alongside the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, they have also committed to reducing emissions from the heating of commercial buildings by 20% by 2025 and 45% by 2030. Annual Climate Action Plans and the actions contained within them map out the decarbonisation strategies for industry, the commercial built environment, and other areas of the economy.

The latest iteration of the Climate Action Plan, Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) was published in December 2022. It sets out the detailed measures required in each sector to meet the Government's Carbon Budgets and the related Sectoral Emissions Ceilings. The Annex of Actions for CAP23 details the actions to be taken, associated timelines, responsible Departments and Agencies, and stakeholders involved for each action. This Plan updates its predecessor, CAP21, but focuses on streamlined actions with directly measurable carbon reduction achievement.

The Ukraine Credit Guarantee scheme

The Ukraine Credit Guarantee scheme was launched on 30 January 2023 to provide low-cost loans to businesses experiencing higher costs arising from Russian aggression in Ukraine. Loans of up to €1 million are available for working capital or investment purposes.

Future Manufacturing Ireland (FMI)

Future Manufacturing Ireland (FMI) was set up in June 2021 as a unit within the Innovation and Investment Division at DETE. The purpose of Future Manufacturing Ireland (FMI) is to ensure greater coherence, coordination and promotion of state-funded infrastructure and Enterprise Agency mechanisms supporting the evolution of Advanced Manufacturing encompassing Digital transformation and Sustainability.

In its response, the Department has noted that Future Manufacturing Ireland engages with EMRA RPOs with a dedicated focus on Advanced Manufacturing across a continuum of resource spanning from fundamental to applied research and commercial deployment. This includes SFI centres, I-Form and Confirm, IDA/EI Technology Centre Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) and the Digital Manufacturing Ireland facility opened in Q1 2023.

FMI activities in the Eastern and Midland Region link to Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) in its mission to promote Digital Transformation and Sustainable Manufacturing. FMI engages with cluster organisations, Advanced technologies in manufacturing (ATIM) and Engenuity Engineering Network to promote government supports for manufacturing companies across operations, innovation, and training agendas.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

In their response, the Department included detail for IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Office.



IDA Ireland's Regional Development:

- The Dublin region is home to 965 IDA supported companies employing 137,822 staff in 2022. The region has repeatedly attracted significant investment across all sectors and activities with prominent investment in ICT, International Financial Services, Pharmaceuticals and Global Business Services. FDI in Dublin also has a high concentration of R&D investment particularly in the Tech sector.
- The Dublin region has a significant ecosystem of well-established companies across Technology, Life Sciences, International Financial Services, Engineering and Consumer Content.
- IDA Ireland has several strategic sites in key locations across the region: Blanchardstown, Grange Castle, Belcamp, Ballycoolin, Poppintree, Swords and Whitestown. The Dublin region is supported by many private developments which are marketed by IDA Ireland and add to the range of strategic property solutions required to attract FDI into the region.
- The Mid-East Region - Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow - is home to 113 IDA supported companies recording employment of 21,861 for 2022.
- There are 39 IDA supported companies in Kildare employing 12,174 in total. There are 20 IDA client companies in Wicklow employing a total of 2,753. In Meath, there are 18 IDA supported companies employing 2,449 and in Louth 36 IDA supported companies employing 4,485.
- The FDI performance in the Mid-East region has been consistent over the past five years with employment among IDA clients increasing by 22.7% over that time.
- Counties in the Mid-East also benefit hugely from the direct and indirect employment generated by IDA client companies located in Dublin. The Mid-East has a significant ecosystem of well-established companies across Technology, Life Sciences, International Financial Services and Engineering & Industrial Technologies. It has also won significant investment in the Food and the Film sub-sectors.
- To support the delivery of IDA's strategy (Winning FDI 2015-2019), IDA had a number of flagship Business Parks in key locations across the region; Navan, Drogheda, Greystones and Arklow. Private developments such as Millennium Park in Naas, Liffey Business Campus in Leixlip and City North in Stamullen provided a range of strategic property solutions helping attract FDI into the region. IDA also works closely with the private sector to secure the provision of appropriate and cost-effective building and property solutions suitable for FDI clients.
- The Midlands Region includes the counties of Westmeath, Longford, Offaly and Laois. There are 50 IDA client companies in the Midlands Region, employing 7,665 people at the end of 2022.
- The FDI performance in the Midlands region has been consistent over the past five years with employment among IDA clients increasing by 30.8% over that time. The region has an impressive range of companies across all industry sectors, with particular strengths in Life Sciences, Technology, Global Business Services, International Financial Services, and Engineering & Industrial Technologies.
- The existing FDI base of client companies in the region continues to perform well in terms of their operational sustainability, job retention and ongoing transformation.

Enterprise Ireland Activities in the Region

- In 2022, 70,785 people were employed across 1,736 Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the Dublin region. 21,105 people were employed in 439 Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported companies in the Mid-East Region and 11,506 people were employed across 193 Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported companies in the Midlands Region. Additionally in County Louth there were 6,348 people employed in 127 Enterprise Ireland supported companies.
- As part of Project Ireland 2040, EI supports sectors with success, such as manufacturing of wood and wood products, manufacturing of food and beverages, mining and quarrying activities, Construction, Business Process Outsourcing, Fintech, Food and Lifesciences.
- In 2022 payments of €36.4 million were made to companies in the Dublin region, €6.4 million in the Midlands Region and €11.2 million to companies in the Mid-East, while €1.6 million was paid to companies in county Louth, to assist them to start, scale and grow in international markets.
- Enterprise Ireland has co-funded, with local enterprise development groups, 175 Community Enterprise Centres across the country including 8 in the Mid-East and 18 in the Midlands.
- The COVID-19 Enterprise Centres Fund was developed to provide financial support to enterprise centres impacted by the pandemic, providing them with financial support for the implementation of a 6 to 12 - month Recovery Plan. 1 for-profit and 16 not-for-profit enterprise centres were approved €1.7 million in Dublin, 5 not-for-profit enterprise centres were approved €486,000 in the Mid-East region and 1 for-profit and 6 not-for-profit enterprise centres were approved €451,000 in the Midlands.
- The Regional Technology Clustering Fund is administered by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of the Government to build sectoral clusters of SMEs at regional level. TU Dublin, Broombridge, was approved to support the Design and Construct Construction Cluster. TU Athlone was approved to support the Industry 4.0 Cluster, while TU Dundalk had seen supported to develop Connected Health & Wellbeing.
- EI supports and collaborates with HEIs in the region, including ITT, ITB, DCU, DIT, NCAD, RCSI, TCD, UCD and IADT through Innovation supports, such as the Commercialisation Fund, Innovation Partnerships and Innovation Vouchers.

Local Enterprise Offices

The EMRA region is served by its Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in Dublin City, Fingal, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, South Dublin (Dublin region), Kildare, Louth, Meath, Wicklow (Mid-East), Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. LEOs are business units within local authorities.

In 2022, the LEOs operating in the Dublin region supported 1,238 businesses employing 5,782 people, representing a net increase of 672 jobs. The LEOs in the mid-east region supported 894 businesses employing 4,313 jobs with a net gain of 295 jobs. Finally, the LEOs operating in the Midlands Region supported 858 businesses employing 4,727 jobs, showing a net gain of 515 jobs.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

The response from the Department provided detail on the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 (which now covers Enterprise 2025 Renewed, The National Economic Plan, and Future Jobs Ireland 2019); Regional Enterprise Plans; The National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan; The National Remote Working Strategy; Initiatives/developments relating to Brexit; The Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Ireland; Climate Action and Energy Supports for Business; The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSLs), and; National Institute for Bioprocessing, Research and Training.

The White Paper on Enterprise

The Government launched the new White Paper on Enterprise in 2022, setting out Ireland's approach to enterprise policy in the period to 2030. The approach set out ensures that Ireland continues to build on its economic strengths as an open economy with strong trade and foreign direct investment, a vibrant innovation hub, and a resilient labour market.

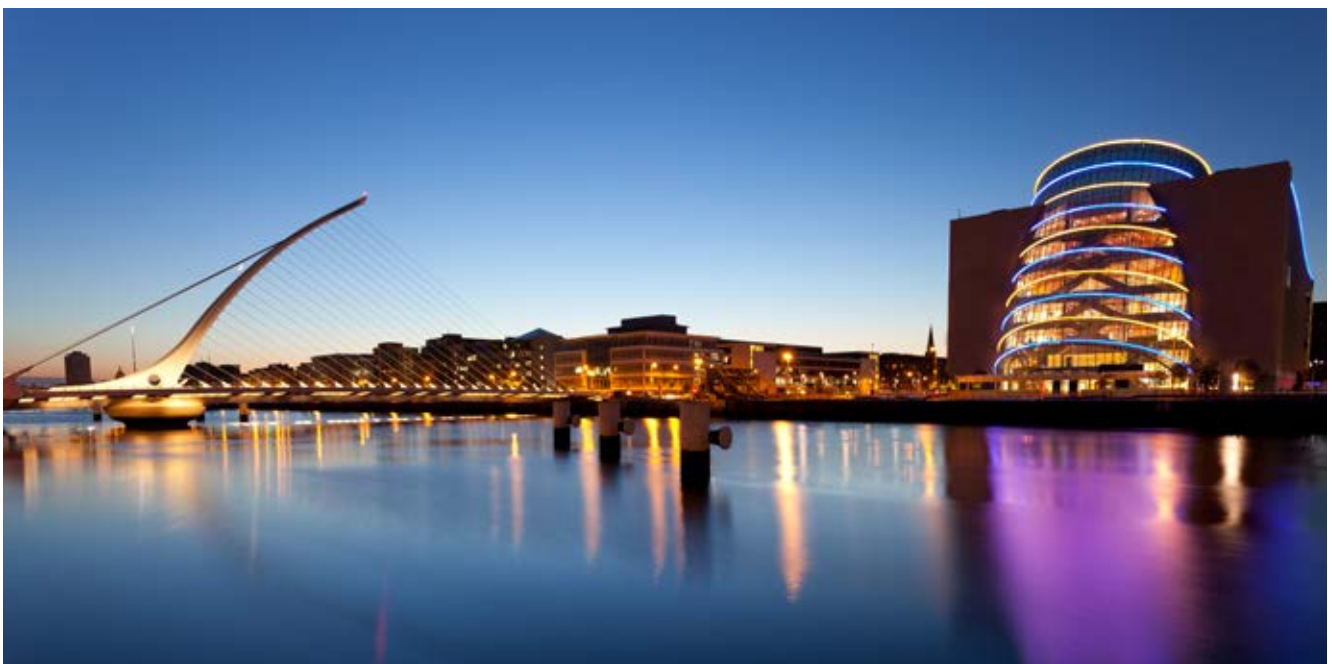
The White Paper includes 15 targets by Government, as set out in relation to maintaining full employment and to achieving the seven enterprise priorities identified in the White Paper. These seven priorities are; integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments, placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy, advancing Ireland's FDI and trade value proposition, strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector, enabling locally trading sectors to thrive, stepping up enterprise innovation and building on Ireland's existing strengths and opportunities.

Alongside the seven priority objectives, the White Paper recognises the importance of ensuring a competitive enterprise environment through favourable framework conditions such as access to finance, infrastructure, skills and talent, taxation, regulation, and cost of doing business. The White Paper highlights that through Project Ireland 2040 and Housing for All, the Government is committed to substantial investment to overcome constraints in areas such as transport infrastructure, energy, water, housing, and climate adaptation.

The priority objectives and targets as set out in the White Paper reflect various elements for consideration set out in the RSES. Considerations around climate change are reflected in decarbonisation objectives set out in the White Paper. Regional development is also a key consideration, with the White Paper committing to ensure regional unemployment does not exceed 1% of the national average rate. The creation of high-skilled and high valued employment is a key tenet of the strategy, which is underpinned by commitments to enhance Ireland's skills capacity across the workforce and address barriers to workforce participation. The White Paper commits to strengthening Ireland's domestic sector, through enhanced innovation and productivity, including strengthening the existing enterprise ecosystem to enhance engagement and collaboration between foreign multinationals and Irish enterprise. Further to this effort, existing supports for SMEs in Ireland will be strengthened, including in the areas of access to finance, capacity building and supports to boost the volume of Irish exporting firms.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is now finalising the first of a series of consecutive two-year Implementation Plans, which will run to the end of 2024. The first implementation plan is expected to be published in H1 of 2023, and identifies a portfolio of key initiatives and projects spread across the seven priority policy objectives.

As part of the monitoring and reporting process of the White Paper on Enterprise Implementation Plans, details of progress made under each of the key initiatives will be included in the six-monthly update reports to the Cabinet Committee on the Economy and Investment. The first of these reports is expected to be published in Q3 of 2023.



Regional Enterprise Plans

The Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 seek to:

- complement and translate national enterprise policy in a regional context
- facilitate collaboration regionally to address prioritised ecosystem gaps and opportunities, and help achieve Agency and LEO investment and jobs targets in each region
- use collective insight and resources in each region, and available regional funding, to progress initiatives to enable enterprise growth and job creation in each region.

Actions to address the following national policy challenges have been incorporated in the new Plans:

- enabling recovery and building enterprise resilience in the context of COVID-19 and other external shocks;
- the twin transition imperative for enterprises to digitalise and contribute to a carbon neutral economy;
- improving competitiveness through effective placemaking, including enabling flexible work patterns, and;
- capitalising on existing and emerging sectoral strengths and capabilities through smart specialisation.

The development of the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 was done in parallel with the creation of Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). The stakeholder consultation events undertaken as part of the development of these Regional Enterprise Plans acted as an entrepreneurial discovery process which has contributed valuable insights to the S3 for Ireland. The Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 were launched by the Tánaiste and both Ministers of State during February, March and April 2022.

Regional Enterprise Plans - National Oversight Group

At the last meeting of the National Oversight Group implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans of the Eastern and Midlands Region was considered by the Department to be progressing well. The first implementation report is expected for Q3 2023 and will document implementation progress to the end of Q2 2023. Initial consultation on the development of the next iteration of the Regional Enterprise Plans (post 2024) will take place in Q4 2023.

The National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan

The 2020 Programme for Government committed to the delivery of a National SME Growth Plan that will map out an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint for SMEs and Entrepreneurs in Ireland. The Tánaiste appointed the SME & Entrepreneurship Taskforce to deliver this plan, which was published in January 2021. Throughout 2022, significant engagement took place across the Department and wider Government and Agencies towards the advancement of the priorities, with progress updates provided regularly to the Taskforce.

In December 2022, a memorandum was brought to Government to report on the progress in 2022, which included:

- The extension of the LEO mandate to work with companies with the potential to export and who have grown to more than 10 employees;
- Reducing the regulatory burden on small businesses through the rollout of the SME Test;
- The launch of the new Skills for Better Business tool to help small businesses improve SME management skills;
- An improved portal for business information and assistance which has recently gone live: www.supportingsmes.gov.ie;
- A new clustering framework;
- A range of new instruments launched in 2022 to improve access to finance and digitalisation.

In January 2023, the SME and Entrepreneurship Taskforce chaired by Ministers Simon Coveney, Dara Calleary, and Neale Richmond reconvened to discuss the direction of work agenda in 2023. The 2023 work agenda will be supported by the White Paper on Enterprise. The previously identified priorities remain relevant with the group agreeing that Climate action, SMEs and green transition should be considered as an additional as priority measure for future progress. On May 11 2023, the Taskforce met to discuss issues of concern regarding business scaling and finance for scaling.

The National Remote Working Strategy

The Government launched *Making Remote Work*, the National Remote Work Strategy, in January 2021. The Strategy identified 15 actions to be undertaken to ensure that remote work is a permanent feature of the Irish workplace in a way which maximises its economic, social and environmental benefits.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment led the development and implementation of the Strategy through the Remote Work Interdepartmental Group (IDG) between 2021 and 2022. All actions outlined in the Strategy have been delivered. The IDG continues to meet in 2023 to share information and coordinate ongoing remote working policy across Government.



Actions delivered by Government departments and other public bodies represented on the Remote Work IDG include:

- Legislating for the right of all workers to request remote working, and the right of parents and carers to request other flexible working arrangements, through the Work Life and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023. The Act was signed into law on the 4th of April 2023, and the relevant sections of the Act commenced in the coming months.
- The launch of the public consultation for the Code of Practice on the Right to Request Remote Working by the WRC on 10th May 2023.
- The publication of the Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect by the WRC in April 2021.
- The announcement of an enhanced income tax deduction for people working from home amounting to 30 percent of heat, electricity and broadband expenses in Budget 2022.
- The launch of Ireland's National Hub Network, and the ConnectedHubs.ie platform in May 2021, underpinned by investment of over €150 million in Ireland's remote working and hub infrastructure from a variety of funding streams managed by DRCD and DETE.
- The development of a new National Hub Network Strategy by DETE and DRCD, which will launch in late 2023.
- The launch of DETE's regional enterprise plans to 2024 with a strong focus on remote working opportunities and infrastructures across all nine regions.
- Measures to accelerate the delivery of the National Broadband Plan.
- The publication of the Blended Working Policy Framework for the Civil Service by DPER in March 2022.
- Ongoing remote work promotion and enterprise engagement and guidance on best practice from a variety of organisations including DETE, HSA, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, WDC, Skillnet Ireland and local ETBs.

Initiatives/developments relating to BREXIT

Online Retail Scheme

A new €3.4m Online Retail Scheme was launched by Minister Richmond on 4th April 2023 and closed for applications on 3 May 2023. In the latest round of the Online Retail Scheme, retailers could apply for up to €25,000 in grant funding to strengthen their ecommerce capabilities. The Online Retail Scheme is a competitive scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland.

Update on Local Enterprise Office Activity

In 2024 it will be ten years since the establishment of the LEOs and over this period they have continued to adapt to the changing business environment and the challenging global economic circumstances, providing a 'first stop shop' and acting as a signposting service for all government supports available to the SME Sector.

The LEO network continues to carry out its primary function of promoting entrepreneurship and enterprise development on behalf of EI at a local level. The local and regionally focused activity of the LEOs is guided by the Local Economic Development Plans of the 31 local authorities.

As LEOs have become more established, they have broadened their engagement with the small locally traded enterprise sector of the economy in response to Government policies to grow the overall productivity of the economy and meet the challenges of a digital, low carbon economy.

In response to a Programme for Government commitment and as outlined in the Enterprise Ireland's strategy 2022 - 2024, Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs are committed to ensuring that businesses of all sizes are assisted on their development journey from start-up to scaling.

In 2023 the Government extended the mandate of the LEOs to provide direct grant aid to small firms (up to 50 employees) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector. The Framework for this engagement has been launched, on a pilot basis.

The White Paper on Enterprise has now set out a medium-term strategic pathway for the LEOs to 2030. As well as broadening the pipeline of exporters, the LEOs will also, over the medium to longer term, provide training, mentoring and development programmes to more locally traded sectors of the economy.

The LEOs foster and encourage small local businesses to take their first steps into exporting through the direct grant assistance offered to small businesses, productivity measures such as LEAN, Green for Micro and Digital for Micro, and through the promotion of entrepreneurship via the annual National Enterprise Awards, National Women in Enterprise Day, and the Student Enterprise Awards, all of which provide a platform to celebrate the brightest entrepreneurs in the country and encourage others to follow in their steps.

The Local Enterprise Offices will continue to adapt their supports to deal with the changing external environment ensuring that they are robust in their offerings to business in tackling existing and emerging economic challenges for new enterprises.

National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027

In July 2022, DETE published the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3). The preparation of the S3 allowed for the assessment of Ireland's regional competitive advantages, future market opportunities, solutions to societal challenges, along with the effectiveness of the current suite of enterprise innovation supports.

Accordingly, the S3 builds on identified regional and national strengths to ensure a supportive environment for innovation to flourish, new start-ups to emerge and businesses to scale is created. It puts a focus on the twin green and digital transformation needed across the enterprise sector while aligning our national innovation system to engage with this challenge. It embraces a regional approach to addressing Ireland's research, development and innovation (RD&I) challenge, providing an important 'bridge' between regional and national innovation strategy-building and decision-making.

Eight strategic goals for S3 have been identified which will support Ireland's ongoing efforts to rise to the challenges of the future identified by our stakeholders:

1. S3 will link national and regional enterprise and innovation policy, connecting the statutory RSEs, Regional Enterprise Plans, Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy and other national policies to bring greater policy coherence at multiple levels of governance.
2. S3 will support the adoption of the ERDF in Ireland by supporting policy objective 1 'A Smarter Europe'.
3. S3 will improve research and innovation capacity in Ireland's regions.
4. S3 will encourage more regionally dispersed RD&I, strengthen the enterprise base and identify emerging areas of opportunity.
5. S3 will increase the regional uptake of new advanced technologies to increase the reach of the twin green and digital transformation throughout Irish enterprise.
6. S3 will drive the development of skills needed for enhancing innovation activity across the economy.
7. S3 will encourage the maximising of sectoral strengths through clustering and the scaling of Ireland's existing areas of research excellence.
8. S3 will lead to a greater visibility and coherence of the innovation system in Ireland's regions both nationally and in Europe.

Smart Specialisation is a key principle underpinning the European Commission's Cohesion Policy for the period 2021-2027 in the Research, Technology, Development and Innovation (RTDI) priority. The existence of an S3 is an enabling condition for EU Member States to access structural funding under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in this field.

Climate Action and Energy Supports for Business

The Green Transition Fund

The Green Transition Fund is part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The total budget for the fund is split into two streams, the Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund (EERIF) (€30m) and the Climate Planning Fund for Business (CPF) (€25m) which will both run from 2022 and 2025.

The EERIF targets manufacturing companies using fossil fuels and incentivises them to adopt CO₂ abatement technologies in their processes. It will accelerate action on potential cost savings and abatement by incentivising the installation of Energy Metering and Monitoring Control Systems and supporting companies to invest in carbon-neutral, low to medium temperature process heating.

The objectives of the fund are to:

- Reduce the payback period of key carbon reducing technologies at plant level by incentivising companies to invest in, and adopt these technologies; and,
- Increase the resilience of companies to climate change and assist them to accelerate progress towards a net-carbon zero pathway.

The CPF is targeted at companies of different sizes and at different stages of engagement, to raise the levels of awareness, engagement and capability within enterprise. The offers being provided under the fund will support companies to accelerate their awareness of CO₂ abatement opportunities, build capability and put in place sustainability plans.

The objectives of the Climate Planning Fund for Business are to:

- Accelerate the awareness of CO₂ abatement opportunities for companies; and,
- Incentivise companies to put in place plans for lower-carbon products, processes and business models, raise the profile of, and increase the urgency of engagement with, the climate and sustainability agenda by Irish-owned enterprises.

The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSL)

The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSL) is a new long-term loan guarantee scheme which will be launched in the Market in mid-2023. When implemented, the GSL will make up to €500 million in longer-term lending available to SMEs, including farmers and fishers and small mid-caps. Up to 70% of lending will be for strategic investments with a view to increasing productivity and competitiveness and thus underpinning future business sustainability and growth. The GSL will also target a minimum of 30% of the lending volume towards environmental sustainability purposes with the aim of encouraging SMEs to take positive actions in support of the climate change agenda.

National Institute for Bioprocessing, Research and Training – NIBRT

NIBRT is an independent research organisation funded by the Irish Government through IDA Ireland that conducts R&D and provides highly specialised training to provide skills to support the growing biologics sector in Ireland and globally. There are 100 researchers, postgraduates, trainers and support people in a purpose-built 6,500 square metre building in Co. Dublin. The building features state of the art biologics manufacturing equipment at pilot scale.

The NIBRT brand now has global recognition and has been a major enabler for investment in the biopharma sector in Ireland. It is delivering on its vision to become a global leader in research, education and training this space and is a critical component in Ireland's value proposition for attracting biologics investments.

In 2022 NIBRT trained 4,700 people, many of whom work around the country (particularly in Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Mayo, Roscommon, Louth and Meath). In addition, it provided Springboard training to a further 775 people.

In 2020 NIBRT launched online training in its NOA (NIBRT Online Academy). There is a large uptake from corporations and governmental bodies in Ireland and internationally.

In September 2020 IDA approved funding for a significant expansion that will build NIBRT's capability and Ireland's offering in cell and gene therapy (CGT), broadly described as ATMPs (Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products). The funding will enable NIBRT to invest in a 1,600 sq.m. building expansion and equipment; to hire new principal investigators and associated teams, as well as additional trainers with cell and gene therapy expertise.

The building expansion is complete and operational from early June 2023. Courses in cell therapy manufacturing have been launched. Principal investigators are being recruited, and business development is under way.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

As requested by the Assembly, the response of the Department included detail relating to a) The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, b) European Innovation, c) The Digital Transition Fund, and d) Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Border Development Fund (in this instance relating only to Louth which is in the Eastern and Midland Region). The response also provided detail on e) Enterprise Innovation programmes funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF)

was established in 2018, with €500m in funding committed over the period to 2027 for co-funded collaborative projects involving the enterprise and research sectors. It is one of four funds in the National Development Plan 2018-2027. DTIF projects focus on the development, deployment, and commercialisation of disruptive technologies to deliver new solutions through investment in the development and implementation of innovative products and services that will alter markets, or the way business operates.

The DTIF objectives are to:

- support enterprises in Ireland to exploit the enterprise opportunities associated with “disruptive technologies” by de-risking collaborative projects
- support enterprises in Ireland to collaborate in order to engage with and be prepared for challenges associated with new “disruptive technologies” that will have a transformative impact on the way we work and live in the future
- build on research undertaken in Ireland and to leverage that research further by supporting the delivery and exploitation of new technology-based solutions from that research
- foster deeper and wider RD&I collaborations between the public and private sectors in key technology areas and to support collaborations between large firms and SMEs in Ireland
- strengthen spin-out, spin-in and other start-up activity associated with disruptive technology.
- prepare Irish enterprises and public bodies to engage in European and global partnerships around the development and deployment of disruptive technologies
- promote innovation and drive collaboration between Ireland's enterprises and its research base.

Essentially, DTIF is about funding collaborations that demonstrate technology-based disruptive innovation, collaborations that can:

- alter markets
- alter the way business operates
- involve new products or the emergence of new business models.

Since 2018, DTIF invested €306m in 91 collaborative disruptive innovation projects with strong commercialisation potential under the first five calls of the Fund. These projects cover areas such as life sciences, medical devices, ICT, artificial intelligence, manufacturing, and environmental sustainability. Funding to each project is allocated over three years subject to reaching agreed milestones.

Each project is a collaborative partnership of between 3 and 13 research and enterprise partners. Small and medium enterprise participation in every project is a requirement and SMEs constitute the largest grouping of partners within the consortia. They also represent the majority of lead applicants, leading 72% of all projects. While there is not a targeted regional dimension to the fund the 340 partners in the 91 projects to date are located across 18 counties, with over half (57%) of all collaborations operating outside Dublin.

European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs)

As part of the Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL), the European Commission and EU Member States will establish and co-fund a network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs). These hubs will support digital transformation in SMEs and public sector organisations by encouraging the adoption of the latest advances in the three DIGITAL key technologies of Cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence and High-Performance Computing. EDIHs will serve as “one-stop-shops” providing access to technical expertise and experimentation, as well as innovation services, and the training and skills development necessary for successful digital transformation.

The results of the European Commission restricted call for the EU-wide EDIH network were issued in late June 2022. All four of Ireland’s designated EDIHs passed the Commission threshold and are eligible to become part of the EDIH network. Two EDIHs will be funded jointly through DIGITAL and RRF, while the remaining two have been awarded a “Seal of Excellence,” which permits them to become full EDIH network members subject to national funding. Funding for all four hubs has been allocated to EI under the RRF to administer the EDIH network.

Two EDIHs are led by partners based in the EMRA region:

- FactoryxChange (FxC) led by the EI funded Irish Manufacturing Research in Mullingar to accelerate factories to become ‘Factories of the Future’ embracing the ecological, digital, and societal challenges;
- CeADAR led by Ireland’s EI/IDA Technology Centre in Applied Data Analytics and Machine Intelligence (based in UCD) which will aim to focus on supporting Artificial Intelligence (AI) transformation in SMEs and public-service organisations.

FxC announced its establishment on 24 February 2023 while CeADAR will become operational in Q3 2023.

Other EDIHs not based in the EMRA region include:

- Data2Sustain is a consortium led by the Atlantic Technological University, Sligo, which will deliver a comprehensive digital services programme to increase the capacity and speed of SME transformation, with a focus on the circular economy and sustainability areas.
- ENTIRE led by Tyndall National Institute Cork to help SMEs and start-ups to become more competitive in their business/production processes using digital technologies such as IoT and sensors.

Data2Sustain announced their establishment on 24 February 2023, while ENTIRE will be established 30 May 2023. Both EDIHs will be available for SMEs and public sector organisations across the country.

The Digital Transition Fund

To boost the uptake of digital technology in enterprises, in 2022, Government established the Digital Transition Fund as part of Ireland’s NRRP. This is an €85 million multi-annual fund which will run until 2026. Through the Digital Transition Fund, we will increase digitalisation of all businesses across products, processes, supply chains and business models. This will bring about productivity gains, access to new markets, increased innovation and improved competitiveness.

This funding is in place to help companies at all stages of their digital journey – from the early days of simply going online to digitalisation of products and business processes, to facilitating exporting and to using digital technologies to develop new markets and business models. €16m was allocated to the DTF in Budget 2023.

This work will be complemented by the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs), which act as one-stop shops for expertise, advice, and opportunities to test out technologies before investing.

Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Border Development Fund

Enterprise Ireland, provided funding to assist regions to support enterprise activity, promote regional growth and create jobs.

Over €126 million in funding has been approved for 79 innovate enterprise projects through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, Border Enterprise Development Fund, and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme to drive enterprise development across all regions.

These funds enable significant collaborative and innovative regional projects and complement the Regional Enterprise Plans where they have served as an enabler for projects emerging from that regional collaborative process.

Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme

There has been no Regional Enterprise Development Fund or Border Development Fund during the last two years. However, the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme was implemented in 2021. The objective of the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme was to provide assistance, including funding supports, to regionally based not-for-profit undertakings that provide economic support to enterprises in sectors and regions negatively affected by COVID-19, as well as a consequence of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU (BREXIT).

Enterprise Innovation programmes funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment secured additional funding for research development and innovation through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) totalling €117 million over the 7 years of the ERDF (2021-2027).

Enterprise Ireland, working with the Department and the Managing Authorities will use this ERDF funding for the following three programmes:

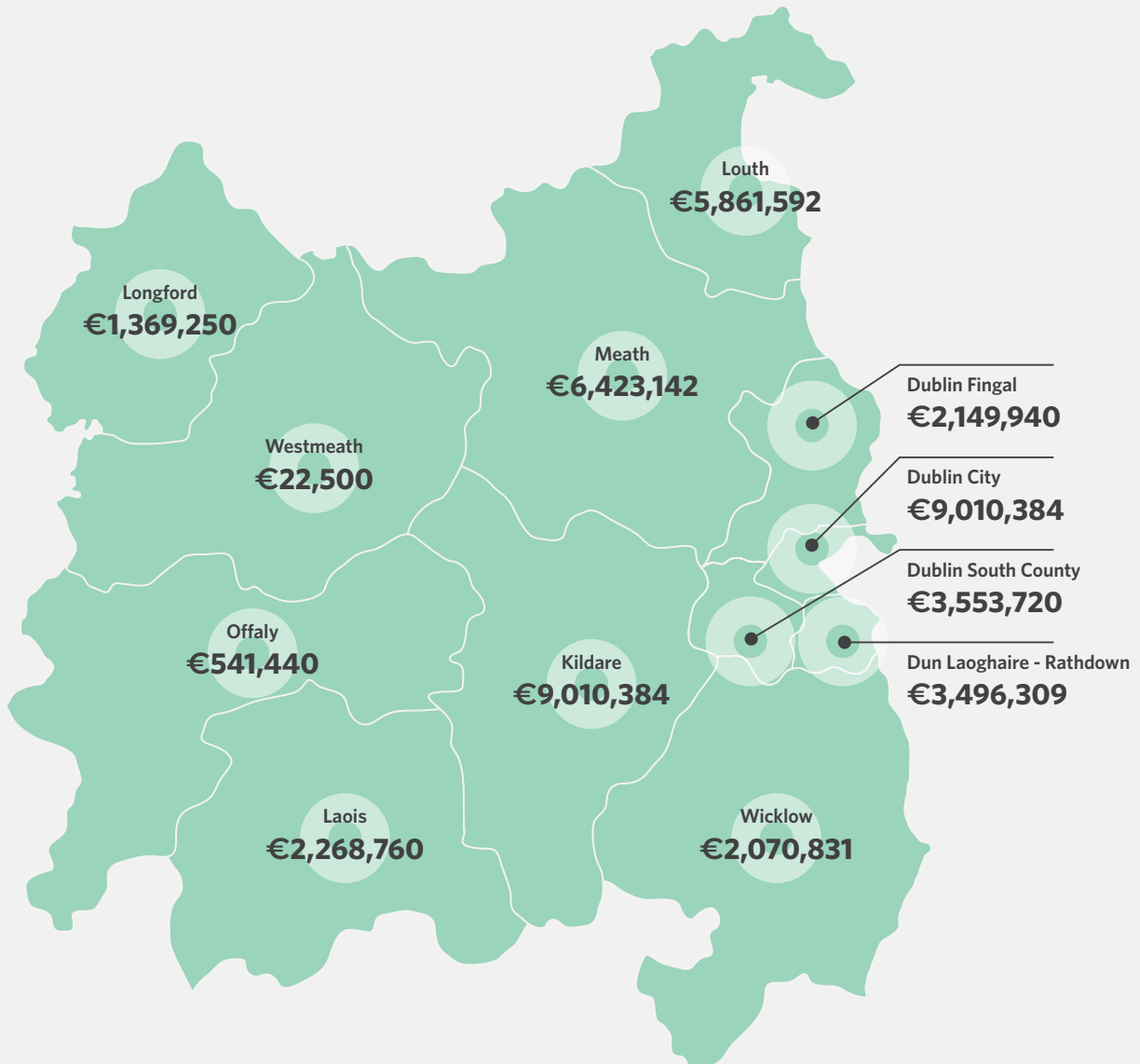
- **KT Boost programme** – will bridge the knowledge transfer gap between industry and academia. It will fund technology transfer specialists in both universities and technological universities across Ireland.
- **Technology Gateways programme** – will provide Technological Universities with an industry gateway with dedicated staff who work with industry to articulate company problems in a manner that can be addressed by the established expert base in the Technological University.
- **Innovators' Initiative programme** – will build on existing international and national best practice in immersive-based, needs-led innovation training programmes connecting on multiple levels with the industry sector clusters in a particular region.

As of yet, no awards have been made under these programmes. The applications to the new Technology Gateway Programme have been assessed and it is expected that the final awards will be announced by the end of Q2 2023. Similarly, calls for the other two programmes, KT Boost and the Innovators' Initiative issued in February this year - the calls have closed, and the applications are currently being assessed.



D1) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

Regional Enterprise Development Fund Total Approval 2017 - 2022



Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund				
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin and Louth	A preclinically validated solution to enable treatment of >90% of patients with Tricuspid Regurgitation	€5.9m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin Clare Galway	A miniaturised smart pump for Heart Failure with preserved Ejection Fraction (HFpEF)	€3.1m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin and Galway	RISOLVE- A Digital Therapeutic Platform for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Overactive Bladder	€1.5m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin and Cork	Encapsulated Oral Vaccine Platform for Melioidosis & Enteric Pathogens	€2.3m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Kildare and Galway	A multifactorial wound treatment monitoring system for intelligent healing of chronic wounds	€4.6m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Meath, Galway and Cork	Closed-loop, whole-cycle approach to reducing the carbon footprint of livestock	€2.8m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin and Galway	A novel stent and deployment system to treat intracranial atherosclerotic disease (ICAD) one of the leading causes of ischemic stroke worldwide	€3.5m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Wicklow and Galway	BioBlate: an intelligent surgical ablation system for treating complex mixed tissue infections including diabetic feet	€3.4m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin and Galway	VascuSense a minimally invasive and intelligent crossing-atherectomy device for the treatment of critical limb ischaemia	€7.0m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin, Galway and Clare	A Breakthrough Platform Technology to Detect and Prevent Peripheral Neuropathy Caused by Chemotherapy	€4.4m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin	CILTER child-protection software	€2.8m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin	Prostate Cancer Active Surveillance via Urinary Monitoring	€2.1m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin	THORAX: Combining Rapid Point-Of-Care Diagnostics, AI, and Machine Learning to Transform Lung Infection Screening & Diagnosis in the Critical Care Setting	€3.3m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 4	Dublin and Cork	ATHENA Migraine Therapy And Diagnostics	€7.5m	

Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 5	Dublin and Galway	Aerospace Disruption - Ablative Surface Treatment to Revolutionise Adhesion	€2.5m	
Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund - Call 5	Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Westmeath	Sustainable Production Using Intelligent Tooling	€1.6m	
Digital Transition Fund			No approvals to date by IDA Ireland under this fund	
Regional Enterprise Development Fund/ Border Development Fund	(There have been no REDF/BEDF calls over the last 2 years)	(There have been no REDF/BEDF calls over the last 2 years)	(There have been no REDF/BEDF calls over the last 2 years)	(There have been no REDF/BEDF calls over the last 2 years)
Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) 2021	Kildare	MERITS (County Kildare Community Network)	€573,080	The objective of RETS is to support the not-for-profit undertakings who have received previous support under the REDF or BEDF negatively affected by Covid-19, as well as a consequence of Brexit. Projects are progressing
	Louth	Louth Meath ETB	€1,436,000	
	Louth	Creative Spark CLG	€270,656	
	Westmeath	Irish Manufacturing Research	€581,600	
	Meath	National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC - now CEAI)	€77,600	
	Dublin	Dublin Enterprise and Technology Centre	€630,580	
	Dublin	Social and Local Enterprise	€261,200	

E) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

National Hub Policy

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and DETE are leading on the development of a new National Hub Policy which will provide an overview of the hub ecosystem in Ireland and examine the contributions that hubs make to the economic and social development of communities across the State. The Strategy will examine the current role hubs play supporting enterprise, employment and non-commercial community activities and will consider opportunities for further development.

The Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme

The Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme was launched in 2022 with the aim of providing Priming and Feasibility funding support to develop a credible pipeline of eligible projects for future funding calls. 47 projects across all regions secured over €3.4m under the REISS.

F) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the information submitted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring. The Assembly acknowledges the active engagement of the Department and its Agencies in this process to ensure the timely inclusion of the Department's response.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment have carried out a number of actions that have enabled progress to be made in implementing the RSES.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations for NOAC to consider;

- The two-year Implementation Plans for the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 should have regard to regional objectives of the RSES where enterprise policy priorities align with applicable RSES objectives. Where relevant, the Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to inform implementation to ensure alignment with regional objectives.
- The Regional Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to inform the Regions pillar of the of IDA Ireland's 2021-24 Strategy or any subsequent strategy. This will ensure that measures directly aimed at securing investment to advance regional development is guided to appropriate locations that supports the spatial strategy of the RSES and recognises the importance of Dublin as a national economic driver; The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, especially in light of BREXIT and the need to develop an all-island economy; Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as vital regional growth centres; and a number of Key Towns.
- In the development of the National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind, the Department should ensure that the regional dimension is appropriately considered, to include alignment with objectives of the RSES as appropriate and any future Regional Renewable Electricity Plans.
- The Department should consider inclusion of a regional representative on the Retail Forum to ensure adherence to the retail hierarchy for the Region as expressed in the RSES and in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012, or any subsequent update.
- The Department should consider introducing a targeted regional dimension to The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) to support implementation of the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3) to create and build on regional competitive advantages, create future market opportunities and identify solutions to identified societal challenges.
- In the development of a new National Hub Policy, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) should consult the Regional Co-Working Analysis which was prepared by the three Regional Assemblies in late 2020. This analysis provides a series of general considerations that should assist policymakers in developing additional coworking hubs across Ireland.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices included in the response of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

- Capital spending by the Department is aligned with population and economic projections, development patterns and spatial planning objectives as set out in the National Development Plan and National Planning Framework of Project Ireland 2040, for which the RSES is a key driver for regional and local implementation.
- The Government launched the new White Paper on Enterprise in 2022, setting out Ireland's approach to enterprise policy in the period to 2030. The approach set out ensures that Ireland continues to build on its economic strengths as an open economy with strong trade and foreign direct investment, a vibrant innovation hub, and a resilient labour market. The priority objectives and targets as set out in the White Paper reflect various elements for consideration set out in the RSES. Regional development is also a key consideration, with the White Paper committing to ensure regional unemployment does not exceed 1% of the national average rate.
- The objectives of the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 and the objectives and priorities set out in the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 are consistent with RSES objectives.
- A Regions Pillar has been included in IDA Ireland's Strategy 2021-2024 which assist in advancing regional development in line with RSES objectives.
- Publication of the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3) which facilitated assessment of competitive advantages, future market opportunities, solutions to societal challenges, as well as the effectiveness of the current suite of enterprise innovation supports in the Eastern and Midland Region in line with RSES objectives.
- Publication of Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 (done in parallel with the creation of Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3)) which build on regional strengths to strengthen the enterprise ecosystems.
- Ongoing implementation and work of the National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, The National Remote Working Strategy, Regional Enterprise Plans, Local Enterprise Offices and the Retail Forum (and supporting schemes) to ensure sustainable jobs growth across the region in line with RSES objectives.
- The establishment of the Construct Innovate Construction Technology Centre and the Enterprise Ireland Spotlight on Skills Workshops are contributing to the enhancement of skills, talent and innovation, and support of the development of sites where high-tech and high potential start-ups can thrive. Additionally, the National Institute for Bioprocessing, Research and Training (NIBRT) provides highly specialised training to provide skills to support the growing biologics sector in Ireland and globally.
- Explicit support for smart cities principles - utilising technology to enhance a cities services and amenities - in existing Enterprise and RDI programmes in line with the strong ambition of the RSES.
- Future proofing and anticipating economic structural change, technological and digital advances, and climate change with specific reference to the White Paper on Enterprise, Climate Action Plans, the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme and, Future Manufacturing Ireland.
- Ongoing roll out of climate action and energy supports for business including The Green Transition Fund and The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSLs).
- Continued successful roll out of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) which focuses on the development, deployment, and commercialisation of disruptive technologies to deliver new solutions through investment in the development and implementation of innovative products and services that will alter markets, or the way business operates. Disruptive technology innovation is central to the economic strategy of the RSES, with the DTIF recognised in the RSES a driver for resilient, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- Through the Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL), two European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) have been approved for the EMRA region and will commence operations in 2023 - FactoryxChange (FxC) led by Irish Manufacturing Research in Mullingar and CeADAR led by UCD. Funding for these hubs has been allocated to EI under the RRF to administer the EDIH network.
- Direct alignment between the work of Future Manufacturing Ireland and RSES RPOs.
- Establishment of the Digital Transition Fund as part of Ireland's NRRP to increase digitalisation of all businesses across products, processes, supply chains and business models in line with RSES objectives.

6.1.3

Minister for Finance

The Department of Finance's mission is "to lead in the achievement of the government's economic, fiscal and financial policy goals, having regard to the goals set out in the Programme for Government - Our Shared Future". The role of the Department of Finance is crucial in enabling the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the RSES.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included progress related to a) fiscal measures that support the settlement strategy of the RSES, b) housing and infrastructure provision, c) rural development, d) sustainable public transport, e) investment in the national road network, f) the development of enterprises, skills and innovation capacity, g) airports and ports, h) culture heritage and sports, i) climate action, j) water and wastewater infrastructure, k) education health and childcare and, l) future proofing and economic structural change including BREXIT, technological and digital advances, and climate change, including Just Transition.

The Department responded by outlining progress by Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) and the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), both of which are bodies under the aegis of the Department of Finance (see B below).

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI), the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) and the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) are bodies under the aegis of the Department of Finance. A description of the activities of HBFI and NTMA was provided by the Department and are included hereunder, along with a description of NAMA (provided by NAMA), focusing on its social remit. Following this, the responses relating to each body are outlined under the headings set out in Section A above.

Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI)

Pursuant to the 'Home Building Finance Ireland Act 2018', HBFI commenced operations on 28th January 2019 and provides funding directly to housebuilders to build homes for owner occupiers, renters and those in need of social housing. To 31 December 2022, HBFI has approved funding of €1.25bn to fund 5,717 new homes across 21 counties. 68% of the funding provided to date is for houses and 32% for apartments. HBFI provides funding for all types of supply from smaller schemes of five units up to larger schemes of 300 units.

HBFI has a national remit to provide funding for commercially viable residential development throughout the State. One of the key factors HBFI considers when assessing the commercial viability of a funding request is the demand for residential units (houses/apartments) in the location. To the end of 2022, HBFI approved funding for projects in 21 counties and continues to engage with stakeholders and run information events throughout the country to increase awareness of its product offering and to ensure that access to funding is not an obstacle for viable residential developments nationwide.

In January 2021, HBFI launched a 'Green Funding Product', designed to encourage the development of more sustainable housing. Projects that qualify and meet the Home Performance Index certification can avail of a discount of up to 0.5% on the margin that they could normally expect to be charged.

National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA)

The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) is a Sovereign Investment Fund with a mandate to invest on a commercial basis to support economic activity and employment in Ireland.

Acting as the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the NTMA provides financial advisory, procurement and project delivery services to State authorities on public infrastructure projects. Acting as the New Economy and Recovery Authority (NewERA), the NTMA provides a dedicated centre of corporate finance expertise to Government, providing financial and commercial advice to Ministers regarding their shareholdings in major commercial State bodies.

National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)

NAMA, within the context of its overriding commercial objective, seeks to manage its portfolio in a manner that complements the objectives of Government Departments, local authorities, State agencies and the Regional Assemblies. This can be seen in several aspects of NAMA's work – such as providing homes for social housing, making properties available for schools and other public uses, working with IDA to identify suitable properties for companies investing in Ireland, and agreeing rent abatements with businesses to support jobs. An area of particular importance to NAMA has been the provision of homes, through the Agency's debtors and receivers, for social housing. NAMA has (to end-March 2023) made over 7,600 houses and apartments, one third of the completed housing stock held by its debtors and receivers in Ireland, available (through the Housing Agency) to local authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing and directly provided 2,872 social housing units.

a) Detail on fiscal measures that reinforce the spatial strategy of the RSES which includes championing the Capital City of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient and global city region; enhancing the Dublin- Belfast Economic Corridor; securing Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres, acting as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns and a network of multifaceted Rural Places.

NTMA - The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

NTMA - ISIF focusses its efforts on making transformational investments across its impact themes of Climate, Housing and Enabling Investments, Indigenous Businesses, and Food and Agriculture. Where possible, ISIF targets Regional Development across all Impact Themes. ISIF's Impact Strategy includes a fifth Compelling and National theme for situations that require the Fund to adapt to new national priorities, such as BREXIT or another pandemic. As at 30 June 2022, ISIF had committed a total of €6bn to Ireland, directly and indirectly through its investment partners. ISIF's portfolio is diversified by asset class per above and its investment activity is spread across its four key investment themes of climate, housing and enabling investments, scaling indigenous businesses, and food and agriculture. This includes investments across all the regions. ISIF seeks to maximise the economic impact of investments and 39,686 jobs were supported by ISIF capital as at 31 December 2021. 47% of jobs were outside of Dublin. See the map below. Further detail is available in the ISIF H1 2022 update published in October 2022.

NAMA - Housing and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

At the core of the RSES is a settlement strategy for the Greater Dublin Area ("GDA"), which sets the framework for local authority development plans in setting out key locations for strategic population and employment growth, coupled with the requisite investment in infrastructure and services. This is based on the policy parameters set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) to better manage the growth of Dublin as a city of international scale supported by the Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda, which form the upper two tiers in the settlement hierarchy.

The RSES identifies a third tier of Key Towns, which have the greatest identified assets and potential to act as regional drivers for population and/or employment growth and include towns such as Swords, Bray, Maynooth, Naas, Wicklow/Rathnew and Navan. Beneath this tier are self-sustaining growth towns which include Celbridge, Leixlip, Dunboyne amongst others.

NAMA indicated in 2015 that it aimed to facilitate the construction of up to 20,000 new residential units by 2020, subject to commercial viability. Reflecting both demand and economic viability, over 90% of this delivery has been within the jurisdiction of the Eastern Midland Regional Assembly, principally within the four Dublin Authorities, Wicklow, Kildare and Meath and located within the major growth towns as per the RSES settlement strategy.

NAMA has made a positive contribution towards achieving this objective, through the delivery of 29,170 units up to 31 March 2023, 13,840 of which were directly delivered through NAMA funding and 15,870 delivered on sites formerly secured to NAMA. There are a further 850 NAMA funded units that are under construction or have funding approved for construction.

These units were mainly delivered in the Greater Dublin Area, with smaller levels of delivery in Cork and Galway. There are residential zoned lands owned by NAMA debtors and receivers that are estimated to have potential for a further c. 17,200 units, mainly post 2025 and largely within the Eastern and Midland Region.

NAMA - Active Land Management and Urban Regeneration Objectives

Another key objective of the RSES is the emphasis on securing compact growth, with a focus on the regeneration of infill and brownfield sites and the promotion of mixed-use opportunity developments, comprising employment uses and residential.

Dublin Docklands

NAMA has continued to consolidate the development of the Dublin Docklands. NAMA originally held an interest in 15 of the 20 blocks identified in the North Lotts and Grand Canal Basin Strategic Development Zone (“SDZ”). This is equivalent to 16.74 hectares or 75% of the developable land in the SDZ. Detailed strategies were developed for each of the 15 blocks. NAMA facilitated the construction of 2.6 million sq.ft. of commercial space and 606 residential units. Sites with planning permission for 1.6 million sq. ft. of commercial space and 1,427 residential units were sold and many of these sites have since been developed by private developers. When fully complete, NAMA’s original interest in the Docklands will provide 4.2m sq.ft. of commercial space and 2,183 residential units, accommodating an estimated 20,000 office workers and homes for over 5,000 people.

Poolbeg West

In June 2021, NAMA completed a comprehensive process to select an investment partner for the development of the former Irish Glass Bottle site into a vibrant residential and commercial extension of Dublin City. This brownfield site is located within the Poolbeg West Strategic Development Zone and extends to approximately 14ha and has potential to deliver up to 3,800 residential units (including 25% social and affordable) and 1 million sq. ft. of commercial space, as well as education and community facilities and some ha of public open space.

NAMA retains a 20% minority shareholding in the Company that now owns the Poolbeg lands and the Company has made considerable progress in delivering development. A comprehensive masterplan has been approved that secures the upfront delivery of strategically important infrastructure and public realm and community facilities. Planning has been secured for almost 900 homes with associated residential and community amenities, with planning proposals in the pipeline for further residential and employment space. Enabling works have commenced on the first phase of development with the first new homes anticipated to be delivered in 2024.

In its response, NAMA asserts that this will transform the site into a natural extension of Dublin’s dynamic and growing City Centre and is fully consistent with the objectives of the RSES to secure compact growth and regenerate infill and brownfield sites serviced by public transport infrastructure.

Dunsink

Further asset management work continues in relation to other strategically important infill sites such as at Dunsink in Dublin 15. The Dunsink area has been identified in the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (which forms part of the RSES) as one of a small number of large-scale strategic residential and economic development areas within the M50, that has capacity to deliver significant development in an integrated and sustainable manner.

The Dunsink area has now been rezoned for residential purposes (from open space/high amenity) in the recently adopted Fingal County Development Plan 2023-2029 and Fingal County Council has committed to preparing a Statutory Plan for these lands in early course.

Sequentially, these lands are eminently appropriate for development in the medium term given they adjoin existing development at Ashtown/Pelletstown. The area is serviced by train stations at Ashtown and Navan Road Parkway. A Railway Order application has been lodged to upgrade the Maynooth rail line to DART standard which will considerably enhance services to the area. Another Railway Order application has been lodged for the Blanchardstown Core Bus Route as part of the BusConnects project which will also benefit this site. Both projects are included in the Transport Strategy for the GDA 2022-2042.

Lissenhall

The overall Lissenhall regeneration area is significant, within which NAMA holds security. The alignment of the proposed Metrolink travels through the NAMA security which will also accommodate the proposed Estuary Station and a major park and ride facility. This site is now included with the designated area for the Swords Local Area Plan which is to be prepared by Fingal County Council within the currency of the 2023-2029 Development Plan.

NAMA continues to work with Government agencies including the Department of Housing, NTA and Uisce Éireann as well as Fingal County Council to asset manage these lands to ensure they deliver much needed residential accommodation in early course. Their development complies with the many worthy strategic outcomes of the NPF and the RSES such as: that local authorities develop a long-term strategic view of housing need; support compact growth; sustainable mobility; and the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. It also supports the business case for Government considering investing in costly but essential public transport infrastructure.

Supporting Infrastructure

NAMA’s Docklands’ and Residential Delivery Business Plans included significant investment in strategic enabling infrastructure, including new roads and streets in the Docklands, access roads to train stations, funding upgrades to water treatment plants, and funding public parks. Such enabling infrastructure has facilitated development well beyond the immediate NAMA security, thus catalysing further growth and investment.

b) Detail relating to housing provision and sustainable urban development, including supporting infrastructure.

NTMA - The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

ISIF is targeting funding for the delivery of 25,000 new homes by 2030 through a range of equity and debt investments. By end 2022 ISIF has cumulatively committed €1.2bn to residential housing which has stimulated an estimated €4 billion of homebuilding activity. ISIF's housing investments are targeting the delivery of over 16,000 new homes by 2025. To date, ISIF funded entities have delivered 11,255 new homes and have a further 5,586 homes under construction and over 10,000 homes at various stages of the planning process.

ISIF's housing investments have targeted the provision of risk capital where funding gaps are most acute with recent examples including:

- provision of equity type solutions to bring new sites into production,
- funding on-site infrastructure to unlock large sites and
- delivering new Purpose-Built Student Accommodation in regional locations.

As a commercial investor, ISIF's housing investment programme to date has resulted in significant investment in new housing stock in the Greater Dublin Area and the Eastern region where housing need is most acute, and a higher proportion of schemes are commercially viable.

ISIF has been active in the provision of infrastructure funding which can unlock landbanks and accelerate the delivery of new homes. In Cherrywood, Co. Dublin, ISIF invested in the up-front provision of roads, water, parks etc to unlock the site which is now being developed and will result in the construction of over 4,000 new homes.

The Housing Infrastructure Services Company, (HISCo), a commercial joint venture between the ISIF and Cork County Council to build supporting infrastructure for housing, has completed a substantial investment in County Louth. The company is facilitating the delivery of 1,300 new homes in Drogheda, by building the first phase of a new access road which will eventually link the M1 to Drogheda Port on land owned by Louth County Council. The new 2-kilometre road will provide key supporting infrastructure that will make it viable to deliver the homes, with subsequent phases of the road having the potential to deliver a total of more than 3,500 new homes.

NTMA - National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)

Acting as the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the NTMA provides financial advice to State authorities in respect of those public investment projects which are referred to it, with a capital value over €75 million. The NDFA may also provide financial advice to State authorities on certain projects below this threshold. In this role, the NDFA advises State authorities on the optimal financing of public investment projects in order to achieve value for money.

The NDFA also procures and delivers Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects as requested by State authorities (with certain exceptions such as Transport Infrastructure Ireland). In this role, the NDFA is responsible for delivering the procurement of a project referred to it and hands it over to the relevant sponsoring body after construction is complete and the asset is operational.

In addition, the NDFA provides contract management and support services in respect of the operations and management of certain existing PPP facilities, and the direct procurement of certain Exchequer-funded projects on behalf of the Department of Education.

The NDFA is procuring a programme of social housing Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Following the delivery of c. 1,000 homes under Social Housing PPP Bundles 1 and 2 in 2021, which are now being managed in the operational phase by the NDFA, a further c. 2,600 homes will be delivered under the social housing PPP programme. This will bring delivery under the programme to c. 3,600 homes. During 2022, pre-procurement activities continued on Bundle 3, which will provide c. 480 homes across six sites in Dublin, Kildare, Sligo and Wicklow. The procurement of Bundle 3 was launched in December 2022. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage also announced Bundles 4 and 5 in June 2022, which together will deliver c. 1,600 homes across 18 sites in the Dublin/Greater Dublin area. Bundle 6, which comprises 520 homes across eight sites in Cork, Kildare, Sligo and Wicklow, was announced by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in January 2023. The NDFA is also working closely with relevant stakeholders on identification of local authority sites for Bundle 7 and beyond.

NewERA provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of the Land Development Agency (LDA). During 2021 and 2022, NewERA's advisory role included for example where requested, reviewing financial statements and corporate plans.

c) Supports for enhanced rural development including sustainable housing provision; mechanisms to enhance the rural economy; mechanisms to enable remote working; and progress of the National Broadband Plan.

NTMA: NDFA - Refer to (b) in respect of housing provision.

NewERA - Refer to (b) in respect of housing provision.

d) Detail on measures that will enable sustainable public transport across the Region including; progress on delivering sustainable transport within the Dublin Metropolitan Area relating to the Dublin- Belfast Economic Corridor, rail enhancements (including DART, LUAS and Metrolink), park and ride facilities, bus services, and road improvements; progress on delivering sustainable transport throughout the remainder of the Region; Delivery of rail enhancements throughout the Region; rural transport options; cycling and pedestrian infrastructure; smart transport technologies and EV infrastructure.

NTMA - National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)

The NDFA is providing financial advisory services to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in respect of the Metrolink project, which TII is procuring. The NDFA is also advising Iarnród Éireann in relation to its capital investment projects (including DART+) through participation in its Capital Investment Advisory Group.

NewERA is a member of the Major Projects Governance Oversight group established by the Department of Transport where the purpose of the group is to support the Department in its work relating to the oversight of the major transport projects such as BusConnects, DART+ and Metrolink.

NewERA also provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of the CIÉ group and during 2021 and 2022 provided advice on assignments including reviews of financial statements, corporate plans, and board appointments.

e) Detail on investment in the National Road Network of the Region.

No response offered.

f) Detail relating to Enterprise, Skills and Innovation Capacity including; Investment aligned to the Region's economic centres including Dublin as a national economic driver, The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (especially in light of BREXIT and the need to develop an all-island economy), Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as vital regional growth centres, and a number of Key Towns ; The development of a Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3); Investment in placemaking to promote economic development; supports for the enterprise supporting ecosystem (including sufficiently scaled landbanks with appropriate utility infrastructure, business incubation centres, community enterprise centres, accelerator development schemes, local enterprise offices, research and innovation centres with Higher Education Institutes, technology gateways, technology centres, research centres, and IDA business and technology parks); specific sectoral supports for sectors including Retail, Tourism, Marine, Low Carbon Economy and Agriculture, identified as labour-intensive economic activities which are of particular importance to the Region, given their sensitivity for job creation, maintenance and sustainability; Detail related to economic future proofing and anticipated economic structural change including the need for a just transition to manage the effects of a low carbon and digital transition, managing economic structural change in sectors including agriculture, and managing the impact of COVID-19 and Brexit (and in particular the impact this will have on the agriculture sector within the Midlands).

NTMA- The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

ISIF invests directly and indirectly (via funds) to support growing and scaling Irish indigenous businesses, many of which are based in the regions. Relevant examples include (i) ISIF's investment in Kaseya, which announced a new office in Dundalk hosting 100+ employees, (ii) ISIF's financing of a refurbishment and expansion of the Guinness Enterprise Centre, one of Dublin's leading hubs for business incubation and (iii) an indirect investment in Wogan's Build Centre, Drogheda.

NTMA - National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)

The NDFA is procuring a programme of higher education Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Construction on the first bundle of the Higher Education PPP Programme is ongoing following financial close/contract signing in December 2022. Higher Education Bundle 1 will provide six new academic buildings across multiple campuses in the eastern, southern and midlands regions with construction expected to be completed from late 2024 to mid-2025, depending on the facility. The second bundle in this Higher Education PPP programme is currently at competitive dialogue stage with the tender submission stage expected in Q2/Q3 2023.

In its procurement role the NDFA supports sustainable procurement and delivery of infrastructure by preparing green procurement plans. These plans detail climate action and sustainability initiatives being undertaken on projects, including appropriate formal environmental assessment, sustainability scoring in tender assessment and the use of digital technologies for the design, construction and operation of facilities to facilitate better resource efficiency.

The NDFA is also providing financial advice to Government Departments on a wide range of projects with sustainability and climate action objectives such as the project validation stage of the Climate Action Fund, solar PV installation project in schools and the Dublin District Heating System Project. The NDFA meets SEAI to discuss various energy efficiency measures on a quarterly basis.

g) Detail relating to the Airports and Ports of the Region.



NTMA - The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

ISIF's Connectivity Fund investments include:

- A €35 million investment in Dublin Airport Authority's (DAA) €400m bond issuance in 2016 and a €40 million investment in DAA's €500m bond issuance in 2020. ISIF acted as a strategic domestic partner for DAA in these bond issuances, aimed at supporting construction of a new runway at Dublin Airport and bolstering DAA's liquidity as it sought to withstand the impact of Covid-19.
- A €350 million debt facility to Aer Lingus as part of ISIF's Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund. The ISIF facility strengthened the airline's liquidity position and contributed to the future funding requirements of Aer Lingus as it sought to withstand the impact of Covid-19. Aer Lingus is a key customer of Dublin Airport and is a significant employer, directly and via its supply chain in the region.
- ISIF is actively considering how it may make commercial investments to support the development of port and related onshore infrastructure to enable and capture value from the significant Offshore Renewable Energy projects planned for Ireland's East Coast and elsewhere.

NewERA provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of DAA and Dublin Port. During 2021 and 2022, NewERA provided advice on a number of DAA and Dublin Port related assignments including reviews of financial statements, corporate plans and board appointments.

h) Detail relating to Culture, Heritage and Sports including cultural and heritage led regeneration, support for the Region's Gaeltacht and supports for the UNESCO candidate sites.

No response offered.

- i) Detail relating to Climate Action including; the delivery of a targeted low carbon just transition for the peatlands of the wider Midlands; the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient, circular and environmentally sustainable economy; enabling the decarbonisation of energy production in the Region; investment in the Electricity Transmission and Distribution Network; detail on an energy efficient and climate resilient built environment; delivery of necessary Flood Relief and Coastal Defence Infrastructure; and providing a Strategic Network of connected Green Infrastructure.*

NTMA - The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

ISIF has to date invested over €450m in climate-related investments, ranging from renewable energy, to innovative technology companies, to forestry investments. Investments including:

- €12M commitment to ClonBio Green Gas Limited to support the Kildare based company's expansion of existing biomethane business
- €11M (approx.) Loan to Shamrock Renewable Products Ltd, a manufacturer of carbon neutral fuel products for the domestic consumer, based near Kells in Co Meath
- €54M to Dublin Waste to Energy; a thermal waste treatment plan producing electricity
- Commitments to three forestry funds: three forestry investments in 1) DAMPUT, 2), The Foraois Limited Partnership, and 3) Irish Strategic Forestry Fund.

NTMA - National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)

Refer to answer at f) above in relation to sustainable procurement and other actions in this area by the NDFA.

NewERA provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of Bord na Móna, Coillte, EirGrid, ESB and Gas Networks Ireland who all play a role in the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient, circular and environmentally sustainable economy.

Ireland has a green bond programme where the issuance is managed by the NTMA. The allocation of proceeds raised through the sale of green bonds, which takes place after the actual expenditure, is overseen by the Irish Sovereign Green Bond Working Group. This is chaired by the Department of Finance. In general, the programmes mentioned in i and j (Section 25A Report) were allocated green bond proceeds. Details are set out in the Irish Sovereign Green Bond Allocation Reports which are available online.

- j) *Detail relating to the provision of water and wastewater infrastructure including The Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midland Region, the Vartry Water Supply Scheme, The Rural Water Programme, the active leakage control and water mains rehabilitation programme, the Greater Dublin Drainage Programme, Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plan Project, Athlone Main Drainage Project, and the Upper Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme.*

NTMA - NewERA

NewERA provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of Uisce Éireann. NewERA provided financial advisory services relating to assignments on the provision of water and wastewater infrastructure during 2021 and 2022 including the Vartry Water Supply Scheme, the Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plan Project and the Athlone Main Drainage Project.

- k) *Detail relating to Education, Health and Childcare including; enhanced health care services and infrastructure in accordance with the RSES Settlement Strategy, whilst developing community healthcare networks to support local populations; Providing education and childcare services and infrastructure, that respond and cater for current and future populations including financial and legislative support for TUS Athlone campus thus supporting Athlone's role as a Regional Growth Centre serving the wider Midland catchment.*

NTMA - The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

In 2021 ISIF invested €25m with Harrison Street with the objective of supporting the development of new Purpose-Built off-campus Student Accommodation, with a focus on regional Ireland. ISIF also has a €54m commitment to DCU to support the funding of the Campus Development Program.

NTMA - National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)

Refer to answer at f) above in relation to the Higher Education PPP Programme, which includes development of new facilities and TUS Athlone in Bundle 1 (currently under construction).

In addition, the NDFA is delivering a programme of Exchequer Funded Schools on behalf of the Department of Education. During 2022, the procurement of the first bundle of a programme of Exchequer funded schools commenced, with tenders received in October 2022. The developments in the programme, comprising six bundles, range from new builds to extensions/refurbishment projects for works at both primary and post primary level in 11 counties across Ireland (Westmeath, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Kildare, Wicklow, Meath, Carlow, Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick) and are expected to provide in excess of 24,000 pupil places. The first bundle comprises seven schools on six sites across four counties and includes new builds, extensions and refurbishments to primary, post primary and special schools. A letter of intent was issued to the preferred tenderer in April 2023 with appointment expected in Q3 2023. Preprocurement activities on the second, third and fourth bundles are continuing.

- l) *Detail relating to measures aimed at future proofing and dealing with economic structural change, particularly resulting from Brexit, technological and digital advances, and climate change, including Just Transition.*

NTMA - The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)

See (2a)-: ISIF's strategy includes a fifth Compelling and National theme for situations that require the Fund to adapt to new national priorities, such as Brexit or another pandemic.

NTMA - National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)

Refer to answer at f) above in relation to sustainable procurement and other actions in this area by the NDFA.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Further to the primary recommendation of the 2021 Monitoring Report, the Department was requested to provide detail on the development of the International Financial Services Strategy 2025, and any updates to same, including its current status and implementation. The Assembly sought particular information on the horizontal priority of Regionalisation with respect to the Eastern and Midland Region, and actions relating to regional focus, the Grand Canal Innovation District, and Regional Skills Fora. No specific update was provided by the department.

The Assembly also requested detail on any other policy initiatives/ developments that are relevant, including those by any agency under the aegis of the Department. The response from the Department made reference to ISIF's Impact Investment Strategy which was published during 2022. See B(a) above.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

In their response, the Department noted that Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) has initial funding of €730m available to support the building of new homes throughout the State.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

In their response, the Department noted that to 31st December 2022, Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) has approved 99 facilities across 21 counties. HBFI publishes regular updates on its funding to date on its website at <https://www.hbfi.ie/data-protection-notice/about-hbfi/hbfi-data>. The following summarises the total number of developments approved for funding in each county.

County	No of Approved Facilities	No of Homes	Value €m
Carlow	1	22	€2.6
Cavan	-	-	-
Clare	2	30	€5.3
Cork	18	760	€104.5
Donegal	2	82	€9.2
Dublin	16	1,795	€505.8
Galway	4	196	€52.6
Kerry	4	175	€33.1
Kildare	7	536	€75.1
Kilkenny	1	113	€42.1
Laois	3	116	€20.6
Leitrim	-	-	-
Limerick	1	76	€16.4
Longford	-	-	-
Louth	9	466	€87.4
Mayo	5	92	€15.1
Meath	9	517	€95.5
Monaghan	1	12	€1.3
Offaly	5	143	€34.1
Roscommon	-	-	-
Sligo	-	-	-
Tipperary	1	32	€6.3
Waterford	2	44	€12.4
Wexford	3	70	€12.2
Wicklow	4	426	€114.1
Westmeath	1	14	€2.0
Total	99	5,717	€1,247.7

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

In their response, the Department noted that Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) was established as a government initiative to address a shortfall of finance available for the construction of residential housing in the State. Through its broad product range, and an agile business model, HBFI forms part of the Government's strategy to meet the targets set out under Housing for All.

In their response for the 2021 Monitoring Report, NAMA raised concerns regarding the overall population strategy of the RSES, which they appreciate is ultimately informed by the NPF. They expressed the belief that there is a requirement to re-examine the timescales over which the disruptive growth scenario is implemented and believe it needs to take effect over a number of Development Plan cycles. That issues around the spatial distribution of population need to be addressed was not in dispute, but NAMA expressed the belief that these problems will not be resolved by the immediate restriction of development in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). In their response, NAMA was concerned that the household projection targets will seriously jeopardise the realisation of their mandate from Government to deliver starter homes to the GDA market. They noted that the remaining development sites that NAMA holds security over are eminently capable of supporting the overarching objectives of the RSES and NPF to facilitate healthy place-making; support sustainable mobility; enhance amenity and heritage resources; provide access to education; support efficient use of infrastructure; provide economic opportunity; create conditions for climate change resilience; and ultimately lead to compact urban development. However, NAMA expressed the view that the inevitable changes to zonings as a result of revised population and household targets means their development, in line with other policies of Government is in considerable doubt.

In their response for 2023 Monitoring, NAMA did not make reference to the concerns outlined above. The 2023 response noted that having regard to the provisions of Section 25A (1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, (as amended) and the requirement for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly to undertake a review of progress on the delivery of RSES objectives, NAMA expressed the belief that they have assisted in securing these objectives in the following manner; securing residential growth in a way that is directly aligned with the settlement strategy of the RSES; secured the regeneration of mixed use brownfield sites for employment creation and residential uses; and promoted development that integrates public transport objectives with land use planning.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the information submitted by the Department of Finance and NAMA and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the Department of Finance and NAMA have carried out a number of actions that have enabled progress to be made in implementing the RSES. Actions of note include delivery by NAMA of the majority of its new residential units in the region, with delivery specifically aligned with the RSES settlement strategy; alignment of ISIF investment programmes with the RSES settlement strategy and other relevant RPOs, and; active land management and urban regeneration undertaken by NAMA in line with RSES compact growth principles and the Dublin MASP, with a focus on the regeneration of infill and brownfield sites and the promotion of mixed-use opportunity developments, comprising employment uses and residential.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendation for NOAC to consider;

- Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) should ensure regional balance and alignment with the RSES Growth Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy in awarding funding for commercially viable residential development throughout the State.
- As per the recommendation included in the 2021 Monitoring Report, the Regional Assembly should be afforded opportunity to inform the horizontal priority of Regionalisation, to be included in the International Financial Services Strategy 2025-, as well as the subsequent implementation process of the aforementioned strategy. This will ensure that measures directly aimed at increasing employment in the international financial services (IFS) sector of the regions is guided to appropriate locations that supports the spatial strategy of the RSES and recognises the importance of Dublin as a national economic driver; The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, especially in light of BREXIT and the need to develop an all-island economy; Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as vital regional growth centres; and a number of Key Towns.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices included in the response of the Department of Finance.

- Launch by Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) of a 'Green Funding Product', designed to encourage the development of more environmentally sustainable housing, in line with RSES objectives for low energy buildings.
- To 31st December 2022, HBFI has approved 99 loan facilities across 21 counties.
- Delivery by NAMA of the majority of its new residential units in the EMRA region, with this delivery aligned with the RSES settlement strategy.
- Over 7,600 houses and apartments made available by NAMA to local authorities and approved housing bodies for social housing to end-March 2023 and 2,872 social housing units directly provided.
- Through its Active Land Management and Urban Regeneration Objectives - and in line with RSES compact growth principles and the Dublin MASP - NAMA has reported delivery of compact growth, with a focus on the regeneration of infill and brownfield sites and the promotion of mixed-use opportunity developments in the Dublin Docklands, Poolbeg West, Dunsink and Lissenhall.
- Alignment of ISIF investment programmes with the RSES settlement strategy and relevant RPOs. As at 30 June 2022, ISIF had committed a total of €6bn to Ireland, directly and indirectly through its investment partners.
- ISIF's investment activity is spread across its four key investment themes of climate, housing and enabling investments, scaling indigenous businesses, and food and agriculture, all of which are in line with RSES objectives.
- ISIF's Connectivity Fund investments include investment in Dublin Airport Authority's BOND issuances in 2016 and 2020 and a debt facility to Aer Lingus as part of ISIF's Pandemic Stabilisation and Recovery Fund.
- Acting as the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the NTMA provides financial advice to State authorities and procures and delivers Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects as requested by State authorities which is delivering homes in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow.
- The NDFA is providing financial advisory services to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in respect of the MetroLink project, which TII is procuring. The NDFA is also advising Iarnród Éireann in relation to its capital investment projects (including DART+) through participation in its Capital Investment Advisory Group. These activities support RSES objectives.
- The NDFA is delivering a programme of Exchequer Funded Schools on behalf of the Department of Education. During 2022, the procurement of the first bundle of a programme of Exchequer funded schools commenced, with tenders received in October 2022.
- NewERA provides financial and commercial advice to relevant Government Ministers and Departments in respect of Bord na Móna, Coillte, EirGrid, ESB, Gas Networks Ireland and Uisce Éireann who all play a role in the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient, circular and environmentally sustainable economy in line with RSES objectives.

6.1.4

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications' vision of a climate neutral, sustainable, and digitally connected Ireland will be achieved by collaboratively delivering policies and programmes to empower people, communities, and businesses to continue the transition to a better quality of life for current and future generations. The work of the Department impacts on the daily lives of every citizen in Ireland and has major environment, societal and economic benefits.

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications has responsibility for policy and programmes across a number of areas of national strategic importance, encompassing telecommunications; postal; energy; climate action; waste management, resource efficiency and the circular economy; environmental policy and air quality, and natural resources. It is supported in its mandate by 14 State bodies, comprising a number of leading commercial, non-commercial and regulatory bodies.

These policies are directly aligned to a number of Regional Strategic Outcomes defined by the RSES including for instance; Healthy Communities (RSO 4), Sustainable management of Water, Waste and Other Environmental Resources (RSO 7), Build Climate Resilience (RSO 8), Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy (RSO 9), Enhanced Green Infrastructure (RSO 10) and Biodiversity and Natural Heritage (RSO 11).

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

- i) *Progress in decarbonising the Region's energy system including increasing renewable energy, including offshore potential, upgrading of energy transmission networks and roll out of smart grids to support renewables and micro production and support for the role of community generation and renewable energy use in industrial areas.*

Renewable Electricity Division

The development of renewable energy is central to achieving the Region's climate ambitions and the overall energy policy in Ireland. Renewable energy reduces dependence on fossil fuels, improves security of supply, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions creating environmental benefits while delivering green jobs to the economy, thus contributing to the Region's national competitiveness. Climate change, energy security and competitiveness are inter-related challenges that will be addressed through the transforming of the economy from one based on fossil fuel dependence to a low carbon economy based around energy efficiency, renewable energy, and smart networks.

The Programme for Government states that a reliable supply of safe, secure, and clean energy is essential in order to deliver the phase-out of fossil fuels. The Government is committed to the rapid decarbonisation of the energy sector and will take the necessary actions to deliver 80% renewable electricity by 2030.

Substantial commitments were made under the Climate Change and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, including the reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 51% by 2030 and the introduction of legally binding carbon budgets and sectoral ceilings. Ireland's legally binding carbon budget programme includes the reduction of electricity emissions by 75% by 2030 and limiting CO₂eq. emissions for electricity over the first two budget periods to 60 MtCO₂eq.

The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) provides a detailed plan for taking decisive action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall GHG emissions by 2030, setting Ireland on a path to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050. Ireland has increased the ambition across the electricity generation sector, with a target that 80% of electricity will come from renewable electricity sources by 2030. To achieve this Ireland aims to have 9 GW of onshore wind and 8 GW of solar by 2030, and support at least 500 MW of local community-based renewable energy projects and increased levels of new micro-generation and small-scale generation.

Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework

There is an urgent need to accelerate the energy transition and achieve a more resilient energy system. Additional onshore wind and solar energy within the Region will play a critical role in the accelerated energy transition, given the significant resource potential in the area as well as the need to develop renewable energy projects in closer proximity to areas of high electricity demand, which will reduce the need for additional investment in grid reinforcement.

A supportive policy framework for renewable electricity generation development at national, regional, and local level is critical to ensuring the successful delivery of the renewable electricity targets under the CAP 23. In this respect, work commenced in 2022 on a Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF) to ensure a more facilitative and supportive spatial planning framework for the delivery of increased onshore renewable electricity generation, to enable the delivery of Ireland's national energy and climate objectives, as set out in the CAP 23. The RESPF will create a framework within which all stakeholders should operate in order to achieve the delivery of Ireland's national onshore renewable electricity targets.

The RESPF, scheduled to be launched in 2023, will establish a clearly articulated national policy and will see the allocation of regional spatial and renewable generation capacity targets, together with a number of supporting principles and policies which will underpin the successful delivery of the regional renewable electricity targets and Ireland's accelerated renewables programme.

As committed to in CAP 23, a Roadmap in relation to the RESPF is currently being developed in collaboration between the Department and the three regional assemblies to assist with and guide the development of the individual Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies (RRES) strategies. This will streamline the drafting of these strategies whilst enabling a consistent approach.

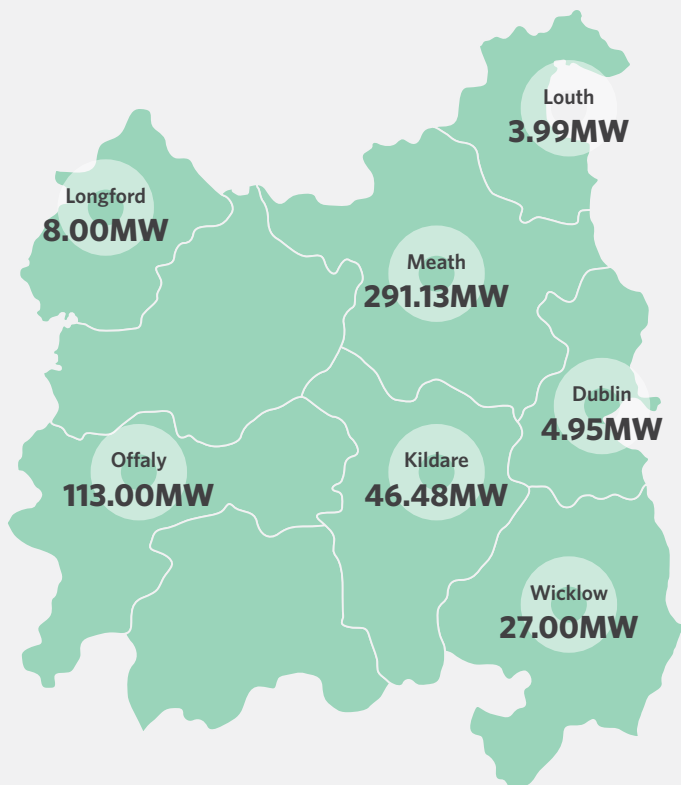
Onshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS)

The technology levels given are indicative and for electricity the level of each technology will be driven by technology costs and competitive auctions under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) as well as major private sector funding through Corporate Power Purchase Agreements. RESS provides a guaranteed price to generators, as decided through a competitive auction, for a nominal 15-year period.

The first RESS auction (RESS 1), held in 2020, had 479 MW of successful onshore wind energy projects and 796 MW of successful solar energy projects. A total of 1836 MW of renewable generation was successful in the second auction (RESS 2), representing a nearly 20% increase on Ireland's current renewable electricity generation capacity. The successes of the first two RESS auctions meant that 2022 was a record year for renewable electricity generation connection in Ireland.

In RESS 1, the Eastern and Midland Region accounted for 39% of the successful capacity in the auction. This comprises 23 projects with a combined capacity of 494 MW as broken down in the table below. While this is encouraging, it is noted that there are only 4 onshore wind projects in the Region coming through the first two RESS auctions. If this trend continues, Ireland will not be in a position to meet its targets of 80% renewables by 2030 and comply with the electricity carbon budgets.

RESS 1



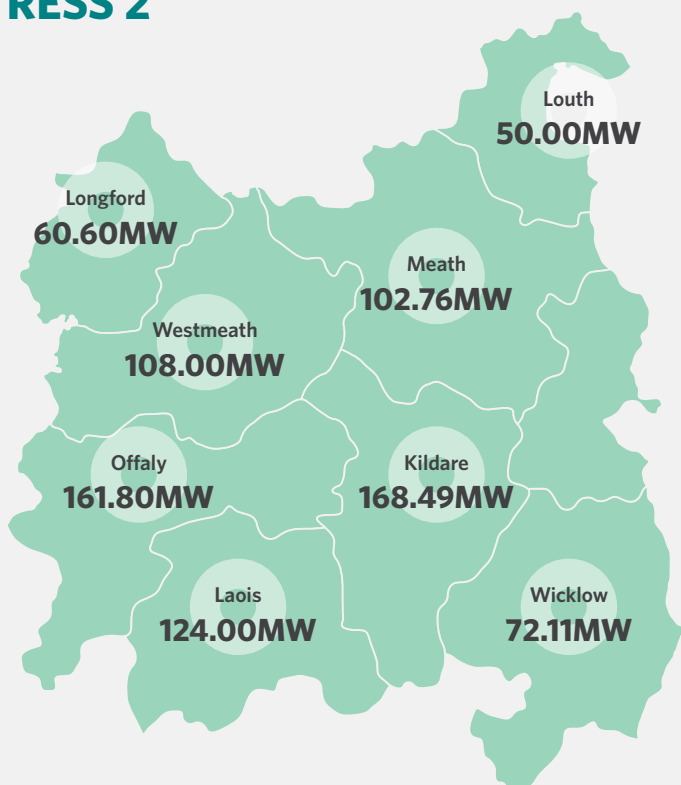
Solar Projects



Wind Projects

	Solar Projects	Wind Projects
Dublin	1	0
Kildare	7	0
Longford	1	0
Louth	1	0
Meath	7	0
Offaly	1	2
Wicklow	3	0

RESS 2



Solar Projects



Wind Projects

	Solar Projects	Wind Projects
Kildare	6	0
Laois	1	1
Longford	2	0
Louth	1	0
Meath	5	0
Offaly	3	1
Westmeath	3	0
Wicklow	4	0

In RESS 2, the Eastern and Midland Region accounted for 46% of the successful capacity in the auction.

This comprises 27 projects with a combined capacity of 847.76 MW as broken down in the table below.

The Government is committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 and an annual reduction of 4.8% over the first Carbon Budget period and 8.3% over the second period to 2030, including through maximising the amount of renewable energy on the grid. Future advances in system flexibility, storage technologies including batteries and green hydrogen as well as regional and international interconnection will enable very high levels of renewable electricity on the grid.

A strong future pipeline of onshore wind and solar projects from the Eastern and Midland Region is now absolutely critical to participate in the future programme of RESS auctions over the coming years in order for Ireland to meet its first two carbon budgets for the electricity sector and deliver on 80% renewable electricity target sets out in the CAP 23. The importance of the Region to Ireland's security of supply and matching renewable generation to demand cannot be overstated.



Renewable Energy Communities (RECs)

Community renewable energy projects will play an important role in the transition to an electricity grid that is up to 80% powered by renewables by 2030. The RESS supports communities in a variety of ways, including through a separate category for community projects and a mandatory community benefit fund for every project supported in the scheme.

Through the Department's continued engagement with Renewable Energy Communities (RECs), there is evidence of significant challenges REC projects may face with the competitive, auction-based nature of RESS. Therefore, from 2024, support for communities for the development of renewable projects will transition to the non-competitive Small-Scale Generation Scheme (SSGS), which is due to be launched later this year. The scheme aims to support renewable electricity generators above 50kW but smaller than those supported in the RESS. The scheme will thus align more closely to the capacity of the community energy sector, thus ensuring a more sustainable delivery of the renewable energy community target of 500MW by 2030. A consultation process on the high-level design of SSGS took place in Autumn 2022. Stakeholder feedback is being reviewed and where relevant incorporated into the final design of the SSGS.

In order to ensure an adequate pipeline of community renewable electricity projects, SEAI administers a range of capacity-building supports including an information warehouse, trusted intermediary and advisor services, and financial grant supports, all of which are vital to support community-owned RESS projects in being built.

The most recent grid policy designed by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities included significant relaxations for community projects and the Department has established a RESS Communities Steering Board, made up of the key state players and several community advocates, to provide strategic guidance on how best to maximise community involvement in RESS.

Community energy projects and the community benefit fund will play a major role in the Eastern and Midland Region, particularly in the context of the just transition and harnessing the history and potential of the region as an energy provider for local communities and the country.

Microgeneration Support Scheme - MSS

Micro-generation is the general term used to refer to the generation of electricity from renewable technologies including solar PV, micro-wind, micro-hydro and micro-renewable combined heat and power (CHP). Micro-generation has an important role to play in empowering and driving engagement and participation. It creates opportunities for domestic, community, farming and small commercial customers to take the first steps towards investment in renewable technologies, which can play a role in shaping electricity demand and decarbonising homes and businesses.

The Government's Micro-Generation Support Scheme (MSS) is targeting 380MW of new renewable generation capacity to contribute to an overall revised target for solar PV of up to 8GW by 2030, under the CAP 23. This would generate over 300 GWh of renewable electricity per annum, with the potential to abate 1.4 million tonnes of CO₂eq over the lifetime of the installations. This amounts to 60,000 homes and 9,000 non-domestic installations, such as small farms and businesses, schools and community groups etc.

The MSS provides support to domestic and non-domestic applicants for renewable installations up to 50kW. The first phase saw the commencement of the MSS domestic solar PV grant on the 16th of February 2022, with grants available through the SEAI, up to a maximum of €2,400.

Since the introduction of the MSS domestic grant in February 2022, the SEAI have seen application levels rise sharply. In 2022, the SEAI received 16,819 applications to the Domestic Solar PV programme, which resulted in grant support for 10,018 homes, at a cost of €24.4m and a total installed capacity of 46.5 MW. This indicates an average installation size of 4.6kW. This is a significant increase from 2021, where 4,077 homes received grant support, with 16.3 MW capacity installed. Moreover, current projections for 2023 indicate an even higher level of applications will be supported.

The second phase of the MSS commenced on the 22nd of September 2022, when the SEAI extended the solar PV grant scheme to the non-domestic sector, including schools, businesses, small farms and community enterprises, for installations up to 6kW.

Key changes from the previous pilot scheme for domestic solar PV include the removal of the minimum BER C requirement and the extension of eligibility to homes built before 2021 (up from 2011). This has significantly increased the number of homes now eligible for grant support.

The final phase of the MSS involves the introduction of a Clean Export Premium (CEP) feed in tariff, which will offer a guaranteed export tariff support for new non-domestic installations between 6kW and 50kW in size. The tariff will be fixed for 15 years and is expected to be available later in 2023, following the completion of an implementation plan by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU).

These applicants will also be eligible to avail of the Clean Export Guarantee (CEG) tariff. The CEG tariff represents a key aspect of a comprehensive enabling framework for micro and small-scale generators in Ireland which allows them to receive payment from their electricity supplier for all excess renewable electricity they export to the grid, reflective of the market value of the electricity. Tariff rates currently range from €13.5c/kWh to €24c/kWh. The CEG became available upon the transposition of Article 21 of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) into Irish law on the 15th of February 2022, to both new and existing micro and small-scale generators.

Grid Development

Investment in the electricity grid is regulated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). In 2020 CRU sanctioned a €4 billion capital investment spend on the grid over the 2021-2025 five-year period, reflecting Government's ambition to facilitate a low carbon future. The electricity system operators, EirGrid and ESB Networks, must use the funds to ensure the electricity grid is fit for purpose to underpin economic development and achieve energy and climate policy objectives, including decarbonisation. Of particular importance is the need to accommodate the high level of renewables being added to the system to meet the Government's 80% target as well as the increased demands from the electrification of Ireland's heat and transport sectors.

The CAP 23 requires EirGrid to update "Shaping our Electricity Future", its roadmap for future development of the electricity grid, for an electricity system with 80% of power coming from renewable sources. Shaping our Electricity Future 1.1 is due to be published by the end of Q2 2023.

Private Wires

The CAP 23 includes a commitment to carry out a public consultation on Private Wires and a deadline for publication of Q4 2023 has been set. The policy area of Private Wires is broad in nature and as such, detailed consideration must go into formulating the consultation in order to ensure that all aspects of the policy area are considered. Publishing a consultation and, ultimately, providing a clear policy position on the issue of Private Wires is a priority for the Department. Work on this policy area is ongoing within the Department with officials engaging directly in recent months with interested stakeholders as part of the consultation formulation process.

Electricity Storage

CAP 23 also recognises the important role of energy storage in facilitating the transition to higher levels of renewables on the system. Under CAP 23, the Department has committed to developing a storage policy that supports the 2030 targets and aligns with Ireland's renewable gas ambition, security of supply, and flexibility policy drivers by early Q3 2023. In combination, the CRU will be reviewing the regulatory treatment of storage, including licensing, charging and market incentives which is to be completed by end 2023.

Hydrogen Strategy

Hydrogen, including hydrogen-based fuels and derivatives, provides us with an incredible opportunity in Ireland. It provides the potential for long duration energy storage, dispatchable renewable electricity, the opportunity to decarbonise some parts of high temperature processing and a potential export market opportunity, given Ireland's offshore renewable energy potential. The Government has committed to targeting an initial 2GW of floating offshore wind, which will include projects available for green hydrogen production and other non-grid uses.

A hydrogen strategy for Ireland is being developed, with an anticipated completion timeline of Q2 2023. This strategy will set out the need for a robust safety and regulatory framework to be in place, as well as the need to ensure licensing and permitting procedures are in place to enable sustainable indigenously produced green hydrogen supply chains to develop.

INFOMAR

INFOMAR is Ireland's national marine mapping programme, jointly managed by Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) and the Marine Institute, and it creates a range of integrated mapping products of the physical, chemical and biological features of the seabed. Such comprehensive mapping supports offshore planning and development including Offshore Renewable Energy and can assist with de-risking location of offshore renewable and communication infrastructure.

- ii) *Progress in decarbonising buildings including in achieving energy efficiencies and retrofitting in existing buildings and Near Zero-Energy Building (NZEB) for new buildings.*

Residential Energy Efficiency Division

The Department notes that energy efficiency in new buildings and the building regulations are under the remit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. As such, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications has no input on these matters.

For existing buildings, the Government has put a number of supports in place across the residential, commercial and public sectors. These supports incentivise projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions by improving energy efficiency and increasing the use of renewable energy.

National Retrofit Plan

The National Retrofit Plan sets out the Government's approach to achieving the CAP targets of upgrading the equivalent of 500,000 homes to a Building Energy Rating (BER) of B2/cost optimal level and installing 400,000 heat pumps to replace older, less efficient heating systems by 2030.

In line with commitments in the Plan, in 2022 the Government launched a package of significantly enhanced supports to make it easier and more affordable for homeowners to undertake home energy upgrades. Following the introduction of the new measures:

- 27,200 home energy upgrades were supported in 2022, which represents a 79% increase year-on-year. Figures to end of March 2023 show that a further 9,946 home energy upgrades have been delivered in Q1 of this year.
- 4,438 homes were delivered across the fully funded schemes in 2022 which represents an increase of 85% year-on-year. Figures to the end of March 2023 show that a further 946 home energy upgrades completed under the fully funded schemes in Q1.
- 8,481 homes were upgraded to a post works BER or B2 or better in 2022, representing a 95% increase year-on-year. Figures to the end of March 2023, show that a further 3,304 homes have been upgraded to a post works BER of B2 or better in Q1.

The Department is working with SEAI to build on the strong performance of 2022. A record €356 million in funding has been allocated to SEAI for residential and community retrofit for 2023 to support the delivery of 37,000 retrofits this year.

Public Sector Climate Action Strategy 2023-2025

The Public Sector Climate Action Strategy 2023-2025, published in March 2023, was a commitment under the CAP 21 and CAP 23. The Public Sector Mandate 2023 GPP requirements and Public Sector Climate Action Strategy 2023-2025 GPP advice represent a further step towards a circular economy, and a commitment that the public sector will not install heating systems that use fossil fuels after 2023, subject to specified exceptions.



Heat Policy Division

Heat and Built Environment Taskforce

The Heat and Built Environment Taskforce has been established to accelerate and drive delivery in relation to retrofitting, renewable heat, district heat, decarbonisation and overall energy use needs of the building stock. The aim of the Taskforce is to identify work on the critical path and ensuring alignment in the development of policies and activities underway across Government Departments and proactively managing risks to ensure targets are achieved. The Taskforce, which includes attendance by the Minister, has met four times this year and the next meeting is scheduled for June 2023. The membership of the Taskforce aligns with the initial allocation of Ministerial responsibilities for the Sectoral Emissions Ceilings agreed by Government. The Taskforce is being supported by other groups established to examine specific aspects of its remit, including: industry, public sector, residential retrofit, biomethane, and district heating. High level actions to be taken in respect of these areas have been set out in the CAP 23.

Heat Policy Statement

Work on the development of a Heat Policy Statement is in progress, as set out in CAP 23 and the National Energy Security Framework. It is expected that a draft Heat Policy Statement will be published for public consultation in the first half of 2023, as well as undergoing a screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Roadmap for Phase out of Fossil Fuel Boilers

CAP 2023 commits to develop and publish, by Q4 2023, a roadmap, under the auspices of the Heat and Built Environment Delivery Taskforce, to phase out fossil fuel heating systems in all buildings. All options are currently under consideration, including the requirement to ensure a just transition to any alternative heat sources. As a consequence, there has been no commitment made thus far by Government to phase out oil and gas boilers in existing dwellings within a specified timeframe.

In terms of new dwellings, Part L of the Building Regulations is performance-based and technology neutral and through these fossil fuel boilers in new dwellings are phased out by advancing regulatory performance requirements. This result is it is no longer practical to install fossil fuel boilers as the primary heating system in new dwellings and as such heat pumps are now the main heating system in most.

National Geothermal Energy Summit

Geological Survey Ireland (GSI), a division of the Department, held the first National Geothermal Energy Summit on 9th November 2022 at TU Dublin's Grangegorman campus. This event brought together experts from the worlds of policy, industry, and research to discuss the vision for the future of geothermal energy in Ireland. Plans are currently underway to develop a number of Deep Geothermal Demonstration projects, in the Dublin area, to support decarbonisation through District Heating systems.

Climate Action Roadmap for the Department

The Public Sector Climate Action Mandate 2022 derived from the Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP 21) requires each Department to prepare a Climate Action Roadmap to report on progress towards achieving the GHG emission reduction and energy efficiency target's set out in CAP 21.

The Department's Roadmap outlines the work undertaken by the Department to date and plans to reduce carbon emissions from the Department's buildings and transport operations by reducing energy usage and shifting energy sources from fossil fuels towards renewable and carbon zero energy sources.

New Head Office for the Department

The Department's current head office is at Adelaide Road, and at present, the Department participates in the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Optimising Power at Work campaign which monitors energy use.

In January 2022, the OPW, on the Department's behalf, commenced a deep retrofit of Tom Johnston House, Haddington Road, Dublin 4, which will become the Department's new head office in early 2024. This OPW flagship project will deliver a publicly owned, Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) with a BER rating of A2 which will significantly assist the Department to achieve the 2030 targets. The project includes transitioning away from fossil fuels to use of heat pump technology and solar panels as well as LED lighting throughout the building.

The Department will continue to use the Optimising Power at Work campaign when it moves offices. The Department will also continue to manage energy use in its existing buildings.

National Core Store

Work is underway with Geological Survey Ireland to progress OPW plans to develop a National Core Store which would be NZEB or energy negative, including solar panels and a geothermal space heating demonstrator.

Reduce Your Use Campaign

From October 2022 to March 2023 the Department participated in the Reduce Your Use Campaign. Thanks to the energy savings actions undertaken across the Department, the final outturn for the campaign was a reduction of 267,956 kWh of energy (31%) used in the three buildings selected for the campaign in comparison with the same six-month period in the 2019 baseline (October-March). This figure represents a combined savings from reducing the amount of electricity and heating fuels used in the Department's buildings. Notably, the Department used 16% less electricity and 41% less heating in 2022-23 when compared to the same period in 2019.

iii) Progress in decarbonising the transport sector, including transition to low emissions and electric vehicles and facilitating roll out of EV charging infrastructure and priority parking

Responsibility for the decarbonisation of the transport sector lies with the Department of Transport. The Climate Action Plan 2023, prepared by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, sets out the Government's action in respect of the transport sector. See Section 5.1.2.9 in this regard.



Geological Survey Ireland (GSI)

Geological Survey Ireland compiled and published a report on 'Green Metals: Demand Arising from Decarbonisation of Energy and Transport Sectors' in March 2023.

GSI has also commenced a review of their operations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This review will include the following actions.

- Examine feasibility of biofuel/HVO use, and its availability, for trucks, off-road drilling rigs and survey vessels.
- Develop a plan to replace diesel vehicles with electric or hybrid as they become available, and replacement is required.
- Examine feasibility of electric drilling equipment
- Maintain a watching brief on availability and suitability of electric or hybrid survey vessels.
- Examine working practices regarding 4WD vehicle use, to see if mapping and monitoring operations could be supplemented through use of drones and electric offroad vehicles.

Once this review is completed the methodology to quantify energy savings will be developed and a timeframe for the implementation of actions identified will be included in the revised Department's Climate Action Roadmap in Q3 2023.



iv) Progress in accelerating transition to low carbon and circular economy and society, for more sustainable management of natural resources, and realising blue growth and bioeconomy opportunities

Circular Economy Strategic Policy Division

Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022

In 2022 the Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 became law and represents a robust legislative framework for significantly improving Ireland's recycling and re-use rates, and for reducing the use of a wide range of single-use disposable items. A number of measures provided for in the Act are now coming on stream and will improve waste segregation, incentivise recycling and reduce consumption of certain single-use disposable items.

Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023

Significant pro-circular policy and legislation has been introduced since 2021. In that year the Whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023 was published, which committed to making Ireland a Circular Economy leader in Europe by the end of the decade. Ireland's Circular Economy Programme (2021 to 2027) was also published in 2021 by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The vision for the programme is an Ireland where the Circular Economy ensures that everyone uses less resources and prevents waste to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Circular Economy Innovation Grant (CEIG)

A Circular Economy Innovation Grant (CEIG) scheme was launched in 2021, which has so far awarded approximately €1.1m in funding for circular projects. The Circular Economy Strategy commits to increasing CEIGs funding year-on-year to reach €1m per annum by 2024.

A National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap

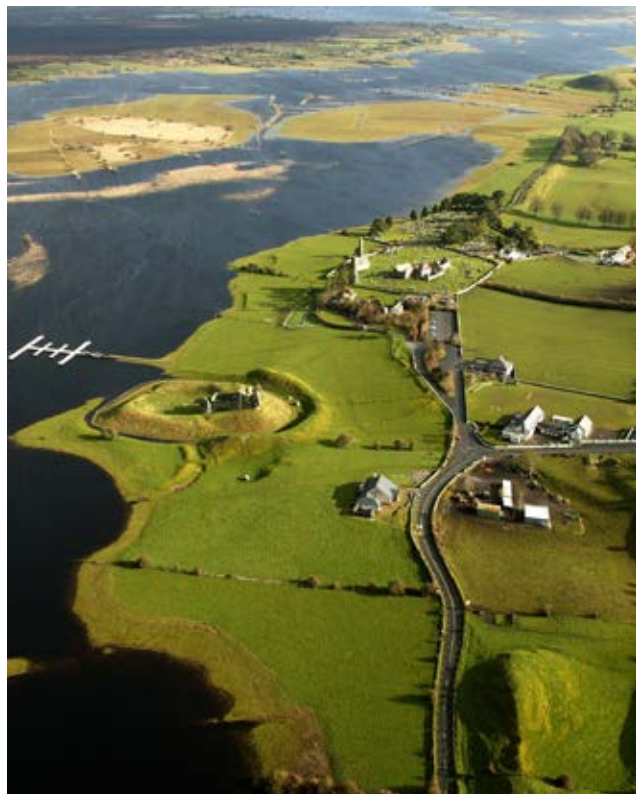
A National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap was published in November 2022, which sets out priority actions to bring the focus on food waste prevention, across key sectors in the food supply chain, together in a coherent manner.

Sustainable Management of Natural Resources

Through the Coastal Change Assessment project, GSI is producing shoreline change rates and coastal vulnerability mapping, with anticipated data releases for Dublin Metropolitan area by Q4 2023 and the Eastern coastal counties (including Louth, Meath and Wicklow) by Q2 2024.

The Tellus airborne geophysical mapping survey has been completed for over 75% of the country including all of the EMRA area. This data is being used to update geological mapping, including extents of important groundwater aquifers and to assist potential for mineral exploration, including for Critical Raw Materials within the region. Much of this data has been released along with geophysical maps of the region on the GSI website.

Geochemical soil sampling has also been completed in the southeast region, including County Wicklow. This information is crucial in understanding the chemistry of the soil and is useful in a number of projects supporting the agricultural, environmental, mineral and geological sectors.



Geoscience Policy Division

Policy on Petroleum Exploration and Production

A Policy Statement on Petroleum Exploration and Production in Ireland was published in August 2022, replacing the 2019 “Policy Statement - Petroleum Exploration and Production Activities as part of Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Economy”, in order to reflect the current policy and legislative position of the Government on Petroleum Exploration and Production, and to provide clarity to stakeholders in relation to future authorisations which may be granted under legislation.

This Policy Statement outlines the commitment contained in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future to end the issuing of new licences for the exploration and extraction of gas on the same basis as the decision taken in 2019 by the previous Government in relation to oil exploration and extraction.

This means that whilst no new authorisations for new exploration will be granted, existing authorisations will not be affected by this change. Holders of existing authorisations can continue to apply to progress through the standard licensing lifecycle stages towards a natural conclusion, which may include expiry, relinquishment, or production.

Any applications for follow-on authorisations or applications to undertake offshore activities under an authorisation are subject to Ministerial consent and must continue to meet environmental, technical, and financial criteria as appropriate.

Irish Offshore Strategic Environmental Assessment (IOSEA6)

To facilitate existing authorisation holders in being able to seek to progress their authorisations, the Department has commenced its sixth Irish Offshore Strategic Environmental Assessment (IOSEA6). This involves a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate assessment of the Departments “Plan for issue of Petroleum Exploration and Production Authorisations in Irish Offshore Waters for the period to 2030”.

This Plan will set out the proposed approach to the issuing of petroleum authorisations, and the consideration of the possible offshore exploration activities that could take place under petroleum authorisations. It takes into account all the policy changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent years, including the placing of the commitment to end the issuing of new licences for new exploration and extraction on a statutory basis. This Plan was made available as part of a consultation process at the end of 2022 and is currently in the process of being finalised.

Policy Statement on Geothermal Energy

A draft Policy Statement on Geothermal Energy for a Circular Economy is due to be submitted to Government for approval and is expected to be published in the coming weeks. The draft Statement outlines the approach to be taken in regulating shallow and deep geothermal systems, including licensing the exploration for and the utilisation of deep sources of geothermal energy. It also sets out the scope for a strategy to promote the development of the sector, including the approach to be taken in engaging with the public, providing information resources and gathering data and bridging gaps in knowledge. The draft Policy Statement has been finalised with the assistance of the Geothermal Energy Advisory Group, informed by the submissions received on foot of a public consultation on the draft Policy Statement. The development of the draft Statement is an important step in addressing the barriers to the development of geothermal energy in Ireland and will focus attention on its potential.

Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining

A Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining– Critical Raw Materials for the Circular Economy Transition was published in December 2022. The policy for mineral exploration and mining underpinning the Policy Statement is to ensure a stable, robust, and transparent regulatory framework that supports environmentally sustainable mineral exploration and mining; and to maximise the contribution that sustainable exploration and mining can make to Irish society, economic development and the transition to a circular economy and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through the supply of the raw materials necessary for sustainable development.

The Statement sets out principles, grouped under five themes of Robust and Stable Regulation; Increasing Awareness and Participation; Sustainable Development; Building Capacity and Access to Knowledge; and International Co-operation and some specific actions have been identified to implement the policy. An Advisory Group on Minerals Exploration and Mining has been established which the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications will consult on the implementation of the Policy Statement, which includes a review of the regulatory processes and measures to support public awareness and participation. Implementation of the Policy Statement will also take into account the outcome of the EU Critical Raw Materials Act which is currently under negotiation at European level.

- v) *Progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with agreed national sectoral plans and 2030 targets, and support for undertaking emissions monitoring at a regional and local authority level*

Environment and Climate Action Plan Delivery

The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) was published in December 2022 by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, which supersedes the Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP 21). The Department has made progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through renewable electricity, hydrogen strategy, energy efficiency and Heat Policy Statement. By the end of 2021 the Department had achieved savings of 47.1% towards the 2030 energy efficiency target.

The Department has a Green Team whose mission is to implement practices to help reduce the organisation's environmental footprint and to promote 'green' and wellbeing practices among employees and suppliers in order to achieve the goals identified in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023. These include the Department's aim to be a recognised leader in climate action, to transform the Department's energy system for a net zero emissions future and to transition to a circular economy-protecting and restoring the environment through sustainable resource use. The Green Team are currently preparing an Opportunities Register which will identify additional ways to reduce the Department's carbon footprint. Members of the Team have completed the National Green Team Training Course and the Department is liaising with SEAI on the organisation of appropriate training for all staff.

Ireland's EU Just Transition Plan and Programme

Following approval by the Government on the 29th of November 2022, the European Commission adopted Ireland's Territorial Just Transition Plan and associated Programme, incorporating €84.5 million of funding from the EU Just Transition Fund (EUJTF) for 2021 - 2027, on the 13th of December 2022. When national co-financing is included, this new Programme will provide for investments of up to €169 million, which will be targeted at the economic transition of the Midlands Region for the period up to 2027.

Ireland's first Territorial Just Transition Plan sets out the impacts on the region as a result of the ending of peat extraction for energy production and identifies the development needs and priorities for the territory in order to address these impacts. A public consultation on the draft Territorial Just Transition Plan was carried out in 2022, to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to input.

The purpose of the EU Just Transition Programme is to address the adverse effects of the climate transition by supporting the most affected territories and workers and to promote a balanced socio-economic transition. This supports those most impacted by moving away from fossil fuels to leverage new economic opportunities presented by move to an economic model based on Net Zero emissions, aligning with the Climate Action Plan. It sets out the investment priorities and planned allocation of up to €169 million of investments to address the development needs identified in the Territorial Plan.

Investments under the EUJTF in Ireland will be targeted at the Midlands, including the entire counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon and Municipal Districts of Ballinasloe (Co. Galway), Athy and Clane-Maynooth (Co. Kildare), and Carrick-on-Suir and Thurles (Co. Tipperary) most impacted by the cessation of commercial peat extraction.

The Programme will be managed by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), focusing on three strategic priorities:

- Priority 1** - Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy by supporting productive investments in enterprise, SMEs and community actions, focusing on sectors and activities which can address the economic challenge of the transition for example regenerative tourism - business supports, bioeconomy initiatives and a grants scheme for implementation of Local Economic and Community Plans and regional enterprise development supports.
- Priority 2** - The restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and the regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets to enable the transition towards climate-neutrality while also facilitating the diversification and modernisation of the economy of the Territory. This priority includes support for wetlands restoration, tourism trails network and work on farm peat soils.
- Priority 3** - Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition by supporting clean, green mobility to build regional attractiveness and support economic development. This priority includes support towards the Electrification of Rural Link services, Electrification of commercial bus services and EV destination charging infrastructure.

The EUJTF will contribute to the RSES objectives and outcomes in the Midlands Region including in relation to decarbonising transport, bioeconomy and biodiversity and nature heritage.

vi) Progress in the preparation of a national Landscape Character Assessment to inform the identification of Strategic Energy zones as areas suitable for larger scale renewable energy generation projects.

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications is reviewing any emerging requirements under the recast renewable energy directive and will engage with the relevant stakeholders as required.

vii) Progress in achieving good air quality for all urban and rural areas in the Region and incorporating the objectives of the EU Environmental Noise Directive.

Environmental Noise Protection

Ireland gave further effect to the assessment and management of environmental noise by way of S.I 663 of 2021. This amending Regulation established a common framework to avoid, prevent or reduce, on a prioritised basis, the harmful effects of exposure to environmental noise. It has permitted the establishment of dose-effect relations to be introduced and established common noise assessment methods.

Noise Action Plans & Strategic Noise Maps

Local authorities (LAs) are required under SI No 549 of 2018, which implements the Environmental Noise Directive (END), to report progress each year on the implementation of their Noise Action Plans (NAPs). The EPA reviewed the NAPs and supplied feedback to the local authorities including on areas where improvements were considered warranted. Measures implemented include the introduction of sustainable transport measures, principally pedestrianisation and various initiatives to encourage walking and cycling, speed limit reductions and pavement rehabilitation.

Findings from the EPA's Noise-Adapt research projects focus group with local authorities identified the need for a more centralised approach for strategic noise mapping to ensure consistency and to avoid difficulties related to managing various departments involved in the process.

During 2021 the Department worked with the County and City Management Association (CCMA) to establish a more centralised approach to Strategic Noise Mapping. This involved the addition of the Roads Management Agency into the process and the establishment of a project manager within Dublin City Council to lead the work of the agglomerations. This has enhanced the process and has led to better co-ordination and resource sharing.

Health Risks of Environmental Noise Pollution

Minister of the Environment, Climate and Communications has signed regulations for noise health risk assessments to be used to estimate and communicate the risks to health of exposure to noise pollution in Ireland.

The WHO Environmental Noise Guidelines 2018 provide exposure response functions for health outcomes, including annoyance and sleep disturbance, as well as risk ratios for cardiovascular health outcomes. These provide the basis for quantifying the number of people suffering from specific health effects due to noise.

The range and magnitude of negative health impacts of noise in Europe are significant, with many suffering effects such as annoyance, sleep disturbance, ischaemic heart disease, mortality due to ischaemic heart disease and even learning impairments in children. People in urban areas are most affected, and the main source contributing to negative health effects is road traffic noise.

These health risk assessments can also be used to estimate the health benefits of changes in exposure resulting from the introduction of policies, mitigation measures in Noise Action Plans or other initiatives. Results will quantify the concrete health effects of noise in Ireland and will be easily understood by the public and other stakeholders.

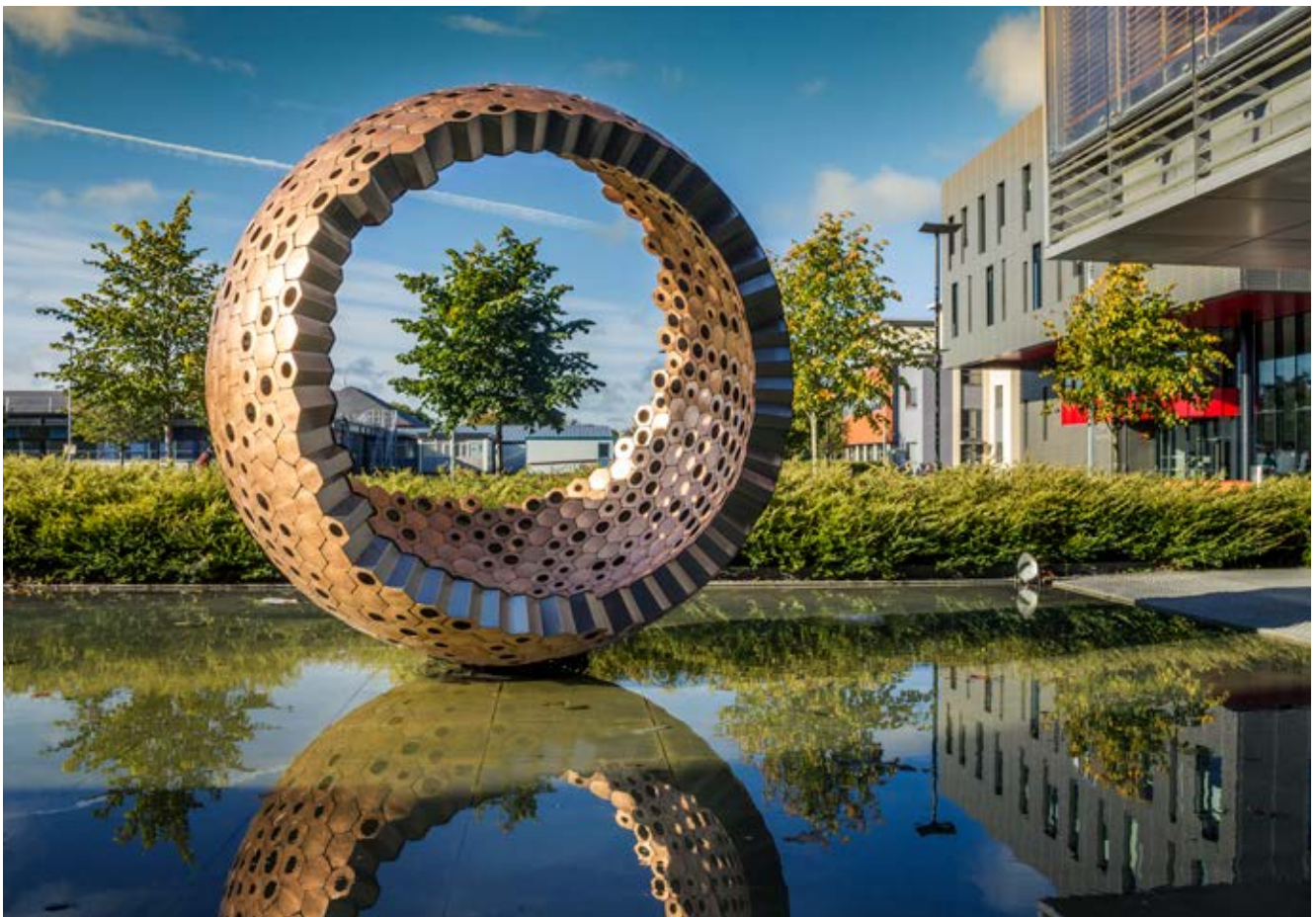
viii) *The role of digitalisation in enhancing urban and rural regeneration, supporting development of a network of co-working/remote working hubs and smart cities, towns and villages in the Region, including delivery of the national broadband plan and future communications networks.*

National Broadband Plan Division

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the initiative to rollout high-speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in almost 560,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms, along with 679 schools, where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service. It is expected that eventually over 600,000 premises will be served by the NBP, including new builds.

As of 28th April 2023, over 381,300 premises have had detailed designs completed, and over 147,600 premises were available for order/pre-order. In addition, 136,270 premises were passed and able to avail of a high-speed broadband connection, with 38,877 premises already connected.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are public locations which have been selected to receive high-speed connectivity as part of the NBP in areas with poor broadband coverage including many of Ireland's offshore islands. In the Eastern and Midland region, 74 BCPs were in place by the end of April 2023, 72 of which were open for business and providing high speed broadband services to communities. These locations include places of community importance including community centres, library hubs, local sports facilities, tourism locations and other public places. There were also 113 school Strategic Connection Points (school SCPs) in the Eastern and Midland region that had a connection installed by the end of April 2023 and 74 of these schools were provided with high-speed connectivity.



B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of your Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency.

Commission for Communication Regulation (ComReg)

Climate Action Measures

The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) commits that public sector bodies will complete their individual Climate Action Roadmaps by the end of Q1 2023. ComReg's forthcoming roadmap explains how the organisation aims to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate as set out in CAP 21 - and as updated in CAP 23 - and reach its 2030 carbon and energy efficiency targets. The ComReg Roadmap is based on the SEAI/EPA Public Sector guidance for the preparation of Climate Action Roadmaps. In accordance with the guidance, this first Roadmap is focused on ComReg's plans for reducing total energy related emissions and fossil fuel related emissions from its operations. The scope of the roadmap may be expanded in future iterations to include other non-energy GHG, indirect emissions, and adaptation to climate change. ComReg will continue to put in place necessary measures, where possible, in order to reduce its Carbon Footprint, in line with the government's annual Climate Action Plan and other initiatives.



Digital Economy

ComReg understands the importance of digitalisation in enhancing rural and urban regeneration. Ireland's modern digitally connected society and economy is highly dependent on reliable and secure ECN and ECS. They form the backbone of much of Ireland's critical national infrastructure providing connectivity to the essential services upon which citizens rely, such as healthcare providers, energy providers, financial institutions, emergency services and public administration. ComReg is aware that consumer experience is not uniform and that there is a risk of citizens being left behind ("digital divide"). Those living in rural areas are at risk of missing out on the benefits of digitalisation due to the low incentives for commercial rollout in these areas.

ComReg aims to create an environment that supports efficient investment and innovation in both fixed and mobile communications markets to support the roll-out of Very High-Capacity Networks (VHCN) to all areas.

On the mobile market side, in the Multi-Band spectrum award (MBSA2) 2022, coverage obligations were included that ensure licence winners must provide:

- 3 Mbit/s to 99% of the population within 3 years and 92% of the geographic area of Ireland within 7 years;
- 30 Mbit/s to 95% of the population, 90% of motorways, and 80% of primary roads within 7 years; and
- 30 Mbit/s service to 345 specific locations within 7 years, consisting of 40 business and technology parks (including "strategic sites"), 65 hospitals, 24 higher education campuses, 14 air and seaports, 160 train and bus stations, and 42 top visitor attraction information points.

On the fixed market side, ComReg supports the rollout of the National Broadband Plan and also aims to maintain an environment of regulatory certainty so that investment in VHCN is encouraged.

Digital Hub Development Agency

The Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA) has reduced its energy consumption meeting the targets for 30% reduction in 2020 and is continuing to work towards the 2030 targets for further reduction of energy consumption and reduction of GHG emissions.

In recent years, the DHDA has completed the following projects:

- Installation of solar panels on the roof of the Digital Depot (2021), with a maximum output of 13.5kW.
- Replacement of end-of-life boilers in Digital Depot & The Gatelodge (2022) and 157 Thomas Street (2018) with more efficient natural gas condensing boilers.
- Replacement of end-of-life UPS equipment with more efficient unit, eliminating significant energy waste (2022).
- Insulation works in the south façade of the Digital Depot building (2017)
- LED retrofit for all lights that needed replacement across campus including emergency lights.

In 2023 the DHDA will complete the following:

- Replacement of end-of-life oil boiler for a modern more efficient natural gas condensing boiler in 10-13 Thomas Street, significantly decreasing the GHG emissions associated with this building.
- Continue the LED lights retrofit across campus.
- Review current bicycle parking areas to add spaces for secure scooter parking.

In the coming years the DHDA will seek to complete the following:

- Increase the on-site renewable energy generation.
- Continue the LED lights retrofit.
- Improve the insulation of building walls and windows.
- Install Electric Vehicle charger points to foment the use of electric vehicles amongst clients and staff.
- Electrification of heating systems in buildings with small footprint such at Thomas Court.
- Upgrade of end-of-life air conditioning systems with more efficient units.
- Upgrade the showers and changing facilities to foment cycling and other forms of clean commuting.
- In relation to the biodiversity and natural heritage, the DHDA has facilitated the installation of beehives on site and has sponsored the installation of beehives in the Dublin 8 area through the Bee8 program. The DHDA has also engaged local community groups in the annual harvest of the pear tree situated beside St. Patrick's tower, and supported grafting of Ireland's oldest fruit bearing tree, the famous Digital Hub pear tree.

In addition to above:

- Cycling to work has been actively supported and promoted across the campus.
- Waste segregation facilities have been installed across the campus and actively promoted.
- The Digital Hub has actively promoted the campus for green technology companies and strived to build a cluster of green technology companies.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The EPA use a variety of energy sources to power and heat its buildings. Sources include biomass (wood chip and pellet), natural gas, thermal solar, photovoltaic (PV), bio-petroleum gas (bio-LPG), kerosene and electricity (air-to-water heat pumps). Electricity is purchased from 100% renewable sources via OGP Frameworks. In 2021, the EPA partnered with external energy efficiency experts and commissioned thorough energy audits for all EPA locations. The audits identified the existing building fabric, current energy use and carbon emissions for each building as well as identifying the significant energy users in each building.

In their Dublin Campus buildings (located in the EMRA region), the EPA confirms they undertook detailed energy audits, which allowed them to identify focussed actions to decarbonise their Dublin buildings.

These actions build on previously implemented action in Dublin and include:

- LED lighting installation at an advanced stage in McCumiskey House Dublin (9tn CO₂e predicted savings)
- Solar PV upgrade design completed and plans to install Solar PV in our Dublin Campus in 2023.
- Improve the building fabric through Internal wall insulation and upgrading external windows in 2024/2025.

The EPA also outline that they have a vehicle management policy in place which promotes the purchase of carbon efficient vehicles in their fleet. The EPA has electric vehicle charging points in all of its buildings with plans in place to upgrade them to the latest technology. Their vehicle fleet consists of a total of 33 vehicles, 27% of which are low emission vehicles which includes four electric vehicles (EV's) and five plug-in hybrids. A significant portion of the fleet is made up of four-wheel drives and light cargo vans, which are used for accessing challenging terrain for environmental monitoring, site visits, inspections, and the transportation of equipment. The EPA continues to promote cycling to work and provides secure bicycle parking and showers for cyclists.

The EPA's environmental management programme encompasses the circular economy in areas such as Green Public Procurement and reuse and recycling of furniture in all capital and refurbishment projects. While our impact on blue growth is limited based on our activities, we have ongoing actions to conserve water and have a number of ongoing projects such as reductions in sample sizes for analysis (reducing plastic), waterless urinals and rainwater harvesting. Water usage is monitored by monthly meter readings.

EPA Strategic Plan 2022-2026

The EPA's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 recognises the need to lead by example to reduce its energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions with a commitment to reduce their carbon emissions by 30% by 2026. Significant effort and capital investment have been made in recent years to reduce energy consumption and to use renewable energy sources where possible.

Key achievements across all EPA locations in the past year include:

- Carbon reporting supported by improved data processes
- 3 year rolling plan established for reducing emissions from buildings
- LED lighting projects complete in Wexford (39tn CO₂e predicted savings)
- LED lighting project advanced in McCumiskey House Dublin (9tn CO₂e predicted savings)
- Monaghan heating upgrade commenced (19tn CO₂e predicted savings)
- Solar PV upgrade design completed for all EPA locations (105tn CO₂e predicted savings)

The EPA maintains an Environmental Management System certified to ISO 14001:2015 Standard which allows them to identify and mitigate any impacts on the environment as a result of their activities. These initiatives are designed to help achieve the 2023 targets.

There are recognised synergies between protecting biodiversity and actions to prevent and adapt to climate change. The EPA commits to enhancing biodiversity at their offices with the aim of ensuring that the footprint on biodiversity ideally presents a net gain. The high-level plan is to ensure that we manage 50% of our available green spaces for biodiversity, which is applicable across all EPA locations.

The role of biodiversity in staff well-being initiatives is also being enhanced through the plan. This includes the establishment of outdoor meeting areas for staff, woodland walk areas, biodiversity walks and talks. Butterfly and bee monitoring, installation of swift boxes, wildlife planting and increased native planting have also been carried out at EPA locations to enhance, preserve, and protect biodiversity at the EPA. The EPA local Green Teams are leading the implementation of the biodiversity activities.

Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme

Monitoring of ambient air quality in Ireland is carried out by the EPA. The AAMP has undergone a significant upgrade in recent years and has expanded the network of stations from 29 to 111 to date.

The monitoring stations collect air quality data for a range of pollutants in order to provide information to the public and to ensure air quality is within the EU limit values. All stations and data are available on a dedicated EPA website.

Life Emerald Project

The EPA in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, funded by EU, are working on a project called LIFE EMERALD which will also improve Ireland's ambient air quality information and support greater monitoring and management capabilities. This will allow for greater understanding of air quality between current monitoring stations and at a more localised level across the region. It will also provide the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the factors contributing to poor air quality

Ecosystems Monitoring System

The monitoring of negative impacts of air pollution upon ecosystems based on a network of sites that is representative of their freshwater, natural and semi-natural habitats and forest ecosystem types, taking a cost-effective and risk-based approach. The initial stage of development of the network has been completed. The EPA has been working closely with NPWS, DAFM and other stakeholders to implement this report and establish the network.



Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

Supports and Resources

The SEAI has developed and published a suite of online resources that provide spatial breakdowns of key energy data, to support evidence-based policies and decision-making by local authorities and regional assemblies.

These online resources help inform the responses of local authorities and CAROs, specifically around the following line items, outlined in DECC's 2023 EMRA Monitoring Report submission:

- (a) Progress in decarbonising our energy system including increasing renewable energy, including offshore potential, upgrading of energy transmission networks and roll out of smartgrids to support renewables and micro production and support for the role of community generation and renewable energy use in industrial areas
- (b) Progress in decarbonising buildings including in achieving energy efficiencies and retrofitting in existing buildings and Near Zero-Energy Building (NZEB) for new buildings.
- (c) Progress in decarbonising the transport sector, including transition to low emissions and electric vehicles and facilitating roll out of EV charging infrastructure and priority parking.
- (f) Progress in protecting biodiversity and natural heritage and achieving improved conservation status of protected species and habitats in the Region in line with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, and to support the development of ecological networks and connectivity between protected sites while also addressing the need for management of alien species and conservation of native species.
- (h) Progress in the preparation of a national Landscape Character Assessment to inform the identification of Strategic Energy zones as areas suitable for larger scale renewable energy generation projects

Local authority Climate Action Plan (LA-CAP) dashboard

The SEAI has launched a local authority Climate Action Plan dashboard that aims to help support local authorities in researching and developing their LA-CAPs, by visualising and summarising key energy-related data, broken down to the local authority level. The dashboard allows local authorities, and the public, to explore different types of energy related data – wind capacity, number of home energy upgrades, BERs, etc – in an intuitive visual way, while allowing for re-analysis by 3rd party consultants through the downloading of data in a spreadsheet.

The initial release of the LA-CAP dashboard provides local authority level summaries in the following areas;

- Domestic BER
- Heat Demand
- Electric Vehicles
- Wind Generation (MEC)
- Solar PV Farm Generation
- Sustainable Energy Communities

Of further note is that the dashboard has also been incorporated into the Regional Development Monitor platform informing and monitoring the implementation of the 3 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES).

The SEAI has engaged with local authorities and the CAROs on how the current dashboard can be further extended to support their energy data needs, and they are working to implement as many of those suggestions as possible.

District Heating and Energy Maps

The SEAI has launched a District Heating Map platform on their website. This map shows initial modelled analysis by SEAI to identify towns and cities with the highest potential for developing Ireland's first district heating networks. District heating is a promising pathway for local authorities and CAROs to help decarbonise Ireland's heating sector. It is estimated in the National Heat Study that over 50% of Ireland's building stock would be suitable for connection to a district heating network, and Ireland's government has now set targets under the Climate Action Plan to deliver 2.7 TWh/year of heating through district heating by 2030. SEAI's District Heating Map supports LAs and CAROs in identifying-and-matching potential sources of waste heat (power plants, industrial sites, data centres, food production, and wastewater treatment sites) with potential "anchor loads" of heat demand (local authority offices and buildings, public and privately funded hospitals, state prisons, and publicly funded universities and colleges).

SEAI continues to service and expand its Suite of Energy Maps that provide key information on the spatial distribution of energy supply and demand across Ireland, and in different local authorities and regions - <https://www.seai.ie/technologies/seai-maps/>.

In addition to the District Heating Map mentioned above, these maps provide detailed spatial breakdowns of:

- Wind Energy - Wind Generators, Wind Speeds, NPWS Designated Areas, and Offshore Constraints
- Bio-Energy - Potential Gas Production through AD of Silage / Slurry, and Biomass crop suitability
- Geothermal Energy - Closed / Open Loop Heat Pump suitability
- Heat Demand - Area / Linear Heat Density, and by Sector
- Hydro Power - Potential Hydro sources, and hydro connections
- BER Map - Domestic / Non-Domestic BERs, and Geographic Divisions (County, LA, and Electoral Division)

The SEAI is rolling-out automated monthly and/or quarterly updates on several of these Energy Maps, to ensure they are as up-to-date as possible for local authorities and CAROs. Additionally, the SEAI will soon launch a new "Solar Atlas" that illustrates solar irradiance across the country, and the location of planned and connected grid-level solar farms. Furthermore, the SEAI is working to consistently geocode its various grant databases, to better map the distribution of SEAI-channelled investments in sustainable energy, e.g. home energy upgrades, etc. The SEAI is also trialling this community based social marketing to encourage home energy grant uptake. Here, SEAI's spatial analysis helps identify areas within local authorities and CAROs with higher proportions of poorly rated homes, or homes on oil-boilers, where home energy upgrades would bring the most benefit.



EirGrid

Hydrogen Policy, Electricity Networks and Systems

In November 2021 EirGrid published its 'Shaping Our Electricity Future' roadmap, a blueprint for radically transforming the country's electricity grid. EirGrid was requested by the Government to transform the electricity system in anticipation of a future without coal, oil, peat and ultimately one with net zero emissions. Specifically, EirGrid must redevelop the grid to manage the vast majority of Ireland's electricity coming from renewable sources by 2030. The Shaping Our Electricity Future roadmap is the result of a comprehensive 14-week consultation across all sectors of society and two years of research by industry experts and tens of millions of technical simulations. It provides an outline of the key developments needed from a networks, engagement, operations, and market perspective to support a secure transition to at least 70% renewables on the electricity grid by 2030. This is an important step on the journey towards up to 80% renewables target, which will present opportunities for further renewable generators, and ultimately, net zero by 2050. The plan comprises 40 new grid infrastructure projects, representing a total investment of over €1 billion. This is on top of an existing €2.2 billion programme of grid infrastructure projects which the EAP have already engaged with communities on and which they have funding for.

EirGrid has had regard to Section 10.3 of the RSES relating to Energy. Over the period of the RSES, and including subsequent to the last EMRA RSES Monitoring Report 2021, EirGrid has progressed a number of grid development projects set out in RPO 10.22 (see below).

It is noted that for a number of these projects occurring in the public domain, the Regional Assembly, and/or relevant planning authority have proactively engaged with EirGrid and in the consenting process by way of pre-application engagement and consent submissions.

- The Celtic interconnector project has received all statutory consents for offshore and onshore and is now in the construction phase.
- The North-South Interconnector project has received consents in Ireland and Northern Ireland and is now in the construction phase.
- A number of existing circuits and substation nodes across the region and country have been or are being upgraded to ensure higher capacity on the existing network.
- A number of customer renewable generation projects have been or are being connected to the National Grid.
- EirGrid is actively engaged with statutory stakeholders, as well as with communities and landowners, for identifying options for new circuits, and ultimately identifying a Best Performing option for each circuit project following consideration of alternatives. This includes its East Meath – North Dublin project (CP1021), primarily comprising a new underground circuit between Woodland substation in Co. Meath, and Belcamp substation in the Fingal administrative area.
- The Dunstown-Woodland 400 kV underground cable project (CP0966) has recently been submitted to An Bord Pleanála as Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID).
- EirGrid is actively progressing its Powering Up Dublin programme, which comprises a number of projects for the replacement and upgrading of the existing high-voltage cable (220 kV) network in Dublin, as well as the expansion of existing Dublin substations at Poolbeg and Belcamp.
- The various elements of the Laois-Kilkenny Reinforcement project are in the construction phase

A number of these projects were included in EirGrid's 5-year Grid Implementation Plan (2017-2022). A new Implementation Plan, with accompanying SEA, is currently being drafted by EirGrid, following public consultation on SEA Scoping. It is anticipated that the draft Implementation Plan and SEA 2023-2028 will be published in Q3 2023 for consultation, including consultation with the Regional Assembly.

Having regard to RPO 10.20, EirGrid has also progressed its major roadmap for decarbonising the energy system – Shaping our Energy Future – initially developed to meet the then target of 70% renewables, and currently being updated to meet a revised Government target of 80%.

Having regard to RPO 10.24, EirGrid continues to support the Phase 1 Offshore Renewable programme, including coordinating the recent RESS auction for offshore renewable energy. However, it is noted that this Phase will primarily be developer-led, with EirGrid ensuring an adequate onshore grid network is in place to accommodate planned offshore generation.

Also, over this time, EirGrid has made written submissions to various Planning Authorities in respect of their various Development Plan-making processes. For the most part, adopted and draft Development Plans over this period align with the Guidelines set out in the RSES regarding facilitating the provision of energy networks in principle.

EirGrid is satisfied that the Regional Policy Objectives outlined in the RSES will “ensure the development of the energy networks in a safe and secure way to meet projected demand levels, to meet Government Policy, to ensure a long-term, sustainable and competitive energy future for Ireland and enable energy service providers to deliver their statutory function”.



National Oil Reserves Agency

The National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) is an agency that has been established primarily to hold Ireland's 90 days of strategic oil reserves. Under this remit, it does not have a direct role in supporting the objectives of RSES.

The Agency does however continue to meet its Public Body Energy Management Obligations as set out under SI 426/2014. In its roles as Administrator of the Renewal Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) scheme, it supports the Department of Transport in the development and implementation of policy in the area of renewable fuels in the transport sector. The Agency is also one of the primary sources of funding for the Climate Action Fund and to date has provided a total of €216m to the Fund.

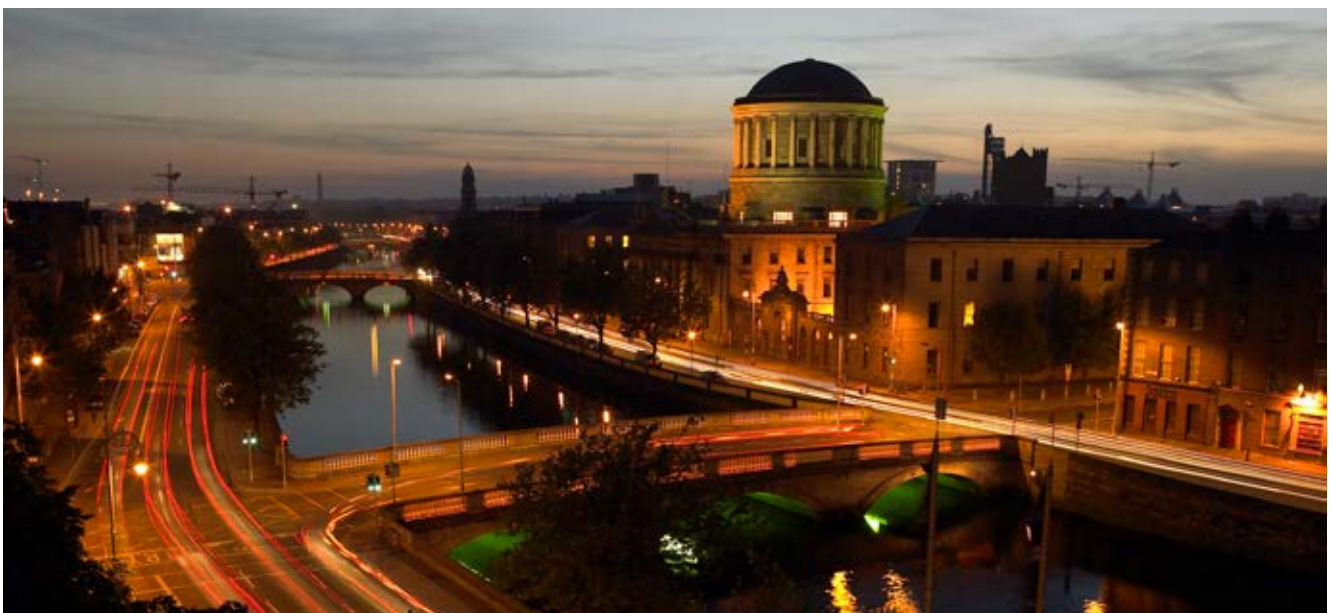
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) has delivered a solar PV (Photo Voltaic) network consisting of 16 systems nationally. The PV systems range in size from 6 kWp up to 50 kWp. IFI have signed up with ESB Networks and Energia as microgeneration partners through the NC7 application process for one of our 50 kWp systems.

IFI have also signed up for the green energy export grant scheme for our smaller systems through the NC6 process. From 2020, the solar systems combined have generated 327,950.05 kWh and avoided 103,097.99 kg of CO₂ going to the atmosphere. IFI are on track to deliver three more systems in 2023 and to further expand our solar PV projects in 2024.

Energy usage has reduced in IFI properties by 5.7%, and thermal usage has reduced by 2.8%. IFI has carried out several audits and completed deep and shallow retrofits at a number of properties. IFI has achieved three 'B' energy ratings in public offices to date. IFI's Climate Action Roadmap for 2023 has been published and a project pipeline is in place that will see more audits and building upgrades completed from 2023 to 2030.

Inland Fisheries Ireland has a fleet of 208 vehicles. The process of swapping out ICE's (internal combustion-engine vehicles) with electric vehicles has also started. The last 3 years saw IFI remove 45 ICE vehicles and replace them with electric vehicles. To date, this has resulted in a 7.9% decrease in our fuel usage. IFI has started trialling electric boat engines and have rolled out over 30 electric bicycles to field staff - these e-bikes are used to carry out river, estuary, lake and coastal patrols.



To facilitate a smooth transition for IFI drivers and to remove range anxiety, IFI project managed the delivery of an internal EV charging infrastructure network consisting of 45 EV charging stations with associated dedicated parking. IFI's Climate Action Roadmap has a target of 80% EVs on fleet by 2030. Further plans are in place to expand on the current IFI EV charging network and to develop intra-state charging arrangements with other agencies and bodies.

Biodiversity – Freshwater Ecosystems

Healthy freshwater ecosystems are essential for people and nature. Fish populations are a key component of these ecosystems and a primary barometer of environmental health. Fish populations are critical to the many different types of these ecosystems in Ireland, including rivers, lakes, canals, and other wetlands (e.g., marshes and peatlands). Although freshwaters cover a fraction of Ireland's landmass, they support rich biodiversity and provide ecosystem services to people, such as clean water, amenity value and flood protection, that are disproportionate to their size. They are also important for maintaining a stable climate (riparian zones and wetlands act as a national carbon pool). Biodiversity underpins EU and global food security. Biodiversity loss risks puts our food systems and nutrition at risk. Biodiversity loss is intrinsically linked to and exacerbates climate change (EU, 2020). Inland Fisheries Ireland delivers a public service that aligns with national biodiversity protection priorities encompassing the 'mainstreaming' biodiversity into decision making across all sectors (IFI's formal planning and advocacy role); strengthening the knowledge base for environmental conservation; increasing awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services (IFI's education and outreach); conserving and restoring biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside (IFI's operations, research and habitat restoration programmes); the marine environment (IFI's protection role at sea); expanding and improving management of protected areas and species (IFI's role in integrated catchment management).

Climate Action and Sustainability

As one of Ireland's core environmental agencies, the IFI is committed to leading by example in climate action and sustainability. The IFI has the necessary ambition and capacity to deliver and excel on their national obligations under the Climate Action Plan 2023. IFI's progress to date highlights the dedication of their management and staff to helping reduce its impact on the environment. The IFI has designed and developed a national energy monitoring system that shows what each of their properties is using in carbon emissions daily, weekly, or monthly. This system enables management to make informed decisions on properties that are high-energy users. As a result of this system, audits were carried out on high-energy users, and taking the results from the audit, the IFI carried out several deep and shallow retrofits.

Inland Fisheries Ireland's protection and conservation roles relate to all aspects of the aquatic environment and all factors that influence the biotic communities within waters, which in any way relate to the propagation of fish populations. Ireland has more than 70,000 km of rivers and streams and 144,000 ha of lakes, all of which fall under IFI's fisheries management jurisdiction. IFI delivers an environmental remit (water quality, physical habitat) including the areas of biological diversity, sustainability, and heritage. Risk-based coordinated and nationally consistent environmental services maximise IFI's contribution to the sector. Coordinated and nationally consistent risk-based environmental services protect biodiversity and natural heritage and assist in achieving improved conservation status of protected species and habitats in the region in line with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. The IFI Operations and Research Divisions support the development of ecological networks and connectivity between protected sites. Environmental research, investigation, and assessment with associated communication of scientific and evidence-based reporting of outcomes to all is a critical element of IFI's proactive environmental function. The IFI have fostered close working relationships with expert peers in sister agencies such as the EPA, the local authorities, NPWS, OPW and Waterways Ireland among others. This facilitates significant collaboration with a strategic focus on delivery of IFI's goals and legislative responsibilities. This collaboration also facilitates national delivery (where remit of public authorities overlap and resources allow) of broader environmental goals associated with implementation of the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the protection of conservation species and the management of alien species (and other National and European legislative provisions).

Water Framework Directive

The IFI has been assigned the responsibility by the EPA of delivering the fish monitoring requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in Ireland. The IFI is a fisheries-focused environmental agency, the principal functions of which are enshrined in Section 7 of the Inland Fisheries Act, 2010 (to promote, support, facilitate and advise the Minister on the protection, conservation, management, marketing, development, and improvement of inland fisheries, including sea angling). The IFI is represented at Tiers 1, 2 and 3 within the WFD governance framework. The IFI welcomes collaboration with all others in this field - positive and proactive engagement with other sectors, organisations and stakeholders that interact with the water environment is critical in order to deliver improved outcomes with regard to WFD policy, decision making and implementation at a national, regional and local level.

By way of background, the EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) requires all Member States to protect and improve water quality in all waters so that we achieve good ecological status by 2015 or, at the latest, by 2027. Ecological status is based on the composition and abundance of biological quality elements including fish and is applied to rivers, lakes, groundwater, and transitional coastal waters. IFI were assigned the responsibility of undertaking the fish monitoring programme for the WFD by the EPA in 2006 and since then have been carrying out the national fish surveillance monitoring programme in rivers, lakes and transitional waters. In 2020, the IFI entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) designed to support the fish monitoring requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and associated activities; this MOU is supported by funding from the DHLGH and DECC.

A key step in the WFD process is for EU Member States to assess the health of their surface waters through national monitoring programmes. Classification tools are the main instruments used to classify the status (High, Good, Moderate, Poor, or Bad) of each water body (section of a river or other surface water). Once each country has determined the current status of their water bodies, ongoing monitoring helps to track the effectiveness of measures needed to clean up water bodies and achieve good status. The IFI staff provide advice and data in various forms to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), DECC, state agencies, stakeholders, and colleagues in support of riverine restoration.

The recent (2020) River Restoration Works - Science based Guidance centred on Hydromorphological Principles in an Era of Climate Change, an IFI publication (IFISH), outlined a phased approach to planning and design of river restoration works. Its principles provide an assurance that projects are sustainable, resilient and include climate proofing protocols, and achieve restoration objectives without causing detrimental ecological impacts. This range of research programmes provide the evidence base to support the rationale for riverine restoration and are used to monitor achievement of restoration goals.

As part of Ireland's Water Framework Directive (WFD) deliverables the IFI has been tasked by DHLGH with delivering on a suite of tasks, focused on riverine connectivity, in the context of the Water Framework Directive. The DHLGH invited IFI to undertake a series of investigations concerning barriers issues and to develop plans and protocols in preparation for WFD third cycle implementation. The funding support received has enabled IFI to undertake a 4-year National Barriers Programme (NBP) programme (2018 - 2021). IFI's NBP created has succeeded in the development of an IFI Barrier Assessment and Screening Tool (I-BAST), which will now be used on an all-island basis. The I_BAST associated geodatabase consists of 73,055 structures of which 21,376 have been assessed by the end of 2020 and 5,482 are classified as a barrier to fish migration. This dataset will facilitate the prioritisation of barrier removal and mitigation decisions to maximise restoration gains.

Environmental Riverine Enhancement Programme (EREP)

The Environmental Riverine Enhancement Programme (EREP) is a collaborative research programme funded by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and managed by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). The EREP evolved from previous joint research efforts between the two state agencies to understand the impacts of arterial drainage maintenance on the river corridor, its habitat and biota including fish. Initial research was undertaken in the 1990s as part of the Environmental Drainage Maintenance (EDM) studies. This work formed the basis for the current OPW guidance and training on environmentally friendly maintenance measures and river enhancement. Since 2008, the EREP has been developing knowledge and datasets for channelised river catchments, with baseline monitoring at a catchment-wide scale and specific scientific studies conducted at a reach-scale. Underpinning all EREP activities is the Water Framework Directive (WFD) with the requirement to improve the ecological quality of watercourses and achieve "good status". Particular emphasis has been placed on hydromorphology as a relevant element of the EREP, focussing on lateral and longitudinal connectivity, as well as the morphological conditions of the instream and riparian zones. River restoration is not just about restoring "hydromorphology" it is also concerned with restoring water quality - IFI's WFD and other programmes provide advice and data to support a range of initiatives directed at improving water quality. The Catchment Care (2018 to 2022) is an EU Interreg funded project set up to establish cross-border river restoration projects which will contribute to achieving good water quality status through the implementation of catchment restoration actions, capacity building in conjunction with local communities and the provision of a platform for cross-border knowledge exchange between community, regional and national stakeholders.

IFI's guideline document Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment outlines an integrated watercourse protection strategy, developed by us in consultation with a wide range of experts in the area. The strategy adopts a simple four-step approach to watercourse protection planning. Implementation of this strategy should not only protect watercourses and their associated riparian zones in urban areas, but also provide other benefits important for the well-being of people living nearby. This guidance document aims to support planning processes which address predicted Climate Change impacts associated with water (Climate Change Adaptation) and encourages greater CO₂ sequestration along watercourses (Climate Change Mitigation).

Bord na Móna

Progress in decarbonising the electric power system has continued, albeit at a slower pace, in the period from 2020, where Ireland came close to achieving its target of having 40% of electricity demand met from renewable sources. Probably the single biggest step which has contributed to the decarbonisation of the electric power system in recent years has been the removal of peat fired generation from the energy mix.

Bord na Móna formally ceased the harvesting of milled peat in 2020, following the closure of the ESB peat fired stations in Lanesborough and Shannonbridge. In the period since 2020 the company has been running down its stocks of milled peat with the result that in 2022, peat was responsible for meeting only 1% of electricity demand. This represents a dramatic change in peat's role in the electricity generation mix over the last decade, down from a high of approximately 8% in 2015 to less than 1% today. The associated reduction in CO₂ related emissions has also been very significant, with emissions from peat fired generation approximating to 2.2mt in 2018, declining to ~0.3mt in 2022.

2023 will finally see peat removed from the generation mix as the last remaining peat unit, Edenderry Power station converts to 100% biomass no later than December this year. Peat has been replaced in the generation mix by renewables and gas in the main, with on-shore wind and biomass being the major contributors from the renewables perspective. The use of biomass at the Edenderry power station has increased significantly in recent years as Bord na Móna's plans to accelerate the decarbonisation of its portfolio picked up pace. The majority of the biomass used to displace peat in the energy mix is locally sourced, with approximately 10% of the biomass fuel used annually coming in the form of sustainably sourced imports, which are required to enhance the overall quality of the biomass fuel mix. Biomass is the only dispatchable & firm source of renewable generation on the electric power system and has therefore performed an important role in maintaining security of supply on a power system increasingly dominated by intermittent forms of generation such as wind and solar pv.

On-shore wind has been the major contributor to the growth of renewables on the electric power system and is now responsible for meeting over one third of electricity demand annually. Much of Bord na Móna's landbank is infinitely suitable for the development of renewable projects of scale and the period since 2020 has seen a further expansion of the company's operating asset base, as well as a significant expansion of its development pipeline in the renewables sector. In 2022, the company completed the construction of two major wind farm projects, the first projects to be delivered to the grid under the Government's Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The 75 MW Cloncreen wind farm in Co. Offaly and the 100 MW phase 2 of the Oweninney wind park in Co. Mayo, developed in conjunction with JV partners ESB Wind, where two of the largest projects to secure off-take agreements in the RESS1 auction in 2020. The projects were undergoing final commissioning in late 2022, just over two years after clearing in the renewable energy auction. This represents a rapid transition from renewable energy potential to operational capacity demonstrating Bord na Móna's capability in delivering renewable energy projects of scale on its landbank.

Bord na Móna also secured capacity in the RESS2 auction in May of 2022 and the two successful projects, the 126 MW Derrinlough wind farm on the 108 MW Timahoe North Solar pv farm, developed in conjunction with JV partners ESB, are now both under construction. Both projects will be commissioned in 2024, adding to the ongoing growth of Bord na Móna's renewable energy portfolio. The Timahoe Solar pv project represents the company's initial foray into utility scale solar development and once commissioned the Derrinlough wind farm will see the company's installed capacity of on-shore wind reach almost 600 MW, positioning Bord na Móna as one of the largest generators of renewable electricity in the Irish market.

Aside from its operating portfolio, the company has a development pipeline of approximately 2 GW of on-shore wind and a further 0.5 GW of solar capacity, all of which could be added to the power system by 2030. As one of the largest players in the renewable energy sector and given the anticipated growth in off-shore wind over the coming decade, it is natural step for the company to become involved in the developing off-shore sector. To that end Bord na Móna announced a Joint Venture partnership with Ocean Winds, one of the largest players in the sector globally, to develop at least 2 GW of off-shore wind capacity in Irish waters. The Realt na Mára project (1.2 GW) off the coast of Dublin and the Celtic Horizon project (0.8 GW) off the Wexford coast, are already under development and it is hoped to deliver at least one operational project by 2030.

If Ireland is to see the target of 80% of electricity demand to come from renewable sources by 2030 become a reality, the form and nature of the firm capacity required to back-up intermittent renewable capacity will be crucial. Bord na Móna already has over 100 MW of flexible gas fired capacity in its operational portfolio and has additional capacity under development. A range of flexible technologies are being considered including Battery Energy Storage capacity, with the first 25 MW of capacity under construction at the Clonreen wind farm site. It is anticipated that this Battery project will be commissioned in time for the winter of 2024/25.

While making very significant progress in delivering capacity which is making a major contribution to the decarbonisation of the electric power system, Bord na Móna is encountering a number of critical issues which threaten to delay the roll out of its development pipeline. Chief among these issues are delays in the planning system and lack of sufficient grid capacity to allow new renewable projects in particular, to connect to the power system in a timely and cost-effective manner. As part of the overall development programme the company will continue to deliver new network capacity on a contestable basis where possible, but is calling for a wider expansion of the high voltage power system to facilitate the connection of both on-shore and off-shore capacity to meet 2030 targets. A more streamlined planning process is also required to see the effective delivery of major infrastructure projects in the energy sector. This is urgently required to facilitate the timely and cost-effective delivery of both power and energy networks, as well as new generation capacity, which will be required to maintain a secure energy system, as well as facilitating the ongoing decarbonisation of the of the wider economy.

Energy Efficiency

Although Bord na Móna is not commercially or directly involved in the development or delivery of NZEB infrastructure, Bord na Móna is progressing Energy Efficiency measures within the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy (as part of the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) and the Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme.

In addition, Bord na Móna has received planning permission for a new headquarters building in Newbridge.

The new headquarters will target the LEED Accreditation which is a globally recognised symbol of sustainability achievement and leadership. Some of the features will include:

- Onsite monitoring of construction waste and avoidance of landfill use
- Renewable energy generation using building integrated photovoltaic system
- Water efficient appliances to reduce potable water consumption
- High efficiency heating system that uses air to water heat pump technology
- Electric vehicle charging facilities will be available at the site.

Bord na Móna is deemed a Public Body and must therefore achieve a 51% reduction in energy-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.

In addition, Bord na Móna are also a participant in the Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme (EEOS) by virtue of the fact that it sells energy to final consumers. Compliance with this Scheme requires Bord na Móna (and other obligated parties) demonstrate that they are responsible for a defined amount of energy saving across different sectors. This is achieved by effectively delivering energy efficiency projects (including but not limited to residential retrofitting) across the region and country. For the last audited year, Bord na Móna achieved 103% of its obligated EEOS target.

Electrification of Transport Fleet

Whilst not a specific function of the company, Bord na Móna is actively engaged in examining the potential for the enhanced electrification of transport and mobility, in particular installing EV chargers at its facilities, modifying its company car/light van fleet policy to transition to Electric Vehicles and it is the first company in Ireland to deploy a fully electric refuse collection vehicle.

Circular Economy & Climate Action Measures

Bord na Móna's Recycling business continued to drive progress in the circular economy, particularly in terms of the recycling and the reuse of valuable resources. Bord na Móna commissioned a plastics recycling plant in 2019 and continue to operate the country's only tyre recycling plant in Co Louth. In addition, the biological treatment facility for organic waste in Co Kildare is the largest facility of its kind in the state and is responsible for diverting circa 25,000 tonnes pa from disposal.

Following the cessation of peat production, in 2021 Bord na Móna commenced the Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (PCAS) also referred to as EDRRS (Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation, Restoration and Decommissioning Scheme). This scheme encompasses the rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna peatlands on 82 bogs and funding for the scheme of €108 million is secured through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) (the key instrument at the heart of NextGenerationEU). This strategy has been developed to optimise ecosystem service benefits of peatland rehabilitation and restoration, particularly carbon storage and reducing carbon emissions. In addition, the scheme will also benefit biodiversity and water (water quality and catchment management) and includes a scientific monitoring programme to track the changes in the eco-system service. EDRRS also funds a scientific monitoring programme and will deliver benefits across climate action (GHG mitigation through reduced carbon emissions and acceleration towards carbon sequestration), enrich the State's natural capital, increase eco-system services, strengthen biodiversity, provide employment, improve water quality and storage attenuation as well as developing the amenity potential of the peatlands.

At the end of April 2023, rehabilitation of over 13,500 hectares has been completed in 40 bogs with plans to commence rehabilitation on a further 16 bogs in Summer 2023. In undertaking this work, Bord na Móna is reassigning employees from peat harvesting activities into rehabilitation operations which aids Just Transition.

At its core Bord na Móna is fundamentally transforming its business from Fossil Fuel to Climate Solutions. At present, the company is delivering climate solutions via the development of its renewable energy portfolio, and the delivery of the enhanced peatlands decommissioning, rehabilitation and restoration scheme (see below).

Rewetting of drained peatlands can lead to restoration of functional peatland aspects, such as the return of typical peatland species, which in turn may lead to the restoration of peat-formation and the carbon sink function. Initially the re-wetting supports carbon storage and reduces emissions from these peatlands. In time the carbon sink function for a portion of the Bord na Móna land-bank can be restored. As part of the Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (EDRRS), carbon monitoring is ongoing on Bord na Móna bogs prior to and post-rehabilitation and more definitive figures will be available at the end of the scheme in relation to both carbon storage benefits and avoided carbon emission benefits. Based on the current available data it is estimated that the carbon stored in the ground where rehabilitation has been completed to date is 20 to 25 million tonnes of carbon.

Bord na Móna continue to develop monitoring of greenhouse gas emissions from its peatlands. The past 2 years has seen the establishment of a Carbon research team (4 people) and the development of 2 flux towers to monitoring GHG emissions, in addition to other methods of GHG monitoring. Bord na Móna also continue to support other scientific monitoring projects generally funded by the EPA and other sources such as SMARTBOG and Terrain AI.

Bord na Móna both in preparation for the Corporate Sustainability Report Directive (CSRD) and on foot of its commitment to the Climate Action Framework for Commercial Semi State companies is developing procedures to account for its Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions aligned with the GHG Protocol.

With the cessation of peat harvesting by the company, Bord na Móna is engaging on an ambitious scheme of enhanced decommissioning, rehabilitation and restoration of former industrial peatlands. The proposed improvements, under the Scheme which are in compliance with the Habitats Directive, includes a scientific monitoring program and will deliver benefits across climate action (GHG mitigation through reduced carbon emissions and acceleration towards carbon sequestration), enrich the State's natural capital, increase eco-system services, strengthen biodiversity, provide employment, improve water quality and storage attenuation as well as developing the amenity potential of the peatlands. It is also expected that the work will also lead to the development of best practice guidelines for future projects.

The Peatland Climate Action Scheme

The Peatland Climate Action Scheme (or EDRRS) has prepared rehabilitation plans for 38 different bog sites in its first 2 years. Each rehabilitation plan has been subject to Appropriate Assessment screening in relation to avoiding impacts on habitats and species that are listed as or qualifying interest in various Natura sites in the Midlands. Several bog rehabilitation plans have gone to stage 2 with the preparation of a detailed Natura Impact Assessment to mitigate any residual impacts on these protected sites. Mitigation, where needed, has been carried out as part of the rehabilitation programme. This includes, for example, the installation of additional silt control features to avoid potential water quality impacts on protected water-courses. Rehabilitation carried out as part of PCAS has been fully compliant with the EU Habitats Directive.

As outlined above, over 13,500 hectares of Bord na Móna peatlands have been rehabilitated since 2021 and while biodiversity is expected to generally lag in response to re-wetting, some species can respond quite quickly to the re-wetted conditions. Re-wetting and the development of new habitats can help support many species that are under pressure in the wider landscape by providing space and habitats for these species. Some examples of biodiversity observations to date are listed below.

New wetlands have been created across the rehabilitated bogs and recent survey work has identified that these are being used by breeding waders, gulls and wildfowl, many of which are threatened or in decline. In addition, these new wetlands will become increasingly important for a diversity of invertebrates such as dragonflies and damselflies. These species breed in such wetlands and thus provide a valuable food source for many breeding and wintering birds. There is an intensive biodiversity monitoring programme as part of PCAS that is monitoring the benefits of re-wetting on biodiversity at various levels including vegetation cover, habitats, breeding and wintering birds, pollinators and other key species.

Re-wetting carried out by Bord na Móna provides new habitat for breeding birds like the Black-headed Gull. Other bird species seen using rehabilitated bogs include the Great White Egret, Green Sandpiper, Goosander, Redshank, Snipe, Woodcock and numerous duck species.

The Marsh Fritillary Butterfly is protected at European level and has been in decline due to habitat loss. In 2009 there was only one known site for Marsh Fritillary Butterfly on Bord na Móna land, and in 2022, there are now 29 known Bord na Móna locations. This butterfly species is naturally spreading and colonising new Bord na Móna sites, after peat extraction ceased and as the cutaway is re-wetting and developing suitable habitats.

Round-leaved Wintergreen, a fen habitat species, which is currently red-listed with its status as “near threatened”, has been found on Mountlucas bog in Offaly and subsequently found on 6 other Bord na Móna cutaway bogs in the past 2 years, indicating that it is spreading in its distribution. This species had not been previously recorded in Offaly and Bord na Móna rewetted cutaway is providing new habitat for this species.

The PCAS/EDRRS rehabilitation scheme includes raised bog restoration at sites like Kellysgrove and Glenlough that were drained but not harvested significantly. The area of EU Habitats Directive Annex I active raised bog habitat is expected to expand at both sites in response to the re-wetting. This habitat will increase in extent over a period of 5-10 years as the Sphagnum mosses naturally respond to the wetter conditions. This will support Irelands national and international commitments in relation to the conservation of raised bog habitat via The National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 2017-2022 and the EU Habitats Directive.

Invasive species are also being recorded and monitored as part of the rehabilitation programme. Specific management plans and protocols to avoid the potential spread of invasive species have been developed and implemented. Bord na Móna have also carried out active control of Japanese Knotweed at 3 sites in the past 2 years, significantly reducing local extent of this species at these sites.

The latest Forest Service Inventory Report has documented a small increase in native woodland cover in Ireland. This has been attributed in the report as being due in part to the emergence of Birch woodland and other native woodland on Bord na Móna cutaways that have come out of industrial peat production in the past few decades. This is just one example of how Bord na Móna land is providing green infrastructure such as new native broad-leaved woodland and scrub that will support the connectivity of protected conservation sites.

Following the company's exit from Peat harvesting in 2020, the company will cease supplying solid fuel on to the Irish market in 2023. Whether or not this will lead to an improve in urban air quality will be a function of how well authorities vested with the power to enforce air quality legislation actively enforce against rouge and non-compliant operators/solid fuel suppliers.

Onshore Renewable Energy Provision

As an owner/operator of some of the largest onshore wind farms in Ireland, including the largest wind farm on the power system, the 200 MW of installed capacity at our Oweninney complex in Co. Mayo, Bord na Móna is planning on delivery many more large-scale energy projects. Their development pipeline includes the largest onshore wind project under development on the island, the 300 MW project at Ballydermott in Co. Kildare. As such Bord na Móna welcomes the formal identification of suitable areas of its landbank as part of strategic energy zones at national and regional level. This could facilitate the speedy delivery of operating capacity in these areas in time to make a significant contribution to the achievement of our 2030 targets, with all the associated energy security and climate benefits.

River Basin Management Plan

Bord na Móna is a member of the Midlands & Eastern Water & Environment Operational Committee under the auspices of the local authority Water Programme whose function, inter alia, is to implement the deliverables under the 3rd cycle of river basin management plans. Bord na Mona is actively engaging with this the LAWPRO on the applicable programme of measures defined under the proposed Third Cycle draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 and reporting to the EPA and LAWPRO on its water quality monitoring programme to track and verify expected improvements in water quality post rehabilitation of the peatlands.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to your organisation.

Local Authority Climate Action Plans

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 set out that each local authority is required to prepare a local authority climate action plan for its respective administrative area. The plans will be consistent with the most recent approved climate action plan and national adaptation framework and are being developed over the next 12 months. Once adopted, each plan will be valid for five years. Local authorities are key drivers in advancing climate policy at the local level. The local authority climate action will help local authorities to address, in an integrated way, the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change adaptation and strengthen the alignment between national climate policy and the delivery of effective local climate action. The local authority plans are designed to lead to a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in each local authority area.

The five guiding principles for the local action plans are - ambitious, action-focused, evidence-based, participative and transparent. Each authority in its local climate action plan will:

- assess current emissions levels from local authority sources and more widely within the county/city through a Baseline Emissions Inventory.
- carry out a Climate Change Risk Assessment to identify climate hazards and assess vulnerability to these hazards.
- identify and plan a “decarbonising zone” (DZ). The DZ will be a specific part of the county/city which will act as a ‘test bed’ of what is possible for accelerating low carbon actions.

Under the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Amendment Act 2021, statutory guidelines were developed in collaboration between the local government sector, technical agencies (such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Met Éireann), and government departments.

Developing the local climate plans will require more from the local authorities (including the 12 local authorities in the EMRA region). In recognition of this, the Department is providing funds for specific roles to form part of and strengthen climate action teams - a Climate Action Coordinator and a Climate Action Officer. A dedicated Community Climate Action Officer is also funded through the Climate Action Fund (CAF) Community Climate Action Programme - Strand 1. These supports will ensure that each local authority has a specialised team in place to coordinate the development of the plan and responsible for supporting its implementation and tracking this.

Climate Action Regional Offices

In January 2018, the government established four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) in recognition of the need to build capacity within the local government sector to respond and adapt to climate change. The CAROs play an important role in ensuring that cross-sectoral climate issues are identified and addressed. The CAROs provide a shared service function within the local government sector, with input from the County and City Management Association (CCMA). The need for regional climate offices was reflected in both the National Adaptation Framework and the National Mitigation Plan and a commitment was made to provide €10 million in funding over a 5-year period. The CAROs play a central role in supporting and coordinating climate actions undertaken by local authorities, the measurement and recording of key performance indicators and supporting the advancement of behavioural change initiatives. The CAROs are supporting the local authorities to develop and coordinate their local climate plans across regions and nationally and assist with sharing knowledge and best practice.

Each office is operated by a lead local authority. Two CAROs operate in the EMRA region, namely;

- Dublin Metropolitan Region CARO - hosted by Dublin City Council
- Eastern and Midlands CARO - hosted by Kildare County Council

Local Authority Climate Action Training Programme

The Department supports upskilling and capacity building in the local government sector by funding the local authority Climate Action Training Programme, with a commitment of €1.575m over 2021 - 2023. This programme is designed to increase understanding of climate change and the need for action among all local authority staff and elected members. Building climate action capacity in the local authorities is essential to support the leadership role in the fight against climate change and in building resilience to its negative effects.

The Department has a Service Level Agreement with Kildare County Council, as the lead authority for the Eastern and Midlands CARO, to deliver the training programme. Kildare County Council works in collaboration with Tipperary County Council which is the lead authority for the local authority Services National Training Group

Climate Action Plan 2023

Following Government approval, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications published the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) in December 2022. CAP23 is the latest update to Ireland's national climate action plan, which supports the delivery of Ireland's national climate objectives of achieving a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by no later than 2050.

Under the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, a climate action plan must contain a roadmap of actions to ensure compliance with the Sectoral Emission Ceilings (adopted in July 2022) for the remainder of the first Carbon Budget period (2021-2025), as well as actions to address failure or potential failure to meet the ceilings, and potential actions and policies for future carbon budget periods.

CAP23 also contained chapters that focused on: enhancing and expanding Ireland's work in areas relating to climate research and innovation; improving the governance, delivery and reporting process for climate action and; progressing citizen engagement events and activities. The action plan also included chapters that focused on policies, plans, actions and measures in areas relating to Adaptation, Public Sector, Just Transition, Circular Economy and International Climate Action.

In March 2023, CAP23's Annex of Actions was published, providing additional information on CAP23 actions, including:

- Steps to support delivery.
- Expected outputs.
- Timeline for delivery.
- Lead Govt Departments.
- Other stakeholders.

Public Sector Climate Action

To support public sector bodies leading by example, a Public Sector Climate Action Mandate applies to public bodies covered by the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) decarbonisation targets, with the exception of local authorities, commercial semi state bodies, and schools. The Mandate supports the public sector's climate ambition through a number of measures, for example: phasing out fossil fuel heating systems, promoting the use of active travel, phasing out the use of parking in buildings that have access to public transport, and procuring only zero-emission vehicles.

The Department has also published a Public Sector Climate Action Strategy 2023-2025. The aim of the strategy is to provide consistency across the public service and place the public sector on a clear pathway to achieving at least a 51% reduction in GHG emissions, and a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.

Climate Action Plan - ComReg Measures

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 calls on relevant public bodies to perform their functions in a manner consistent with the Irish Government's climate policies, in so far as practicable. As a 'relevant body', ComReg seeks to be an organisation that values environmental sustainability. Environmental sustainability in this context is concerned with mitigation (i.e., reducing/minimizing the negative environmental impact caused by human activity) and adaptation (i.e., measures taken in the face of adverse weather conditions caused by climate change).

ComReg coordinates with DECC on the Government's annual Climate Action Plans under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. ComReg has three specific actions in the most recent Climate Action Plan, CAP 23:

- Action AD/23/12: Where appropriate, implement the findings and key takeaways from the report on ComReg's network resilience project: 'Climate Change and its Effect on Network Resilience in Ireland'.
- Action AD/23/13: Collate and review the various methodologies available to calculate the environmental impact of ECN and promote the harmonisation of such measurement indicators across the EU.
- Action CE/23/9: ComReg will begin work on considering consumer information actions to inform consumer choice aimed at driving improvements to the environmental sustainability of the electronic communications sector

Climate Action Plan - Bord na Móna Measures

Bord na Móna are specifically identified as a Lead or stakeholder for a number of actions in the CAP 2023 and progress on these is set out below:

- Bord na Móna are facilitating a number of third level institution research projects on rehabilitated peatlands - Wetpeat, Smartpeat, Waterpeat, SWAMP, Smartbog, etc. A Bord na Móna carbon monitoring programme including two eddy co-variance towers is ongoing under the PCAS/EDRRS scheme.
- Land Use, Land Use Change, Forestry Action LU/23/14 - As stated previously Bord na Móna have installed two eddy co-variance towers under PCAS/EDRRS on their peatlands for the measurement of GHG. This is in addition to two other flux towers installed on Bord na Móna peatlands as part of research projects.
- Land Use, Land Use Change, Forestry Action LU/23/15 - Over 13,500 hectares of peatlands has been rehabilitated since 2021 under PCAS/EDRRS. A monitoring programme is in place for measurement of GHG, hydrology and other parameters.
- Bord na Móna have also started a pilot Sphagnum inoculation programme as part of PCAS/EDRRS. 100,000 Sphagnum plugs have been planted across 25 ha and 7 sites to speed up the trajectory of development of Sphagnum-rich vegetation. The Sphagnum inoculation pilot will also serve to support ongoing paludiculture and various "carbon farming" initiatives.
- Bord na Móna and Coillte are also collaborating on the Midlands Native Woodland Project. This forestry project is looking to develop broad-leaved woodland on areas of Bord na Móna cutaway peatlands that cannot be re-wetted successfully. This project will have benefits for ecosystem services including carbon sequestration and biodiversity by expanding native woodland cover in Ireland, as well as potentially developing a timber resource that can be utilised productively in the future.

Climate Action Plan Measures - Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)

Inland Fisheries Ireland has published its Climate Action Roadmap (2023) as required by Government. This document outlines how IFI aims to meet the requirements of the Climate Action Mandate 2022 (the Mandate) and reach its 2030 carbon and energy efficiency targets. In this roadmap IFI has focused primarily on plans for reducing total energy related emissions and fossil fuel related emissions from relevant operations in line with the targets in the Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21) but has also included IFI's unique contribution to water, the environment, biodiversity and climate research and action.

Clean Air Strategy

The Clean Air Strategy was published in April 2023. It outlines how we will enhance and protect the quality of the air that we breathe and realise the full environmental and health benefits of cleaner air. The CAS provides the high-level strategic policy framework necessary to identify and promote the integrated measures across government policy that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner ambient air, while delivering on wider national objectives. It outlines how we will enhance and protect the quality of the air that we breathe and realise the full environmental and health benefits of cleaner air.

New solid fuel regulations for Ireland

In order to achieve our commitment to continued improvements in our air quality and bringing associated health benefits to our population, new Solid Fuel Regulations were introduced in October 2022 and apply across the entire state.

They include more stringent technical standards for all solid fuels and allows regulation of the most polluting fuels to be prioritised. The regulations also include a revised registration, certification, and labelling requirement to ensure that approved products are of the highest quality, and to provide reassurance to consumers regarding the standard of the product they are purchasing.

The measures taken in the new solid fuel regulations will serve to protect human health and the environment and are consistent with our climate commitment of phasing out the most polluting fuels. They will also assist in our transition from an over-reliance on coal products towards less polluting alternatives and ultimately a transition to low carbon, low air pollutant fuels.

The Department is currently working with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) to establish an enhanced enforcement support structure for local authorities. This structure will support the provision of improved co-ordination, expertise and advice to support consistent implementation of solid fuel regulation and all air quality legislation across the country.

Urban Transport-Related Air Pollution (UTRAP)

The UTRAP working group was jointly convened by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and the Department of Transport (DoT) in autumn 2019. The primary aim of the group was to examine transport-related air pollution and to develop an evidence-based national policy framework within which local authorities could reduce traffic related air pollution to reduce the potential for exceedances of EU limits. The final report was published in January 2023 and is available on the Department's website.

The UTRAP Group will continue as a forum for ongoing engagement between the key transport stakeholders and as a sub-group of the Strategic Implementation Group. This alignment with the CAS will allow the UTRAP Group to contribute to the overall national air quality management structures including the provision of annual updates.

District Heating

The Climate Action Plan 2021 affirmed the significant contribution that district heating can make to increasing the level of renewable energy in the heat sector and reducing emissions. The Climate Action Plan 2023 contains further actions which build on the previous CAP, including delivery of up to 2.7TWh of district heating by 2030. The District Heating Steering Group was established further to Action 187 of the 2021 Climate Action Plan. The District Heating Steering Group recommendations to Government will set the future policy direction for district heating. The proposed recommendations to Government for action are being finalised. A key proposed recommendation of the District Heating Steering Group report is a centralised approach to delivery through the establishment of a District Heating Programme Office, led by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SAEI), to ensure a balanced and timely delivery of district heating networks in Ireland. Until a single entity is established, district heating should continue to be delivered at local authority level. The report recommends the Department, along with SEAI, prepare a Long-Term Strategy for district heating to provide the guiding principles for the development of district heating in Ireland.

The Department is in the process of developing a regulatory framework for district heating to ensure clarity in relation to the rights and obligations of consumers and suppliers of district heating and is engaging with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in that regard. CRU has been appointed as Regulator for district heating networks and will be responsible for the development of appropriate regulation of the sector going forward.

Electricity Interconnection

In July 2018, the Department published a policy statement on electricity interconnection. In addition to articulating the Irish policy position, this statement has provided clarity to potential interconnector investors, and has assisted the CRU in determining an appropriate regulatory approach to electricity interconnection consistent with Government policy. Government support for enhanced interconnection as a means of driving the transition of a low carbon energy future is more recently reflected in the 2019 and 2021 CAPs and 2020 Programme for Government. As per CAP action EL/23/16 DECC is in the process of updating the National Policy Statement on Electricity Interconnection. This will be an update to the 2018 policy statement. The development of the policy is at an advanced stage and it is on track for a Q2 delivery in 2023.

National Just Transition Fund

The National Just Transition Fund (JTF) is a key pillar of the Government's plan for the Midlands Region. A fund was made available in 2020 to support communities transitioning to a low carbon economy. The focus is on retraining workers and generating sustainable employment in green enterprise across the Midlands Region. The Department is supporting 56 projects. Further details on each project are available at: gov.ie - National Just Transition Fund (www.gov.ie)

National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

The NMPF brings together all marine-based human activities, outlining the Government's vision, objective and marine planning policies for each marine activity. The NMPF adopts the principles of co-existence, detailing how these marine activities will interact with each other in ocean space.

The NMPF will enable the Government to:

- Set a clear direction for managing our seas.
- Clarify objectives and priorities.
- Direct decision makers, users and stakeholders towards strategic, plan-led, and efficient use of our marine resources.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have responsibility of the implementation of the NMPF.

Draft Offshore Renewable Development Plan II (ORED II)

The draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II (ORED II) is Ireland's first national-level spatial strategy for our offshore renewable energy (ORE) future. When finalised, it will provide a high-level framework to support and guide the long-term, sustainable and planned development of Ireland's immense offshore wind, wave and tidal resources. A large-scale public consultation on the draft ORED II and its associated environmental assessment reports (Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment) was held in early 2023. There was high engagement with the consultation and key economic, environmental and social stakeholders provided input.

The Department is currently updating the draft ORED II based on consultation feedback as well as policy and technological developments. It is expected that the finalised version will be published in autumn 2023. Along with the statutory National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF - Ireland's marine spatial plan), the ORED II will contribute towards the future sustainable development of Ireland's ORE resources.

The ORED II is crucial to building to delivering on the long-term model for ORE in Ireland - the Future Framework, and the Government ambitions to develop 2GW offshore wind for green hydrogen production and at least 30GW floating energy into the future, as set out in the Programme for Government. It is a key document that will guide Ireland's transition to the plan-led Future Framework and presents a significant step towards harnessing Ireland's long-term ORE potential by setting out the proposed spatial strategy to be adopted to achieve this.

Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) and Marine Area Consenting

The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 underpins an entirely new marine planning system and provides for:

- Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) – to be established July 2023
- Maritime Area Consents (MACs) for the maritime area
- Maritime licences for specific scheduled activities
- The MAP Act provides a modern, efficient and Aarhus compliant regulatory and marine planning framework for ORE development.

In December 2022, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications issued Maritime Area Consents to the first phase of seven offshore renewable energy projects, in what represents a significant milestone in the delivery of offshore wind in Ireland. Coming on the back of the publication of the Climate Action Plan 2023, this confirms the government's commitment to delivering on our climate ambitions and enhancing the State's energy security.

The award of a MAC follows a comprehensive assessment by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications into each project's financial and technical competency. This approach enables all Phase One projects to begin their pre-planning application engagement with An Bord Pleanála. These projects are currently in the early stages of making planning applications to An Bord Pleanála, which has been resourced with a dedicated marine directorate to process these applications. The award of a MAC also enabled Phase One projects to participate in the ORESS 1, the first auction for offshore wind under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). ORESS 1 is expected to procure approximately 2.5GW of electricity generating capacity.

ORESS is an auction-based process which invites renewable energy projects to compete against each other, by bidding as low as possible, in order to win contracts to provide electricity at the bid price for a twenty-year period. The ORESS 1 auction results were announced in May 2023.

Over 3GW of capacity has been procured from four offshore wind projects through ORESS 1, which will deliver over 12TWh* (terawatt hours) of renewable electricity per year. This is the largest volume of renewable energy Ireland has ever procured at auction — equivalent to over a third of Ireland's entire electricity consumption this year and over a quarter of projected 2030 electricity demand. It is also enough to power over 2.5 million Irish homes with clean electricity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 1 million tonnes in 2030.

Under the community benefit fund provisions of ORESS 1, the successful projects are required to make payments to local marine and coastal communities hosting offshore renewable energy projects. These communities will now benefit from over €24 million per year, beginning before construction and continuing for up to 20 years after a project begins to produce renewable energy.

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications also chairs the Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce, which is responsible for co-ordinating all relevant departments and agencies towards mobilising our economy towards Ireland's offshore wind opportunity. Members of the Taskforce include, among others, the Department of Transport; the Irish Maritime Development Office; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Enterprise Ireland; the IDA; and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

In March, the government approved the Offshore Wind Energy Programme, the system-wide plan developed by the Taskforce, and a summary of the key actions highlighted for delivery in 2023 across the Taskforce's eight workstreams was published. The actions include measures relating to supply chain, ports policy, skills and workforce, and regulatory consenting

The Government Commitments on Offshore Renewable Energy approved by the Dail on 24 May, and the associated Phase Two Offshore Wind policy, aim to accelerate the delivery of 5 GW of offshore wind by 2030. Within Phase Two, auction participants will compete for supports to develop offshore wind within specific Offshore Renewable Energy Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs), as provided for in the Maritime Area Planning Act. The location of Phase Two DMAPs will be geographically aligned with available onshore grid capacity and established in line with requirements of the MAP Act and EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive.

A first South Coast DMAP is being developed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications in collaboration with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage. Consistent with provisions in the MAP Act, it is intended that an initial DMAP Proposal will be published in summer 2023, before Oireachtas approval is sought for a more detailed draft DMAP which has been subject to statutory environmental assessments and a public consultation in late 2023. This transition to a Plan Led approach will expedite future delivery of offshore wind, while ensuring that development is managed in a planned, strategic and sustainable way.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Engagement and Adaption Division

EU Cities Mission - Dublin City

In April 2022 Dublin City Council, alongside Cork City Council, was selected from over 300 applicants to be part of the EU Cities Mission. The Department is supporting the two cities in achieving the target of being net zero cities by 2030 and will work alongside relevant departments and agencies.

The European Commission set up the EU Cities Mission in 2021. Its aim is to support 100 cities in the EU to become climate neutral by 2030 and to pave the way for all cities in Europe to be climate neutral by 2050. European cities can substantially contribute to the EU Green Deal target of reducing emissions by 55% by 2030. The Cities Mission forms part of Horizon Europe which is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. There are five "missions" which are each designed to address pressing global issues that require cross-domain cooperation at both EU and national level. Large urban areas have been selected for specific focus as urban areas across Europe account for 75% of its population. The cities mission will help cities to become places which provide citizens with a good quality of life through cleaner air, safer transport and less congestion and noise. Dublin City is poised to act as an experimentation and innovation hub, implementing cutting-edge and creative solutions across areas such as energy, transport, waste, infrastructure and buildings to reduce their environmental footprints.

Review of the National Adaptation Framework

The current National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in 2018. A primary objective of the NAF is to bring a clear and strong focus to both the challenges and the opportunities of transitioning to a climate resilient future, and the importance of a positively focussed and cost-effective national transition agenda. The NAF sets out Ireland's strategy for the application of adaptation measures across Government sectors and the local authority sector to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and also to avail of any positive effects that may occur.

Action 455 of CAP 2021 and the provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (the Climate Act) required that a review of the NAF be undertaken in 2022. The review of the NAF examined key developments at national, EU and international level that have arisen since the original NAF was published. The statutory review of the NAF was completed in 2022 and a report to the Minister on the review submitted in September 2022 recommended that a new NAF be developed in 2023. The report which also contained 33 supporting recommendations regarding key issues was approved by the Minister.

CAP23 includes Action AD/23/2 which is for a new NAF to be developed in 2023. The new NAF will take account of adaptation developments at International and EU level along with adaptation progress in Ireland since 2018.



National Dialogue on Climate Action

The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) promotes and support widespread public and stakeholder engagement on climate action, with the goal of empowering everyone in society to actively participate in the climate transition.

In 2022:

- The Department engaged 4,300 members of the public, 400 stakeholders and vulnerable populations,
- Published the Climate Conversations 2022 Summary Report, the EPA Climate Change in the Irish Minds (CCIM), and the National Youth Assembly on Climate Report.
- Supported a research programme to inform the Climate Action Plan 2023 and sectoral policies.

In 2023:

- The Department hosted the second National Youth Assembly on Climate with DCEDIY and will shortly be publishing a report from the day.
- In Q2 2023 the Department hosted the 3rd National Climate Stakeholder Forum (NCSF) attended by over 150 stakeholders and policymakers examining the social contract on climate action and identifying responsibility for different actors in society across 6 climate task force areas: a short report will be published from the day in the coming weeks.

In 2023, the NDCA will be more inclusive and will include:

- Climate Conversations including an online consultation
- A series of deliberative workshops with people not yet engaged in the climate dialogue and populations vulnerable to the transition to carbon neutrality, (e.g. disabled persons, people living in rural Ireland, young people, ethnic minorities etc).
- Interviews with a broad range of societal actors to capture case studies where people are delivering practical climate actions
- A 4th National Climate Stakeholder Forum examining how insights from engagement have already informed policy
- A National Event on Local Climate Action exemplifying best practice in the delivery of local climate action.

Insights from the NDCA program will culminate in a final report at the end of the year which will include examples of best practice and case studies to promote engagement and to inform policy.

Environment and Climate Action Plan Delivery

The Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP) supports the objectives of the RSES. Under strand 1 of the CCAP €24 million is being provided to all local authorities to support local communities to build low carbon communities in a considered and structured way. Each local authority has received an allocation under this programme, including an equal portion of 12% of the overall programme funding for administrative purposes, which can be used towards the cost of a dedicated resource for the programme who is referred to as the Community Climate Action Officer (CCAO). This programme has not yet opened for applications from community groups and so this funding has not yet been received by the local authorities.

A further €3 million is being provided from the Shared Island Fund to support cross-border⁴ and all-island⁵ community climate action initiatives as an integrated part of Strand 1 of the Community Climate Action Programme - referred to as Strand 1a. This competitive fund will be available to support projects proposed by any of the 31 local authorities in Ireland.

Under Strand 2 of the CCAP a further additional €1.5 million was committed from the CAF for the second phase of the Creative Climate Action programme, which launched in November 2022.

⁴ Cross-border projects involve projects that are both north and south of the border.

⁵ All-island projects are broader than cross-border projects and could involve multiple projects across Ireland.

Environment Protection - Noise

The Department will shortly issue a 'call' to local authorities for them to carry out Acoustic Design studies on noise hotspots. The purpose of the studies will be to exam which noise mitigation measures, or combination of measures, will best reduce the noise levels in hotspots. The study will have to take into account the targets laid down in the Zero Pollution Action Plan for 2050.

Air Quality, International & EU Climate Policy

In 2021, the Department made up to €1,000 available to each local authority to carry out local communications activities on solid fuel and air quality in their jurisdiction. The Department made €250,000 available for solid fuel enforcement pilots in 2022; 3 counties in the region applied for this funding and only 2 drew down an allocation. In 2023, €500,000 has been made available under a similar programme, four local authorities have applied for funding, however the allocation decisions have not been made at this time.

Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	Longford	Communications	587	Complete
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	Westmeath		1,000	Complete
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	Offaly		1,000	Complete
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	Louth		1,000	Complete
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	Meath		1,000	Complete
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	Kildare		1,000	Complete
Solid Fuel Communications 2021	South Dublin		895	Complete
Solid Fuel Grant 2022	Longford	Solid Fuel Enforcement Pilot	6,930	Complete
Solid Fuel Grant 2022	Westmeath	Solid Fuel Enforcement Pilot	22,125	Complete
Other				

National Broadband Plan

The local authority Funding Scheme (LAFS) was established by the NBP Division of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications in 2022. The purpose of the scheme is to ensure that local authorities process planning applications for the deployment of fibre in a timely manner which is vital to boosting the overall timeframe of the rollout of the National Broadband Plan. The total funding for this scheme for 2022 is €2 million, for distribution among the 31 local authorities and the Roads Management Office (RMO). Details of the breakdown of funding was provided to all local authorities and the Roads Management Office. The amount of funding for each local authority is comprised of a base rate of €30,000 per annum combined with a ratio amount based on the number of premises within the local authority area that form part of the NBP Intervention Area. Funding for 2022 has been drawn down by all 31 local authorities and the Roads Management Office.

The first local authority regional meetings for the Southern, North Western, and Eastern and Midlands Regions took place at the end of 2022, with good levels of engagement from all stakeholders. Further meetings are due to take place across all regions throughout 2023, with the second regional meeting for the Eastern and Midlands Region taking place on 28th April in Meath. These meetings serve as an open forum, with all stakeholders provided an opportunity to raise points for discussion. There have been some positive outcomes as a result of the issues raised at these meetings, including securing collective agreement with a range of stakeholders and subsequently arranging for the issuing of formal, written clarifications to all local authorities regarding timelines for processing Section 254 licence applications and related payment arrangements, in order to assist with ensuring a clear, harmonised and consistent approach.

Residential Energy Efficiency

Approximately €264 million has been secured from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the Warmer Homes scheme to be administered by the SEAI for the period 2022-2027 which will allow higher budget allocations to the scheme in the years to come.

Non-Residential Energy Efficiency

Through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications funds several support schemes and support initiatives for the public sector and enterprises, which can assist these sectors in increasing their energy efficiency and lowering their carbon emissions.

A summary of the existing support schemes administered by SEAI is set out below:

- Community Energy Grant; grant support for cross-sectoral projects including homes, businesses and other non-domestic applicants including public sector bodies. Typically, around 60% of funding is for non-domestic.
- Support Scheme for Energy Audits (SSEA); supports SMEs (€2,000 voucher) to carry out professional energy audits and thus encourages implementation of energy saving measures identified.
- Large Industry Energy Network (LIEN); SEAI assists the companies on energy improvements. Best practice guidance is shared among LIEN members on how to manage energy performance.
- Excellence in Energy Efficiency Design (EXEED); a certified program for a systematic energy efficient approach to design, construction, and commissioning new investments and upgrades at the earliest stages of the business lifecycle. It is open to both business and public sector.
- Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH); a grant (of up to 30%) to support investment in renewable heating systems using heat pumps. An operational support tariff over 15 years for new installations or installations that currently use a fossil fuel heating system and convert to using biomass or anaerobic digestion heating systems.
- Non-Domestic Microgen Scheme; provides financial assistance to help businesses and other sectors to install solar PV panels to generate electricity on site. Grants are available for systems up to a maximum of €2,400 for installations of up to 6kWp.
- Energy Academy; online resource - access to high quality energy training.
- The Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme; an energy management and advisory programme which supports public bodies in achieving its energy targets - 50% energy efficiency improvement and 51% emissions reduction targets by 2030. The programme offers comprehensive support and engagement to guide public bodies in reaching their targets focussing on capacity building and energy management principles, which are low cost means of delivering energy efficiency improvements.
- The Public Sector Pathfinder Retrofit programme is a capital support programme co-funded by the Department and administered by the SEAI. The Programme is aimed at testing retrofit approaches, building capacity, and developing a scalable model that can be replicated across the wider public sector including schools. The participating partners are the Department of Education, Higher Education Authority, Further Education and Training, Office of Public Works, HSE and the local authority sector.
- Energy Contracting Support Scheme; provides supports and expertise across business and public sectors to deliver energy efficiency through Energy Performance Contracts (EPCs), Local Energy Supply Contracts (LESCs) and Energy Performance Guarantees (EPGs).

SEAI provide information and advisory services to businesses and public sector bodies including briefings, workshops, workplace resources, access to energy auditing services and case studies of best practice.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by the Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

Just Transition Fund

The list of national Just Transition Fund projects is available online at: gov.ie - National Just Transition Fund (www.gov.ie).

Climate Action

Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
Climate Action Fund Call 1	Dublin (SDCC)	South Dublin County Council Tallaght District Heating Scheme This project, the first of its kind in Ireland, uses waste heat from a Data Centre to heat surrounding buildings, including Tallaght IT and other civic buildings. It is envisaged that this may become an exemplar for other Data Centres in Ireland.	4.47m (over life of project)	Phase 1 Complete-Heat On
	Dublin (DCC)	Dublin District Heating System (DDHS) This project aims to capture waste heat generated at industrial facilities, in particular, the Dublin Waste to Energy Plant in Ringsend and pipe it into homes and businesses in the Poolbeg, Ringsend & Docklands areas of Dublin city.	20m (over life of project)	Approved in principle-subject to ongoing validation
Climate Action Fund Call 1	Nationwide	ESB Electric Vehicle High Power Charging Infrastructure Development Project. This project is installing new modern electric vehicle chargers across the country as well as upgrading the existing charging network.	10m (over life of project)	In Delivery-ongoing
Climate Action Fund Call 1	Midlands (including Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Kildare, Laois, and Meath)	The Bord na Móna Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme (EDRRS) Approved by Government in 2020 for the enhanced rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna peatlands that had been previously harvested for peat extraction for electricity generation. This rehabilitation will take place on 82 bogs over a 5-year period from 2021 to 2026.	108m (over life of project)	In Delivery-Ongoing
Climate Action Fund Call 1	Nationwide	Road Management Office (RMO) – local authority Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project; This project will retrofit non-LED local authority public lights to high efficiency LED Lanterns.	17.47m (over life of project)	Approved in Principle -subject to ongoing validation
Creative Climate Action**	Longford, Offaly* Lead Applicant are based in Dublin	Workers' Villages - The Irish Architecture Foundation, working with key partners, will deliver a programme of commissions and events which highlight the cultural legacy and changing futures of Bord na Móna workers villages. Over 2021/2, three communities connected to Bord na Móna villages will be paired with an architect to creatively co-design a placemaking project connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A touring outdoor exhibition will be developed from research, exploring the legacy of Frank Gibney and the Bord na Móna villages in the context of Just Transition and a film will be produced to document the programme.	€111,460	Final Report being prepared
Creative Climate Action**	Dublin	RISING - This interdisciplinary arts project aims to creatively empower the communities of Dublin Docklands to explore the complexities of climate change, inspiring local action, and acting as a model for communities nationally and internationally. The project partners will provide opportunities for Docklands residents to engage in creative programmes and dialogue with artists and climate experts in order to devise practical actions and modes of communicating these actions to a varied local public. This project will build on RISING undertaken by Brokentalkers and Trinity. This is a multimedia performance developed from conversations with south inner city community groups and academics about climate change which will be presented as a site responsive performance for Dublin Theatre Festival 2021.	€82,568*	Delivered

Creative Climate Action**	Dublin	Creative Climate Action Crumlin - an 18 month programme of events and community actions enabling artists, residents and climate scientists to exchange knowledge and ideas and develop projects that build capacity to achieve the behaviour change to respond to the climate crisis. It is led by Dublin City Council. Projects will respond to the themes of: Home, Travel, Food, Shopping and Recycling, Local Climate and Environment - their impact will be measured and evaluated.	€150,000*	Delivered
Creative Climate Action**	Westmeath	Repair Acts Ireland is a 16-month pilot project that brings the care and repair of objects into the heart of a conversation about shopping and recycling in Ireland. Through a series of intergenerational events the programme collates past histories of repair practices, presents stories of repaired objects and speculates on future facing repair mind-sets. This will be achieved through a mix of interdisciplinary artistic and applied research methodologies, including storytelling, data visualisation, speculative design, performance and Live Action Role Play, visual, online and mixed media and digital place-making.	€199,821.25*	Delivered
Creative Climate Action**	Dublin	Stories of Change is an intergenerational, creative vehicle that poses daunting questions on climate change but more importantly, answers them by showcasing local solutions to the climate crisis through the visual medium of photos, the art of storytelling, and the gift of food. A team of environmental educators, sustainable chefs and professional photographers will tour four Irish counties with five identified partners. Their mission is to bring the community together to showcase and celebrate people leading locally such as local food growers, energy projects etc. through the medium of photo exhibitions, communal feasts and environmental workshops created by the locals for locals.	€ 99,167	Delivered
Creative Climate Action**	Dublin*	Línte na Farraige will connect the public visually and tangibly to the risks from future sea levels, through a series of light installations across 6 Irish coastal locations and heritage sites. The installations will provoke a dialogue around rising sea levels and will demonstrate how the future is still in our hands; as the rate and amount of sea level rise depends on our future greenhouse gas emissions. Interactive educational resources provided on the Línte na Farraige website and information boards, will encourage the viewer to understand our role as a society to reduce carbon emissions and act. A selection of videos will be created to record the visual art piece for future generations.	€156,081	Delivered
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Dublin	The Spark - Capacity building for community-led climate action - this will fund the Bohemian Football Club's 'Spark' project, which will design climate solutions that will provide local people and communities ownership of assets of transition and in doing so enhance public support for climate action, equality and raising standards of living. The project will include the development of 5 climate action based training curriculums developed for specific audiences/community groups. The project will also pilot a community space that will house a bicycle library, a library of things and a creative space for communities to create and engage in climate projects and training.	€ 500,000	Implementation
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Dublin, nationwide	Building a Feminist Community Work Approach to Climate Change - this project will fund the development of a capacity building programme and associated resources to support community development and women's organisations to engage in climate policy and climate action to have their voice heard in policy and decisions relating to climate change, with a particular focus on its impact on women & marginalised communities.	€499,502,50	Implementation
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Dublin	Pilot Initiative to deliver home energy upgrades community 'one stop shop' - this project will fund The Wheel to Pilot Initiative to deliver home energy upgrades community 'one stop shop' will focus on the supports required to establish an advisory service for householders, addressing their needs at the initial stages of their home energy upgrade journey. This advisory service will represent the pilot phase of developing a fully-fledged One-Stop-Shop. The pilot programme will be developed and delivered with and to the rural communities of West Cork, marginalised by their remote location.	€100,000	Implementation

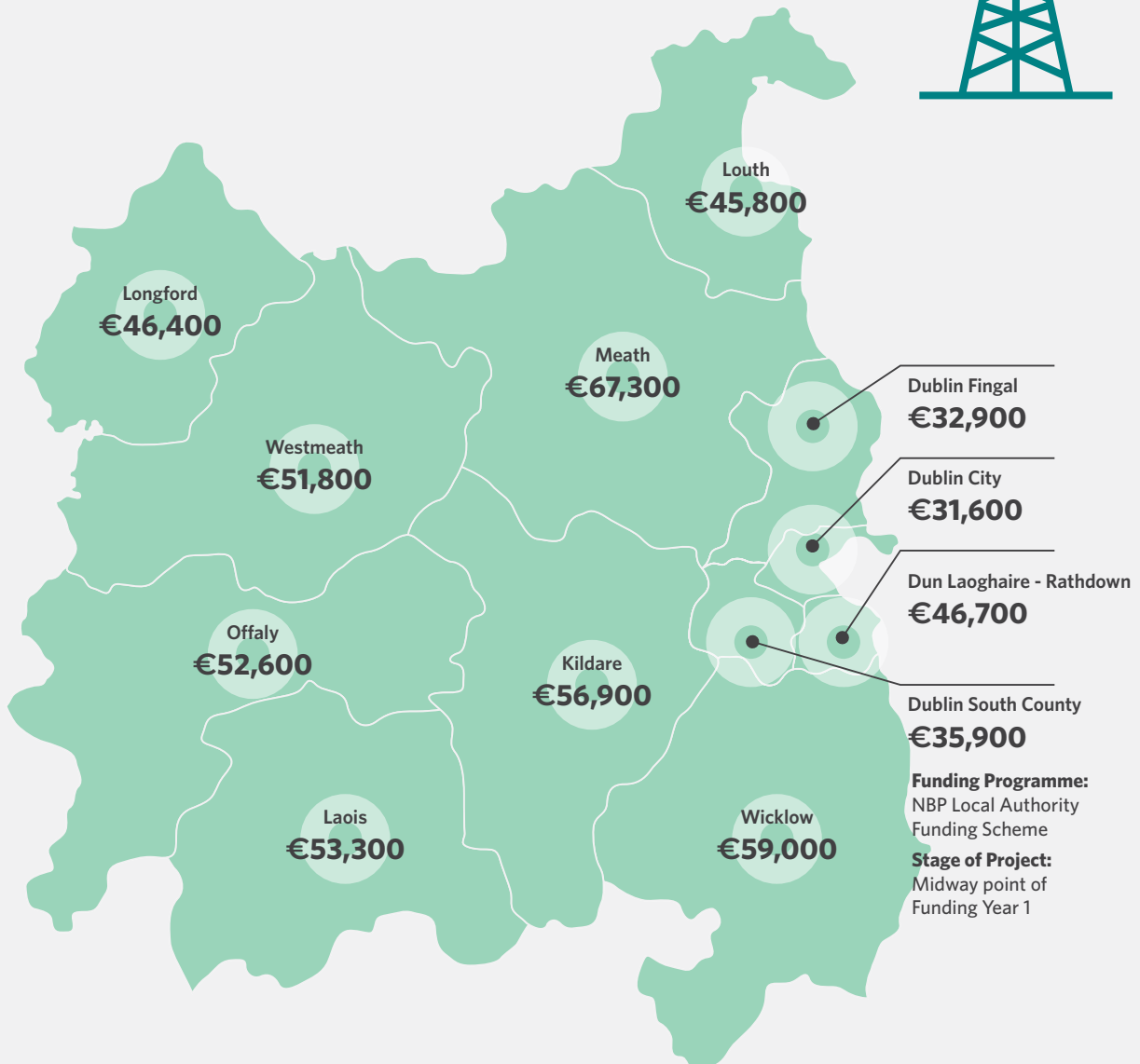
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Dublin, nationwide	GAA Green Club Programme - organizational Capacity Building Project - this will fund the 'GAA Green Club Programme' which aims to build the organisational capacity to deliver on a toolkit that has already been developed under another programme by developing a Community Engagement Toolkit that will a) provide information on how to engage the community to ensure that the actions identified are relevant to the membership, the wider community and the physical/social environment surrounding the Club and integrated into the Club Strategic Planning Process, b) provide training to GAA County Planning & Training officers to support the coordination of this process and c) provide training to GAA Club Planning Facilitators to facilitate the local Club Strategic Planning process.	€100,000	Implementation
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Meath	Climate Action and Local Food - supports for community hubs (CALF) - this project will fund the development and delivery of Climate Action and Local Food - supports for community hubs (CALF), an 18 month long project to establish a peer-to-peer experiential "learning by doing" network of regional food hubs from different counties in Ireland and that builds the capacity of emerging and established food hubs using Open Food Ireland's user-owned platform to connect local farmers and producers with their local community to strengthen the local economy and reduce climate impacts through local food. It will develop a set of resources for community groups, cooperatives, social enterprises, small farmers and others to establish local food communities.	€76,755	Implementation
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Dublin, Longford	Building Circular Economic Opportunities in Communities (BCEOC) - this will fund the Rediscovery Centre's (RDC) project titled 'Building Circular Economic Opportunities in Communities' (BCEOC), which is a tailor-made training and mentoring programme designed to build capacity within communities to develop new Circular Economy (CE) projects or enterprises.	€447,980	Implementation
Strand 2 of the CCAP - Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Dublin	Food Waste to Sustainable Food Communities: A Capacity Building Programme - This project will fund the engagement of a network of partners and citizens, to take further action to reduce food waste and increase food security in their communities through the redistribution of surplus food. The project aims to develop and deliver training and capacity building materials for food sharing communities. This includes: online educational courses on food waste minimisation and food redistribution targeted at food industry, Community Voluntary Organisations (CVOs), and individuals; case studies of CVO best practice in food sharing; and to develop a toolkit for communities.	€498,055.93	Implementation
Just Transition Fund				
Other				

*Lead Applicant is based in Eastern and Midland Region, with some elements of the project based elsewhere.

** Creative Climate Action is a joint initiative that is co-funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The first round saw €1 million provided by the CAF for an overall competitive fund of €2 million.

National Broadband Plan Local Authority Funding Scheme

National Broadband Plan Local Authority Funding Scheme



F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

No further comments were provided.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the detailed responses received from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the SEAI and commend the effort of the Department, its agencies and associated State bodies in presenting coordinated reports for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the Department has demonstrated that progress has been made in implementing the RSES and have carried out a number of specific actions that enable same.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations for NOAC to consider;

1. Reasserting the first recommendation from the 2021 Monitoring Report, the Department should include the Regional Assembly as a body to be consulted in relation to the development of new policies, policy statements, plans and programmes by the Department, its agencies and associated State bodies which relate to the themes sought and addressed in this report and which are aligned with RSES objectives. This includes the development and scope of any potential Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) identified by the Government in the EM region.
2. The Regional Assembly should be represented on appropriate working groups for new iterations of the annual Climate Action Plan where thematic alignment exists with RSES objectives to support multi-level territorial and sectoral policy alignment.
3. The Regional Assembly should be consulted in the development of the forthcoming local authority Climate Action Plans to ensure consistency with spatial planning policy, including the RSES.
4. The Department should continue to support and improve resource sharing between the SEAI and the Regional Assembly to provide evidence-based policy and decision making including enhancing the Regional Development Monitor platform. The EMRA very much welcomes the integration of the SEAI's local authority Climate Action Plan (LA-CAP) dashboard into the Regional Development Monitor platform and ongoing engagement between the SEAI, local authorities and the CAROs to further extended this engagement to support wider data sharing.
5. The Department should facilitate closer engagement between Eirgrid and the Regional Assembly to identify future key energy infrastructure needs across the region including consultation during any further revision to Eirgrid's Grid Implementation Plan for the 'Shaping Our Electricity Future' roadmap. Further to the Department's response, The Assembly welcomes the progression of a number of grid development projects under RPO 10.22, coordination of the recent RESS pursuant to RPO 10.24, and the engagement of EirGrid with the Development Plan making process aligned with the Guidelines set out in the RSES regarding facilitating the provision of energy networks.
6. In calculating shoreline change rates and coastal vulnerability mapping for the Dublin Metropolitan area and the Eastern coastal counties, the GSI Coastal Change Assessment project should have regard to the Mapping Repository of the Ireland-Wales Ecostructure project (See section 5.2.4.7) which contains GIS maps for 3,405 artificial structures and 1,260 coastal flood defences on the Irish and Welsh shores of the Irish Sea. This work provides an indication of the current extent of coastal hardening and a basis for predicting further developments in response to climate change.
7. RPO 7.26 of the RSES is to support the development of guidance for assessment of proposed land zonings in order to achieve appropriate riparian setback distances that support the attainment of high ecological status for waterbodies, the conservation of biodiversity and good ecosystem health, and buffer zones from flood plains. Where appropriate, IFI should engage with the Regional Assembly in implementing the Environmental Riverine Enhancement Programme (EREP).

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

- Work has commenced on the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF) to ensure a more facilitative and supportive spatial planning framework for the delivery of increased onshore renewable electricity generation, to enable the delivery of Ireland's national energy and climate objectives, as set out in the CAP 23. The RESPF is due to be launched in 2023.
- Two Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auctions have been held, in 2020 and 2022. Eastern and Midland Region accounted for 39% (2020) and 46% (2022) of the successful capacity in the auctions.
- Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) will play an important role in the transition to an electricity grid that is up to 80% powered by renewables by 2030. Therefore, from 2024 support for communities for the development of renewable projects will transition to the non-competitive Small-Scale Generation Scheme (SSGS), which is due to be launched in late 2023.
- The Department has published a draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II (ORED II) representing Ireland's first national-level spatial strategy for our offshore renewable energy (ORE) future. When finalised, it will provide a high-level framework to support and guide the long-term, sustainable and planned development of Ireland's immense offshore wind, wave and tidal resources.
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers a range of capacity-building supports including an information warehouse, trusted intermediary and advisor services, and financial grant supports, all of which are vital to support community-owned RESS projects in being built.
- The launch of the SEAI local authority Climate Action Plan dashboard that provides key up-to-date energy related data to assist local authorities preparing their own Climate Action Plans.
- The SEAI District Heat Map Platform is a valuable resource to help local authorities and CAROs identify towns and cities with the highest potential for developing Ireland's first district heating networks.
- The Micro-Generation Support Scheme (MSS) launched domestic and non-domestic grants in 2022 which provides support funding for the generation of electricity from renewable technologies including solar PV, micro-wind, micro-hydro and micro-renewable combined heat and power.
- In 2020 the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) sanctioned a €4 billion capital investment spend on the grid over the 2021-2025 period, reflecting Government's ambition to facilitate a low carbon future.
- EirGrid are preparing the document 'Shaping our Electricity Future 1.1', which is due to be published by the end of Q2 2023. This document will ensure the electricity grid is fit for purpose to underpin economic development and achieve energy and climate policy objectives, including decarbonisation.
- Inland Fisheries Ireland have developed an innovative National Energy Monitoring system that demonstrates what each of their properties is using in carbon emissions daily, weekly and monthly in order to make decisions and choices in reducing their carbon footprint.
- Ongoing work of Bord na Móna in their efforts to transition from a fossil fuel-based company to a climate solutions/renewable energy company with numerous renewable energy projects having been commissioned (including the 75 MW Cloncreen wind farm in Co. Offaly) with further projects in the planning pipeline.
- In 2021 Bord na Móna commenced the Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (PCAS) also referred to as EDRRS (Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation, Restoration and Decommissioning Scheme). This scheme encompasses the rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna peatlands on 82 bogs and funding for the scheme of €108 million is secured through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) (the key instrument at the heart of NextGenerationEU). At the end of April 2023, rehabilitation of over 13,500 hectares has been completed in 40 bogs with plans to commence rehabilitation on a further 16 bogs in Summer 2023.
- The Department are currently prioritising policy in relation to Private Wires, which is a commitment under CAP 23, and publication of a public consultation is due in Q4 2023. Private wires are private localised electricity grids which allow energy users to connect directly to the source of electricity generation, bypassing the national grid

- Energy Storage Policy, a priority under CAP 23, is progressing and will be published in 2023.
- A hydrogen strategy which will set out the need for a robust safety and regulatory framework to be in place for Ireland is being developed, with completion due in 2023.
- Implementation of the National Retrofit Plan for domestic energy upgrades, including the provision of grants in relation to this. In this respect a record €356 million in funding has been allocated to SEAI for residential and community retrofit for 2023 to support the delivery of 37,000 retrofits this year.
- The Heat and Built Environment Taskforce has been established to accelerate and drive delivery in relation to retrofitting, renewable heat, district heat, decarbonisation and overall energy use needs of the building stock.
- A draft Heat Policy Statement will be published for public consultation in the first half of 2023.
- A Roadmap for the Phase out of Fossil Fuel Boilers in all buildings is currently being prepared.
- Geological Survey Ireland, a division of the Department, compiled and published a report on 'Green Metals: Demand Arising from Decarbonisation of Energy and Transport Sectors' in March 2023 and has also commenced a review of their operations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- In 2021, the Whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023 and Ireland's Circular Economy Programme (2021 to 2027) were published, promoting Ireland as a leader in Circular Economy, and promoting less resource usage and waste prevention which aids sustainable economic growth. The Strategy also resulted in the launch of the Circular Economy Innovation Grant (CEIG) scheme.
- A National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap was published in November 2022, which sets out priority actions to bring the focus on food waste prevention, across key sectors in the food supply chain, together in a coherent manner.
- Geophysical mapping surveys and geochemical soil sampling have been undertaken in the Region to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) is working on the Coastal Change Assessment project, which will produce shoreline change rates and coastal vulnerability mapping, with anticipated data releases for the Dublin Metropolitan area by Q4 2023 and the Eastern coastal counties (including Louth, Meath and Wicklow) by Q2 2024.
- A Policy Statement on Petroleum Exploration and Production in Ireland was published in August 2022, in order to reflect the current policy and legislative position of the Government on petroleum exploration and production.
- A draft Policy Statement on Geothermal Energy for a Circular Economy is due to be published in 2023. The development of the draft Statement is an important step in addressing the barriers to the development of geothermal energy in Ireland and will focus attention on its potential.
- A Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining- Critical Raw Materials for the Circular Economy Transition was published in December 2022.
- The Climate Action Plan 2023 was published in December 2022 by the Department.
- The Department has made progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through renewable electricity, hydrogen strategy, energy efficiency and Heat Policy Statement, and by the end of 2021 the Department had achieved savings of 47.1% towards the 2030 energy efficiency target.
- Ireland's first Territorial Just Transition Plan, launched in 2022, sets out the impacts on the region as a result of the ending of peat extraction for energy production and identifies the development needs and priorities for the territory in order to address these impacts. The Plan supports those most impacted by moving away from fossil fuels to leverage new economic opportunities presented by moving to an economic model based on Net Zero emissions, aligning with the Climate Action Plan. It will be targeted at counties in the Midlands most impacted by the cessation of commercial peat extraction.
- In 2021 the Department worked with the County and City Management Association (CCMA) to establish a more centralised approach to Strategic Noise Mapping and this involved the addition of the Roads Management Agency which has led to better co-ordination and resource sharing.
- New regulations have been signed by the Minister for noise health risk assessments to be used to estimate and communicate the risks to health of exposure to noise pollution in Ireland.

- Implementation of the National Broadband Plan and the provision of Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) in 74 locations in the Eastern and Midland Region and 113 school Strategic Connection Points (school SCPs) in the Eastern and Midland Region, providing high speed broadband services to communities.
- Under the Cities Mission, DECC is supporting the cities of Dublin & Cork in achieving the target of being net zero cities by 2030 working alongside relevant departments and agencies. Dublin City is poised to act as an experimentation and innovation hub, implementing cutting-edge and creative solutions across areas such as energy, transport, waste, infrastructure and buildings to reduce their environmental footprints.
- The Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP); €24 million is being provided to local authorities to support local communities to build low carbon communities in a considered and structured way. €3 million is being provided from the Shared Island Fund to support cross-border and all-island community climate action initiatives. A further €1.5 million committed for the second phase of the Creative Climate Action programme.
- local authorities to carry out Acoustic Design studies on noise hotspots in order to reduce the noise levels & will take into account the targets laid down in the Zero Pollution Action Plan for 2050.
- A Public Sector Climate Action Mandate applies to public bodies covered by the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) decarbonisation targets, with the exception of local authorities, commercial semi state bodies, and schools. The Mandate supports the public sector's climate ambition through a number of measures, for example: phasing out fossil fuel heating systems, promoting the use of active travel, phasing out the use of parking in buildings that have access to public transport, and procuring only zero-emission vehicles
- Funds made available by the Department to each local authority to carry out local communications activities on solid fuel and air quality (solid fuel enforcement pilots).
- Establishment of the local authority Funding Scheme (LAFS) to ensure local authorities process planning applications for the deployment of fibre in a timely manner which is vital to boosting the overall timeframe of the rollout of the National Broadband Plan.
- Funding secured from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the Warmer Homes scheme for the period 2022-2027 which will allow higher budget allocations to the scheme in the years to come.
- DECC supports schemes and initiatives for the public sector and enterprises through SEAI, which can assist these sectors in increasing their energy efficiency and lowering their carbon emissions.



6.1.5

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

The vision of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is to ensure an innovative and sustainable agri-food sector operating to the highest standards by leading, developing and regulating the agri-food sector, protecting public health and optimising social, economic and environmental benefits. This is underpinned by strategic goals that align with the content of the RSES (such as RSOs 3, 4 and 12 aimed at supporting rural communities, healthy communities and a strong economy), including, to provide income and market supports to underpin the rural economy and the environment, to provide the optimum policy framework for the sustainable development of the agri-food sector, to deliver a sustainable, growth-driven sector focused on competitiveness and innovation driven by a skilled workforce delivering value added products in line with market demands, and, to maintain and develop strategic, operational, regulatory and technical capacity to achieve operational excellence. The role of the Department is crucial in enabling the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the RSES.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included detail on, a) enhancing the competitiveness of the agriculture sector, b) measures aimed at enhancing the rural economy, c) recognising the value of horticultural land, promotion of sustainable farming practices and support the achievement of climate targets, d) measures addressing the potential impact that Brexit will have on agriculture, food and marine sectors, e) future proofing of the agricultural economy and the establishment of sustainable farming practices, f) progress relating to the future of former peat production bogs and peatlands, g) transformation of our food systems in line with the sustainable development goals and building climate resilience, and g) marine planning and the sustainable management of Marine Waters including the development of the National Marine Planning Framework.

a) Detail relating to enhancing the competitiveness of the agriculture sector with an urgent need for mitigation as well as real and effective and adaptation mechanisms for the long-term sustainability of the agri-sector including agri-food.

The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine have a number of policies and strategies in place to ensure Agriculture plays its role in meeting the national climate targets by 2030 and 2050, while continuing to sustainably produce food and feed. In their response, the Department note that climate change adaptation is integrated into a range of DAFM policies, measures and schemes currently but this work is dynamic and continually evolving.

Food Vision 2030

The development of a new ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector was a key commitment of the Programme for Government, which called for an ambitious blueprint for the sector for the years ahead, supporting family farms & employment in rural Ireland and adding value sustainably into the future, with a strategic focus on environmental protection.

In late 2019, a committee with 32 members representative of the sector, and chaired by Tom Arnold, was established and tasked with developing the agri-food strategy to 2030. Their terms of reference were to outline the vision and key objectives, with associated actions, required to ensure the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the agri-food sector in the decade ahead. The Committee held thirteen meetings and following the publication of a draft Strategy and associated environmental assessments for public consultation, a final Strategy was agreed in July 2021 and published in August 2021.

Entitled “Food Vision 2030—A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems”, its Vision is that “Ireland will become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems over the next decade. This should deliver significant benefits for the Irish agri-food sector itself, for Irish society and the environment. In demonstrating the Irish agri-food sector meets the highest standards of sustainability — economic, environmental, and social — this should also provide the basis for the future competitive advantage of the sector. By adopting an integrated food systems approach, Ireland will seek to become a global leader of innovation for sustainable food and agriculture systems, producing safe, nutritious, and high-value food that tastes great, while protecting and enhancing our natural and cultural resources and contributing to vibrant rural and coastal communities and the national economy”.

In their response, the Department maintain that the Food Vision 2030 Strategy sets out a pathway to become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems over the next decade. Food security, food safety and nutrition are key components of Sustainable Food Systems. The Strategy will deliver significant benefits for the Irish agri-food sector itself, for Irish society and the environment. In demonstrating the Irish agri-food sector meets the highest standards of sustainability — economic, environmental, and social — this will also provide the basis for the future competitive advantage of the sector.

The Strategy consists of 22 Goals, grouped into four high-level Missions for the sector to work towards:

- A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector;
- Viable and Resilient Primary Producers with Enhanced Well-Being;
- Food that is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad;
- An Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Agri-Food Sector, Driven by Technology and Talent.

The response from the Department notes that the Climate Action Plan 2023 and the Food Vision 2030 Strategy set out a series of measures and actions to ensure that the sector delivers in terms of its contribution to the climate challenge while also building resilience into the food production system for the future.

The success of Food Vision 2030 will depend on effective implementation and oversight. A monitoring and implementation framework is included in the strategy and highlights areas for collaboration and partnership within the sector but also with key external stakeholders. It also details oversight and monitoring mechanisms, including the establishment of a High-Level Implementation Committee (HLIC) chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and its key task will be to ensure the delivery of the four Missions. The HLIC comprises senior officials from relevant Government Departments and the agencies involved in the sector.

A formal implementation plan for Food Vision 2030 was published in May 2022. This identifies stakeholders, deliverables and a timeframe for each of the 218 actions under the 22 goals. On a biannual basis, the Department collates updates from across the various stakeholders. The HLIC's seventh meeting was held on the 10th of May 2023.

The immediate priority identified by the Committee in the context of climate, was to commence work on the important actions to determine the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy and the beef sectors. Work on these actions has progressed.

- The Food Vision Dairy Group was established in late January 2022 and tasked with producing a detailed plan to manage the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy sector. The Final Report was submitted to the Minister on the 25th of October 2022 and sets out a list of 19 recommended actions for the sector. This is published on the gov.ie website. The report was prepared through a process of collaboration and cooperation and represents a broad consensus on the key actions in the Group's view that are required in the context of the Climate Act 2021 and the specific ceiling set for emissions from the agriculture sector in July 2022.
- The Food Vision Beef and Sheep Group was established in June 2022 and tasked with producing a detailed plan to manage the sustainable environmental footprint of the beef sector. The Final Report was submitted to the Minister on the 30th of November 2022 and sets out a list of 21 recommended actions for the sector. This was also published on the gov.ie website.

Some of these recommendations are now included in the Climate Action Plan 2023 and the Groups will progress others, while also progressing the other important actions for the dairy, beef and sheep sectors set out in Food Vision 2030.

In terms of overall progress, 3 actions are complete, 64 actions have substantial action undertaken, 145 actions have commenced and are progressing, and 6 actions have not yet commenced. The implementation process allows us to monitor the process, examine areas where progress is not being made and to adjust as necessary. The first Food Vision Annual Report detailing progress was published in May 2023.

DAFM Competitive Research Programme

DAFM's competitive research programme, through Research Performing Organisations in the regions, support 'public good' research projects to enhance the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the sectoral agri-food supply chain, forest and marine activities. The DAFM research programme also supports cross cutting issues such as ICT, the Bioeconomy, rural development and the development of human capital, skills and innovation in particular for early-stage researchers (Masters and PhD students and post-docs).

Since 2010, over €240m has been committed to agri-food, forest and marine research projects through the programme. In the last large thematic research call run by the Department in 2021, over half of the funding was assigned to climate and environment research, many with a strong focus on climate mitigation in particular.

In their response, the Department note that adaptation and mitigation are both essential elements in addressing climate change in agriculture and note that DAFM are taking a holistic approach to climate action. They argue that actions can and should work in an integrated manner to maximise co-benefits and to decrease the impacts of climate change on rural and coastal livelihoods and enhance the resilience of our food, fibre and fuel production systems.

The Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP)

The Agricultural Catchments Programme is in place since 2006 and is used to evaluate the impact of Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) and the Nitrates Derogation which are implemented under the Nitrates Directive'. This Programme and has been funded by the Department and has been delivered by Teagasc since its inception.

The Programme is primarily designed to monitor the effectiveness of the Nitrates Regulations, and this will be a central focus the 2021 EU Nitrates Review. However, the scientific findings will also provide an assessment of the contribution that Irish farmers are making to the delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives, the key driver of EU water policy.

The Nitrates Derogation allows more intensive farmers to operate at a higher stocking rate than that stipulated in the Directive, subject to adherence to stricter rules to be implemented by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The current derogation will run to the end of 2025, with an interim review to commence in 2023.

Included in the research carried out by the ACP is the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) commenced in 2019 with 29 advisors. The number of advisors employed under the Programme has since expanded and 44 advisors are now engaged under the Programme. Twenty of these advisors are managed by Teagasc and funded by the Government through my Department and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The remaining 24 advisors are funded by nine dairy processors.

The ASSAP advisors work across all counties in Ireland and collaborate with catchment scientists from the local authorities Waters Programme to provide farmers with confidential advice focused on preventing nutrient losses to water.

An external expert Review of ASSAP took place in 2021. It recommended the continuation and expansion of the Programme. Since then, the Government Departments have committed to continue providing funding for this important Programme. At the same time, the dairy industry has committed additional advisors to the Programme.

Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS II)

The largest measure directly relating to enhancing the competitiveness of agriculture in Ireland's Rural Development Programme is TAMS II which involves investment in physical assets. This will promote increased competitiveness and sustainability in relevant sectors. Increased grant aid now available to farmers under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) (up to 60% for certain schemes including the installation of solar panels), which will enhance the competitiveness of agriculture.

TAMS II and other schemes, including for example, the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), are targeted at improving the competitiveness of agriculture. EIP-AGRI schemes and they also improve long-term sustainability through research and innovation.

Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS III)

The Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS III) and other schemes, for example, the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), are targeted at improving the competitiveness of agriculture but it also improves long-term sustainability through research and innovation.

In relation to climate change, Nitrogen reduction is also supported through the continuation of aid for Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment. Over 5,200 applications have been paid in full under the LESS measure of the Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS) 2 since its launch in 2015.

From 2023 year under TAMS 3, funding for this measure will increase from 40% to 60%. As well as reducing the chemical fertiliser allowances for farmers under Nitrates legislation, the use of protected urea is also being promoted which will help achieve ammonia emissions targets in addition to GHG emissions reductions.

Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP)

The response from the Department notes that the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 will underpin the sustainable development for Ireland's farming and food sector by supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness, by strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, and by contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels.

A budget of approximately €9.8 billion is allocated for the period, with about 60% of this in direct income support and 40% in Rural Development interventions, with a significant increase in the national co-financing of the Rural Development interventions. Over 20 schemes will support over 120,000 family farms and rural communities across the country. This support provides a significant multiplier effect in regional areas, ranging from 1.75 for processors to 2.5 for beef producers. In its response, the Department indicated that this will have a positive effect for farming families and their communities, generating employment and activity at farm level and through agri-related businesses.

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP) contains measures that address the 9 Specific Objectives of the CAP, and the cross-cutting objective of modernising the sector by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation, and encouraging their uptake. Specific Objective 2, in particular, is to "enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness, both in the short and long term, including greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation".

The Irish CSP in this context has a number of contributing interventions that enhance the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, including:

- a sectoral intervention granting support for the operational programmes of existing Producer Organisations in the Fruit and Vegetable sector;
- a support for administrative and legal costs for new producer groups that wish to form in a number of sectors, including beef, sheep, horticulture, amenities, fruit and vegetable;
- Support for On-farm Capital Investments with a broad variety of categories under which farmers can receive grants to co-fund investments on their farms for equipment, storage facilities, improvements relating to animal welfare, and environmental investments.
- LEADER, a community-led intervention which is currently under development and led by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Once local development strategies are created/selected, specifics about the contribution of this intervention can be shared.

Objectives 3-6 of CAP relate to climate mitigation and adaptation, management of natural resources protection of biodiversity and landscapes. In line with policy direction, in order to meet national and EU obligations, and to respond to the demands of the market and consumers, there is an increased pressure on the sector to become more environmentally sustainable. This changing dynamic is reflected in the increased environmental focus in this CAP. Many of the measures in the Plan, both individually and combined, will deliver multiple benefits across climate, water quality and biodiversity. They are part of the new 'Green Architecture' of the CAP, which will build from the bottom up - starting with improved environmental outcomes from conditionality (formerly cross-compliance), adding further environmental benefits from the Eco-scheme, and culminating in high-impact environmental outcomes from rural development measures. Many schemes will make a contribution to these objectives, including the €1.5 billion flagship Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES), combining landscape actions, results-based actions and cooperation projects to deliver significant environmental, climate and biodiversity ambition, and the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme, improving the emissions of our national suckler herd.

Measures supported under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 are designed to meet the objectives of the new Common Agriculture Policy, some of which are:

- to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, including by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing carbon sequestration, as well as to promote sustainable energy;
- to foster sustainable development and efficient management of natural resources such as water, soil and air, including by reducing chemical dependency; and
- to contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, enhance ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (RDP)

The overall objectives of the RDP include enhanced competitiveness and are further detailed into six broad priority areas. These priorities are distributed into key focus areas related to the competitiveness and viability of agriculture and agri-environment objectives.

In their response, the Department note that the RDP is a vital support to the viability of Ireland's rural economy. The Mid-term review of the RDP indicated that the total direct and indirect impact of RDP expenditure on the rural economy is of the order of €1,863m in output, compared to the aggregate national impact of RDP expenditure of €2,186m. Assuming that the expected level of expenditure is all spent by the end of the original programme, it is estimated that there will be €3,217 million in direct and indirect impacts. If induced (indirect) impacts are included, this figure rises to €3,629 million. This compares to a national impact of €4,240 million. It is also estimated that RDP expenditure supports 4,178 jobs on an annual basis in the rural economy. Specific support comes from the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme and the LEADER Scheme which has proven to be an effective tool for supporting the economic and social development of rural communities by providing the resources necessary for communities to support their own development.

Fisheries

In its response, the Department noted that Ireland's long-standing policy position is that fishing quotas are a public resource and are managed to ensure that property rights are not granted to individual operators. When a quota allocation is not fished by an individual operator, it is returned to the State for re-distribution to the fleet. This is important to ensure that quotas are not concentrated into the hands of large fishing companies whose owners have the financial means to buy up such rights. This approach helps to support a fishing fleet based around the Irish coastline and in rural communities, including in the Eastern region (including Dublin). This means that the Irish fishing fleet is made up of various sizes and types of fishing vessels who have retained a strong economic link with our coastal and rural communities and have provided vital employment in these communities, where there are limited alternative economic activities. The response noted that any movement towards privatisation of fishing rights would seriously risk fishing vessels losing an economic link with Ireland's coastal communities and the Minister works closely with the fishing industry to ensure this does not happen.

In relation to management of fish quotas, vessels under 55 feet in length receive the same catch limit which includes small scale, coastal and rural fishers licensed to fish for whitefish, including in the Eastern region. Pelagic stocks of mackerel and herring also have allocations made available, in accordance with Ministerial National policy, supporting smaller vessels in coastal and rural communities, including in the Eastern region.

Ireland's inshore fisheries fleet generally consists of fishing boats of less than 12 metres overall length, covering in the region of 1,700 fishing boats which are predominately active within six nautical miles of the shore. Key inshore fish stocks include crab, lobster, bivalve shellfish and crayfish, these are non-quota species, hence management efforts focus on sustainable practices, both environmentally and economically.

Sea-fisheries, marine aquaculture and seafood processing play a key contribution to coastal and rural economies and continue to create employment opportunities for these communities.

The Department's European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 is commencing its implementation. The €258 million programme will provide a wide range of supports for fishers, aquaculturists and for the wider development of the seafood sector, including in coastal and rural communities.

European, Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)

The European, Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 aims to support a resilient, climate smart, environmentally sustainable and profitable Irish seafood sector in order to maximise its contribution to jobs and growth and maintain the economic and social activities of our most vibrant and sustainable coastal communities. The €258 million programme contains high level actions to address the four EMFAF priorities and the specific objectives under each. Of particular relevance is Priority 1 - to foster sustainable fisheries and the restoration and conservation of aquatic biological resources. Objectives and actions under this priority include reducing the impact of fisheries on biodiversity, reducing carbon emissions of fisheries and prepare for climate change impact on fishing patterns and implement climate action measures around business operations. Priority 2 also has relevance in this regard, concerning the fostering sustainable aquaculture activities, and processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products, thus contributing to food security in the Union. Under this priority support will be provided for the sustainable development of the aquaculture and seafood processing sectors, as well as support for producer organisations.

b) Detail relating to measures aimed at enhancing the rural economy.

Food Vision 2030

Food Vision 2030 recognises the importance of the rural economy and includes three actions specifically on Rural Development.

- **Mission 2, Goal 4, Action 23** - Government will continue to focus on Rural Development. DAFM will work with the Department for Rural and Community Development and others, including the agri-food stakeholders, to deliver on Our Rural Future 2021 to 2025 for the economic and social development of rural areas over the next five years.
- **Mission 2, Goal 4, Action 24** - Rapid roll-out of the National Broadband Plan. This is seen as critical to realising many of the actions in Food Vision 2030.
- **Mission 2, Goal 4, Action 25** - DAFM will ensure that the contribution of the entire agri-food sector to the economic and social fabric of the country is recognised in public policy.

Bioeconomy Implementation Group

DAFM, together with DECC, chair the Bioeconomy Implementation Group that is endeavouring to implement the actions set out in the Government Policy Statement on Developing Ireland's Bioeconomy. This work, together with many of the institutional-led research projects we fund, will identify opportunities for local economies and the realisation of the benefits of green technologies.

To help encourage on-farm renewable technology uptake and usage, grant aid is provided through TAMS 3 to assist farmers in maximising their contribution to the production of renewable energy through the installation of Solar PV technology along with battery storage on Irish farms. The Solar Capital Investment Scheme has seen the grant rate increased for Irish farmers from 40% to 60%, with a €90,000 investment ceiling, assisting farmers to generate renewable energy for use in their farming businesses.

LEADER

The LEADER programme will continue under the CSP led by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). LEADER is aimed at identifying challenges in rural Ireland and providing resources necessary for communities to support their own development and create capacity at local level. Once local development strategies are created/selected, the details of the specific contribution of this intervention will be apparent. The themes will include economic development, job creation, rural infrastructure, social inclusions and sustainable development of the rural environment and climate change mitigation.

- c) *Detail relating to recognising the value of horticultural land, protecting the resource productivity of agricultural land and addressing development pressures. This includes any measures that ensure food security in the Region and promotion of sustainable farming practices that maintain the quality of the natural environment, protect farm landscapes and support the achievement of climate targets.*

Food Vision 2030

Food Vision 2030 recognises that an expanded horticulture sector would make a valuable contribution to the Missions in the Strategy, particularly in realizing a climate-neutral sector by 2050. While occupying less than 1% of total land, horticulture contains a diverse range of sectors, such as mushrooms, potatoes, field vegetables, protected fruit, protected vegetables, outdoor fruit, and amenity crops such as nursery stock, protected crops including bedding plants, cut foliage, outdoor foliage and bulbs, Christmas trees and turf grass.

- **Mission 2, Goal 1, Action 32** - Develop a strategy to set out the road map for the horticulture industry to 2030, taking advantage of the growing demand for fruit and vegetables, whole-foods and amenity; to increase production and consumption of Irish produce on the domestic market and, where possible, to take advantage of expanding opportunities internationally.
- **Mission 3, Goal 4, Action 10** - Explore domestic market opportunities, particularly for horticulture, organic, prepared consumer foods, tillage crops, pigmeat and poultry and support initiatives to encourage retailers, food service operators and the public sector to source Irish food and drinks, while at all times respecting the EU Single Market Principles and Regulations.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (RDP)

Measures supported under RDP Priority Areas 4 and 5 typically come under the overall CAP objective of ensuring sustainable management of natural resources, landscape and climate management. The main measures under Priority Areas 4 and 5 include Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Schemes (GLAS), Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) and ANC. These three measures account for nearly 68% of the overall RDP budget.

DAFM Competitive Research Programme

DAFM's competitive research programme, through Research Performing Organisations in the regions, support 'public good' research projects that provide the scientific basis to guide policy formation and deliver solutions for practical challenges and opportunities that underpin the value and development of sustainable primary production (including horticulture and crop production), farm and land management for the mitigation of GHG emissions and adaptation to climate change, maintain healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, food product development and process innovation. These connected themes seek a systems-based approach to landscape management and support sustainable measures for the achievement of climate targets and protecting food security and nutrition. In addition, the Department is funding research into peat alternatives for use in the horticulture sector.

Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES), under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027, is an agri-environment climate measure, the aim of which is to deliver significant long-term environmental improvement through participation by a significant number of farmers on the most appropriate land, with each making a strong improvement on their farm. This will build on, and complement, achievements under the other two elements with the new CAP Green Architecture, namely, Conditionality and the Eco-Scheme. Using a habitats-based approach, delivered through both multi-functional prescription and results-based actions, ACRES aims to contribute significantly to achieving improved biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes.

These will be achieved through two approaches under the scheme:

- an ACRES General approach offering a range of measures for individual farmers (both targeted and general); and
- an ACRES Co-operation approach, available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas, who opt to undertake measures, as well as bespoke farm, and landscape actions. Farmers participating in this approach have the assistance of a Local Cooperation Project (CP) Team, who will assist with implementation of the scheme at local level.

The “Direct Payments” interventions under Pillar 1 of the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 include payments that are applied to most farmed agricultural land in Ireland. To be eligible for payments, which for many sectors make up a significant portion of farm income, farmers must comply with minimum standards under Conditionality. Consisting of Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and standards for the maintenance of land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAECs), it is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to ensure that the objectives of the standards are complied with.

For the period 2023-2027, certain new GAECs are being introduced, such as GAEC 2, which relates to the protection of peatland and wetland. GAEC 7 now includes crop rotation as well as diversification requirements. Other GAECs are strengthened beyond minimum legislative requirements. For example, GAEC 8 applies to all agricultural areas, in the main, rather than just arable farms, with certain exceptions for commonage, Natura 2000, forestry, GAEC 2 and GAEC 9 lands. Requirements for those who choose to participate in Eco Schemes and /or Pillar II interventions also build on conditionality requirements.

Organic Farming Scheme

While the Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS III) is targeted at improving the competitiveness of agriculture, it also improves long-term sustainability. Organic farmers that participate in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) are eligible for support of 60% in the Organic Capital Investment Scheme (OCIS), one of the Schemes within TAMS III, and are eligible for priority access to the Agri-Climate Rural Environmental Scheme (ACRES). In 2023, the rates payable to farmers in the Organic Farming Scheme were reviewed and significantly increased for all enterprises but particularly for horticulture.

The total number of active organic farmers being funded under the RDP is around 2,010, managing approximately 110,000 hectares of land. Due to the extension of the RDP, covering the transitional period 2021 and 2022, the OFS was reopened in 2021 and an additional 286 applicants were added to the scheme. Over €12m was issued to farmers in 2022.

Climate Action Plan 2023

Climate Action Plan 2023 sets out ambitious targets to increase area under tillage and organics.

Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan

The Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan provides an extensive list detailing what DAFM are doing. In their response, the Department made specific reference to the following examples:

- Within horticulture, DAFM actively promotes and supports practices around adaptation and mitigation through two vital funding supports, the EU Producer Organisation Scheme and Commercial Horticulture Grant Aid Scheme.
- DAFM issues fire risk warnings and has provided training in the use of prescribed burning.
- Early warning systems for blight for example.
- Surveillance for certain diseases affecting animals and plants which must be notified to DAFM if suspected or confirmed.

Other schemes

The response of the Department notes that along with the Organic Farming Scheme, other schemes contributing to Priority Areas 4 and 5 include the Burren Programme, the locally-led EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and the Traditional Farm Building Scheme which has been extended for three further years and has the scope of beneficiaries that are eligible to apply for the scheme has been expanded. There are also significant links to some of the measures that impact on competitiveness such as the agri-environment aspects of EIP-AGRI and TAMS II. Elements of Measure 1 that relate to BDGP and GLAS (ended 2022) training are also directly relevant. The largest support that falls under the sustainable management of land is ANC.

d) Details of measures mitigating the potential impact that Brexit may have on agriculture, food and marine sectors including agriculture and food exports throughout the region.

The response from the Department noted that Brexit has presented very serious challenges for the agriculture and fisheries sectors, despite the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) reached between the EU and the United Kingdom (UK). Since 1 January 2021 the UK is outside the EU Single Market and Customs Union and all interactions between Ireland and UK became an interaction with a ‘Third Country’. This has resulted in new procedures and regulatory requirements applying for businesses moving goods to, from or through the UK, excluding Northern Ireland (NI).

The import of agri-food goods from Great Britain (GB) is now subject to full EU third country SPS import controls. The Government and industry have invested significantly to ensure that Ireland met its regulatory obligations while also minimising disruption to this import trade as result of the final Brexit outcome. There was very effective collaboration between economic operators and all State agencies responsible for implementing what has been the single biggest change to the EU import controls regime since the Single Market was first created in 1990.

Sea-Fisheries

As detailed comprehensively in the stand alone submission by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA), as predicted, Brexit brought substantial permanent changes to the nature and extent of the work done by SFPA in both fishery control and food safety controls. 2021 saw the impact of most, but not all, of those changes with some SPS-export controls deferred until April 2023 (see 'Export of EU agri-food to Great Britain' below).

Import Freight Consignments

For freight trade imports to Ireland, SFPA has a role in implementing one EU regulatory regimen intended to manage risks of entry to the EU of fishery product from illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. Wild caught fishery products need to be accompanied by a Catch Certificate from the Fishery Competent Authority of the Flag State of the vessel catching the fish, attesting to the legitimate entitlement of that vessel to catch such fish. All consignments of fishery products entering the EU at an Irish Border Control Post (BCP) are notified to SFPA for appraisal and authorisation from an IUU perspective. Without SFPA IUU sign-off, DAFM do not release these products for free-circulation following their food safety (SPS) controls. SFPA controls assess the presence and accuracy of Catch Certificates, ensuring alignment with other documentary submissions, on for example, quantity and species. More enhanced checks such as requesting physical inspection by DAFM or contact with the Flag State authorities may take place on a risk basis.

Significant exemptions include farmed, freshwater or molluscan fish where SFPA role is verifying that absence of catch certificate is justified. Against a backdrop of reduced Third Country imports during COVID-19 impacted 2020, 2021 data show 4-fold increase in the number of import controls undertaken by SFPA since Brexit (from approximately 800 to over 3,000). This was, predictably, mostly driven by pre-existing trade from UK coming to be classified as Third Country entry. There also arises a moderate 'displacement' effect where Third Country imports intended for the EU market, which might previously have arrived in UK for EU-entry, now arrive to an Irish BCP, following which they have free access to the EU common market.

IUU controls of UK imports have been serviced from a regionalised model, rotating amongst SFPA ports. Initially 24/7 but this has been reduced to day & evening cover. Impacts continue on delivery of local work. This is relatively reactive work, difficult to predict and needing turnaround within tight timeframes. Necessity for office-base detracts from regional work away from base when a port is covering this task.

Export Freight

Among the small group of food certifications required by UK for import to its territory since 1st January 2021 has been a requirement for Catch Certificates for wild-caught fish. In the case of fish imported to UK which has been caught by an Irish vessel, SFPA is the relevant authority to validate and issue a Catch Certificate. That is the case for all Irish-caught fish, regardless of the country from which they are exported to UK. Moreover, that is the case for all Irish vessel-caught fish being exported from UK to, for example, the EU, following landing by an Irish vessel to UK port, and also Irish-caught fish traded from NI to GB. Ireland's trade to the UK has driven an almost 8-fold increase in the number of catch certificates issued for export freight consignments by SFPA in 2021 (approximately 200 to almost 800). There has also been an increased trend towards other Third Countries, somewhat driven by Irish exporters diversifying away from the increasing bureaucracy requirements of UK trade.

Catch Cert applications are serviced by local SFPA ports either on the basis of the home-port of the exporter, or the vessel. Complex (multi-landing) consignments require extensive SFPA follow-up. Whilst Catch Certification should be almost a foregone conclusion for a consignment intentionally selected by an operator for regulatory scrutiny, that is not always the case.

2021 also saw several build-ups to an additional and substantial requirement from UK, to require Export Health (SPS) Certification & notification, for both imports to, and transits through GB. March, September, November 2021, and January 2022 deadlines were all real until they were each postponed by UK. All of this involved substantial preparatory work which continues to affect SFPA, and Irish exporters.

Import Direct Landings

Direct Landings relate to fish landed to an EU port by a fishing vessel flagged a Third Country, when that vessel has caught these as wild fish, and are a form of food import to the EU, subject to various EU import requirements for operators, and control obligations for port state authorities.

SFPA is involved in implementing three different regulatory regimens for such landings to Irish ports;

1. SPS food Safety requirements: EU 2017/625 as implemented by 2019/625 and 2019/2126;
2. IUU port state requirements: EU regs 1005/2008 as implemented by 1010/2009;
3. NEAFC Port state requirements: nominally EU reg. 1236/2010.

In the case of fresh fishery products, and also for NI-registered vessels, there are relatively little SPS impacts, although products other than fresh fishery products including frozen fish or live bivalve molluscs are amongst the small subset which invoke various, generally prohibitive, SPS obligations.

For IUU and NEAFC controls, the requirements apply to subtly different groups of fish but overlap substantially, and may generally be regarded to include;

- Restriction to only land in certain designated ports, not just any ports;
- Advance submissions, regardless of size of vessel or landing;
 - * IUU Pre-notification of intended arrival
 - * IUU pre-landing declaration
 - * IUU Catch Certificate from Flag State
 - * NEAFC Ports State Control Form
- Await authorisation from Competent Authority of port before discharge, as opposed to more normal discharge regardless of action of authority.

Before 2021, Ireland had occasional, individually large landings from EEA-flag fishing vessels. Whilst Third Country from the perspective of IUU and NEAFC, these were exempt from any SPS connotations as EEA imports. Two Irish ports (neither of which are located within the EMRA region) were designated for both IUU and NEAFC purposes, Killybegs and Castletownbere, with landings only happening in Killybegs. Landings by other EU MS vessels had been an ongoing event. Landings from UK vessels had been in the order of 700 per year, with reducing trend. Substantial numbers of these were from operators working under 'flags of convenience', with economic interest and home-port largely in Ireland or Spain.

Classification of UK landings as Third Country (TC) has resulted in a dramatic increase in number of Direct Landings by Third Country Vessels to Irish ports (nominally 20-fold from approximately 30 to over 600). These are not new landings to Ireland, just newly classified as TC. Landed volume is still driven by the small number of large landings of non-UK TC country vessels. Those non-UK landings continue to be dominated by Blue Whiting, but UK landings bring mixed demersal (Monk & Meg) along with higher value pelagic (Mackerel). There have also been recurrent landings of Irish-based NI-registered Prawn freezers and Irish-based small NI inshore vessel (Crabs & Lobsters).

Third Country Landing Ports At the beginning of 2021 Ireland had two ports designated in accordance with both IUU and NEAFC Castletownbere & Killybegs, for landings of third country vessels of fresh fishery products at any time.

As non-BCPs these could not accept frozen fish under EU food law, however both EEA and NI vessels could land frozen fish, arising from their SPS equivalence with the EU. From 1st February 2021, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine decided through SI 37 of 2021 to designate further Irish ports from both IUU and NEAFC perspectives, largely to facilitate landings by Irish-resident operators with NI-registered fishing vessel. Those designations had various limitations to balance control burden and industry facilitation, notably applying only to NI-registered vessels and also limiting times, vessel size, fish species. From 1st October until 31st December 2021, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further designated two further ports on restricted basis, Quigley's Point and Merville, to facilitate landings by NI vessels exploiting a wild oyster fishery in Lough Foyle.

As Live BMs are exempt from EU IUU requirements, and NI vessels are exempt from SPS requirements, these were NEAFC-only designations. SFPA Impact Extensive work had been done to extend FMC role in initial reception of various documentary requirements and these have functioned well. Existing SFPA systems in Castletownbere and Killybegs have adapted well to the upsurge in Third Country vessel requirements. There is significant activity by NI registered operators in North Donegal and this has placed a significant control burden on SFPA and accordingly, the development of a Greencastle port office has been prioritised. An impact-limiting factor has been the acceptance of authorisation, subject to documentary control, and with direct regard to an EU -level physical inspection target of 5%. Ongoing dissatisfaction with the availability of port designation continues, with likelihood of additional port designation for SFPA to provide a credible control service for EU-entry. The higher-level issue remains in the implementation of a regimen designed for large international vessels never designed for small coastal vessels landing to their home port.

Export Direct Landings

UK departure from EU means that Irish vessels landing to UK ports are Third Country direct landings to UK, thereby a form of export from EU and import to UK. This generally brings the same three connotations as would apply reciprocally in EU law, with Ireland as the Flag State. In the case of Irish flag vessels, Ireland has flag state roles, including assessment, validation, and provision of Catch Certificate for these vessels and processing of NEAFC PSC notification from a flag state.

SPS connotation are generally low to non-existent for direct landings of fresh fishery products, however UK implementation of SPS controls will effectively prohibit wild-scallop landings by Irish vessel to GB ports. Classification of landings to UK ports as Third Country landings has driven an approximately 20- fold increase from approximately 20 to over 400. The bulk of those were to NI ports with some to England. Along with several Irish vessels operated from a Northern Ireland home-port base, 2021 saw a trend in Irish vessel pelagic landings towards NI port landings. This was not believed to be a Brexit-associated trend, instead arising from the revocation Irish Art. 61.1 Control Plan and absence for facility for post-transport weighing in Ireland.

Also, in the absence of implementation of SPS controls by UK, there were continued scallop landings by a small number of Irish vessels to English ports.

Somewhat generally, the impact for SFPA has been relatively low. This is substantially influenced by the Northern Ireland protocol which, from an SPS and IUU perspective, regards an Irish vessel landing to NI port as an EU vessel landing to an EU port. Therefore, SFPA flag state role to provide Catch Cert has not been required. Similar IUU exemption applies to scallop landings (molluscs). However, from a NEAFC perspective, all of these 31 landings are regarded as landing by a foreign vessel to a UK port, requiring PSC flag state processing by Irish FMC. Nevertheless, a substantial logistical liability rests with SFPA for provision of Catch Certs, when requested by an Irish vessel at-sea, to UK authorities 4 hours before landing.

At-Sea Fishery Control & Fishing Access

The late-agreed EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) established the principle of reciprocal access, thereby allowing EU vessels to fish in UK EFZ and UK vessels to fish in EU-EFZ. Primacy is accorded to the coastal entity and a prevailing principle is that of the flag state only authorising access to third-party waters when supported by relevant catch opportunity.

Both aspects of this reciprocation are generally covered by the EU Sustainable Management of External Fishery Fleet (SMEFF) EU regulation, which implements a principle of a Commission lead for the interface of EU with Third Countries.

UK authorisation of several thousand EU vessels, including several hundred Irish vessels, to fish in EU waters is included in the TCA. Reciprocal authorisation was provided for several hundred UK vessels to fish in EU waters. Ongoing additions, subtractions and expiry and re-issues of licenses have ensued, with substantial administrative overheads. The TCA identified small parts of the respective 6-12 zones where reciprocal access might be possible, if pre-Brexit track record can be met.

In terms of Irish 6-12 previously fished by UK vessels, and mainland-GB 6-12 previously fished by UK vessels, these were not within the TCA-agreed areas. The TCA does however include potential for 6-11 Crown Dependency Islands, notably Isle of Man, but Irish vessels do not meet the necessary track record despite attempts to demonstrate. Specific issues arose with UK claim of a 12NM zone around Rockall and alleged non-compliance arising from Irish vessel presence in that zone.

The IE/NI voisionage arrangement, enabling reciprocal access to 0-6 waters, was clarified in early 2021, to be implicitly provided for in the TCA. However, within that structure, its actuation would need to be supported by the coastal state authorisation, through EU competency under the SMEFF regulation. SFPA published a prohibition on NI vessels accessing Irish 0-6 in mid-January 2021. In early July 2021, reciprocal authorisations for several hundred vessels were issued by UK and EU with consequent rescinding of SFPA notice SFPA Impact SFPA Data Unit and FMC have had several instances of data requests, looking to verify extent of Irish vessel activity in a particular UK zone, in order to support authorisation requests through EU Commission to UK. These are generally relatively problematic because data are reported according to ICES Statistical Rectangle, and not according to those zones. Jan-July absence of 0-6 access involved significant communication effort from organisation, and for smaller vessels presented remarkable change, albeit at a low-impact time of year.

Displacement & trends for other EU vessels

A no-deal Brexit, or any version of Brexit without reciprocal access would have left many EU vessels, previously reliant on UK EFZ, needing to find new fishing grounds. Risk of increased commercial pressure on finite biological resource would have been possible. The risk would have seemed to abate with the TCA providing for reciprocal access. However, as a surrogate for activity displacement, there are some indicators of a trend evident in landing data. In the case of EU vessels previously fishing northern EU waters, previously landing to UK ports for transport to EU markets; a combination of the increased regulatory bureaucracy for their direct landing to UK ports, and subsequent regulatory bureaucracy for export from UK to EU, has driven such landings from other EU MS vessels to Irish ports. In particular, a group of Belgian beam-trawlers appear to have relocated their operation towards an Irish landing model, dramatically increasing landings from that EU MS to Ireland, bringing commensurate trend of displacing their activity towards Irish EFZ. Conversely, data are consistent with a less marked move south from Spanish/French vessels previously landing to Irish or UK ports, now wishing to avoid the logistical risk of the landbridge route to EU-market for their fish after landing.

Brexit Funding Initiatives & Eligibility Assessment

Ireland achieved access to funds within an EU Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR). Irish government policy has been to allocate some of those funds to compensate Irish fishers for the impact of Brexit. A seafood taskforce report was published until early 2022, recommending over a dozen different funding schemes for various Irish fleet sectors. In advance of that, on the basis of interim recommendations of the taskforce, a Brexit Tie-up scheme was implemented in late 2021, with the stated intention of mitigating the impacts of Brexit on Irish fishers through quota reductions or fishing ground access under the TCA.

Eligible vessels could choose to forego fishing and 'tie-up' and not fish for one calendar month, either October November or December and receive a state grant, according to vessel size. Substantial SFPAs workload was involved in;

- Informing the wording of the scheme, both eligibility criteria for scheme entry, and compliance criteria for tie-up, to ensure necessary clarity and rigour;
- Assessing every one of the applicant vessels activity records against eligibility criteria;
- Dealing one-to-one with almost every applicant failing eligibility criteria;
- Verifying compliance with the tie-up criteria for all such vessels.



SFPA impact Quantitative metrics are 245 primary applications, 12 formal re-checks and 11 squid applications. However, these data do little justice to the immense workload for SFPA within this scheme. Eligibility criteria (minimal days at sea or quantity landed) were designed to ensure that only hitherto active vessels could avail of the scheme, as opposed to dormant vessels being paid to remain dormant. In the case of smaller vessels not required to have log-sheets, eligibility criteria were built around Sales Notes indicating purchase of fish from those vessels in sufficient quantities. Numerous examples arose of claimed sales by vessels, not supported by entry of Sales Note by purchasers, with subsequent iterative dialogue involving purchasers moving from non-compliance towards compliance with late Sales Notes, and entire new time-pressured reapplication and reassessment.

Export of EU agri-foods to Great Britain

In respect of exports of EU agri-food goods to Great Britain, the UK Government has taken a phased approach to the introduction of these requirements. The full set of controls to be applied were deferred a number of times in 2021 and again in 2022 by the UK Government. On the 5th of April 2023, the UK Government released its new Border Target Operating Model document which sets out in broad terms the UK's new approach to managing its borders, including how it plans to control imports of agri-food goods from the EU.

Considering this, the Department is reactivating its preparatory activities which will include a new targeted communications plan focused on the new UK requirements; engagement with UK authorities; staffing; a review of IT systems; a new series of comprehensive training courses for certifying officers and food businesses to ensure that they are familiar with the new GB import requirements. The response from the Department notes that this preparatory work will be critical in minimising any potential disruption to Irish exports to Great Britain - our largest market for agri-food exports - when they are introduced.

Food Vision 2030

Food Vision 2030 recognises that the fisheries and seafood sector faces challenges arising from Brexit. The response from the Department indicated that the UK is likely to open up its market for food through a set of new trade agreements which could impact on UK price levels, particularly during the second half of the decade. This Strategy envisages Irish agri-food protecting and building on its strong position within the British market for key food and drink exports, while recognising that the market is likely to become more competitive.

The long-term policy of increasing trade diversification will continue, but the unique importance of the UK market for the Irish agri-food sector will remain. Building on Ireland's reputation for providing safe, sustainable, and high-quality food will be key to maintaining a strong market position in the UK.

- **Mission 2, Goal 1, Action 34** - The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine has set up a Seafood Sector Taskforce involving seafood industry representatives and other stakeholders to provide recommendations on the appropriate measures that will best support the sector and the local coastal communities. A Seafood Taskforce Report was published. The report, "Navigating Change —The way forward for our Seafood Sector in the wake of the EU/UK Trade & Cooperation Agreement" was published in October 2021 and contains recommendations that will be examined with particular regard to available funds and to the eligibility of the recommended measures for funding under the Brexit Adjustment Reserve, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and with other relevant funding sources and with regard to State Aid rules and the Public Spending Code.

Research funding in the food area seeks to develop healthier food products with greater added value, thus positioning them to appeal to markets in Europe, the US and elsewhere. In its response, the Department noted that while there are no interventions that specifically target these objectives, the combined impact of the approximately €9.8 billion euro targeted to the CAP objectives will assist in mitigating the impact of Brexit.

Over 130,000 farms will be supported with Pillar 1 direct payments totalling €6.1 billion in the period, including over €600 million ringfenced for a redistributive payment designed to move funding from larger to smaller- and average-sized farmers. Pillar 2 contains more targeted measures such as the €1.25 billion for Areas of Natural Constraints, support for producer organisations, and sector-specific measures for animal welfare, such as the Sheep Improvement Scheme, and the Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme.

The combined effect of these multi-annual interventions gives farmers the ability to better plan for the next five years during a period where some uncertainties due to Brexit remain.

The response from the Department noted that the Government is committed to addressing the challenges facing our seafood sector following the United Kingdom's exit from the EU and the adoption of the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA), which has been the most significant and enduring challenge faced by the fisheries sector in generations. The response notes that the Minister is pursuing all opportunities at EU level to help address the unequal burden sharing whereby Ireland carries an excessive burden of the EU quota transfers to the UK and is constantly seeking opportunities for Ireland to increase fishing opportunities where possible for Irish fishers, including in the Eastern region.

At the Agri-Fish Council in March 2023, the Minister expressed his disappointment that the Commission, in its recent Communication on the functioning of the CFP, did not completely address the impact of the TCA, noting that substantial changes brought about in fisheries policy as a result of the TCA requires that a comprehensive review of the CFP be carried out that would support changes to deliver a fair and equitable policy. This review of the implementation of the CFP presented a timely opportunity to address the inequitable impact of the quota transfers under the TCA.

The Department noted that the existing CFP legal framework does allow for changes to quota sharing arrangements between Member States which could be used to address the impacts of Brexit. The response indicated that the Minister will continue to raise this issue with the Commission and fellow Member States to seek increases in fishing opportunities for Irish fishers, including in the Eastern region.

Significant interventions have taken place to address the impact of Brexit on the seafood sector. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine established the Seafood Task Force to examine the implications of the EU/UK Trade & Cooperation Agreement (TCA) for the Fishing Industry and Coastal Communities and to consider initiatives and make recommendations to address those implications.

As noted in the response from BIM, In its report in October 2021, the Seafood Taskforce made sixteen recommendations to leverage BAR funding to support the seafood sector and coastal communities respond to the challenges posed by Brexit. Based on these recommendations, under the oversight of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) a number of support schemes are being implemented by BIM in line with DPER and EU eligibility requirements.

Over €271 million in supports and development strategies to date and projects funded under BAR support schemes must be completed and paid before the end of 2023. Projects have included short term supports and longer-term restructuring initiatives for the fishing fleet, capital supports for both processing and aquaculture sectors, funding for entrepreneurial initiatives in coastal communities and investment in marine infrastructure. Combined, these schemes contribute to sustaining employment in the seafood sector as a whole, providing new career opportunities and ensuring those transitioning within the sector are supported.



e) *Detail relating to future proofing of the agricultural economy and the establishment of sustainable farming practices and production methods, particularly in light of climate change and the impact of agriculture on this. This may include supports for low carbon and low impact farming such as local agri-food, biomass production, permaculture, appropriate agri-forestry, precision farming, the bioeconomy and incorporating circular economy thinking.*

Food Vision 2030

The food system approach adopted by Food Vision 2030 aims to deliver food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, environmental, and social bases to generate food and nutrition for future generations are not compromised.

This means:

- It is profitable throughout (Economic Sustainability).
- It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (Environmental Sustainability).
- It has broad based benefits for society (Social Sustainability).

Food Vision 2030 Mission 1, A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector, contains seven goals that aim to deliver a climate-neutral food system by 2050, with verifiable progress achieved by 2030, encompassing emissions reductions, carbon sequestration, improvements in air quality, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity, improvements in water quality, development of diverse forests, enhanced seafood sustainability, exploring the bioeconomy and strengthening Origin Green.

The first Food Vision 2030 Annual Report was published in May 2023 and describes progress to the end of 2022. It also highlights key achievements for each of the four missions. Mission 1 contains 61 actions, of which 3% have been achieved, 28% have substantial action undertaken, 64% have commenced and are progressing and 5% have not yet commenced.

CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Interventions in the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 include supports that encourage low-carbon and low-impact farming practices in existing farming systems, such as the measures in Eco-Scheme for extensive farming, low use of chemical fertiliser, enhanced "Space for Nature", and other practices that aim to reduce the amount of fertiliser needed. Support for environmental investments, and investments targeting improved farming practices are available in the On-farm capital investments intervention. The amount of Utilisable Agricultural Area devoted to organic farming is projected to increase from 2% to 7.5% by 2027 through the implementation of the Organic Farming Scheme.

In their response, the Department indicate that significant ambition in the areas of climate emission reduction, water quality improvement and protection of habitat/biodiversity will be achieved through the green architecture of the CSP, which will build from the bottom up - starting with improved environmental outcomes from conditionality (formerly cross-compliance), adding further environmental benefits from the Eco-scheme, and culminating in high-impact environmental outcomes from rural development measures. Many schemes will make a contribution to these objectives, including the €1.5 billion flagship ACRES Scheme, combining landscape actions, results-based actions and cooperation projects to deliver significant environmental, climate and biodiversity ambition, and the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme, improving the emissions of our national suckler herd.

DAFM Competitive Research Programme

DAFM's research programme supports the areas of low carbon and low impact farming, biomass production, agri-forestry, precision farming, the bioeconomy and incorporating circular economy thinking. Research is being conducted in these areas in research performing organisations across the Eastern and Midlands territory.

Organic Farming Scheme

Over 2000 new farmers applied to join the Organic Farming Scheme in 2022 and all received approval letters in February 2023. The area of land now being farmed organically is estimated at approximately 200,000 ha. In the last 12 months (since Q2 2022) Teagasc have appointed 6 new organic advisors and Bord Bia have appointed a manager specifically for the organic sector. Organic farmers that participate in the OFS are also eligible for support of 60% in the Organic Capital Investment Scheme (OCIS).

Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations

The Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations 2022 give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) and are the responsibility for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, however, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine play a key role in implementing these regulations at both a national and regional level to ensure compliance, protection and reduce agriculture footprint on the environment.

As part of the European Commission's Implementing Decision granting Ireland its current Nitrates Derogation, additional conditionality was included by the Commission requiring a two-year review of water quality.

Under that review water quality data for 2021 and 2022 must be compared, and where the review identifies polluted waters or where worsening trends have occurred over this period, the maximum stocking rate limit permitted under the Nitrates Derogation must reduce from 250kg to 220kg livestock manure nitrogen per hectare from 2024 onwards. The EPA is currently working to provide the water quality data that will be used in this review.

As part of the 5th NAP the scope of some existing measures was broadened, other measures were expanded and a number of new measures were introduced to drive improvements in water quality.

European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs)

Interventions that have potential to contribute to innovative and novel farming practices and production methods include the European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) where support is granted to Operational Groups to develop and test innovative solutions to challenges identified in the sector. Projects are across several themes and topics, including the integration of the development of the bioeconomy at farm level, environmental challenges, and the uptake and utilisation of digital tools and technologies, among others.

Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)

ACRES promotes the adoption of agricultural actions that aim to address the issues of climate change mitigation, water quality and the preservation of priority habitats and species. ACRES also includes actions to promote the planting of new hedgerows and the maintenance of existing hedgerows, as hedgerows provide an important carbon pool in the landscape and also act as an important habitat for biodiversity and wildlife corridors. It also supports the planting of trees in groups, rows and parkland, and also in riparian buffer zones.

Targeted Agricultural Modernization Scheme (TAMS)

Funding towards Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) equipment has increased from 40% to 60% under the TAMS III scheme launched in 2023. As well as reducing the chemical fertiliser allowances for farmers under Nitrates legislation, the use of protected urea is also being promoted which will help achieve ammonia emissions targets in addition to GHG emissions reductions.



Other Initiatives

The Department note in their response that the digitalisation and modernisation of the sector will be further supported by interventions such as Knowledge Transfer Groups, Continuous Professional Development for Advisors, and the mandatory training as part of several Pillar 2 interventions.

The new CAP Network will support the communication, dissemination of information at national and EU level. It will also provide support for innovation to connect the main actors. The Departments' AKIS Coordination Group, will also provide an improved implementation and monitoring process to assist with more rapid and equitable diffusion of science and technologies to achieve sustainable development.

There are several schemes that support low carbon farming. GLAS promoted agricultural actions which introduced or continued to apply agricultural production methods that aim to address the issues of climate change mitigation, water quality and the preservation of priority habitats and species. BDGP includes Carbon Navigator tools which estimate the potential greenhouse gas reductions and financial savings that can be made on each farm through enhanced farm efficiency. It also allows individual farmers to set future targets and make comparisons with average and best performing farmers.

There are several EIP-AGRI Operational Groups that deal with research and innovation in Low-Carbon and Biomass including Biomass to Biochar for Farm Bioeconomy (BBFB), Biorefinery Glas and the DANÚ Farming Group who are researching a Biological Farming Transition Programme.

f) Detail relating to any progress relating to the future of former peat production bogs and peatlands, including ensuring a Just Transition.

Under the EU Just Transition Fund, for which the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is Managing Authority, DAFM will make available up to €20 million for pilot testing and demonstration bioeconomy facilities in two areas: Optimised and integrated industrial bio-based systems based on agriculture and/or forestry-based value chains; and Processing and co-processing of bio-based waste and mixed bio-based waste.

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups were set up to research this area including the Blackstairs Farming Futures which aimed to develop a new revenue stream for commonage farmers for the delivery of innovative eco-system services whilst simultaneously improving habitat conditions in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and adjacent habitats including peatlands.

The North Connemara Locally Led Agri-Environmental Scheme developed an incentive system for improving agricultural management of upland heaths and peatlands and enable the restoration of peatland and grassland habitats. Both these EIPs are now closed.

In addition to this, two further EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, under the fourth call for proposals under Ireland's Rural Development Programme, to identify innovative solutions in the re-wetting of former peatlands — Green Restoration Ireland and FarmPeat. These EIPs are due to finish in 2023.

In its response, BIM detailed that following initial exploratory work in the 2000s, it has identified significant swathes of land in Ireland which it suggests could be utilised for aquaculture. In particular, marginalised rural land and cutaway peatlands form a significant land holding which, BIM argues, offers little in the way of commercial return at present. Some 80,000 hectares of cutaway peatland alone will exit peat production in the coming years and whilst some can be rehabilitated, the opportunity for job creation in these areas remains limited. The RAMPS (Recirculating Aquaculture Multitrophic Pond Systems) project developed out of preliminary work in perch pond production is based on a modified design of similar systems used for catfish in North America. The project further seeks to explore the potential for developing multi trophic freshwater systems on marginalised agricultural land and cutaway peatlands. Using algae and duckweed to treat fish waste and recirculating water in pond systems thereby reducing discharges and abstraction. An ancillary benefit of such systems is that they have the potential to not only develop as circular economy projects but produce commercially viable protein which can be abstracted from the algae and duckweed.

g) Detailing relating to the transformation of our food systems in line with the sustainable development goals and building climate resilience.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Transforming Our World, which was adopted by Ireland in 2015 aims to deliver a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful future for the entire world. It sets out a framework for how to achieve this comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ireland's National Implementation Plan 2022-2024 further details how the SDGs will be implemented to support national policy.

Food Vision 2030

Food Vision 2030 aims for Ireland to become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems over the next decade. In demonstrating the Irish agri-food sector meets the highest standards of sustainability— economic, environmental, and social, this should deliver significant benefits for the Irish agri-food sector itself, for Irish society and the environment.

Food Vision 2030 is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and these linkages are included in the strategy document. Mission 4, Goal 7, Action 3 also states that DAFM will align policy development and implementation with Ireland's commitments under the SDGs taking account of specified goal targets and indicators.

DAFM Competitive Research Programme

DAFM's competitive research funding programme has a strong focus on supporting research aimed at ensuring food and nutrition security while addressing environmental and societal challenges and is underpinned by a food systems approach. In particular, it aims to facilitate innovation throughout the food chain by encouraging the development of sustainable and healthier food options while producing and processing food in a more sustainable manner and reducing food loss and waste. Such a food systems approach will help to tackle a number of grand societal challenges relating to climate action, good health and well-being, responsible production and consumption, zero hunger and more.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (RDP)

The RDP includes several national policy objectives in the areas of promoting food chain organisation and the development of the farming and wider agri-food sectors. These programmes identify over 400 recommendations to achieve sustainable growth over a range of cross-cutting themes. Thus, many themes that are central to the objectives and priorities of Rural Development Regulations and Ireland's RDP are consistent with national as well as EU agricultural policy.

The emphasis is also to support the organisation of artisan and small-scale food production, especially in the areas of added value production, participation in quality schemes, and strengthening of producers' position in the market that facilitates cooperation and collaboration as well as strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry, and research and innovation, including for the purpose of improved environmental management and performance.

h) Detail relating to marine planning and the sustainable management of Marine Waters including the implementation of the National Marine Planning Framework, the protection of the marine environment and growth of the marine economy, including sectoral opportunities in the seafood sector and marine energy for instance.

In relation to sustainable fishing in marine waters, scientific information on the state of the fisheries exploited by the Irish fleet is compiled by the Marine Institute and is published in the Stock Book each year. The most recent Stock Book, 2022, contains 75 stocks that are subject to the scientific advice of the Marine Institute. From the 75 stocks, 40 are assessed as being sustainably fished in 2022. This number has grown consistently every year since 2013. This positive trend has led directly to increases in the quotas in 2023 for some of Ireland's most important commercial stocks including Prawns (nephrops), Celtic Sea Monkfish, Hake and Megrim and North-west Haddock and Whiting. The reopening of the Spurdog fishery, after it was closed for over ten years to rebuild that stock, is a positive example of sustainable practices bearing fruit. In addition, the North West Herring fishery will be re-opened this year as a commercial fishery. This fishery was closed, other than for the collection of data for scientific purposes, since 2015.

Brexit Adjustment Reserve

The €271 million in Brexit Adjustment Reserve supports and development strategies to date has not only provided mitigation against the negative effects of Brexit and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, but provided stimulus for growth of key sectors within the seafood industry, including capital supports for seafood processing, aquaculture and entrepreneurial initiatives in coastal communities.

EMFAF Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027

The EMFAF Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 will support a diverse range of activities within the marine area.

Fisheries

For fisheries, the Programme will support capital investment on board, capital investment ashore relating to the landing obligation, innovation in fishing gear and methods, technical advice to the fleet, acquisition of first vessel by young fishers, supports to the inshore fleet, training and marketing. For aquaculture, the Programme will support implementation of the National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture. This will include in particular support for capital investment in aquaculture sites, supports for innovation and research to develop technology and enhance knowledge, advisory services, training and marketing. For seafood processing, it will support capital investment in seafood processing enterprises, in particular to add value to raw material, enhance energy efficiency, reduce CO2 emissions, and enhance competitiveness. It will also support innovation to develop new products, advisory services, marketing and training. The Programme will support the socio-economic development and diversification of coastal communities through the seven Fisheries Local Action Groups.



EMFF Marine Biodiversity Scheme

The EMFAF Programme will support Ireland's environmental obligations through a continuation of the EMFF Marine Biodiversity Scheme. This will fund appropriate assessment of fisheries and aquaculture activities, reporting on the Marine Strategy framework Directive, projects in support of the CFP, and species and habitat restoration. The Programme will support enhancement of Ireland's knowledge of its marine environment, particularly in terms of enhancing knowledge of climate change impacts on fish stocks, habitats and species.

Lastly, the Programme will fund Ireland's compliance with its obligations under the CFP, specifically for fisheries protection and for fisheries management science.

BIM's key themes in response to Marine Spatial Planning are provision of advice, cross-agency collaboration, building technical capacity and development of applied solutions. Work under the first three of these themes is ongoing. Implementation of applied solutions initially focuses on Offshore Wind Farms under the provision that these solutions will apply to MPAs and other MSP challenges as they arise.

B) Please outline any progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of your Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency.

In the main response, DAFM provided direct points of contact for each of the agencies which were contacted for a direct reply. Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Marine Institute Ireland and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority submitted responses in addition to the main response from the DAFM. In a stand-alone response, Coillte indicated that they had nothing additional to add to the main response submitted by the Department. Teagasc did not submit a stand-alone response, however the main response from DAFM provided an update on the Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP) which has been delivered by Teagasc (see Section A).

Bord Bia

The response from Bord Bia noted that its remit is the marketing and promotion of Irish food, drink and horticulture, with a particular focus on international export markets.

In the domestic market, Bord Bia does not operate on a regional basis and does not keep records of a type that enables analysis of supports, projects or initiatives given to, or carried out in a particular county or counties. Notwithstanding this, Bord Bia provided a letter of response, accompanied by the latest Origin Green progress report, which captures data up to 2021. A more recent progress report covering the years from 2021 to date is due for release shortly and can be shared with the Assembly at that time.

In a similar approach to the Bord Bia response for the 2021 Monitoring Report, the 2023 response letter focuses on Origin Green - Ireland's food and drink sustainability programme which is led by Bord Bia. A voluntary programme, Origin Green membership comprises farmers, food producers, retailers and foodservice operators and the programme aims to achieve increased levels of sustainable food production. Origin Green enables members to set and achieve measurable sustainability targets that respect the environment and serve local communities more effectively.

In their response, the Origin Green progress report aligns to questions a, b, c, d, e and g in Section A. They note that questions f and h are not applicable to Bord Bia. In relation to any policy initiative or development related to enhancing the sustainability of the agriculture, food and marine sectors, the Bord Bia response notes that the Origin Green Progress Report sets out in general terms, the next phase of the programme which includes initiatives and developments relating to further enhancing the sustainability of the agri-food sector.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara

As detailed in the response from BIM, the Irish Seafood Sector contributes over one billion euro to the Irish economy employing circa 14,000 people directly and indirectly around the coast and making the ocean a key economic, social and environmental asset.

To protect this resource and sustain the long-term viability, profitability and value of the sector, the industry continues to improve its performance and adopt best practices. Using the universal language of the SDG's, the BIM response outlines that the Irish Seafood Sector will be able to communicate its contribution to advancing sustainable development, both by minimising negative impacts and maximising positive impacts on people and the planet, for example on UN SDG's 14.1, 14.2 and 14.4.



Marine Institute Ireland

In its response, the Marine Institute outlined its functions and outlines how its work supports the objectives of the RSES. Integrated into Section A above, the Marine Institute response provides detail on policy initiatives/developments including a) Sustainable Blue Economy; and b) National Marine Planning Framework.

Furthermore, the BIM response includes substantial detail on funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES – These responses are integrated below. The response also provides substantial detail relating to the funding programmes administered by you're the Marine Institute, over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region. These tables are included in Section E below.

The Marine Institute provides government, public agencies and the maritime industry with a range of scientific, advisory and economic development services that inform policy-making, regulation and the sustainable management and growth of Ireland's marine resources. The Institute undertakes, coordinates, and promotes marine research and development, which is essential to achieving a sustainable ocean economy, protecting ecosystems, and inspiring a shared understanding of the ocean.

In relation to the objectives of the EMRA RSES, the work of the Marine Institute supports climate policy objectives and economic policy objectives – supporting A Smarter Europe, A greener, low-carbon Europe e.g. via the Institute's research programmes and funding, A more connected Europe e.g. through the work of the IMDO and support to the Department of Transport, and A more social Europe, a Europe closer to citizens, e.g. via policy support provided by the Marine Institute's socio-economic data and evidence programme to government.

Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)

In its stand-alone response, the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority stated its commitment to the promotion of compliance and the effective and fair regulation of the sea-fishing and seafood sectors that fall within the Authority's mandate in order to support safe and sustainable seafood. This means the fair regulation of all fishing vessels operating within Ireland's 200-mile limit and Irish fishing vessels wherever they operate, and all seafood produced in Ireland.

The SFPA provides regulatory oversight to Ireland's Seafood Sector enabling economic activity in the sector to the value of €1.3 billion in 2022. The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority promote the sustainability of Sea-Fisheries in Ireland's Exclusive Economic Zone through the enforcement of the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy. Measures include, fishery control, Seafood Safety Control, Enforcement, Import & Export Certification and Classification. It is amongst the SFPA's responsibilities to collect and report data in relation to sea-fisheries and food safety as required and to represent or assist in the representation of the State at national, Community and international fora as requested by the Minister.



C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Food Vision 2030

Food Vision 2030, Ireland's shared stakeholder-led strategy for the agri-food sector, has the potential to transform our agriculture, food, forestry and marine sectors, with environmental, economic and social sustainability at its core. Food Vision aims for Ireland to be "A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems". As outlined in Section A, Food Vision's goals are grouped around four high-level Missions for the sector.

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP)

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP) contains measures that address the 9 Specific Objectives of the CAP, and the cross-cutting objective of modernising the sector by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation, and encouraging their uptake.

The CSP has programmed approximately €9.8 billion for the period 2023-2027, and this financing will be used to address the economic, environmental and societal needs of the sector.

The CAP Strategic Plan commenced on 1 January 2023 and several interventions have launched. While it is still early in the programme, the response from the Department outlined that, to date, application rates have met or exceeded expectation, with very good uptake of environmental schemes including under the flagship Agri-Climate and Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) and the organic farming scheme (both outlined in Section A above).

EIP-AGRI Operational Group

An EIP-AGRI Operational Group has been established to aid in the re-wetting of former peatlands.

EMFAF Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027

The EMFAF Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 has been strongly focused on sustainable development. Mission 1 of the Programme is developing a climate smart, environmentally sustainable seafood sector. This includes objectives concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation, minimising the impact of fishing/aquaculture activities on the marine environments, managing the fisheries/aquaculture resources in a sustainable manner, reduction of waste in the marine environment and promoting the circular economy, effective control and enforcement and enhancing marine knowledge.

It DAFM response indicates that these objectives will be achieved through targeted investment in the fishing sector and wider seafood industry to improve sustainability and efficiency, and support for public interest projects to enhance control and enforcement, data collection, research and development and enhancement of marine knowledge.

National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development 2030

The BIM response notes that the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development 2030 is completed and is being prepared for publication.

Sustainable Blue Economy

As noted in its stand-alone response, the Marine Institute's integrated ocean knowledge, advice and services enable a growing number of government clients and stakeholders to meet commitments and targets in relation to environmental protection and restoration, climate, energy and economic development. In particular over the reporting period of the monitoring report, there has been an increased focus on informing and supporting government in the area of safe, sustainable and secure seafood production; sustainable development of offshore renewable energy; implementation of marine spatial planning and licensing support; the establishment of marine protected areas; strengthening the strategically important maritime sector; and supporting the transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral blue economy.

There is an increasing demand for the data and evidence that are essential to inform national policy and to underpin the state's governance of our maritime area. Through laboratory, field and seagoing work, the Institute carries out statutory environmental, fisheries and aquaculture surveys, seafood testing and other monitoring programmes assigned by government. The Institute plays an important role in supporting the state's response to the impacts of our changing seas and oceans, through working with the national and international scientific community to observe, study and understand our changing oceans. This essential scientific advice supports industry, protects consumers and underpins legislative and other obligations aimed at the protection and management of the marine environment.

The Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) is the part of the Marine Institute which supports Ireland's maritime transport sector. The IMDO provides maritime business development functions and advisory services to government, specifically the Department of Transport. In this capacity, the work of the IMDO over the recent period is targeted at

1. The development of capacity in the shipping industry in response to Brexit challenges – new and expanded routes and services;
2. The quantification of Landbridge traffic pre-Brexit, including agricultural produce;
3. The development of a ports policy statement for Offshore Renewable Energy that creates opportunities for regional ports to contribute to the infrastructure response, with potential long term benefits for importers and exporters;
4. Digitalisation of the maritime industry: The IFSTL project was a successful pilot study that established the benefits that accrue to importers and exporters (including those involved in the agriculture industry) when maritime procedures and processes are digitalised.

Research and innovation are central to the role of the Marine Institute as both a research performer and a research funder. In addition, the Institute holds responsibility for coordinating national marine research, and supporting Irish-based researchers to achieve success in international programmes. Further details of funding awarded to EMR organisations is provided in the table in Section E below.

Through the Marine Institute Blue Bioeconomy Programme, the Institute has and continues to provide policy support towards the development of the Bioeconomy Action Plan, the Irish Macro-Algal Cultivation Strategy to 2030, and the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development. The Marine Institute is a partner in the BlueBio Cofund (Blue Bioeconomy) and Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, providing funding to Irish partners across all the regions. Both of these European funding mechanisms aim to enhance competitiveness, resilience and sustainability in their respective sectors. Although many of these activities are targeted at national and international policies and legislation, many are also supporting Ireland's regions and their associated economic spatial strategies and regional enterprise plans.

National Marine Planning Framework

As noted in the response of the Marine Institute, its programmes and plans support the overall strategic objectives of the NMPF (Economic, Environmental, and Social/Human Health), as well as providing specific data and evidence services to support the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the NMPF. As DMAPs (Designated Maritime Area Plans) are developed, data and evidence will be required at a more regional and local spatial scale. This work is currently being evolved in partnership with the policy owner: DHLGH – Marine Planning Unit. This will be important for the next iteration of the EM RSES.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Competitive Research Programme

DAFM's competitive research programme, launched approximately every 18-months, support 'public good' research projects and innovation in Research Performing Organisations in the regions to address challenges and opportunities in the agri-food, forest and marine sectors. The research Calls also support the development of human capital, skills and innovation in particular for early stage researchers (Masters and PhD students and post-docs). Since 2010, over €210m has been committed to agri-food, forest and marine research projects through the programme.

The DAFM Research Programme also collaborates in project co-funding arrangements with other national (EPA, SEAT, SFI, HRB) and international (EU countries, DAERA NI, USDA) research funding bodies and their competitive research calls.

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) is the current agri-environment climate measure under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027. The Government has committed €1.5 billion to the Scheme over its duration, which is the largest amount ever committed to an agri-environment scheme. This financial commitment highlights the anticipated contribution of the Scheme to the delivery of long-term environmental improvement through the participation by a significant number of farmers on the most appropriate land, with each making a strong improvement on their farm.

Some 46,000 farmers have been accepted into this scheme under Tranche 1, which shows the level of interest, the commitment and environmental ambition of our farmers in contributing to the long-term ambition of delivering on environmental and climate objectives. Tranche 2 of the Scheme is scheduled to open for applications in Quarter 4 of 2023.

Using a habitats-based approach, delivered through both multi-functional prescription and results-based actions, ACRES aims to contribute significantly to achieving improved biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes.

These will be achieved through two approaches under the scheme:

- an ACRES General approach offering a range of measures for individual farmers (both targeted and general); and
- an ACRES Co-operation approach, available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas, who opt to undertake measures, as well as bespoke farm, and landscape actions. Farmers participating in this approach have the assistance of a Local Cooperation Project (CP) Team, who will assist with implementation of the scheme at local level.

The ACRES General approach introduces a qualitative approach, compared to its predecessor under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (the Green Low carbon Agri-Environment Scheme [GLAS]), with the inclusion of a number of results-based actions. The ACRES Co-operation approach also includes this qualitative aspect on a wider scale with land included in the Scheme to be assessed using results-based scorecards, with incentives in place to increase scores and improve the landscape being farmed. The introduction of a Farm Sustainability Plan as part of the ACRES application process will help achieve the underlying principle of ACRES which is “the right measure in the right place”.

The purpose of a results-based system is to reward good environmental practice and encourage increased ambition through subsequent increased scores and resulting increased payments.

Contracts under ACRES are for a minimum period of 5 years. The ACRES General approach offers a maximum payment of €7,311 per participant per full calendar year. The level of payment achieved will be determined by the payment rates for the respective actions selected and undertaken. ACRES Co-operation approach offers a maximum payment of €7,000 per participant per full calendar year, with a participant able to avail of an additional €3,500 per annum in respect of Non-Productive Investments and Co-operative/Landscape Actions.

The Teams in each of the eight ACRES Co-operation were appointed following a competitive tendering process and their role is to assist ACRES Co-operation participants in their respective areas to assist them at local level e.g. by the identification of appropriate non-productive investments or landscape actions.

It is envisaged that ACRES will, by means of both approaches, enhance the contribution of the agriculture sector to a range of environmental, climate and biodiversity objectives. The payment rate for each action is based on income forgone, costs incurred and transaction costs and, while ACRES is not an income support scheme, it provides valuable assistance to farmers to enable them to implement the various actions.

CAP Strategic Plan

Ireland’s CAP Strategic Plan opened on the 1 January 2023. As outlined in Section A, the programme includes a suite of new supports and environmental measures.

BIM Schemes

Fisheries

- Brexit Off-Register Capacity Buy-Out Scheme
- Brexit Temporary Fleet Tie up Scheme
- Brexit Fisheries Cooperative Transit Scheme
- Brexit Voluntary Permanent Cessation Scheme

Aquaculture

- Brexit Sustainable Aquaculture Growth Scheme

Seafood Processors

- Brexit Processing Capital Support Scheme

Fisheries/Aquaculture/Seafood Processors

- Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Scheme

Marine Institute Marine Research Programme

Investments under the Marine Institute's Marine Research Programme closely align with priorities as stated in key national strategies (e.g. Impact 2030, Food Vision 2030, Climate Action Plan 2021, etc.) and EU strategies (e.g. European Green Deal Strategy, EU Farm to Fork Strategy, EU Strategy for the Atlantic, Marine Strategy, Marine Spatial Planning and Water Framework Directives).

These investments underpin the goal to progress maritime sectors towards climate neutrality, targeted particularly for:

- The sustainable development of Ireland's marine economy including offshore renewable energy sector.
- A green transition for the blue food sector (Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership – EU Horizon Europe).
- Investigating marine carbon storage options (Blue Carbon Research Programme) and increasing ocean observation for mitigation against the effects of climate change (e.g. sea level rise, ocean carbon uptake, food-webs & habitats).

The programmes include training and capacity building programmes such as the Marine Institute Cullen Scholarships, Postdoctoral Fellowships, Access to National Research Vessels (via the Institute's Shiptime Programme), as well as project-based awards such as Blue Carbon Research Programme, which has 2 projects involving Dublin organisations, 4 distinct HEIs (2 from the EM Region) & International collaboration.

Joint funding instruments have also been administered to grantees in the EMR. This includes BlueBio ERA-NET Co-fund (see above), and also JPI Oceans: a pan-European intergovernmental platform aiming to increase efficiency and impact of research and innovation for sustainably healthy and productive seas and oceans.

Eastern & Midland Region Organisations involved in the projects include 5 HEIs, 3 public bodies & 1 SME as follows:

- Dublin City University (2 projects)
- Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (2 projects)
- University College Dublin (UCD) (7 Projects)
- NUI Maynooth (2 projects)
- Trinity College Dublin
- Gavin and Doherty Geosolutions Ltd.
- Geological Survey Ireland
- Met Eireann
- Teagasc

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

The department provided funding details relating funds obtained in the Region under the Agricultural Catchments Programme and the National Federation of Group Water Schemes as follows.

Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
Agricultural Catchments Programme	Wexford, Cork and Louth	Teagasc Agricultural Catchments Programme	€2.9m p/a 2020-2023	Year 4 2023
National Federation of Group Water Schemes	Westmeath	Dedicated Source Protection Pilot Programme	€500,000	2021-2023

Bord Bia

In its response, Bord Bia provided detail on a Marketing Assistance Programme which provides grants to companies who meet certain criteria and who are members of the Origin Green programme. Grants are for eligible marketing activities such as website development, packaging design and trade fair attendance. The table below sets out the marketing grants approved for companies located in the counties of the Eastern and Midland Region in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Companies & Amounts Approved

Dublin

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	13	€78,000
2022	21	€139,000
2023	24	€181,000

Kildare

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	2	€19,000
2022	5	€34,500
2023	5	€34,500

Laois

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	1	€4,000
2022	1	€3,000
2023	1	€4,000

Longford

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	0	n/a
2022	1	€15,000
2023	1	€16,000

Louth

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	3	€33,500
2022	4	€30,000
2023	2	€12,500

Meath

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	6	€40,500
2022	6	€49,000
2023	6	€45,500

Offaly

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	2	€9,000
2022	2	€15,000
2023	3	€25,000

Westmeath

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	1	€10,000
2022	1	€4,000
2023	1	€7,000

Wicklow

	Companies Approved	Companies Approved
2021	3	€21,000
2022	3	€33,000
2023	5	€42,500

Total 2021-2023: €905,500

BIM

In its response, BIM provided a spreadsheet detailing individual grants which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region.

The content of this spreadsheet is aggregated here below.

Fund Name	Relevant EMRA Counties	Paid to Date (to the nearest €1000)	Amount Outstanding (to the nearest €1000)
Seafood Training Scheme 2018 - Individual	Wicklow	€3,000	
Seafood Training Scheme 2018 - Employers	Louth	€1000	
Seafood Capital Investment Scheme	Kildare	€230,000	
Seafood Training Scheme	Dublin	€1000	
Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Development Scheme - Project Type 1	Louth & Wicklow		€40,000
Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Development Scheme - Project Type 3	Dublin	€1000	
Brexit Inshore Fisheries Business Model Adjustment Scheme	Dublin, Louth and Wicklow	€147,000	
Brexit Processing Capital Support Scheme	Dublin, Kildare & Louth		€1,099,000
Brexit Sustainable Aquaculture Growth Scheme	Louth & Wicklow	€362,000	€11,000
Brexit Temporary Fleet Tie-up Scheme	Dublin, Louth & Meath	€986,000	
Brexit Temporary Fleet Tie-up Scheme 2022	Dublin, Louth & Meath	€2,406,000	
Brexit Voluntary Permanent Cessation Scheme	Dublin & Louth	€2,376,000	€9,601,000
Covid-19 Aquaculture Support Scheme	Dublin & Louth	€20,000	
Covid-19 Temporary Fleet Tie-Up Scheme	Dublin & Louth	€15,000	
Fleet Safety Scheme - Vessels 12m and greater	Dublin & Louth	€83,000	€26,000
Fleet Safety Scheme - Vessels under 12m	Louth	€1,000	€5,000
Marine Tourism Safety Scheme	Louth & Wicklow	€2,000	€6,000
Seafood Capital Investment Scheme	Dublin & Louth	€55,000	€2,000
Seafood Training Scheme	Dublin, Louth & Meath	€14,000	€4,000
SME Seafood Processing Innovation Scheme	Dublin	€9,000	€23,000
Sustainable Fisheries Scheme Part B	Dublin & Louth	€326,000	€44,000

Marine Institute

Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
Marine Research Programme – Ship-Time Research Survey (Awarded 2021)	Dublin	Development of a fibre-optic approach for offshore site investigation - This project proposes to develop a methodology using distributed acoustic sensing (DAS) for rapidly acquiring offshore seismic data over considerable distances (km scale), at high resolution. This approach has never previously been used for offshore geotechnical investigations. From the point of view of scientific timing, an opportunity currently exists to explore the novelty of this application.	85,000	Completed in March 2021
Marine Research Programme – Ship-Time Research Survey (Awarded 2021)	Dublin	Deep Structure of Porcupine Ridge and Rockall Plateau Margins - The overarching aim of the project is to acquire the first ever whole-crustal images of Rockall Plateau passive margin, Porcupine Ridge passive margin, the adjacent Porcupine Abyssal Plain (all within Irish sovereign territory), as well as Erriador Seamount and the East Thulean Rise. Data acquisition will involve 4 long controlled-source Ocean Bottom Seismometer (OBS) profiles. This dataset will be used to answer fundamental science questions concerning interplay between continental rifting and break-up, Large Igneous Province emplacement, and extreme global climate change.	266,000	Completed in May 2021
Marine Research Programme – Post-Doctoral Fellowship (Awarded 2021)	Dublin	Shark Island: enhancing sustainable shark ecotourism in Ireland - SHARK ISLAND is a multidisciplinary project linking biologists, policy makers and the general public to enhance sustainable ecosystem service provision of Ireland's unique shark and ray resources, while simultaneously improving conservation outcomes for the animals in Ireland's waters.	399,032	Ongoing – Due to complete March 2026
Marine Research Programme – Cullen PhD Scholarship (Awarded 2021)	Dublin	Development of a Cumulative Effects Assessment Framework for Ireland's Marine Planning Process -This research project will mediate scientific data and stakeholder knowledge through GIS, to expand our understanding of the human-environmental interactions in Irish marine waters. At the heart of the research is the development of a GIS-based CEA methodology intended to enhance the evidence-base for Marine Spatial Planning, facilitating dialogue and setting good practice standards transferable to other jurisdictions.	110,000	Ongoing – Due to complete August 2026
Marine Research Programme – Cullen PhD Scholarship (Awarded 2021)	Kildare	Recovering legacy tidal records to elucidate trends in sea level rise in Ireland – This project will involve the digitisation of paper marigrams, especially the Cork and Galway records. These records will be analysed for tidal constituents, non-tidal residual statistics, and mean sea level. This information will be critical for understanding mean sea level throughout Ireland, and coastal vulnerability specifically in the Cork and Galway regions.	110,000	Ongoing – Due to complete August 2026
Marine Research Programme – Blue Carbon Research Programme (Awarded 2021)	Dublin	Quantification, characterisation, source and fate of past and present carbon storage in coastal and offshore sediments for effective marine management (Quest) - This project will conduct a multidisciplinary programme of research to qualify and quantify stocks of carbon in Irish marine sediments, examine and characterise threats to Blue Carbon in these settings and support the development of long-term management strategies. This programme will comprise spatial predictive modelling along with offshore surveying and sampling, laboratory analysis and hydrodynamic modelling to deliver comprehensive geochemical, geological, geotechnical, environmental and morphodynamic assessments of Blue Carbon 'hotspots' in Irish waters.	997,853 (844,195 MI and 153,658 EPA)	Ongoing – Due to complete May 2026
Marine Research Programme – Blue Carbon Research Programme (Awarded 2021)	Dublin	Investigating Ireland's Blue Carbon Potential Through a Scientific, Socio-economic and Legislative Approach (BlueC) - The overarching aim of BlueC is thus to advance scientific understanding of the carbon dynamics in Irish coastal and marine environments, whilst simultaneously improving management and harnessing their potential for climate mitigation, adaptation and other ecosystem services to underpin policy development. The multidisciplinary team will focus on carbon stocks and sequestration rates in seagrasses and saltmarshes.	1,599,738 (1,353,396 MI and 246,342 EPA)	Ongoing – Due to complete May 2027

Marine Research Programme – Ship-Time Research Survey (Awarded 2022)	Dublin	Site Investigation and Baseline data acquisition for leakage monitoring at Carbon Capture and Storage site in the north Celtic Sea (InStor) - The InStor project will make a significant contribution to the creation of a baseline model and the future development of the envisaged CO2 geological storage site at the Kinsale Head Gas field, by acquiring high-resolution geophysical and geochemical data sets, and thereafter building an integrated geophysical and geochemical baseline model which is critical for future CO2 leakage monitoring. It will further assist in the seabed and sub-seabed investigation useful for de-risking the development of marine infrastructure for the wind energy sector in the North Celtic Sea.	72,000	Completed in March 2022
Marine Research Programme – Ship-Time Research Survey (Awarded 2022)	Kildare	A4 Aimsir & EirOOS - For the A4 project team this will mark the first Irish involvement in international efforts for sustained observing of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). The survey will also deploy the glider, Laochra na Mara, to provide hydrographic observations from the Goban Spur to the on-shelf moorings. EirOOS is an SFI infrastructure grant to fund an Irish ocean observing system, one element of which is mooring infrastructure capable of measuring ocean circulation on the shelf and shelf edge.	176,000	Completed in October 2022
Marine Research Programme – Ship-Time Research Survey (Awarded 2022)	Dublin	Development of an integrated geophysical approach using fibre-optics for scour potential and assessment - The 2021 survey acted as a proof of concept, showing that fibre optic cables can effectively be used in an offshore environment to assess the geotechnical properties of the near surface geology. The next phase of research (the 2022 survey) will take the lessons learnt from the earlier project and allow the proposed methodology to be scaled up and used for the assessment of ground conditions in more dynamic marine conditions.	208,000	Completed in December 2022
Marine Research Programme – BlueBio ERA-NET Co-fund - H2020 Project number 817992 (Awarded 2022)	Dublin	ImPrESsIVE: Improved Processing to Enhance Seafood Sidestream Valorization and Exploration - The main aim of the project is to improve the extraction of added value compounds such as LC MUFA-, PUFA-rich oils, bioactive peptides and chitosan from underutilized seafood side streams (fishery and crustacean) in terms of yield and quality by using emerging non-thermal technologies as advanced pre-treatments (pulsed electric field, high pressure, ultrasound, etc.) for further applications in the food and nutraceutical industries.	150,000	Ongoing – Due to complete August 2025
Marine Research Programme – JPI Oceans Joint Call on Underwater Noise in the Marine Environment (Awarded 2022)	Dublin	PURE WIND (Impact of sound on marine ecosystems from offshore wind energy generation) - This project aims to expand our knowledge of the radiated noise and the biological consequences of Offshore Wind Farms and place them in appropriate regulatory contexts, including provisions for adaptive mitigation advice. From the source and medium side, we will quantify key features of radiated noise from fixed and floating OWF, to increase understanding and simulate cumulative effect of clusters on radiated noise, helping us to identify sensitive habitats in cross-basin soundscapes. From the biological perspective, we will identify spatial and qualitative use of operating OWF by top predators and study the impacts of OWF noise on zooplankton behavior. These efforts will advance our knowledge of acute and cumulative effects of operational OWF noise across pelagic food webs. Harmonising and combining these two sides, we will develop knowledge and tools for integration of all aspects of noise production and propagation from operational OWF.	99,938	Ongoing – Due to complete October 2025
Marine Research Programme – Ship-Time Research Survey (Awarded 2023)	Dublin	Quantification, characterisation, source and fate of past and present carbon storage in offshore sediments for effective marine management (Quest) - see above	220,000	To be completed in 2023 or 2024 (depending on vessel ability)

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

No further comments to those that have been incorporated above.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the response received from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for the purposes of RSES Monitoring. In addition, the reports received by agencies under the aegis of the Department, including Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Marine Institute Ireland and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority are most welcome.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the DAFM have demonstrated that progress has been made in implementing the RSES and have carried out a number of specific actions that enable same.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendation to NOAC for consideration;

- Repeating the sole recommendation included in the 2021 Monitoring Report, the Regional Assembly should inform the implementation of the new Agri-Food Strategy to 2030 which was published in August 2021. It is essential that implementation policy and investment priorities reflect the RSES to allow managed and sustainable growth that enables each place to fulfil ambition and potential.
- The Regional Assembly should be included as a stakeholder in the formal implementation plan for Food Vision 2030. This would help to ensure that implementation measures are aligned to the policy contained within the RSES, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. Furthermore, EMRA's participation on the Interreg Europe ORIGINN project (2023-2027) which focuses on the identification of good practice for rural innovation can support implementation of Food Vision 2030 at the regional and local levels through updates to the biannual HLIC meetings.
- The Assembly should continue to be invited to participate on evaluation panels for the DAFM Competitive Research Programme where research themes cross-cut RSES priorities. This will ensure that funded research supports regional policy and vice versa.
- Objectives 3-6 of CAP relate to climate mitigation and adaptation, management of natural resources protection of biodiversity and landscapes. Implementation of the CSP should have regard to the results and outputs of the ESPON QGasSP and Interreg Europe PROGRESS projects on which the Assembly was lead stakeholder and active partner respectively.
- The Assembly supports the position of the Minister that any movement towards privatisation of fishing rights would seriously risk fishing vessels losing an economic link with Ireland's coastal communities and would be contrary to RSES objectives relating to fisheries, aquaculture and coastal communities.
- Working with the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), DAFM should ensure that actions and themes funded under the LEADER programme for rural development are aligned with and complement relevant RSES objectives.
- Standards for the maintenance of land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAECs) developed by DAFM, should be consistent with existing approaches applied by NPWS for designated and non-designated land and should be informed by the most recent peer reviewed international research.
- DAFM should ensure that all publicly funded or co-funded research projects are recorded⁶ and, where relevant, appropriately aligned with other ongoing research both within DAFM and its agencies, and being undertaken by third parties.

⁶ Example: While the response by DAFM referenced the bioeconomy scheme being funded through the EU Just Transition Fund for which the Assembly is the Managing Authority, no reference is made in the response to a second scheme which will focus on funding research for farming under wet conditions at catchment scale.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices noted in the response of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

- Publication of Food Vision 2030, an ambitious ten-year strategy focusing on the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the agri-food sector, which is clearly aligned with the key principles and relevant objectives of the RSES.
- Ongoing implementation of Food Vision 2030 with stakeholders of regional relevance and in line with the 2023 Climate Action Plan.
- Ongoing roll-out of DAFM's competitive research programme supporting research across themes of central relevance to the EMRA RSES including rural development, climate and environment research. EMRA participated in an evaluation panel for this research programme in 2023.
- Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations in 2022 and ongoing research undertaken through the Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP) focused on preventing nitrates contamination and nutrient losses to water, a key concern noted in the RSES.
- Targeted Agricultural Modernization Schemes (TAMS) and other schemes such as EIP-AGRI are improving the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of agriculture in line with RSES objectives.
- The Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 provides a key framework to support the sustainable development of Ireland's farming and food sector by supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness, by strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, and by contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels. The Assembly is represented on the CAP Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee which met first in December 2022.
- Ongoing implementation of Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (RDP) a vital support to the viability of Ireland's rural economy which is aligned with the economic strategy of the RSES.
- The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Seafood Development Programme 2021-2027 is commencing its implementation with the Assembly represented on the Programme Monitoring Committee.
- Establishment of the Bioeconomy Implementation Group chaired by DAFM and DECC which will help to deliver RSES objectives relating to the circular bioeconomy.
- The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) has been established under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027. This will help to improve biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes in line with RSES objectives.
- Ongoing implementation of the Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan in line with RSES objectives.
- Appropriate policy, funding and administrative measures have been implemented by DAFM and its agencies to mitigate the potential impact of Brexit on agriculture, food and marine sectors including agriculture and food exports throughout the region.
- A number of schemes are being rolled out by DAFM as part of the EU Just Transition Fund for which the Assembly is the Managing Authority.
- Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Marine Institute Ireland and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority are all undertaking activities which are supporting the objectives of the RSES and key national and European objectives.
- The National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development 2030 is completed and is being prepared for publication.
- The programmes and plans of the Marine Institute support the overall strategic objectives of the NMPF (Economic, Environmental, and Social/Human Health), as well as providing specific data and evidence services to support the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the NMPF. As DMAPs (Designated Maritime Area Plans) are developed, data and evidence will be required at a more regional and local spatial scale. This work is currently being evolved in partnership with the policy owner: DHLGH - Marine Planning Unit. This will be important for the next iteration of the EM RSES.

6.1.6

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The mission of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is to provide high-quality education which will (a) enable individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society; and (b) contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. This is aligned to the RSES and in particular RSO 13 which is to "improve education skills and social inclusion" and RSO 12 which is "to build a resilient economic base and promote innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems that support smart specialisation, cluster development and sustained economic growth." It is also aligned with RSO 5 which is to "enhance, integrate and protect our arts, culture and heritage assets to promote creative places and heritage led regeneration."

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included, for instance: learning and training activities; the role of universities, research centres and Education Training Boards; progress in the development of multi-campus Technological Universities (TUs); progressing regeneration and economic synergies in proximity to education campus development; the development of Technology and Innovation Poles anchored by Regional Scientific Centres, and the development of sites where high-tech and high potential start-ups can thrive, in conjunction with IoTs and Universities; the enhancement of skills, talent and innovation and fostering of collaboration between enterprise, higher education institutions and public sector, to identify areas for investment in Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) as part of a smart specialisation approach; rolling out the 'Smart Cities' concept throughout the Region; future proofing and anticipating economic structural change, and; benchmarking Ireland's performance in RDI against other comparable economies and progress towards improving our comparative performance.

Access to high quality further education and lifelong learning

Human Capital Initiative (HCI)

The Human Capital Initiative (HCI), which commenced in 2020, aims to increase capacity in higher education to provide skills-focused programmes designed to meet priority skills needs. Some key HCI objectives are to increase provision in areas of identified skills need; future proof graduates with industry relevant skills for emerging technologies; ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills; and incentivise continued reform and innovation in higher education provision building on best practice available nationally and internationally. To date, HCI Pillar 1 has provided 7,288 graduate conversion places on 95 courses over a 3-year period. A further 2862 places will be on offer in 2023/24.

At present, HCI Pillar 2 has delivered some 1000 additional graduates in high skills needs areas.

HCI Pillar 3 is focused on the core principle of embedding innovation and agility across a wide spectrum of undergraduate provision. Twenty-four projects developing innovative, and responsive models of programme delivery, are underway. The projects address a variety of initiatives from the development of national systems for Micro Credentials and Recognition of Prior Learning to developments in course provision in additive manufacturing, cyber security and financial services. These projects will boost the higher education systems ability to respond rapidly to changes in both skills requirements and technology and strengthen collaboration with enterprise.

The Department's report has provided a breakdown of courses available in third level campuses across the EMRA region.

Springboard+

Springboard+ began in 2011 as part of the Government's Jobs Initiative to provide free and heavily subsidised upskilling and reskilling opportunities through higher education in areas of identified skills need. Since then, it has evolved alongside economic improvements to also address the skills development needs of those already in employment.

Springboard+ complements the core State-funded education and training system and is one of several initiatives designed to meet current and future skill needs of the Irish economy. The further development of skilled workers remains central to our ability to attract ongoing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the further development of our Small Medium Enterprise (SME) sector.

The primary objective of Springboard+ is to provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy by supporting those who are unemployed or Returners to gain sustainable employment. In addition, it provides opportunities for workforce development to enhance the skill levels of those in employment and increase the national rate of lifelong learning. Collaboration between enterprise and higher education providers is key to the design and delivery of the programmes.

The programme is unique in that programmes are on offer in both public and private higher education providers. Most programmes are delivered either fully online or in a blended format making them fully accessible.

To date over 100,000 people have benefited from a Springboard+ course. The 2023/24 programmes will be launched in the coming weeks with 8,700 new places on offer, with approximately 4,700 of these in providers in the Eastern and Midland Region.

Adult Literacy for Life

The ALL Strategy was launched on 8th September 2021, (International Literacy Day), on the basis of an extensive, far-reaching and inclusive consultation process including, in particular, those with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs.

The vision of ALL embodied in the Strategy is to ensure that everyone has the literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society and realise their potential. All adults in Ireland should have the literacy skills to enjoy a good quality of life within their families, communities and workplace. It takes a new innovative systems-based approach to literacy, adopting a cross-Government, cross-economy and cross-society approach which closely references complementary initiatives across relevant national strategies and policies.

The 16 Education and Training Boards, funded through SOLAS, provide a range of programmes to cater for the literacy needs of adults. These adult literacy programmes are responsive and learner-centred, providing classes in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. Digital skills in using devices as well as other practical digital skills such as learning how to use the internet, cloud services, and applications are all areas that have become a priority for delivery by Adult Education Services, including for older adults.

Over 9,000 unique learners enrolled in Adult Literacy Groups in the Eastern and Midland Region in 2022, and over 5,000 have in the first four months of 2023.



Research

The Department's response states that Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) funds research that makes a real difference to our society and economy, now and into the future. SFI funds research in Ireland's Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) - often in partnership with Industry or other national and international research funders.

Through this funding they are ensuring that Ireland has the skills, ideas and technologies that is needed to be a true global knowledge economy and that societal challenges are being addressed. SFI ensure that they are only funding world class research by engaging independent international experts, all of whom are based outside of Ireland, to review the research proposals that SFI receives and to review the investments they make. SFI funding opportunities are open to all HEIs across the country and through an extensive peer review process funding is awarded based on the available budget. SFI strive to ensure a balanced portfolio which places an emphasis on early and advanced research careers, frontiers/discovery and applied research, research projects that are led by individuals and small groups as well as large scale research centres. SFI research teams are at the forefront of new discoveries and advancements and are producing the highly skilled talent needed for companies that have established a presence in Ireland, SMEs, and for academia and our public sector. SFI Research Professors are acting as magnets for the best international talent and industry and SFI is investing in the critical infrastructure, providing institutes and researchers with the equipment they require to carry out world class research.

In March of 2021, An Taoiseach, Micheal Martin along with Simon Harris, Minister for Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science, launched SFI's new 2025 Strategy, Shaping our Future. The new strategy was developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders throughout Ireland and aims to further unlock the potential of Irish research to meet current challenges, seize future opportunities and support the priorities outlined in Ireland's recent Programme for Government: Our Shared Future. In response to the current challenges Ireland is facing, the strategy optimises Ireland's ability to prepare for future crises and to scale its knowledge economy. The Department's response states that as we prepare for Ireland's future, science will play a crucial role in helping us as a country anticipate what's next, plan for our future skills and collaborate with the research community, industry, citizens, agencies and Government. These ambitions are addressed under two pillars within the strategy, 'Delivering Today' and 'Preparing for Tomorrow'. 'Delivering Today' focuses on developing Ireland's top talent, building on our excellent research base and maximising tangible societal and economic benefits for Ireland in the immediate future. 'Preparing for Tomorrow' seeks to position Ireland to take first-mover advantage on new and emerging fields. To do this, SFI will focus on anticipating what's next and developing the skills needed for the future of work using a data led approach. To achieve this SFI will increase collaborations across the research ecosystem to maximise efficiencies and impact.

Since launching in 2012, the SFI Research Centres have transformed the research ecosystem in Ireland, creating an environment where multi-institutional and multi/inter-disciplinary collaborations are now the norm and where industry (both SMEs and MNCs) can effectively join and collaborate with these academic networks. The SFI Research Centres are helping to improve the quality of people's lives through healthcare, informing public policy on climate change mitigation and they have been instrumental in the delivery of SFI's Education and Public Engagement strategy, including increasing engagement with underserved and underrepresented communities across Ireland. SFI Research Centres will play a critical role in helping Ireland recover from and succeed in the face of unprecedented global challenges such as BREXIT, future pandemics and climate change. Such threats also present opportunities to harness Ireland's scientific human capital to create innovative solutions through research and innovation, to ultimately create a more resilient economy and society. To date, Centres have developed research excellence in areas of national priority, supporting indigenous and multinational industries as well as informing policy development through collaborations with government departments. The Centres rapidly pulled together in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, with boundaries between Centres no longer visible, responding as a highly interconnected, coordinated and open network ready to respond to the specific challenges to be addressed.

A key objective of the Centres is to support SME competitiveness through R&D collaborations, an objective that is critically important in terms of realising the potential for Centres to positively impact on rebooting of the Irish economy. According to the most recent data, SMEs represents approximately 30% of all industry contracts signed with Centres. The majority of contracts represent one-off engagements with low levels of repeat business. The extent of engagement is highly sector dependent with sectors such as medical devices, renewable energy and IT characterised by high SME engagement, while others such as Pharma are dominated by multi-nationals. Centres have adopted a variety of models to ensure SMEs can collaborate and are not disadvantaged by cost share requirements. These include consortium/membership models (lower co-funding contribution required by SMEs} in addition to the provision of consultancy and innovation services and training workshops. Much of the engagement is facilitated through EI programmes, such as the Innovation Voucher, which Centres use as a relationship building tool, effectively a steppingstone to a full R&D collaboration.

As of end 2022, the SFI Research Centres have signed 1,426 collaborative research agreements with 688 companies – 366 of which are Irish companies. 317 of the 688 companies are categorised as MNC, 340 as SME with the remainder being a mix of start ups and “other” company categories.

SFI currently supports 16 SFI Research Centres, 7 of which are hosted in Higher Education Institutes within the Eastern and Midland Region. A key objective of the Centres is to support SME competitiveness through R&D collaborations, an objective that is critically important in terms of realising the potential for Centres to positively impact on rebooting of the Irish economy. It is important to note that although the Higher Education Institutes with responsibility for these Research Centres are based within the Eastern and Midland Region (Dublin) their academic and industry partners are located right across Ireland. Equally, HEIs within the Eastern and Midland Region that are not hosts of the other 9 SFI Research Centres are academic partners on those Centres.

Cross-cutting ‘upskilling and training’ and ‘research’, SFI currently funds 6 SFI Centres for Research Training (CRTs) that are collectively hosted across a partner network of 10 research bodies. The purpose of the Centres is to provide cohorts of academically outstanding future research leaders and with the skills and knowledge required to address the future challenges of an ever-changing work environment. The SFI Centres for Research Training aim to promote excellence in research and education and will train over 700 doctoral students in data and ICT skills; equipping them with transversal, cross-sectoral and discipline specific skills. The SFI Centres for Research Training are a new and critical dimension of Ireland’s fourth level education system which have been modelled on international best practice and have been funded following rigorous international peer review. There are currently 6 SFI Centres for Research Training, two of which are hosted at Higher Education Institutes in the Eastern and Midland Region 1) SFI Centre for Research Training in Machine Learning, 2) SFI Centre for Research Training in Digitally Enhanced Reality. As is the case with SFI Research Centres, the SFI Centres for Research Training involve industry and academic partners across Ireland.

Progress in the development of multi-campus Technological Universities (TUs)

The creation of Technological Universities is a key commitment within the Programme for Government and will deliver significant advantages to national priorities in relation to Higher Education access, research-informed teaching and learning, as well as supporting enterprise and regional development. The Technological Universities Act (2018) highlights the role of the TUs in developing and promoting strong social and cultural links, and links supporting creativity, between the technological university and the community in the region in which the campuses of the technological university are located. The Act also promotes effective relationships between TUs and organisations representing the social, creative and cultural interests of the community in the region in which the campuses of the technological university are located.

The Department’s response provides progress updates for TU Dublin, the Athlone IT and Limerick IT Consortium, the TUSEI Consortium, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), and for the Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire (IADT).

TU Dublin

Campus locations: Grangegorman, Tallaght, Blanchardstown

In 2019, TU Dublin was the largest provider of third level education in Ireland with over 29,000 students enrolled in a wide range of disciplines. The university provided opportunities across the NFQ levels and for a diverse student base, with a large cohort of part-time learners representing almost 20% of the national part-time student population. In its first year, TU Dublin conferred 8,232 graduates with qualifications ranging from Level 6 to Level 10. TU Dublin has some 3,500 staff.

TU Dublin published both its first strategic report and annual report in 2020. The plan “TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030” centres on the three pillars of ‘People’, ‘Planet’ and ‘Partnership’ with a vision to ‘Create a Better World Together’. Notable goals include the aims to have at least 1/6 of revenues from non-Exchequer sources, delivery of a new organisational design, 1/3 of offerings delivered through multiple pathways, be in the top 3 Irish universities for graduate employability and be the largest provider of lifelong learning for industry and the professions, all by 2023.

Along with investment in technology enabled systems, the design and investment of over 200,000m² of new campus development is prioritised in the TU Dublin strategy. The university is seeing the roll-out of state-of-the-art facilities in the city campus and this building programme, the largest education infrastructure project underway in the State, will continue at Grangegorman through the period of the strategic plan to 2023. New PPP facilities of 4,000m² and 5,200 m² respectively are at final business case stage for the Blanchardstown and Tallaght campuses.

Technological University (TU) of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest

The TU of the Shannon was established on 1st October 2021 (following a joint application from the former Athlone IT and Limerick IT) and comprises of a third level education facility with over 14,000 students across six campuses in Athlone, Limerick City, Clonmel, Moylish, Ennis and Thurles.

The TU’s Athlone Campus is home to approximately 7,000 of TUS’s 14,000 students. As the sole higher education provider servicing the Midlands, TUS Athlone plays an integral role in educating and upskilling the local workforce in key areas of technological advancement. Athlone Campus is very active in the area of Apprenticeship both craft based and consortia led including in cutting edge fields such as polymer technology.

The TU launched its Strategic Plan 2023-2026, on 10 March 2023, with a key priority being to ‘provide greater access pathways through progression options, apprenticeships, online delivery, flexible learning, international and non-traditional routes to education’.

SETU - Wicklow County Campus

Located at Clermont House, Rathnew, the SETU Wicklow County Campus is home to the Lifelong Learning Centre, formerly operated by IT Carlow. It became part of the South East Technological University following that TU's establishment on 1st May 2022. The Lifelong Learning Centre offers part-time undergraduate and post-graduate courses in the areas of Business and Accounting, Humanities, PR & Media, Computing, and Science & Health. Approximately 500 learners are registered at the Campus.

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)

As autonomous higher education institutes established under statute, it remains a matter for the governing body of an Institute of Technology to set the institute's particular strategic pathway within the higher education landscape, including whether or not to seek joint TU designation through the prescribed legal processes. Under the statutory framework provided in the Technological Universities Act 2018, two or more IoTs may jointly seek TU designation through a prescribed legislative process. Section 29 of the 2018 Act provides for the application jointly by two or more applicant institutes to the Minister of Education and Skills for an order seeking designation as a TU subject to their jointly meeting specified eligibility criteria. Section 38 of the 2018 Act provides that an applicant institute and an established technological university may apply to the Minister for an order.

In June 2020, DkIT launched a new three-year strategic plan in which the Institute articulates a mission to be a leader for higher education and craft apprenticeships, and the engine for growth and social cohesion in North Leinster-South Ulster through the achievement of TU status and strengthened cross-border alliances. Dr Ruaidhri Neavyn was appointed by the HEA as an advisor to assist the President, Governing Body and Management Team in achieving DkIT's strategic objective to achieve Technological University (TU) status. DkIT is currently developing a TU Vision which lays out its ambitions, capabilities and strengths in terms of how it will contribute to the strategic development and evolution of a multi campus TU as described in the 2018 TU legislation. DkIT has submitted an application to the HEA for further funding, as part of the second cycle of the TU Transformation Fund initiative, to support their aim to meet the required TU metrics as soon as possible.

Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire (IADT)

In October 2020, IADT received funding under the Transformation Fund to explore potential trajectories towards TU designation under the 2018 Act.

Progressing regeneration and economic synergies in proximity to education campus development and the development of Technology and Innovation Poles anchored by Regional Scientific Centres, and the development of sites where high-tech and high potential start-ups can thrive, in conjunction with IoTs and Universities.

A key goal of SFI's Strategy, Shaping our Future, is to "increase geographical Involvement and engagement across the country, including through the SFI Research Centres, and increased collaboration with the new Technological Universities and the Institutes of Technology to ensure that benefits arising from SFI activities are realised across the entirety of Ireland."

In support of this goal, the newly formed Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFERIS) provided budget to SFI to support excellent and impactful research which benefits from the unique strengths of both sectors. Consequently, a research programme will be launched inviting research proposals led by the Technological University (TU)/ Institutes of Technology (IoT) sector with partners from the established University sector. This investment will not only increase financially supported collaboration between the sectors but importantly will provide leadership opportunities for the TU/IoT sector.

The Frontiers for Partnership Awards call opened in April 2021, and at the deadline (26th May 2021), 95 proposals were submitted; of which 85 were eligible. 85 proposals underwent a two-stage international peer review process. 13 awards were ultimately funded, the details of those funded within the EMRA region are provided in the Department's report.

The enhancement of skills, talent and innovation and fostering of collaboration between enterprise, higher education institutions and public sector, to identify areas for investment in Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) as part of a smart specialisation approach

The Department is leading the development of the next national Research and Innovation Strategy. The next strategy contributes to and aligns with key national economic and social policy documents, such as Project 2040, (the National Economic Plan/National Recovery and Resilience Plan, Programme for Government, Statement of Strategy for DFHERIS), as well as the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. DETE has recently developed Ireland's new S3 which involves a 'bottom-up' consultation process where government, business, academia and civil society identify a region's strengths and comparative assets, prioritise research and innovation investment in competitive areas and define a shared vision for regional innovation. DFHERIS will be a member of the S3 steering group led by DETE. DFHERIS will work with DETE and other key stakeholders to ensure that the priorities identified in the S3 are reflected in the next national Strategy and that there is coordination/collaboration and efficiency in the development of both over the coming months.

SFI's 2025 strategy *Shaping Our Future* sets out the vision that Ireland will be a global innovation leader in scientific and engineering research for the advancement of Ireland's economy and society. The 'Tangible Benefits' theme in 'Delivering Today' aims for the research SFI fund to make the greatest possible difference for our society and economy. In support of this, SFI seeks to foster academia-industry interactions by building strategic partnerships with industry to perform cutting-edge, industry-informed STEM research. There are three key themes within Preparing for Tomorrow: A Cohesive Ecosystem, Future Skills and Anticipating What's Next. Actions under the Cohesive Ecosystem pillar include improving how SFI communicate, engage and work with others in the Irish RD&I system to increase our collective performance and efficiency. It is about better co-funding of programmes and alignment and cooperation nationally, and with Northern Ireland and Britain. Key to this will be significantly upscaling engagement with the public to determine their priorities and highlighting opportunities for them to play a role in the research conducted in Ireland.

In October 2022, Irish Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD, UK Minister for Science and Investment Security, Nusrat Ghani MP and Northern Irish Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Edwin Poots MLA, announced a €74 million (£64 million) investment to create new collaborative research centres across Ireland, Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The programme will establish virtual Centres of distributed excellence linking researchers across academia and industry to perform cutting-edge research in areas of mutual economic, societal, health and environmental importance. Co-Centres will be structured according to the existing SFI model and will be funded by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Northern Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and co-funded by industry. The call closed in March 2023 with proposal review currently underway.

The call under the 'Co Centres: Collaboration for Transformative Research and Innovation' Programme opened in November 2022 and focuses on two thematic areas: Climate, and Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems.

The SFI Research Centres are a critical platform for industry/academic research collaboration. The Centres and their industry partners are working together in areas of strategic importance to Ireland and in line with the national research prioritisation areas. The newly launched SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship seeks to support academia-industry interactions and to address industry-informed challenges. Awards under this programme can be made to academic researchers (at faculty and postdoctoral level) wishing to spend time in industry worldwide through the temporary placement of academic researchers with an industry partner.

SFI launched the SFI Public Service Fellowship pilot programme in 2021. This initiative offers researchers a unique opportunity to be temporarily seconded to Government bodies to work on projects with mutually beneficial outcomes. Host organisations included: Office of the Revenue Commissioners, Local Government Management Agency, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Oireachtas Library & Research Service, Houses of the Oireachtas Service and Department of Justice and Equality.

12 fellowships were awarded to foster innovation within the Public Sector by supporting the development and implementation of data-driven and evidence-based approaches. Details of the awards made to those Fellows based at EMRA region institutions are included in the table of funded awards. Due to the success of the pilot programme, the SFI Public Service Fellowship Programme will relaunch in 2023.

In late 2022 Ireland's ERDF Programme was formally approved by the European Commission. It is co-funded by the Government of Ireland (€52.6m) and the European Union (€46.5m) under two European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Regional Programmes - the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 and the Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027.

The realisation of the programme will be through the establishment of three regional SFI ARC Hubs focused on specific thematic areas that will be aligned with the respective regional strategic priorities and the 'National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027' (S3). Each SFI ARC Hub will be hosted by a lead Research Body located in the Programme Area, but it will be multi-site and can involve collaboration with other Research Bodies both in the Programme Area and in other Programme Areas in the Republic of Ireland.

The Programme aims to accelerate early-stage, cutting-edge research, to commercial impact readiness and develop a new cohort of entrepreneurial scientists and engineers that are primed from an early stage to exploit the commercial potential of their research endeavour. It will facilitate the transition of SFI-funded research projects into existing national and international closer-to-market supports, as appropriate and support knowledge transfer from academia through the creation of High Potential Start Ups (HPSUs) and licensing agreements using a novel framework (and associated translational research budget) that integrates critical elements of a research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem with entrepreneurial approaches, thus accelerating time to market from research concept to HPSUs, new product introduction, licences and innovations.

SFI aims to launch this new programme in 2023.

Rolling out the 'Smart Cities' concept throughout the Region

The response from the Department made reference to 'challenge-based funding'.

'Challenge-based funding' is a solution-focused approach to research funding that uses prizes, strict timelines, teamwork, and competition to direct research activities at ambitious societal problems. Several leading countries and private philanthropic funding organisations have pioneered this approach in recent years. Many of the existing challenges facing humanity are encapsulated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including climate action, affordable and clean energy, and sustainable cities and communities.

The National Challenge Fund provides ambitious researchers the chance to make a difference by developing solutions to key challenges in the areas of Green Transition and Digital Transformation.

The National Challenge Fund is a €65 million research fund that consists of eight challenges. In total, it aims to fund approximately 90 research teams with up to €250k over 18 months to develop their ideas. Under each challenge stream, a number of teams will then be awarded follow-on funding of up to €500k before going on to compete for prizes between €1-€2m.

The National Challenge Fund encourages collaboration between government departments, agencies, enterprise, the academic research community, and societal stakeholders to identify challenges and enable action to address green transition and digitalisation targets set at government level. These partnerships will inform the expected outputs and outcomes to ensure that they are meaningful and relevant to the end user. It is expected that solutions are inclusive, equitable and sustainable and adhere to the principles of responsible research and innovation.

The National Challenge Fund was established under the Government's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. The fund is coordinated and administered by Science Foundation Ireland. The first 26 teams to be funded under the programme were announced in February 2023. Details of those funded are available within the funded awards table below.

SFI also runs a number of other Challenge based Funding programmes, which are open to all HEIs across the country to put together teams and apply to the programme. Some of these programmes are run in partnership with other Government bodies.

Challenge-Based Funding Programmes

- The SDG Challenge (in partnership with Irish Aid)
- SFI-Defence Organisation Innovation Challenge (Department of Defence)
- Food Challenge
- Plastics Challenge
- AI for Societal Good Challenge (in partnership with Irish Aid)
- Zero Emissions Challenge (in partnership with Irish Aid)
- SFI Future Innovator Prize



Future proofing and anticipating economic structural change

The response from the Department made reference to the SFI Investments.

The investments in research made by SFI, on behalf of the Government of Ireland, are central to providing the people, skills, ideas, knowledge, technologies, companies and infrastructure that Ireland needs as we emerge from the pandemic and address other challenges such as climate change and BREXIT. This capacity building prepares Ireland to address identified future challenges and, in addition, emerging or unknown challenges. Strengthening Ireland's knowledge economy, in part through SFI's investments in research, is a critical component of protecting Ireland's economic future and responding to economic structural change.

Green Skills

Ireland's flexible skills eco-system is designed to be responsive to societal challenges, including those resulting from climate change. NZEB training, delivered through a network of Centres of Excellence including at LOETB, provide an example of targeted interventions designed to address specific, emerging areas of skills need linked to the green transition.

Other examples include emerging requirements in areas including Electric Vehicle maintenance and offshore wind. The cross-Departmental Offshore Wind Energy Programme, created to drive delivery and capture the economic and business opportunities associated with the development of offshore renewables in Ireland, includes important skills and workforce responses. DFHERIS is leading, in collaboration with DECC, on a dedicated Skills and Workforce Workstream as part of this Programme. There is close engagement with industry, through the Green Tech Skillnet, promoted by Wind Energy Ireland, the representative body for the Irish wind industry. A detailed skills assessment report for offshore wind is being carried out and will inform future planning in this area.

Last year also saw the establishment of a dedicated Construction and Green Skills Programme Office within SOLAS. Working with ETBs nationally, this office is focused on developing programmes and initiatives to drive forward this reform agenda with a particular focus on the construction sector.

Alongside courses in NZEB and retrofit, a national suite of Green Skills programmes is currently being developed by SOLAS in collaboration with enterprise partners for blended delivery by ETBs in areas such as sustainability awareness and resource efficiency to assist in delivering on these challenges. These green skills courses are being developed and rolled out in ETBs across the EMRA area.

Modern Methods of Construction

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) are at the forefront of the future of the construction industry but they can also help address climate action goals. MMC provide economic opportunity. The end result of MMC, as well as a key principle of RSES, is the creation of a healthier and more attractive place to live, work, study and invest in.

The Eastern and Midland region is almost uniquely placed in Ireland to take advantage of the boon in modern methods of construction with the demonstration park at Mount Lucas.

Modern Methods of Construction – Skills

The construction skills landscape is evolving and the priority being placed on MMC at a cross-government level is to increase skills availability, productivity and environmental sustainability, and to reduce cost.

The Report on the Analysis of Skills for Residential Construction & Retrofitting 2023–2030 highlights that the greater adoption of MMC would be expected to lessen the projected increased need in labour demand set out in the report. MMC will also promote the diversity of career opportunities in the sector, including new and emerging careers, and will provide applicable specialist training towards emerging MMC skills requirements.

Modern Methods of Construction – Skillnet Programme

A 2022 research publication by the Construction Professionals Skillnet, 'Modern Methods of Construction – Defining MMC Business: Construction Professionals Skillnet' found that industry requires talent and upskilling supports for senior roles in MMC.

In response, a new micro-credential in Strategic Co-ordination and Collaboration for Modern Methods of Construction was launched in February 2023. This was developed following intensive engagement with industry to identify the key knowledge and skill gaps in the sector, the programme is highly practical and ensures that participants acquire the knowledge and develop the necessary skills to effectively deliver an MMC project.

This is the first of a number of micro-credentials being developed by the Construction Professionals Skillnet and covers project critical areas such as project managing with design freeze, commercial relationships and structures, and how to create a collaborative culture.

In addition, a micro-credential for procurement and finance areas relating to MMC activities is in development.

Modern Methods of Construction – Demonstration Park

The Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB), in conjunction with the National Construction Training Campus located in Mount Lucas, is also making a significant commitment to increase MMC skills capacity. Under Housing for All, a National Demonstration Park for MMC is being developed at Mount Lucas, and is to be opened by the end of this year. The overall aim of the park is to share knowledge and experience of MMC and help to advance relevant skills development in the construction sector.

The project is being overseen by a project management team comprised of representatives of LOETB, SOLAS, DFHERIS, DHLGH and DETE.

The work of the Inter-Departmental MMC Leadership Integration Group chaired by DETE can play a key role in harnessing the MMC productivity dividend through driving greater adoption of such methods.

The demonstration park provides an opportunity to avail of the place making criteria of RSES. It also provides an economic opportunity to be a leader of MMC innovation and provision and that in turn will help hit Climate Action goals – MMC has the potential to be a much greener method of construction. It is a clear opportunity to provide a spotlight on innovation and talent and leverage that strength into a growth strategy for the region.

Benchmarking Ireland's performance in RDI against other comparable economies and progress towards improving our comparative performance

No response provided

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

The Departments response has provided details in relation SOLAS and Skillnet Ireland on initiatives supporting the objectives of the RSES.



SOLAS

Strategic Performance Agreements and Targets

A new set of Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for the period of 2022-2024 were developed and published. Strategic Performance Agreements between SOLAS and each of the 16 ETBs set out the context, strategic priorities and individual ETB's contribution to the achievement of key national Further Education and Training (FET) sector targets. The Minister of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has approved the new national targets as outlined in the SOLAS Corporate Plan 2021-2023.

FET System Targets

The 12 system targets as referenced below have been monitored throughout 2022, both on a national basis and also for each ETB and an annual report published earlier this year. A new transformative digital platform which has been designed specifically for the purpose of ensuring a live report on the system targets throughout the period of the agreements has now been launched with the ETBs and is being rolled out on a national basis. The infrastructure now in place will be transformative in identifying areas of success as well as areas that require action.

The 12 National System Targets are highlighted in the Departments response.

Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland's Business Networks are made up of interconnected businesses and sector experts within a particular sector or geographic region, established to provide upskilling and talent development programmes to businesses, for their employees. Skillnet Ireland partners with industry bodies, supporting over 9,000 businesses and 35,000 trainees in the Eastern and Midland Region. A total of 70 Skillnet Business Networks provide programmes to support businesses across all counties in the Eastern and Midland Region.

Skillnet has deep roots in the SME sector, and they combine those roots with a dedicated regional focus. In 2022, 90% of the companies they supported in the Eastern and Midland Region were SMEs which equates to over 8,500 SMEs. Skillnet Ireland are also committed to supporting FDI in the region and have a Strategic Talent Development Partnership in place with the IDA. The partnership is aimed at supporting FDI companies who are looking to attract and retain talent to drive business growth.

Skillnet Ireland supports businesses in the region through its networks and its initiatives including Mentorswork, Climate Ready Academy and Innovation Exchange.

Green Tech Skillnet, based in County Kildare, is a network facilitating the workforce and development needs of the Irish renewable energy industry. The network aims to deliver impactful training and networking events to a growing workforce, facilitate thought leaders within the renewables sector whilst contributing to Ireland's deep decarbonisation and energy transition. The network recently announced the expansion of Green Tech Skillnet's Wind Turbine Technician programme which aims to address a critical skills gap highlighted in the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) 'Skills for Zero Carbon' Report.

The Construction Professionals Skillnet, based in County Dublin, is a network which provides funded training and development solutions specifically for the construction industry. Skillnet Ireland recently published research in to the area of 'Modern Methods of Construction - Defining MMC Business'. Following the publication of this research the network launched a new micro-credential in Strategic Co-ordination and Collaboration for Modern Methods of Construction in order to ensure construction business across the country have the essential skills in MMC to support the delivery of the Government's Housing for All and Project Ireland 2040 targets.

The MentorsWork programme is designed to provide SME owner/managers with the skills and supports to help your business thrive, by addressing the specific needs of each business. The programme supports businesses to address their own priority areas and the programme is tailored to suit the business's needs.

Climate Ready offers leadership and skills support for enterprises who want to develop their operational and strategic sustainability, offering a suite of Micro Credentials leadership programmes in energy management, waste and circular economy and transport.

The Innovation Exchange is designed to offer a complete framework that will enable both SMEs and large corporates to develop a full understanding of the innovation process from ideation through to procurement and will allow for a structured and managed process to connect both parties that will lead to increased business opportunities.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Policy initiatives included in the response by the Department include the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2020-2024, Innovation 2020, review of the Grangeogorman Sustainability Strategy, and Reform of the Higher Education Authority Act.

The new FET Strategy 2020-24 was launched in July 2020 and is framed around a vision for future FET in Ireland. The strategy outlines how FET will provide pathways for a diverse group of learners, will support societal participation and strong communities, will prepare people for successful careers and a lifetime of learning and development and will be a major driver of Ireland's next critical phase of economic and social development. The strategy sets out the role of FET within a more collaborative and cohesive tertiary education system for Ireland. It outlines the contribution FET will make alongside higher education providers to serve school leavers, lifelong learners, employees looking to upskill and marginalised people who want to re-engage in education, while also supporting employers and communities. Priorities are set out across three core pillars: building skills; creating pathways, and; fostering inclusion. There is also a strong focus on enabling themes including staffing, professional development and digital transformation in FET, as well as capital investment and measurement and data.

The FET Strategy states that, by the end of 2024:

- There will be a greater overall penetration of FET across the population of Ireland.
- A greater share of school leavers will be choosing FET or apprenticeship as their first destination.
- People will move seamlessly between FET & HE with clear transition criteria in large numbers.
- A significant and growing cohort of people in employment using FET to upskill and of employers viewing FET as a critical enterprise resource.
- Progression levels through FET will increase strongly, with pathways from core skills and community education available to all who wish to pursue them.
- A digitally transformed FET system will offer a large portfolio of flexible, online and blended opportunities

To support the achievement of these goals, strategy implementation is being informed by core FET Targets, a clearer framework for tertiary education, strategic planning and funding processes, the enhancement of quality assurance processes in FET and the transformation in the availability and use of FET data.

Since its launch and publication, the Department of Further, Higher Education Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) continues to liaise closely with SOLAS on implementing the Strategy. This is a collaborative effort with the FET Strategy Implementation Group and their subgroups, so that progress continues to be made on the three core pillars of Creating Pathways, Building Skills and Fostering Inclusion.



Other Policy Initiatives

In 2023, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were invited to submit proposals for funding under the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) call for proposals for Graduate Conversion and Specialisation courses. This was the second call for proposals under HCI Pillar 1 and will fund courses in the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Subject to acceptance & Contract, a sample of Eastern and Midland Region institutions that are expected to benefit from this funding include:

HEI Provider

The image displays seven HEI logos arranged in two rows. The top row contains four logos: DCU (Dublin City University), Dundalk Institute of Technology, Maynooth University (National University of Ireland Maynooth), and Technological University Dublin. The bottom row contains three logos: Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Trinity College Dublin, and University College Dublin. Each logo is centered within a white circle, and the institution's name is printed below it.

There was no new call for Springboard+ 2023/24 as programmes are being funded on a multiannual basis.

Programmes will be funded in a number of higher education providers in the Eastern/Midlands beginning in the autumn, including:

HEI Provider

This image is identical to the one above, showing a grid of seven HEI logos in white circles: DCU, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Maynooth University, Technological University Dublin, TUS, Trinity College Dublin, and University College Dublin. Each logo is centered within a white circle, and the institution's name is printed below it.

Unified Tertiary Education and Research System

The Department is developing a policy vision to progress a more unified tertiary education and research system, details of which were noted by Government on 24th May 2022.

The vision is for a well-functioning, unified tertiary system for knowledge and skills, composed of complementary further education and training, higher education and research and innovation sectors. One of the key objectives for this vision is the creation of more comprehensive and unified regional and national systems.

This objective aims to create more coherent and powerful responses to the regional rebalancing objective of Project Ireland 2040 and the associated Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The combined presence of higher and further education and training providers and research centres has a footprint in every county across Ireland. A more unified further education and training, higher education and research and innovation system regionally could capitalise on this footprint to assist in necessary regional rebalancing as envisaged under Project 2040.

Outcomes that will contribute to the achievement of this objective are:

- Prioritisation of capital apprenticeship proposals to realise the potential for shared infrastructure on the ground
- Further developing regional partnerships between ETBs, universities & technological universities to meet the needs of community, society and economy, for example through the expansion of regional learning pathways.
- Strengthening and growing skills ecosystem engagement with enterprise on skills needs at regional and local level.
- Growth of engagement of the FET network in innovation through Regional Enterprise Plans, consistent with the objectives of the Smart Specialisation Strategy, to build local engagement, coordination and opportunity
- Empowerment of Technological Universities to realise their potential in their regions, with their distinctive R&I capability at the centre of their collaboration with enterprise and especially Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.
- Strengthening of regional systems to support indigenous growth through innovation
- Acceleration of, in a knowledge-based economy, greater complementarity between the creation of new knowledge and skills, imparting this knowledge and skills in both further and higher education and bringing this knowledge and skills system closer to indigenous innovation and enterprise, to build future workforce capacity for a knowledge-based economy at regional and national levels.

Significant progress has been achieved across many of the actions highlighted in the Policy Platform document published in May 2022. The progression of these actions has demonstrated in a tangible way the transformative nature of this policy and also highlights the potential for further, more unified actions across the system.

Notable examples include:

- New capital programmes for further and higher education now include an emphasis on unified tertiary objectives for infrastructure and campus development. Applications must demonstrate how they can support a more unified tertiary system through, for example, potential opportunities to co-locate, adaptation of existing provision to take advantage of regional ties and transition patterns between institutions and greater collaboration between institutions.
- Linking the innovation system with the further education and training system the new National Modern Methods of Construction Demonstration Park in Co Offaly is a tangible example where innovation is being put into practice by the apprenticeship system.
- A new National Tertiary Office has been established in the Higher Education Authority in December 2022, to be jointly managed by HEA and SOLAS to work on the development of joint FET and HE programmes. Work is ongoing on 14 such programmes that are being advanced this year, four of which are located in the EMRA region.
- The new National Access Plan sets out an action to build on and improve partnerships and collaborative pathways between the FET and HE sectors, community partners and employers.
- Commencing with the OECD Skills Strategy Review, a more unified approach to addressing strategic skills needs through both the FET and HE provision.

Regional Dialogue Initiative

In addition, DFHERIS is seeking to further align the work of sectors with Government priorities on a regional basis, to progress priority issues including regional balance, climate action, housing, health, enterprise development and a shared island. Furthermore, there a number of key DFHERIS priorities which also depend on regional engagement for their achievement in 2023.

The DFHERIS Regional Dialogue Initiative 2023 is being created to:

- Enable regions to expand and develop actions to achieve DFHERIS policy objectives and the wider Government objectives to which they are aligned providing a richer evidence base for future DFHERIS policy and funding strategies
- Progress a more unified tertiary system by meeting leaders together and stimulating the development of regionally-based unified actions focusing on the impact and contribution that the system can make to Government priorities
- Communicate the work of DFHERIS in a coherent way that is relevant to our stakeholders and to seek feedback on this, strengthening the potential for collaborative work on shared objectives
- Raise the profile and expand the visibility of DFHERIS, expand the stakeholder network and open up more effective engagement at a regional level.

This initiative is based on the principle of two-way, high-level dialogue between regional further education, higher education and research sector leaders and DFHERIS senior leaders to discuss a series of agreed agenda items focused on key Government strategic priorities. The meetings are scheduled to take place in June 2023 in regions around the country.

The outcomes of this work will form an evidence, advisory and engagement foundation to support the development of a Tertiary Education Strategy as provided for in the Higher Education Authority Act 2022.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

The response from the Department identified the SFI Frontiers for the Future Funding Programme and the TU RISE Funding Programme for mention.

SFI Frontiers

The SFI Frontiers for the Future Programme provides opportunities for independent investigators to conduct highly innovative, collaborative research with the potential to deliver impact, whilst also providing opportunities for high-risk, high-reward research projects.

The programme comprises two streams: Projects and Awards

- Projects provides funding for high-risk, high-reward research that facilitates highly innovative and novel approaches to research.
- Awards provides larger scale funding for innovative, collaborative and excellent research programmes that have the potential to deliver economic and societal impact. This aspect of the programme is being run in collaboration with Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and the Children's Health Foundation (CHF). Details of awards made under the SFI Frontiers for the Future Programme in 2021 and 2022 in the EM area are within the table below. See also above response under Q1(f).

The Awards stream is currently open. The Project stream is currently closed.

In addition, a key goal of SFI's Strategy, Shaping our Future, is to "increase geographical involvement and engagement across the country, including through the SFI Research Centres, and increased collaboration with the new Technological Universities and the Institutes of Technology to ensure that benefits arising from our activities are realised across the entirety of Ireland."

In support of this action, the newly formed Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFERIS) provided budget to SFI to support excellent and impactful research which benefits from the unique strengths of both sectors.

TU RISE Programme

The Technological University “Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise” Scheme (TU RISE) proposed under the ERDF2021-2027 will enhance central research functions within the higher education technological sector to further institutions’ engagements with their regions. The purpose of the scheme is to establish, strengthen, and systemise research and innovation offices in Technological Universities (TUs) to enable engagement with local and regional enterprises and community stakeholders. The benefits of research and innovation offices will be accelerated and cascaded across disciplines and campuses of institutions through staff development, including increased researcher human capital, at faculty/school level. As such, TU RISE will result in a deepening of research-led teaching and learning excellence, including at apprenticeship and post-graduate levels, extension of research fields, and greater capacity within TUs to serve national and regional strategic objectives in line with Ireland’s Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). TU RISE, focusing on research capacity building in TUs, will complement change achieved as a result of the TUTF and teaching and learning enhancement under NRRP.

Programme outcomes are expected to be:

1. Establishment and/or development of central research functions in institutions to support research capacity building and further engagement with regions;
2. Enhancement of institutional research capacity through increasing researcher human capital in research areas that have potential to facilitate stronger engagement with regional enterprise aligned to Ireland’s Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Regional Enterprise Plans. Increased researcher human capital will extend the research fields and research specialisation of TUs and enhance institutions’ research capacity to serve national and regional strategic objectives.

At present, the draft Implementation Plan for the scheme requires the approval of the Monitoring Committee after which the Regional Assemblies will review the draft call for proposals documentation prepared by the HEA, which will administer the scheme.

Specific Funding Opportunities

The SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme, in collaboration with IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, seeks to support academia-industry interactions to address industry-informed challenges. Awards under this programme can be made to academic researchers wishing to spend time in industry worldwide through the temporary placement of academic researchers with an industry partner. This programme is currently open.

The SFI Discover Programme Science Week Call aims to provide support to Festivals and Events nationwide that encourage people, particularly those underrepresented in STEM, or those with less access to STEM to engage in ways that are relevant and accessible during Science Week and beyond. This programme is currently open.

The Science Week Call encourages applicants:

- who are continuing to develop and deepen their engagement with broader communities through existing Festivals and Events, or
- who are creating a new offering for a community or region not yet served by Science Week.

The SFI-IRC Pathway Programme supports talented postdoctoral researchers from all research disciplines to develop their track record and transition to become independent research leaders. This call is currently closed and will reopen in H2 2023.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

Tables are included in the response report submitted by the Department, which include key SFI Investments in 2022. For each research project listed, the name of the funding programme is included, along with the project name/description, the HEI with responsibility for the award, the amount awarded and the stage of the project. As set out in the response report, the benefits and impact of the awards themselves are very often disseminated well beyond the host organisation - e.g., SFI Research Centres have several academic and industry partners right across the country.

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

The Department's response has highlighted that PEACEPLUS represents an investment of €1.144bn in support of projects that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to cross border economic and territorial development. It will contribute to a more peaceful, prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland and will leave a lasting legacy.

The programme will build upon previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes by combining these two funding streams into one cohesive new programme. It is supported by the European Union, the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government. PEACE PLUS will commence in 2024 and DFHERIS is leading on a €50 million Skills Initiative. It has been proposed that the Call for Proposal will issue in September and delivery will commence in April 2024.

The PEACEPLUS Programme will be making a call for an application under Theme 2:

- *Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation -*
- *Investment Area 2.3 - Programme Area Skills Development.*

Over the lifetime of the programmes (to 2027), DFHERIS will be required to provide €12.8 million, commencing with a nominal provision of €400k in 2024. 80% will be recouped by DFHERIS from the EU Commission. The investment area will support area-based approaches, designed to address evidenced skills gaps, as detailed in Government national and sub-regional skills strategies.

These objectives will support the goals of increased productivity and employment and higher levels of cross border labour mobility. The PEACEPLUS Programme will build on best practice area-based models of skills development.

The programme area for the PEACEPLUS Programme is:

Northern Ireland;

The border counties of Ireland (Counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo).

This is the core programme area. The programme, however, has flexible geography beyond its administrative borders called a functional area. This will allow for organisations and institutions not based in the core programme area to get involved in projects by linking with partners within the core area.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the detailed report received by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science have demonstrated that progress has been made in implementing the RSES and have carried out a number of specific actions that enable same. This includes the Department's efforts in progressing initiatives aimed at delivering on the RSES, including the delivery of the Technological University of the Shannon in October 2021 (including the campus in Athlone), the development of the Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024, the reform of the Higher Education Authority Act 1971, the Science Foundation Ireland Strategy 2025, and the Skills to Advance initiative, among others.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations for NOAC to consider;

1. Where applicable, in its consideration of applications under section 29(1) of the Technological Universities Act 2018, the Department may consider it appropriate to set assessment criteria to ensure appropriate consideration of NPF population targets, the RSES settlement strategy and other relevant metrics, thus supporting and delivering on Project Ireland 2040 and the RSES.
2. The Regional Assembly should be included as stakeholder under the Peace Plus programme where projects will be considered on a cross-border basis with a view to improving cross border co-operation and connectivity. Such projects should align with the objectives of the RSES.
3. In undertaking any education campus development, the Department should endeavour to progress regeneration and economic synergies both within and in proximity to the campus under development, as well as integrate the 'smart cities' concept and other 'future proofing' measures.
4. The Regional Assembly should inform the next National Research and Innovation Strategy to ensure alignment with the RSES and key national policy documents.
5. The Department should ensure that appropriate Benchmarking is undertaken against other comparable economies to facilitate progress towards improving our comparative performance in RDI.

H) Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices noted from the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science report;

The establishment of the Technological University of the Shannon in October 2021 has a key driver and enabler of balanced regional development in the midland and mid-west region. The Athlone campus is highlighted as playing an integral role in educating and upskilling the local workforce in key areas of technological advancement and is very active in the area of apprenticeship both craft based and consortia led.

The continued expansion of the Springboard + initiative to provide free and heavily subsidised upskilling and reskilling opportunities through higher education in areas of identified skills need. Such an initiative is a positive example of government led supports to support a targeting reskilling of the labour market to areas of skill shortages. Up to 100,000 people have benefited from a springboard course to date. The 2023/24 programme will offer 8,700 new places with approximately 4,700 of these by higher education providers in the EMRA region.

The provision of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Research Centres that play a critical role in helping Ireland recover from and overcome global challenges such as Brexit, future pandemics and climate change. At the end of 2022, SFI Research Centres have signed 1,426 collaborative research agreements with 688 companies (366 of which are Irish companies).

The government had set an ambitious target to retrofit 500,000 homes by 2030. Important steps in delivering this target are to increase numbers enrolling in NZEB courses and the establishment of the SOLAS Green Skills Programme Office. In 2022, the target to retrofit 27,000 homes was achieved and for 2023 the aim is to retrofit 37,000 homes. Within the EMRA Region, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Boards (ETBs) operate an NZEB Centre of Excellence at the National Construction Training Campus in Mount Lucas.

6.1.7

Minister for Education

The mission of the Department of Education is “to facilitate children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland’s social, economic and cultural development.” This is aligned to the RSES and in particular RSO 13 which is to “improve education skills and social inclusion” and RSO 5 which is to “enhance, integrate and protect our arts, culture and heritage assets to promote creative places and heritage led regeneration.”

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included, for instance, progress related to equality of access to education, school provision in locations experiencing population growth, provision and enhancement of play and recreation facilities, universal design in new school buildings and promoting and facilitating access to arts, culture and heritage (including support for the development of the Irish language).

Equality of access to education

The response of the Department referred to the legal basis on which the education system in Ireland operates on an inclusive basis in keeping with obligations under the Constitution, national and international law. The response states that the Department fulfils its commitment through supporting the operations of the school system according to the principles of equality set out in law, as well as making specific reference to all immigrant children, including children of asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and unaccompanied minors who are entitled to access pre-school, first and second level education in a manner similar to Irish nationals, until they have reached the age of 18 years.

The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in schools) programme is the Department’s main policy initiative to address educational disadvantage. The total Department spend on DEIS in 2023 is in the region of €180million (up from €150million in 2021). This includes an additional €32million allocated to extend the programme from last September meaning the programme now includes over 1,200 schools and supports approximately 240,000 students nationwide. This means 1 in 4 students are now supported in the programme.

The DEIS Plan includes reference to Travellers as a named group at risk of educational disadvantage, and includes specific actions in relation to Traveller and Roma education to promote improvements in school attendance and completion. In March 2022, the Minister for Education announced a significant expansion of the DEIS programme using a refined identification model. Importantly, the model takes into consideration the significant educational disadvantage experienced by learners who have self-identified as being of Traveller or Roma ethnicity (as well as those who reside in centres managed by the International Protection Accommodation Service (known as Direct Provision Centres) or are experiencing homelessness.

Overall, the expansion means the number of DEIS schools has increased from 884 to 1,200 and a number of existing DEIS schools are getting additional supports.

Among the key supports for Traveller children are Tusla’s Education Support Service (TESS), comprising the statutory Education Welfare Service, the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme.

Traveller Education Policy

The Department of Education provides a wide range of supports to all schools to ensure that all students have their educational needs met, to support the inclusion of all students, including Traveller students, and to address barriers to students achieving their potential.

The Department is committed to ensuring that actions to improve education outcomes will be advanced in line with relevant Programme for Government commitments, including the commitment to develop a National Traveller Education Strategy. Some of the initiatives already underway include the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, Traveller Education Strategy, the STAR Pilot Programme, and the use of the Dormant Accounts Funding to tackle education disadvantage.

School provision in locations experiencing population growth

All twelve local authorities in the Eastern and Midland Region have engaged with the Department at the preparatory stages of the making of their new development plans. The Department is also a statutory consultee in the statutory planning process (for Development Plans and Local Area Plans). This engagement between the local authorities and the Department includes an assessment of existing schools provision in the various settlements in a Development Plan area, and more importantly, the distribution of the likely planned population increase over the lifetime of the plan. There has been good engagement on these matters. The process is that where population increases are indicated by the local authority, the Department examines closely the extent of the increase in a particular settlement, the location of the proposed additional population and the capacity of the existing schools in the particular settlement to cater for it; whether it would be feasible (or appropriate) to extend an existing school or schools in order to meet the projected future need or whether a new school altogether is likely to be required.

This engagement, which is reported by the Department as being strong, is considered invaluable and essential to identifying likely requirements to provide new schools to cater for future populations. It also assists the planning authorities in considering the most appropriate site or sites from a physical and schools planning perspective and proposing a suitable zoning.

As well as the allocation of new sites for schools, the inclusion of buffer zones and land use designations that support education development adjacent to existing and established schools (where required to facilitate potential future expansion) is identified as being critical by the Department as regards meeting school accommodation requirements arising in Existing Built-Up Areas. In some instances, such provision may present the only viable solution for the provision of school places to meet the needs of the local community. The Department therefore requests strong support for the intensification of the use of existing school sites and their immediate environs in order to meet future needs.

Provision and enhancement of play and recreation facilities

The response from the Department states that many schools have a general-purpose room/sports hall and practically all schools have outdoor play areas. In addition, many schools, use adjacent local facilities, including community halls, public parks, playing fields and swimming pools. The provision of general-purpose rooms, PE halls and outdoor hard play areas form part of the accommodation brief for all new school buildings or where a major building or refurbishment project is being delivered for an existing school.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding will address ancillary accommodation requirements across schools, particularly to support the reform and modernisation of school curricula (e.g., STEM and PE) involving a PE Hall and laboratory build and modernisation programmes in line with the existing NDP objectives and Programme for Government commitments.

In respect of funding provided to schools by the Department, this is in respect of education provision at primary and post-primary level. Schools may access funding from other government departments, e.g. Department of Sports, Department of Children, local authorities, from their own resources or other sources in respect of facilities provided by the school for their own use or the use of the wider community.

Universal design in new school buildings

To facilitate and enhance the design of school buildings, the Department has developed a suite of technical and school design guidance with a view to offering better guidance to school authorities and Design Teams. These are available on the Department's website and are continually reviewed and updated based on an ongoing policy of research and feedback. Underpinning the design guidelines are the Universal Access principles incorporating guidance from the NDA Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) which include specific advice on the external and internal environments, sanitary ware and vertical circulation, provision for the use of induction loops, signage using braille and high colour contrast and the creation of suitable acoustic environments within school buildings. In its response, the Department stated its commitment to ensuring that school building designs continue to incorporate the provisions of Universal Design and accessibility through adherence to the Departments suite of technical and design guidance in the delivery of its annual capital building programme.

Promoting and facilitating access to arts, culture and heritage

In its response relating to this objective, the Department focused on supports for the development of the Irish language including in the Gaeltacht areas in Co Meath and throughout the Region.

The development of the Irish language in Gaeltacht areas in Co Meath and throughout the Region is being supported by the implementation of the Department's Policy on Gaeltacht Education since 2017. The overarching objective of the POG, which is aligned with the objectives of the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030, is to support and promote the use of the Irish language in Gaeltacht communities by ensuring the delivery of high-quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht language-planning areas. To support this objective, the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (Scheme) was launched in 2017 to provide schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas with the option to seek recognition as Gaeltacht schools on the basis of the implementation of specified language-based criteria, which include a requirement for participation by schools in the language-planning processes provided for under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

A guide for schools is currently being developed by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Údarás na Gaeltachta, COGG, Gaeloideachas and other relevant agencies, to provide information on how best to strengthen links, engagement and participation between school management, their school community and local language-planning committee. A guide for Gaeltacht primary schools to strengthen links between early-years settings and schools, which has been informed by COGG commissioned research, will also be published by the Department in 2021.

Scoil Uí Ghramhnaigh (Athboy), Scoil Ultain Naofa (Gibbstown), and Coláiste Pobail Ráth Chairn (Athboy), which are all schools located in County Meath, joined the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme in 2017 and have since been in receipt of the additional resources which are being made available to facilitate participation in the Scheme.

Work on the development of a new policy for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht is currently underway by the Department. This policy will build on the achievements of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and will contribute to the development of the Irish language across the Region. The development of the policy will be informed by national and international research, and by an extensive public consultation process and stakeholder engagement.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

Not applicable

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

The response by the Department references relevant schools building programmes and identifying the need for and delivery of school accommodation. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. An annual demographic analysis is conducted for school planning purposes which takes into account multiple factors, including the residential development activity, child benefit data and school enrolments to identify future requirements. This analysis informs the Department's projection of school place requirements in the short to medium term and facilitates provision to meet that need. The longer-term perspective, informed by the NPF, RSES and Development Plans as appropriate is also closely considered. Information on residential development activity is an important element in the assessment of the need for school accommodation provision and the timing of same. The Department liaises with local authorities in that respect.

On the basis of these demographic analyses, 47 new schools at national level have been announced to be established since 2018, at both primary and post primary level, with the majority of these schools (24 primary and 16 post-primary) to be located in the EMRA area. The Department is now implementing a shorter cycle for demographic projection exercises, with these now occurring on an annual basis. This will ensure capital investment decisions are informed by the most current available data. In order to further support strategic planning for school accommodation provision by the Department, more specific and detailed medium to long-term school place projections at school planning area level are currently being produced, aligned with NPF population targets. This will inform school planning in correlation with NPF and RSES goals.

The monitoring of progress towards NPF targets, including the quantum and timing of housing delivery, is another critical element of the school planning process. Enrolment trends are closely monitored in that regard and the Department has also continuously worked to strengthen the process for identifying and monitoring residential development activity. Recently, a new system has been implemented using the Geodirectory facility on the Department's Geographical Information System which facilitates quarterly updates on new dwelling completions at a local level. This will better support the appropriate timing of school accommodation provision, in line with the pace of residential development. This Department's use of its Geographical Information System continues to expand, and is an integral element of the school planning system, for both analysis and communication purposes.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

In line with the EMRA request, the Department's response includes: Primary and Post Primary School Buildings, and; Digital Strategy for Schools.

Primary and Post Primary School Buildings

The Department's capital investment programme is designed to provide an appropriate teaching and learning environment for the over 1 million students and 100,000 school staff across a network of almost 4,000 schools. During the National Development Plan period 2018-2022, over 870 school buildings were completed under the Large-Scale Capital Programme (LSCP), Additional School Accommodation Scheme (ASA), Energy Retrofit Pathfinder Programme and Modular Accommodation programme. Approximately, 340 of these were delivered in the Eastern and Midland Region.

The Department has a significant existing pipeline of projects to be delivered over the coming years to meet capacity needs. In 2023, some 300 school building projects are currently under construction, including 40 new school buildings and 260 projects at existing schools. There are over 1,000 other school building projects in the Department's pipeline at various stages of development of which 455 of these projects are in the Eastern and Midland Region.

Digital Strategy for Schools

The Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 was published in April 2022 and sets out the Department's policy approach to continue the progress made in embedding digital technology across the curriculum and in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. It builds on the achievements of the previous strategy. The stated vision of the Digital Strategy is "to empower schools to harness the opportunities of digital transformation to build digital competence and an effective digital education ecosystem so as to develop competent, critically engaged, active learners while supporting them to reach their potential and participate fully as global citizens in a digital world".

The Digital Strategy aligns with the EU Digital Education Action Plan "Resetting education and training for the digital age" 2021-2027. The EU DEAP offers a long-term strategic vision for high quality, inclusive and accessible European digital education. It is the intention that it will guide and assist policy approaches in the Irish context also.

The significant investment and direct funding to schools under the previous Digital Strategy was seen as fundamental to its success. This new strategy will support the ongoing advancement of digital infrastructure through targeted funding, and working with colleagues across Government to ensure broadband connectivity to all schools, regardless of location. It will be supported through a capital investment of some €200m over its lifetime under the National Development Plan 2018-2030. The first tranche of this funding in respect of the 2021-2022 school year, €50m, issued in December 2021.

€50m in grant funding was also issued in November 2021, as part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), to address the needs of learners at risk of educational disadvantage because of the digital divide.

The Department also funds broadband connectivity to all recognised primary, special and post-primary schools through the Schools Broadband Programme at an annual cost of some €13m.

All primary and special schools will be provided with high-speed broadband in 2023 under the Department of Education's Schools Broadband Programme. These upgrades are being delivered through the National Broadband Plan, commercial provision and a Department of Education-led project funded as part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). Currently there are circa 2,500 primary schools on high-speed connectivity, with the remaining primary schools due to be connected before year end.

All post-primary schools are now provided with minimum speeds of 200 Megabit per second, with some on speeds of up to 1 Gigabit per second. Evidence of usage is constantly monitored and when required, connectivity is upgraded.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

In their response, the Department has indicated that the status of School Building projects is listed on a county-by-county basis on the Department's website at www.education.ie and is updated on a monthly basis to reflect their progress through the various stages of capital appraisal, site acquisition, design, tender and construction. Links were also provided for approved works under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2011-2023, the Summer Works Scheme, as well as for Emergency Works Approvals.

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

In its response, the Department states it is important to note that in relation to aligning with the NPF, what we have to date is the Regional Spatial strategies developed and finalised. These are being developed into county development plans and then in local area plans. It is still too early to see the full impact of the growth strategy of the NPF being reflected where housing is being located and ultimately school provision given the existing pipeline of planning permissions and planned housing developments that were already in the system.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the detailed report received by the Department of Education and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the Department of Education have demonstrated that despite the existing pipeline of planning permissions and planned housing developments that were already in the system, progress has been made in implementing the RSES and have carried out a number of specific actions that enable same. This includes an annual demographic analysis for school planning purposes across 314 planning areas; the adoption of a GIS based system to monitor the quantum and timing of housing delivery to better support the appropriate timing of school accommodation provision; ongoing capital investment in Primary and Post Primary School Buildings with specific figures provided for the EMR; ongoing rollout of the Digital Strategy for Schools; engagement between all 12 local authorities and the Department in the statutory plan-making process; the development of updated school design guidance for Special Needs Accommodation in mainstream schools, in addition to the ongoing development of a new design guide for Special Schools following extensive research on the design of new special school projects; ongoing schemes and the development of useful guides to support the development of the Irish language.

Having regard to the information submitted, The Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations to NOAC for consideration;

1. The Regional Assembly should inform the engagement between the Department and the 12 local authorities across the region in strategy development for the provision of new schools to cater for future populations. In particular, the Regional Assembly and the RSES should inform policy and strategy around the intensification of the use of existing school sites in Existing Built-Up Areas and their immediate environs in order to meet future needs.
2. The Regional Assembly welcomes the production of specific and detailed medium to long-term school place projections at school planning area level that are currently being produced in addition to the annual demographic analysis pertaining to the 314 school planning areas nationally. The Regional Assembly would welcome parallel analysis pertaining to alignment with NPF population targets and the RSES settlement strategy, thus supporting and delivering on Project Ireland 2040.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices noted from the Department of Education's report;

- The use of Dormant Account Funding to tackle education disadvantage for Traveller and Roma communities, to support attendance, participation and retention among Traveller and Roma learners. It is noted that €400,000 of such funding was allocated in 2022.
- The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme with a fund of €180 million signifies the Department's commitment to addressing educational disadvantage where it arises. Since last September (2023) the scheme includes over 1,200 schools and supports 240,000 students (one in four students are now supported).
- Under the National Development Plan increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding will address ancillary accommodation requirements across schools, particularly to support the reform and modernisation of school curricula (e.g. STEM and PE) involving PE Hall and Laboratory build.
- To assist schools applying for improved school facilities projects, the Department has developed a suite of technical and school design guidance with a view to offering better guidance to school authorities and design teams. These are available on the Department's website and are continually reviewed and updated based on ongoing policy of research and feedback from reviews of recently built schools. The Department is also committed to ensuring that school building designs continue to incorporate the provisions of Universal Design.
- Ongoing work by the Department to carry out an annual demographic analysis for school planning purposes which takes into account multiple factors including the residential development activity, child benefit data and school enrolments to identify future requirements, and better support the appropriate timing of school accommodation provision in line with the pace of residential development. The Department indicate that the longer-term perspective is informed by the NPF, RSES and Development Plans as appropriate.



6.1.8

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's mission is to support the sustainable and efficient delivery of well-planned homes and effective local government. Central to this are a number of key goals including, ensuring that planning and building in our regions and communities contributes to sustainable and balanced development, providing for a stable and sustainable supply of good quality housing, providing a framework for the sustainable management of water resources, managing the Irish State's nature conservation responsibilities under national and European law, formulation and implementation of policy relating to Ireland's architectural heritage, and, responsibility for built heritage including the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. These goals are directly aligned to a number of Regional Strategic Outcomes defined by the RSES including for instance, Sustainable Settlement Patterns (RSO1), Compact Growth and Urban regeneration (RSO 2), Rural Communities (RSO 3), Healthy Communities (RSO 4), and, Biodiversity and Natural Heritage (RSO 11).

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting RSES Implementation across a number of areas. The Department provided a thematic overview of relevant measures and have indicated that since the adoption of the RSES, the Department (DHLGH) has undertaken a range of initiatives to secure the objectives of the RSES, including both funding and investment measures and introduced supporting legislation and regulation.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. The response of the Department can be summarised as follows;



Regional Demographics and Structural Housing Demand

The Department has indicated that in order to give effect to the national and regional settlement strategies set out in the NPF and RSES and with the objective of supporting and improving the plan-making process, the Housing and Planning Divisions of the Department jointly engaged the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake independent research into structural housing demand in Ireland to 2040.

The findings of the ESRI work were published in December 2020 as a research paper on Regional Demographics and Structural Housing Demand at a County Level, which provides a robust housing demand projection to inform policy and investment with regard to housing at national, regional and local levels. The ESRI projection model and paper are now the definitive source of information for Government. Planning guidelines on Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning were published in December 2020 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The projected annual average requirement to accommodate the needs of more than 33,000 new households in Ireland from 2020-31, when disaggregated to each individual local authority area, forms the basis for an annual average Housing Supply Target to 2031. The inclusion of an appropriate Housing Supply Target, calculated in accordance with the guidelines, now comprises a key element of the core strategy of individual development plans.

The Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities, published in July 2022 provide further guidance in relation to the zoning of land to meet identified housing need that reflects the NPF and RSES priorities for brownfield and infill development and sustainable urban extension. Oversight of this process is provided by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) as part of its statutory plan evaluation function.

Census 2022 Preliminary results of Census 2022 indicated that for the first time in 171 years, Ireland's population exceeded the five million threshold. There were 5,149,139 people in the State on Sunday, 03 April 2022, an 8% increase since April 2016. CSO housing construction data published for Q1 2023 show that while there has been continued growth in all regions, the east of the country and counties surrounding Dublin continue to dominate.

To facilitate convergence with the NPF development scenario, the Government is enhancing the alignment of public investment with the NPF objectives through Project Ireland 2040, which comprises the NPF and the National Development Plan 2021-2030. There is a particular emphasis on measures to stimulate and support urban brownfield and public transport-led housing development at scale, measures to encourage accelerated regional city growth and balanced regional development in accordance with the NPF strategy. The Department also indicate that convergence will also be driven by the adoption of City and County development plans in the region and by the continued targeted investment in enabling infrastructure and social and economic development.



Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration

The Department indicate that the NPF and RSES include specific objectives to regenerate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale, and in particular to reverse the stagnation or decline of urban centres, including measures to reduce vacancy, re-use existing buildings and promote infill and area based regeneration.

Development Plans must meet the specific targets for 'infill' and 'brownfield' development in the Core Strategy. This focussing of growth within the existing built up area of cities and towns is a new policy requirement and is supported by a range of departmental initiatives. This includes funding for regeneration and public realm projects through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) to regulatory measures such as the Residential Zoned Land Tax and proposed Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones legislation, and simplifying requirements for change of use from vacant commercial to residential in town centres.

From a funding perspective, the Department have indicated that significant resources are being provided to enhance the urban environment of our cities, towns and villages through the URDF and Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) under Project Ireland 2040. The aim of the URDF is to achieve more compact, sustainable and mixed-use development, with a view to ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and visit. The Department has indicated that a wide range of proposals have been supported in the RSES area that will contribute to the redevelopment of key brownfield areas, including areas containing derelict sites and buildings. This will be achieved through both enabling infrastructure and new master-planned development proposals.

The Department has indicated that Local authorities have been provided with a range of powers and mechanisms to deal with vacancy and dereliction in urban centres and to incentivise redevelopment and renewal. Examples include:

- The Vacant Site Levy, introduced by the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, which empowers local authorities to compile a vacant site register and to apply a levy to properties listed on the vacant site register. The rate increased from 3% to 7% of the market valuation of relevant properties from 2019. Site owners became liable to pay from 2020.
- The Derelict Sites Act 1990 imposes a duty on every owner and occupier of land to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. The Act also imposes a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps to ensure that land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site;
- The Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2018 provide for an exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of the change of use of certain vacant commercial premises, including vacant areas above ground floor premises, to residential use. This measure is aimed at facilitating the productive re-use of qualifying vacant commercial buildings as homes, while also facilitating urban renewal and the bringing on stream of increased housing supply. In February 2022 Minister O'Brien signed the Planning and Development Act (Exempted Development) Regulations 2022, which extend the operation of the 2018 Regulations until 2025.
- The Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund provides a grant to support the refurbishment of vacant properties in towns and villages, with priority given to areas with high levels of vacancy or dereliction.
- The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Fund launched in May 2022 seeks to increase the supply of owner occupier apartments in cities. The scheme is expected to deliver up to 5,000 additional apartments in the five NPF cities. It will support the Government's objectives of compact growth and creating vibrant liveable cities. The scheme is targeting the activation of existing planning permissions for apartment developments over four storeys in height that cost more to build than they can be sold for to individual buyers. The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme will bridge the viability gap for developments that meet the eligibility criteria. The Government has allocated €450 million for the scheme up to 2026.

Under the National Vacant Home Reuse Strategy, the Vacant Homes Unit in the Department provided annual funding to each local authority to support the work of a Vacant Homes Office. Each office is tasked to support, implement and further develop, update, monitor and review the progress of local authorities' Vacant Homes Action Plans and actions to address vacant private housing; in addition to other core functions to identify and bring vacant homes back into use.

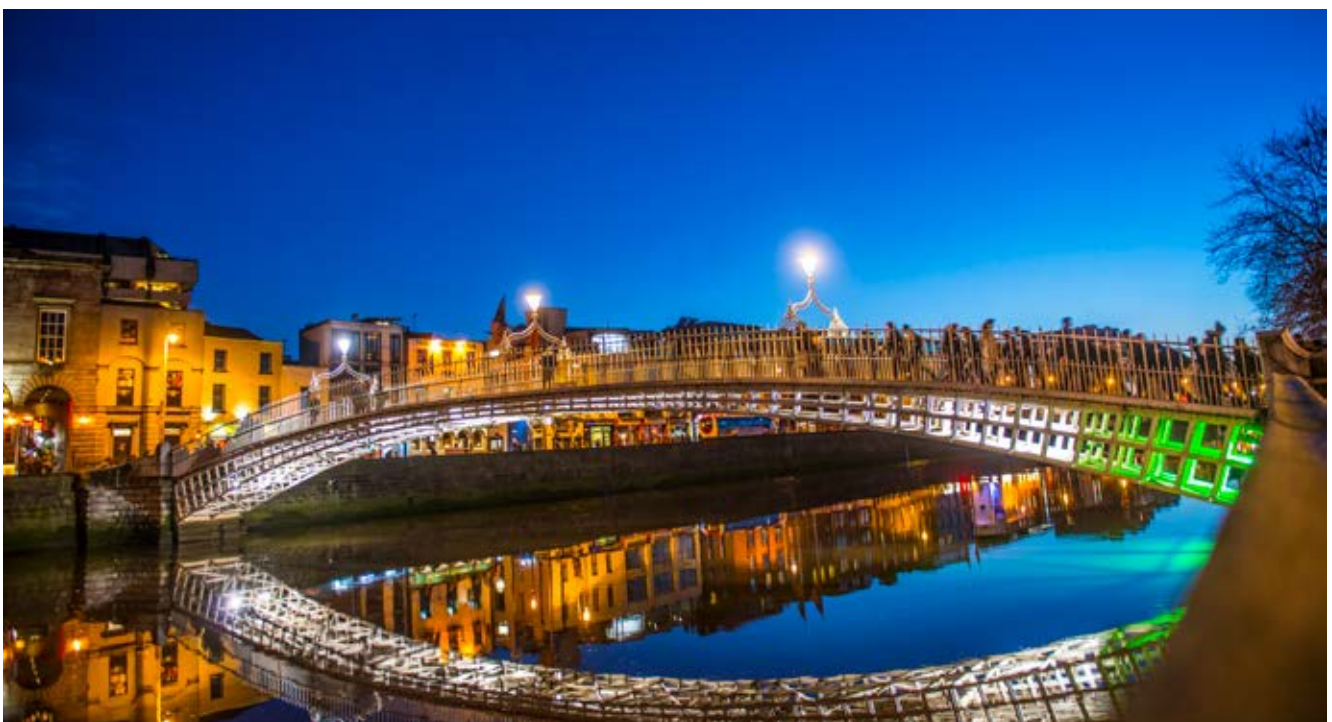
In addition, under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, two schemes were introduced to assist in bringing vacant stock back into use:

- The Repair and Leasing Scheme was introduced to assist property owners in bringing vacant properties back into use for social housing. The scheme is particularly targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental properties.
- The Buy and Renew Scheme was introduced to support local authorities in purchasing and renewing housing in need of repair for social housing use. The Buy and Renew Scheme particularly focuses on older vacant homes to help tackle dereliction and improve the appearance of the built environment.

The importance of promoting urban renewal and brownfield regeneration is reflected in 'Town Centre First' policy, prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development and published in February 2022. Town Centre First aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into town centres. The policy contains actions to provide towns with the tools and resources required to become more viable and attractive places and recognises the intrinsic importance that built and natural heritage contributes to this. Heritage and climate action approaches illustrated in the policy were drawn from exemplars of heritage-led funding of the Historic Towns Initiative and the Historic Structures Fund.

The Built Heritage Policy Unit is engaging with local authorities on new policy initiatives including Heritage Ireland 2030, the National Policy on Architecture and the New European Bauhaus. It has also made recommendations for the long-term protection and sustainable development of towns and places through heritage-led regeneration to combat dereliction and vacancy, and contribute to climate action, vernacular architecture and cultural landscapes. In partnership with the Heritage Council the Department supported a number of pilot projects to inform new policies and urban renewal programmes. The dissemination of research is through the Collaborative Town Health Check Programme, project managed by the Heritage Council, and through the OPR's training remit.

The Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2022 include mechanisms to improve the monitoring of brownfield targets in plans, in order to provide a more regular, annual monitoring and report process for local authorities.



Housing

The Department has indicated that under Housing for All, the Government plans to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade. This includes the delivery of 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes by 2030. Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4bn per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

The return of the Department indicates that publication of new dwelling completion figures were released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) for the first time in June 2018.

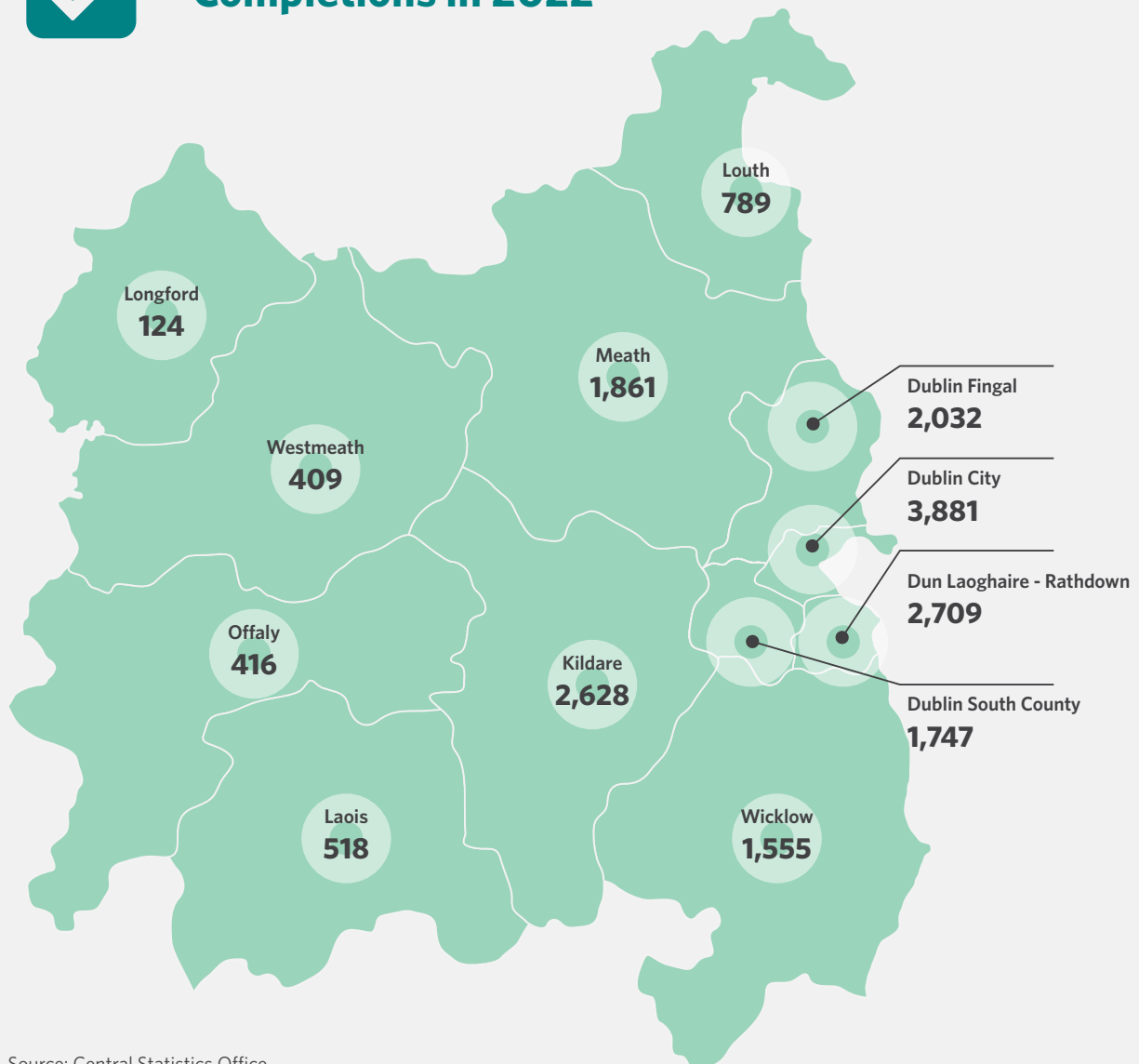
Most recent data, on a national basis, shows the following trends on housing delivery up to Q4 2022;

- New dwelling completions for 2022 totalled 29,822, an increase of 45.1% on 2021, when 20,553 dwellings were completed.
- In 2022, 84.1% of all new dwelling completions were in urban areas and the remainder in rural areas. At the beginning of the series in 2011, 38% were in urban and 62% in rural areas.
- Within the Eastern and Midlands Region, a total of 18,669 new dwellings were completed in 2022.





Total New Housing Completions in 2022



Source: Central Statistics Office

The Department also provided an update on Social Housing targets and spending. It is indicated that The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme in addition to promoting city focused and compact growth seeks to increase the supply of owner occupier apartments and to provide those who wish to purchase a home with greater choice. Under the scheme a viability fund will support the construction of apartments for eligible schemes in the five cities by bridging the gap between what owner occupiers can pay and what it costs to build the apartments. The Government has allocated €450 million for the scheme up to 2026.

New planning guidelines on the Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing, published in May 2021, seek to ensure housing choice by preventing multiple housing and duplex units being sold to a single buyer. Apartments are not included as the primary focus is protecting traditional family homes while enabling continuing investment where it is needed i.e. apartment developments with viability constraints.

Rural Development

The National Planning Framework and RSES supports the concept of the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging their growth and prosperity while also seeking to arrest the decline in areas that have experienced low population growth in recent decades.

Chapter 5.3 'Planning for the Future Growth and Development of Rural Areas' of the NPF includes several specific national policy objectives that aim to support the sustainable development of rural areas and deliver strengthened and diversified rural communities. Town Centre First policy reflects the challenges faced by towns and villages in rural areas and their need to function as viable and vibrant locations for people to live and work. Investment for the development of rural Ireland is available through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, both administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Underpinned by significant NDP funding, the RRDF provides an opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a sustainable impact in rural communities, and to address depopulation in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the NPF and RSES relating to Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities.

In addition to the funding schemes administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development; the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), which is under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, has commenced a Farm Plan Scheme which supports landowners to deliver actions that benefit habitats and species in Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.



Placemaking and Green Infrastructure

The RSES objectives emphasises the importance of regeneration and placemaking as a driver of change to revitalise urban areas and notes that placemaking is critical to sustained socio-economic vibrancy.

High quality placemaking has been supported by the Department through the targeting of URDF funding towards transformative urban regeneration projects. There have been two calls for proposals. In 2019, approval in principle and provisional funding allocations issued in respect of the 87 projects approved under Call 1. A further 45 projects were approved under Call 2. A total of 56 projects in the Eastern and Midland Region have been successful to date, with provisional allocations with a combined value of over €637 million.

In addition to the above, URDF Call 3 was issued on the 30th January 2023. In accordance with the Government's Vacant Home Action Plan 2023, the third round of funding support is specifically designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across cities and towns, ensuring accelerated provision of residential accommodation. It is proposed that a revolving fund of up to €150m of URDF support will be made available to the local authority sector by way of individual allocations to each local authority to be used to tackle long term vacancy and dereliction.

In relation to green infrastructure, the inclusion of policy in relation to green infrastructure and nature based water management solutions in development plans is promoted by the Section 28 Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities published in July 2022. The Water Division also published guidance in March 2022 in relation to the nature based management of rainwater and surface water runoff in urban areas, titled 'Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document'. Significant progress has been made in this area in recent years at a regional level and through adoption of climate adaptation, heritage, and biodiversity plans at a local level.



Eastern and Midland Region - URDF Provisional Funding Allocation

Local authority Area	Project	Awarded Amount	Stage of Project
FOUR DUBLIN AUTHORITIES	North Inner City Concept Area 1 The North Inner City project involves the regeneration and redevelopment of several areas of the north city that have suffered from dereliction and decline over a number of years. The main objective of this project is to achieve long term sustainable regeneration around the redevelopment of various areas.	121,285,388.00	Preliminary Design Stage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dublin City Council ▪ Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council ▪ Fingal County Council ▪ South Dublin County Council 			
	South Inner City Concept Area 2 The aim of the South Inner City project is to consolidate urban development and link several strategic areas of the south city through the delivery of a number of complementary projects in order to address existing public realm fragmentation, pockets of deprivation and further enhance areas of redevelopment potential.	53,015,166.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	Rutland Street NEIC The building will be redeveloped as a community development project and will contain a wide range of uses. The design will reduce energy use and the carbon footprint of the building and be accessible for all regardless of mobility from the street. The building will also be made safe and useable as a multi-tenant public facility.	16,387,007.00	Tender Stage
	Naas Road LAP lands Funding for a study relating to the barriers to development of these key lands in the Naas Road, Local Area Plan.	187,500.00	Project Completed
	Park West/Cherry Orchard Industrial Lands Analysis The proposal is to carry out a detailed analysis of the primarily industrial lands at Park West / Cherry Orchard to scope their development potential for high density residential and employment uses taking into account Project Ireland 2040 which prioritises compact growth within cities.	140,625.00	Project Completed
	Artists' Workspaces Funding for two feasibility studies for creative community campuses (CCC) on two Dublin City Council sites in Dublin 8. This proposal is a new initiative by Dublin City Council that will address the documented critical deficit in Artists Workspaces by developing these Workspaces alongside private apartments with two buildings on each site. CCC will incorporate not just private artist's studios, but also spaces for visiting artists, a gallery, community event spaces and moreover an opportunity for artists and prospective apartment dwellers to integrate the campus using an Open Design approach.	200,000.00	Project Completed
	Inchicore - St Michael's Estate & Environs Regeneration Proposed regeneration of Inchicore/Kilmainham area by developing St Michael's Estate and environs. The proposal will complement the regeneration of the area. It will provide a high-quality streetscape with accessible civic spaces and increase the use of public transport in the area.	140,321.11	Project Completed
	Santry River Restoration Project The Santry river restoration project is to demonstrate how compact regeneration and development can be facilitated while simultaneously complying with environmental and sustainability objectives such as the Water Framework Directive. The outcomes of the initiative will include improved water quality, reduced flood risk, the development of nature-based and other amenities for the communities living within the catchment.	750,000.00	Preliminary Design Stage

Local authority Area	Project	Awarded Amount	Stage of Project
	<p>Cherrywood PA</p> <p>The overall Cherrywood proposal is to transform the area into a compact, mixed- use and rail-based community that is consistent with principles that support place-making, urban design and quality.</p>	40,361,115.00	Ongoing
	<p>Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Hub</p> <p>URDF support is providing an initial catalyst for various targeted areas to be encompassed within a new strategic design strategy for Dundrum</p>	4,000,000.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	<p>Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Action Plan</p> <p>This is funding to develop a community cultural and civic action plan for Dundrum, to assess current provision and make recommendations on future requirements including 'Dundrum Phase II', the Central Mental Hospital lands and certain Council owned sites and also provide detail on specific community facility needs and options appraisals including site location, capital costs and ongoing financing options. From these options, projects will be selected to progress to 'Category A' funding applications under the URDF.</p>	65,679.00	Project Completed
	<p>Cherrywood Public Parks, Greenways & Attenuation</p> <p>This project supports the provision of elements of green infrastructure such as public parks, greenway and attenuation ponds in Cherrywood SDZ.</p>	13,673,560.00	Project Completed
	<p>Stillorgan (Public Realm works)</p> <p>This project will support transformative public realm improvements as set out in the "Stillorgan Village Area Movement Framework Plan" which includes detailed proposals for fundamental changes and recalibrations to the road layout/public realm, including substantially reduced cross- sections for car-traffic, new public spaces, public seating and planting, substantially wider pavements, facilities for cyclists and 'Age Friendly' enhancements for the area.</p>	7,658,379.00	On Site
	<p>Spatial and Economic Action Plan for Dun Laoghaire</p> <p>The 'Spatial and Economic Action Plan for Dun Laoghaire' will examine a number of other land use scenarios for the Town, with a focus on the potential for employment-related uses. The spatial context for this Action Plan will include a focus on a number of key sites which may be coming available for development in the near future. The Action Plan will provide an economic profile of the town at present and place Dún Laoghaire in the context of the Dublin economy.</p>	67,480.00	Project Commenced
	<p>Balbriggan Rejuvenation</p> <p>The Balbriggan Rejuvenation project involves the significant enabling of existing assets centred around its public realm, coastal and architectural character, underutilised brownfield sites by harnessing economic and development opportunities</p>	25,438,875.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	<p>Dunsink Feasibility Study - Transportation and Surface Water Assessments</p> <p>This URDF supported project will involve feasibility studies in relation to the strategic land bank at Dunsink, in particular assessments relating to transport and surface water.</p>	41,250.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	<p>Sustainable Swords</p> <p>"Sustainable Swords" is a place-making strategy and funding is provided to complete the development of this strategy in order to improve the resilience of the local economy and provide for an enhanced, accessible, inclusive, child friendly and healthy urban environment.</p>	375,000.00	Project Commenced
	<p>Balbriggan</p> <p>Funding to support the planning and design of a suite of projects to make improvements in Balbriggan and its environs.</p>	2,125,000.00	Project Commenced

Local authority Area	Project	Awarded Amount	Stage of Project
	<p>No. 11 Parnell Square</p> <p>Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht are supporting Poetry Ireland and the Irish Heritage Trust in redeveloping the historically significant No 11 Parnell Square as a state of the art all island institution celebrating poetry. The project compliments other development projects in the area.</p>	3,862,500.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	<p>Campus at Grand Canal Quay (Public Realm Re-use)</p> <p>This relates to the development of the Grand Canal Innovation District. This project led by Trinity College Dublin.</p>	1,500,000.00	Project Completed
	<p>Tallaght Town Centre (Civic Plaza/Link Road)</p> <p>The proposal relates to the provision of a number of key infrastructure, services, civic, residential and amenity projects in Tallaght town centre which upon delivery will act as a catalyst for the wider and long term growth of Tallaght, as a living town and the thriving heart of South Dublin County.</p>	31,894,325.00	Detailed Design Stage
	<p>Naas Road/Ballymount</p> <p>Funding for a range of studies to develop a plan led approach with a view to the development of these brownfield lands into a sustainable, vibrant mixed use urban quarter.</p>	569,953.00	Project Completed
	<p>Adamstown</p> <p>The Adamstown project relates to the provision of key elements of supplementary strategic infrastructure in the SDZ (Strategic Development Zone) Planning Scheme, which upon delivery will facilitate the development of the Adamstown town centre element of the SDZ lands, and the continued roll-out of suitably located and scaled housing.</p>	9,997,465.00	On Site
	<p>Clonburris</p> <p>The Clonburris proposal involves the provision of critical supplementary strategic infrastructure that will be essential to the appropriate further development of this unique and complex site.</p>	186,300,000.00	Detailed Design Stage

Local authority Area	Project	Awarded Amount	Stage of Project
Kildare	Naas Library (including Public Realm works) The proposal is for the redevelopment and rejuvenation of Naas Town Hall to provide a library and cultural centre. The vision is to create an iconic library, cultural and public space in the heart of the historic town of Naas.	4,445,243.00	On Site
	Celbridge Southern Relief Road & Second Liffey Crossing Technical assistance for the advancement of the Celbridge Southern Relief Road & Second Liffey Crossing.	400,000.00	Project Commenced
	Newbridge Cultural and Civic Quarter Project relates to plans to reinvigorate the historic heart of Newbridge and enable the creation of a Cultural and Civic Quarter. Funding will allow for project establishment, stakeholder engagement and feasibility study.	492,000.00	Project Commenced
	Canal Quarter Naas Project is for technical assistance to develop area known as Canal Quarter in Naas, as the cultural and creative district of Naas. The aim is to address the challenges affecting Naas town centre through a plan led transformation of this underutilised area of town while connecting the town centre to peripheral areas in a sustainable and permeable manner. This will be achieved through utilising and investing in the Canal Quarter's existing assets and developing new cultural, civic and retail activities, community amenities and mixed residential/commercial development.	195,000.00	Project Commenced
	Maynooth Town Centre Renewal - Strengthening the Grid This project will support the preparation of a Masterplan informed by an urban design analysis and extensive stakeholder and public consultation to maximise the development potential for the urban block structure and the preparation of key town renewal projects so as to increase town centre living	1,908,750.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	Naas Town Renewal Masterplan The project will support the preparation of a Naas Town Renewal Masterplan with a strong urban design, public realm, economic and transportation focus for the historic core of Naas.	3,496,374.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	Celbridge to Hazelhatch Link Road This project supports essential infrastructure to support compact consolidated development in Celbridge.	10,237,500.00	Preliminary Design Stage
Laois	Portlaoise - A Cultural Quarter The creation of a Cultural Quarter around the original historic settlement core of Portlaoise. Funding is for works to complement housing projects being supported by Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.	7,192,348.00	On Site
	Portlaoise - A Low Carbon Town This project will assist in delivering on elements of Portlaoise 2040 - A Vision for Portlaoise - A Strategy for a Better Town Centre which identified the need to remove car dominance from the Town Centre and to address the poor pedestrian experience, and facilitate and encourage the modal shift to cycling throughout the wider town.	2,026,372.00	On Site
	Portlaoise - Placemaking for a Low Carbon Town This project will complement and build on the implementation of other Low Carbon town developments through cycle routes, E-Car Charging Points, Low Energy Public Lighting, and will also augment the work already underway on the Cultural Quarter.	9,000,000.00	Preliminary Design Stage

Local authority Area	Project	Awarded Amount	Stage of Project
Longford	Longford Connected (Public Realm Market Square) This project involves public realm works to address accessibility and connectivity in Longford Town. URDF support in relation to the Public Realm Regeneration works (Market Square and Grafton Court/Retail Square combined Contract) together with an examination of a Urban Design Framework Plan for supporting bid areas under Longford Connects going forward	2,990,355.00	On Site
	Camlin Quarter Regeneration This project involves the development of connections between critical functions of the town core to promote sustainable mobility, social equity and environmental integrity. This project aims to address long standing legacy issues in order to create an attractive environment for living, commerce and investment.	10,440,941.00	Preliminary Design Stage
Louth	Long Walk Quarter Dundalk Rejuvenation scheme to reinvigorate the Long Walk Quarter to establish new living and working quarter at the heart of Dundalk town centre. Funding will support street improvement and upgrade, creation of improved public spaces and promotion of café culture, incorporation of public art.	533,000.00	On Site
	Westgate Vision Funding for technical assistance including project management, concept development, feasibility and detailed design and planning associated with "Westgate Vision". Narrow West Street in Drogheda and its environs, known as Westgate, is characterised by vacancy, dereliction and underuse of buildings and this project relates to an urban design vision for the area.	608,052.00	Project Commenced
	St. Nicholas Quarter and Backlands Regeneration This project will establish a new living and working quarter in the heart of Dundalk town centre	7,487,771.00	Detailed Design Stage
Meath	Ashbourne Road and Public Realm Improvement Funding for significant public realm improvements and enhancement of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure.	6,376,050.00	On Site
	Flowerhill Regeneration Project Technical assistance for an urban regeneration and development framework for the Flowerhill area of Navan.	75,000	Project Commenced
	Navan Active Land Management Project As part of the regeneration of the County town of Navan, financial support will be provided to Meath Co. Council for to tackle priority derelict sites in the town.	3,683,000.00	On Site
	Railway Street Regeneration and County Archive Technical assistance for urban regeneration plan for entire lands comprising historic building of St. Patricks classical school and the Council's former offices in Navan.	187,500.00	Project Commenced
	Flowerhill and Abbeylands Regeneration (Flowerhill) Public Realm Regeneration	7,661,250.00	Preliminary Design Stage
Offaly	Tullamore Urban Area Funding will be provided towards the Tullamore Street Enhancement Scheme which will see a variety of works carried out.	4,521,950.25	On Site
	Tullamore Urban Regeneration Development 2020 The proposed Tullamore Regeneration Framework will be the principal impetus for compact mixed use urban development in the town centre of Tullamore, regenerating vacant and underused town centre sites in a coherent and integrated manner.	2,245,407.00	Detailed Design Stage

Local authority Area	Project	Awarded Amount	Stage of Project
Westmeath	Loughanaskin The project relates to master planning of the Loughanaskin area to provide for integrated enterprise/commercial/residential development.	750,000.00	Project Commenced
	Canal Avenue & Environs Regeneration Project Technical assistance for the development of a project in the eastern quadrant of Mullingar's urban core, in order to revitalise the area including improving connectivity to the Royal Canal.	1,706,250.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	Athlone Tourism Cultural Quarter Technical assistance to regenerate the West side of Athlone to support its emerging cultural quarter status by combining strategic planning together with best practice planning policies and active land management	750,000.00	Preliminary Design Stage
	Blackhall, Mullingar Technical assistance to develop the project for the southwest quadrant of Mullingar's urban core with potential for comprehensive regeneration and redevelopment into a dynamic urban quarter.	2,452,500.00	Detailed Design Stage
	Athlone Town Centre Regeneration & Enhancement Funding is technical assistance to fast-track the Council's work on building the primacy and impact of the town centre (East side), by prioritising improvements to the public realm, unlocking derelict strategic sites and proactive programme of active street frontage.	587,450.68	Project Completed
	Athlone Town Centre Regeneration & Enhancement This project involves public realm and streetscape enhancement works to unlock the potential of a derelict prominent town centre site	4,775,268.00	On Site
	Wicklow	Bray Transport Bridge Support for the provision of a new public transport bridge over the river Dargle. This will unlock lands at the former Bray Golf Club site and adjoining brownfield opportunity sites within Bray.	6,450,000.00
Arklow Historic Town Core This project will transform the streetscape and public realm in the historic core of Arklow, including a plaza and rationalisation of the existing court house building.		2,351,013.00	On Site
Wicklow Town This project involves the relocation and upgrading of the library and Fitzwilliam Square upgrade and street improvement.		4,627,409.00	On Site
Bray Harbour Area Integrated Regeneration This project focuses on the regeneration of the Bray Harbour Area and release of various sites for future development through a series of integrated project elements.		7,140,000.00	Preliminary Design Stage
TOTAL		56 PROJECTS	637,830,342.04

Heritage

Heritage Ireland 2030 is Ireland's new national heritage plan. It is built around a vision of our heritage – in all its forms – being at the very centre of local and national discourse, valued by all and cared for and protected for future generations. At the heart of this framework are three themes: communities, leadership and partnerships. These reflect the importance of ongoing collaboration between government and communities, heritage organisations, individuals and local authorities in caring and planning for our heritage.

In addition to the overall strategic approach outlined in Heritage Ireland 2030, 'A Living Tradition: A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage' was published by Government in December 2021. The publication specifically looks at different ways of assessing and managing our unique heritage assets. The three themes acknowledge that our vernacular heritage is part of our past but continues to be used in the present and should also be part of our future. The first theme, understanding, looks at the root causes of abandonment of vernacular buildings, the potential for rehabilitation and reuse, and ways of dealing more effectively with them. The second theme, minding, focuses on the sustainability of vernacular buildings, feeding the results into conservation and maintenance. The third theme, handing on, looks forward in time, exploring exemplars for sensitive adaptation, conservation and extension of vernacular buildings.

Linked to this, the Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structures Fund (HSF). The Community Monuments Fund (CMF) introduced this year is for conservation and other works at national monuments.

Over 590 heritage projects across every county in the Country have benefited from a combined sum of €8m under BHIS and HSF. The Department supports projects under the CMF for investment in archaeological heritage. The fund is prioritised for local authorities, private owners and custodians, and community groups for the care, maintenance, protection and promotion of local monuments and historic sites. Approximately €6m has been invested under the CMF.

The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) is a joint undertaking by the Department and the Heritage Council and provides a template for heritage-led regeneration. Heritage-led regeneration can stimulate economic activity as footfall and visitor numbers increase and opportunities arise to address retail and commercial vacancy. A total of €2 million has been allocated for the heritage-led regeneration of towns around the country.

Arising from Ireland's ratification of the European Landscape Convention, the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 was launched in May 2015. In 2022, personnel from the Built Heritage Policy Unit and National Monuments Services undertook to contribute to a pilot undertaken by the EPA on landscape character assessment, the outcomes of which will inform a wider landscape character assessment approach.

In terms of National Parks, such as the Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains in the Eastern and Midland Region, Project Ireland 2040 investment consists of ongoing maintenance and upgrading of the 87,000-hectare network of sites.

The NPWS also operate a local authority Biodiversity Action Fund. The fund has grown in popularity since it launched in 2018. €1.2 million was allocated to 31 local authorities for 120 Biodiversity Projects in 2021.

Ireland's 3rd National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) outlines a suite of objectives, targets and actions which aim to ensure that biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored. In the period since the Plan launched, significant progress has been made in implementing the actions in the NBAP, including:

- DHLGH published 'Development Plans: Guidelines for Planning Authorities' in 2022, supporting integrated planning for green infrastructure within statutory land use plans, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework.
- NPWS awarded funding, through the Heritage Council, for the appointment of biodiversity officers in those EMRA counties which did not already have a biodiversity officer, namely Kildare, Offaly, Westmeath, Laois, Longford, Louth and Meath. In addition to developing a Biodiversity Plan for their area, the new biodiversity officers will advise the local authority on biodiversity related issues and the authority's obligations in relation to protecting biodiversity, helping local authorities to fully integrate biodiversity conservation into all of their policies, plans and actions, through training and provision of expert advice.
- The NPWS Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) offered funding to local authorities to implement actions identified in the National Biodiversity Action Plan, including the restoration of native species and the control of invasive alien species. Counties in the EMRA region received €906k in funding for such projects during 2021 and 2022 through this funding stream.

The NPWS Farm Plan Scheme supports landowners to deliver actions that benefit habitats and species in Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, to support farmland biodiversity more generally, and to provide a platform for trialling new conservation approaches which can be delivered on a wider scale. Farm Plans were delivered in counties Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois in 2021 and 2022.

NPWS led on the preparation of the current (covering the period 2021-2027) Prioritised Action Framework for Ireland. PAFs are strategic multiannual planning tools, aimed at providing a comprehensive overview of the measures that are needed to implement the EU-wide Natura 2000 network (of SACs and SPAs) and its associated green infrastructure, specifying the financing needs for these measures and linking them to the corresponding EU funding programmes.

In line with the objectives of the EU Habitats Directive on which the Natura 2000 network is based, the measures identified in the PAFs should mainly be designed “to maintain and restore, at a favourable conservation status, natural habitats and species of EU importance, whilst taking account of economic, social and cultural requirements and regional and local characteristics”.

During the development of the PAF, input and feedback was sought from a number of key stakeholders, including local authorities via the County and City Management Association (CCMA). The PAF outlines the priority conservation measures required to be taken by all actors, including local authorities, to restore habitats and species listed in the Birds and Habitats Directives, both within designated sites as well as associated green infrastructure. NPWS prepares and publishes site-specific conservation objectives for SACs and SPAs on a rolling basis.

Architecture and Design

Places for People, a new National Policy on Architecture was launched in May 2022, and promotes quality in architecture and the built environment for increased environmental, economic and social sustainability and resilience. The policy vision emphasises the power of architecture and design to support a more sustainable and resilient society based on knowledge and creativity and driven by leadership and inclusive participation.

The policy supports the implementation of architectural and built environment priorities in the NPF, the Climate Action Plan 2021, Housing for All and Town Centre First. In the European context, policy direction and funding mechanisms stem from the European Green Deal, including the Renovation Wave, Just Transition and the New European Bauhaus.



Water Services

The Programme for Government commits to funding Uisce Éireann's capital investment plan for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure on a multi-annual basis, supported through the National Development Plan.

The current revenue control period, RC3, runs from 2020–2024. As part of the revenue control process, the CRU reviewed Uisce Éireann's capital investment plan 2020–2024. This capital investment plan set out a clearly defined set of priorities to deliver improvements to water and wastewater services throughout Ireland, where they are needed most urgently to meet our EU drinking water and wastewater obligations, while supporting balanced urban and rural development.

As well as significant investment to improve compliance with public health and environmental standards, the National Development Plan specifically aims to ensure that water services investment supports the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. Recently updated water services capacity registers have also assisted in this regard. Major water services projects benefitting from NDP funding in the region include the following:

Name of Project	Project Description	Commenced	Completion	Cost Range
Athlone Main Drainage	Works to upgrade the Athlone sewer network to reduce the risk of sewer flooding	Q1 2023	Q3 2025	€100m €250m
Greater Dublin Drainage Scheme	The new regional wastewater treatment facility to protect public health, safeguard the environment and facilitate the social and economic growth to 2050.	Subject to Appraisal	Subject to Appraisal	
Old Connaught Woodbrook	The construction of two new reservoirs, together with associated network upgrades and pumping station.	2022	2025	
Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade	Major upgrade works to enable plant to treat the increasing volumes of wastewater arriving at the plant to the required standard, enabling future housing and commercial development	Q1 2021	Q4 2025	
Uisce Éireann's National Programme of Investment to tackle leakage through find and fix (active leakage control) and watermain rehabilitation	As part of the National Leakage Reduction Programme. Working with local authorities to repair bursts and fix underground leaks	On-going	On-going	
Upper Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme	Uisce Éireann expanding and upgrading the sewerage system in communities across Kildare.		Q1 2022	
Vartry Water Supply Scheme	This major upgrade included a new water treatment plant, 4km pipeline and covered reservoir at Stillorgan	Q1 2018	Q4 2021	
Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midland Region	The Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midlands Region will deliver a new source of water supply to address substantial water supply demand deficits in the region.	Subject to Appraisal	Subject to Appraisal	

Current funding under the Rural Water Programme provides an annual subsidy payable to group water schemes towards their operational and management costs of supplying water for domestic use. Demand led funding is available for improvements to private wells and on-site wastewater treatment systems.



Uisce Éireann's 'Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme' is intended to provide capacity primarily in wastewater treatment plants to cater for growth in smaller settlements that would not otherwise be provided for in the larger scale investment plan. An overall budget of €98 million was allocated to the programme over the five years to 2024. The programme is directed at settlements with a population of less than 2,000 persons, with identified capacity constraints and where no Uisce Éireann capacity upgrade project is currently proposed. The programme offers the potential for housing development in settlements in rural areas as an alternative to one-off development. Furthermore, the water main rehabilitation program is strategically planned to reduce interruptions from water main bursts, improve water quality and replace end-of-life assets.

Marine Planning

Key developments since the adoption of the RSES have been the publication of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), and the enactment of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021. The NMPF was launched in July 2021 and represents the proposed approach to managing Ireland's marine activities to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources to 2040. This single framework, bringing together all marine-based human activities, and sets out objectives and planning policies for each activity. Those activities include offshore renewable energy; fisheries; ports, harbours and shipping; safety at sea; sport and recreation; tourism; and wastewater treatment and disposal. The NMPF will be the key decision-making tool for Government departments, state agencies, regulatory authorities and policymakers for decisions on marine activities.

The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 constitutes the biggest reform of marine governance since the foundation of the State, with a legal and administrative framework to support a marine environment that Ireland can benefit from socially, environmentally and economically. The Act establishes a new planning regime for the maritime area and will be a key enabler of decarbonisation of Ireland's energy sources and the development of offshore energy. It streamlines arrangements on the basis of a single consent principle, i.e., one State consent (Maritime Area Consent) to enable occupation of the Maritime Area and one development consent (planning permission), with a single environmental assessment.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

The Department has identified that a number of State Bodies under the remit of the Department have also contributed to supporting the objectives of the RSES. These include;

Land Development Agency

The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on an interim basis in September 2018 by way of an Establishment Order made under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971. The Land Development Agency Act 2021 was enacted in July 2021 and following commencement of relevant provisions, the Land Development Agency Designated Activity Company was incorporated in December 2021. Following the dissolution of the interim entity, the LDA has been established as a commercial state body. The agency assists implementation of RSES objectives by coordinating appropriate State lands for regeneration and development, opening up key sites which are not being used effectively for housing delivery, and driving strategic land supply and assembly for housing. The LDA is currently progressing plans to develop housing schemes in Dundrum, Dublin, at the former Central Mental Hospital site.

Housing Agency

The Housing Agency works with the Department, local authorities and AHBs in the delivery of housing and housing services. The agency is involved in delivery of a wide range of actions, including policy development through the provision of data analysis and research and the publication of best practice guidance. It also supports local authorities and AHBs through project feasibility and development of housing, procurement and contracts preparation and advisory services on Part V delivery, turnkey delivery, and design and build tenders. The agency supports a wide range of projects and provides project management, design, and contract administration for construction projects.

An Bord Pleanála

Under Section 143 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, An Bord Pleanála is required to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in the performance of its functions. Section 37 of the Act provides that where a planning authority has decided to refuse permission for development on the grounds that a proposed development materially contravenes the development plan, the Board may grant permission where it considers, inter alia, that permission for the proposed development should be granted having regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the area.

Furthermore, under Section 37A, strategic infrastructure developments are dealt with directly by the Board in cases including where the scheduled development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of any of the objectives in the RSES.



Office of the Planning Regulator

The OPR has sought to secure the objectives of the RSES via the three statutory functions of the Office, namely (a) assessment of statutory plans (b) reviews of local authority planning functions and (c) education, training and research and awareness. The OPR carries out an assessment and evaluation of statutory plans to ensure consistency with national and regional planning policy. These include City and County Development Plans (including Variations) and Local Area Plans (including Alterations). The OPR makes submissions at the different plan stages, as appropriate.

The OPR assessed the city/county development plans (CDPs) and made submissions regarding the local authorities within the EMRA region at key stages, including issues paper, draft plan and material alterations. The OPR also evaluated and assessed local area plans (LAPs), proposed variations to CDPs, and proposed amendments to LAPs, at key stages. During its assessment the OPR had regard for the objectives of the EMRA RSES.

The key themes or topics of the recommendations made by the OPR at draft and material alterations stages of the CDPs within EMRA's regional area included zoning, settlement hierarchy, core strategy, compact growth, sustainable transport, and renewable energy and climate change. Of the twelve CDPs which have been adopted by the local authorities in the EMRA region, the recommendations of the OPR were satisfactorily addressed for five plans⁷. In the case of the seven remaining plans, the Minister has issued a final direction on six plans⁸, and a draft direction on one plan⁹.

Engagement with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and local authorities

EMRA participates in the OPR-led Plans Evaluation Forum (the Forum), which was established in June 2019. The purpose of the Forum is to facilitate discussion and information sharing in the consideration of statutory plans and encourage greater policy alignment amongst stakeholders in the context of the plan making process. Forum members meet approximately every four to six weeks.

The OPR met with the three regional assemblies, including the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, in March 2022. The meeting provided an opportunity for the OPR and the three regional assemblies to have an open discussion and share updates regarding the work of each organisation, any challenges arising, and to discuss matters of regional importance.

⁷ Dublin City 2022-2028, Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029, Longford County Development Plan, Louth County Development Plan 2021-2023 and Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027.

⁸ Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Development Plan 2022-2029, Laois County Development plan 2021-2027, Meath County Development Plan 202-2026, South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028, Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

⁹ The Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029 was adopted in March 2023 and the Minister issued a draft Direction on 4th May, however, final consideration is currently ongoing.

The OPR and EMRA held a workshop in March 2023 to discuss matters relevant to the Eastern and Midland Region, including: the use of GIS and spatial data in planning matters; upcoming local area plans in EMRA's regional area; research and training activities (EMRA and the OPR); and progress on the RSES.

The OPR also engaged proactively with the forward planning teams in the planning authorities within the Eastern and Midland Region to discuss the preparation of the local authorities pending development plans and local area plans. The alignment of plans to the EMRA RSES was a reoccurring topic for discussion.

OPR's Research, Education, Training and Public Awareness Activity functions

Under Section 31(Q)(1) of the Act a core function of the OPR is to conduct education and training programmes for elected members and staff of planning authorities and regional assemblies. This includes the staff and elected members in the Eastern and Midland Region Assembly (EMRA).

The EMRA Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) has 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) which are aligned with international, EU and national policy and which in turn set the framework for city and county development plans in the Eastern and Midland Region. The OPR training and research programme strongly supports the implementation of these objectives by upskilling and informing staff, elected representatives and decision makers in local authorities and regional assemblies on the principles, policies and procedures that support the implementation of these policy objectives.

The OPR has collaborated with the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) to develop a tailor-made planning training programme for elected members. The programme currently focuses on topical themes relevant to the members' role in making Local Area Plans, Rural transport, Energy and Planning Legislation and Guidance.

In June 2022 the OPR delivered a presentation to the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) to raise awareness of the various planning training opportunities that are available for elected members. At the request of the Chair of EMRA the OPR produced a short video for elected members setting out the statutory timeline and procedures associated with the Part 8 consultation and consent process for local authority own developments.

The OPR is also mandated to conduct education and training programmes for staff of local authorities in respect of such matters as the OPR considers are of relevance to the functions of the local authority, particularly relating to proper planning and sustainable development. The programme currently focuses on Planning and Flood Risk Management, Marine Spatial Planning and Planning Enforcement.

The OPR has sponsored and supported the delivery of training workshops on the use of Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) web-tool, hosted and maintained by University College Dublin.

The OPR also participated in EMRA's Regional Green Infrastructure Coordination Workshop (December 2022). The aim of the workshop was to support the further development of Green Infrastructure policies and coordinate the mapping of strategic Green Infrastructure in the EMRA Region as part of the implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031.

Furthermore, the OPR, in conjunction with the CCMA, advanced work on the completion of a Learning and Development Strategy for local authority and regional assembly staff. The Strategy was finalised in 2022 and issued to the DHLGH, and the chair of the Housing, Building and Land Use Committee of the CCMA. The Learning and Development Strategy was formally published in Q1 of 2023.

OPR Review of Systems and Procedures used by Planning Authorities

The OPR is implementing a programme of reviews of the systems and procedures used by local authorities across the county to deliver their planning functions, including forward planning operations. The programme is focussed on identifying good practice and achievements, promoting learning between organisations, as well as highlighting any areas for improvement. The overall intention is to embed a culture of continuous improvement in the Irish planning sector, which will contribute to the effective implementation of the objectives for the EMRA area by the relevant authorities.

GIS and Spatial Data Management

The OPR, through its GIS and Spatial Data Management capability, is providing the critical evidence-base its planners need to evaluate statutory plans. This has enabled the OPR to make submissions on CDPs and LAPs at key stages, and recommendations to the Minister regarding the assessment of adopted plans, which are grounded in evidence and help to ensure that plan proposals support the Regional Strategic Outcomes. Some specific examples of this include supporting:

RPO 3.2: Local authorities, in their core strategies shall set out measures to achieve compact urban development targets of at least 50% of all new homes within or contiguous to the built up area of Dublin city and suburbs and a target of at least 30% for other urban areas.

RPO 3.3: *Local authorities shall, in their core strategies, identify regeneration areas within existing urban settlements and set out specific objectives relating to the delivery of development on urban infill and brownfield regeneration sites in line with the Guiding Principles set out in the RSES and to provide for increased densities as set out in the 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas', 'Sustainable Urban Housing; Design Standards for new Apartments Guidelines' and the 'Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities'.*

The OPR is developing a tracking mechanism focusing initially on housing completions for measuring progress in delivery of NPF/RPO objectives regarding Compact Growth.

RPO 7.36: *Planning policy at local authority level shall reflect and adhere to the principles and planning guidance set out in Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government publications relating to 'Wind Energy Development' and the DCCAE Code of Practice for Wind Energy Development in Ireland on Guidelines for Community Engagement and any other relevant guidance which may be issued in relation to sustainable energy provisions.*

The OPR is using GIS modelling to undertake technical assessments regarding the viability of Wind Energy Strategy proposals in local authority plans. This analytical capability has enabled the OPR to evaluate plans ensuring local authority targets are in line with national targets to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

No response provided.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

In addition to the funding initiatives and allocations highlighted by the Department and documented at section A) of above, the Department indicated that in terms of 'championing the Capital City of Dublin', the Department has committed funding in excess of €500m for the City, across a wide range of transformative regeneration projects. In other areas of investment, major funding of social and affordable housing has also been targeted at the urban centres of the Region.

In summary, investment in the Region has continued across all areas of the department, but of particular note are the following investment schemes/oversight structures:

- Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Croí Cónaithe Scheme, for both towns and cities.
- Affordable Housing Fund to enable the provision of affordable housing.
- The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) for social housing.
- Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme (EERP).
- Delivery by Irish Water (now Uisce Éireann), the Land Development Agency and the Housing Agency.
- Oversight by bodies such as NOAC, OPR, RTB and An Bord Pleanála.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by the Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

No further Information provided.

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

The Department indicated that the RSES continues to play an important role in transposing the national policy objectives of the NPF to regional level and has been a key policy influence for the newly adopted development plans across the region. The Department looks forward to working with the Eastern and Midland Region over the remainder of the lifespan of the strategy to achieve balanced and sustainable regional development.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the information submitted by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

The response by the Department has indicated progress across a number of areas of the RSES including RSOs, such as RSO 2 which focuses on compact growth and urban regeneration and RSO 9 to support the transition to low carbon and clean energy. Accordingly, on review of the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the agencies under its aegis, have carried out a number of actions that have enabled progress to be made in implementing the RSES.

The Assembly considers that there is need to support and reinforce the work to date and therefore make the following recommendations to NOAC for consideration;

1. Provide enhanced support measures in order to converge towards the NPF and RSES development scenario for the Eastern and Midland Region, including acknowledging trends that indicate a continuing challenge to achieve housing targets in line with the NPF and RSES.
2. Support coordination of RSES objectives, related to strengthened and diversified rural communities, both within and across Government Departments, including the provision of housing to ensure the viability small towns and villages.
3. The standard and quality of housing provision should align with the Regional Strategic Outcomes of the RSES, in particular in relation to creating healthy communities.
4. Having regard to the provisions of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, ensure timely and closer engagement between the Department and the Regional Assembly with regard to Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) and any role for Regional Assemblies to inform joint DMAPs in collaboration with coastal planning authorities.



In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

- The emphasis on measures to stimulate and support urban brownfield and public transport-led housing development at scale to facilitate convergence with the NPF development scenario.
- Evidence that compact growth goals of targeting a greater proportion (40%) of future housing development to be within and close to the existing 'footprint' of built-up areas is happening. In 2022, 84.1% of all new dwelling completions were in urban areas and the remainder in rural areas. At the beginning of the new dwelling completion series in 2011, 38% were in urban and 62% in rural areas.
- Policy Measures and Funding to promote compact growth and regeneration in order to reverse the stagnation or decline of town centres, including measures to reduce vacancy, re-use existing buildings and promote infill and area based regeneration. This includes the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), Town Centre First measures, to regulatory measures such as the Residential Zoned Land Tax and proposed Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones legislation, simplifying requirements for change of use from vacant commercial to residential in town centres, and the Croí Cónaithe (Cities and Towns) Funds.
- The introduction of the Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme, in addition to promoting city focused and compact growth, seeks to increase the supply of owner occupier apartments and to provide those who wish to purchase a home with greater choice.
- A total of € 637,830,342.04 has been allocated to URDF projects across the EMRA Region.
- A focused 3rd URDF Call issued on the 30th January 2023, specifically designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across cities and towns, ensuring accelerated provision of residential accommodation in accordance with the Government's Vacant Home Action Plan 2023.
- The provision of financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structures Fund (HSF). The Community Monuments Fund (CMF) introduced this year is for conservation and other works at national monuments.
- NPWS awarded funding, through the Heritage Council, for the appointment of biodiversity officers in those EMRA counties which did not already have a biodiversity officer, namely Kildare, Offaly, Westmeath, Laois, Longford, Louth and Meath.
- The NPWS Farm Plan Scheme that supports landowners to deliver actions that benefit habitats and species in Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, to support farmland biodiversity more generally, and to provide a platform for trialling new conservation approaches which can be delivered on a wider scale. Farm Plans were delivered in counties Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois in 2021 and 2022.
- Ongoing investment in a number of the major waters services projects in the Region as identified in the RSES.
- The allocation of €98 million (2019-2024) to Uisce Éireann's 'Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme' to provide capacity primarily in wastewater treatment plants to cater for growth in smaller settlements that would not otherwise be provided for in the larger scale investment plan. The programme is directed at settlements with a population of less than 2,000 persons, with identified capacity constraints and where no Uisce Éireann capacity upgrade project is currently proposed, offering the potential for housing development in settlements in rural areas as an alternative to one-off development.
- Continued work by State Bodies and agencies to deliver the RSES such as the OPR training and research programme that strongly supports the implementation of RSES objectives by upskilling and informing staff, elected representatives and decision makers in local authorities and regional assemblies on the principles, policies and procedures that support the implementation of these policy objectives.

6.1.9

Minister for Transport

The Department of Transport's mission is to shape the safe and sustainable development of transport, to support economic growth and social progress.

The Department of Transport's focus is on a number of areas including road, aviation, maritime, public transport, sustainability and climate change. These goals are directly aligned to a number of Regional Strategic Outcomes defined by the RSES including for instance; Healthy Communities (RSO 4), Integrated Transport and Land Use (RSO 6), Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy (RSO 9), Global City Region (RSO 14) and Enhanced Strategic Connectivity (RSO 15).

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department was asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. The response of the Department was structured according to the response template issued to the Department. As such, this section is structured accordingly with the response included in the order listed under each heading.

a) Progress in relation to the integration of Planning and Transport Policy to achieve more sustainable settlement and travel patterns as identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), and in the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), which was prepared as part of the RSES. This provides the spatial framework for alignment of key transport infrastructure and investment throughout the Region, to ensure that investment is targeted in the right locations with a focus on compact growth and sustainable transport in the designated settlements including;

- *Dublin as Capital City;*
- *Athlone, Drogheda, and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres; and*
- *A network of Key Towns throughout the Region including Bray, Maynooth, Swords, Navan, Naas, Wicklow-Rathnew, Graigecullen (Carlow), Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore and Portlaoise*

Overview of Integrated Planning and Transport Policy in the Dublin Metropolitan Area

A working group was established in December 2021 under Action 26.1 of the Government's Housing for All plan to consider opportunities for Transport-Orientated Development (TOD) in major urban centres. TOD refers to a form of urban development that seeks to maximise the provision of housing, employment, public services and leisure space in close proximity to high quality transport services. The working group is jointly chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Transport, and includes representatives from the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the Land Development Agency (LDA). Its role is to consider opportunities for TOD in the five cities and the group will also review opportunities for better integration of land use and transport in regional centres.

The working group has completed a review of opportunities for TOD in Dublin in the areas of Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council. This review identified fourteen locations in Dublin that have the potential for the phased delivery of circa 130,000 residential units and other intensive mixed-use development that is close to existing or planned high-capacity public transport nodes.

The outputs from this work will inform Government policy and initiatives to support the National Planning Framework (NPF) objectives of compact growth and sustainable mobility, meet housing delivery targets in Housing for All and support climate targets under the Climate Action Plan 2023. Engagement with the relevant local authorities, the LDA, the NTA and infrastructure providers, such as Uisce Éireann, will also continue in order to accelerate TOD. This will include consideration of legislative and policy provisions, institutional arrangements, capacity-building measures and funding and resources required to facilitate the delivery of such plan-led development in a timely manner.

The working group will now focus on opportunities in the wider eastern region (Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Louth) in 2023 and will prepare separate reports on these centres.

Section 28 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable and Compact Settlements are due to be published in June 2023 by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Department of Transport is engaging with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in respect of incorporating guidance on the Integration of Planning and Transport Policy into these upcoming Guidelines.

The Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042 was published by the NTA in January 2023 following approval by the Minister for Transport. It sets out a statutory framework for transport investment for the next 20 years for Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow and was developed to align with the spatial planning objectives of the National Planning Framework and the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

Dublin Port

Dublin Port is progressing the implementation of its Masterplan in order to ensure that the Port can provide for future sustainable growth and changes in facilitating seaborne trade in goods and passenger movements to and from Ireland and the Dublin region in particular.

Works include the redevelopment of existing berths; creation of new berths; deepening of the port's navigable channel from 7.8m to 10m draught; upgrading of the road network; provision of unified state services facilities for control and inspections; and improvements in utility infrastructure.

Approximately 25% of the overall project has been completed to date, with considerable work completed on the Alexandra Basin Redevelopment which is the first of three Strategic Infrastructure Developments projects. This work was part funded by Connecting Europe Facility along with finance from the European Investment Bank. Works are also commencing on elements of the MasterPlan 2 (MP2) Project, which is the second major capital development project from Dublin Port's Masterplan 2040. Between the ABR Project and the MP2 Project, Dublin Port Company has now secured all of the planning permissions required for the major development works planned on the northern side of the port. The company is also progressing the third and final Masterplan project, the 3FM project, with the commencement of the pre-planning stage and in particular the preparation of the detailed project design and the environmental impact reports. It is expected that the company may lodge a planning application with An Bord Pleanála later in 2023.

While the primary function of our ports is to facilitate maritime transport, at the same time, it is recognised that there is a pressing need for Ireland to have the port capacity in place to exploit the opportunities presented by Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE). A policy statement on the facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by ports was published in December 2021. This sets out that Ireland will potentially need to build, on a phased basis, around four to five standard ORE port facilities (each capable of building 500 MW of ORE annually) that will act as construction and deployment ports over the next 25 - 30 years. A number of ports within the Eastern and Midland region, not under the aegis of the Department of Transport, and terminal operators within ports, are progressing their plans for the provision of the required facilities.



Public transport projects within the Dublin Metropolitan Area

The National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NDP) provides funding to progress delivery of key public transport projects within the Dublin Metropolitan Area and several milestones have already been achieved for each of these projects.

MetroLink

MetroLink will be a fully segregated and mostly underground new rail line from the Swords area to Charlemont in the south of Dublin City Centre. It is a key project under the NDP.

A significant milestone in the progression of the MetroLink project occurred in July 2022, when the Minister for Transport secured Decision Gate (DG) 1 approval under the Public Spending Code (PSC) from Cabinet for MetroLink. This decision enabled the project to move to planning application stage and on 30th September 2022, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) submitted a Railway Order application to An Bord Pleanála. The statutory planning consultation for the project closed on 16th January 2023.

In line with the PSC and the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform Circular 06/2023, TII is currently preparing the Project Design, Planning and Procurement Strategy for MetroLink. It is anticipated that these documents will be submitted to the Department of Transport over the coming year for consideration at DG 2 of the PSC. Subject to approval at DG 2 and funding, TII will then prepare a Final Business Case for consideration by Cabinet at DG 3.

TII is also in the process of appointing a Client Partner to support the efficient and effective delivery of the project. It is currently anticipated that the Client Partner will be appointed in the coming months to provide the adequate number of resources and support across all phases of the project to ensure the successful delivery of MetroLink. This appointment will be a significant development in the process of progressing MetroLink through the Decision Gate process and toward delivery, subject to approval and funding.

BusConnects Dublin

Under the NDP, BusConnects programmes will be substantially delivered in all of Ireland's five cities by the end of the decade. Not only will these programmes significantly enhance the quality of public transport in our cities, but they also include the parallel development of high-quality cycle lanes.

The programme preliminary business case and the detailed project brief for next-generation ticketing were approved by Government in March 2022. This decision gave DG 1 approval to the programme in principle, DG 1 approval to the Core Bus Corridors, to facilitate planning applications, and DG 2 approval to next generation ticketing, facilitating the commencement of competitive dialogue.

To date the NTA has submitted planning applications to An Bord Pleanála in respect of nine of the Core Bus Corridor schemes and hopes to submit applications for all remaining schemes by the end of 2023. This will be dependent to an extent on the enacting of the Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021 by this summer.



The Network Redesign for the entire Dublin network is being rolled out over 11 phases and currently the NTA expect it to be completed by early 2025. Progress to date includes:

- Phase 1 of BusConnects was launched in Dublin in June 2021. The first phase included routes connecting Dublin's north-east to the city centre covering the areas of Howth, Baldoy, Donaghmede, Raheny, Malahide, Portmarnock and Howth. These routes are operated by Dublin Bus.
- Phase 2 of the BusConnects Network Redesign launched on 28th November 2021 and serves the communities of Maynooth, Celbridge, Leixlip, Lucan, Adamstown, Liffey Valley and Palmerstown to the City Centre as well as Ringsend and Sandymount. This saw the introduction of the C-Spine (C1, C2, C3, C4), route 52, eight peak only routes (P29, X25, X26, X27, X28, X30, X31 and X32) and six local routes (L51, L52, L53, L54, L58 and L59). Two night-time routes (C5 and C6) were also introduced. This phase provided enhanced bus services with a high frequency spine as well as new local and radial routes. This phase is primarily operated by Dublin Bus, with the exception of the L51 and L52 which will be operated by Go-Ahead Ireland.
- Phase 3 of the BusConnects Network Redesign launched on 29th May in the north of Dublin. This phase introduces northern orbital routes called the N4 and N6. The N4 is operated by Dublin Bus and the N6 is operated by Go-Ahead Ireland.
- Phase 4, the 'G-Spine' which is in the 'Ballyfermot - City Centre - Docklands' area was introduced on the 16th of October 2022, all operated by Dublin Bus.

DART+

The DART+ programme, formerly known as the DART Expansion programme, is a cornerstone project of the Government's Project Ireland 2040 vision.

It comprises five different projects in and around the Greater Dublin Area:

1. DART+ Fleet: a ten-year procurement framework for electric and battery-electric fleet
2. DART+ West: extension of DART services from the City Centre to M3 Parkway and Maynooth, construction of a new depot and city centre enhancements
3. DART+ SouthWest: extension of DART services from the City Centre to Hazelhatch and Celbridge, including four-tracking from Park West to Heuston
4. DART+ Coastal North: extension of DART services to Drogheda
5. DART+ Coastal South: improvement of DART services on Greystones line, level crossings removal etc.

In consultation with Iarnród Éireann, the NTA is progressing the various projects which are at different stages of planning and development.

These consist of:

- Approval by Government of the DART+ preliminary business case in December 2021 permitted the purchase of 95 additional DART carriages for arrival in 2025. On 29th November 2022, the Government approved a second purchase of fleet under the framework agreement with Alstom, which will see 90 new battery-electric multiple units enter service in 2026.
- The Government Decision in December 2021 also granted DG 1 approval to DART+ West which allowed the project to enter the statutory planning process. The Railway Order for DART+ West was submitted on 29th July 2022. This commenced the formal planning process for the Maynooth line which includes the new depot and Dublin city centre works. It is anticipated that construction will commence in 2025 and will be completed by 2028.



The Railway Order application for the DART+ South West project was submitted to An Bord Pleanála on 22nd March 2023. The project will extend DART services from Dublin city centre to Hazelhatch and Celbridge train station and includes four-tracking from Park West to Heuston. It is anticipated that construction will commence in 2025 and will be completed by 2029.

Luas Finglas

The Minister approved the Strategic Assessment Report for the Luas Finglas project at DG (Decision Gate) 0 of the PSC (Public Spending Code) in 2021. The preliminary business case for the project will be submitted to the Department of Transport by the NTA later this year and will then be brought to Government for its approval in line with the PSC. This will enable the project to enter the statutory planning process through the submission of a Railway Order Application to An Bord Pleanála.

Rail stations

Pelletstown station opened in September 2021. The construction works at Kishogue station in West Dublin is expected to be completed by the end of this year. Construction works at Woodbrook station near Shankill on the DART line are expected to commence during 2023, with a view to the new station coming into operation during 2025. Furthermore, the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2022-2042 proposes new stations for Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin and Kylemore in Dublin.



Public transport projects in the Region

All-Island Strategic Rail Review

The All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR), launched in April 2021, is being undertaken by the Department of Transport in conjunction with the Department for Infrastructure Northern Ireland, and will inform the development of inter-urban/inter-regional rail on the Island of Ireland over the coming decades.

The Review is considering the future of the rail network with regard to the following ambitions: improving sustainable connectivity between the major cities (including the potential for higher/high-speed rail), enhancing regional accessibility, supporting balanced regional development, and rail connectivity to our international gateways. This also includes the role of rail freight.

The Review is also considering the scope for improved rail services and infrastructure along the various existing corridors. The scope also considers potential future, corridors of the network including disused and closed lines.

The draft Review report, with associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), was published in July 2023 for SEA public consultation. It is anticipated that the Review report will be finalised in Q4 2023.

Following the completion of the Review report, the report will be submitted for approval by the Minister for Transport and, ultimately, to Government, as well as to the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Should there continue to be an absence of Ministers in the NI Executive, approval will be considered taking into account the decision-making framework set out in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2022 or relevant legislation in place at the time.

Enterprise Fleet Replacement Programme (EFRP)

The Enterprise Fleet Replacement Programme includes the procurement of new Intercity trains for the flagship cross-border service between Dublin and Belfast. The project is run jointly by both Iarnród Éireann and Translink. The project will facilitate the replacement of the existing Enterprise fleet upon its end of useful life circa 2027 and enable an hourly service to be introduced all day on the route, with a target journey time of sub-two hours. This investment will transform the customer experience on the route, allow for a significant reduction in carbon emissions over the lifetime of the new fleet, support a modal shift to public transport, and facilitate greater levels of compact growth along the corridor. This project is considered a flagship project for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and its PEACE PLUS funding programme, which is part funding the project to a minimum value of €165m excluding VAT. Development of the business case and design development for the EFRP is continuing with the ITT forecast to be submitted in Q1 2024, subject to funding approvals.

Rail Freight 2040 Strategy

Iarnród Éireann published a Rail Freight 2040 Strategy in December 2021. The Strategy has been developed around five main pillars: enhancing connections with sea ports; addressing rolling stock requirements; developing internodal port network; network developments; and policy initiatives. These pillars focus on internal and external aspects of the rail freight business and when pursued as part of a cohesive strategy will result in wide ranging transformation of rail freight in Ireland.

To support the implementation of the Strategy the procurement of a multi-disciplinary team is currently underway.

Navan Rail Line

The issue of a rail connection to Navan was re-examined as part of the development of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042. The strategy proposes delivery of the Navan rail line in the medium term from 2031-2036. A project of this scale will require significant planning and design before construction can commence. A dedicated project team is expected to be in place from 2024, and it is expected that this pre-construction work will commence in the second half of this decade under the NDP funding envelope out to 2030.

National Train Control Centre

The new National Train Control Centre (NTCC), located on the grounds of Heuston Station, will replace the existing Central Traffic Control Centre at Connolly Station. Following substantial completion of the building in November 2022, the NTCC building snagging works and complementary scope was completed in March 2023. Completion and full commissioning is expected by May 2026. The NTCC is a key enabler for expansion of rail services as it will enhance rail traffic management and will underpin both the planned and potential future expansion of rail services across the entire rail network.

Roads Projects

The delivery of roads projects are progressing within the Region, including the on-going management and protection of national road networks and the following road projects; N2 Slane Bypass; N2 Rath Roundabout to Kilmoon Cross; N2 Ardee to south of Castleblaney; M4 Maynooth to Leixlip; M4 Mullingar to Longford (and Sligo); M11 from Jn 4 M50 to Kilmacanogue; N3 Clonee to M50; N52 Ardee Bypass; N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan; M50 Dublin Port South Access.



Public Transport in Rural Areas

TFI Local Link Rural Transport Programme services

The Department of Transport is strongly committed to improving public transport services in rural areas and to piloting new transport initiatives for people of all ages and abilities living there.

The Department and the NTA are supporting this by providing increased funding for enhancing TFI Local Link (this is the brand name for the Rural Transport Programme) services, for both regular “timetabled” services, and “door-to-door” Demand Responsive Services (DRT) as well. There has been a substantial increase in funding allocated for Local Link services since 2016, going from €12.2 million in 2016 to €43m in 2023.

The additional funding has enabled the introduction of over 100 new Rural Regular Service routes, as well as improvements to DRT services. The new Rural Regular Services operate at least five times per day over a 5/6/7 days per week schedule. They are specifically designed to ensure connectivity with other public transport services and better linkage of services between and within towns and villages.

Additionally, the Department is exploring the expansion of non-conventional modes of transport to give the public a well-rounded transport offering, for example the expansion of the Community Transport Scheme.

Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan

One of the key plans for enhancing the existing transport network across Ireland is the NTA's Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan, ‘Connecting Ireland’, which aims to develop an integrated, accessible, and sustainable network of public transport offerings in rural areas across Ireland.

It is a major national public transport initiative with the aim of increasing public transport connectivity, particularly for people living outside the major cities and towns. Over 100 rural villages will benefit from frequent public transport service (at least three return trips daily) for the first time. The Plan will also see a 25% overall increase in rural bus services, and over 60 new connections to regional cities from surrounding areas providing improved access to shops, services, employment and education opportunities for all people in all communities.

Phase 1 of the plan was rolled out in 2022, with 38 new and enhanced services launched. Phase 2 was launched on 17th February 2023 and 69 new and enhanced services are proposed. The Connecting Ireland implementation programme for 2023 is available on the NTA's website. It contains route details, estimated operational timescales and operator details starting Q1 2023.

b) Enabling Access for All. This may be achieved through better design of transport infrastructure and services to ensure accessibility across all societal needs, age, gender and disabilities in line with the principles of universal design and gender equality; upgrading infrastructure to allow for new interchange and bus hub facilities, new fare structures, improvements to passenger information, bus waiting facilities and integrated timetabling of bus and rail into a coherent national and regional network.

The Department of Transport, the NTA and the public transport companies are fully committed to strengthening public transport offerings and progressively making them accessible for all, especially for Disabled People/Persons with Disabilities, Persons with Reduced Mobility and Older People.

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), the Department and its agencies are progressively making public transport accessible, including in rural areas, by ensuring that:

- new infrastructure and services are accessible from the start, and
- retrofitting older (legacy) infrastructure and facilities to make them accessible.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair accessibility and audio/visual aids, are built into new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. The Department of Transport funds the ring-fenced Public Transport Accessibility Retrofit Programme, managed by the NTA, which includes programmes to install accessible bus stops in rural and regional areas, to upgrade bus bays at regional bus and train stations, to upgrade train stations to make them accessible to wheelchair users, and to increase the number of wheelchair accessible taxis.

In addition, to making the “hard” infrastructure and services accessible, it is crucial to provide the “softer” type of supports to enable disabled people to travel independently on public transport.

The NTA supports disabled people to travel independently on the public transport network through initiatives such as:

- Just a Minute (JAM) Card for anyone with a communications difficulty,
- Provision of Disability Awareness Training to public transport staff,
- Travel Assistance Scheme which provides free assistance for people who need it to access public transport or plan journeys across the GDA. The travel assistants carried out 1,782 assists in 2022 in the GDA.

In addition to works under the Retrofit Programme, other examples of progress in making public transport accessible include:

- Over 95% of passenger trips across the TFI Local Link network are now accessible.
- Bus Éireann's PSO coach fleet is now 100% wheelchair accessible with the wheelchair lift.
- Accessibility audits were carried out on 15 regional Bus Éireann Stations to ensure they comply with Building Regulations on accessibility.
- Iarnród Éireann is continuing its programme to refurbish and replace lifts at 52 stations across the network. In this regard, the following accessibility works were undertaken between 2019-2023:
 - * Carlow station, Co Carlow - New PRM TSi (Technical Specification for Interoperability for Persons with Reduced Mobility) compliant footbridge with lifts constructed and currently operational
 - * Edgeworthstown station, Co Longford - New PRM TSi compliant footbridge with lifts constructed and currently operational
 - * Gormanston station, Co Meath - New PRM TSi compliant footbridge with lifts constructed and currently operational
 - * Dalkey station, DLRCC - New PRM TSi compliant footbridge with lifts constructed proposed to come in to operation in June 2023.

Accessibility works are proposed at a further 9 stations within the Region to be implemented between 2023 - 2031, subject to funding and statutory approvals.

c) Shift to sustainable mobility, with a focus on improvements to walking and cycling provision in cities, towns and villages; to support healthy and active lifestyles including progress in the delivery of the National Cycle Plan and the NTA Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan and in achieving mode share targets in the Smarter Travel Policy

The National Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) was published in April 2022 and replaced the active travel and public transport policy as set out in the Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future and the National Cycle Policy Framework.

The SMP includes a target to deliver at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys and a 10% reduction in kilometres driven by fossil fuelled cars by 2030. However, new, more ambitious targets have been introduced under the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) which was published in December 2022, to emphasize just how transformative the level of system change required will be for Ireland to meet its 2030 emissions targets.

The key performance indicators and targets outlined in the CAP 23 transport chapter are intended to illustrate the level of change required by 2030 and includes a reduction in total kilometres driven of 20% (relative to a projected NTA 2030 'business as usual' reference scenario that incorporates projected demographic growth).

In the context of modal share, CAP 23 sets out the below targets for 2030:

- 50% increase in daily active travel journeys
- 130% increase in daily public transport journeys.
- 25% reduction in daily car journeys.
- Shift in Daily Mode Share to 53% (car), 19% (PT), 28% (AT) by 2030 (In 2018 modal share was: 72% (car), 8% (PT), 20% (AT))

Cycle Network Plan for the Greater Dublin Area

A draft Cycle Network Plan for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) has been published on the National Transport Authority (NTA) website and a final version is due for publication shortly.

National Cycle Network (NCN)

In May 2022 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) launched plans for a National Cycle Network (NCN), a planned core cycle network of 3,500km that will criss-cross the country, connecting more than 200 villages, towns and cities. The network will include cycling links to transport hubs, education centres, employment centres, leisure and tourist destinations, and support “last mile” bicycle deliveries.

The National Cycle Network is due for publication in 2023. The plan has been progressed by TII and incorporates many existing and planned Greenways as well as a range of proposed new cycle routes, as part of its proposed national cycle corridors that connect urban centres. The aim of this intra-urban plan is to encourage greater levels of travel via cycling and walking rather than private car use amongst leisure users, tourists, and commuters. Where an urban cycle network already exists (or is planned), the NCN will integrate with this route (if appropriate). Continued collaboration by TII with the NTA and local authorities will assist in successfully integrating the NCN with existing and planned urban networks across the country.

Climate Action and Sustainable Mobility Engagement Strategy

To achieve Ireland’s climate action ambitions in the transport sector and to support people in choosing sustainable mobility over private car use, there is a need to promote awareness and understanding amongst citizens of what is involved in the Avoid-Shift-Improve approach, as listed in the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23), to achieving a sustainable transport system. There is a need for clear messaging on, and awareness of, the climate action and other co-benefits of shifting from private car use towards sustainable mobility, including the benefits to individuals, families, communities, and businesses.

A key CAP 23 (Action TR/23/6*(TF)) and SMP (Action 68) deliverable for 2023 is the development and implementation of a new Climate Action & Sustainable Mobility Public Engagement Strategy, to help support and communicate the wider benefits of climate action in transport, and to support delivery on the scale of behavioural change required.

This strategy will include a multi-faceted approach, including:

- Public Communications and Engagement
- National Advertising Campaign
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement
- Sustainable Mobility Policy Project Acceptance support for the roll-out of infrastructure projects at a local level
- Car Advertising Regulation and Labelling
- Evaluation Framework & Research Support
- Evaluation Framework
- Long-term Attitudes & Behaviour Impact Research Study
- Communications & Engagement Best-Practice Research Study
- Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan and Pathfinder Programme

In addition to the above details, it is also worth noting that as part of its work in governing delivery of the SMP and its action plan, the Department has established a Leadership Group to oversee and drive implementation of the policy. It includes representatives from all agencies tasked with action delivery as well as the regional assemblies and, through the CCMA, the local authority sector.

The Leadership Group has also established a Delivery Team to develop and oversee a series of 35 projects under a Pathfinder Programme, all of which are centred around the shift to sustainable mobility. These projects are to be delivered by the end of 2025.

d) Public Realm and Active Travel interventions; accelerated measures for walking, cycling and placemaking initiatives to improve accessibility and permeability in the public realm, and safe routes to schools.

The Department is overseeing the implementation of several such initiatives as part of the Pathfinder Programme. In the EMRA region these include:

- CycleConnects
- Longford Cycle Network
- Rural Cycleway Rapid Deployment – Navan to Trim
- Dundalk Regional Road Cycleway
- Mullingar Cycle Corridor
- Wicklow Active Travel Links
- Athlone Bus Service Electrification
- Athlone Cycle Corridor
- Naas Mobility Network Integration
- Safe Routes to School Programme Acceleration
- Rathmullen Road and Marley’s Lane schemes, Drogheda
- Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator
- Workplace Mobility Hubs (Dublin)
- Last Mile delivery project
- BusIt2School

Progress on these projects is being tracked by the Department’s Project Management Office established in 2022 to work on the governance of SMP, and by the SMP Delivery Team.



Active Travel Infrastructure

The NTA are responsible for the delivery of its Active Travel Infrastructure Programme, working with local authorities to provide walking and cycling infrastructure across all local authority areas. The Climate Action Plan and the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (which has replaced the Smarter Travel Policy as the key policy document relating to Active Travel and public transport) sets out targets of 1,000km of walking and cycling infrastructure to be delivered nationally by 2025. Across all local authority areas, over 600 km of walking and cycling infrastructure has been delivered by the end of 2022.

The Active Travel Infrastructure Programme includes behavioural change programmes, such as the Safe Routes to Schools Initiative, Smarter Travel Workplace and Campuses, (both Pathfinder Projects) and Bike Week. The Safe Routes to School Initiative was established during 2021, with the first phase of 170 schools (nationally) selected in June 2021, 167 of which remain actively engaged in the Programme. As of 31st May 2023, projects at 22 schools have been completed with all remaining schools at various stages of progress through the Programme. 108 additional schools were selected for inclusion in Round 2 of the Programme on 12 December 2022 which brought the total number of schools currently in SRTS to 275.

The NTA’s oversee the delivery of the Smarter Travel Workplace and Campuses programme and the Green Schools Travel programme, the latter in partnership with An Taisce. The Smarter Travel team provides a package of measures to promote cycling, walking, public transport, car sharing, the use of technology instead of travel, and flexible working packages and similar measures are promoted in schools as part of the Green Schools programme. 133 new schools began working on the Travel and GC Travel themes as part of the Green-Schools programme in September 2022.

The NTA also launched the Smarter Travel Mark Pathfinder Project in 2023. This project will provide organisations with recognition as a workplace or campus that is committed to active and sustainable travel for their workforce, students and visitors. To achieve the Smarter Travel Mark, organisations will have to demonstrate robust communications, policies, facilities, incentives and supports in favour of sustainable commuting and business travel.

In addition, Bike Week took place in May 2023 with over 1,000 events held by local authorities across the country. The NTA are responsible for running Bike Week in conjunction with local authorities.

CycleRight is the National Cycling Training Standard launched and operated by Cycling Ireland in January 2017. Training is delivered to primary school children and departmental funding allows the expansion of the training programme with increased numbers year-by-year. There is a target of 42,000 students to receive the training in 2023, an increase of 7,000 on 2022 levels.

The Department of Transport, in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, announced the introduction of a pilot initiative to develop a scheme for the provision of high quality up-cycled bicycles and e-bikes for those on low incomes and/or most marginalised and disadvantaged, via Pobal's Community Services Programme.

Five organisations around the country were selected to undertake the upcycling work as part of a 3-year pilot programme, funded by the Department of Transport. Funding of €1 million per annum for the period 2021-2023 inclusive has been allocated to this initiative. A review of the pilot will be undertaken in 2023, and a decision about a second round of the initiative will be taken once this review is complete.

e) Preparation of Local Transport Plans in conjunction with the NTA for settlements throughout the Region to set out priorities for public transport infrastructure and services, pedestrian and cycle improvements.

The NTA, in conjunction with TII, have developed an advice note which sets out a methodology on how to assess the opportunities and constraints for sustainable transport within an area. This Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) methodology has been designed as a key input into Local Transport Plans (as provided for in the NPF and RSES), and can be undertaken in parallel to statutory plans. The NTA is working with local authorities to support the development of Local Transport Plans.

f) Delivering National and Regional Greenways and development of flagship greenways in the RSES; the Dublin-Galway Eurovelo Route, the Shannon Wilderness Corridor and triangular navigation route encompassing the River Shannon and the Royal and Grand Canals, the cross-border East Coast Trail, the Dublin Mountains and Wicklow Way, the Barrow and Boyne Blueways, the Slieve Blooms and Midland peatways.

The Minister for Transport has responsibility for overall policy and exchequer funding in relation to Greenways. The planning, design and construction of individual Greenways is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) as the approving authority, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Expenditure incurred related to pre-construction support, mostly on feasibility and planning and design. The funding supported the following:

- The Fingal Way Greenway from Donabate to Balbriggan;
- The Boyne Valley Greenway from Drogheda to Navan;
- Sections of the Grand Canal Greenway in Kildare and Offaly;
- Sections of the Dundalk Bay to Carlingford Lough Greenway
- Sections of the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Greenway in Longford; and
- The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway in County Westmeath.

Furthermore, construction works continued the 104m long Athlone pedestrian and cycling bridge over the River Shannon.

Projects that were progressed in 2022 included the Grand Canal Greenway in Offaly, Kildare and South County Dublin, the Blessington Greenway in Wicklow, the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Greenway in Longford (Corlea Bog), Wicklow to Greystones Greenway and the Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway. These projects are generally at the feasibility, planning and design stages.

The following Greenway projects commenced construction in 2021/2022 with completion expected in 2023:

- A significant section of the Grand Canal Greenway (specific sections include Aylmers Bridge to Sallins; Daingean to Tullamore Hennessy's Bridge to Turraun; Daingean to Edenderry and Turraun to Shannon Harbour).
- Boyne Valley to Lakelands Greenway.

g) Supporting Climate Action Decarbonisation of transport through a transition to electric vehicles and electrification of public transport and local authority fleets, lower carbon fuels and technology.

In line with RPO 7.42 of the RSES, key infrastructural interventions will be required to support the decarbonisation of strategic gateways and transport corridors.

The Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) is part of the European Union's Fit for 55 legislative package. The forthcoming AFIR, which will replace the existing Directive (2014/94/EU) will contribute to transport sector emissions reduction by setting mandatory minimum recharging and refuelling infrastructure requirements on the TEN-T network to ensure that there is a sufficient and interoperable infrastructure in place to support the transition to light-duty and heavy-duty vehicle fleets, and to ensure ports and airports are equipped to provide alternatives to the use of on-board fossil-fuelled engines for vessels at berth or stationary aircraft. Provisional political agreement between the European Council and the European Parliament was reached 27th March 2023 and is now subject to formal approval by the two co-legislators.

It is expected that the regulation will require the establishment of a network of recharging points (600 kW) across the TEN-T Core network at 60 km intervals (by 2030), and across the TEN-T Comprehensive network (by 2035), with interim network coverage and recharging capacity targets set for 2025 and 2027.

For recharging of heavy-duty vehicles – dedicated charging points capable of supplying 3,600 kW charging capacity at 60 km intervals are expected to be required on the TEN-T Core network by 2030, and of 1,500 kW at 100 km intervals on the TEN-T Comprehensive network. The regulation will also set interim network coverage and recharging capacity targets for 2025 and 2027.

With respect to hydrogen refuelling infrastructure for road vehicles, refuelling stations will be required at 200 km intervals along the TEN-T core network by 2030.

TEN-T maritime ports will also be expected to ensure they are equipped to ensure minimum shore-side electricity supply for seagoing container and passenger ships by 2030, and capable of supporting the refuelling of liquefied methane powered vessels by 2025, with our major airports also required to ensure the provision of electricity to stationary aircraft by 2030.

The AFIR (Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation) is in preparatory stages and will replace the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive and necessitate an update to the National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland 2017-2030. Preparatory scoping work in this regard is underway within the Department of Transport to progress an update of the National Policy Framework in line with anticipated AFIR requirements. A draft of this framework will be due for submission to the European Commission by end 2024.

The transport chapter of CAP 23 brings a real, new focus on the need for systemic action, at all levels of Government, in order to better integrate planning and transport systems in order to achieve the 50% emissions abatement target for the sector by 2030.

The updated transport decarbonisation pathway has been informed by two core analyses of the Irish transport system undertaken over the past year:

- The OECD's Redesigning Ireland's Transport for Net Zero review, undertaken at the request of the Climate Change Advisory Council
- Refreshed transport decarbonisation pathway modelling, undertaken by the NTA

In recognition of the OECD report's findings that the Irish transport system embeds car-dependency and increased emissions by design, the AVOID-SHIFT-IMPROVE (ASI) framework for transport sustainability has been applied to categorise all transport sector actions under CAP 23, and to emphasise the crucial role of spatial and land-use planning in designing transport systems that can support net-zero ambition.

The transport chapter of CAP 23 also sets out a number of key work programmes for 2023-2025, including:

- Enhanced Governance and Accelerated Implementation
- Communications Strategy
- Haulage and Logistics
- Enhanced Spatial and Land Use Planning
- Strategic Transport Planning
- Demand Management Strategy
- Road Space Reallocation
- Active Travel Infrastructure Programme
- Major Public Transport Infrastructure Programme
- Public Transport Services Investment and Rural Mobility Programme
- Smart, Shared and Integrated Mobility
- Decarbonising Public Transport and School Transport Services
- ZEV and Electrification Strategy
- Renewable Fuels for Transport
- Transport Adaptation for Enhanced Climate Resilience

New indicators have been introduced, and certain CAP21 indicators have been reframed, to make very clear just how transformative the level of system change required will be. Meeting the 2030 transport abatement targets will require transformational change and accelerated action across all key decarbonisation channels.

The key performance indicators and targets outlined in the CAP 23 Transport chapter are intended to illustrate the level of change required by 2030, including:

- a reduction in total kilometres driven of 20%
- to reduce our fossil fuel use in transport by 50%,
- to have nearly 1 in 3 cars on the road as a battery electric vehicle by 2030.

In the context of modal share, CAP 23 sets out the below targets for 2030:

- 50% increase in daily active travel journeys
- 130% increase in daily public transport journeys.
- 25% reduction in daily car journeys.
- Shift in Daily Mode Share to 53% (car), 19% (PT), 28% (AT) by 2030 (In 2018 modal share was: 72% (car), 8% (PT), 20% (AT)).

This will be hugely challenging to achieve but this level of change is possible with full implementation of sustainable transport and behavioural change interventions. Fleet electrification and use of biofuels will continue to provide the greatest share of emissions abatement in the medium term, and vehicle targets, while unchanged, have been reframed as a percentage share of the total 2030 projected fleet and as a share of new registrations, to better embed the electric vehicle strategy within wider sustainable mobility policy.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of the Department of Transport, in supporting the objectives of the RSES

Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland

Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (ZEVI) was launched in July 2022 as a dedicated Office charged with supporting consumers, the public sector and businesses to continue to make the switch to zero emission vehicles. ZEVI coordinates measures to support the uptake of zero emission vehicles and the rollout of charge point infrastructure to accelerate progress towards Ireland's ambitious electric vehicle targets committed to in the Climate Action Plan.

The Government has committed significant funding to support zero and low emitting vehicles through the National Development Plan, which currently includes an allocation of almost €500 million for the period 2021-2025 and additional support from the Climate Action Fund and the Shared Island Fund. €110m has been allocated in 2023 to ensure the continued transition to electric vehicles which includes funding for EV grants and EV charging infrastructure. This underpins the Government's commitment to making electric vehicles accessible to all. This funding will continue to incentivise the switch to electric vehicles as well as enabling the expansion of a fast and rapid electric vehicle charging network to stay ahead of demand. The 2023 Climate Action Plan reinforced the Government's established ambitious objectives and targets for transitioning to zero emission road transport, including having almost 1 million electric cars and vans on the road by 2030. Along with wider transport decarbonisation, the move to zero emission vehicles is a key action identified in both the national Climate Action Plan and the EU's fit for 55 package.

The EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 was published in January 2023. The strategy sets out the Government's ambition regarding the delivery of a public EV charging network to support up to 195,000 electric cars and vans by the middle of the decade. The strategy outlines the need to increase current charging capacity by at least 250% in order to be ahead of EV user demand and also to align with the upcoming EU Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Regulation.

An implementation plan has also been published which outlines the actions in each of the delivery categories including;

- Delivering a National EV Charging Network Plan,
- Roll-out of new schemes and funding supports,
- Delivery of policy and strategy required to deliver the strategy delivery and
- Reporting and communication actions.

Each of the actions outlines the timelines, owners and supports to deliver each action. Zero Emissions Vehicles Ireland (ZEVI) will be responsible for delivery of the strategy.

ZEVI is developing a number of additional schemes to support the rollout of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure. These include:

- Destination Charging Scheme - this will be open for applications from the public and private sectors. In January 2023, ZEVI launched the first new destination charging scheme, the Shared Island Sports Club EV Charging Scheme, to support the installation of fast electric vehicle chargers at sports clubs.
- EU Just Transition Fund Community Centre Scheme. It is envisaged that, in particular, the provision of destination charge points at community centres will support the transition to EVs in these communities.
- A new Residential Neighbourhood Charging Scheme will be launched by ZEVI to provide EV charging for residents without access off street parking. This EV charging will be designed to mimic home charging and will incentivise off-peak charging in a location convenient to the resident's home. In addition to this we will be working with local authorities to support them creating local charging plans to be rolled out in the coming years
- A pilot shared charging scheme is being planned for later in 2023. Not everybody can charge at home or in work. Although research indicates that between 60-80% of EV owners will be able to charge at home, this still leaves a significant cohort who will be reliant on some form of publicly accessible, or shared charging, as a 'base' charge station.

Shared charging has the potential to provide a solution to those who do not have off-street parking and also to encourage more intense usage of home chargers, particularly important for those chargers that have benefitted from the home charger grant (sweating the asset).

Electric Vehicle Supports

The Government's existing grant schemes for electric vehicles aim to encourage behavioural change and support the Government's commitment to achieving a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030.

A wide range of supports are provided to incentivise the purchase of EVs which include:

- A grant of €5000 for battery electric vehicles (BEVs), reducing to €3500 from July 1 2023, up to a total vehicle cost of €60,000;
- Home Charger grant scheme - up to €600;
- VRT relief of up to €5,000 for the purchase of BEVs;
- Benefit-in-Kind tax relief for battery electric vehicles;
- eSPSV grant scheme - a grant for taxi drivers to make the switch to an EV;
- AFHDV grant scheme - a grant for HDVs to bridge the gap between a low emission vehicle and a fossil fuel vehicle;
- Low rate of annual motor tax; and
- Tolling reductions of 50% for battery electric vehicles and 25% for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

The existing grant schemes are kept under continuous review to ensure that they are as effective as possible in driving the decarbonisation effort. Notwithstanding the recent increases in the price of electricity, an EV remains much less expensive to run than a petrol or diesel car.



Policy and Strategy

ZEVI is developing a number of policy strands to help facilitate an effective and inclusive transition away from Internal Combustion Engine vehicles, in line with international best practice and principles.

In addition to its dedicated work programme, ZEVI expects to deliver or contribute to the following policies and programmes in 2023:

Title	Outputs/objectives	Delivery
ZEVI Data Strategy (Deliverable)	Enable assessment of EV and EV infrastructure Feed into all other workstreams Promote adherence with GDPR and related data responsibilities	Working with CSO and external stakeholders Expected in 2023
ZEVI Accessibility Strategy (Deliverable)	Ensure that EV and EV Infrastructure policy adheres to best practice in universal design, safety and accessibility for users Establish and consider user needs in ZEVI policy and workstreams	Extensive consultation with representative groups and stakeholders Expected in 2023
Interoperability and Standards	Ensure that any ZEVI schemes align with AFIR objectives Reduce risk of challenges for consumer EV adoption	Ongoing
National Islands Strategy	Ensure that Island communities are acknowledged and considered in the context of any ZEVI schemes	2023
General Tourism Sector considerations	Recognise and facilitate the role of EVs in the tourism sector Engage with stakeholders such as Failte Ireland, car hire/leasing providers and accommodation representative groups	Ongoing
Climate Action Plan 2023 - workstreams	Expected significant collaboration across Govt Departments to implement CAP actions ZEVI likely to provide views and inputs on a number of cross-sectoral work programmes which include EVs	Ongoing



Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

ZEVI has very strong engagement with both public and private sector stakeholder groups, meeting three times a year and also meet regularly on a one-to-one basis. This engagement is critical in informing the development and roll out of the EV national infrastructure.

ZEVI are developing a medium-term communications strategy and building an independent online presence, launching a new zevi.ie website later this year, with an aim to make this a one-stop shop for independent and objective advice on EVs for people in Ireland.

During 2023, in addition to rolling out new charging schemes as outlines above, with the significant support and efforts of many stakeholders, ZEVI is developing the first iteration of the National EV Charging Network Plan that will identify the charging needs at a detailed level across the country. In doing this work, ZEVI is working with TII, ESB Networks, the local authorities, the Regional Assemblies and Charge Point Operators. In addition, a Risk Governance Group has been assembled particularly to look at the risks associated with rolling out high power infrastructure, and working on this group with ZEVI are the CRU, TII, DoT, ESBN and SEAI. The first report on this work will be made available mid-year focused on the EN-Route charging requirements across the motorway and Ten-T Network.

Fleet Electrification

Dublin Bus is preparing for the introduction of 134 electric buses into service.

Depot Electrification

Dublin Bus has commenced a multiyear programme to install grid-to-bus charging infrastructure across its depots and enable the introduction of fully electric buses into service in Dublin. Work has commenced on the installation of charging infrastructure in two depots (Phibsboro and Summerhill) while tender responses for similar work in a further two depots (Harristown and Ringsend) have been received from potential contractors.

Accessibility

In partnership with the NTA and Go-Ahead Ireland, Dublin Bus opened a new Bus Plaza facility at Liffey Valley Shopping Centre which provides a new hub for bus services connecting south and west Dublin, north Kildare and the city centre. The plaza features a canopy with 6 bus bays along with a fully accessible set down area. It is situated in the newly revamped Yellow Car Park area at Liffey Valley Shopping Centre, all of which has been extensively redeveloped recently and now includes increased spaces for drivers with a disability, increased parent and child spaces, new electric vehicle charging points, street furniture, passenger waiting areas, real-time data on car parking space availability, real-time passenger journey signage and new public lighting.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSEs which are relevant to the organisation

National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)

NIFTI is the Department of Transport's framework for supporting the consideration and prioritisation of future investment in the national land transport network. It is the Department's response to the NPF, and the changes in population and settlement patterns targeted between now and 2040.

NIFTI's role is to act as a common lens through which to consider potential investment at the individual project level. NIFTI does not identify specific projects for investment, determine the total amount of transport funding available or decide upon the allocation of funding to different areas. The identification of specific transport projects and potential investments is guided by the NTA's Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies, TII's National Roads 2040 Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. However, the projects that emerge from these sectoral investment strategies will have to demonstrate their alignment with NIFTI to receive funding.

In order to achieve the National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework, NIFTI sets out four priorities for transport investment, which are:

- Decarbonisation,
- Protection and Renewal,
- Mobility of People and Goods in Urban Areas, and
- Enhanced Regional and Rural Connectivity,

These Investment Priorities represent the key objectives of transport investment over the coming decades, and all new investments in the transport sector should demonstrate how they align with them. Future iterations of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies developed by Regional Assemblies should also be informed by these investment priorities.

In order to deliver the most appropriate solution to a given problem or opportunity, the four NIFTI investment priorities are supplemented by modal and intervention hierarchies, which set out how we will undertake investment. For a given problem, these hierarchies support the consideration of the most appropriate solution from both a sustainability and cost-effectiveness perspective.

Under the modal hierarchy, those proposing projects in the transport sector will have to consider the use of active travel and public transport ahead of solutions reliant on private transport. Under the intervention hierarchy, those proposing projects will need to demonstrate that the maintenance or optimisation of existing assets, has been considered ahead of extensive enhancements or outright new infrastructure. Both hierarchies are principle-based tools, rather than strict rules, and it is recognised that some modes and interventions will not be appropriate to address some transport challenges.

The Transport Appraisal Framework (TAF), which will be published shortly, provides guidance to those proposing investments on how to reference a projects alignment with the modal and intervention hierarchies and assessing the impact of their scheme on each of the NIFTI investment priorities.

Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23)

The Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) is discussed in more detail under Section A above.

EU Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR)

The EU Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) is discussed in more detail under Section A above.

Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP)

The Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) is discussed in more detail under Section A above and Section 5.2.4.5

National Demand Management Strategy

Under CAP 23, the Department is committed to developing a National Demand Management Strategy and has established a Steering Group to drive the development of this Strategy.

Transport demand management is a term that is used to describe mechanisms for increasing efficiency in the transport system, by reducing travel demand rather than increasing capacity. Demand management measures include fiscal measures such as progressive taxation or congestion charging, parking and traffic management measures such as road space reallocation or the removal of public and private carparking, air quality measures such as clean air zones and planning policy. They are considered important complimentary measures for the promotion of sustainable mobility modes i.e., public transport, walking and cycling.

The Strategy will be a high-level, national strategy, and will provide a detailed roadmap of interventions – regulatory, fiscal or otherwise – that relevant authorities can deploy at a national, regional and local level to drive efficiency in the existing transport systems and reduce overall travel demand in support of the objectives of CAP 23. In developing the Strategy, the Department of Transport will work to a guiding set of principles. It will support a ‘just transition’ by encouraging the alignment of demand management measures with other planned measures, such as public transport service enhancements in urban and rural areas, new active travel infrastructure, the Safe Routes to Schools Programme and supports for shared mobility facilities and services. It will take account of people with additional mobility needs, ensuring the same or better access to towns and services, and it will ensure our road networks can appropriately and efficiently support the movement of goods and people, particularly public transport services, and ongoing national and regional economic development. It will recognise that measures can only be effective and equitable when alternative, more sustainable, public transport and active travel options are readily available.

The development of the Strategy will require extensive public and stakeholder consultation over the next 12 months. It is planned to have a draft Strategy ready for consultation by the end of Q4 2023. EMRA is a member of the Steering Group and will be involved throughout.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Transport

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Transport is the EU funding instrument that supports the development of the Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) network. Funding under CEF is delivered in the form of grants allocated following competitive calls for proposals. Co-funding rates generally range from 20% to 50% of eligible costs for Irish projects.

There is an overall budget of more than €25 billion allocated to transport projects across Europe for the 2021-2027 period. This is heavily frontloaded, with the bulk of the funding to be allocated via three large-scale calls in 2021, 2022, and 2023. These calls aim to support infrastructure projects on the core and comprehensive TEN-T network covering areas including rail, maritime and inland ports, roads, and digital systems for transport.

There were a number of successful Irish applications in the 2021 call. These included Iarnród Éireann, who were awarded €2.5m to support development of a rail freight system connecting Ireland's busiest seaports and establishing transfer points for freight between rail and road (including the implementation of the aforementioned Rail Freight 2040 Strategy). The Department of Transport and Transport Infrastructure Ireland were also involved in a successful multi-country project which was awarded funding to support the deployment of intelligent transport systems on the TEN-T road network, including the M7/N7.

The results of the 2022 call, in which Irish interest was also expressed, are likely to be available by the end of June 2023. The final large-scale call of the 2021-2027 period will be launched in September 2023 and will close in January 2024.

In addition to these large-scale calls, CEF Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Facility calls will support the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure across the network. The current AFIF call closes in November 2023 and it is expected that there will be a further AFIF call in 2024.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by the Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

Approximately €360 million per annum funding was provided for walking and cycling projects under the National Development Plan for 2020-2025. The majority of this funding is administered by the Department of Transport through the NTA's Active Travel and Greenways Programmes.



These are shown in the table below, including the Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme.

Funding Programme	County	Year of Funds Allocated	Amount Awarded (€)
Active Travel Investment programme	Dublin	2022 & 2023	€259,327,071
Active Travel Investment programme	Louth	2022 & 2023	€11,818,361
Active Travel Investment programme	Meath	2022 & 2023	€28,045,000
Active Travel Investment programme	Kildare	2022 & 2023	€23,635,000
Active Travel Investment programme	Wicklow	2022 & 2023	€17,416,500
Active Travel Investment programme	Longford	2022 & 2023	€4,882,668
Active Travel Investment programme	Westmeath	2022 & 2023	€7,900,000
Active Travel Investment programme	Offaly	2022 & 2023	€6,691,290
Active Travel Investment programme	Laois	2022 & 2023	€6,300,000
Greenways funding	Fingal	2023	€500,000
Greenways funding	South Dublin	2022 & 2023	€2,250,000
Greenways funding	Kildare	2022 & 2023	€5,695,000
Greenways funding	Wicklow	2022 & 2023	€9,150,000
Greenways funding	Westmeath	2022 & 2023	€20,320,000
Greenways funding	Longford	2022 & 2023	€1,122,000
Greenways funding	Louth	2022 & 2023	€1,070,000
Greenways funding	Meath	2022 & 2023	€1,978,000
Greenways funding	Offaly	2022 & 2023	€5,323,000
Maritime transport funding	No exchequer funding for state ports*	NA	NA
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Dublin City ¹⁰	2021 & 2022	€29,880
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	2021 & 2022	€21,954
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Fingal	2021 & 2022	€19,280
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Kildare	2021 & 2022	€57,241,142
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Laois	2021 & 2022	€25,954,479
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Longford	2021 & 2022	€17,079,855
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Louth	2021 & 2022	€16,905,297
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Meath	2021 & 2022	€52,992,121
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Offaly	2021 & 2022	€27,485,074
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	South Dublin	2021 & 2022	€15,856
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Westmeath	2021 & 2022	€25,066,551
Regional and Local Roads Grant Programme	Wicklow	2021 & 2022 Grant Allocation	€26,953,181

¹⁰ Regional and Local Roads grants are primarily directed to local authorities outside Dublin. The four Dublin local authorities are required to self-fund their normal maintenance and renewal road works programmes as a result of these Councils' Local Property Tax (LPT) receipts. Accordingly, these Councils do not feature in most of the grant programmes but are eligible for road condition survey and training grants and may apply for monies under the Strategic Grant programme.

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

Iarnród Éireann, an agency under the aegis of the Department of Transport, has highlighted the importance of connectivity to national ports, including Dublin Port, in relation to the rail freight strategy, and in this respect challenging discussions remain with Dublin Port and the ability of the port to commit and deliver rail-based solutions for existing and new infrastructure projects at the port.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the information submitted by the Department of Transport and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

The response by the Department has indicated progress which supports the Regional Strategic Objectives (RSOs), particularly RSO 4 (Healthy Communities) which is concerned with protecting and enhancing the quality of our built and natural environment to support active lifestyles including walking and cycling; RSO 6 (Integrated Transport and Land Use) which is concerned with promoting the best use of transport infrastructure, and promote sustainable and active modes of travel to ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning; RSO 9 to support the transition to low carbon and clean energy; RSO 14 (Global City Region) which is to promote Dublin as a global city region and protect and enhance international connectivity, including ports and airports; and RSO 15 (Enhanced Strategic Connectivity) which is to protect and enhance international connectivity and regional accessibility. Accordingly, on review of the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the Department of Transport, and the agencies under its aegis, have carried out a number of actions that have enabled progress to be made in implementing the RSES.

The Assembly considers that the ongoing work of the Department could be strengthened and therefore make the following recommendation to NOAC for consideration;

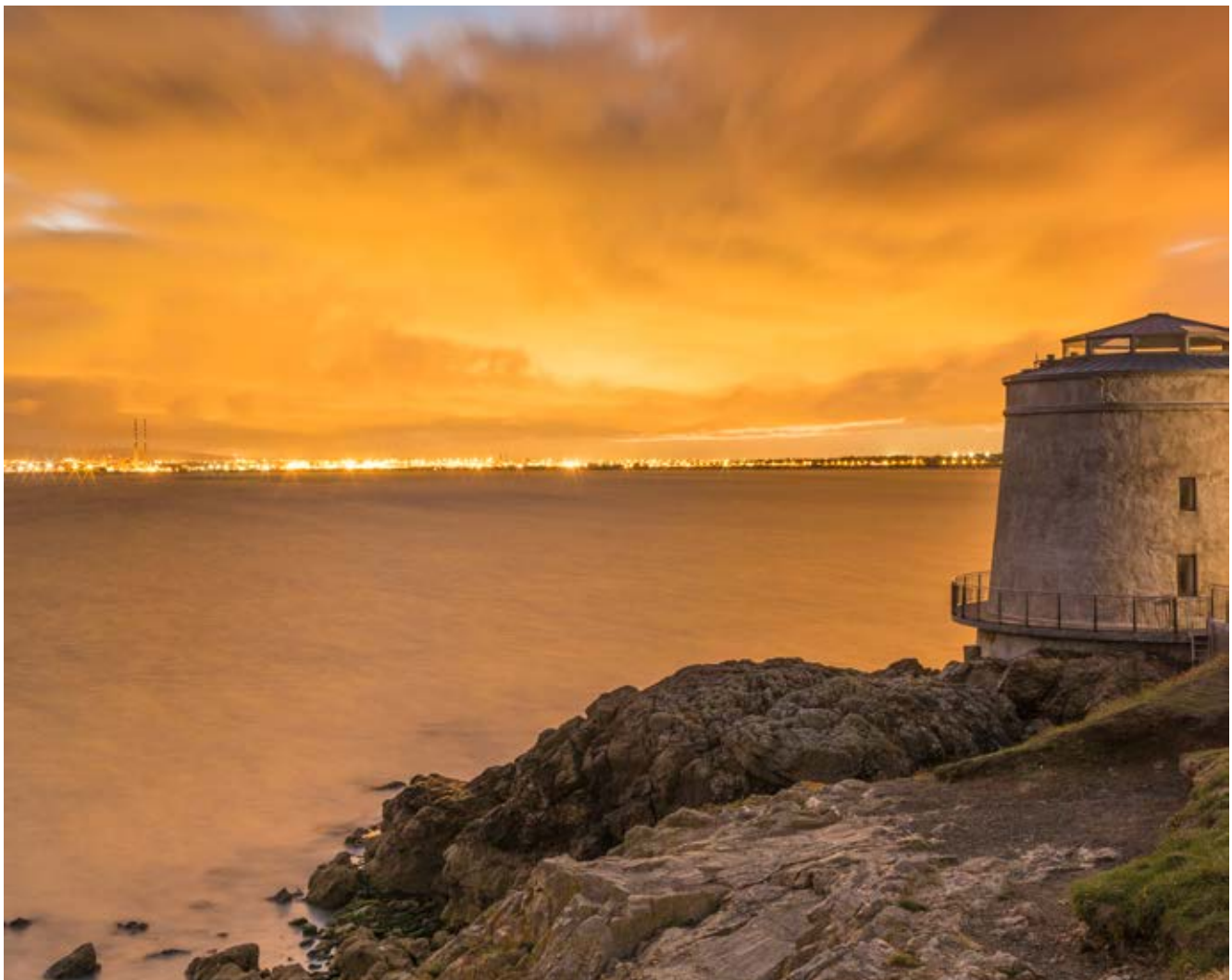
1. Ongoing collaborative work between the Department of Transport and the Regional Assembly should continue in relation to the implementation of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042, the NTA's Rural Mobility Plan 'Connecting Ireland', and the actions under the National Sustainable Mobility Plan relative to the Region.
2. The Regional Assembly is a key stakeholder and should be appropriately consulted in the preparation of new Department of Transport policies and programmes, including from bodies under the aegis of the Department of Transport, which are aligned with RSES objectives.



In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of the Department of Transport.

- Identification, under the Transport-Orientated Working Group, of fourteen key locations in Dublin that have the potential for the phased delivery of circa 130,000 residential units and other intensive mixed-use development that is close to existing or planned high-capacity public transport nodes.
- Implementation of the Masterplan 2040 for Dublin Port in order to ensure that the Port can provide for future sustainable growth and changes in facilitating seaborne trade in goods and passenger movements to and from Ireland and the Dublin region in particular.
- A policy statement on the facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by ports was published in December 2021, in relation to the provision of Offshore Renewable Energy facilities.
- A Railway Order application was submitted to An Bord Pleanála on 30th September 2022 for Metrolink which will be a fully segregated and mostly underground new rail line from the Swords area to Charlemont in the south of Dublin City.
- Planning applications have been submitted to An Bord Pleanála in respect of nine of the twelve Dublin Core Bus Corridor schemes under the BusConnects Dublin programme and applications for all remaining schemes will be lodged by the end of 2023. Dublin Bus is also preparing for the introduction of 134 electric buses into service.
- The detailed project brief for next-generation ticketing was approved by Government in March 2022 facilitating the commencement of competitive dialogue.
- The DART + programme, an expansion of DART services, is being progressed. This includes the purchase of 95 additional DART carriages for arrival in 2025 and the purchase of 90 new battery-electric multiple units to enter service in 2026; the lodgement of a Railway Order to An Bord Pleanála for DART+ West on 29th July 2022 which includes a new depot and Dublin city centre works on the Maynooth line; the lodgement of a Railway Order to An Bord Pleanála for DART+ South West on 22nd March 2023 which will extend DART services from Dublin city centre to Hazelhatch and Celbridge train station and includes four-tracking from Park West to Heuston.
- The submission by the NTA of a preliminary business case for the Luas Finglas project to the Department of Transport.
- New rail stations at Pelletstown, Kishogue (West Dublin), Woodbrook DART (Shankill) are either completed, under construction or are commencing construction and new stations are proposed for Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin and Kylemore in Dublin.
- The draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review report, which will inform the development of inter-urban/inter-regional rail was published in July 2023 and it is anticipated it will be completed in Q4 2023.
- The development of the Enterprise Fleet Replacement Programme (EFRP) which includes the procurement of new Intercity trains for the flagship cross-border service between Dublin and Belfast.
- The publication of the Rail Freight 2040 Strategy by Iarnród Éireann in December 2021.
- The new National Train Control Centre (NTCC) building at Heuston station was completed in March 2023. Full commissioning is expected by May 2026.
- The NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area was launched in January 2023 with a focus on Avoid-Shift-Improve (ASI) framework for transport sustainability to categorise all transport sector actions under CAP 23.
- A draft Cycle Plan for the Greater Dublin Area was published by the NTA in 2023.
- Phase 1 of 'Connecting Ireland', the NTA's Rural Mobility Plan, was launched in 2022 with 38 new and enhanced services launched, and Phase 2 was launched in February 2023 with 69 new and enhanced services. The Plan aims to increase public transport connectivity in rural areas. Furthermore, there has been significantly increased funding for enhancing TFI Local Link services (the Rural Transport Programme).
- An increase in accessible infrastructure and services, including supports, to enable disabled people to travel independently on public transport.
- Implementation of actions under the National Sustainable Mobility Policy, published in April 2022, including progress on 35 projects under a Pathfinder Programme, centred around a shift to sustainable mobility.

- Implementation of a Climate Action & Sustainable Mobility Public Engagement Strategy, to help support and communicate the wider benefits of climate action in transport, and to support delivery on the scale of behavioural change required.
- The NTA has published an advice note, guidance on an Area Based Transport Assessment methodology, to assist local authorities in preparing Local Transport Plans.
- Active Travel Teams have been established in all local authorities.
- Provisional political agreement on an Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) to reduce transport emissions on the TEN-T network was reached in March 2023
- Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (ZEVI) was launched in July 2022 as a dedicated Office charged with supporting consumers, the public sector and businesses to continue to make the switch to zero emission vehicles.
- The EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 was published in January 2023 regarding the delivery of a public EV charging network including the availability of a wide range of supports to incentivise the purchase of EVs.
- National Demand Management Strategy, providing mechanisms for increasing efficiency in the transport system by reducing travel demand, is currently being prepared. It is anticipated that a draft Strategy will be available for public consultation by Q4 2023.



6.1.10

Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

The mission of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform is “to serve the public interest through sound governance of public expenditure and by leading and enabling reform across the Civil and Public Service”.

The two Strategic Goals of the Department are:

1. To manage public expenditure at sustainable levels in a planned, balanced and evidence informed manner, in order to support Ireland’s economic, social and climate goals.
2. To drive reform and innovation across the Civil and Public Service to improve service delivery to the public, and to enhance strategic policy making and public governance structures.

This is aligned to the RSES, in particular RSOs 1 and 2 which support sustainable settlement patterns, regeneration and compact growth, RSO 6 which relates to the proper integration of transportation and land use planning and RSO 9 relating to the transition to low carbon and clean energy.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department was asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them.

The response of the Department is outlined as follows;

Project Ireland 2040 is the government’s long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all of its people. The plan changes how investment is made in public infrastructure in Ireland, moving away from the approach of the past, which saw public investment spread too thinly and investment decisions that didn’t align with a well-thought-out and defined strategy. Alongside the development of physical infrastructure, Project Ireland 2040 supports business and communities across all of Ireland in realising their potential. The National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The combination of the NDP and NPF is key in realising the effective development of Dublin using compact growth and effective urban regeneration. It is also key to the roles of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as well as other urban and rural locations in the EMRA.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) is responsible in the first instance for planning policy and the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF). The Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) is responsible for allocating and overseeing capital expenditure at the Departmental level and for the National Development Plan (NDP). It should be noted that DPENDR, in carrying out its role does not consider the merit of individual projects or sectoral policy strategies and is not responsible for project progress as this is primarily a matter for individual Departments and Agencies.

The Department has indicated that the Delivery of individual projects or sectoral policy strategies, are a matter in the first instance for the relevant Government Department.

It should be noted, however, that DPENDR has published Project Ireland 2040 Annual Reports since 2018, along with Regional Reports for each of those years. The reports highlight Project Ireland 2040 achievements since the launch of the NDP and give a detailed overview of the public investments which have been made throughout the country. These Regional Reports set out the projects and programmes which are being planned and delivered in each region as part of the public investment detailed in Project Ireland 2040. While the Regional Reports do not provide an exhaustive list of all public capital expenditure in the region, they serve to highlight the diverse range of investments being made by the State under Project Ireland 2040 in the Eastern and Midland counties of Dublin, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois. Project Ireland 2040 Annual and Regional Reports for 2022 are planned for publication in July 2023.

More granular information on individual projects and programmes can be found on the capital investment tracker published by DPENDR which was last updated in February 2023. This update provides a composite update on the progress of all major investments that make up Project Ireland 2040. It focuses on projects with estimated costs greater than €20 million. The update increased the coverage of projects and includes the ability to search the tracker by county, user-friendly dashboards and other information to aid interpretation of the data. The myProjectIreland interactive map was also updated in February 2023 and was extended to include over 1,200 projects across the country.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of the Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The OPW provide progress on the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 through updates of the capital tracker, myProjectIreland interactive map and the Project Ireland Annual and Regional Reports published by DPENDR.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

The Government has committed to investing €165 billion in capital programmes and projects across a range of investment sectors, as set out in the National Development Plan 2021-30 published in October 2021. Over €12.8 billion is available to spend on vital infrastructure this year, including capital carryover from 2022. This will ensure investment continues to be made in areas such as housing, transport, education, enterprise, and sport and climate action.

A series of regional reports have been published on the Project Ireland 2040 website, outlining the country-wide reach and impact of the public infrastructural investments under the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework. The report on the Eastern and Midland Region details the specific regional projects and programmes now being planned and delivered in this area.

In February 2023 the updated capital projects tracker was published, which sets out details of the key projects and programmes being implemented under the NDP, including the location of the projects where possible. The Tracker includes a number of major projects directly related to the Eastern and Midland Region.

The recent renaming and reconstitution of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform to specifically include NDP Delivery, has brought about a greater emphasis and mandate for the delivery of the NDP. In light of this new role, a review of the support structures and levers available across Government to maximise delivery of projects was undertaken, as well as engagement with stakeholders and Government colleagues. As a result, a series of actions and reforms were identified as priorities to improve delivery of NDP projects and programmes. The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform secured Government approval for that package of measures on 29th March.

Those measures include:

- Significant changes to reduce the administrative burden in delivering major capital projects;
- The Minister is now taking a direct role in overseeing delivery of the NDP through chairing the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board;
- Capacity reviews of departments and agencies with significant delivery programmes to ensure that adequate resources for project delivery are in place;
- Additional reforms to the Capital Works Management Framework, which sets out the contracts used for public capital projects;
- Direct reporting to Government on NDP delivery on a quarterly basis throughout 2023 and 2024 will now also take place and
- An independent evaluation of NDP priorities and capacity will be conducted over the coming months.



D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Just Transition Fund

The department noted the following with regard to the EU Just Transition Fund, however, the Assembly notes, as Managing Authority for the EU JTF, that much of this information (in Italics) is now outdated.

“The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) worked to prepare and submit a Territorial Just Transition Plan to the Commission in 2021 in order to be able to access this funding. It has been confirmed that Ireland’s allocation under the EU JTF will be €77m (in 2018 prices) from 2021-2027. The JTF must be co-funded with national resources - the rate of funding will depend on the region type and will range from 50 - 85%.

DECC is being assisted by consultants with this work and a Steering Group has been established with representatives from DPENDR, DFHERIS, the three Regional Assemblies together with the EU Commission. Stakeholder engagement is ongoing. The EU Just Transition Fund will support investments that support local economies, are sustainable in the long-term and contribute to a transition to a climate-neutral and circular economy. In terms of governance of the Territorial Just Transition Plan, DECC is liaising with the Regional Assemblies and with DPENDR to take advantage of existing programme management capacity and expertise already available within the system”

The Assembly, as Managing Authority for the EU Just Transition Fund, prepared the EU JTF Programme which was approved by the EU Commission in December 2022. DECC were responsible for the preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan. The Territorial Just Transition Plan is a document that provides an overarching strategy and parameters within which the EU JTF programme will operate in Ireland.

The EU JTF is a new funding programme running from 2021 to 2027. This new programme was created to support regions throughout Europe that are experiencing negative impacts from the transition away from fossil fuel-intensive industries. The funding programme in Ireland will support the areas in the wider Midlands where communities have been negatively affected by the closure of peat production and peat-fired energy generation facilities.

Co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union, up to €169 million will be available over the duration of the fund. The investment will be targeted to support the diversification of local economies and the creation of new opportunities that complement the assets of the Territory. The fund will also restore degraded peatlands and regenerate industrial heritage assets, as well as invest in smart and sustainable local mobility so that local communities are able to benefit from the economic opportunities and amenities.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is responsible for the implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the fund with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) looking after governance and oversight. EMRA is working closely with DECC and delivery partners to manage and execute activities under the fund.

National Recovery & Resilience Plan

The EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is the largest component of NextGenerationEU, making €724 billion available to Member States in the form of grants and loans. The aim of the facility is to help repair the economic and social damage brought about by the pandemic and make post-Covid European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

Ireland is expected to receive €915m in grants over the lifetime of the RRF. In order to access this funding, Ireland has developed the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The RRF is a performance-based instrument with payment contingent on the satisfactory achievement of milestones and targets.

The NRRP is based on sixteen investment projects and nine reform measures and their associated 109 milestones and targets covering the following priorities:

- Priority 1: Advancing the Green Transition
- Priority 2: Accelerating and Expanding Digital Reforms and Transformation
- Priority 3: Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation

The overall objective of Ireland’s Plan is to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery, in a manner that complements and supports the Government’s broader recovery effort. Therefore, NRRP has been developed alongside, and reinforces the policies and approaches within, the Government’s Economic Recovery and National Development Plans.

An Implementing Body in Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform oversees NRRP implementation. The delivery of the plan is well underway.

The table below provides a summary of the NRRP investment projects and reform measures:

Priority	Project title	Accountable Department
1. Advancing the Green Transition (€518m)	De-Risking A Low Cost Residential Retrofit Loan Scheme	D/ECC
	Accelerate Decarbonisation of The Enterprise Sector	D/ETE
	Public Sector Retrofit Pathfinder Project	OPW
	Future Electrification of Cork Commuter Rail	D/Transport
	National Grand Challenges Programme	D/FHERIS
	Enhanced Rehabilitation of Peatlands	D/ECC
	Uisce Éireann - River Basin Management Plan	D/Housing
	Climate Action And Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill	D/ECC
	Carbon Tax	D/FIN
2. Accelerating and Expanding Digital Reforms and Transformation (€291m)	Shared Government Data Centre	OGCIO & OPW
	Digital Transformation of Enterprise In Ireland	D/ETE
	Digital Infrastructure And Funding For Schools	D/Education
	Online Response Option For The Census Of Population	CSO
	5G Technologies To Drive A Greener, More Innovative Ireland	OGCIO
	Ehealth Projects	D/Health
3. Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation (€181m)	Addressing The Digital Divide And Enhancing Digital Skills	D/FHERIS & D/Education
	Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP)	D/SP
	Solas Recovery Skills Response Programme	D/FHERIS
	Technological Universities Transformation Fund	D/FHERIS
	Reducing Regulatory Barriers To Entrepreneurship	D/ETE
	Anti-Money Laundering	D/FIN & D/Justice
	Aggressive Tax Planning	D/FIN
	Pensions	D/FIN
	Increasing The Provision Of Social And Affordable Housing	D/Housing
Health	D/Health	

REPowerEU is the EU's plan to rapidly phase out EU dependency on Russian fossil fuel imports. The plan aims to boost the independence and security of the Union's energy supply. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was chosen as the best vehicle for delivering on the REPowerEU plan, given its objective of boosting economic and social resilience, the mix of reforms and investments, the well-established implementation framework, and the existing role of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) in supporting energy policy projects. Ireland can access €90m in EU grants under this instrument.

Additionally, Ireland has availed of an option for member states to transfer some of their Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR) funding to the NRRP to finance REPowerEU investments and reforms under the RRF. This aligns with Government objectives to invest in energy efficiency and reduce dependence on foreign fossil fuel.

The Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform is considering potential investment and reform proposals that could be funded under the REPowerEU mechanism with Government Departments. Similar to the development of Ireland's current National Recovery and Resilience Plan, RePower EU proposals will be subject to negotiation with the European Commission.

Brexit Adjustment Reserve

The Brexit Adjustment Reserve represents an important response by the European Union to the challenges posed by the United Kingdom's departure from the EU. Ireland played a leading role in securing support for the Reserve at the marathon European Council meeting last July. The Reserve can be seen alongside Next Generation EU as the European Union's twin responses to the challenges of Covid and Brexit that have characterised the last year.

The purpose of the Reserve is to help counter the adverse economic and social consequences of Brexit in the sectors and Member States that are worst affected. It can support measures such as:

- support to economic sectors, businesses and local communities, including those dependent on fishing activities in the UK waters;
- support to employment, including through short-time work schemes, re-skilling and training;
- ensuring the functioning of border, customs, sanitary and phytosanitary and security controls, fisheries control, certification and authorisation regimes for products, communication, information and awareness raising for citizens and businesses.

It is generally acknowledged that Ireland is the Member State most impacted by Brexit and so we expect to be a significant beneficiary of the Reserve.

Build Digital Grant

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform launched a competitive challenge-based grant call on 16th December 2020 to deliver the Build Digital Project for the Construction Sector. Increasing innovation in the Irish Construction Sector is more necessary than ever over the coming years in order to deliver on the ambitions set out in the Government's Project Ireland 2040 investment strategy.

To support the industry in grasping this opportunity, a Construction Sector Innovation and Digital Adoption team has been established by government and industry. This is to deliver on the seven priority actions detailed in the Building Innovation Report which was itself informed by research carried out by KPMG and Future Analytic Consulting and peer reviewed by Technological University Dublin. This work drew upon a wide-ranging survey and consultation, international benchmarking process and an economic analysis of causes of productivity trends in the Construction Sector in Ireland.

TU Dublin was selected in March 2021 as the successful applicant based on the prescribed criteria. The successful bidder is eligible to draw down public grant funding of up to €500,000 per annum for a total of five years, subject to meeting the requirements of the grant agreement. The project will present significant opportunities for industry participation and cooperation, as well as the need for the public funding to be supplemented by industry funding. The Project aims to embed the use of digitalisation in many areas such as procurement, sustainability and standards by enhancing the skills of the workforce and focusing on driving a cultural change to realise the full potential of digitalisation.

Capacity, innovation and digital adoption within the Irish Construction Sector is increasing through the Government's collaborative approach and continued regular engagement with industry representatives via the Construction Sector Group. The CSG Innovation and Digital Adoption Sub-Group continues to progress its seven priority actions with tangible progress evident. For example, Construct Innovate - a construction technology centre of excellence - with funding of €5 million has been established which will help Irish construction companies to develop competitive advantage, using cutting edge products and services that are more efficient, more environmentally sustainable, and more effective for their customers.

ERDF

On the 22nd of October 2020, the Minister announced that there would be two Operational Programmes with the Regional Assemblies acting as Managing Authorities for the ERDF Operational Programmes for the 2021 – 2027 programming period.

Reflecting the two different EU classifications of the development status of different regions in Ireland, the Regional Development Model created two Operational Programmes:

1. The area designated as 'Region in Transition', (as its GDP is 75%-100% of the EU27 average), managed by the Northern Western Regional Assembly (NWRA).
2. The two regions designated as 'More Developed', (as the GDP in each of the regions is over 100% of the EU average), managed by the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), with significant collaboration from the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

In January 2020, a Partnership Process Steering Group (PPSG) was established, to guide and advise on the programming of the Cohesion Policy Funds through the development process of the Partnership Agreement for the period 2021 - 2027. The Steering Group oversaw the development of a Needs Analysis by Indecon Economic Consultants, which specifically looked at regional development needs, including the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee (PAMC) will succeed the PPSG. This will be established later this year in 2023 following the adoption of the Partnership Agreement by the EU Commission in September 2022.

The EU Commission adopted Ireland's ERDF Programmes in late 2022. Following adoption, the Southern Eastern and Midland Regional Programme launched in April 2023 and will focus on the following key strategic outcomes:

1. Developing Smarter More Competitive Regions through RD&I capacity building within the universities and technological universities, accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial applications at a regional level, supporting innovation diffusion and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems in line with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and Regional Enterprise Plans.
2. Creating Greener More Energy Efficient Regions and a Just Transition by focusing on scaling up investment in actions that improve the energy efficiency of residential homes while targeting homeowners in, or at risk of, energy poverty.
3. Supporting Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions using an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns, empowering local authorities to gather data and lead actions on regeneration using a Town Centres First Framework.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by the Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

The Department has made no comment in relation to this.

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

The Department has made no comment in relation to this.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the detailed report received by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

Accordingly, on review of the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and the agencies under its aegis, have carried out a number of actions that have enabled progress to be made in implementing the RSES.

The response by the Department has indicated progress across a number of areas of the RSES including RSO's 1 and 2 which support sustainable settlement patterns, regeneration and compact growth, RSO 6 which relates to the proper integration of transportation and land use planning, RSO 7 relating to the sustainable management of water, waste and other environmental resources and RSO 9 relating to the transition to low carbon and clean energy.

The Assembly considers that there is need to support and reinforce the work to date and therefore make the following recommendations for consideration;

1. Recognise that the Regional Assembly is a strategically important organisation for the management of EU Funds in Ireland, including ERDF and EU JTF, and ensure that support for the organisation continues and strengthens in this regard. This allows for alignment between policy formulation and delivery of the evidence based RSES (and Project Ireland 2040), with EU Funding Streams, thus maximising benefits for the Region and creating tangible impacts where it matters.
2. Secure and continue to support the alignment of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) which form Project Ireland 2040, ensuring investment decisions are aligned in order to realise RSES objectives.



In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform:

- Continued alignment of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) to form Project Ireland 2040 ensuring investment decisions are aligned, thus supporting the growth strategy of the RSES.
- Continued publication of Project Ireland 2040 Annual Reports since 2018, along with Regional Reports for each of those years to highlight achievements since the launch of the NDP and give a detailed overview of the public investments which have been made. Project Ireland 2040 Annual and Regional Reports for 2022 are planned for publication in July 2023.
- The publication and update of the capital investment tracker which contains information on individual projects and programmes; the update increased the coverage of projects and includes the ability to search the tracker by county with user-friendly dashboards.
- The publication of the myProjectIreland interactive map which includes search facilities allowing citizens to view projects in their regional area, by city, by county or by eircode.
- Government commitment to invest €165 billion in capital programmes and projects across a range of investment sectors, as set out in the NDP 2021-2030, ensuring investment continues to be made in areas such as housing, transport, education, enterprise, sport and climate action.
- Acknowledgement of the strength of Regional Assemblies in the delivery of EU funds in Ireland including the ERDF and EU JTF.
- Renaming and reconstitution of the DPENDR to specifically include NDP Delivery, has brought about a greater emphasis and mandate for the delivery of the NDP.
- The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform secured Government approval for a package of measures on 29th March 2023, which include:
 - * Significant changes to reduce the administrative burden in delivering major capital projects; Minister now taking a direct role in overseeing delivery of the NDP through chairing the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board;
 - * Capacity reviews of departments and agencies with significant delivery programmes to ensure that adequate resources for project delivery are in place;
 - * Additional reforms to the Capital Works Management Framework, which sets out the contracts used for public capital projects;
 - * Direct reporting to Government on NDP delivery on a quarterly basis throughout 2023 and 2024 will now also take place
 - * Independent evaluation of NDP priorities and capacity will be conducted over the coming months.

6.1.11

Minister for Foreign Affairs

The mission of the Department is to promote and protect abroad the values, interests and economic well-being of Ireland and its people. The Department fulfils a diverse range of policy, promotional, programme management, public service, representative and administrative functions in pursuit of this Mission, through its headquarters staff and network of some 80 diplomatic and consular missions abroad. In particular, the Department provides advice and support to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministers of State and the Government on all aspects of foreign policy and on all issues relevant to the promotion of peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. The Department is responsible for trade promotion strategy and coordination and plays a key role, through its Missions abroad, in advancing Ireland's economic interests, cultural profile and reputation internationally. This is aligned to the RSES and in particular RSO 6.31 which is to "promote Ireland's Edge to strengthen linkages between Irish-owned enterprises and foreign owned enterprises, and to support existing Irish entrepreneurs and to attract overseas entrepreneurs" and RPO 6.34 which seeks to "support the construction of a regional brand that is consistent with, and complementary to, current local and national branding, to promote the Region domestically and abroad".

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department of Foreign Affairs provides support for a broad range of initiatives to promote all-island cohesion, including through funding schemes administered by the Department such as the Reconciliation Fund and the Shared Island Civic Society Fund.

Deepening North South cooperation is a key objective of the Department of Foreign Affairs, including through the full and effective use of the North South Ministerial Council and active support for the work of the North South Implementation Bodies. This includes support for InterTradeIreland, which supports business trading on a cross-border basis, and Tourism Ireland, which promotes Ireland to overseas tourists on an all-island basis.

The Department also works to support the all-island economy, in recognition in particular of its importance for people and communities in border areas. The Department remains committed to supporting the all-island economy and encouraging the building of active North South links across a broad range of areas.

In collaboration with other Government Departments, the Department of Foreign Affairs supports businesses and other stakeholders, particularly those operating in the border region, in adapting to changes that have occurred as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This includes tracking the implications of Brexit for business on the island of Ireland.

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of your Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

The Department's response refers to Part D below.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to your organisation

The Department's response refers to Part D below.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to your organisation

Through the Reconciliation Fund, the Department of Foreign Affairs provides support for civil society organisations working to promote reconciliation and create better understanding between communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between Ireland and Britain. The Fund has supported over 3,000 projects with more than €60 million in grant funding since its establishment in 1982.

The vast majority of the funding awarded through the Reconciliation Fund goes either directly to groups working within Northern Ireland or organisations in Ireland working in peacebuilding on a North South basis. The projects supported can build meaningful links across communities, addressing the issues that are impacting on their lives, including sectarianism, and working to create better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland.

This includes a number of organisations operating in the Eastern and Midland Region, particularly those in border areas.

In 2023, the Department of Foreign Affairs launched the Shared Island Civic Society Fund to promote practical North South cooperation and engagement across a range of sectors and themes, consistent with the objectives and commitments of the Good Friday Agreement. Funding being awarded through the Shared Island Civic Society Fund will support groups in strengthening all-island civic, economic, cultural, and/or political links on the island of Ireland.

Organisations from across the island of Ireland were eligible to apply for support through the Shared Island Civic Society Fund, provided that their proposed project involved a cross-border partner. This year's appraisal process for the Shared Island Civic Society is now complete, with a full list of successful applicants to be announced in due course.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

The response has provided details of organisations supported through funding schemes administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs which can be found at the following web address: <https://www.dfa.ie/about-us/funding/>

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

No further comment is provided by the Department.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the report received by the Department of Foreign Affairs for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that the Department of Foreign Affairs have demonstrated that the Department has provided initiatives that are complimentary to the achievement of the aims of the regional and spatial economic strategy including supports for all island cohesion through funding schemes administered through the Department.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations to NOAC for consideration;

- The Regional Assembly, having regard to its geographic area and in recognition of the oversight role of the Regional Assembly in coordinating key actors, should be included as a consultative stakeholder to promote practical north-south cooperation and engagements across a range of sectors and themes in so far as they are compatible with the RSES.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs should support and strengthen the work of the Regional Assembly at European and international level.

H) Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of the Department of Foreign Affairs

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices noted from the Department of Foreign Affairs report;

- The commitment to achieving deeper North South co-operation and the support for InterTradeIreland that supports businesses trading on a cross border bases and Tourism Ireland which promotes Ireland to overseas tourists on an all-Ireland basis.
- The continued use of the Reconciliation Fund to provide supports for civil society organisations working to promote reconciliation and improved understanding for communities in Northern Ireland, North - South interaction and between Ireland and Britain.

6.1.12

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

The mission of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is “to enhance the lives of children, young people, adults, families and communities, recognising diversity and promoting equality of opportunity”. This is aligned to the RSES and in particular RSO 13 which is to “improve education and develop the right skills to attract employers and retain talent and promote social inclusion to ensure opportunities for quality jobs across the Region” and RSO 4 which is to “protect and enhance the quality of our built and natural environment to support active lifestyles including walking and cycling, ensure clean air and water for all and quality healthcare and services that support human health”.

A) Progress made in supporting the objectives of the RSES

The Department were asked to identify the progress that has been made in supporting the objectives of the RSES that are applicable to them. This included, for instance, access to childcare and education; investment in childcare services; support the development of policies to address the play and recreation needs of children and young people; ensure new buildings and public spaces are designed to ensure accessibility; and integration of i) age friendly and family friendly strategies by local authorities, and ii) migrants and minority groups including non-Irish nationals and Travellers.

Access to Childcare and Education

Early Years

The Department outlines that significant investment has been made to address affordability for parents through the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). As part of Budget 2023, additional funding of €121m was allocated for the NCS to reduce average parental co-payments for early learning and childcare. From 2nd January 2023, all families accessing registered early learning and childcare receive a minimum hourly NCS subsidy of €1.40. This is an increase of €0.90 from the previous minimum hourly rate. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides 2 free years of pre-school to children in the eligible age range of 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months prior to beginning primary school.

Work is underway to develop a tailored policy response in order to progress the development of a new strand of funding for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services to address the impacts of disadvantage. Through this work, services will be provided with a proportionate mix of universal and targeted supports to support children and families accessing their services who are experiencing disadvantage. The consultation and engagement phase is presently underway to inform and shape this work, following on from a detailed scoping phase.

Youth Affairs

Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils) in each local authority are supported by the Department to give children and young people a voice in the development of local policy, services and programmes. Comhairle na nÓg are available for consultation on the Local Economic and Community Plans and link in with their Local Community Development Committees where appropriate.

Integration

Working closely with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) and Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has led in the development a new local integration model.

As part of this model, a permanent network of local authority Integration Teams (LAITs) will be established in each local authority area to coordinate the provision of supports for:

- Applicants for International Protection;
- Those with Refugee, Subsidiary Protection, or Permission to Remain status;
- Programme Refugees;
- Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTP).

The establishment of these teams satisfies a core objective of the RSES by helping address the social exclusion of IP populations in the Region and by supporting them to connect with mainstream service providers. It is envisioned that this new model of integration will be operationalised in the latter half of 2023.

Investment in Childcare Services

Early Years

In December 2021, detailed proposals for a new funding model for the Early Learning and Childcare sector were made to Government by the Expert Group in their report, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*. Their 25 recommendations were accepted in full by Government and implementation of this new funding model is well underway.

In September 2022, Minister O’Gorman launched *Together for Better*, the new funding model for early learning and childcare. This new funding model supports the delivery of early learning and childcare for the public good, for quality and affordability for children, parents and families as well as stability and sustainability for providers. *Together for Better* brings together three major programmes, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, including the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the new Core Funding scheme.

Core Funding, which began in September, is the new funding stream worth €259 million in full year costs to start this partnership for the public good between the State and providers. Its primary purpose is to improve pay and conditions in the sector as a whole and improve affordability for parents as well as ensuring a stable income to providers.

Core Funding is designed specifically as a supply-side funding stream, paid directly to providers, related to the costs of delivery. Core Funding is based on operating hours, number of places offered by services, and the age group of children for whom the places are offered, given the staffing requirements determined by the regulatory ratios for different care categories, as well as allocations for graduate leaders in services. Core Funding gives providers a stable income source based on the nature of the service they deliver. A provider’s income now consists of Core Funding, NCS and ECCE subsidies, and parental fees. Structuring Core Funding primarily based on capacity means that services have an allocation each year that does not fluctuate in line with children’s attendance. Core Funding contributes to services’ sustainability and significantly increases income for the overwhelming majority of services and provides greater funding stability. A number of safeguards have been put in place to ensure there are no unintended outcomes of Core Funding, including a funding guarantee and a Sustainability Fund which are open to services.

Core Funding allows for substantial increases in the total cost base for the sector, related both to pay and non-pay costs, without additional costs being passed on to parents. Core Funding introduces fee management, which in year one is effectively a fee freeze, where providers cannot increase the fees charged from last September 2021. This ensures that parents’ costs do not increase and that the increased NCS subsidies are fully felt by parents. 94% of services have now signed up to Core Funding, ensuring that fee management impacts very widely. Core Funding also requires Partner Services to offer the NCS and/or ECCE to all eligible parents to ensure that parents can avail of their full entitlement to subsidised provision.

The introduction of fee control measures is one of the recommendations of the Expert Group. The fee control measures for the first year are the first step in this process but this will be further developed in future years as further information about income and costs in the sector is analysed. Core Funding also assists affordability by guaranteeing access to NCS subsidies, particularly the extension to the age eligibility and increase in value of the universal subsidy from January 2023. Services in Core Funding must offer NCS for everything outside of ECCE-only provision.

Core Funding has provided evidence of increased capacity in ELC and SAC. Initial analysis shows the increased capacity is the type of capacity that is in highest demand relative to supply (i.e. more baby and toddler places as well as school-age places).

Approx. 119,000 children now benefit from an NCS subsidy – an increase of more than 100% since May 2022. Parents may now receive a higher subsidy towards their early learning and childcare fee with the increase in minimum rates from €0.50 to €1.40 having come into effect on 2nd January 2023. Following the 2023 Budget increase, the minimum subsidy a family using 45 hours per week will receive is worth €3,276 per child.

Progress on the new funding model has been made extremely rapidly. Public investment in the sector has now surpassed €1 billion, five years ahead on the First 5 target, and much of what the Expert Group recommended has been accomplished, with more work underway.

Youth Affairs

The Department provides funding (€72.948 million in 2023) to support the provision of youth services in urban and rural communities nationwide. €46.29 million in funding is currently allocated via the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme. The mission of this scheme is to provide out-of-school supports to marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable young people in their communities to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential, including through the development of social and personal competencies that are likely to enhance their employability.

Support in the development of policies to address the play and recreation needs of children and young people

The Department continues to support local authorities to develop new or refurbish existing play and recreation facilities by funding the Department's Capital Grant Scheme for Play and Recreation. This scheme supports the work of local authorities in improving access to quality play and recreation facilities within their communities.

Ensuring new buildings and public spaces are designed to ensure accessibility across all societal needs, age, gender and disabilities

Many of the projects funded as described above give particular focus to inclusion and access, helping to ensure that children with a diverse range of needs can avail of the benefits of high quality play facilities alongside their peers.

Integration of age friendly and family friendly strategies including provision for flexible housing typologies and specialist housing provision by local authorities, to meet the future needs of a diverse and inclusive Region and to ensure the integration of migrants and minority groups including non-Irish nationals and Travellers

The Terms of Reference for the Traveller Accommodation Expert Group [Department of Housing] were drawn up in consultation with the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) and include consulting "with all relevant stakeholders at local and national level, including Traveller representative organisations and other stakeholder groups represented on the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) and Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACCs). Such consultation will include an invitation for written submissions and a series of meaningful national, regional and local workshops/focus groups."

B) Progress made by agencies that operate under the aegis of each Department, in supporting the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to that agency

The Department's submission does not include details under this heading.

C) Details of any policy initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020

The new policy framework for children and young people (0-24) is expected to be published in the coming months, covering the period 2023-2028. Last year, the Department published a blueprint for this new framework, setting out its purpose to ensure children and young people's rights are realised in Ireland, and that children and young people are a central consideration in all decisions affecting their lives. The framework is strongly aligned to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and focuses particularly on how Government works, ensuring that children and young people are a central consideration in all decision making affecting their lives. While many children and young people are doing well, it also recognises that there are acute challenges for specific cohorts who experience disadvantage, such as child poverty, and child and youth mental health and wellbeing. The framework proposes a series of spotlight programmes focusing on these intractable issues, where some children and young people are experiencing severe difficulty and input is required from across Government. On child poverty, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is working closely with the Department of the Taoiseach.

Overall, the framework will:

- Provide a platform to realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland, so that all partners can work effectively together to ensure children and young people can thrive.
- Create an environment where the needs of children and young people are a central part of everyone's agenda.
- Spotlight areas requiring special focus in order to address the challenges being faced by children and young people in Ireland, and generate momentum for change, such as child poverty and children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- Support all children and young people to achieve 5 National Outcomes, with special measures for vulnerable children and young people who need concerted support.

The new policy framework has been developed in collaboration with other Government Departments and is informed by consultations with children and young people, parents, service providers, and others, including a specific, open consultation on the framework conducted last year, the results of which have been published. Consultations with children and young people began in 2021, a wide-ranging consultation to inform both the development of the new framework and Ireland's report to the UN Committee on the rights of the child, the findings of which were published in the 'What We Think' suite of reports. Further targeted consultations were carried out in 2022 with children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, young carers and young people with experience of homelessness. In addition, the Children's Rights Alliance carried out a series of themed consultations with civil society organisations, on behalf of the DCEDIY.

The framework is also informed by data on the lives of children and young people, particularly the Indicator Set developed under Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the previous policy framework, which aim to track the extent to which children are meeting Government's 5 National Outcomes. These outcomes are: Active and Healthy; Achieving in Learning and Development; Safe and Protected from Harm; Economic Security and Opportunity; and Connected, Respected and Contributing to Their World.

Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027

The Department are continuing to provide training and support under all the initiatives of the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027, ensuring that the objective of placing the voices of children and young people at the heart of the Plan is met. In addition, the Department are supporting the launch of a new Local Creative Youth Partnership in 2023. The LCYP structure aims to engage young people in their communities to develop, implement and evaluate annual programmes of engagement and activity, and focusses on young people who may not have opportunities to engage in creative activities.



Other Policy Initiatives/Developments that are relevant, including those by agencies under the aegis of the Department

Early Years

First 5, the whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028) was published in 2018 as a constituent strategy of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures.

The vision of First 5 is that 'all babies' and young children's early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period which should be enjoyed. Families will be assisted and enabled to nurture babies and young children and support their development, with additional support for those who need it. Those providing services for babies, young children and their families will be equipped to contribute to their learning, development, health and wellbeing'.

Publication of the First 5 Strategy was followed by the publication of the First 5 Implementation Plan, in May 2019, which ran from 2019 to 2022. Annual Implementation Reports for 2019, 2020 and 2021/2022 have been prepared, with the 2019 Report published in 2020 and, the 2020 and 2021/2022 Reports due for publication in June 2023.

During the first four years of implementation, significant progress has been made towards realising the First 5 vision including through actions and initiatives, which are of relevance to the RSES, on access to childcare, play and recreation, inclusion, and family-friendly policies.

These initiatives include:

- A First 5 pilot initiative, the Little Baby Bundle, will see a 'Little Baby Bundle' filled with a range of useful items, including play items to encourage early communication and bonding, household items for help with safe bathing and safe sleep, as well as a range of other items to support new parents after the birth.
- My Little Library, also a First 5 pilot initiative, includes a free book bag with storybooks and resources offered to every 4 and 5 year old who started school in September 2021 and again in 2022.
- The introduction of Together for Better, the new funding model for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Aged Childcare (SAC), the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, including the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the new Core Funding Scheme, with a fourth element - the Equal Participation Model under development that will fulfil a further First 5 commitment.
- Transposing the provisions of the EU Directive on work life balance for parents and carers through the enactment of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023.
- The launch of Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support, the cross-government approach to ensuring greater awareness of parenting support services, greater access to parenting support services, more inclusive parenting support services, and needs-led and evidence-informed parenting support services.
- The publication of the Independent Review of the ELC and SAC Operating Model, which concluded that a new dedicated State agency under the remit of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the optimal operating model for the ELC and SAC sector for the years ahead.
- The publication and initial implementation of both the National Action Plan for Childminding (2021-2028) and Nurturing Skills, the A Workforce Plan for ELC and SAC (2022-2028).

Youth Affairs

Following a reform process, the UBU Your Place Your Space targeted youth funding scheme was launched in December 2019 and became fully operational on 1st July 2020. At the time of becoming fully operational, 252 organisations had successfully applied for funding under the scheme. As noted above, €46.29 million is allocated to this scheme in 2023 and 267 organisations successfully applied for funding this year, with 2 more currently pending.

D) Details of any funding competitions/initiatives/developments that have been finalised or are in preparatory stages that support the objectives of the RSES which are relevant to the organisation

Integration

Launched on 26th July 2022, the International Protection Integration Fund aims to enable community-based organisations to play a greater role in supporting the integration of International Protection (IP) applicants. As such, the fund satisfies the objectives of the RSES by addressing the social exclusion of IP populations and enabling them to actively participate in Irish society. The recent launch of a funding model for children, young people and families in the International Protection system also satisfies the objectives of the RSES. This fund enables the Children and Young People's Services Committees to enhance their provision of support services to IP applicants in 2023, thus further addressing the social exclusion of migrant populations in the region.

E) Details of the funding programmes administered by each Department (and agencies under the aegis of each department), over the last two years, which have been awarded within the Eastern and Midland Region

The response from the Department provides a detailed list of projects which have been funded in the Eastern and Midland Region and Nationwide under the various funding programmes outlined in Section D above.

Funding Programme	County	Project Name and Description	Amount Awarded (€)	Stage of Project
International Protection Integration Fund 2022	Dublin, Louth, Meath, Wicklow, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly & Laois	A variety of initiatives aimed at encouraging and facilitating the integration of International Protection applicants into Irish communities.	€1.24 million	In-progress
Enhancing CYPSC Supports for Children and Families in the International Protection System 2023	Dublin, Meath, Wicklow, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly & Laois	Enhancement and further development of CYPSC supports and services for children, young people and families in the International Protection system.	€566,729	In-progress

F) Any other comments that were made with respect to each Department (including any agencies under the aegis of each Department) and implementing the RSES, including any recommendations that are considered would facilitate the process

None provided.

G) Response and Recommendations of the Regional Assembly

The Assembly welcomes the detailed report received by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and commend the effort made in presenting a coordinated report for the purposes of RSES Monitoring.

On review of the information submitted, the Assembly is satisfied that Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth have demonstrated that progress has been made in implementing the RSES and have carried out a number of specific actions that enable same. This includes, for example: i) the establishment of the International Protection Integration Fund to enable community-based organisations to play a greater role in supporting the integration of International Protection applicants to address social exclusion of international protection populations and enabling them to actively participate in Irish society ii) the whole-of-Government approach adopted by 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'; and iii) funding initiatives associated with the new 'Together for Better' funding model whose objectives are aligned with specific RSES RPOs, namely RPO 6.1, 6.27 and 9.2.

Having regard to the information submitted, the Assembly considers that the work to date could be enhanced and make the following recommendations for NOAC to consider;

- The Regional Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to liaise with the National Disability Authority to inform new guidance documents and those under review in order to facilitate enhanced implementation by local authorities and other key stakeholders.
- The Regional Assembly should be afforded an opportunity to provide input into the development of the planned successor framework to 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' strategy covering the period 2023-2028.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in this section, the Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices noted from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth;

- The establishment of a permanent network of local authority Integration Teams (LAITs) to co-ordinate the provision of supports for applicants for international protection and programme refugees. The establishment of these teams satisfies a core objective of the RSES by helping to address social exclusion of such migrant populations.
- The 'Together for Better' funding initiative launched by the Department in September 2022 for Early Learning and Childcare provides significant improvement in supports available to the delivery of early childhood learning, quality and affordability for children, parents and families as well as stability and sustainability for service providers.
- The provision of €46.29 million in funding supports under the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme is an important initiative to provide out-of-school supports to marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable young people in the community to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential.



7.0

Implementation Progress made by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

This section of the Report outlines the implementation progress made by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly during the two-year period between June 2021 and June 2023. It outlines the measures that have been put in place, as well as additional policy and research carried out by the Assembly, to enable and deliver implementation.

Since the finalisation of the RSES in 2019, implementation of the RSES has been the focus of the Assembly to support the achievement of the regional strategic outcomes of the Strategy. To this end, the Assembly has established governance structures and worked through dedicated forums, to advance RSES implementation.



7.1

Continuation of Governance Structures for RSES Implementation

As identified in the previous Monitoring Report, a specific structure was established for the making of the RSES. This allowed for the members of the Assembly to perform their function in making the Strategy and to be supported by political Strategic Planning Area Committees and thematic working groups, consisting of key stakeholders.

This structure was then reimagined for the implementation of the RSES to ensure coordination, focus and drive in the delivery of the RSES policies and objectives. The implementation structure has an implementation group for the overall RSES and a specific implementation group for the MASP (see below) with political oversight from the existing Strategic Planning Area Committees and a new MASP SPA Committee.

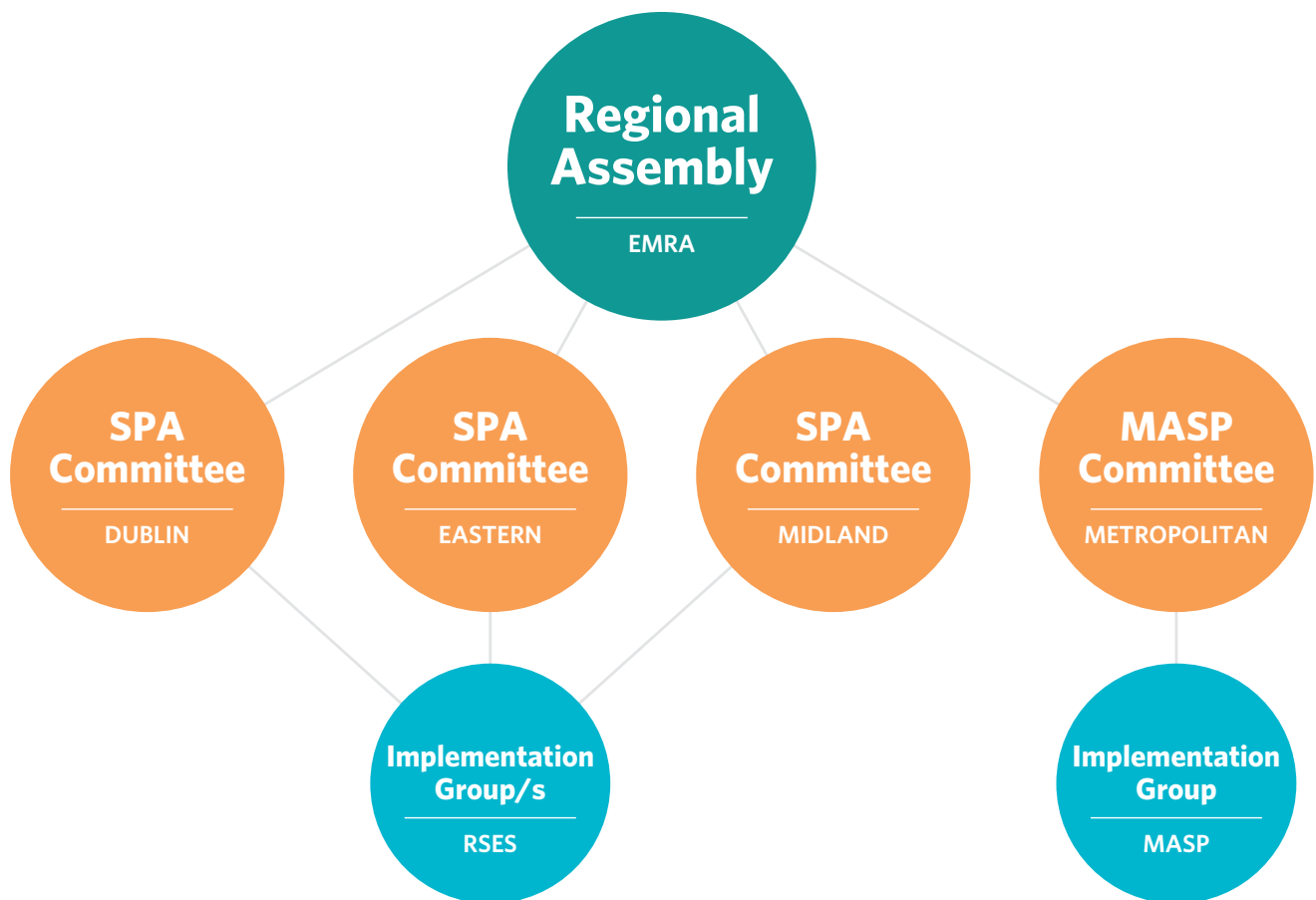


Figure 3: Governance Structures

7.1.1

Strategic Planning Area Committees (SPAs)

The Strategic Planning Area Committees for the Midlands, Eastern and Dublin were reconstituted as part of the new Assembly in 2019 following on from the Local and European elections of May 2019. These Committees and the MASP Committee, meet on an agreed basis, have adopted standing orders and nominated chairpersons. They provide a forum for members to advance priorities and policies specific to each strategic planning area and have informed the prioritisation of the implementation of the RSES.

7.1.2

Implementation Group

Implementation includes key stakeholders, local authorities and agencies who are integral to the implementation of the RSES and who were also co-producers of the Strategy. As identified in the previous Monitoring Report, due to Covid restrictions this Group met online in an implementation forum. In June 2020, the Assembly also held an online RSES implementation webinar that attracted a large number of attendees from a wide range of stakeholders. The webinar detailed implementation progress of the RSES across the three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Economic Opportunity and Climate Action, and provided opportunity for attendees to contribute to the discussion.

Overall RSES implementation has proceeded on a multilateral and bilateral basis as needs be.



7.2

Ensuring Consistency with the RSES

7.2.1

Submissions and Observations by the Assembly

The Regional Assembly has a statutory function under Section 27 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) with regard to the preparation of a draft development plan, the making of a draft development plan and the variation of a development plan. It should be noted that the Regional Assembly does not have a statutory function, under Section 27 of the Act, with regard to material alterations of a draft Development Plan. As detailed in the previous section, the twelve local authority Development Plans in the region have been finalised and the Assembly has exercised its function in relation to section 27 in all cases.

This has provided for detailed statutory submissions and observations to the draft Plans of Wicklow, South Dublin, Dublin City, Fingal and Kildare, and a variation to the Louth County Development Plan.

The Assembly also made submissions to two local authorities adjacent to the Region namely, Cavan and Carlow with respect to their draft County Development Plan review processes, in the interests of cross regional consistency.

In formulating these submissions, the Assembly has worked with the local authorities in the preparation of city and county development plans both formally through the requirements of Section 27 by way of observations on development plans and variations of development plans, and informally through the executive in preparation of the core strategy of development plans.

With regard to other local authority plans, a submission was made to the Issues Paper for the Local Area Plan of Regional Growth Centre of Dundalk, and to the Emerging Preferred Scenario for the City Edge Project in Dublin.

The Assembly has a remit to ensure policy consistency across a wide range of sectors at different scales to ensure delivery and implementation of the RSES.

In influencing EU and national policy, submissions were made to the European Semester 2023 & the National Reform Programme, The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025, the Sustainable and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities- Proposed Policy Approach Consultation Paper, the draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II, and the Uisce Éireann Investment Plan 2025-2029.

There is a statutory requirement for the National Transport Authority – Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area to be consistent with the RSES for the region. The RSES is required by legislation to be consistent with the Transport Strategy of the NTA, as set out in Section 23(7)(c) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Likewise, the Transport Strategy is also required to be consistent with the relevant RSES in force for the GDA, as set out in Section 12(6) of the Dublin Transport Authority Act (DTA) 2008 (as amended). Section 12 of the DTA Act sets out further procedures for the NTA to consult with and consider the views of the relevant regional assemblies, in the course of preparing a Transport Strategy, and after publication of a draft Strategy. In this regard the Assembly made two submissions, including the statutory statement of consistency, to the NTA Review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (2022-2042).

The Assembly, in cooperation with the other Regional Assemblies, made a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage with regard to the pre-legislative scrutiny stage of the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022. This submission was also sent to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Assemblies were also invited, as witnesses with sectoral expertise, to the Committee to discuss the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022.

7.2.2

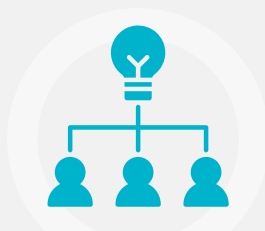
Stakeholder Cooperation

The co-production element and existing statutory functions of the Assembly require that Implementation of the RSES is performed by a wide range of stakeholders in the public sector. In this regard ongoing engagement, promotion and integration of the RSES in other forums on a bilateral and multilateral basis with key implementation stakeholders is critical. To this end, the Assembly worked with the following forums, committees and groups to advance RSES implementation;

Forums



NTA Transport Strategy for the GDA Advisory Board



Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT)



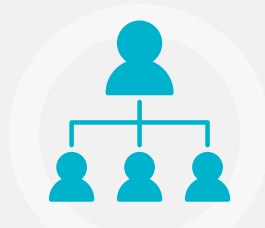
Our Rural Future Implementation Advisory Group



DHLGH - Regional Assemblies Forum



Regional Enterprise Plans for Dublin, Midlands, Mid-East, and North-East



Dublin and Eastern & Midland CARO Steering Groups



National SEA & AA Forums



National Transport Demand Management Strategy Steering Group



National Adaptation Framework Steering Committee (Climate)



NTA National Forecasting Review Project - Coordination Group



Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) Leadership and Delivery Groups



Renewable Electricity Spatial Planning Steering Group and Delivery Group



OPR Plan Evaluation Forum

In engaging with stakeholders across the public sector to advance RSES implementation, EMRA consistently works to raise the regional profile and ensure functional delivery and alignment. In this regard EMRA will continue to work closely with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), the County and City Managers Association (CCMA), the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and other relevant bodies to ensure alignment. Where functional boundaries do not align directly with the region (as is the case with the Eastern & Midlands CARO which extends beyond the region), EMRA engages as appropriate with the LGMA, the CCMA, DHLGH and the other Regional Assemblies to ensure policy coherence.



7.3

Dublin MASP Implementation

The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), adopted in 2019, is the first statutory plan for the Dublin metropolitan area (DMA) covering Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin, and parts of Fingal, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. The MASP is an integrated land use and transportation plan to deliver compact growth in the city centre within the M50 and at accessible locations along key public transport corridors, existing and planned.

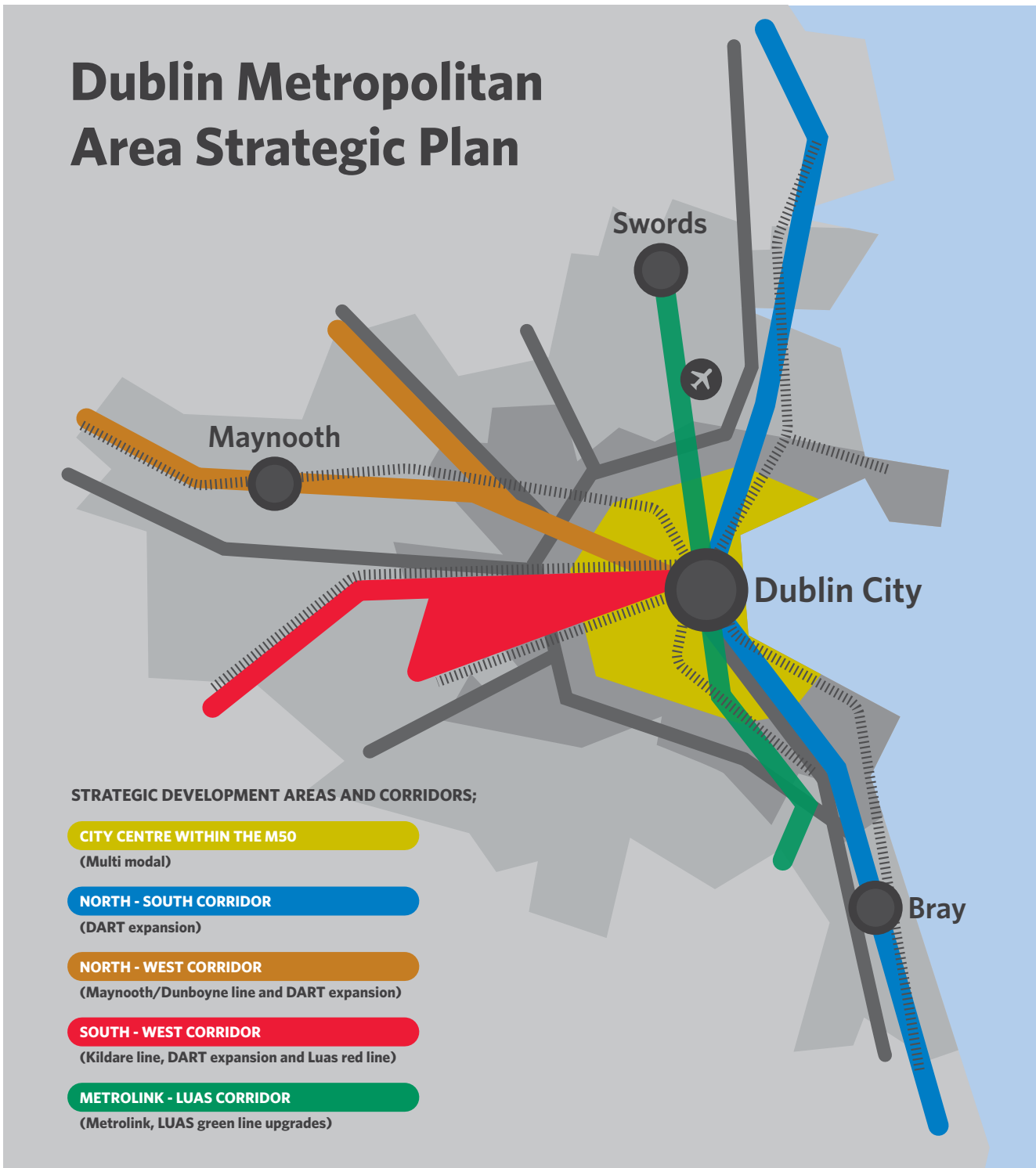


Figure 4: Dublin MASP

7.3.1

Establishment of Governance Structures to Oversee and Drive Delivery

As identified in the previous Monitoring Report, a Strategic Planning Area (SPA) Committee for the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan was established in 2019 comprising of a proportion of elected members from each of the 7 local authorities, to oversee the implementation of the MASP. This committee has met on numerous occasions and has made recommendations to the full Assembly.

The MASP Implementation Group includes key stakeholders from the infrastructure and enterprise agencies, local authorities and Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), and the MASP Committee comprises elected members representing the seven local authorities.

The Implementation group provides a forum to co-ordinate planning, transport and infrastructure delivery in the MASP. Tasks involved in the monitoring of the MASP area through the Implementation Group include updating progress on Table 5.1 of the MASP, assessing delivery of strategic development areas since the adoption of MASP in 2019 and its progress on an annual basis, and informing the prioritisation of investment and delivery to achieve the objectives of the MASP.

7.3.2

Significant Housing Delivery on all Strategic Corridors and in the Core

There was significant site activity reported within identified strategic development areas (SDAs) in the city and docklands, on the north, west and southern urban fringes, and in Donabate and Swords. There have been c. 20,000 residential units constructed or under construction since the establishment of the MASP in 2019, representing 7% of the total identified 280,000 population capacity in the MASP.

Based on local authority returns, a number of plans and studies are required to deliver on the MASP. New Local Area Plans have been adopted (or their lifetime extended) in Tallaght, Park West-Cherry Orchard, Ballymun, Ashtown/Pelletstown, Ballycullen, Donabate, Kellystown, Lissenhall East and Leixlip, and Local Area Plans are currently being progressed for Maynooth and Environs, Ballybogan (Dublin Industrial Estate and Environs), Clondalkin, Dundrum and Old Connaught. A Local Area Plan for the North East Inner City (DCC) is due to commence in 2024 and a review of the Kiltiernan/Glenamuck Local Area Plan is due to commence in Q3 2023. Required non-statutory plans include a Strategic Framework for the City Edge (located in the Naas Road/Ballymount areas) project (completed since 2022), Infrastructure Capacity Assessment Study for the South-East area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (currently under preparation), Feasibility Study for Dunsink (published in 2022), masterplans for Jamestown (currently under preparation) and Belmayne/Belcamp Lane on the North Fringe lands (completed in 2020), and a Place-Making Strategy for Swords (completed in 2022).

A number of key strategic infrastructure projects are needed to drive delivery of mixed-use districts including Poolbeg (Dodder Bridge), Docklands (pedestrian/cycle bridges) Parkwest-Cherry Orchard (amenities) Adamstown (public spaces), Clonburris (transport, water/drainage, social), Cherrywood (transport and open spaces), Sandyford (open space), Kiltiernan- Glenamuck (Distributer Road), Belmayne/Belcamp (transport), Dunboyne (roads), Bray Environs (transport), and Woodbrook-Shanganagh (new DART station).

7.3.3

Progress in Delivery of Key Infrastructure Projects

Through the Implementation Group, EMRA is working with infrastructure agencies to address key water, wastewater and transport deficits to support planned population and employment growth.

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

In 2021, Uisce Éireann published the National Water Resources Plan, a 25-year Framework Plan for water assets, and in 2022, the Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern and Midland Region was adopted. Furthermore, in January 2023 the NTA published the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2022-2042 (and the Cycle Connects Strategy due later in 2023) detailing how public transport and a cycle network will be developed across the GDA region.

Work is progressing on key water infrastructure projects. The North Docklands Sewerage Scheme and the Upper Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme are complete, and the Old Connaught -Woodbrook Sewerage Scheme is progressing. The Vartry Water Supply Scheme is complete, and Uisce Éireann are progressing the Old Connaught-Woodbrook Water Supply Scheme, which will provide additional capacity for up to 12,000 homes, and is due for completion in Q4 2024. Drainage Area Plans are being finalised for the Bray and Environs area, and the Ringsend Catchment area. The Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade is progressing and is due for completion in Q4 2025.



Transport Infrastructure

Work is also progressing on key transport infrastructure projects. In this regard, planning applications for 9 of the 12 BusConnects Core Bus Corridors were submitted to An Bord Pleanála in 2023, with the remainder due to be lodged during the remainder of 2023. With regard to DART services, Railway Orders have been lodged to An Bord Pleanála for Dart +West (Maynooth to Connolly station line, with a depot and city centre works) and DART + SouthWest (increasing capacity between Hazelhatch and Celbridge, and Dublin city centre). A rail order is due to be submitted to An Bord Pleanála for DART + Coastal North (extension of network from Malahide and Drogheda McBride stations) in Q3 2023. It is anticipated that the DART +CoastalSouth (additional passenger capacity between Drogheda and Greystones) will be progressed during 2023. The provision of DART fleet and carriages under the DART +Fleet are expected to enter service in 2025, with 90 new battery-electric multiple units entering service in 2026.

The Luas Finglas project is progressing and the Minister for Transport has approved the Strategic Assessment Report for the project. The preliminary business case for the project will be submitted to the Department of Transport by the NTA later this year. Furthermore, the Transport Strategy for the GDA 2022-2042, published in January 2023, recommends the extension of the Luas line to Bray town.

Work is also progressing on the provision and construction of rail stations. Pelletstown station opened in September 2021. The construction works at Kishogue station in West Dublin is expected to be completed by the end of this year. Construction works at Woodbrook station near Shankill on the DART line are expected to commence during 2023, and it is anticipated that the new station will come into operation during 2025. The Transport Strategy for the GDA 2022-2042 proposes new stations for Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin and Kylemore in Dublin.

Further to the allocation of funding under the Active Travel Investment Programme (see Section 6.1.9 E), the NTA have established Active Travel Units in all metropolitan local authorities.

7.3.4

Alignment of Project Ireland 2040 and Enterprise Funds

Tracking project delivery and the drawdown of funding will be a priority to oversee the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, enterprise funds and other funding at local level through the MASP and RSES, as detailed by the local authorities in their responses to the preparation of this report.

Call 1 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) awarded €9.9 million in funding for 'ready to go' projects in the Dublin metropolitan area, works at Rutland Street, Bray Public Transport bridge, Tallaght public realm, innovation and mobility hub, Cherrywood Green Infrastructure and Stillorgan public realm works and c.€2.5 million for 'further development' was awarded to St Michael's estate, Park West/Cherry Orchard/Naas Road Joint Framework Plan, and Sustainable Swords.

Call 2 of the URDF awarded an additional €449 million in provisional funding in 2021 for metropolitan projects including; the South and North Inner City Concept Areas (Dublin City Council), Cherrywood Public Access, Permeability and Amenity and Dundrum Community, Cultural and Civic Hub (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Balbriggan Rejuvenation and Dunsink Feasibility Study (Fingal), supplementary strategic infrastructure for the Clonburris and Adamstown SDZs (South Dublin), Celbridge to Hazelhatch Link Road and Maynooth Town Centre Renewal (Kildare County Council), and the Bray Harbour Area Integrated Regeneration (Wicklow County Council). Infrastructure delivery was also enabled by local authority Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) and Serviced Sites Initiative (SSI) funds.

Climate and Technology Funds - The PI 2040 Climate Fund provided investment to develop district heating in Dublin Docklands and in Tallaght. The PI 2040 Technologies Funds supported innovative Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) partnerships, while Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) awarded funding to Research Centres in UCD and Trinity in collaboration with DCC and DLR councils.

Enterprise and Innovation Funds Enterprise Ireland (EI) rolled out COVID supports and a Community Enterprise Centres (CEC) fund, and EMRA has carried out analysis of the potential to develop a network of co-working/remote working hubs. EIs Regional Enterprise Development fund (REDF) provided funding to provide incubator/co-working space in the Guinness Enterprise Centre, an innovation hub at TU Dublin-Blanchardstown and a UCD Agtech hub in Kildare. The Irish Strategic Investment fund (ISIF) provided investment to develop a media campus on the IDA Strategic Site in Greystones.

7.3.5

Next Steps- MASP Implementation

A key priority for 2023 will be to identify and prioritise a 'pipeline' of projects in the Dublin Metropolitan Areas to leverage future funds and partnership opportunities, in collaboration with the MASP Implementation Group and Committee of elected members. It is also intended to establish indicators for monitoring of delivery and reporting for MASP, in line with the emerging RSES monitoring framework and national Guidelines.

7.4

Policy Development and Research

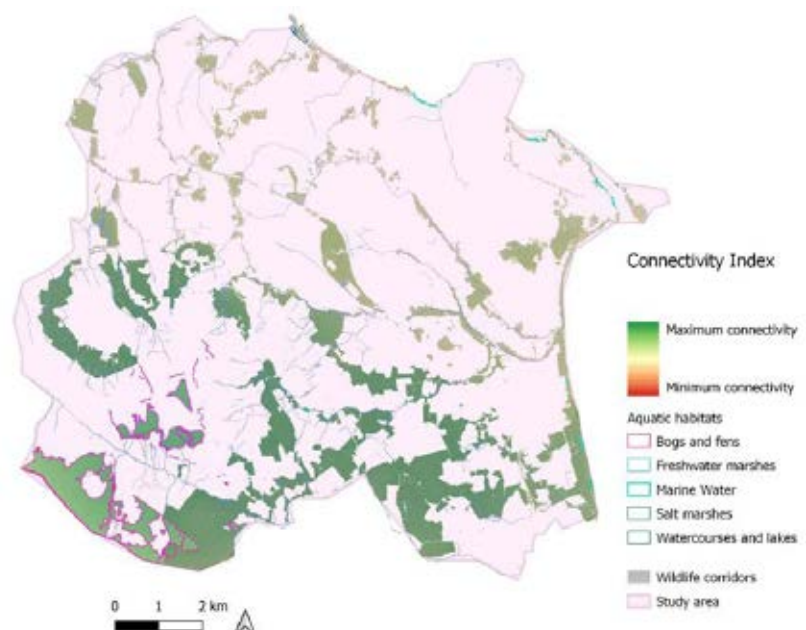
In order to progress the RSES, EMRA has carried out its own policy development and research to enable implementation and to inform and guide stakeholders in their own policy making and RSES implementation. This includes the following;

7.4.1

Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services Mapping Methodology

Through participation in the Interreg Europe PROGRESS project (see Section 7.6.1 below), the EMRA - in cooperation with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and our project partner CREAM¹¹ - secured additional funding to undertake a Pilot Action to test a Green Infrastructure Decision Support Mapping Approach for Ecosystem Services. This involved developing and testing a mapping methodology to contribute to enhanced decision-making for Green Infrastructure by scoring and mapping ecosystem services for the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council administrative area. In Q4 2021 and Q1 2022, a methodology was developed and criteria were established to transfer the SITxell conceptual model and methodology. A range of ecosystem services were mapped based on three 'contrasting perspectives': 1) Intrinsic value, 2) Functional value, and 3) Leisure/Cultural value. The Pilot Action also tested whether these three dimensions might be combined in order to identify the areas maximising the sum and the diversity of values.

The Mapping Approach was evaluated by target users at dedicated workshops in January 2022 and it was determined that the methodology and mapping approach was both effective and appropriate to contribute to the development of a coordinated approach for Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services Mapping in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The technical report outlining the methodology of the mapping approach was launched by Councillor Lettie McCarthy, Cathaoirleach of Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown on the 13th of June 2022. The successful completion of this Pilot Action has improved the implementation of ten RPOs of the RSES pertaining to green infrastructure and ecosystem services and has advanced MASP objectives for strategic green infrastructure.



11 Ecologic Research and Forestry Applications Centre, Barcelona, Spain

7.4.2

Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool

The EMRA participated as lead stakeholder on the ESPON QGasSP Targeted Analysis Project which focused on the development and delivery of a robust, simple and proportionate method for quantifying and forecasting the relative Greenhouse Gas impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, with pan-European applicability (See 7.6.3 below). Throughout this project, the EMRA led stakeholder input on methodology development and multiple iterations of the various project deliverables. The final main report and the first five Annexes to the Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool were uploaded to the publicly accessible ESPON QGasSP webpage on 30th November 2022. These included the final methodology document and case study pilots, including the Ireland Case Study Pilot which focused on Co. Meath. In March 2023, the final version of the Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool was launched is now fully accessible via the ESPON Policy & Knowledge Platform. In recognition of outstanding limitations relating to tool usability, a follow-up of this project is currently being planned by ESPON with the format yet to be decided. The EMRA remains committed to supporting the development of a user-friendly tool for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies in Ireland.



7.4.3

OECD Missions on Regional Attractiveness

In 2022 and 2023, EMRA facilitated the coordination of the fact-finding mission in Ireland for the OECD's work on 'rethinking regional attractiveness' policies in the new global environment. This work was undertaken with the support of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and is a priority activity of the Regional Development Policy Committee (RDPC). Working closely with 15 regions in 5 OECD member countries (Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), it aims to help regional and national policy-makers to better understand the position of regions in an evolving global context, including emerging challenges and opportunities, and identify the policy levers at their disposal to enhance the attractiveness of regions to the key international target groups of investors (including exporters), talent, and visitors. In doing so, it seeks to support regions transition towards new territorial development policies that promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development, while enhancing regional attractiveness. The EMRA's involvement in this Mission included coordinating and attending a scoping meeting on 4 April 2022, providing feedback and comment on the draft report, and facilitating the launch of the final report at REGIONS IN FOCUS 2023, the regional seminar and training event of the Association of Irish Regions (AIR) in February 2023.

EMRA continues to engage with the OECD which has commenced a new Mission to explore and examine territorial attractiveness disparities and how national, regional and local policies and governance arrangements can lead to more 'balanced regional attractiveness'. The OECD is coordinating a fact-finding mission in Ireland, through the DHLGH and the EMRA has facilitated this work by nominating stakeholders from the three SPAs along with other regional and national stakeholders to attend a meeting and roundtables which took place on 26th June 2023.

7.4.4

Research & Project Cooperation Framework for the Assembly

During Q2 2023, the EMRA have advanced the development of a Research & Cooperation Framework. The aim of this document is to provide a framework for effectively using research and engaging in cooperation projects to support evidence-based decision-making to drive the regional agenda, through healthy placemaking, climate action and economic opportunity. It is envisaged that this document will guide the continued delivery of an evidence base and build capacity to enable and support RSES development and implementation which is sustainable; people focused; open and accountable. The accompanying Research & Cooperation Programme which is being developed for the 2023-2027 period will outline the specific research and cooperation projects scheduled over the next four years. To be updated annually, this programme will provide a synopsis of live and proposed projects, along with a list of legislative and policy developments (recent and expected) that may inform future research topics.

7.4.5

Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) Pathfinder 27 Project

As mentioned under Section 6.1.9 Minister for Transport, the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) was launched in April 2022 and is a strategic framework to 2030 to achieve significantly greater levels of active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport journeys to lower carbon emissions from transport. It is a critical policy to deliver the transport objectives in Ireland's Climate Action Plan (CAP). An Action Plan was launched highlighting actions to be completed in relation to the SMP between 2022-2025. The actions outlined in the Plan will deliver for national, regional and local policy objectives, and in this respect are aligned with the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

One of the actions under the SMP is the delivery of 35 Pathfinder Projects around the country. The Pathfinder Projects for the Eastern and Midland Region are listed under Section 6.1.9.

The Pathfinder 27 Project, the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Programme, is being delivered by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, for the Eastern and Midland Region. The Project consists of a training, education and capacity building workshop programme to assist local authorities, Councillors and Public Participation Networks to design and implement smart and sustainable mobility projects. The Project will include an online platform which will enable the sharing of information across the local authorities and encourage collaboration on active travel schemes. The content and format of the workshops are currently being designed, and discussions with key stakeholders have been held. It is anticipated that the workshops will commence in Q3 2023, and the programme is anticipated to finish in 2025.



7.4.6

Regional Renewable Electricity Strategy

Under Action 102 of the Government's Climate Action Plan 2021 several measures have been agreed 'to ensure supportive spatial planning framework for onshore renewable electricity generation development' including the following.

Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF)

In the first instance preparation work is ongoing to publish a Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF) by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication. The aim of the RESPF is to ensure the sustainable and swift development of additional onshore renewable energy capacity in Ireland by supporting consistent plan-led spatial planning and evidence-based identification of strategic resources for onshore renewable electricity generation across all three Regional Assemblies to and to facilitate the achievement of the national target of up to 80% RES-E by 2030. The purpose of this Policy Framework shall be to effectively translate the national climate and energy policy objectives to the National and Regional Assembly level and provide specific spatial targets which will then need to be planned for at a local authority level. It is expected that a draft RESPF will be published by Government during early Q3 2023 for public consultation. A representative from EMRA sits on the steering group forum to inform the preparation of the draft RESPF.

Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies (RRES)

In addition to the above, preparation work is also ongoing to publish of a Roadmap for the development and implementation of Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies (RRES) through which the regional spatial targets mentioned above will be allocated down at a county level by all three Regional Assemblies. To assist in the preparation work for the development and content of the Roadmap, a representative from EMRA sits on the working group forum for the project which also includes representatives from the other two Regional Assemblies, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and consultants assisting in the preparation of the Roadmap. To date in 2023 there have been 3 no. meetings of the working group with further meetings to be scheduled as the project advances.

The Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies will offer a consistent and unified approach to the identification and selection of sites as appropriate for onshore renewable electricity development, so to avoid the discrepancies currently present at a local level. It is envisaged that this Roadmap will enable the Regional Assemblies to establish a methodology by which the national and regional spatial targets, as determined by the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework, will be translated into identifiable areas as suitable for renewable electricity deployment at a regional and county level. Incorporating the landscape assessment criteria produced by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, it is expected that the Roadmap shall undertake landscape designations which will be a noted constraint in the identification of areas as suitable for renewable electricity deployment. The delivery of these steps will ensure a more facilitative and supportive spatial planning framework for the delivery of increased onshore renewable electricity generation in order to enable the delivery of Ireland's national energy and climate objectives, as set out in the current Climate Action Plan and its successors.

Once finalised, the RRES strategies will provide an effective structure through which Ireland can harness the market opportunities presented by its onshore renewable energy resources and supply sustainable development of carbon free onshore renewable electricity. The publication of the Roadmap to develop and implement Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies is expected in Q4 2023.

Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategies

Furthermore, a review and publication of a revised Methodology for local authority Renewable Energy Strategies (LARES), led by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is also in preparation which will provide a best practice approach to identifying and assessing renewable energy resources in spatial plans at local authority level. At the policy level, the integration of LARES, not only with County Development Plans, but also with more recent initiatives, in particular county level climate action plans, need to be considered. Growth technologies, for example Solar PV, need to be given additional emphasis in the methodology. Developments in policy on renewable energy in the heat and transport sectors, and the accompanying infrastructure requirements, need to be incorporated. An updated methodology for the preparation of LARES is expected by the end of 2023.

7.4.7

Contributor and Steering Functions on External Projects

The EMRA has contributor roles and sits on steering groups for several projects which are aligned with delivery of RSES objectives, but do not form part of the formal work programme. These include the following:

Public Participation and Performance Criteria in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The EMRA has a contributor role on a research project entitled 'Public Participation and Performance Criteria in Strategic Environmental Assessment: The Way Forward to Advancing Practice', or the SEAWAY project. Co-funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR), the project commenced in March 2022 and is led by the School of Geography in University College Dublin (UCD). The project duration is 24 months with an estimated completion date of March 2024. The ultimate goal of the project is to improve public participation in SEA in Ireland and to provide a robust SEA performance evaluation framework and associated KPIs to facilitate performance checks during assessments. An online survey was undertaken in October/November 2022 and interviews with national and international experts were undertaken in Q1 2023. A public participation pilot was undertaken on the 13th of June 2023 as part of the SEA for the Dundalk Local Area Plan in cooperation with the local authority planners. Overall, the research outputs and outcomes will contribute to advancing the effectiveness of SEA in protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development in line with RSES objectives.

Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) Webtool

The Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) Webtool is a novel GIS decision support tool for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and planning processes in Ireland. Bringing together more than 130 public datasets, the tool allows planners to examine environmental considerations within their plan area and create plan-specific environmental sensitivity maps. These maps can help planners anticipate potential land-use conflicts, thus informing the identification of suitable development locations while protecting the environment.

The ESM webtool is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR), and it is hosted by Tailte Éireann on GeoHive - the National Geospatial Data Hub. It has been developed and it is maintained by researchers at University College Dublin's School of Geography and the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) at Maynooth University. The web-tool's maintenance periods of 2019-2021 and 2021-2024 include training local authorities, governmental departments, consultancies and the general public on the effective use of the web-tool. The EMRA is represented on the project Steering Committee which meets every 6 months and has actively assisted in promoting the webtool across the region and internationally. For example, as part of the Interreg Europe PROGRESS project on which the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is a partner (see Section 7.6.2), the webtool was ranked first out of a series of European good practice case studies on improved landscape governance for economic and environmental sustainability, with 'evidence of success' a key assessment criterion. In recognition of its potential as an example of good practice which can be emulated in other European regions, the webtool has been included on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform having been submitted by the EMRA.

Green Space Engage

The EMRA is represented on the expert steering committee for the Irish Research Council 'Green Space Engage' project which is funded under the COALESCE (Collaborative Alliances for Societal Challenges) fund for research that addresses national and global societal challenges. The project is conducting research on rethinking green space design for health and wellbeing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by the School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy at UCD, the project commenced on 1st September 2022 and involves the integration of social science (e.g., mobile interviews) with computer science (e.g., machine learning) to co-develop data with stakeholders and then use the information gathered in a series of green space co-design workshops employing simulation software.

Ecostructure

The Ecostructure project was a 5-year collaboration between 5 leading research institutions in Ireland and Wales which was co-funded by the EU through the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020. The project investigated (1) the ecology of marine artificial structures; (2) their effects on the natural environment; and (3) methods of enhancing their biodiversity value. The overarching aim was to raise awareness of ecologically sensitive design possibilities for structures in the marine environment, by providing developers and regulators with accessible tools and resources for evidence-based planning and decision-making. The EMRA was represented on the Stakeholder Steering Group from Q2 2021 until the end of the project in Q3 2022. Engagement with the project involved attending project steering meetings (online); reviewing project outputs (policy guidance and research outputs) to determine alignment with RSES objectives, and; facilitating links including meetings, between Ecostructure project staff and third parties from within the existing EMRA stakeholder network to facilitate regional coordination.

Care-Peat

The EMRA is an Associated Partner on this Interreg North-West Europe project. Comprising nine partners and 47 Associated Partners, Care-Peat explores mechanisms to reduce carbon emissions and restore the carbon storage capacity of European peatlands. Diverse Irish partners are involved, including NUIG (Irish lead), EMRA, Bord na Móna, NPWS, the Community Wetlands Forum, and the Irish Peatlands Conservation Council. In addition to developing peatland restoration mechanisms, Care-Peat is evaluating new economic uses for cutaway bogs and is active at EU, national and local political levels to ensure policy and resources facilitate the economic, social, and environmental transition takes place are available. The project commenced in 2019 and received a one-year extension due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the project, the EMRA has provided input on key policy outputs from the project. Care-Peat will culminate with the organisation of a final conference as part of a larger European Peatland Conference in Antwerp (BE) on 19th-21st September 2023.

Mapping Green Dublin

The EMRA was represented on the Academic Advisory Team of the Mapping Green Dublin project which was led by the School of Geography at UCD and was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) from 2019 - 2021. The aim of Mapping Green Dublin was to develop a co-creation approach to enhance the green infrastructure of an inner-city neighbourhood in Dublin that has a deficit of green spaces. The project findings demonstrated that tree planting, alongside opportunities for creating small-scale accessible and high-quality greenspaces, can address many environmental issues in crowded urban spaces. The project found that community involvement can provide important insights into local needs and opportunities for urban greening that have widespread support and established a process for effective engagement with neighbourhoods that allows residents to be participants in the design of their own spaces.



7.5

Regional Development Monitor as Ireland's Regional Data Hub

Managed and project led by EMRA, the Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government and Planning, Peter Burke TD, launched the Regional Development Monitor (RDM) in November 2022 in tandem with the Regional Assemblies.



Accessible to all online and updated quarterly, the Regional Development Monitor enables easy visualization and analysis of recent trends using interactive online dashboards, collating data from across a wide variety of authoritative data from national agencies.

The Regional Assemblies in Ireland, AIRO at Maynooth University and Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) collaborated on this project to create a highly visual and interactive dashboard, or data hub, that provides users with a range of socio-economic and environmental indicators for regional and local authorities.

This resource has been created as a key monitoring resource for the Regional Assemblies to assist in the evaluation and development of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, and to enable local authorities in the preparation and implementation of City and County Development Plans and many other local plans and policies.

Announcing the new Regional Development Monitor, Minister Peter Burke said: "This is a fantastic new tool and will assist with the development and evaluation of many policies across our society. The wide breadth of information is impressive, and the collaborative nature of the project is a great example of public sector partners working together to build on their combined expertise in policy, data knowledge and technology."

The monitor is built on GeoHive, the National Geospatial Data Hub. It collates national authority data sources from agencies such as the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

Additionally, it will also prove a valuable reference and informational tool for all Government departments, public bodies, education, community groups, business and industry, as well as members of the public and the media, seeking accurate information on national and regional trends across a range of economic, social and environmental fields;

- Our People and Places – demographic change, housing completions and vacancy, housing supports, transport, health
- Our Green and Sustainable Future – renewable energy developments, GHG emissions, water quality and wastewater compliance
- Our Region's Economy – labour force statistics, foreign direct investment, life-long learning, affluence and disadvantage

7.6

EU Projects

During the period to which this Monitoring Report pertains, EMRA has been partner on a number of EU projects, strategically selected in order to advance the implementation of the RSES.

7.6.1

PROGRESS

PROGRESS was an Interreg Europe co-funded project with the objective of promoting improved governance for regional ecosystem services through policy learning and capacity building activities. Through stakeholder network activity and the development of a dedicated Action Plan, the objective of the PROGRESS partnership for EMRA was to improve the governance of ecosystem services across the Eastern and Midland Region and to advance the implementation of RPOs relating to ecosystem services and green infrastructure. EMRA was one of 6 regional partner organisations from across the EU involved in the project - Italy, Spain, Ireland, Latvia, Romania and Hungary.

PROGRESS formally commenced in August 2019 and ran until July 2023. EMRA participated fully in all project activities including Good Practice identification through local stakeholder engagement, communication & networking activities, international project seminars, training workshops, and led the only Pilot Action undertaken within the partnership.

Highlights include:

- implementation of a successful Pilot Action to test the transfer of a methodology for mapping ecosystem services for improved decision-making in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (see Section 7.4.2). This Pilot Action formed the centrepiece of the project Action Plan which involved close engagement with key stakeholders from across the entire EMRA region to advance the ecosystem service approach;
- the inclusion of 6 Irish Good Practices identified and documented by EMRA in the four good practice handbooks, on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform and featured on all four thematic policy briefs and infographics developed by the project;
- strong EMRA stakeholder representation at international learning events with national, regional and local government and state agencies, as well as relevant sectoral and interest groups in attendance;
- organisation by EMRA of the 2nd Thematic Seminar online in October 2020 and hosting of the final project meeting and field studies of Phase 1 in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in June 2022;
- inclusion of a specific Action for Regional Assemblies in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025 (Action 31);
- Action Plan implementation which has advanced the implementation of ten RSES RPOs for ecosystem services and green infrastructure and has firmly placed Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure mapping on the regional and local agenda.

7.6.2

Next2Met

Next2Met was an Interreg Europe funded project that aims to increase the attractiveness of the Midland Region as a place to live, work and visit. The project focused on attracting and retaining qualified people and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Midlands by identifying and supporting soft digitalisation measures. Through stakeholder network activity and collaboration with European regions, the objective of the Next2Met partnership for EMRA has been to enhance RSES implementation in line with these objectives. The project brought together 6 regional and local actors and 1 Advisory Partner namely Ireland, Finland, Spain, Germany, Austria, Poland and France, sharing this common challenge and working together to implement policy solutions.

Next2Met commenced in August 2019 and concluded in July 2023. EMRA's efforts in the latter half of the project (from mid-2021 to 2023) focused on expanding our knowledge of best practices from the partner regions and to integrate the learnings from regional exchanges into our policy context. EMRA participated in and hosted study visits that enabled deeper understanding of good practices.

Following these visits, an Action Plan was developed and implemented to co-create alongside stakeholders a mid- to long-term 'regional digitalisation roadmap' that focuses on enabling a digital ecosystem in the Midland region. The new framework aligns at a regional level with national and local strategies, and is in agreement with EU best practices, in a way that enhances the implementation of the RSES. With this additional lens providing greater focus to digital solutions in the Midlands, key Regional Planning Objectives in the RSES are strengthened in their implementation for better quality of life and improved investment opportunities in the region.



7.6.3

QGasSP

QGasSP was an ESPON Targeted Analysis Project for which EMRA was the lead stakeholder. The project ran from October 2020 to Q1 2023. The other stakeholders were the Scottish Government, Department of Infrastructure Northern Ireland and the Regional Council of Kymenlaakso, Finland.

The objectives of the project were:

- The development and delivery of a robust, simple and proportionate method and tool for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, with pan-European applicability (see Section 5.2.4.2);
- To measure and compare emissions at different spatial scales national, regional and local levels
- To enhance Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) allowing for consideration of strategic alternatives in the plan making process;
- To map alternative pathways to Climate Neutrality

For EMRA, the primary objective in participating in this project was to advance the implementation of RPO 3.6. The Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment (GGIA) Tool was successfully piloted in Co. Meath, with output values derived. However, there are still limitations relating to tool usability and data availability. A follow-up of this project is currently being planned by ESPON with the format yet to be decided. Following consultation with ESPON and the Office of the Planning Regulator, the EMRA remains committed to supporting the development of a user-friendly tool to inform spatial planning decisions.



7.6.4

ORIGINN

ORIGINN is an Interreg Europe co-funded project under the 'Smarter Europe' policy objective that aims to support economic and social transformation in rural areas through industrial innovation, with a particular focus on the agri-food sector. The partnership comprises seven regional and local actors from Spain, Ireland, Sweden, Romania, Slovakia, Italy and Estonia. ORIGINN commenced on the 1st of March 2023 and will run for 48 months.

Through active participation in ORIGINN, the EMRA will seek the transfer of good practices from our ORIGINN partners and their stakeholders to counter rural depopulation through entrepreneurial and innovative activity in the agri-food sector and learn new ways to reinforce the growth of the sector through collaboration, innovation, and clustering to support scalable, sustainable and profitable food businesses. Through direct engagement with the project, these good practices will be shared with our local and regional stakeholders and advance RSES implementation. The four thematic semesters of the project will focus on 1) digitalisation, 2) green economy, 3) social innovation, and 4) commercial innovation.

Through alignment with Food Vision 2030, the national policy to make Ireland a world leader in sustainable food systems (see also 6.1.5 Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine), we want to learn about good practices which can deliver:

- A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector for the Midlands;
- Viable and Resilient Primary Producers with Enhanced Well-Being;
- Food that is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad;
- An Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Agri-Food Sector, Driven by Technology and Talent.

Having introduced the ORIGINN project to the Members of EMRA in June 2023, key issues highlighted by the Members that ORIGINN will seek good practice on are:

- Keeping young people in rural areas and in the agri-food sector;
- Creating viable thriving rural enterprises, with a particular focus on entrepreneurship and micro-production;
- Adding value which stays in local communities;
- Maintaining and growing rural Ireland's clean green image.



7.7

ENCORE

EMRA participates in European networks and fora to make sure the voice of the Region is heard at European level and ensure alignment between European policies and programmes and the Assembly's priorities.

The Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE) is one such network. EMRA sits on the Steering Group and participates actively in relevant network events. Having led the co-presidency of ENCORE from 2018 to 2021 and having hosted the 14th Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe virtually from Tullamore in September 2021, the lead presidency of ENCORE was handed over by EMRA to the Province of Gelderland in the Netherlands. EMRA has continued to co-preside and has participated in all steering group meetings, jointly chaired by the EMRA Director.

The 15th ENCORE Conference will take place in September 2023 in Arnhem, Gelderland (NL). The three ENCORE themes will be central, and young people, politicians, administrators and civil servants will discuss ENCORE objectives and strengthen cooperation around all sustainability themes. Over the past two years, EMRA has participated in a number of training and knowledge sharing events which will feed into the September 2023 conference.

The ENCORE themes are:

- Maintaining and enhancing Ecosystem Services
- Transitioning to a Circular Society
- Achieving Zero Emissions through Climate Action



7.8

The Just Transition Process - EMRA's Role

Since the making of the RSES in June 2019, the 'Just Transition' has grown as a key European, national and regional policy priority. This process has emphasised the need for effective implementation of RPOs which respond to the social, economic and environmental impacts of the low carbon transition. The RSES recognises the need to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon society recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this.

RSES RPO 4.84 is to support the rural economy and initiatives in relation to diversification, agri-business, rural tourism and renewable energy so as to sustain the employment opportunities in rural areas. This is a key RPO for the Just Transition. In progressing implementation of this RPO, EMRA has engaged closely with key stakeholders including local authorities in the Midlands, the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT), the Just Transition Unit of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA), the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC)



EU Just Transition

In line with the objective of achieving EU climate neutrality by 2050 in an effective and fair manner, the European Green Deal proposed a Just Transition Mechanism, to leave no one behind. The EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) is the first pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism and will provide support to all Member States. Established within the framework of cohesion policy, the EU JTF is a key tool to support the territories most affected by social and economic impacts of the transition towards climate neutrality. In Ireland, there is a need to accelerate the transition from peat production and electricity generation in the Midlands and EMRA has naturally been involved in this process. Total support from EU JTF for Ireland will amount to 84.5 million EUR over the 2021-2027 programming period. With the Government of Ireland's match funding using Exchequer resources, up to 169 million EUR will be available in the Fund.

In December 2021, EMRA was appointed the Managing Authority of this new EU fund by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communication. As the Managing Authority, EMRA has overall responsibility for the implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the funding programme. EMRA and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications have been working closely together with delivery partners to draft the Territorial Just Transition Plan and the associated funding Programme.

The Programme sets out a number of key investment priorities to address the development needs identified in the Territorial Plan. These include:

- Generating employment by investing in the diversification of the local economy
- Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets
- Providing smart and sustainable mobility options to enable local communities to benefit directly from the green transition

The EU JTF Programme will target the areas most negatively affected by the closure of peat-reliant power stations. The designated territory under the Plan and Programme includes the entire counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath, and municipal districts of Ballinasloe (Co. Galway), Athy and Clane-Maynooth (Co. Kildare), and Carrick-on-Suir and Thurles (Co. Tipperary).

The EU JTF aligns and complements the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) of the Eastern and Midland, the Southern and the Northern and Western Regional Assemblies as the Just Transition territory spreads across all three NUTS2 regions. The three investment priorities described above align with the three Regional Strategic Outcomes of EMRA's RSES – Economic Opportunity, Healthy Placemaking and Climate Action. The EU JTF will deliver targeted financial support to Local Economic and Community Plans and Regional Enterprise Plans, regional tourism strategies, and the national policy statement on the bioeconomy.

The EU Just Transition Fund Programme was adopted by the European Commission in December 2022 and officially launched in April 2023 by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Minister Eamon Ryan along with five Ministers of State and European Commission representatives. EMRA continues to work closely with government departments and agencies to implement activities supported by the EU JTF, with the first calls under the Fund being launched in the second half of 2023. EMRA has been engaging with the eight local authorities covered by the EU JTF Territory to ensure that local stakeholders are best prepared to seize the opportunities the Fund will offer to local communities.

Conclusion

EMRA's engagement with the Just Transition process culminated in its appointment as Managing Authority for the newly created EU Just Transition Fund. The Assembly will now focus on the implementation of the Programme to ensure the stated objectives are delivered for the benefit of the Territory.

7.9

EU Programming and Funding

In the past two years, EMRA has been heavily involved in the finalisation of the 2021-2027 EU-funded programmes in Ireland, engaging extensively with the other Regional Assemblies, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the European Commission to prepare the Partnership Agreement and the various programmes. The Partnership Agreement between Ireland and the Commission was formally launched in September in the presence of the European Commissioner for Regional and Urban policy, Elisa Ferreira, and EMRA's Leas-Cathaoirleach Cllr Kate Feeney.

EMRA worked in cooperation with the Southern Regional Assembly to develop and finalise the Southern, Eastern and Midland ERDF Regional Programme that covers both the Eastern & Midland and Southern regions. Aligned with the overarching objectives set by the European Union for Cohesion policy, the Programme is strongly informed by the RSES and will help with its implementation on the ground.

With a total envelope of €663 million (€265 million ERDF and €398 million Government of Ireland funding), the Programme will support three strategic priority areas:

- **Smarter More Competitive Regions:** Building RD&I capacity in regional public research institutions, accelerating commercialisation of cutting-edge research at regional level, supporting innovation diffusion and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems in line with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and Regional Enterprise Plans.
- **Greener More Energy Efficient Regions & a Just Transition:** Scaling up investment to improve energy efficiency of residential homes, targeting homeowners in/ at risk of energy poverty.
- **Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions:** An integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of towns using a Town Centres First Framework.

The Programme was officially adopted by the European Commission in November 2022 and formally launched in April 2023. Since the Programme adoption, four calls for proposals have been published, all under Priority 1. EMRA will remain involved in the implementation of the Programme, notably through its representation on the Programme Monitoring Committee by members of the Assembly and of the executive, and will make sure that the Programme delivers concrete benefits for the Region.

EMRA also took part in the final steps leading to the finalisation and adoption of the following INTERREG programmes: North West Europe, Atlantic Area, Peace + and URBACT programmes, ensuring they will support transnational projects aligned with regional priorities. All these programmes were adopted during 2022 with first calls launching in 2022 and first half of 2023.

While new funding programmes were being designed, EMRA fulfilled its role in relation to 2014-2020 Programmes. Members of the Assembly and of the executive team sat on the Programme Monitoring Committees (PMC) of the two ERDF Regional Operational Programmes (ROP), the Southern and Eastern ROP and the Border, Midlands and Western ROP and of the following INTERREG programmes: Ireland-Wales, Peace, North West-Europe, Atlantic Area and Urbact, always with a view to ensure that regional priorities are addressed in the funded projects.

The EMRA EU sub-committee, consisting of eight Assembly members and created in 2020, continued to meet regularly over the last two years so that Members could follow and contribute to the development of the round of EU-funded programmes and ensure their alignment with the RSES.

7.10

URBACT National Contact Point

Since 2018, EMRA has been the National Contact Point for the URBACT programme. This European programme promotes integrated sustainable urban development in cities and towns across Europe and helps deliver this through the exchange of learning and best practice. This is closely aligned to the RSES and in particular RSOs 1, 2, 4 and 5 which focus on achieving Sustainable Settlement Patterns, Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration, Healthy Communities and Creative Places.

In its role as Contact Point, EMRA helps guide Irish towns and cities willing to participate in activities and to disseminate the good practices resulting from the programme. In this way, EMRA is building up its own urban expertise and capacities in the realm of sustainable development which encompasses the three main objectives of the RSES - healthy placemaking, climate action and economic opportunities.

As well as supporting those Irish local authorities in concluding their final activities as part of the last batch of Action Planning, Transfer, and Implementation networks under URBACT III (2014-2020), EMRA took on a more direct coordination role in a pilot National Practice Transfer Initiative project whereby five Irish towns (Rush, Rathdrum, Portlaoise, Sligo, Donegal) benefitted from the experience of Cork City in integrating games and playful interventions in the public realm to foster social inclusion, healthy placemaking and economic prosperity. This project ran between June 2021 and December 2022.

This National Practice Transfer experience helped encourage some partners to apply to be part of the first set of Action Planning Networks under URBACT IV, the new programme which was launched at the beginning of 2023. Further to this, Balbriggan, Longford, Ennis, Limerick (2) and Sligo have been announced as being party to six newly funded transnational networks which began on the 1st of June 2023, with Fingal being Ireland's first URBACT Lead partner.



7.11

Raising the Regional Profile

EMRA are currently working to provide a new and upgraded website to enhance the online presence of EMRA, ensure quality communication with our stakeholders and the wider public, and to increase awareness of EMRA and its functions.

The Assembly recognises the need to improve our digital offer, as the relationship with technology has changed and expectations have increased since the development of the current website. The Assembly is changing the way the website will look and work, making it simpler to navigate and developing website functionality to allow stakeholders and the public, engage with the Assembly in an efficient and user-friendly way.

As of June 2023, the structure and the graphic design of the new website was finalised and approved, and wireframes and content for it are being developed. Intended publication date for the new website is September 2023.

The new website will improve transparency through publication of all statutory and non-statutory submissions, and other related policy, research and EU functions.



7.12



Irish Regions European Office (IREO)

The Irish Regions European Office (IREO) provides a shared service for the three Regional Assemblies and 31 local authorities of Ireland (LRAs). Operationally the office is part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and with the support of the Department for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the focus is on bringing the EU closer to the wider local government sector and vice versa.

Although the IREO has no explicit role in implementing the RSES, the work of the Office helps to achieve many of the RSES objectives of not only the EMRA but the other Regional Assemblies, through the delivery of the IREO Strategy as documented below.

The three Regional Assemblies play a vital role in the management and delivery of EU Regional Policy funding programmes in Ireland. All three Regional Assemblies also act as National Contact Points for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and participate on the monitoring committees of those programmes.

The IREO aims to ensure that the office delivers timely, strategic advice and information on EU policy developments to the three Regional Assemblies and local authorities in Ireland and that it coordinates and supports the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions. Working alongside each regional assembly and the objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, the IREO advises and supports the Assemblies and local authorities to pursue EU policy and funding opportunities which align with the RSESs.

The IREO strategy is delivered by:

- Raising awareness and communicating the opportunities for participation in EU funding programmes
- Seeking opportunities for influencing EU policy developments
- Building capacity, networks and partnerships with other regions in the EU
- Signpost to the National Contact Points based in Regional Assemblies, highlighting their role in providing pre and post project development support
- Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government in Ireland to European partners and to the EU institutions.

Raising Awareness and Communication

In June 2022, the IREO organised a visit to Brussels for all 3 regional assemblies. The purpose of this visit was to build awareness of the work of the EU institutions for elected members across Ireland. A total of 23 members and officers attended, including 5 members from SRA and 2 officers.

The first part of the two-day visit, saw the Assemblies attend the European Commission's Berlaymont building for a series of meetings on topics with a range of European Commission officials covering topics such as Technologies for Smart Communities, EU Energy Policy and the EU's Cohesion Policy. All these talks included lively Q&A sessions with the Councillors.

The Assemblies delegation also met with Commissioner Mairead McGuinness, who provided an overview of the issues affecting Europe, including overcoming the challenges of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the impact on the global economy. She also highlighted the important role which she foresees for local authorities in addressing these issues.

The delegation visited the European Parliament and met with MEPs from their respective European Constituencies. The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly met with MEPs Colm Markey, Barry Andrews, Ciaran Cuffe and Frances Fitzgerald. The session offered MEPs a chance to outline their work for their region and for councillors to voice the local challenges they face.

A delegation of senior officials from Dublin City Council visited the IREO offices on 7th December 2022, as part of a visit to Belgium. The team heard from the IREO about the work of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions and were briefed on EU policy issues that will impact on the Council in the coming months and years. Teresa Lennon, Head of the IREO office also provided the group with an update on EU funding opportunities, particularly relevant to cities and urban areas. The delegation also met with European Commission officials, Dublin MEPs and representatives of Flanders Smart Hub.

On Wednesday 19th April 2023, the Irish Regions European Office (IREO), in conjunction with the three Regional Assemblies of Ireland and the Irish Delegation to the EU Committee of the Regions held an EU funding conference “Connecting, Communicating and Collaborating – Irish Regions Cooperating across the EU: How local authorities can engage in European Programmes”. Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Public Expenditure was Keynote Speaker at the event.

This one-day national conference was attended by over 130 delegates and it aimed to communicate the opportunities for local government to participate in EU funding, particularly in the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the Horizon Europe Missions and the LIFE programme.

Influencing European Policy

The IREO continued to monitor and report on EU policy developments and EU funding programmes. Coupled with the subsequent cost of living crisis, the EU came together strongly as a bloc in response to the invasion of Ukraine. Many EU policy proposals aimed to support Ukraine, such as the temporary protection directive which gives those fleeing war in Ukraine the right to temporary protection in EU Member States. The European Commission also launched the REPowerEU proposal, with the aim to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030, in light of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The EU continued to deal with the UK’s exit from the EU and the future relationship through the Trade and Cooperation Agreement has been central. The IREO worked closely with Irish Members of the Committee of the Regions to ensure that the issues for Ireland in relation to the future relationship, trade, peace and stability, as well as the role of local and regional authorities, were highlighted across the EU institutions and other Member States.

Representatives from EMRA joined IREO in Brussels in March 2022 to attend the 8th Cohesion Forum. This is the European Commission’s flagship event, held every 5 years and provides the opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on the important role that cohesion policy plays in improving the well-being of all people living in Europe.

The IREO also monitored EU policy developments in relation to wide range of policy areas including the New European Bauhaus, climate action, urban issues, sustainability, just transition, updated TEN-T regulations, smart mobility, health data, equality and the follow up to the Conference on the Future of Europe. IREO regularly communicate Irish interests to Irish MEPs, European Commission officials and Irish Government officials in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU.

Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government

One of the highlights of the past year was the IREO organised visit by the CoR President of the Committee of the Regions to Ireland in June 2022. This two-day visit showcased the local government sector in Ireland and the work of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

Hosted by the Irish CoR delegation, the visit included a presentation by Cllr Michael Murphy and Cllr Kate Feeney to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Union Affairs, a visit to the Mansion House, a high-level meeting with IBEC and a debate on Youth and Democracy in Europe in conjunction with European Movement Ireland.

Both Cllr. Murphy and Cllr. Feeney informed the Committee of the importance of integrating local and regional government officials into decision-making to ensure that national policies are properly implemented at a local level. As well as this, they highlighted the impact which European Officers can have on the council's ability to secure European project funding.

President Tzitzikostas and the CoR Delegation also met with Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Feargháil. During this meeting, the President pledged to seek to deepen ties between Ireland and his native Greece following the conclusion of his time as President of the Committee of the Regions via his role as Governor of Greece's Central Macedonia Region.

During his Mansion House reception address, President Tzitzikostas reflected on how integral the incorporation of local and regional voices was in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, and how important they will come to be in reacting to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine. He also noted how local and regional authorities are responsible for housing and incorporating Ukrainians into Europe.

The work of local government was highlighted through the weekly work of the Committee of the Regions in Commissions (Committees) and in the plenary sessions. Examples of best practice were presented through opinions and speaking points and mostly notably from the EMRA, Cllr Una Power, Cllr Alison Gilliland and Cllr Kate Feeney highlighted best practice on climate action, equality and economic and social cohesion.



Committee of the Regions

IREO is the secretariat to the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions and co-ordinates the work of the members of the national delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR).

The European Union's assembly of local and regional representatives, the CoR has 329 members from across the 27 EU Member States, all of whom are democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate in their home country. The CoR's role is to inform the development of EU legislation and future European policies through the input of those most closely representing communities, with a focus on those EU policy areas and proposals that most greatly affect regions and cities.

The CoR mainly presents its views through written opinions or resolutions, which are developed in one of six thematic commissions covering the following policy areas:

- Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX);
- Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER);
- Economic Policy (ECON);
- Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE);
- Natural Resources (NAT);
- Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC).



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Each Commission generally meets on five occasions during the year to prepare the opinions for adoption at the 5-6 plenary annual sessions. Commissioners, Presidency Ministers and MEPs regularly attend CoR meetings, and there is an ongoing exchange between the institutions on policy issues.

The Irish Delegation - Eastern and Midland Region Representatives

Below is a list of CoR representatives for the Eastern and Midland Region for 2020 - 2025.

CoR representatives for the Eastern & Midland Region for 2020 - 2025

FULL MEMBERS



CLLR
Kate Feeny



CLLR
Eamon Dooley



CLLR
Aoife Breslin



CLLR
**Caroline
Dwane Stanley**



CLLR
Una Power

ALTERNATE MEMBERS



CLLR
Emma Blain



CLLR
Alison Gilliland



CLLR
Padraig McEvoy

Legislative Works

Irish Members continued to present opinions and make an impact in the Committee of the Regions.

Members of the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR) were actively involved in drawing up some key opinions. These opinions are a valuable resource that inform RSES implementation.

Cllr Alison Gilliland was Rapporteur on 'Towards a structural inclusion of Cities and Regions in UNFCCC COP27' which was adopted in October 2022. This opinion outlined the unique position of the CoR as a driver for the implementation of climate actions at the local level and noted that local and regional authorities are responsible for providing their communities with essential services and immediate responses and relief to the consequences of climate change. Then in November 2002, Cllr Alison Gilliland attended CoP27 on Climate Change as part of the CoR Delegation, ensuring that the voice of regions and cities was heard in the talks.

Cllr Michael Murphy was Rapporteur on 'Strengthening the EU-UK relationship at subnational level and remedying the territorial impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU'. This opinion addressed the lack of territorial depth to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the EU and the UK and called for a stronger role for local and regional authorities in the TCA. It also explored new avenues for cooperation between local and regional authorities in the EU with counterparts in the UK. The opinion was adopted in Plenary in April 2022.

During 2022 Cllr Kieran McCarthy was Rapporteur on two opinions. 'New European Bauhaus - Beautiful, Sustainable, Together' was also adopted at the April Plenary. The New European Bauhaus is an initiative of the European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen and is highly ambitious in its aims. In essence, the Communication expresses the EU's ambition of creating beautiful, sustainable and inclusive places, products and ways of living. A number of initiatives were proposed including the development of a NEB lab, a NEB labelling strategy and the appointment of a NEB Contact Point in each Member State.

Cllr McCarthy's other opinion was adopted at Plenary in December 2022. 'Small Urban Areas as Key Actors to Manage a Just Transition' highlights that small urban areas struggle with a lack of financial resources and relatively low institutional capacities in comparison with other places and they need financial and administrative support to build their capacity to deal with the digital and green transitions.

In March 2022, the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions and the IREO attended the bi-annual European Summit of Regions and Cities, which was held in Marseille, France. This event examined the challenges facing Europe's regions and cities and was dominated by the immediate impact of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. It also discussed the need for an inclusive recovery plan to revive the economy and empower local communities to cope with systemic changes, such as the green and digital transition, in light of the aftermath of the pandemic.

The Delegation continued to act as the key link between the Committee and the Irish Representation. The Delegation also held meetings with Irish MEPs as well as with the Irish Commission representatives to voice the needs of the Irish local government on the EU stage. The Delegation, assisted by the IREO, continued observing all relevant policy dossiers and made interventions, via amendments as well as commission and plenary interventions.

Main discussions and opinions held and adopted in 2022

The COVID pandemic resulted in meetings up until July 2022 held in hybrid format and unsurprisingly the year was dominated by actions to support Ukraine that are impacting all of Europe.

The June meeting marked the half way point in the current mandate for the CoR and saw the Irish delegation members being elected to new roles with Cllr. Kate Feeney being elected as Third Vice President of Renew Europe's CoR delegation and Cllr. Kieran McCarthy as Vice President of European Alliance group.

The most important debates held during the year included:

- January: High Level Debate on Cohesion Implementation with Elisa FERREIRA, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms
- April: Testimonials from Ukraine: Vitali Klitschko, Mayor of Kyiv and Chairman of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, Vadym Boychenko, Mayor of Mariupol, Andriy Sadovyi, Mayor of Lviv, Ivan Fedorov, Mayor of Melitopol, Tetiana Yehorova-Lutsenko, Chairwoman of the Kharkiv Regional Council
- June: Presentation of the priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union by Ivan Bartoš, Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation and Minister of Regional Development of the Czech Republic
- October: Debate on 27th UN Conference on Climate Change
- December: Closing debate on the European Year of Youth and endorsement of the Charter for Youth and Democracy with Margaritis SCHINÁS, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life.

Members of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions participate in many of the working groups of the CoR including the EU - UK Contact Group, the Brexit Inter-regional group the Digital Futures working group and the Broadband platform.

7.14

Key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices of the EMRA

The Regional Assembly considers it appropriate to highlight the key RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices that have been executed by EMRA. These include;

- Working with local authorities to ensure planning policy alignment with the RSES, including the finalisation of all City/County Development Plans
- Ongoing implementation of the Dublin MASP with stakeholders through the established Governance Structures of the MASP Strategic Planning Committee and the MASP Implementation Group, to enable coordinated delivery of policy and infrastructure relating to transport, housing, enterprise and water infrastructure, which provides RSES Implementation.
- Ongoing policy development and research carried out by EMRA to advance and facilitate RSES Implementation including a preliminary Research and Cooperation framework to drive implementation of the regional agenda, a Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services Mapping Methodology, Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool, collaboration with the OECD to develop research on Regional Attractiveness, and contributor and steering functions on externally related projects.
- The Pathfinder 27 Project, the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Programme, is being delivered by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, for the Eastern and Midland Region. The Project consists of a training, education and capacity building workshop programme to assist local authorities, councillors and Public Participation Networks to design and implement smart and sustainable mobility projects.
- Preparatory work by the EMRA to develop a Regional Renewable Electricity Strategy to provide an effective structure through which EMRA can harness the market opportunities presented by its onshore renewable energy resources and supply sustainable development of carbon free onshore renewable electricity.
- The launch of the Regional Development Monitor to provide a much-needed evidence base to support decision making and policy formation, at a time when the planning and wider public sector is faced with many challenges such as housing, regeneration, placemaking, the environment, climate change, sustainable transport and renewable energy.
- Engagement with EU Projects to address complex RSES Implementation challenges, including the production of four policy briefs to inform policy makers in the area of Ecosystem Services and landscape governance for sustainability (PROGRESS), a Regional Digitalisation Roadmap to facilitate increased attractiveness of areas (Next 2 Met), and supporting economic and social transformation in rural areas through industrial innovation, with a particular focus on the agri-food sector (ORIGINN).
- Membership of ENCORE and hosting the 14th Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE) from Tullamore in September 2021 with a focus on Maintaining and enhancing Ecosystem Services, transitioning to a Circular Society, and Achieving Zero Emissions through Climate Action.
- EMRA's strategic role with regard to EU Programming and Funding, including the EU JTF and ERDF, strengthening alignment between policy formulation and delivery of the evidence based RSES, with EU Funding Streams, thus maximising benefits for the Region and creating tangible impacts where it matters.
- EMRA as the URBACT National Contact Point, helping to guide Irish towns and cities towards integrated sustainable urban development. In this way, EMRA is building up its own urban expertise and capacities in the realm of sustainable development which encompasses the three main objectives of the RSES - healthy placemaking, climate action and economic opportunities.
- Strengthening the relevance and applicability of the ongoing work of IREO for RSES Implementation, including through enhanced communication to stakeholders around engaging in EU Funding to facilitate delivery, and learning from the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) opinions to inform RSES Implementation.
- EMRA engaging with key stakeholders through the National SEA Forum and project involvement to enhance SEA monitoring and processes.

8.0

Conclusion and Recommendations

This process thus far has enabled the Regional Assembly to obtain greater understanding and insight into the successes and challenges that face public bodies and local authorities in implementing the RSES. In addition, it has also enabled the Regional Assembly to reflect on the work that it has carried out over the past two years.

The information provided will also be extremely beneficial in terms of informing the next Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the EMRA.

Numerous good practices and implementation milestones have been identified along the way, for instance the NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area was launched in January 2023 with a focus on Avoid-Shift-Improve (ASI) framework for transport sustainability to categorise all transport sector actions under CAP 23, and, that all County/ City Development Plans are now completed within Region, thus enabling the prioritisation of the policy context and spatial strategy of the RSES and Project Ireland 2040.

In addition, the Regional Assembly has identified a number of good practices from its own implementation work that has progressed the RSES. Similar to the previous Monitoring Report this includes for instance, the MASP Implementation Group which provides a forum that brings together key stakeholders of the Dublin MASP; the targeted use of European Funding Projects to advance complex and challenging RSES implementation issues such as the QGasSP ESPON Project, and, Next2Met and PROGRESS Interreg Europe Projects; the launch of the Regional Development Monitor, to monitor the performance of the RSES over its lifecycle and provide a wealth of spatial data for multiple stakeholders using free web-based access; securing EMRA's role as the Managing Authority of the EU Just Transition Fund and delivering the EU JTF Programme within the EU JTF Territory; the Pathfinder 30 Project; and cooperation with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to advance the Renewable Energy Spatial Planning Framework which includes Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies.

Full details of the RSES Implementation Milestones and Good Practices are contained at the end of each section of this Report, and presented together as part of the Executive Summary. These successfully demonstrate the coordination efforts of the Regional Assembly and focus and willingness of many stakeholders to deliver the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

It is important to note that the material in this report is reflective of the position at this time, which is four years into the implementation of a statutory six-year strategy which has a twelve-year horizon. It is also important to note that for this 2023 Monitoring Report, the EMRA recognises the continued impact that the COVID 19 pandemic had on local authorities and public bodies, and acknowledge how this may have influenced implementation progress of the RSES within this time.

On foot of the information received as part of this process, the table below documents the recommendations of the Regional Assembly for consideration by NOAC. These recommendations outline where the implementation progress to date could be enhanced. Please note that the local authorities also put forward recommendations to enhance this process and these are contained at Section 5.1 E) of this Report;

Recommendations for Consideration by NOAC		
	Topic	Recommendation(s)
Authorities	Planning Policy Alignment	In consultation with local authorities, additional supports should be identified and provided to enable local authorities to deliver planning alignment with the RSES through Urban Area Plans/ Local Area Plans for the Region's Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns.
	Delivering the Spatial Strategy of the RSES	In consultation with local authorities, research is undertaken to identify mechanisms which enable the implementation of the RSES by local authorities. Without further consultation with specific local authorities, it would be premature for the Regional Assembly to speculate as to how this should be carried out at this stage.
	Funding- Ambition and Interaction with Funding Mechanisms	<p>Enhance the position and ability of local authorities to prepare successful funding applications. In recent years, it has become clear that the ability of local authorities to prepare successful applications for funding have mainly become resource-dependent, with funding being distributed in a manner that is not wholly aligned to the spatial objectives of the NPF and the RSES. It has been noted in discussions with our stakeholders that local authorities may be in a better position to achieve the opportunities available, particularly the national funds, if the requisite resources were available to prepare comprehensive applications for funding under the current competitive process.</p> <p>That local authorities are supported in engaging with EU Programming and Funding with a national approach to budgeting for matched funding</p>
	Recommendations and Comments of the local authorities that are considered would facilitate the Process	<p>Consideration is given to identifying and, where appropriate, implementing measures that enable local authorities to engage in meaningful implementation of the RSES in their area, including increased resourcing of the planning sector.</p> <p>Consideration is given to enhancing the implementation role of Regional Assemblies, including statutory mechanisms, in light of the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, in order to progress RSES Implementation and in particular regional spatial and economic planning across county boundaries. In the interim, the EMRA will consider the establishment of implementation working groups to progress key issues.</p>
Public bodies	Engagement with the Regional Assembly	<p>It is recommended that any revised planning legislation introduced, ensure that the provisions of Section 25A of the current Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, remain in place, including any proposed legislative amendments arising from the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, to secure the contribution of public bodies to the Monitoring Report.</p> <p>It is recommended that mechanisms are put in place to ensure the fulfilment by public bodies of their statutory obligations under Section 25A. of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which require that public bodies shall, every 2 years, prepare and submit a report to the assembly setting out progress made in supporting objectives, relevant to that body, of the strategy.</p> <p>It is recommended that mechanisms are put in place to ensure the fulfilment by public bodies of their statutory obligations under Section 22A. of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which require that public bodies shall assist and co-operate as far as practicable with the regional assembly in the preparation of the strategy and thereafter supporting its implementation, and, that each public body shall consult with the regional assemblies, as appropriate, when preparing its own strategies, plans and programmes and so as to ensure that they are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and RSES.</p>
	Rural and Community Development	<p>The Regional Assembly should inform the implementation process and work programme attached to 'Our Rural Future' to ensure that regional development occurs in a sustainable manner, which is coordinated and prioritised in line with the spatial and economic strategy defined for the Eastern and Midland Region, thus supporting and delivering on Project Ireland 2040.</p> <p>It should be noted that the Regional Assembly is involved in supporting the review process of LECPs and the Town Centre First Approach.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly should inform the roll out of any future funding calls under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in order to focus the delivery of funding in a coordinated manner that ensures the delivery of the spatial and economic strategy for the Region.</p>

Enterprise, Trade and Employment	<p>The two-year Implementation Plans for the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 should have regard to regional objectives of the RSES where enterprise policy priorities align with applicable RSES objectives. Where relevant, the Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to inform implementation to ensure alignment with regional objectives.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly should be afforded opportunity to inform the Regions pillar of the IDA Ireland's 2021-24 Strategy or any subsequent strategy. This will ensure that measures directly aimed at securing investment to advance regional development is guided to appropriate locations that supports the spatial strategy of the RSES and recognises the importance of Dublin as a national economic driver; The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, especially in light of BREXIT and the need to develop an all-island economy; Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as vital regional growth centres; and a number of Key Towns.</p> <p>In the development of the National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind, the Department should ensure that the regional dimension is appropriately considered, to include alignment with objectives of the RSES as appropriate and any future Regional Renewable Electricity Plans.</p> <p>The Department should consider inclusion of a regional representative on the Retail Forum to ensure adherence to the retail hierarchy for the Region as expressed in the RSES and in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012, or any subsequent update.</p> <p>The Department should consider introducing a targeted regional dimension to The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) to support implementation of the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3) to create and build on regional competitive advantages, create future market opportunities and identify solutions to identified societal challenges.</p> <p>In the development of a new National Hub Policy, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) should consult the Regional Co-Working Analysis which was prepared by the three Regional Assemblies in late 2020. This analysis provides a series of general considerations that should assist policymakers in developing additional coworking hubs across Ireland.</p>
Finance	<p>Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) should ensure regional balance and alignment with the RSES Growth Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy in awarding funding for commercially viable residential development throughout the State.</p> <p>As per the recommendation included in the 2021 Monitoring Report, the Regional Assembly should be afforded opportunity to inform the horizontal priority of Regionalisation, to be included in the International Financial Services Strategy 2025-, as well as the subsequent implementation process of the aforementioned strategy. This will ensure that measures directly aimed at increasing employment in the international financial services (IFS) sector of the regions is guided to appropriate locations that supports the spatial strategy of the RSES and recognises the importance of Dublin as a national economic driver; The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, especially in light of BREXIT and the need to develop an all-island economy; Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as vital regional growth centres; and a number of Key Towns.</p>

Environment,
Climate and
Communications

Reasserting the first recommendation from the 2021 Monitoring Report, The Department should include the Regional Assembly as a body to be consulted in relation to the development of new policies, policy statements, plans and programmes by the Department, its agencies and associated State bodies which relate to the themes sought and addressed in this report and which are aligned with RSES objectives. This includes the development and scope of any potential Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) identified by the Government in the EM region.

The Regional Assembly should be represented on appropriate working groups for new iterations of the annual Climate Action Plan where thematic alignment exists with RSES objectives to support multi-level territorial and sectoral policy alignment.

The Regional Assembly should be consulted in the development of the forthcoming local authority Climate Action Plans to ensure consistency with spatial planning policy, including the RSES.

The Department should continue to support and improve resource sharing between the SEAI and the Regional Assembly to provide evidence-based policy and decision making including enhancing the Regional Development Monitor platform. The EMRA very much welcomes the integration of the SEAI's local authority Climate Action Plan (LA-CAP) dashboard into the Regional Development Monitor platform and ongoing engagement between the SEAI, local authorities and the CAROs to further extended this engagement to support wider data sharing.

The Department should facilitate closer engagement between Eirgrid and the Regional Assembly to identify future key energy infrastructure needs across the region including consultation during any further revision to Eirgrid's Grid Implementation Plan for the 'Shaping Our Electricity Future' roadmap. Further to the Department's response, The Assembly welcomes the progression of a number of grid development projects under RPO 10.22, coordination of the recent RESS pursuant to RPO 10.24, and the engagement of EirGrid with the Development Plan making process aligned with the Guidelines set out in the RSES regarding facilitating the provision of energy networks.

In calculating shoreline change rates and coastal vulnerability mapping for the Dublin Metropolitan area and the Eastern coastal counties, the GSI Coastal Change Assessment project should have regard to the Mapping Repository of the Ireland-Wales Ecostructure project (see Section 5.2.4.7) which contains GIS maps for 3,405 artificial structures and 1,260 coastal flood defences on the Irish and Welsh shores of the Irish Sea. This work provides an indication of the current extent of coastal hardening and a basis for predicting further developments in response to climate change.

RPO 7.26 of the RSES is to support the development of guidance for assessment of proposed land zonings in order to achieve appropriate riparian setback distances that support the attainment of high ecological status for waterbodies, the conservation of biodiversity and good ecosystem health, and buffer zones from flood plains. Where appropriate, IFI should engage with The Regional Assembly in implementing the Environmental Riverine Enhancement Programme (EREP).

Agriculture, Food and the Marine	<p>Repeating the sole recommendation included in the 2021 Monitoring Report, The Regional Assembly should inform the implementation of the new Agri-Food Strategy to 2030 which was published in August 2021. It is essential that implementation policy and investment priorities reflect the RSES to allow managed and sustainable growth that enables each place to fulfil ambition and potential.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly should be included as a stakeholder in the formal implementation plan for Food Vision 2030. This would help to ensure that implementation measures are aligned to the policy contained within the RSES, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. Furthermore, EMRA's participation on the Interreg Europe ORIGINN project (2023-2027) which focuses on the identification of good practice for rural innovation can support implementation of Food Vision 2030 at the regional and local levels through updates to the biannual HLIC meetings.</p> <p>The Assembly should be invited to participate on evaluation panels for the DAFM Competitive Research Programme where research themes cross-cut RSES priorities. This would ensure that funded research supports regional policy and vice versa.</p> <p>Objectives 3-6 of CAP relate to climate mitigation and adaptation, management of natural resources protection of biodiversity and landscapes. Implementation of the CSP should have regard to the results and outputs of the ESPON QGasSP and Interreg Europe PROGRESS projects on which The Assembly was lead stakeholder and active partner respectively.</p> <p>The Assembly supports the position of the Minister that any movement towards privatisation of fishing rights would seriously risk fishing vessels losing an economic link with Ireland's coastal communities and would be contrary to RSES objectives relating to fisheries, aquaculture and coastal communities.</p> <p>Working with the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), DAFM should ensure that actions and themes funded under the LEADER programme for rural development are aligned with and complement relevant RSES objectives.</p> <p>Standards for the maintenance of land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAECs) developed by DAFM, should be consistent with existing approaches applied by NPWS for designated and non-designated land and should be informed by the most recent peer reviewed international research.</p> <p>DAFM should ensure that all publicly funded or co-funded research projects are recorded¹² and, where relevant, appropriately aligned with other ongoing research both within DAFM and its agencies, and being undertaken by third parties.</p>
Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	<p>Where applicable, in its consideration of applications under section 29(1) of the Technological Universities Act 2018, the Department may consider it appropriate to set assessment criteria to ensure appropriate consideration of NPF population targets, the RSES settlement strategy and other relevant metrics, thus supporting and delivering on Project Ireland 2040 and the RSES.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly should be included as stakeholder under the Peace Plus programme where projects will be considered on a cross-border basis with a view to improving cross border co-operation and connectivity. Such projects should align with the objectives of the RSES.</p> <p>In undertaking any education campus development, the Department should endeavour to progress regeneration and economic synergies both within and in proximity to the campus under development, as well as integrate the 'smart cities' concept and other 'future proofing' measures.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly should inform the next National Research and Innovation Strategy to ensure alignment with the RSES and key national policy documents.</p> <p>The Department should ensure that appropriate Benchmarking is undertaken against other comparable economies to facilitate progress towards improving our comparative performance in RDI.</p>
Education	<p>The Regional Assembly should inform the engagement between the Department and the 12 local authorities across the Region in strategy development for the provision of new schools to cater for future populations. In particular, the Regional Assembly and the RSES should inform policy and strategy around the intensification of the use of existing school sites in Existing Built-Up Areas and their immediate environs in order to meet future needs.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly welcomes the production of specific and detailed medium to long-term school place projections at school planning area level that are currently being produced in addition to the annual demographic analysis pertaining to the 314 school planning areas nationally. The Regional Assembly would welcome parallel analysis pertaining to alignment with NPF population targets and the RSES settlement strategy, thus supporting and delivering on Project Ireland 2040.</p>

¹² Example: While the response by DAFM referenced the bioeconomy scheme being funded through the EU Just Transition Fund for which The Assembly is the Managing Authority, no reference is made in the response to a second scheme which will focus on funding research for farming under wet conditions at catchment scale.

Housing, Local Government and Heritage	<p>Provide enhanced support measures in order to converge towards the NPF and RSES development scenario for the Eastern and Midland Region, including acknowledging trends that indicate a continuing challenge to achieve housing targets in line with the NPF and RSES.</p> <p>Support coordination of RSES objectives, related to strengthened and diversified rural communities, both within and across Government Departments, including the provision of housing to ensure the viability small towns and villages.</p> <p>The standard and quality of housing provision should align with the Regional Strategic Outcomes of the RSES, in particular in relation to creating healthy communities.</p> <p>Having regard to the provisions of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, ensure timely and closer engagement between the Department and the Regional Assembly with regard to Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) and any role for regional assemblies to inform joint DMAPs in collaboration with coastal planning authorities.</p>
Transport	<p>Ongoing collaborative work between the Department of Transport and the Regional Assembly should continue in relation to the implementation of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042, the NTA's Rural Mobility Plan 'Connecting Ireland', and the actions under the National Sustainable Mobility Plan relative to the Region.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly is a key stakeholder and should be appropriately consulted in the preparation of new Department of Transport policies and programmes, including from bodies under the aegis of the Department of Transport, which are aligned with RSES objectives.</p>
Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform	<p>Recognise that the Regional Assembly is a strategically important organisation for the management of EU Funds in Ireland, including ERDF and EU JTF, and ensure that support for the organisation continues and strengthens in this regard. This allows for alignment between policy formulation and delivery of the evidence based RSES (and Project Ireland 2040), with EU Funding Streams, thus maximising benefits for the Region and creating tangible impacts where it matters.</p> <p>Secure and continue to support the alignment of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) which form Project Ireland 2040, ensuring investment decisions are aligned in order to realise RSES objectives.</p>
Foreign Affairs	<p>The Regional Assembly, having regard to its geographic area and in recognition of the oversight role of the Regional Assembly in coordinating key actors, should be included as a consultative stakeholder to promote practical north-south cooperation and engagements across a range of sectors and themes in so far as they are compatible with the RSES.</p> <p>The Department of Foreign Affairs should support and strengthen the work of the Regional Assembly at European and international level.</p>
Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	<p>The Regional Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to liaise with the National Disability Authority to inform new guidance documents and those under review in order to facilitate enhanced implementation by local authorities and other key stakeholders.</p> <p>The Regional Assembly should be afforded an opportunity to provide input into the development of the planned successor framework to 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' strategy covering the period 2023-2028.</p>

9.0

Next Steps

This Report was approved by the Members of the Regional Assembly at the Assembly meeting of July 2023 and shall be submitted to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) for consideration.

The National Oversight and Audit Commission shall consider the Monitoring Report of the Regional Assembly and may make recommendations to the Minister in relation to relevant measures to further support the implementation of the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

Pending any future interaction with NOAC and the Minister (if required), the Regional Assembly will continue its work to implement the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region, through progressing the high-level priorities related to the RSES spatial strategy and centres of scale, a resilient economy, placemaking, connectivity, infrastructure, and environment and climate action.

The Regional Assembly will also continue to advocate that the requirement for this Monitoring Report is maintained in legislation, through engaging with any further processes associated with the draft Planning and Development Bill 2022, which proposes the removal of the requirement for this Monitoring Report. As indicated in this Report, the Regional Assembly considers this to be a retrograde step, that will result in missed opportunities for coordinated and focused delivery of the RSES and Project Ireland 2040.







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