



Department of Rural and Community Development

Briefing note for the Minister: Summary of Key functions and priorities

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Department Overview

In his speech to Dáil Éireann on 14th June 2017, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D., announced the establishment of a new Department of Community and Rural Affairs, to be led by Minister Michael Ring, T.D. The new Department will combine the Regional and Rural Affairs Division of the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Community Division of the former Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

The *Action Plan for Rural Development* and the *Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland*, both of which have been published within the last 18 months, provide a policy basis for the new Department. Both documents are for delivery across the whole of Government and will underpin the work of the new Department.

They reflect a shift towards a pro-active approach to rural and community-based challenges and introduce a more strategic and policy-focused approach to these issues, supported by tangible actions. There are also strong synergies between both documents, including in particular their emphasis on economic development holding the key to improving the lives of disadvantaged communities.

The 2017 budget for the Department, combining the 2017 REV programme allocations for both Divisions in their respective dispatching Departments, is approx. **€160 million**. However, this figure may change somewhat, depending on agreement on the final suite of services to transfer to the new Department. A new Vote will need to be created for the new Department in advance of the 2018 Estimates process.

The two Divisions have a combined staff complement of **84 staff**, including 2 Assistant Secretaries. The majority of staff (52) are based in Ballina. A Secretary General will, of course, need to be appointed to the Department as soon as possible.

As the Department is a completely new formation and there is no receiving Department, it will be necessary to establish a new Corporate Services function in the Department of Rural and Community Development. Additional staff will be required for this area. While it may be possible to have certain services such as ICT and Finance functions provided on a shared-services basis, other core functions of the Department will require dedicated staff resources, particularly in the following areas:

- Minister's Office
- Secretary General's Office
- Personnel & Training
- Press Office
- Corporate Services (accommodation, co-ordination of Departmental material for Government, FOI co-ordination, etc)

The exact staff requirements for these areas will need to be established; however, it is likely that in the region of an extra 20-25 staff might be required.

Other practical issues that need to be considered as soon as possible include:

- Letterhead for the new Department and Minister
- Departmental Website
- Accommodation for Dublin-based staff (potentially in the order of 55 in total)

Other issues are likely to emerge as the new Department is formed. As an interim measure, the Department will be dependent on the good will of the two dispatching Departments to provide continuity of core central services.

Rural Development Division

Assistant Secretary – William Parnell

1. Overview

The goal of the Department's Rural Affairs Division is to progress the economic and social development of rural Ireland. In accordance with the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, the Minister has responsibility for providing greater political co-ordination and prioritisation of the work across Government Departments which impacts on rural Ireland.

The **Action Plan for Rural Development** provides the framework for a cohesive and strategic whole-of-Government approach to developing rural Ireland. There is a strong emphasis on economic development, as well as social development, in the Plan. The Department works closely with other Departments – and particularly DJEI, DHPCLG and DCCAIE – in delivering the Plan.

The Rural Development Division comprises five business units which collectively have a total of 52 staff, plus an Assistant Secretary. Most of these staff are based in Ballina - only 12 staff, plus the Assistant Secretary, are based in Dublin.

Business Unit	Staff	Principal Officer
Rural Strategy	5	Sinead Copeland
Rural Policy & Schemes	16	Finola Moylette
LEADER programme	16	JP Mulherin
Inspectorate Services	8	Paul McGoldrick
Rural Broadband & Post Offices	7	Stjohn O'Connor

2. Budget

The Rural Development Division has a budget of **€79.271m** for 2017, including administration costs. The allocation includes €67.4m for capital projects and €11.786m for current expenditure, as shown on the table below.

REV 2017 Breakdown: Regional & Rural Programmes

Subhead	Subhead Title	2017 REV Allocation		
		Current	Capital	Total
E1	Administration - Pay	2,483	-	2,483
E2	Administration - Non Pay	587	96	683
E3	Dormant Accounts Fund	2,320	2,006	4,326
E4	Western Development Commission	1,495	1,000	2,495
E5	National Rural Development Schemes <i>includes:</i> - Rural Recreation Scheme - Rural Walks Scheme - Rural Development Fund - Clar - Rural Action Plan	3,900	11,383	15,283
E6	LEADER	-	40,000	40,000
E7	Tidy Towns	1	-	1
E8	Town & Village Renewal	-	12,000	12,000
E9	Broadband/Post Office Network, etc.	1,000	1,000	2,000
	TOTALS	11,786	67,485	79,271

3. Action Plan for Rural Development

Realising our Rural Potential, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development was launched at the end of January. It contains 276 actions for the delivery across Government, State agencies and other bodies over the next three years to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland.

A key objective of the Action Plan is to change the narrative around rural Ireland. Rural Ireland is modern, dynamic and a key part of our identity and our economy. It is important to change the perception that rural Ireland is disadvantaged and a drain on resources.

Previously, policy approaches to rural Ireland have focused on specific thematic issues such as agriculture or social inclusion and have not addressed the wider and inter-dependent economic and social needs of rural communities in a cohesive way. The Action Plan for Rural Development is the first of its kind to take a co-ordinated approach to rural development right across the remit of Government policy.

Progress on the implementation of the individual actions, and of the Plan as a whole, will be overseen by a Monitoring Committee. Progress Reports will be published twice-yearly, with the first report due by the end of July 2017. The Cabinet Committee on Regional and Rural Affairs will also monitor the progress of the Plan on a regular basis.

4. Development of a National Policy for Social Enterprise

The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a commitment to develop and publish a National Policy on Social Enterprise which will address the lack of any Government policy position or direction for this sector. It is intended to develop and publish the National Policy on Social Enterprise before the end of the year. This will be a comprehensive piece of work which maps out the spectrum of activities in the sector in Ireland, the supports required by organisations at different points on the spectrum, the type of supports available through Government, and a roadmap for the development of the sector.

5. Atlantic Economic Corridor

In February 2016, a proposal for the development of an Atlantic Economic Corridor was published by the Chambers of Commerce of Limerick, Shannon, Ennis, Galway, Roscommon, Mayo, and Sligo and the American Chamber of Commerce. The aim of the

proposal is to develop a 'city of scale' along the Western seaboard to offer an alternative option to the East Coast in terms of attracting Irish and multinational investment and growing jobs.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to progress the concept of the Atlantic Economic Corridor. In this context, an Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce has been established to provide a platform for engagement between stakeholders from the private and public sectors and the wider community to maximise the potential of the Western seaboard. There is widespread support for the initiative amongst all sectors, including Government Departments and agencies.

The Taskforce meets every 8-10 weeks. **The next meeting of the Taskforce is scheduled to take place on 25th July.**

The Department has also been working closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to ensure that the Atlantic Economic Corridor is reflected in the forthcoming National Planning Framework.

6. Rural Development Programmes

The Department administers a number of funding programmes to support rural development. These programmes include:

- Town & Village Renewal Scheme
- CLÁR programme
- Rural Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure programme
- Walks Scheme

The 2017 provision for these, and some other smaller schemes, is €27.283 million. Allocations under the CLÁR programme for this year have recently been announced. Applications under the Town & Village Renewal Scheme (closing date 30th June) and Rural Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure programme will be assessed over the next 6 weeks.

7. Western Development Commission

The Western Development Commission (WDC) was established in 1999 under statute to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region, defined as the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare. Its activities involve policy development and analysis, undertaking key regional initiatives and management of the Western Investment Fund (WIF) which provides loans to SMEs.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a specific commitment to reinforce the role of the WDC so that it supports the implementation of the regional Action Plans for Jobs in the West and North-West. In this context, the WDC has been involved in an increasing number of initiatives (e.g. Regional Action Plan for Jobs Implementing Committees, the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce), some of which go beyond the role the body has played to date.

The WDC has been operating for 18 years, but there have also been a number of important policy and operational developments at regional level in recent years which cut across the remit of the Commission. In particular, the statutory role conferred on the Local Authorities and the Regional Assemblies in relation to local and regional economic development under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 will increasingly change the operating environment for the WDC.

One of the earliest tasks for the incoming Minister will to appoint a new Board to the WDC. An Assessment Panel appointed by the Public Appointments Service has short-listed candidates for the Minister's consideration. The opportunity should also be taken to provide the incoming Board with a new mandate which reflects the changed operating environment within which it operates.

Once the Board is appointed, a competition to appoint a CEO will be run. The WDC is currently operating with an Acting CEO.

8. LEADER Programme

The LEADER programme is a significant EU co-financed programme to support rural development. It has a total budget of €250 million over the period 2014-2020. Effectively however, the programme only commenced in 2016 when allocations were made to each LEADER region.

Concerns have been expressed by many community projects regarding some of the administrative procedures related to the new programme which have delayed its implementation. On 17th May, the outgoing Minister hosted a forum with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, to explore the issues of concern to them and to identify potential solutions aimed at streamlining the current administrative and application procedures.

On the basis of the feedback at the forum, over 30 action points were identified by the Department which will help streamline the administrative processes on the programme. The outgoing Minister has written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies to update them on the changes that the Department intends to make.

9. Rural Broadband

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (CCAIE) has policy responsibility for national broadband policy through the National Broadband Plan (NBP). The NBP aims to provide access to high speed broadband to every premises in Ireland. This is being done through a mix of connections made on a purely commercial basis by telecoms operators, and through a State subvention in areas where it is not commercially viable to make the connections. DCCAIE is currently overseeing a procurement process for the award of contracts for the State intervention area.

DHARRGA is responsible for ensuring that Local Authorities are ready to support service providers once contract(s) for the State intervention area under the NBP are in place. The Department has provided funding to each local authority for the assignment of a dedicated contact point for broadband issues. The appointment of these Broadband Officers will ensure a greater level of consistency in engagement with telecoms operators and clearing obstacles to rollout of infrastructure under the NBP. To date, 30 of the 31 local authorities have appointed a Broadband Officer. The remaining local authority is currently recruiting and is expected to appoint a Broadband Officer shortly.

The Department has established two Regional Action Groups, involving all local authorities, to identify and remove barriers to network rollout, including in relation to issues such as access, planning, environmental issues, legislative issues and road openings.

Separate to the National Broadband Plan, the Minister, along with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Department co-chair an Implementation Group which is driving the delivery of the recommendations made by the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which published its report in December 2016. The Taskforce made 40 recommendations to improve mobile phone coverage and broadband access in the short-term. The next meeting of the Implementation Group is scheduled for July.

10. Post Office Network

The Programme for a Partnership Government made a number of commitments in relation to the Post Office network which were assigned to this Department. The commitments in question have now been completed or are significantly advanced.

There have been a number of developments in relation to postal services generally since the Programme for a Partnership Government was agreed in May 2016, including the commissioning by An Post of a root and branch review of the company. By and large, this has overtaken the work which this Department was involved in relating to the Post Office Network.

Overall responsibility for the postal sector, including the governance of An Post, falls (and always has been) under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

11. Programme Inspectorate

The Regional & Rural Affairs Division has a small Inspectorate which carries out spot-checks on rural development programmes to provide assurance that funding has been spent correctly. Most of the Unit's work relates to the LEADER programme, which is governed by a complex set of EU rules. The Unit is also available to carry out checks on other rural development programmes such as CLÁR and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

12. Dormant Accounts Fund

Legislation governing the Dormant Accounts Fund provides for the disbursement of funds for the purposes of programmes or projects to assist:

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

The Department's role in relation to the Dormant Accounts Fund is to prepare a Disbursement Scheme every three years, which sets out the objectives to be achieved by making disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund and the strategies for achieving those objectives. The Department also co-ordinates the preparation of annual Action Plans in accordance with the three-year Disbursement Scheme. The Action Plans contain the details of specific programmes and projects for delivery across Government Departments.

A Disbursement Scheme for the period 2017-2019 was approved by Government on the 26th April 2017 and **the Department is currently finalising a new Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 2017**, following a detailed consultation process across Government Departments.

Community Development Division

Assistant Secretary – Bairbre Nic Aongusa

13. Overview

The goal of the Department's Community Development Division is to promote and support the development of vibrant, inclusive communities and to provide a coherent policy framework and strategy to support the community and voluntary sector. A key objective is to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to publicly-funded local and community development interventions by means of the Local and Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

The Community Development Division comprises three business units which collectively have a total of 30 staff. Most of these staff are based in Ballina - 10 staff, plus the Assistant Secretary, are based in Dublin.

Business Unit	Staff	Principal Officer
Community & Voluntary Supports and Programmes	10	Jason Kearney
Social Inclusion & Communities	12	Clodagh McDonnell
Libraries Development & Community Policy	8	David Dalton

14. Budget

The Community Development Division has a budget of **€80.559m** (gross) for 2017, including administration costs. (As set out in the Transfer of Functions manual, the pay provision to be transferred will be calculated based on actual pay figures rather than estimates).

The budget is made up of €12.177m for capital projects and €68.382m for current expenditure, as shown on the table below.

REV 2017 Breakdown: Community

Community	2017 REV Allocation		
	Current	Capital	Total
D.1 - ADMINISTRATION - PAY	3,302	0	3,302
D.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	519	117	636
D.3 - SUPPORTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR	12,687	0	12,687
D.4 - SICAP, LOCAL/REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS	42,230	0	42,230
D.5 - LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES (SUPPORT)	1,615	0	1,615
D.6 - RAPID	0	5,000	5,000
D.7 - DORMANT ACCOUNTS MEASURES	5,750	0	5,750
D.8 - PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION	100	700	800
D.9 - INTERREG PROGRAMME	0	1,610	1,610
D.10 - IRISH WATER SAFETY	1,007	0	1,007
D.11 - LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHIVE SERVICE	1,102	2,750	3,852
D.12 - COMMUNITY FACILITIES FUND	0	2,000	2,000
D.13 - OTHER SERVICES	70	0	70
Totals- GROSS	68,382	12,177	80,559
G - APPROPRIATIONS IN AID			
AinA			
6. Programme for Peace and Reconciliation	0	480	480
8. Dormant Accs - Programme Expenditure	5,750	0	5,750

15. Alignment of Local Government & Local Development

As part of the Local Government reform agenda, Local Community Development Committees have been established in all local authority areas for the purposes of managing and co-ordinating local and community development programmes at local level. The Committees are currently managing the implementation of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

During 2016 regional Chief Officer Networks and LCDC Chairs Network were established. The purpose of these Networks is to provide members with a platform for information sharing and engagement with the Department. Plans are underway to develop a Quality and Capacity Building Programme for all LCDCs members which will be rolled out during 2017-2019. Local Economic and Community Plans were adopted in all 31 local authority areas in 2016 and work is now underway to implement the actions identified in the plans.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides the legislative basis which gives effect to the Framework for Public Participation and Public Participation Networks (PPNs), and sets out the mechanisms by which citizens and communities are encouraged and supported to participate in the decision making processes of the local authority. PPNs are now established in all local authority areas. During 2016, the Department advanced a number of important initiatives to promote the development of PPNs including the production of a PPN User Guide, the roll-out of a new data base system, the establishment of a National PPN Advisory Group and the provision of funding to underpin the overall process.

16. Greater cross-government engagement on local and community development

The ***Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland*** was published in early 2016 following public consultation in 2015 and extensive work by the Inter-Departmental Group on Local and Community Development. The Framework Policy will be implemented on a cross-government basis and will seek to secure a joined-up, collaborative and participative approach to local and community development at local level. The development and implementation of policies, programmes and other interventions will be carried out by central and local government in line with the Framework Policy's five core objectives.

17. Delivery of libraries services across local government

In January 2016, the Department launched the Libraries Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021. Over the lifetime of the programme, the Department will invest approximately €23m in 17 capital projects and the roll out of the My Open Library service. This will be matched by some €35m of local authority own funds.

The 'My Open Library' initiative was launched in June 2016, extending public library opening hours during unstaffed hours, while continuing to provide regular staffed times for ongoing delivery of service, supporting customers, developing community engagement and hosting events. Funding of €1.1m has issued to participating Local Authorities to extend an initial pilot phase which will shape the future development and implementation of the service across the broader library network.

A new Library Capital Investment Programme was launched in January 2016. It will invest c.€22m of Exchequer funding in library infrastructure projects (matched by €37m of local authority funds) over the period 2016-2021. In 2016, there were 17.4 million library visits and 3.8 library book issues per capita.

18. Social Inclusion and Community Programmes - €37.5m in 2017

The State's main social inclusion programme, SICAP (Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme), which rolled out in April 2015 and will run until 31 December 2017, had a funding allocation of some €42 million in 2016. It delivered some 47,500 one to one interventions as well as supporting over 3,000 community groups. The aim of SICAP is to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.

SICAP is the first programme to be managed and overseen by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) in each Local Authority area. The LCDCs are the SICAP contracting authorities. This was a key step in the implementation process of the alignment of local development and local government. In Budget 2017 funding was provided for a new Communities Facilities Scheme (CFS) and for a revamped RAPID programme. CFS was recently launched, and a revamped RAPID will be launched shortly. Both are being managed and overseen by the LCDCs in each area.

Overall funding of €42.5m was disbursed to organisations with a focus on social inclusion and disadvantage. Outputs for 2016 include:

- 47,511 = the total number of disadvantaged individuals (15 years upwards) engaged under SICAP on a one-to-one basis.
- 3076 = the number of Local Community Groups assisted under SICAP.

- 242 = the number of initiatives aimed at promoting, developing and/or sustaining social enterprises.

Preparations for the next iteration of SICAP for the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2022 commenced in 2016. A consultation process is being undertaken in 2017.

19. Irish Water Safety

Irish Water Safety is the statutory body established to promote water safety in Ireland. It operates under the aegis of the Department seeking to educate people in water safety best practices and develop public awareness campaigns to promote necessary attitudes, rescue skills and behaviour to prevent drownings and water related accidents. The Department oversees the governance of the body and also provides funding of €1m towards its operating costs and for targeted initiatives aimed at raising the awareness of, and promoting, water safety issues generally. A new Chair was appointed in June 2016 and a new Board was appointed earlier this year.

20. Dormant Accounts

Some €5.75m will be provided in 2017 under Dormant Accounts to fund the Gateway Initiative to meet existing contractual commitments, to fund the Youth Employment Initiative as well as supporting Social Innovation Fund Ireland.

21. Seniors Alert Scheme - €2.3m in 2017

The current *Programme for a Partnership Government* provides for significant investment in the Seniors Alert Scheme to provide additional safety and peace of mind for those living at home. A Review of the Scheme was commissioned by Pobal in 2016, and a new iteration of the scheme will be rolled out in September 2017.

22. Volunteering - €3.5m in 2017

The Department's Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. In 2017, a total of €3.5m is being made available to support volunteer centres and volunteer information services nationwide, as well as a number of national organisations such as Volunteer Ireland and Young Social Innovators. The funding of these organisations is designed to strengthen and foster volunteerism in Ireland, building a support structure for volunteering locally from the

bottom up. This is key to the Department's citizen engagement objectives and supports the spirit of participation in communities.

23. Scheme to Support National Organisations - €6.486m in 2017

This Scheme provides multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. A new Scheme commenced on 1 July 2016, for a period of 3 years, with €16.7 million allocated to 71 organisations.

24. Community Facilities Scheme - €2m in 2017

An allocation of €2 million was made available for the new Communities Facilities Scheme (CFS) in Budget 2017. The scheme was launched in March 2017. The CFS funding provides for small scale capital projects to help grass-roots community initiatives in both rural and urban areas.

25. Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines

The Department is responsible for reviewing the current Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, in collaboration with the County and City Management Association's Dogs Working Group. Following the production of a first draft revision of the Guidelines, it was considered important to broaden the review of the Guidelines to a more formal public consultation, both for quality assurance and to address the need for openness and inclusiveness. A wide-scale formal public consultative process commenced on 1 December 2016 and closed on 28 February 2017. The section is currently reviewing the feedback and data received through the process with a view to submitting the findings to the Minister in June 2017.

26. RAPID Programme

The Programme for Partnership Government gave a commitment to reactivating the RAPID (*Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development*) Programme. A Value for Money Policy Review of RAPID in 2011 recommended that any follow-on programmes should not be rolled out using the same methodologies or structures as the then operational programme. The recasting of the Programme provides an excellent opportunity to design a new programme which incorporates the successful elements of RAPID (the old programme) while building in greater flexibility to more effectively target the changing demographics and geographical boundaries of disadvantaged areas.

RAPID funding will relate to capital projects only and is available for projects in disadvantaged urban areas and provincial towns. A total of €5 million has been made available for the Programme in Budget 2017, breakdown as follows:

- €2.5 million – Dublin North East Inner City
- €2 million – all 31 Local Authorities
- €0.5 million – legacy funding commitments from RAPID (original programme)

It is expected that the new programme will be launched before the Summer break.

27. PEACE Programme 2014-2020

The PEACE Programme is an EU Structural Funds programme aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The programme supports projects that contribute towards the promotion of greater levels of peace and reconciliation, placing a strong emphasis on promoting cross-community relations and understanding. The programme is jointly funded by the EU, Northern Ireland and Ireland. The EU contribution to the programme is €229m (85%). The total value of the programme, including match-funding of €40m (15%), is c.€269m.

The Department is the paying agency for the programme, responsible for disbursing funding, managing the overall financial arrangements and reporting on progress. The Department also oversees programme implementation generally, participating on the programme Steering and Monitoring Committees, advising on programme structure, project selection, etc. In 2017, funding will support the implementation of action plans by local authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland, including the delivery of a number Shared Spaces initiatives by local authorities and other local and regional groups.

28. Current Community Priorities

- Issue Invitation to Tender Documentation to commence tendering process for the new SICAP 2018 programme and continue evaluation process for current programme.
- Roll out of LCDC Capacity Development Training Programme from Sept – target models of best practice
- Agree Libraries Regional Collaborative Model and progress implementation of My Open Library service; agree Library Workforce Plans.
- Develop a new strategy for Libraries 2018-2022 by end year

- Agree a new contract with Social Innovation Funds Ireland
- Launch the new RAPID programme
- Roll out new iteration of Seniors Alert Scheme