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# **An Comhchoiste um Choimirce Shóisialach, Forbairt Pobail agus Tuaithe agus na hOileáin**

Tuarascáil: Aighneacht Réamh-Bhuiséid chuig an Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail

Iúil 2024

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# **Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development, and the Islands**

Report: Pre-Budget submission to the Department of Rural and  
Community Development

July 2024

33/JCSPCRI/029



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## Related information

### Publications

All publications for this committee are available on the [Oireachtas website](#).

### Committee videos

Footage of Committee proceedings can be found on the [Committee videos page](#).

### Contact details

The contact details for the Committee can be found on the [Committee page](#).

### Terms of reference

Read the [terms of reference](#) for the Committee.

## Committee Membership

### Cathaoirleach

[Denis Naughten TD](#), Independent

### Leas-Cathaoirleach

[Marc Ó Cathasaigh TD](#), Green Party

### Members

[Jackie Cahill TD](#), Fianna Fáil

[Joe Carey TD](#), Fine Gael

[Joan Collins TD](#), Independents 4 Change

[Paul Donnelly TD](#), Sinn Féin

[John Paul Phelan TD](#), Fine Gael

[Éamon Ó Cuív TD](#), Fianna Fáil

[Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire TD](#), Sinn Féin

[Senator Paddy Burke](#), Fine Gael

[Senator Róisín Garvey](#), Green Party

[Senator Paul Gavan](#), Sinn Féin

[Senator Eugene Murphy](#), Fianna Fáil

[Senator Mark Wall](#), Labour Party

## Foreword

The Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands today publishes its Pre-Budget Submission to the Minister for Rural and Community Development to assist in their deliberations during negotiations on Budget 2025. The Committee publishes its report alongside a similar report submitted to the Minister for Social Protection.

A key focus for the Committee for Budget 2025 is community supports, rural transport and the Islands. During its examination of these issues, the Committee placed a public call for submissions and received 9 submissions from interested organisations and individuals, and on that note, would like to thank everyone who made a submission to the Committee. All submissions were invaluable to the Committee and are attached in appendix 1.

Based on this, the Committee have made 9 recommendations and are committed to ensuring that these are implemented to ensure the continued development of rural Ireland and local communities through Budget 2025.

The Joint Committee will continue to engage with both the Minister and the Department of Rural and Community Development and seek regular updates on the implementation of the recommendations set out in this report.

**Denis Naughten TD**

Cathaoirleach to the Committee

July 2024

## Introduction

The Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands (the Committee) publishes this pre-budget submission which contains 9 recommendations regarding Budget 2025, with the aim of informing and effecting the budgetary process in a way that is beneficial for the State and its citizens.

In quarter two of 2023, the Committee published a call for submissions from interested individuals and organisations to inform its pre-budget scrutiny process. The Committee received 9 submissions from interested parties. The Committee has published this report based on its own knowledge, the information received through submissions and its engagement with stakeholders throughout the year. A copy of this report will be forwarded to the Department of Rural and Community Development for their consideration in advance of Budget 2025.

The Committee calls on the government and the Department of Rural and Community Development in particular to ensure that Budget 2024 includes economic, social and environmental measures to improve the welfare of those in both urban and rural areas.

The following organisations/persons provided submissions to the Committee;

### Name of organisation

- Hugh Farrell
- Irish Deaf Society of Ireland
- Irish Rural Link
- Mental Health Reform
- REHAB Group
- Social Justice Ireland
- The Wheel

- Vodafone Ireland
  - Voice of Vision Impairment
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## Recommendations

1. The Committee recommends that €15 million/annum be put in place to provide direct funding for major and minor capital development works on the islands as well as providing funding to co-finance or provide leverage funding with other State bodies and local authorities in providing vital infrastructure on the islands. This would help islands overcome the delay in prioritising projects due to cost benefit analysis favouring projects on the mainland. Such a policy in relation to health facilities, sports and community facilities, playgrounds, water, power as well as roads and piers, coastal erosion made a significant difference in the past.
  2. The Committee recommends an allocation of €6.5m to cover increases to current core funding and increases to the minimum wage in Community Services Programmes (CSPs) working towards the Living Wage. The Committee also recommends that the CSP Scheme be expanded substantially to provide extra places to promote social enterprise amongst communities.
  3. The Committee recommends that the CSP scheme revert in 2025 to the system whereby the state fully reimbursed groups for the cost of the minimum wage and employers PRSI for participants.
  4. The Committee recommends that the Department of Rural and Community Development seeks funding for community development supports for the Deaf community as a linguistic minority. The Irish Deaf Society ask that the Department would meet and support IDS to engage with funding and grants available to meet this purpose.
  5. The Committee recommends an additional allocation of €3m in Budget 2025 into Public Participation Networks (PPN) to support capacity building and meaningful engagement with policy structures at local level since the local elections.
  6. The Committee recommends an allocation of €50m in Budget 2025 into the Community and Voluntary sector, to include pay increases for the sector.
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7. The Committee recommends the provision of significant investment in services to expand on the ferry and air services it already provides to islands and to ensure those services are viable and accessible to people with disabilities.

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8. The Committee recommends the increase over two years to €20m in the funding for the CLAR programme with new schemes being initiated to co-fund with the relevant Departments the provision of basic infrastructure including water to houses, village sewerage schemes, extra funding for LIS Roads etc.

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9. The Committee recommends the initiation of a new scheme to fund the provision of Solar Panels on Community Centres in 2025.

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## Context and Background of Recommendations

### Offshore Islands

Our offshore islands continue to be a focus of this committee, with the Committee publishing a Report on the Operation and Effect of National and Local Policy on Island Communities as discussed on Oiléan Árann Mhór<sup>1</sup> in March 2024.

There are approximately 30 islands off the coast of Ireland that need continuous supports and improvements from the Department of Rural and Community Development. Similar to in last year's pre-budget submission, the Committee feel that without good services to the islands, they will not realise their full potential and the current funding to the Island's ferry and air services is not sufficient to cover the increased costs.

As already stated in the Committees 2024 pre-budget submission, the Committee recommends that the payment to the Community Organisations on the non-Gaeltacht islands be improved to ensure they can function properly as the main drivers of development on non-Gaeltacht islands.

### Recommendation

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Committee Report on the Operation and Effect of National and Local Policy on Island Communities as discussed on Oiléan Árann Mhór, available [here](#)

1. The Committee recommends that €15 million/annum be put in place to provide direct funding for major and minor capital development works on the islands as well as providing funding to co-finance or provide leverage funding with other State bodies and local authorities in providing vital infrastructure on the islands. This would help islands overcome the delay in prioritising projects due to cost benefit analysis favouring projects on the mainland. Such a policy in relation to health facilities, sports and community facilities, playgrounds, water, power as well as roads and piers, coastal erosion made a significant difference in the past
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## Community Supports

Community Service Programmes (CSP) support community-based organisations to provide local social, economic and environmental services through a social enterprise model. The objectives of the CSPs are to address community needs through supporting services and community assets making sure that these are inclusive and responsive to those experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation. CSPs also aim to provide employment opportunities and improve an individual's employability, as well as strengthening and supporting community organisations operating as social enterprises to deliver improved facilities and services.

In their submission to the Joint Committee, Social Justice Ireland<sup>2</sup> highlight the importance of Community Services Programmes and state that they provide much needed services to communities that otherwise might not have access and require €6.5m in Budget 2025 to cover increases to current core funding as well as increases to the minimum wage. As well as this, the Committee feel that the Community Services Programmes need to be substantially expanded to provide extra places to promote social enterprise amongst Communities.

### Recommendation

2. The Committee recommends an allocation of €6.5m to cover increases to current core funding and increases to the minimum wage in CSPs working towards the Living Wage. The
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<sup>2</sup> Social Justice Ireland Submission, page 5, available [here](#)

Committee also recommends that the CSP Scheme be expanded substantially to provide extra places to promote social enterprise amongst communities

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3. The Committee recommends that the CSP scheme revert in 2025, to the system whereby the state fully reimbursed groups for the cost of the minimum wage and employers PRSI for participants.
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The Irish Deaf Society<sup>3</sup> outline in their submission to the Committee their values which align with those of the Department of Rural and Community Development with respect to social inclusion and feel the provision of qualified Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreters must be utilized in order to enable Deaf people to independently access and participate within the public domain in society.

The IDS are seeking the establishment of regional drop-in centres to promote access to IDS services as a high priority, particularly for engagement with older Deaf people, Deaf people living in rural areas and Deaf people with other disabilities. The goals outlined by the Irish Deaf Society require significant funding and resources in order to be implemented and operate effectively in ways that meet the specific needs of the Deaf community.

The Committee echoes the sentiments of the Irish Deaf Society and request that the Department of Rural and Community Development seeks funding for the community development supports for the Deaf community as a linguistic minority. Funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development is vital to allow IDS to function as a Disabled Peoples Organisation specifically in terms of community work and outreach, such as the establishment of regional drop-in centres.

### Recommendations

4. The Committee recommends that the Department of Rural and Community Development seeks funding for community development supports for the Deaf community as a linguistic minority. The Irish Deaf Society ask that the Department would meet and support IDS to engage with funding and grants available to meet this purpose.
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<sup>3</sup> Irish Deaf Society Submission, page 2, available [here](#)

As outline in the submission by Social Justice Ireland, Public Participation Networks (PPNs) work across every local authority and are another vital link between national and local Government and policy making. Long term investment in staff is key to keeping communities engaged with the process of participation. The Committee feel additional funding should be allocated in Budget 2025 to support capacity building and meaningful engagement with policy structures at local level.

### Recommendations

5. The Committee recommends an additional allocation of €3m in Budget 2025 into Public Participation Networks (PPN) to support capacity building and meaningful engagement with policy structures at local level since the local elections.
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## Community and Voluntary Supports

REHAB<sup>4</sup>, in their submission to the Committee outline how Community and Voluntary organisations have a long history of providing services and infrastructure at local and national level and are engaged in most areas of Irish society. They provide huge resources in energy, personnel, finance and commitment that would come at considerable cost to the State if they were to be sourced from the open market.

REHAB asserted that there are an estimated 281,250 employees and 648,000 volunteers working in registered charitable organisations in Ireland. It is estimated that the value of this volunteering work, using the minimum wage, it is €1billion per year.

In their submission to the Committee, Social Justice Ireland discuss the Community and Voluntary sector and say that it was a vital part of the national response at local level to the pandemic, the recent increases in the cost of basic goods and services and in assisting new arrivals fleeing war persecution to become part of their new communities. The Government relies heavily on the sector and must ensure adequate resourcing by allocation €50m in Budget 2025.

### Recommendations

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<sup>4</sup> REHAB submission, page 3, available [here](#)

6. The Committee recommends an allocation of €50m in Budget 2025 into the Community and Voluntary sector, to include pay increases for the sector
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## Rural Transport

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the Irish Government has a responsibility to provide access to transportation on an equal basis with others to enable people with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in society. In their submission to the Committee, REHAB<sup>5</sup> reference this convention and say that the people who use their services emphasized that good and accessible public transport, specifically in rural areas, is essential for social inclusion.

### Recommendations

7. The Committee recommends the provision of significant investment in services to expand on the ferry and air services it already provides to islands and to ensure those services are viable and accessible to People with disabilities.
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## CLAR Programme

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) provides funding for small-scale infrastructural projects in rural areas.

CLÁR aims to support sustainable development in identified areas by attracting people to live and work there. The funding works in conjunction with local funding and on the basis of locally identified priorities.

The Committee feel that increased funding in the CLÁR programme is vital in order for rural infrastructure in areas that have seen a decline in population. Co-funding with the Department of Rural and Community Development would be beneficial to accelerate improvements on roads in these rural areas as well as improving basic infrastructure.

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<sup>5</sup> REHAB submission, page 16, available [here](#)

The Committee, with the UN Sustainable Development Goals in mind, feel that a new scheme should be developed to fund the installation of solar panels on community centres to enhance their self-sufficiency and promote sustainability.

### Recommendations

8. The Committee recommends the increase over two years to €20m in the funding for the CLAR programme with new schemes being initiated to co-fund with the relevant Departments the provision of basic infrastructure including water to houses, village sewerage schemes, extra funding for LIS Roads.

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9. The Committee recommends the initiation of a new scheme to fund the provision of Solar Panels on Community Centres in 2025.

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### Supplementary Recommendations

#### Leader Programme

1. The Committee recommends an increase exchequer funding of the LEADER programme with emphasis on additional funding to support core activities in Local Development Companies.

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#### Social Inclusion

2. The Committee recommends that the following regarding Men's and Women's Sheds:
  - Provide for an Annual ringfenced Shed Maintenance Grant scheme be placed at the disposal of sheds nationwide;
  - Provide for a once-off grant of €10,000 for each newly registered shed;
  - Provide for an annual Shed Sustainability Grant to ensure that sheds can survive and thrive in a challenging environment;
  - Carry out an audit of disused publicly owned buildings which may suit sheds' needs and take action to offer sheds secure leases as well as facilitating and encouraging the use of a section of large community buildings and complexes as Men's Sheds.

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3. The Committee recommends that funding should be made available to establish a representative body for Women's Sheds.
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### **Rural Transport Links**

4. The Committee recommends an increase in the Budget for the Rural Transport Programme and delivery of public transport in rural areas is needed.
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### **Community and Volunteer Supports**

5. The Committee recommends increased funding of €1m in Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) as they play a vital community engagement role in the planning and evaluation of development programmes at local level.
  6. The Committee recommends the provision of multi-annual funding for the voluntary and community sector.
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### **Rural and Regional Development**

7. The Committee recommends that Budget 2025 is rural proofed and contain a commitment to regional equity comprising of economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability to utilise their potential and adapt to current and future challenges.
  8. The Committee recommends an increase in both current and capital expenditure for rural development to ensure actions and measures outlined in *Our Rural Future* are adequately resourced.
  9. The Committee recommends an additional allocation of €100m to Regional Development and Transition.
  10. The Committee recommends an investment of €10m in our active transport and cycling and walking infrastructure. This would support local tourism initiatives, and also offer rural dwellers viable transport options to get to and from daily employment and other activities.
  11. The Committee recommend the establishment of a comprehensive programme to assist older people and others in rural areas to access digital services.
  12. The Committee recommends that the definition of Rural Enterprise is expanded to ensure it is supporting as many business opportunities as possible and that the Department of Rural and Community Development develops a policy to repurpose existing agricultural buildings for rural enterprise.
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### **Local Improvement Scheme**

13. The Committee recommends that funding for the Local Improvement Scheme by the Department of Rural and Community Development be doubled and further recommends that the eligibility criteria for the Local Improvement Scheme is revised to ensure that it includes access to any road that serves more than two farms, houses, or a combination of both.

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### **The Islands**

14. The Committee recommends that current funding for the Islands air and ferry service are increased in Budget 2024 to cover increased costs and develop new and improved services to the islands as well as the establishment of a new air service initially three days a week to Inisbofin.

15. The Committee recommends that the Department of Rural and Community Development in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage deliver a pilot on Gateway housing in our Island Communities

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## **Conclusion**

The Committee calls on the Government and the Minister for Rural and Community Development in particular to ensure that Budget 2025 reflects the 9 priority recommendations made by the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands regarding the areas discussed in this report.

The Committee has undertaken detailed Pre-Budget Scrutiny and would seek for the Minister to report back to the Committee on implementation of the recommendations contained within this report.



## Appendix 1 Submissions

### List of written submissions

Organisations	
1. Hugh Farrell	Available <a href="#">here</a>
2. Irish Deaf Society of Ireland	Available <a href="#">here</a>
3. Irish Rural Link	Available <a href="#">here</a>
4. Mental Health Reform	Available <a href="#">here</a>
5. REHAB Group	Available <a href="#">here</a>
6. Social Justice Ireland	Available <a href="#">here</a>
7. The Wheel	Available <a href="#">here</a>
8. Vodafone Ireland	Available <a href="#">here</a>
9. Voice of Vision Impairment	Available <a href="#">here</a>