

ESTIMATES 2023

Vote 34 – D/Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Vote 16 – Tailte Éireann

Vote 23 – Electoral Commission

Statement to the Dáil Select Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage by

Mr. Darragh O’Brien T.D., Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Thursday, 23 February 2023

Chair, Members,

I welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Committee my Department’s Estimate for 2023, as well as the Votes for the newly established Tailte Éireann and Electoral Commission, which are also under the aegis of my Department. I am joined this afternoon by Kieran O’Donnell, Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government and Planning and Malcom Noonan, Minister of State with responsibility for Electoral Reform, Heritage and Water Environment and Marine Environment. I am also joined by officials, Brian Munnely, David Kelly, Sinead Kehoe and Janet Jacobs.

We have provided briefing in advance so I will keep these remarks brief, focussing on critical areas of expenditure.

Overall, the Estimate before the Committee totals over €6.3 billion for the year and is comprised of €2.8 billion in current funding and €3.5 billion capital. In addition, there is €340 million capital carryover from 2022 and €168 million from the proceeds of Local Property Tax (LPT) meaning that some €6.8 billion in funds will be managed across Vote 34 this year.

2022 was a very challenging year for Ireland, and a responsive and agile approach to both policy and finance was required. Whilst we were initially optimistic for a return to pre-pandemic activity and expenditure, 2022 was an even more challenging year on many fronts.

As we continued to contend with the continued reality of Covid-19 and to deal with new and emerging challenges in 2022 with the war on Ukraine and global supply chain issues,

the pace of delivery anticipated at the outset was simply not possible and there was consequential impact on delivery and on expenditure.

However, we pushed on assertively to support strong Housing delivery. My Department continued to work in driving important legislative and structural change, ensuring that vulnerable households were protected and delivering cross Government supports. Budget 2023 confirms the Government's financial support for Housing and underscoring it as one of the top priorities.

Chair, I will now take the Committee very briefly through the key areas of expenditure for 2023:

Housing

2023 is the second year of the implementation of the Housing for All Plan and will see continued record investment in Housing. Overall, €4.5bn in capital funding is being provided, through a combination of Exchequer resources, lending by the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) and investment by the Land Development Agency (LDA). The capital investment will be supplemented by a further €1.4bn to support the implementation of current funded housing programmes.

This funding will ensure that 27,000 additional households will have their housing needs met in 2023 through the provision of social and affordable housing.

In respect of social housing delivery, the main focus is on capital investment to deliver new build homes to support households on social housing waiting lists - 11,830 new social homes will be delivered and the majority of these, 9,100 will be new build homes.

In addition, 9,600 new tenancies will be supported through Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

In line with Government's commitment to deliver affordable housing for all, more new affordable homes will be delivered in 2023. The total capital funding being provided will finance a range of affordability schemes and measures to deliver over 5,500 new affordable purchase and cost rental homes.

Along with the provision of new social and affordable homes, the investment for Housing this year will also address the broader range of critical Housing areas, including Homelessness and special needs, initiatives to address vacancy, ensuring the better utilisation of existing stock, remediation of defective homes and the provision of supports

to maintain people in their homes through energy retrofitting measures, upgrades and adaptation works.

Water

My Department has made substantial progress on how we manage our water quality and our water services. Central to this is establishment of Irish Water as a separate company from its parent, Ervia, being in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility to be known as Uisce Éireann.

An industrial relations agreement, which will assist in ensuring a stable operational environment is maintained, is in place on a Framework for the future delivery of water services between the Department, Uisce Éireann, the CCMA and union representatives.

In 2023, my Department is providing over €1.6 billion to Uisce Éireann for the delivery of water services. This includes €974 million in capital to allow them to continue their investment programme to modernise and expand the capacity of Ireland's water infrastructure through projects such as Ringsend, Arklow WWTPs and the Athlone Main Drainage Project, which will raise network capacities, increase water quality and bring us closer to compliance with European Directives.

This record level of investment will ensure that Uisce Éireann can support the delivery of the Government's housing objectives of 'Housing for All'. In addition, Uisce Éireann is taking additional actions to support housing connections to public water services through publishing capacity registers, engaging with the LDA on identifying land suitable for development and facilitating self-lay accreditation etc.

My Department also continues to invest directly in rural water services through the Rural Water Programme by allocating over €67 million in 2023. My Department will be launching a new Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme in the coming months. This will also include a new element to support the provision of wastewater treatment in non-sewered villages.

Local Government

Minister O'Donnell will shortly speak on matters related to Local Government but I would like to specifically mention the significant capital investment in fire and emergency services in 2023. The allocation will amount to €23.8 million, allowing greater progress on our programme for the construction/upgrading of fire stations, the procurement of fire appliances and other essential, specialised equipment, and the provision of enhanced communication facilities.

Also my Department, over the past 3 years, has worked closely with local authorities to provide an essential lifeline to local businesses in the form of a rates waiver. To end 2022 over €1.28billion has been routed through the Local Government Fund for this purpose.

Met Éireann

This year, some €56 million will be provided to Met Éireann enabling the provision of a range of meteorological services to customers, including monitoring, analysis and prediction of Ireland's weather and climate to ensure the quality, timeliness and reliability of these essential services.

Tailte Éireann and - An Coimisiún Toghcháin

Before I hand over to Minister O'Donnell and Minister Noonan I'd like to note the newly established Tailte Éireann and the Electoral Commission - An Coimisiún Toghcháin.

Tailte Éireann will provide the authoritative property registration system, national mapping and surveying infrastructure and property valuation service for the State.

An Coimisiún will be central to how Ireland's electoral system is administered, how it develops, and how it is safeguarded.

Conclusion

Chair, Members, I have kept my remarks as brief as possible and will now hand you over to Minister O'Donnell, who will speak to you on the important work being funded in Local Government and Planning.

Thank you.