**Programme for Government - *Our Shared Future***

**Department of Rural and Community Development Updates September 2024**

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| **Action** | **Update** | **Status** |
| Bring forward an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy. | The 2021 Town and Village Renewal (TVRS) scheme prioritised tackling vacancy and bringing vacant and derelict buildings back into use as multi-purpose community spaces.  A new Building Acquisition Measure (BAM) was introduced under the 2022 TVRS to support local authorities to purchase vacant and derelict buildings for future development as community facilities, and over €6m facilitated the purchase of 29 properties.  The BAM was made available to local authorities again in 2023 and just over €4.6m facilitated the purchase of 24 properties. The 2023 TVRS had a renewed focus on town centre economic and social vibrancy which was achieved by bringing vacant and derelict buildings back into use as community multi-purpose spaces through refurbishment and renovation. €20.4 million in funding was announced for 82 successful projects under the 2023 Scheme.  The priorities and focus of the 2024 scheme are currently being reviewed and it is scheduled to launch in October this year. | Completed |
| Develop a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy | The National Outdoor Recreation Strategy: [Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027](https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/43eee-embracing-irelands-outdoors-national-outdoor-recreation-strategy-2023-2027/#introduction) was launched in November 2022 and work is ongoing to deliver the 95 agreed actions over the lifetime of the Strategy. | Completed |
| Expand the Walks Scheme to achieve a target of 80 trails. | Target now exceeded with over 140 trails now approved for Walks Scheme. | Completed |
| Ensure that the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund supports the development of (water) projects. | Applications are not limited in terms of sector and a local authority or other body eligible under the rules of the Fund can make an application in relation to a water or wastewater project. | Completed |
| Publish and implement a new Rural Policy to build on the progress of the Action Plan for Rural Development to promote rural recovery and development in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. | [Our Rural Future](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/#our-rural-future-rural-development-policy-2021-2025): Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 was published in 2021.  Our Rural Future represents the Irish Government’s blueprint for a post-COVID-19 recovery and development of rural Ireland over the years ahead. It provides the framework to achieve the vision of transforming the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas.  Bi—annual progress reports and annual work programmes are published on [gov - Our Rural Future: Annual work programmes and progress reports (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/bcbca-our-rural-future-annual-work-programmes-and-progress-reports/) | Completed |
| Initiate a regular series of Rural Ideas Fora to foster ongoing contributions from communities to inform rural policy development and innovation. | Two Rural Ideas for per year have taken place on a range of themes which are material to rural development. | Completed |
| LEADER   * Prioritise a state-led Rural Development Programme to bridge the gap between the wind-up of the existing LEADER Programme and implementation of the new programme. * Simplify and reduce bureaucracy and promote the role of independent Local Action Groups (LAGs), while ensuring that strong accountability and transparency mechanisms are in place to protect taxpayers’ money. * Prioritise national and local government support to pursue extra EU funding opportunities through Community-led Local Development (CLLD). * Apply to the EU for exemption from State Aid rules constraining the potential of the LEADER Programme to help communities and small business, particularly in the context of COVID-19. * Review capital funding restrictions under the LEADER Programme for broadband. * Increase the Rate of Aid available to private enterprise through LEADER from 50% to 75% for capital projects. | The Transitional LEADER Programme which came into effect on 1 April 2021 operated to end of March 2024.  A total of €70 million in funding was made available over this programming period.  This funding included €20 million in European Union Recovery Instrument (EURI) funding.  The maximum rate of aid available to private enterprise through LEADER has been increased from 50% to 75%.  The 2023 – 2027 LEADER programme is now operational. | Completed |
| Expand the provision of free-to-use wireless internet connectivity in rural areas, through the roll-out of Broadband Connection Points (BCPs), WiFi4EU public Wi-Fi networks and the Digital Innovation Programme. | The rollout of the BCPs and WiFi4EU networks has been completed with 294 BCPs currently live and over 1,170 WiFI4EU hotspots available nationwide. | Completed |
| Publish the Islands’ Action Plan in 2020, so that action can be taken on improving connectivity, transport links, education, job creation and fully exploiting the potential for tourism on our islands. | [Ár nOileáin Bheo, (Our Living Islands)](https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/a7188-our-living-islands/#policy-and-action-plan-documents) National Islands Policy and Action Plan 2023 – 2026 was published following its launch on the 7th of June 2023. This whole-of-government policy was developed following an extensive consultation process with the island communities and other stakeholders.  The policy is underpinned by five high-level strategic objectives, identified by islanders themselves as being of key importance for the sustainable future of their communities:  1. Revitalise population levels on the islands  2. Diversify island economies  3. Enhance Health and Wellbeing services  4. Empower Island Communities  5. Build smart sustainable futures  The policy is accompanied by an Action Plan for the period 2023-2026 that includes 80 time-bound actions which will be implemented by various stakeholders, led by a nominated government department or State agency. | Completed |
| Ensure that the Local Improvement Scheme is funded into the future. | The Local Improvement Scheme has continued to receive record funding.  In April 2024, the Minister announced an allocation of €40 million for repairs and improvement works on non-public rural roads and laneways under the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS). The allocation of funds is across 2024 and 2025.  This investment demonstrates the continued commitment of the Minister to vital road infrastructure in rural Ireland, providing access to people’s homes and farms.  This announcement marked a total allocation of almost €170 million to the Local Improvement Scheme since its reintroduction in 2017. Up to the end of 2023, LIS has upgraded over 4,000 non-public roads and lanes, benefiting nearly 20,000 landowners and residents in these rural areas. | Ongoing |
| Establish a Rural Youth Assembly, as part of a National Youth Assembly, to allow young people in rural Ireland to identify and influence policy issues that impact on them and their future.  (DRCD lead, with DCEDIY) | Three Rural Youth Assembly meetings have taken place to date.  The fourth annual Rural Youth Assembly will take place in Q4 2024. | Completed |
| Encourage young people to participate in community development initiatives through special awards for youth led involvement, e.g. the Tidy Towns Youth Award. | A new Young Persons in Tidy Towns award was incorporated in to the 2021 competition.  This award is now a permanent fixture in the TidyTowns Special Awards. | Completed |
| Build on Ireland’s first ever National Social Enterprise Policy. | [*Trading for Impact*](https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/7abc2-trading-for-impact-national-social-enterprise-policy-2024-2027/)*:* the National Social Enterprise Policy 2024-2027 was launched in July 2024.  The policy is informed by an updated evidence base comprising an OECD Review of Social Enterprise in Ireland, a National Economic and Social Council’s (NESC) Review of Social Enterprise on the Island of Ireland and a Baseline Data Collection Exercise.  An extensive consultation process took place which included six Regional Stakeholder Events, a series of bi-lateral meetings between Department officials and key stakeholders, and a public consultation which received 44 submissions.  This new policy has been designed to cultivate and sustain a strong and impactful social enterprise sector in Ireland that enriches the social, environmental, and economic wellbeing of our communities.  The policy details five key objectives:  1. Building Awareness of Social Enterprise  2. Growing and Sustaining Social Enterprise  3. Supporting the Green Transition  4. National and International Engagement  5. Impact Measurement  The Minster also launched a new €2m Dormant Accounts funded ‘Growing Social Enterprise' fund to provide capital supports that assist enterprises to achieve their social, environmental and economic objectives, and to improve their sustainability and impact.  The fund will benefit up to 100 social enterprises nationwide, with grants ranging from €1,500 to €100,000 | Ongoing |
| Publish a strategy to support volunteering, including the development of a comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice. | [The National Volunteering Strategy](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3cba6-national-volunteering-strategy/#:~:text=The%20National%20Volunteering%20Strategy%20(2021%20-%202025)%20sets%20out%20a) 2021-2025 was published on the 5th December 2020.  This Strategy seeks to develop and enhance the role of the volunteer and encourage volunteering as a means of developing vibrant communities. It will provide the framework and the building blocks to realise this vision, through the implementation of the five strategic objectives.  1. To increase participation and diversity in volunteering including embracing new trends and innovation  2. To facilitate, develop and support the Volunteering Environment so that it contributes to vibrant and sustainable communities  3. To recognise, celebrate and communicate the value and impact of volunteers and volunteering in all its forms  4. To promote ethical and skills-based international volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland  5. To improve policy coherence on volunteering across Government both nationally and locally  Annual updates are published on [gov - National Volunteering Strategy – Annual Updates (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2204a-national-volunteering-strategy-annual-update-2021/) | Completed |
| Introduce, on phased basis, a number of projects in approach to Community Development Projects. | In March 2021, a new Community Development pilot initiative was announced promoting an autonomous approach to community work with marginalised communities.  €1m funding was made available to the three-year pilot programme in 2022 and seven successful pilot organisations were allocated funding of €125,000 each. A further €1m was secured in 2023 for community development supports and the pilot initiative was expanded to support three additional projects.  An independent evaluator, Values Lab was chosen to evaluate the three-year pilot programme. The final Programme Evaluation Report will capture the experience, learning and impact of the Programme, with particular reference to the community work underpinning the programme  In June 2022, the Empowering Communities Programme (ECP) was launched and aims to enhance community access to key services, and empower local communities to craft their own response to area based poverty, social exclusion and the resulting consequences, with the support of the relevant Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and Local Development Company (LDC). Initially, a budget of €2 million was approved for funding the 14 small areas. The programme has since been expanded and now focuses on 17 small areas experiencing significant disadvantage, identified using the Pobal HP Deprivation Index and with regard to geographic spread.  The Department will host a Showcase event on Monday, 23rd September 2024 in Athlone to highlight the important work and impact of both programmes. | CDP – Ongoing  ECP – Ongoing |
| Commit to the introduction of an annual small capital grants programme administered through local authorities for the maintenance, improvement, and upkeep of community centres. | Over €45m was awarded to over 860 projects under Community Centre Investment Fund in 2022 for the refurbishment of existing community centres across the county. Progress is being made on bringing these projects to completion in the coming months and to date over 200 of the projects have been completed in full.  The focus in 2023 moved to funding the construction of new build community centres. 22 applications were received and an announcement of the successful projects will be made shortly.  A further €20m was announced in June 2024 for the refurbishment of existing community centres across the county. The application process opened on July 29th and closed on September 5th. | Ongoing |
| Support and enhance the Social Innovation Fund Ireland programme to help secure additional philanthropic funding sources specifically for community-based programmes and projects in the areas of climate justice, rural and community development. | Rethink Ireland (formerly Social Innovation Fund Irealnd) has been funded from the Dormant Accounts Fund through contractual funding arrangements since its creation in 2013.  The current five-year contract between Rethink Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development runs from January 2021 to December 2025 and provides match funding to a maximum of €5.5m per annum.  In 2023, the Department provided a total of €5.5m to Rethink Ireland from the Dormant Accounts Fund. | Ongoing |
| Refine and build on a range of programmes to support communities including CLÁR, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Community Service Programme (CSP) and Community Enhancement Programme (CEP). | The Department of Rural and Community Development published the Indecon Report on the Review of the **Community Services Programme (CSP)** in September 2020. Following this review, the Department and Pobal, who administer the programme on behalf of the Department, undertook extensive stakeholder consultation in relation to a restructuring of the CSP programme.  In late 2022, existing CSP supported organisations were invited to apply to transition to the restructured programme. A new funding rate allocation model for the CSP programme was introduced from 1st January 2023, as an alternative to the former flat rate payment model. An open call for applications followed in March 2023, which resulted in an addition 14 new organisation approved entry under the CSP, supporting 13 managers and 23 full time equivalent (FTE) positions.  In September 2023, the Department announced €1m funding to expand the programme, which resulted in 32 existing organisations benefitting from additional funding towards the cost of supporting 7 managers and 35 FTE positions from June 2024.  In addition, the Department reviewed the impact of the increase of €1.40 per hour to the minimum wage level from 1st January 2024, which was announced as part of the 2024 budget statement. As a result of this review, on 13 December last, it was announced that the contributions to FTEs and Managers in CSP supported organisations in receipt of both the higher and medium rates of funding would see an increase to their contribution.  The CSP currently supports 430 community organisations with funding of €53m for 2024.  The 2024 **CLÁR Programme** was launched in March with a total budget of €7.8 million.  Applications across all measures are currently being assessed  The new **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)** 2024-2028 commenced on 1 January 2024 following an extensive procurement process for delivery of services. Throughout 2022 and 2023, the Department undertook an independent review of the SICAP 2018 - 2023 programme, as well as stakeholder consultation to inform the next programme iteration. SICAP 2024-2028 new target groups include people with a criminal history, people impacted by educational disadvantage and permanent residents of Ireland’s islands.  The new SICAP programme builds on the previous iteration which saw significant investment into communities. A 10% increase in funding was secured for SICAP for 2022, the largest increase since the programme was launched. In 2023, a further increase of €1.3m was secured and for 2024, another €3m was secured. This represents a total increase of €8.3 million in funding for the programme over 3 years, with annual funding now totalling €47.4m in 2024.  Funding of €5 million was allocated for the delivery of SICAP services to new arrivals from Ukraine in 2022. Additional funding of €10m was then secured for continued delivery of these services in 2023, and a further €10m has been secured for new arrivals funding in 2024. Following feedback and engagements with Local Development Companies (LDCs) on utilisation of this funding, the Department later issued revised guidance confirming that the funding could also be used to deliver SICAP services to International Protection candidates (IPAS candidates) as well as Ukrainian arrivals.  At the Department’s Welcoming New Communities event in Dublin Castle on July 15th, Minister Joe O’Brien announced an additional €1m in funding for allocation to LDC’s delivering SICAP services to New Arrivals. This funding has now been allocated, using the most up-to-date CSO data on the placement of New Arrivals across Ireland.  A €6 million **Local Enhancement Programme (LEP)** was launched in December 2023 to replace **the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP)** with funding allocated to over 3,500 projects across the country. | CSP – Ongoing  CLÁR – Ongoing  SICAP – Ongoing  CEP – Completed/  LEP - Ongoing |
| Support our library network to meet the needs of our ever-changing society and implement the public libraries strategy, Our Public Libraries 2022. | The new Public Library Strategy ‘[*The Library Is The Place’*](https://www.gov.ie/en/news/e6d8e-the-library-is-the-place-new-five-year-strategy-for-public-libraries-unveiled/) was published in July 2023 and it contains 66 actions. One of the key actions was the development of a new Libraries Capital Programme which was announced in April 2024 when funding of over €25m was approved to support infrastructure projects in 11 public libraries and the provision of 12 new mobile library vehicles.  The previous Libraries Capital Programme 2016-2022 provided funding of approximately €29m for 16 projects and 12 of these have been completed to date. A further two projects are currently under construction with Ennis expected to open in October and Stillorgan due to open in Q1 2026. The remaining two projects are at early stages and do not have opening dates as of yet.  Funding of €3.1m was provided in September 2022 to support the provision of the *My Open Library* service in 46 library branches. Some €2.2 million was approved to support the provision of the service in 17 new library branches and a further €900,000 was invested in enhancing the equipment in 29 branches that already had the service in place. The *My Open Library* service provides library access to members from 8am to 10pm, 365 days a year.  In November 2023, funding of €1.3m was approved to support the provision of new computers, laptops, iPads and other information and communication technology in public libraries across the country.  Funding of €3 million was announced in September 2020 to support a Small Scale Capital Works Programme in public libraries. To date, 28 of the 30 Local Authorities have completed the projects that were funded and the two remaining local authorities will complete their projects before the end of 2024. | Ongoing  Ongoing  Ongoing  Completed  Ongoing |
| Continue to develop and enhance the demand-led Senior Alerts Scheme and ensure that it adapts to changing demographics and technological advancements. | A new Senior Alerts Scheme launched in Q3 2021 and runs to Q3 2025.  The Department will continue to examine the future of the scheme in the context of a greater inter-departmental approach on future adaptive technology programmes. | Ongoing |
| Update legislative provisions with the Charities Regulator, to ensure that it has the necessary powers to increase trust and confidence in the management and administration of charities. | The Charities (Amendment) Act 2024 was signed into law by the President on 10th July 2024.  The process of commencing the provisions of the Act is now underway. | Ongoing |
| Carry out a comprehensive review of PPNs and LECPs to ensure they are fit for purpose for climate action and community development. | The PPN review, which included extensive consultation with stakeholders, was published in Q2 2022. The recommendations from the Structural Review, and additional actions identified in the sector, have been included in a new PPN Roadmap, implementation of which will commence this year.  Local and Economic Community Plans (LECPs) detail how Local Authorities will support economic and community development in their areas over the next six years. The Department hosted a number of training webinars in 2022 to support Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and local authority staff in the development of the new Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), with one event focusing on Climate Action/Environment. Updated guidelines on LECP were also issued, which focus on sustainable development and increased collaboration with communities.  The newest iteration of the LECPs is finalised in most local authority areas and all LCDCs are required to proof their plans from a sustainability and climate action perspective. The remaining local authorities are now getting approval of the final drafts through the Municipal Districts, SPCs and LCDCs and final approval by the full councils. It is expected that all LECPs will be in place by Q4 2024. A review of the LECPs can commence when all LECPs are in place. | PPNs – Completed  LCDC Ongoing |
| Widening the eligibility of the Bike to Work scheme | During 2021, the Department of Rural and Community Development, in collaboration with the Department of Transport, developed a €3m pilot initiative for the repair and sale of up-cycled bicycles as an alternative to the Bike to Work scheme for low income individuals and groups or those who are most marginalised or disadvantaged. The funding is being provided by the Department of Transport over a three-year period, with the pilot delivered via the Department of Rural and Community Development’s Community Services Programme.  Five organisations were approved under this pilot with contracts in place up to the end of December 2024. An interim evaluation was undertaken, full details of the report are available in the following link: [Upcycling of Bicycles and e-Bikes Pilot Initiative Evaluation report](https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2023/12/Upcycling-of-Bicycles-and-e-Bikes-Pilot-Initiative-EVALUATION-REPORT_.pdf). The report outlined that the pilot programme demonstrated innovative practice and supported the development of an infrastructure for bike refurbishment and re-use in social enterprises in Ireland, which would otherwise be difficult to achieve given the high set-up and premises costs required.  My Department is currently engaging with the Department of Transport and Pobal, who administer the programme on behalf of both Departments, in relation to the current expenditure under this pilot and potential future budgetary negotiations. | Ongoing |