

Opening Statement – 26 June 2024

Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan T.D.

Select Committee on Further Revised Estimates 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to present the 2024 Further Revised Estimate for the Connectivity and Communications Delivery programme of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. This Further Revised Estimate were required due to the recent transfer of marine planning related functions to my Department from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The 2024 Estimates in respect of the other Programme areas within my Department relating to Climate Action, Energy Transformation and Circular Economy Development were considered by the Select Committee on the Environment and Climate Action at its session yesterday, 25 June.

The aim of this Programme is to deliver world class connectivity and communications. To achieve this, an allocation of just over €409 million is being provided under Programme D for 2024. This total is comprised of €30.5 million current and €378.9 million in capital. The

funding aims to provide for the development of a secure digital communications and services infrastructure, that will contribute to future growth of the economy.

Key measures supported include:

- National Broadband Plan.
- Ireland's National Cyber Security Centre
- National Eircode system.
- Supporting a sustainable, nationwide post office network.
- Digital Hub Development Agency and the National Digital Research Centre.
- Establishment and implementation of a National Public Warning System.

The **National Broadband Plan** continues to receive the largest capital allocation within this programme with €343.5 million ringfenced to progress work under the Plan during 2024. This year's allocation, which is an increase of €63.9 million over the 2023 allocation of €279.6 million, is an indication of the Government's commitment to continuing the roll-out of our national high-speed broadband network. Up to 31st May this year, over 254,900 premises have been passed across all counties and over 83,500 premises have been connected. Premises located throughout the Country can now connect to the high-speed fibre network, meaning an increasing

number of homes and businesses nationwide can order and pre-order through local broadband service providers.

Due to the increased funding allocated this year National Broadband Ireland expects to have passed over 300,000 premises by the end of 2024. This represents over 50% of the rollout in the intervention area.

During 2024 National Broadband Ireland will commence survey and design activity on the following islands off the coasts of Donegal and Galway - Tory, Arranmore, Inishmore, Inishere, Inish Méain and Inishboffin. The Black Valley in County Kerry, that was the last place in the Country to be connected to the electricity grid in 1976, is not being left behind by the National Broadband Plan and will also be provided with high-speed fibre broadband in 2024.

The Government is on course to achieve its objective that by 2028, investment under the National Broadband Plan, supplemented by further investment by commercial operators will mean that access to Gigabit broadband is possible for every premises in Ireland.

Just under €11 million has been ringfenced in my Department's Estimates to fund the operational costs of the **National Cyber Security Centre** for 2024.

The National Cyber Security Centre is the lead Government agency for cyber security in the state. The main goal of the National Cyber

Security Centre is to actively detect, disrupt and defeat cyber threats targeting critical infrastructure and critical networks, including Government.

Since the 2021 Capacity Review of the National Cyber Security Centre, there has been significant progress in increasing the capabilities and resources of the Centre. Staffing has increased from 25 in 2021 to 55 at the end of 2023, and it is expected that staffing levels will reach 75 by the end of 2024.

The budget allocation for 2024 will support a range of measures, including the implementation of the Network and Information Systems 2 (NIS2) Directive and delivery of phase two of the National Cyber Security Strategy 2019 – 2024, post Mid Term Review.

The 2024 Estimates also includes an allocation of €10 million in respect of continued support for the **Post Office Network**. This is the second year of a three-year commitment under the Programme for Government to provide €10 million per annum from 2023 to 2025 to provide for a sustainable post office network as a key component of the economic and social infrastructure throughout Ireland.

€4.5 million is allocated in 2024, to facilitate payment of fines imposed by the **EU Court of Justice judgement** in respect of Ireland's failure to

transpose the European Electronic Communications Code Directive in time and failure to notify the Commission of the transposition.

In 2024, €4 million each is being provided for **Eircodes** and **Euro QCI projects**. The Eircodes allocation will provide for a number of key activities including the operation of the Postcode Management Licence Holder contract and external expertise to support the Department in assessing options for the long-term strategic delivery of Eircode post-2026 and a Data Impact Protection Assessment.

The allocation of €4 million for the QCI project is to fund a joint project between my Department and the EU to build a national quantum communication infrastructure for Ireland as part of DIGITAL Europe's EuroQCI, an EU-wide quantum communications infrastructure programme. The goal is to secure critical infrastructure against the threat of cybersecurity attacks due to advances in quantum computing power.

Funding of nearly €3.6 million is allocated for the **Digital Hub Development Agency** and €3.5 million for the **National Digital Research Centre**. In addition, just under €3 million to progress work on a national cell broadcast Public Warning System. When in place this system will provide information to the public on developments in the event of a major emergency or disaster which pose a significant and imminent threat to human life, property or the environment.

I am happy to take any questions relating to the 2024 estimate of expenditure for the Connectivity and Communications Delivery Programme.