

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Annual Report 2023



Coimisiún Thithe
an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Commission

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Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD
Ceann Comhairle



Senator Jerry Buttimer
Cathaoirleach of
Seanad Éireann

Introduction by Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach

We are pleased to present the Annual Report of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for 2023 pursuant to section 6 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003-2021 (the Commission Acts).

The report outlines the work of the Commission over the past year in performing its functions, specifically in relation to the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas, and providing members of the Houses with the services they need to carry out their work as legislators and representing their constituents.

The second annual report on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 is presented with this report. It shows the performance of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the breadth of its work in 2023. Over this period the Service continued to advance its strategic priorities through the delivery of modernised, effective, and responsive services to meet the evolving needs of the Houses and members.

We welcome the achievements over the past year and acknowledge the commitment and work in developing services and supporting the Houses and their members.

The financial accounts of the Commission, which have been audited by the C&AG, are presented at page 130. The accounts show that the cost of running the Houses of the Oireachtas in 2023 was €150.4 million against a budget of €174.8 million, resulting in a net underspend of €24.4 million, a 14% financial saving for the year.

As we stated in last year's report, an important focus of the Commission's work at the present time is the safety and security of members of the Houses when carrying out their work. The threats, intimidation and harassment experienced by members, directed towards female members in particular, is profoundly concerning. Above all else, elected members must be allowed to go about their work as legislators and representatives of their constituents safely and securely, free from any form of threats of violence or intimidating behaviour.

The increasingly abusive online environment undermines women's participation in politics in particular, with consequential implications for democratic representation. Women currently make up just 27% of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, 60 female members from a total of 220 members.

We have and will continue to put measures in place to support members to do the work for which they were elected without fearing for their personal safety or the safety of their staff. Last year the Commission established a scheme to support members of the Houses who wish to install additional security measures in their constituency offices and homes.

Given the increased climate of hostility experienced by members, last year we established a task force charged with examining the abuse and harassment experienced by those in public life, its causes, effects, and what action can be taken to help prevent it. Over the last 12 months the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life conducted an in-depth examination of the situation and presented its report to the Commission in May. The [report](#) lays out, in the starkest of terms, the scale of the problem and its effect on those subjected to threats and intimidating behaviour.

The Task Force presented a series of recommendations to tackle the issue of threats of violence and intimidation against elected members and those standing for election. We will establish an Implementation and Oversight Group to drive implementation of these recommendations. The Commission will give the highest priority to implementing the recommendations as it believes that it is of paramount importance to ensure the safety and security of members, their staff and others involved in political life.

We are grateful to Task Force members, and the Chairperson, Ms Nóirín O'Sullivan, for their thorough examination of all the issues involved and their commitment to this important work.

As a workplace and a public place we are committed to providing an inclusive and accessible environment for members, staff and all who visit the Leinster House complex. Last year the Houses of the Oireachtas was awarded Autism-Friendly Accreditation for the parliamentary complex by AslAm, Ireland's National Autism Charity. The accreditation recognises that Leinster House presents an Autism-friendly environment, welcoming and accessible to autistic people.

This was a joint endeavour by members and staff, supported by the Joint Committee on Autism. In its final report to the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Committee made a number of recommendations to improve services for autistic people. Among its recommendations the Committee recommended that the Commission work towards achieving Autism-Friendly Accreditation for the parliamentary complex. Over past year the Service worked towards this objective by implementing the required actions, including Autism-awareness training for members and staff.

This important achievement sets the standard for all public bodies to ensure their public buildings are open and accessible to all. We are grateful to Senator Micheál Carrigy, Cathaoirleach of the Joint Committee on Autism, and members of the Committee for leading this initiative. We also acknowledge the collaborative efforts of members and staff in the parliamentary community. We will ensure that accessibility continues to be a priority in the day-to-day management and maintenance of the complex.

In December we were honoured to unveil a bronze bust of Lord David Trimble in Leinster House to mark 25 years since he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with Mr John Hume in recognition of their roles in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement. The bust of Lord Trimble is displayed alongside the bust of Mr Hume, unveiled in 2022 to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. It is fitting that we in the Houses of the Oireachtas should thank and honour both men for their contribution to peace.

The sculptures are on display in the public area where visitors to the Houses can view them and reflect on both men's achievements, especially young people and school groups who will learn about both leaders and their visionary work in the pursuit of peace.

As the Houses resumed full parliamentary operations over the last year, we were pleased to welcome heads of state and other dignitaries to Leinster House. We had the honour of welcoming H.E. Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, and H.E. Joseph R. Biden, President of the United States of America, to address joint sittings of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

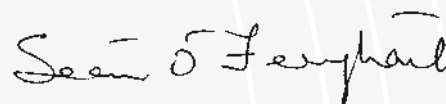
We were also pleased to host the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments in September 2023. More than 400 parliamentarians together with Speakers or Deputy Speakers from parliaments of the member states of the Council of Europe met in Dublin over three days for the conference.

Our membership of interparliamentary associations provides a forum for dialogue and cooperation between members of the Houses and parliamentarians at an international level and is an important aspect of the parliamentary work of members.

We are now in the final year of 33rd Dáil and 26th Seanad. An important objective of the Commission and the Service over the next period is preparing for the transition to the 34th Dáil and 27th Seanad following the general elections to both Houses. As well as the normal change in membership that follows an election, consistent with the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2023 there will be 14 additional members of the 34th Dáil. An important priority in the post-election period is to ensure the provision of services to support members, in particular newly elected members, in undertaking their legislative and representative roles in Dáil and Seanad Éireann.

In conclusion, we would like to thank members of the Commission and their committees for their work over the past year.

We would like to acknowledge the achievements of the Service over the past year. We express our appreciation to the Secretary General, the Management Board and staff of the Service for their work in delivering the services required to support the Houses of the Oireachtas and the work of members.



Seán Ó Feargháil TD

Ceann Comhairle



Senator Jerry Buttimer

Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann



Peter Finnegan
Secretary General
(Chair of the Board)

Secretary General's Overview

Annual Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 – A Parliament Working Effectively for the People

I am pleased to present the second progress report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 – A Parliament Working Effectively for the People.

This report was prepared pursuant to section 16(1)(k) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003-2021 (the Commission Acts), which requires me, as Secretary General of the Service, to provide an annual progress report on implementation of the Plan to the Commission.

Overall I can report good progress on the delivery of our actions to implement the Strategic Plan. 2023 saw important work towards achieving our strategic objectives against the backdrop of a continuously changing operating environment, with staff wholeheartedly embracing the challenges and opportunities placed upon them over the course of the past year.

In 2023, the Commission's net outturn was €150.4 million, in line with the Commission's three-year budget of €462m for the period 2022-2024. At the end of last year, the Commission employed 705 FTE staff and 473 FTE members' and party staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance.

In supporting the sittings and business of the Houses and their Committees, the Service continued to deliver procedural supports and advice of the highest

standard. Over the course of the past year we have seen a continued high level of parliamentary activity:

- there were 100 sittings of the Dáil and 98 sittings of the Seanad over a total of 1495 hours across both Houses.
- there were over 3,000 witnesses in attendance at 973 meetings of Oireachtas Committees.
- more than 60,000 Parliamentary Questions were tabled.
- there were 93 Bills initiated and 36 Bills enacted.
- the Library and Research Service responded to 1,152 requests for information and research.
- the number of visitors to the Houses exceeded 54,000.

Promoting the wellbeing and resilience of the parliamentary community while supporting the business needs of the organisation has also remained a core priority for the Service. In 2023, the Service continued to successfully roll out the now well-established blended working practices introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic. We further introduced a Right to Disconnect Policy, recognising the unique nature of working in the national parliament.

Our HR People Strategy for the 2023-2024 period was launched last year to assist the Service in building an inclusive and well supported parliamentary community through building the parliamentary workforce of the future. This is supported

by the Learning and Development Strategy 2023-2024 that aims to ensure that all staff have the knowledge, skills and attributes to carry out their roles efficiently and professionally. The Members' Services One-Shop-Shop, Catering and Printing services, and Members' HR all continue to provide vital services to members to support them in their work and as employers of staff.

Additionally, in 2023, an Internal Communications Working Group (ICWG) was established to review internal communication within the organisation, identify areas for improvement and develop an action plan to deliver these improvements. This strategy and action plan was launched in November.

At the heart of all of these initiatives is a recognition that the people who make up our parliamentary community are our greatest asset.

During 2023, we also continued to strengthen our culture of dignity and respect, diversity and inclusion. As part of this work, the Service proceeded to provide a range of supports to staff and members of the public. These include the key roles of an Access Officer, Disability Liaison Officer for staff, a dedicated EDI team and two in house Irish Sign Language Interpreters.

Moreover, the Openness and Inclusion Steering Group continued to further its educational, access and engagement agenda. This includes five official placement programmes in place in the Oireachtas, such as: the Student Placement Programme for members; the Transition Year Programme; the Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme; WAM (Willing, Able, Mentoring) Programme; the ISL and Trinity College Deaf Studies Programme, and the Traveller and Roma Internship programme.

The OWL programme continues to be hugely successful based on the support and contribution of everyone in the Houses of the Oireachtas and the HR team who currently manage the programme on a daily basis. In February 2024, the programme was the recipient of the Advancing Disability Equality Award at the Irish Centre for Diversity's National Diversity and Inclusion Awards.

Throughout 2023, we also worked with Aslam, Ireland's Autism Charity, to make the Leinster House complex more accessible for autistic people. As a result, in December 2023, The Houses of the Oireachtas achieved Autism-Friendly Accreditation from AsIAM, who will continue to measure our progress and identify further steps we can take to support the ongoing improvement of the physical and sensory environment of the Leinster House complex.

In order to enhance the access currently provided by the parliament to the Deaf Community, in 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas' Irish Sign Language team set out to create an Irish Sign Language glossary of parliamentary terminology.

Accommodation remained a challenge for us. In 2023, the Head of Facilities Management and Business Continuity continued engagement with the OPW towards working to develop a long-term Estate Strategy for the Oireachtas complex. As part of this engagement, current and likely future needs are assessed on an ongoing basis. The sustainability team and the Facilities Management Unit have further worked closely with the OPW in 2023 to implement energy management projects and initiatives.

In December, we launched our first Climate Action Roadmap as part of our commitment to make the Houses of the Oireachtas a more sustainable workplace. The Roadmap sets out how the Service will continue to improve its environmental performance by using less energy and less resources in delivering its services.

Numerous public events took place throughout 2023. These events helped strengthen public engagement and raise awareness of the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The final initiative of Seanad100 – “Minority Voices, Major Changes” programme took place in 2023, with a ceremony hosted in the Oireachtas Library reading room on 22 February, where the Institute of Public Administration publication *100 Bliain de Sheanad Éireann 1922-2022* was launched by the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann.

The Houses of the Oireachtas marked 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement with a range of public engagement events and initiatives during April and May, including with a showcase of Herstory’s ‘Peace Heroines’ exhibition to honour the peace women of Northern Ireland.

In April, the OPLA hosted, in conjunction with the Council of the Bar of Ireland, the OPLA and Bar of Ireland Legal Workshop for members. Topics covered included the law on private papers, privilege for utterances, coercive control and harassment, data protection, ethics, and the rules for politically exposed persons.

In October, the PBO held a post-Budget stand in the Coffee Dock in LH2000 further to the publication of its preliminary review of Budget 2024 published on Budget Day. Staff members of the PBO provided information on

the Budget and answered queries from members and staff on their budget queries.

Our work on international parliamentary diplomacy continued to grow in strength over the course of the past year. There were 33 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Plenary and Committee meetings attended in 2023. The Protocol Unit managed and supported 28 incoming visits and addresses to the Houses during 2023.

On 13 April, on invitation from the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD, and the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, the President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden Jr, addressed a joint sitting of the Houses of the Oireachtas as part of his visit to Ireland.

During 28-29 September, we hosted the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (ECPPE) at the Convention Centre Dublin. More than 60 Speakers or Deputy Speakers attended the two-day conference, which was delivered in partnership with colleagues at PACE.

Cyber security remained a key focus for the Service. In 2023 we began implementation of the Oireachtas Cyber Security Strategy and Roadmap through a range of initiatives. These included the launch of the Service’s first dedicated quarterly Cyber Security Newsletter, as well as the launch of Cyber Security Awareness month in October. To further support implementation of the Strategy and Roadmap, in 2023, we also established a Cyber Security Programme Board, which met on a regular basis throughout the year. The Board is chaired by the Service’s Deputy Secretary General.

As part of our ongoing commitment towards becoming a digitally transformed parliament, throughout 2023, the Service's Digital Transformation Programme remained a key driver in transforming the way we work, with 2023 being a building year for a lot of Digital Transformation projects. As the Digital Parliament Programme progressed in 2023, more Oireachtas services also moved to the cloud. These moves mean improved productivity, enhanced security, facilitated collaboration, better performance, and greater reliability and resilience for IT services.

The Service is committed to growing its capacity to work through the first official language of the State, the Irish language. During 2023 implementation of the Rannóg 2024 Plan continued with the objective of publishing official translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas.

To advance the Strategic Outcome 'Toward a Bilingual Parliament' the Library and Research Service (L&RS) was commissioned to carry out a comparative study of bilingual parliaments. Completion of the analysis for the study took place in 2023, with a number of recommendations issuing in respect of areas of activity which will allow us to move progressively towards a bilingual Oireachtas.

In July, Rannóg an Aistriúcháin further hosted representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas, Senedd Cymru, the Welsh Government, the First Legislative Counsel, Wales, and The Office of the Advocate General, Malta for the first 'Oireachtas Colloquium on Bilingual Parliaments'.

Work also progressed to facilitate an increase in the amount of Irish spoken in both Houses, with full reports from the two 'An Ghaeilge sa Teach' established in 2022 being published in 2023.

The Bilingualism in Technology Policy, which aims to ensure early analysis of projects to guarantee timely identification of bilingual requirements, was further advanced in 2023. Future systems development such as Dáil Journals, Seanad systems and Committee portals will also include bilingualism.

I am pleased to report that overall, the Service made significant progress in supporting the work of the Houses, their Committees and members; in supporting our parliamentary community; in developing and using new technologies, and in strengthening our public engagement. I am very mindful of the flexibility and effort of all staff, I want to acknowledge and thank them for their outstanding work, their unstinting commitment, professionalism, and dedication.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the members of the Management Board and Audit Committee for their ongoing commitment and support. I also wish to thank the members of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for their support over the past year. Working together, significant progress has been made in 2023 and I am confident that we can build on this during 2024, the last year of our current strategic plan, in order to deliver on our vision of 'a Parliament working effectively for the People'.



Peter Finnegan

*Clerk of Dáil Éireann and
Secretary General of the Houses
of the Oireachtas Service*

Our Governance Framework

The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (the Commission) is the body responsible for the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas and is the governing body of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. The Commission was established in 2004 as an independent statutory body under the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003. It is accountable to the Houses of the Oireachtas for the performance of its functions.

The Commission is responsible for determining financial and administrative policy for the delivery of programmes and services to the Houses and their members to support them in carrying out their parliamentary functions. It also oversees the implementation of those policies by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (the Service).

The Commission consists of 11 members. The Ceann Comhairle serves as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Commission.

Commission members serve in a corporate capacity and do not represent their parties, groups, or their own interests at this forum. Commission members carry out a valuable role in communicating information about Commission policies and decisions through the parliamentary system.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service (the Service) is the public service body that provides professional advice, procedural and administrative services and facilities to the Commission, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and their Committees and to members of the Houses.

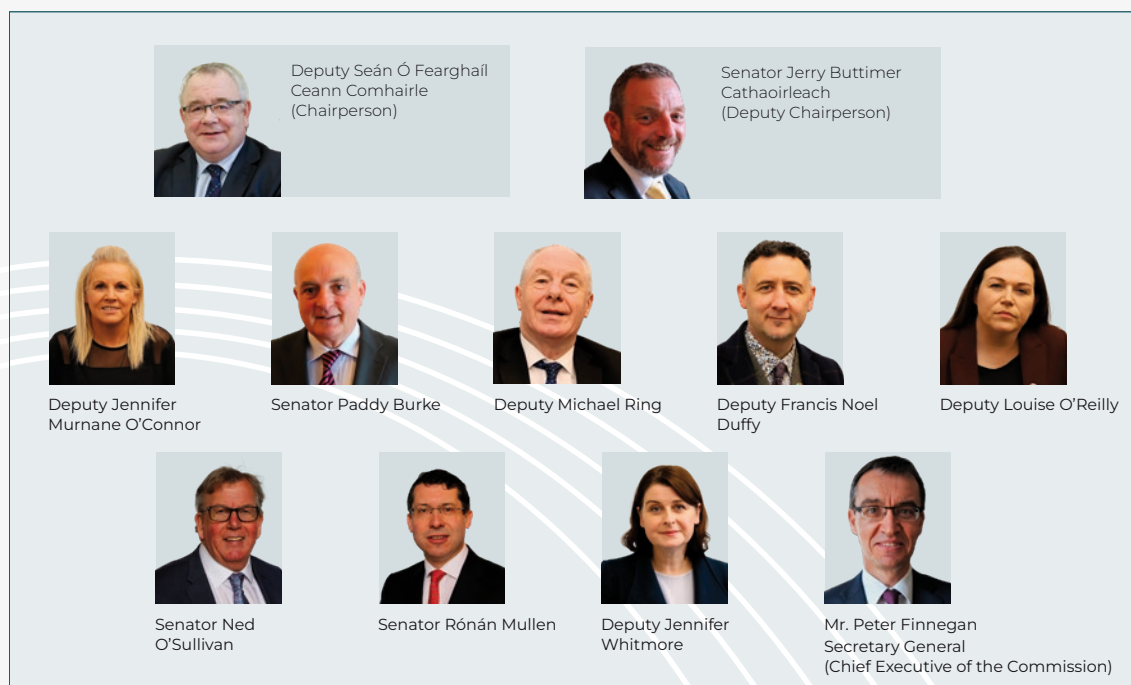
The Service is headed by the Clerk of the Dáil and Secretary General. It is staffed by 652 Civil Servants of the State and 53 State industrial staff (full-time equivalents) whose terms and conditions of employment are set down in the General Civil Service Statutory Code, the Staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Act 1959 and the Commission Acts 2003 to 2021.

There are 473 political staff working full-time in either Leinster House or in members' constituency offices who are employed directly by the members, or the relevant political party, and who are paid by the Commission.

The Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service

The Secretary General has responsibility for managing the Service on a day-to-day basis and for implementing Commission policies. The Secretary General is also the Chief Executive and a member of the Commission, the Clerk of Dáil Éireann, and the Accounting Officer in respect of Commission expenditure.

Members of the Commission (June 2024)



Management Board

The Secretary General is assisted in the overall management of the Service by the Management Board.

The top-level management structure consists of the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General, and five Assistant Secretaries reporting to the Secretary General.

The Management Board comprises the Secretary General (Chair of the Board), the Deputy Secretary General, four Assistant Secretaries, the Clerk of Seanad Éireann, a Principal Officer who is the chair of the Principal Officer Network in the Service, and one external member of the Board appointed by the Secretary General.

The Board has overall responsibility for implementation of the strategic plan for the Service. It oversees and accounts for the performance of the Service through

collective leadership. It also decides on issues of strategic, operational, and financial importance, which may then be referred to the Commission for decision as appropriate.

The Management Board has established five strategic committees, each chaired by a board member, to support it in carrying out its functions: Governance, Performance and Accountability Strategic Committee (GPA); Engagement, Sustainability and Campus Development Strategic Committee (ESCD); People and Organisation Strategic Committee (P&O); Technology and Digital Transformation Strategic Committee (TDT); and Coiste Straitéiseach an Oireachtais Dhátheangaigh (CSOD). The Strategic Committees were established to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to the management of strategic and operational issues in the Service that have a cross-divisional dimension.

Members of the Management Board (June 2024)



The work of the Management Board and its committees is driven by the policies adopted by the Commission, as well as by the strategies and priorities set out in the Strategic and Action Plans for the Service 2022-2024. Members of the Management Board and other senior managers in the Service attend Commission meetings as required.

The Role of the Commission

The role of the Commission under the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts is to provide for the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas, to act as the governing body of the Service, to consider and determine policy in relation to the Service, and to oversee the implementation of that policy by the Secretary General.

The founding Commission legislation in 2003 led, in summary, to two consequences: (i) the Commission became the sanctioning authority for expenditure and for deciding on staff numbers, provision of services and related matters (this authority formerly rested with the Department of Finance); and (ii) the system for the allocation of budgets to the Houses of the Oireachtas changed from the annual Civil Service Estimates and “Vote” process to the provision of a three-year budget drawn from the Central Fund. A new budget is set in legislation every three years following negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The budget is approved by the Commission and the necessary amending legislation is then passed by both Houses. The Commission’s current three-year budget allocation is €462m for the period 2022-2024.

Membership of the Commission

The Commission consists of 11 members:

- the Chairman of Dáil Éireann (*ex officio* member) (Chairperson of the Commission);
- the Chairman of Seanad Éireann (*ex officio* member) (Deputy Chairperson);
- the Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (*ex officio* member) (Chief Executive of the Commission);
- one member of the Houses of the Oireachtas appointed by the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (the Minister's representative);
- four ordinary members appointed by Dáil Éireann; and
- three ordinary members appointed by Seanad Éireann.

The Commission operates on the general principle that it seeks to support the Houses and all members equally in carrying out their role as elected representatives. Members of the Commission (excluding *ex officio* members) qualify for an annual allowance. The Minister's representative qualifies for an allowance if they are not a serving Minister of State.

Functions of the Commission

The legislation sets out certain specific functions of the Commission, including to:

- oversee ongoing expenditure by the Houses;
- keep annual accounts;
- pay salaries and expenses of members, their staff, and the staff of the Service;

- perform functions in relation to civil service staff of the Commission;
- produce and publish strategic plans, annual reports, annual estimates, and produce handbooks and information relevant to the business of the Houses of the Oireachtas for members of the Houses;
- provide translation services in respect of Acts of the Oireachtas and Statutory Instruments;
- make fiscal and economic information, analysis and advice available to the Houses of the Oireachtas and Oireachtas Committees;
- prepare and publish guidelines for members on the use of publicly funded services and facilities, and to specify charges for same, following a dissolution of the Dáil;
- exercise certain functions regarding secretarial facilities for members and qualifying parties, for example, the allocation of resources under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members and the provision of ICT, printing and graphic design facilities;
- exercise certain legal functions, including participation in legal proceedings where necessary and arranging for the provision of legal advice;
- appoint the Clerk of Dáil Éireann on the recommendation of the Ceann Comhairle from among the list of names selected by the Top-Level Appointments Committee (TLAC), following an open competition organised by the TLAC; and
- appoint the Clerk of Seanad Éireann, Clerk-Assistant of Dáil Éireann and Clerk-Assistant of Seanad Éireann on the recommendation of the Ceann Comhairle or Cathaoirleach, as appropriate.

Matters outside the Remit of the Commission

The Commission does not have the authority to:

- set members' salaries or allowances
- set staff pay, conditions or pensions
- control or manage any building works – this function is carried out by the Office of Public Works (OPW) for all government departments and offices.

In addition, the Commission does not have a role in the day-to-day management of the Service. This is the responsibility of the Secretary General and the Management Board.

Transparency and Accountability

The Commission is accountable to the Houses of the Oireachtas in the performance of its functions. It publishes an annual report which is laid before both Houses and published on the Oireachtas website. The annual report sets out information on the work carried out by the Service in supporting the Houses and members, as well as accounting for expenditure of public funds in the running the Houses for that particular year.

The Commission, through the Secretary General, submits its accounts to the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31 March each year for auditing. The Commission is accountable to the Committee of Public Accounts of Dáil Éireann for the findings of the public audit and is accountable to the relevant Oireachtas Committees in respect of its strategic plan and related policy matters.

Commission meeting agendas and minutes are published to the Houses of the Oireachtas website. The Commission is also subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Code of Conduct for Commission Members

The Commission is governed by a Code of Conduct that establishes ethical standards to guide the conduct of its members, both collectively and individually, in performing their functions.

The principles on which the Code is based are responsibility, integrity, loyalty, commitment, compliance, information, and administration. As members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Commission members are also bound by the Codes of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Ethics Acts by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, as appropriate. As Designated Directors under the Ethics Acts, Commission members are required to provide an annual statement of their registrable interests to the Chair of the Commission and to the Standards in Public Office Commission.

Disclosure of Interests by Commission Members

Under its Code of Conduct, and in addition to compliance with the requirements under the Ethics in Public Office Acts, Commission members must disclose any material interest that they or any connected person may have in any matter under consideration at a meeting, or otherwise in matters concerning the functions of the Commission. All disclosures of interests are recorded in the minutes of Commission meetings which are published on the Houses of the Oireachtas website when approved.







Committees of the Commission

The Commission has two key standing advisory committees: a Finance Committee, which considers quarterly financial reports and submits them to the Commission for approval; and an Audit Committee, which oversees and advises on risk management, internal controls (including the internal audit function and matters identified by external audit), and value for money. The Audit Committee was established on a statutory basis pursuant to section 10 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2009. It reports annually to the Commission and its reports are published on the website. The Commission's Finance and Audit Committees meet on a quarterly basis. Further details on the work of the Audit Committee in 2023 can be found at Appendix III. The Commission may also establish sub-Committees as necessary to assist it in carrying out its responsibilities.

Current Membership of the Commission

Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl Ceann Comhairle	Chairperson <i>Ex officio</i> member
Senator Jerry Buttimer Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann	Deputy Chairperson <i>Ex officio</i> member
Mr Peter Finnegan Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service	Chief Executive <i>Ex officio</i> member
Senator Paddy Burke	Seanad member
Deputy Francis Noel Duffy	Minister's representative
Senator Rónán Mullen	Seanad member
Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor	Dáil member
Deputy Louise O'Reilly	Dáil member
Senator Ned O'Sullivan	Seanad member
Deputy Michael Ring	Dáil member
Deputy Jennifer Whitmore	Dáil member

Members of the Audit Committee (June 2024)

	Mr Pat McLoughlin (external member and Chair)		
	Deputy Francis Noel Duffy		Ms Noreen Fahy (external member)
			Mr Cyril Maybury (external member)
			
			Senator Victor Boyhan
	Deputy Emer Higgins		Mr Charles Hearne (Staff of the Service)
			Deputy Rose Conway Walsh

Overview of the Work of the Commission in 2023

The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission is the statutory body responsible for the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Commission oversees ongoing expenditure by the Houses and provides strategic direction on the provision of services to the Houses and their members. It also has responsibility for the employment of staff of the Service.

In carrying out its statutory responsibility to oversee the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Commission normally meets at least once a month when the Houses are sitting or as may be necessary for the effective performance of its functions.

Commission meeting agendas and minutes are published on the website. Attendance at meetings in 2023 is set out in Appendix VI of this report. The Commission has continued to meet virtually during this period.

In 2023 the Commission held 9 meetings. The matters dealt with can be summarised as follows:

Membership of Commission Sub-groups

- Appointment of members to fill vacancies in the membership of the Finance Committee, the Audit Committee and the Print Users' Council

Commission Appointments

- Appointment of Deputy Chairperson of the Commission
- Appointment of Assistant Secretary, Corporate and Members' Services, Houses of the Oireachtas Service

Financial Performance

- Quarterly financial reports from the Finance Committee and examination of detailed information on spending by the Houses against spending forecast
- Commission's Annual Accounts for 2022
- Commission's Statement of Estimates for 2024

Strategy

- ICT Digital Transformation Strategy
- Cyber Security Strategy for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service

Policy and Services

- Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members
- Digital Transformation Workplan and Budget 2024
- Dignity and Respect Policy for the Parliamentary Workplace
- Public Representation Allowance (PRA): Guidelines for Members of the Houses on allowable expenditure under the PRA
- ICT Managed Print Service
- Data Protection Policy
- Action plan to pursue accreditation for the Houses of the Oireachtas as an Autism-Friendly Parliament
- Proposal to establish an Oireachtas LGBTQI+ Caucus
- Maternity and Paternity Leave for members of the Houses of the Oireachtas
- Service Level Agreement for the provision of legal services to members of the Houses

- Service Level Agreement for the provision of legal services to the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and Committees of the Houses
- Oireachtas TV
- Proposals from the Working Group on Portraiture and other Art

Annual Reporting

- Commission Annual Report 2022 to the Houses of the Oireachtas in accordance with section 6 of the Commission Acts
- Audit Committee Annual Report 2022 to the Commission in accordance with section 14A(10)(c) of the Commission Acts
- Secretary General's 2022 Annual Report to the Commission on Implementation of the Strategic Plan in accordance with section 16(1)(k) of the Commission Acts
- Women's Parliamentary Caucus Annual Report 2022
- Dignity and Respect Policy Steering Group Annual Report 2022

Human Resources for the Service

- Statutory consultation on Taoiseach's appointment to the post of Superintendent of the Houses of the Oireachtas

Legal

- Legal Proceedings involving the Houses of the Oireachtas

Business Case Approval

- Replacement of broadcasting hardware
- Replacement of software for the counting of votes for the vocational panel seats in Seanad elections
- Digital Signage Hardware Project
- Committees Digital Signage and Áis Linn
- Dáil Chamber and Committee Meeting Infrastructure
- Unified Communications System
- Chamber Digital Signage
- Committee Task Manager Planner

Accommodation

- Programme of work for the Leinster House campus
- Protocol for former members' access to Leinster House

Security Matters

- Security matters relating to the parliamentary precinct
- Personal safety and security of members of the Houses
- Actions to address personal security issues facing both serving and potential female members of the Houses

Annual Report on Implementation of Strategic Plan 2022-2024 – A Parliament Working Effectively for the People

Vision

A Parliament working effectively for the People.

Mission

To be an innovative and responsive parliamentary service that proudly supports the Houses of the Oireachtas in effectively discharging their constitutional functions; supports members as parliamentarians and representatives of the People; and promotes an accessible and engaged Parliament.

Values



Impartial



Accountable



Inclusive



People focused



Collegiate



Innovative

Secretary General's Report

Annual Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

A Parliament Working Effectively for the People

This report is prepared in accordance with section 16(1)(k) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003-2021 (the Commission Acts), which require me, as Secretary General, to present a progress report on the implementation of the Strategic Plan annually to the Commission.

This is the second progress report on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024. The report outlines our substantial progress towards achieving the five high-level strategic outcomes that underpin our three-year strategy, and the advancements made in 2023 towards achieving the 27 goals set out under the five strategic outcomes of Strategic Plan 2022-2024:

1. An Effective Parliament
2. An Inclusive and Well-Supported Parliamentary Community
3. An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament
4. A Digitally Transformed Parliament
5. Towards a Bilingual Parliament.

Throughout 2023, the organisation has continued to advance a range of initiatives in line with its commitments under the Strategic Plan 2022-2024. These include initiatives to support an effective legislative process, the implementation of the Oireachtas Cyber Security Strategy, the continuation of the Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) programme,

the Service's work towards achieving Autism-Friendly Accreditation and the launch of the organisation's first Climate Action Roadmap.

A number of key public engagement activities took place in 2023. These include the address of a Joint Sitting of the Houses by the President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden Jr in April 2023, as well as the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (ECPP) in September 2023. Furthermore, in September 2023, for the first time ever, a Joint Oireachtas Committee meeting was held on an off-shore Island, with the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands sitting on Árainn Mhór.

Over the remainder of this Strategic Plan, we will continue to transform our capacity as a digital parliament and invest in technology to support parliamentary activity and inform the public. The continuous implementation of our Cyber Security Strategy will help us build a resilient parliament. The further development of our Digital Transformation Programme and blended working practices will further support organisational effectiveness and the wellbeing of our community. We will also take the opportunity in 2024 to examine the responsible use of artificial intelligence in a parliamentary setting through implementing two small AI pilot use projects.

Our Internal Communications Strategy will help us to further enhance how we communicate across the organisation. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will be an important foundation on how we seek to broaden our Parliamentary Community. At the heart of all of these initiatives is a recognition that the people who make up our parliamentary community are our greatest asset.

Overall, this report demonstrates how the organisation has successfully responded to both continuous and emerging challenges and opportunities as presented in our current strategic plan for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.



Room 2, Leinster House.

Key Parliamentary Activities 2020-2023

Key Parliamentary Activities	2023	2022	2021	2020
Sittings of the Houses				
Dáil sitting days	100	106	95	82
Seanad sitting days	89	105	84	48
Dáil sitting hours	945	1,076	943	822
Seanad sitting hours	550	721	608	324
Divisions recorded (votes in the Houses)				
Dáil Divisions	213	152	154	139
Seanad Divisions	105	125	76	93
Parliamentary Questions				
PQs and replies to PQs processed ¹	60,051	68,153	68,297	48,735
<i>Questions for written answer</i>	48,948	55,688	55,898	37,941
<i>Questions for oral answer</i>	2,351	2,349	1,690	977
Official Report of Debates				
Hours of parliamentary debate	3,076	3,639	3,303	1,743
Pages reported and published	37,494	44,502	37,466	20,948
Translation Services				
Days of simultaneous translation of Oireachtas proceedings	189	211	177	130
Bilingual titles of Bills	93	121	160	78
Meetings of Parliamentary Committees				
Committee meetings	973	1,065	1,170	344
Committee sitting hours	1,581	1,842	1,752	597
Committee witnesses	3,001	3,296	2,596	792
Reports presented by Committees	91	69	75	9
The Legislative Process				
Bills initiated in both Houses	93	121	160	78
<i>Government Bills</i>	36	66	49	35
<i>Private Members' Bills</i>	57	55	111	43
Bills initiated in the Dáil	75	96	112	60
<i>Government Bills</i>	35	58	36	24
<i>Private Members' Bills</i>	40	38	76	36
Bills initiated in the Seanad	18	25	48	18
<i>Government Bills</i>	1	8	13	11
<i>Private Members' Bills</i>	17	17	35	7
Amendments proposed to Bills	4,528	7,238	4,283	1,620
Bills passed by both Houses	36	52	50	32
<i>Government Bills</i>	36	52	48	31
<i>Private Members' Bills</i>	0	0	2	1

¹ The number of PQs processed includes Questions for written answer, Questions for oral answer, PQs withdrawn, and PQs disallowed.

Key Parliamentary Activities	2023	2022	2021	2020
Legal and Legislative Services				
Legal advices issued	533	619	639	593
<i>To Parliamentary Committees</i>	140	160	145	64
<i>To the Service</i>	393	459	494	529
PMB proposals (new) in receipt of legal advice	56	45	57	42
PMB proposals (new) in receipt of drafting services	19	22	33	32
Parliamentary Library & Research Service Services				
Parliamentary Library & Research Service Publications	65	108	129	102
<i>Bill Digests published</i>	23	50	42	19
<i>Bill Briefings published</i>	27	41	61	24
Customised briefings for members and other users	1,419	1,301	1,186	1,225
Documents laid before the Houses	1,438	1,835	2,128	1,930
Records Management				
FOI requests received	129	120	125	200
Parliamentary Budget Office				
Total Output	209	123	82	100
Parliamentary Budget Office Publications	93	64	71	97
Briefings provided to Oireachtas Committees	5	7	5	3
Costing requests from members	74	39	–	–
Public Engagement				
Press releases	554	592	619	204
Visitors to Leinster House	54,529	29,239	1,874	13,302
Facebook followers ²	9,851	9,164	8,713	8,052
X/Twitter followers ²	47,332	44,669	41,498	38,892
Oireachtas.ie				
Visits to website	2,179,246	1,405,838	1,231,016	2,298,617
Website page views	5,608,400	4,661,853	4,576,635	6,611,405
Oireachtas TV				
Oireachtas TV Hours of Broadcast	8,717	8,769	8,769	8,784
<i>Live broadcast of Oireachtas proceedings</i>	1,030	1,254	1,435	982
<i>Broadcast of original content</i>	1,267	972	859	2,424
Interparliamentary Engagement				
PACE plenary and committee meetings	44	35	69	58
Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE	5	6	15	13

2 As at 31 December 2023.

Key Parliamentary Activities	2023	2022	2021	2020
MS Teams				
MS Teams virtual meetings	105,089	89,180	47,913	21,121
Rannóg Translation Services				
Pages of translation of corporate documentation	439	199	–	–
Pages of translation of committee documentation	353	227	–	–
Pages of press releases translated	69	83	–	–
Pages of all other translation	382	107	–	–
Key Resources	2023	2022	2021	2020
Staff of the Service (Civil Service Staff, State and Industrial) (FTEs) ³	705	674	637	596
Members' staff (FTEs) ⁴	473	461	451	437
Net Expenditure (€000)	150,371	139,280	132,493	134,065

3 As of 31 December 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020.

4 Numbers of FTEs have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Strategic Outcomes and Goals

1

An Effective Parliament

1. Support and advise Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann, Oireachtas Committees and their members in conducting their business effectively.
 2. Promote initiatives to support an effective legislative process in Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and Oireachtas Committees.
 3. Strengthen the delivery of research, analysis and information services to support the legislative, oversight and scrutiny functions of the Houses, Oireachtas Committees and members.
 4. Ensure the delivery of quality support services to members in a changing working environment.
 5. Ensure high standards of professionalism and corporate governance.
-

2

An Inclusive and Well-Supported Parliamentary Community

1. Promote and support the health, wellbeing and resilience of the parliamentary community.
 2. Reimagine the way we work and implement flexible and innovative blended working practices.
 3. Provide ongoing support and development opportunities to ensure we are an employer of choice.
 4. Strengthen our culture of dignity and respect, diversity and inclusion.
 5. Develop a strategy to implement the recommendations of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament.
 6. Provide a safe, secure and accessible physical environment that meets the needs of the parliamentary community.
-

3

An Open,
Engaged and
Sustainable
Parliament

1. Strengthen public engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas, including through the use of digital communication technologies.
2. Further develop our education programme for primary, post-primary and third-level institutions.
3. Establish a centralised Oireachtas Archives to safeguard and preserve the documents produced by the Houses of the Oireachtas.
4. Enhance our engagement with government departments.
5. Strengthen our EU, UK and other international relationships.
6. Support the delivery of the *Public Sector Decarbonisation Strategy, Climate Action Plan 2021* and the implementation of biodiversity initiatives.

4

A Digitally
Transformed
Parliament

1. Continue to advance our cyber security capabilities.
2. Progress the implementation of the Digital Transformation Programme.
3. Continue to implement innovative solutions to modernise our technical infrastructure in the context of a blended working model.
4. Provide effective and responsive technical supports to ensure resilience and continuity of service in our digital systems.

5

Towards a
Bilingual
Parliament

1. Continue to implement the Rannóg 2024 Plan with the objective of publishing official translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas in a timely manner and clearing historic arrears.
2. Conduct a comparative study of bilingual parliaments to enable us to progress towards a bilingual Oireachtas.
3. Facilitate a progressive increase in the amount of Irish spoken in both Houses.
4. Progressively increase the cohort of bilingual staff in the Service.
5. Develop initiatives to support members and staff in maintaining and improving their competence in spoken Irish.
6. Adopt a 'Bilingualism through Technology' programme for the Service.

Strategic Outcome 1: An Effective Parliament

Our Goals under this Strategic Outcome:

- 1.1** Support and advise Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann, Oireachtas Committees and their members in conducting their business effectively.
- 1.2** Promote initiatives to support an effective legislative process in Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and Oireachtas Committees.
- 1.3** Strengthen the delivery of research, analysis and information services to support the legislative, oversight and scrutiny functions of the Houses, Oireachtas Committees and members.
- 1.4** Ensure the delivery of quality support services to members in a changing working environment.
- 1.5** Ensure high standards of professionalism and corporate governance.

Our key activities and achievements during 2023:

- **Dáil Éireann** sat for 100 days (945 Hours).
- The **Dáil Business Committee** held 36 meetings.
- 213 Dáil divisions were recorded.
- 359 Topical issues were selected for debate in the Dáil.
- 60,051 Parliamentary Questions were processed.
- **Seanad Éireann** sat for 89 days (550 Hours).
- 105 Seanad divisions were recorded.
- 371 Commencement matters were tabled for debate in the Seanad.
- 93 **Bills** were initiated in both Houses.
- 36 were government Bills and 57 were Private Members Bills (PMBs).
- 36 Bills were passed by both Houses during 2023, all Government Bills.
- The **Editor of Debates Office**:
 - Published 37,494 pages of the Official Report of the proceedings of the Dáil, Seanad and **Parliamentary Committees**.
 - Published four Dáil Bound Volumes.
- 48,948 written replies to **Parliamentary Questions** (60,051 questions) not taken on the floor of the Dáil are published in the Official Report by the Debates Office.
- Overall, **Parliamentary Committees** held 973 meetings (over 1,581 hours).
- 3,001 witnesses attended Committee meetings.
- 91 committee reports were presented.
- The Houses of the Oireachtas received 156 EU legislative proposals in 2023 and concluded consideration on 150. Nine political contributions were published by six Committees, reporting on 13 separate legislative proposals.
- The **Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA)**:
 - Issued 533 legal advices. 140 (26%) of these were advices delivered to **Parliamentary Committees**. 393 (74%) advices issued to the Service, with 139 issuing to the Service on parliamentary and procedural issues and 254 issuing to the Service on corporate issues.

- The Private Members' Bills (PMB) Legal Advisory Team provides legal advice to members regarding policy proposals that they wish to develop into PMBs and provides advice at Committee Stage. In 2023, the team received 56 new PMB proposals and completed 46 PMB proposals for members. There were 41 ongoing PMB proposals at the end of 2023. Of these, 22 (54%) were for TDs and 19 (46%) were for Senators.
- 19 new PMB proposals were assigned to the legislative drafting service.
- During 2023, 11 OPLA PMBs were published in either House. Six of these Bills were settled in 2023, with the other five settled in previous years. A further 12 PMBs were settled by the OPLA but not introduced during 2023.
- The OPLA provided a dedicated legal adviser to the Joint Committee on Assisted Dying in addition to the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life. Further, the OPLA provided targeted legal advice and dedicated legal advisers to both the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sports and Media and the Committee on Public Accounts in their engagement and consideration of RTÉ.
- The **Oireachtas Library** and **Parliamentary Research Service** provide information and research to support the work of both Houses, Committees and individual members in respect of their parliamentary duties.
- During 2023, the **Oireachtas Library**:
 - Responded to 1,152 requests for information from members and other users.
 - Provided the parliamentary community with a media monitoring service.
- Supported research across the parliamentary community by providing access to more than 15 academic databases and over four thousand peer-reviewed electronic journals.
- Processed 1,438 documents laid before the Houses (via the DocsLaid Portal) and made these available to members.
- Together with the Parliamentary Research Services (PRS) produced 175 blog posts for members.
- During 2023, the **Parliamentary Research Service (PRS)**:
 - Supported members in their scrutiny of government legislation through its Legislative Analysis Service including 27 Bills Briefings, 23 Bills Digests and seven pre-legislative scrutiny outputs of general schemes of Government Bills for Committees.
 - Provided detailed scrutiny of four PMBs for Committees.
 - Responded to 267 requests for commissioned research from individual members with expert research briefings.
 - Produced 11 research briefings to support Committees' elective work programmes.
 - Assigned an expert Senior Researcher to support the work of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life.
 - Together with the Oireachtas Library produced 175 blog posts for members.
- The **Records Management Unit** coordinated the Service's response to 141 FOI requests.

- The **Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)**:
 - Produced 93 publications (briefing papers, commentaries, notes, working papers, analytical tools, and original data visualisation presentations and infographics).
 - Completed 74 costing requests.
 - Prepared 5 briefings for Oireachtas Committees.
- The PBO released its preliminary review of Budget 2024 on Budget Day, 10 October 2023.
- **Members' HR** provides members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann with a range of HR services in respect of their staff to support their parliamentary work. At the end of 2023, there were 472.94 FTE members' and party staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance. Members' HR processed 96 new hires in 2023.
- In 2023, the **Members' Pensions Unit** administered pension payments to 454 former members, spouses and dependents of former members of the Houses and MEPs.
- The **Members' Services One Stop Shop** provides members with a single access point for information on the services and resources made available to support them in carrying out their parliamentary functions, including information on allowances and payments applicable to their position.
- The **Service's Corporate Governance Framework** is designed to support the achievement of the strategic goals as outlined in the Strategic Plan and to meet the Commission's statutory and non-statutory obligations.
- In 2023, a total of 88 governance meetings were held. The Commission held nine meetings in 2023, and the Management Board met 17 times.
- The **Houses of the Oireachtas Service Action Plan 2023**, as well as the Service's updated **Customer Charter and Action Plan**, were published in 2023.
- The **Finance Unit** processed 6,677 invoices for good and services.
- At the end of 2023 there were 22 live **procurements** open and at various stages of completion.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well-Supported Parliamentary Community

Our Goals under this Strategic Outcome:

- 2.1** Promote and support the health, wellbeing and resilience of the parliamentary community.
- 2.2** Reimagine the way we work and implement flexible and innovative blended working practices.
- 2.3** Provide ongoing support and development opportunities to ensure we are an employer of choice.
- 2.4** Strengthen our culture of dignity and respect, diversity and inclusion.
- 2.5** Develop a strategy to implement the recommendations of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament.
- 2.6** Provide a safe, secure and accessible physical environment that meets the needs of the parliamentary community.

Our key activities and achievements during 2023:

The **Health and Wellbeing Group** organises monthly events and webinars to promote the health, wellbeing and resilience of all members of the parliamentary community. Seven events took place in 2023. The Health and Wellbeing Group further continued to support HR Services in the implementation of the **Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023**.

A review of the implementation of the **Blended Working Policy** was carried out in 2023. The Blended Working Policy is based upon the central Civil Service Framework and aims to allow for the greatest level of flexibility while ensuring the Service can operate effectively as a parliamentary service.

The following policies were approved and published to support the parliamentary community in 2023:

- An updated **Attendance Policy** (January 2023).
- A **Right to Disconnect Policy** (May 2023).
- A **Compensatory Leave Policy** (July 2023).
- A **HR People Strategy 2023-2024** (October 2023).
- A **Learning and Development Strategy 2023-2024** (October 2023).
- An **Induction Policy** (November 2023).

A renewed **People and Organisation Development (POD)** initiative for the organisation was launched at a staff meeting in November 2023. POD is a strategic initiative designed to enhance the capabilities of individuals within the organisation while fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth.

HR Services provides a wide range of **training and development** opportunities to the staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and to members and their staff.

- There were 956 attendances at 297 training courses delivered during 2023 (153 courses were delivered by external providers, and 144 were organised by the Training and Development Unit).
- 40 Service staff pursued courses under the Advance/Refund of Fees Scheme.

The **Procedural Development Unit** delivered training initiatives, tailored to the specific procedural requirements of individual groups. 23 courses were delivered to Departments and Oireachtas staff with 692 attendees in total.

The **PO Network** met 5 times in 2023 to discuss a range of issues.

HR Services continued to implement a strategic recruitment approach to ensuring the timely placement of new staff and bringing recruitment competitions in-house for faster turnaround. During 2023, 17 competitions were held and there were 103 new entrants to the organisation. At the end of 2023 there were 705 FTEs in the Service, an increase of 31 FTEs since 31 December 2022.

In 2023, an **Internal Communications Working Group (ICWG)** was established to review internal communication within the organisation. The ICWG worked with external consultation to translate its findings into an **Internal Communications Strategy**, and an **Internal Communications Action Plan** for the Service for 2023-2024.

Work to progress the development of the Commission's first **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy** continued in 2023. The EDI Strategy for the period 2024 was approved by the Management Board and the Commission in Q1 2024.

A group of ten **Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme** trainees graduated on 5 July 2023, at an awards ceremony in Leinster House. On 18 September 2023, the fourth (2023-2024) group of OWL programme trainees commenced their OWL journey. In March 2023, the Programme was awarded the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation award in the category of workplace and organisation of the future. In February 2024, the Programme was the recipient of the Advancing Disability Equality Award at the National Diversity and Inclusion Awards.

Throughout 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service worked with AslAm, Ireland's Autism Charity to make the Leinster House complex more accessible for autistic people. In December 2023, the Houses achieved **Autism-Friendly Parliament** accreditation from AslAm.

Under the requirements of the Children First Act 2015, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service has a **Child Safeguarding Statement** in place, supported by a Child Safeguarding Implementation Plan.

On 20 December 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service published its **Gender Pay Gap Report** for 2023 in line with legislative requirements under the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021.

The **Irish Sign Language team** launched the glossary of new signs for parliamentary terms (<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/how-parliament-is-run/houses-of-the-oireachtas-service/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/isl-glossary/>) on Oireachtas.ie in December 2023.

The **Safety Statement** of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service sets out the commitments the Service expects from the Office of Public Works (OPW), political personnel (members and their staff), service contractors, media personnel and visitors.

In 2023, the Head of **Facilities Management and Business Continuity** continued engagement with the OPW towards working to develop a long-term Estate Strategy for the Oireachtas complex.

The Superintendent's section provides operational support and security for sittings of the Houses and the Oireachtas Committees, high-level parliamentary meetings and official events hosted by the Houses. A new **Superintendent** for the Houses was appointed in September 2023.

In May 2023, the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD, and the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, established the **Task Force on Safe Participation in Public Life** to examine and make proposals on how to safeguard participation and promote civil discourse in political life. The Task Force met 11 times during 2023.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Our Goals under this Strategic Outcome:

- 3.1** Strengthen public engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas, including through the use of digital communication technologies.
- 3.2** Further develop our education programme for primary, post-primary and third-level institutions.
- 3.3** Establish centralised Oireachtas Archives to safeguard and preserve the documents produced by the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- 3.4** Enhance our engagement with government departments.
- 3.5** Strengthen our EU, UK and other international relationships.
- 3.6** Support the delivery of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Strategy, Climate Action Plan 2021 and the implementation of biodiversity initiatives

Our key activities and achievements during 2023:

The final initiative of **Seanad100 – “Minority Voices, Major Changes” programme** took place in 2023, with a ceremony hosted in the Oireachtas Library reading room on 22 February, where the publication *100 Bliain de Sheanad Éireann 1922-2022* was launched by the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer.

The Houses of the Oireachtas marked 25 years of the **Good Friday Agreement** with a range of public engagement events and initiatives during April and May 2023.

A total of **54,529 people visited Leinster House in 2023**. This is a marked increase from 2022, when there were 29,239 visitors to Leinster House, and more in line with pre-Covid 19 numbers.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) accounts saw an increase in followers in 2023. The use of Facebook and X livestreaming of parliamentary debates continues to raise public awareness.

The Service’s **Social Media Team** won gold for the organisation’s X account in the ‘State Organisations’ category at the annual Social Media Awards. Since 2018, the social media team has received a total of nine gold awards at the Social Media Awards.

The **Oireachtas.ie** website is the primary public engagement vehicle for the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas. A wide variety of parliamentary content is published and consumed each sitting day on Oireachtas.ie. In 2023, there was a 56% increase on 2022 in overall website traffic.

2023 in summary:

- 2,197,246 visits to Oireachtas.ie.
- 554 press releases issued.
- 5,608,400 website page views.
- 43,071,461 minutes of live streaming consumed.

Oireachtas TV broadcasts major events and provides access to an online archive that contains daily videos of

Dáil, Seanad and Committee debates. It also produces a range of programmes including documentaries, studio debates on important parliamentary events and historical talks.

Overall, there were over 1,030 hours of live broadcasting of Oireachtas proceedings in 2023, and over 1,266 hours of Oireachtas original TV content broadcast. Replay of Committee proceedings made up 34% of total Oireachtas TV airtime in 2023.

Standout achievements for Oireachtas Broadcasting Unit (OBU)/Oireachtas TV during 2023 included:

- Oireachtas TV acting as the domestic and international host broadcaster for President Biden's visit to Leinster House in April 2023.
- OBU live streaming the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Convention from the Convention Centre Dublin (CCD) to the Council of Europe's website in September.
- OBU supporting the first off-site meeting of the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands in September, streaming live on Oireachtas.ie and Oireachtas TV, from Árainn Mhór Island, County Donegal.
- OBU cooperating with the NLI to produce a series of recitations of WB Yeats' poems to mark the centenary of his award of the Nobel Prize – throughout 2023.
- Designing, producing and broadcasting 'Smiling Public Man', a live event to mark the same centenary, held in the Seanad Chamber in November.
- Oireachtas TV continuing to provide special event coverage, such as Budget Day 2024.

- Rolling out bi-lingual graphics on our Dáil and Seanad coverage.
- The ISL team completing their project which created a glossary of new signs for parliamentary terms (available on Oireachtas.ie) and then being invited to present their work to the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters in South Korea, July 2023.

The **Oireachtas Education Programme**, led by the Parliamentary Education Officer, provides access to online parliamentary education resources and to on-site workshops. The programme also promotes the role of the Houses among teaching professionals and with the public through the publication of education programmes on Oireachtas TV.

The establishment of the **centralised archives** to safeguard and preserve the documents produced by the Houses of the Oireachtas requires legislative change. This will be completed during 2024.

The **Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)** has continued to engage with the Department of Finance, The Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and other government departments and bodies in relation to information on public finances.

The **Interparliamentary and Travel Unit, the Protocol Unit and the Committees Secretariat** support members in the ongoing development of interparliamentary relations. Our work on international parliamentary diplomacy continues to grow in strength:

- There were 33 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Plenary and committee meetings attended in 2023.

- During 28-29 September 2023, the Service hosted the **European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (ECPP)** at the Convention Centre Dublin.
- The Protocol Unit managed and supported 28 incoming visits and addresses to the Houses during 2023. The Unit also included support provided to two conferences during 2023.
- There were 11 incoming and five outgoing Parliamentary Friendship Group activities in 2023.
- The 63rd plenary session of the **British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA)** took place on 5 and 6 March 2023.

There were 41 weekly Oireachtas Digests on Europe (ODE) produced by the **Oireachtas National Parliament Office (NPO)** in 2023.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is an active participant in the **European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)**. In 2023 the Houses of the Oireachtas responded to 171 requests for comparative information and made 11 requests for information to the ECPRD network.

The Service's **Climate Action Roadmap** was launched in December 2023. The Roadmap sets out how the Service will:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% in 2030.
- Increase the improvement in energy efficiency in the public sector from the 33% target in 2020 to 50% by 2030.

Strategic Outcome 4: A Digitally Transformed Parliament

Our Goals under this Strategic Outcome:

- 4.1 Progress the implementation of the Digital Transformation Programme.
- 4.2 Continue to implement innovative solutions to modernise our technical infrastructure in the context of a blended working model.
- 4.3 Provide effective and responsive technical supports to ensure resilience and continuity of service in our digital systems.
- 4.4 Continue to advance our cyber security capabilities.

Our key activities and achievements during 2023:

The Oireachtas **Cyber Security Strategy and Roadmap** continued to be implemented throughout 2023. The Strategy and Roadmap are aligned with international security standards and best practices and comply with regulatory and legislative requirements.

A **Cyber Security Programme Board** was established in 2023. The Board is chaired by the Service's Deputy Secretary General with a focus on supporting the implementation of the Cyber Security Strategy.

In 2023, the Service adopted a dedicated **Information Security Charter**, as well as a **Data Information Classification Policy** as part of the Charter.

Throughout 2023, a range of **cyber security initiatives** have also been launched as part of the implementation of the Cyber Security Strategy. These include:

- Circulation of a Cyber Security Behaviour Assessment Survey during June and July 2023.
- Launch of the Service's dedicated quarterly Cyber Security newsletter in September 2023.
- Launch of Cyber Security Awareness month in October 2023.

The Service's **Digital Transformation Programme** has been a key driver in transforming the way we work. Achievements in 2023 under the Programme include:

- Ongoing development of the Chamber Business System.
- Committee Signage and Áis-Linn development completed during Q3.
- Áis-Linn Calendar project went live in Q2.
- Simultaneous interpretation booth expansion and upgrade completed.
- Implementation of hybrid meeting rooms. Six Political Party rooms and Rooms 2 and 4 in historic Leinster House, were completed in 2023.

Throughout the year, the **TDT Strategic Committee**, with the support of the Management Board, maintained high-level oversight of the 2023 Digital Transformation Work Plan.

Microsoft (MS) Teams has continued to be used widely across the Oireachtas and has played a vital role in enabling and supporting remote working.

In 2023 there were:

- 105,089 virtual meetings held on MS Teams; this compares to 89,180 virtual meetings in 2022.
- 197,041 Team calls, and overall, since MS Teams was introduced, over 560,000 Teams calls have been made.
- Over 1.7 million chat messages.
- 357 private committee meetings of which 274 (77%) had a virtual element.

Overall, the **ICT Helpdesk** provided support for 16,653 calls in 2023 for members and their staff, and for Service staff.

In 2023, ICT continued to deliver and integrate the new **Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS)** solution for the Oireachtas to complement the move to a mobile workforce and blended workplace. As part of Cloud migration, a number of changes will be rolled out over 2024.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Our Goals under this Strategic Outcome:

- 5.1** Commission a comparative study of bilingual parliaments to enable us to progress towards a bilingual Oireachtas.
- 5.2** Facilitate a progressive increase in the amount of Irish spoken in both Houses.
- 5.3** Progressively increase the cohort of bilingual staff in the Service.
- 5.4** Develop initiatives to support members and staff in maintaining and improving their competence in spoken Irish.
- 5.5** Adopt a 'Bilingualism through Technology' programme for the Service.

Our key activities and achievements during 2023:

In 2023, the Rannóg 2024 Steering Group was restructured as the **Coiste Straitéiseach an Oireachtais Dhátheangaigh (CSOD)** strategic sub-committee. CSOD monitors and reports on our progress as we work toward a bilingual parliament. It met six times in 2023.

Publication of official translations as of end of 2023:

- 88% percent of all Acts (2019-2023) have been translated (Stage 1) and 52% published (Stage 6).
- There are 511 arrears Acts on the High Court list. Of these, 192 Acts (6,489 pages) have been cleared. In terms of remaining workload, 62% of pages remain to be published.

The **Library and Research Service (L&RS)** and **Rannóg an Aistriúcháin** presented the findings of the report on a comparative study of bilingual parliaments to the Management Board at the end of Q2 2023.

During 10 and 11 July 2023, Rannóg an Aistriúcháin hosted representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas, Senedd Cymru, the Welsh Government, the First Legislative Counsel, Wales and The Office of the Advocate General, Malta for the first '**Oireachtas Colloquium on Bilingual Parliaments**'.

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin continued to provide a variety of **translation services** aimed at facilitating the use of Irish in the Houses. Work has also continued to progress on the range of services that the Houses of the Oireachtas provides bilingually, building on Straitéis na Gaeilge, 2021 and the Oireachtas Language Scheme 2018.

The Service continues to work with PAS to seek Irish language generalist candidates for assignment to the Service, and to conduct its own competitions for specialist roles. An additional thirteen staff with Irish language proficiency were recruited during 2023.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service organises delivery of in-house **Irish language classes** for the Oireachtas community. Online Irish learning resources are also promoted. During 2023, 346 Service staff and members' staff availed of Irish language classes.

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin involvement in and contribution to the Digital Parliament Programme has been ongoing and all member- and public-facing systems are being developed bilingually. This includes the development of Áis-Linn and the new Digital Signage.

Strategic Outcome 1: An Effective Parliament

Goal 1: Support and advise Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann, Oireachtas Committees and their members in conducting their business effectively.

Providing high quality procedural support and advice to office holders, chairs of Committees and to members of the Houses is an essential function of the Service. The business of the Houses is conducted in accordance with the rules and precedents as set out in Standing Orders and in Salient Rulings of the Chair. During 2023, the Service continued to maintain and enhance the advice and support services it provides to the Houses and their Committees.

The Service supported Dáil Éireann on each of its 100 sitting days and Seanad Éireann on each of its 89 sitting days.

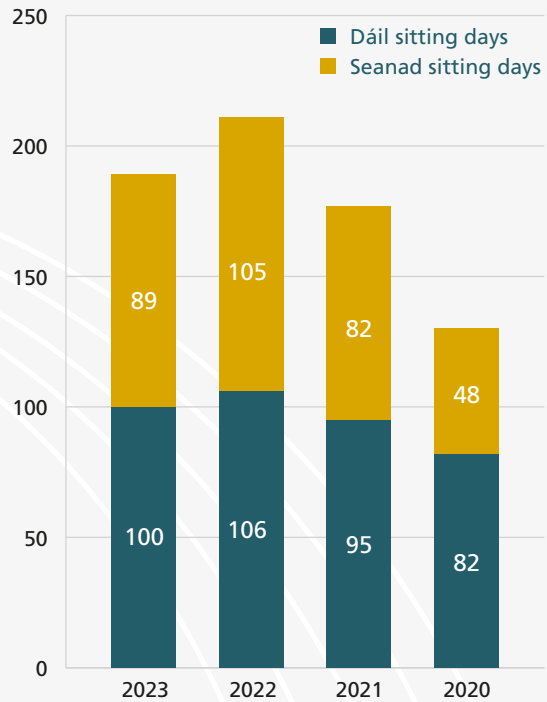


Figure 1: Sitting Days of the Houses

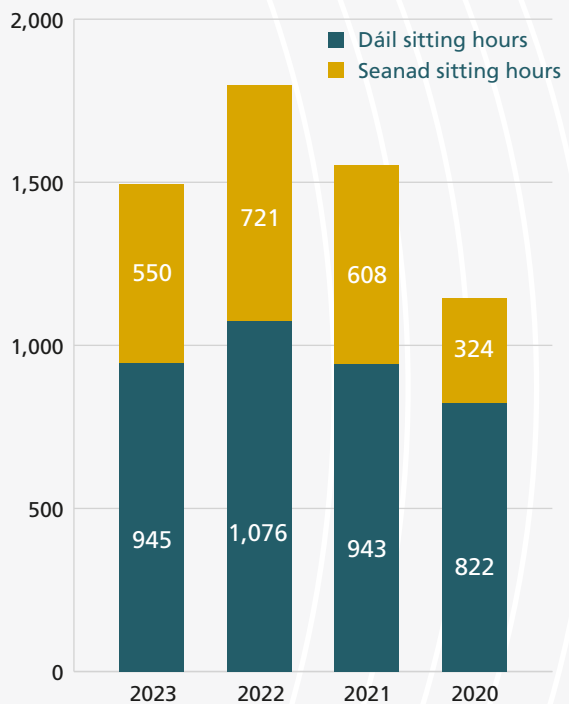


Figure 2: Sitting Hours of the Houses

Support for Dáil Business

The Clerk and Clerk-Assistant of the Dáil and the House Services business units support the sittings and business of Dáil Éireann and its office holders by providing procedural advice and assistance in preparing for, and presiding over, the sittings of the House. They also support the work of Dáil Standing Committees.

Procedural briefings are prepared for each sitting of the Dáil to guide the Chair through each item of business. Chairs are briefed before proceedings in the House, and Committee Chairs are briefed at their request on procedural rulings in relation to Bills and proposed amendments.

Table 1: Meetings of Dáil Standing Committees	2023	2022	2021	2020
Dáil Business Committee	36	36	39	51
Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight	7	8	5	6
Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform	5	9	12	8
Committee of Selection	9	8	5	5

The Journal Office provides a range of procedural support services to the Dáil. It publishes all the business before the House to the Dáil Business website, and updates the status of all business before the House on the Dáil Business website (e.g., whether any business items are subject to deferred divisions, or the stage of a particular piece of legislation). In each Dáil sitting week, there are likely to be several written motions to be considered by the House, all of which are processed and published by the Journal Office. In addition, the Journal Office processes and publishes all amendments to written motions, often at short notice.

The Journal Office also processes and publishes the results of all divisions (or 'votes') in the Dáil. In 2023, the Journal Office recorded 213 Dáil divisions (votes in the House), a 40% increase over 2022. The Journal Office also advises relevant stakeholders of the outcomes on business before the Dáil and compiles the official minutes of the House (the 'imeachta' or 'journal'). Individual journals may be provided to the courts as evidence of the proceedings of the Dáil. The Journal Office also publishes the Standing Orders of the Dáil and is in general a repository of knowledge and advice in relation to parliamentary procedure.

In relation to the Standing Committees of the Dáil, the Journal Office acts as the secretariat for the **Dáil Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight**, which held seven meetings in 2023.

The **Business Committee Secretariat** was originally contained within the Journal Office but is now a separate unit. The **Business Committee** held 36 meetings in 2023, and the **Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform** (which is also supported by the Business Committee Secretariat) held five meetings. In 2023, the **Chamber Business Team** was established and commenced business-process testing of the new Chamber Business System (CBS), which, when it goes live, will deliver real-time information to members through both CBS and Áis-Linn and via digital signage around the Leinster House campus. Given the inter-relationships between the work of the three units, it is envisaged that as digital transformation progresses, a programme of restructuring will be undertaken between the Journal Office, the Business Committee Secretariat and the Chamber Business Team.

Table 2: Parliamentary Questions (PQs)	2023	2022	2021	2020
PQs Processed ¹	60,051	68,153	68,297	48,735
Questions for Written Answer	48,948	55,688	55,898	37,941
Questions for Oral Answer	2,351	2,349	1,690	977
'Covid-19-Related Queries' Processed	–	–	–	3,398

1 The number of PQs processed includes Questions for Written Answer, Questions for Oral Answer, PQs Withdrawn and PQs Disallowed.

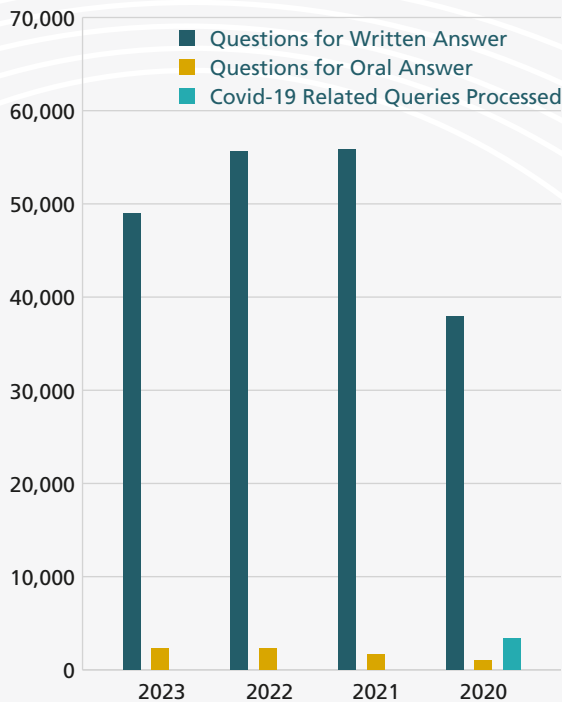


Figure 3: Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

The **Questions Office** processed 60,051 Parliamentary Questions (PQs), of which 2,351 were for oral answer. There were 5,314 pages of Questions Paper published in 2023. The **Editor of Debates Office** publishes Parliamentary Questions and Replies not taken on the floor of the Dáil as part of the Official Report of parliamentary proceedings.

In November 2023, for the first time, the number of parliamentary questions asked, replied to and published during a Dáil term exceeded 200,000. The number passed the previous record, from the 31st Dáil, of just over 198,000 questions and replies. This new record

was set in 169 fewer sitting days than that accumulated in the 31st Dáil.

Support for Seanad Business

The Clerk and Clerk-Assistant of the Seanad and the Seanad Office support the sittings and business of Seanad Éireann, its Committees, its office holders and members by providing procedural advice and assisting them in preparing for and presiding over, the sittings of the House. The Seanad Office also supports the Clerk of the Seanad in the carrying out of his statutory functions, specifically in his role as Seanad Returning Officer for the five vocational panels, in the Annual Review of the Register of Nominating Bodies, and in the compilation of the Annual Register of Members' Interests.

The Seanad sat for 89 sitting days (550 sitting hours) in 2023. The average sitting time was six hours and 11 minutes per day. It produced 98 Order Papers, including Supplementary Order Papers.

Of the 93 Bills initiated in the Houses in 2023, 18 were initiated in the Seanad; one was a Government Bill, and 17 were Private Members' Bills.

The Seanad Office supported eight meetings of the Seanad Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight,⁵ three meetings of the Seanad Committee of Selection, and seven meetings of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee.

The Seanad Office further supported five meetings of the Seanad Select Committee on Scrutiny of Draft EU-related Statutory Instruments which was established in December 2022. The Committee held its first meeting on 19 April 2023.

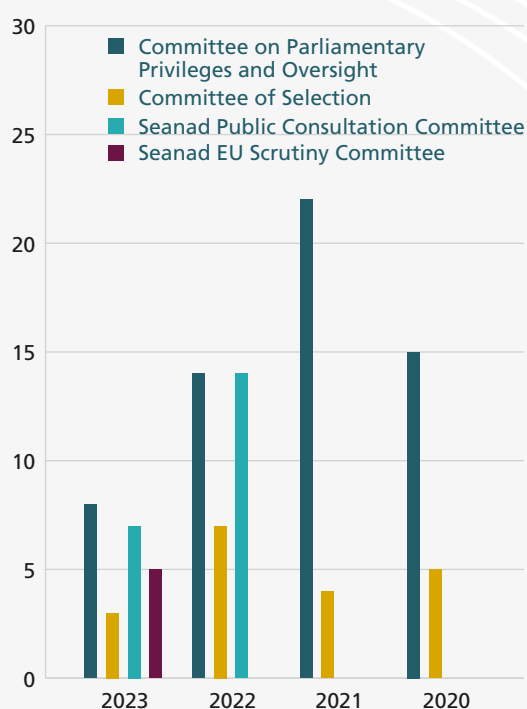


Figure 4: Meetings of Seanad Committees

Official Report of parliamentary proceedings

The Editor of Debates Office reports and publishes proceedings of the Dáil, Seanad and Joint and Select Committees in the floor language (Irish or English) within set deadlines.

In 2023, the Debates Office reported 3,076 hours of Dáil, Seanad and Committee debate. This amounted to 37,494 pages of Official Report of proceedings in addition to 5,314 published Parliamentary Questions. The Office published these debates to the website in HTML, PDF and XML formats. Bound volumes of the debates are also printed and deposited with the copyright libraries.

There were 616 Parliamentary Committee meetings in public session reported in 2023. Although Committee meetings outnumber those of Dáil and Seanad, the total word counts of the Official Report of meetings of Committees and the Houses are roughly equivalent. The total reported for the Dáil and Seanad came to approximately 11.76 million words for the year, with Committees account approximately 11.55 million words. Parliamentary questions form a large part of parliamentary debates. The written replies to parliamentary questions not taken on the floor of the Dáil account for approximately 12.73 million words (48,948 questions for written answer) of the Official Report.

Proceedings of the Dáil, Seanad and their Committees are conducted through the medium of Irish or English. Rannóg an Aistriúcháin (the Service's Translation Section) provided simultaneous translation services (Irish to English) during 189 sitting days of parliamentary proceedings.

⁵ The name of the Committee on Procedure and Privileges (Seanad Éireann) was changed to Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight (Seanad Éireann) in the committee record on 14 January 2021.

Table 3: Translation Services	2023	2022	2021	2020
Simultaneous translation provided on sitting days for the parliamentary proceedings	189	211	177	130
Bilingual Titles of Bills ¹	93	121	160	78
<i>Government Bills</i>	36	66	49	35
<i>Private Members' Bills</i>	57	55	111	43

¹ This figure includes long and short titles of Bills formally initiated in the Houses.

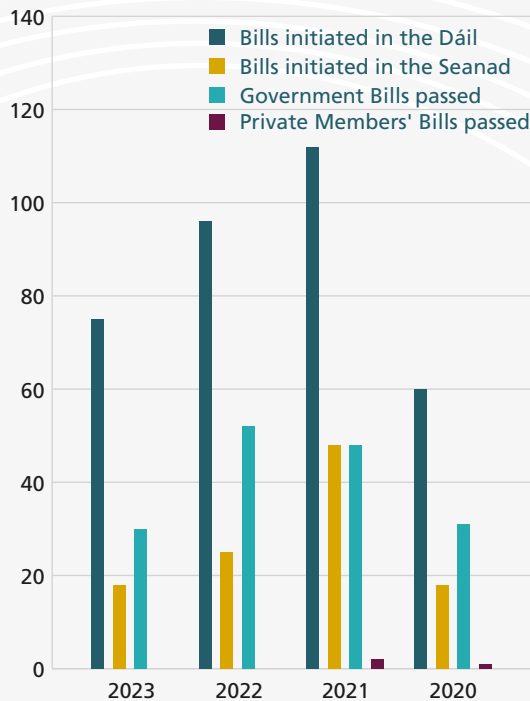


Figure 5: Bills initiated in both Houses and Bills passed

The **Bills Office** supports the legislative process in both Houses and manages the legislative process from Bill publication to the transmission of a certified vellum copy of every Bill passed by both houses to the President for signing.

A total of 93 Bills were initiated in both Houses, 57 of which were PMBs. **Appendix IV** lists Bills initiated in the Houses, with **Appendix V** listing the Bills passed. In 2023, the Houses passed 36 Bills. These were all Government Bills.

Additionally, the Bills Office examines the text of all Bills and amendments and supports the Chairs and Clerks of both Houses in rulings on admissibility in accordance with Standing Orders. In 2023 there were 4,288 amendments proposed to Bills as they passed through the legislative process. All Bills are examined by the Bills Office prior to publication and are examined for financial implications prior to proceeding to Dáil Committee Stage. The Bills Office also examines Committee and Report Stage amendments for compliance with Standing Orders. The Chairs of both Houses and Committee Chairs are individually briefed, as required, in relation to the admissibility of Bills and amendments.

Parliamentary Publications

The Service is responsible for the provision of parliamentary publishing and printing services, to include printing, electronic publishing and related services, for parliamentary documents. These services are imperative to the functioning of parliament and for ensuring that all legislative and other parliamentary papers are available for members of the Houses when required.

An in-house **Parliamentary Publication Unit (PPU)** was established in the Service in 2023. The PPU will be responsible for managing and undertaking the mark-up, printing and publication of core parliamentary business documents. Additionally, the PPU will also deliver core technical services to the Bills Office for the marking up of legislative documents, including managing the process of adding tags and annotations to legislative documents to provide structure, formatting and additional information.

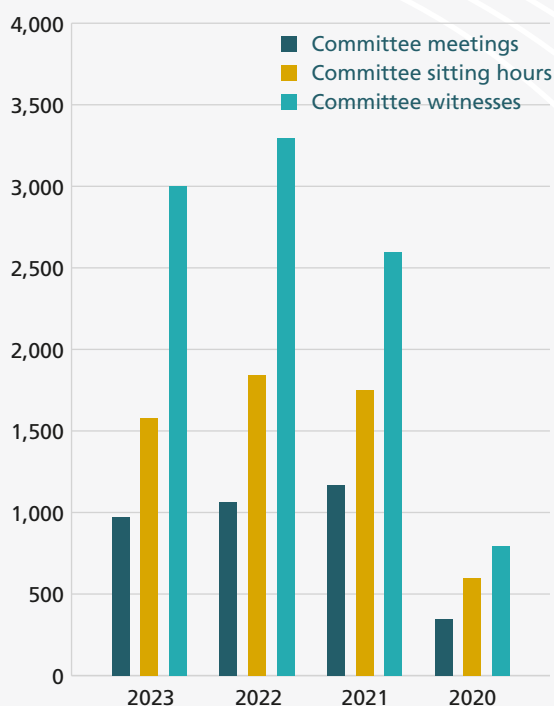


Figure 6: Parliamentary Committees

Parliamentary Committees

Parliamentary Committees are established to conduct oversight of the work of a government department or to examine a particular policy area in depth, according to the Orders of Reference given to them by the Dáil and Seanad. Committees invite and receive submissions from organisations

and individuals including government departments, State bodies, stakeholder groups and members of the public. Their public meetings are broadcast live and they may publish reports on specific issues. Committees also scrutinise government expenditure and debate proposed legislation.

The Committees' Secretariat teams of Clerks, policy advisers and administrative staff provided support to 26 **Parliamentary Committees** in 2023. **Appendix VI** lists the Committees for the 33rd Dáil and 26th Seanad.

Committees also have access to a wide range of information, research and services and support from the Oireachtas Library, the Parliamentary Research Service (PRS), the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA) and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), as required.

The Committees' press officers work to increase media coverage of the **Parliamentary Committees** by promoting and providing information such as press releases to national and local media. They respond to media queries, monitor media coverage of Committee work and assist in organising events, report launches and press briefings on behalf of Committees.

In 2023, the Committees' Secretariat supported 973 parliamentary committee meetings over 1,581 sitting hours at which 3,001 witnesses, including key stakeholders and independent experts across a range of public areas, contributed.

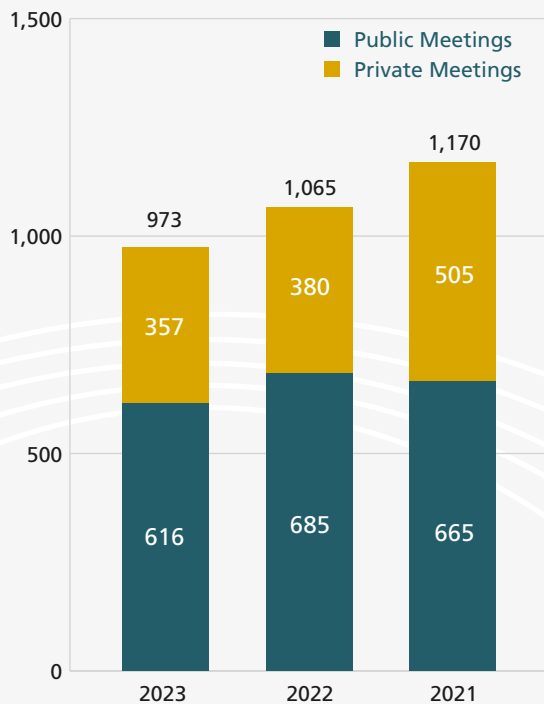


Figure 7: Committee Meetings – Private and Public

Of 973 Committee meetings held during the period, 616 were public meetings and 357 were private meetings. Of these private meetings, 274 (77%) had a virtual element and 83 (23%) were committee room attendance only.

With the agreement of both Houses, the **Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands** held a meeting of the Committee on Árainn Mhór Island, County Donegal on 22 September 2023. The meeting, the first official Oireachtas business to be held on an offshore island, signifies the importance of involving all the people of Ireland in the democratic process. The Committee’s meeting covered three strands: climate neutrality and biodiversity on the islands, housing and sustaining communities on offshore Islands and eHealth and living longer on islands.



The Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands held an official sitting on Árainn Mhór Island, County Donegal.

There were **two Special Committees** in operation in 2023:

- **The Joint Committee on Autism**, established in February 2022, published its final report on 14 June 2023 and stood dissolved.
- **The Joint Committee on Assisted Dying**, established in January was established in 2023.



The Joint Committee on Autism published its final report with recommendations for *Improving the Lives of People with Autism*.

One Special Committee published its final report in 2023:

- The **Joint Committee on Autism** published its final report on 14 June 2023. The report details key cross-cutting issues and concerns in particular sectors, disability services, education, higher and further education, social protection, employment, health, and housing and planning. It makes 109 recommendations based upon

its examination of the issue. Throughout the course of 23 public meetings and 32 private meetings, the Committee learned a great deal about the challenges faced by the autistic community and those who support them. The Committee met with a broad range of witnesses including academics, service-providers, autistic self-advocates, policymakers and more.

Overall, Committees presented 91 reports in 2023, setting out findings and recommendations in their respective policy areas. Of these, 43 were public policy related reports. A selection of reports published throughout the year are presented below:

- The **Committee on Budgetary Oversight** published a report on January 31 on Budget 2023, in which it made a number of recommendations and observations towards providing additional clarity on the impact of the measures contained in Budget 2023.
- The **Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth** published a report on 14 February 2023 entitled Report on Assessments of Need for Children. The report made 39 recommendations upon examining the issue.



A meeting of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters.



The Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement published its report on *Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement*.

- The **Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement** published a report on 28 March 2023 entitled *Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement*. The report seeks to understand how the Good Friday Agreement came to be agreed in 1998 and what we can learn from the process to inform politics today.
- The **Joint Committee on Health** published on 8 May 2023 its report on the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe Access Zones)) Bill 2022.
- The **Joint Committee on Disability Matters** published on 6 July 2023 a report entitled 'Aligning Disability Funding with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Budget 2024 Pre-Budget Submission'. The report covers the Committee's third pre-budget submission with the aim of informing the budget process 2024.
- The **Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science** published on 13 July a report on the future of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). The Committee made recommendations upon examining the issue.

- The **Joint Committee on Justice** published on 27 September 2023 a report on the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Defamation (Amendment) Bill. The report makes 18 recommendations in relation to the topic examined.
- The **Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage** published a report on 05 October 2023 on modern methods of construction. The report makes recommendations which aim to progress the use of these efficient building technologies.
- The **Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action** published on 14 December a report on the examination of recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly report on biodiversity loss. The report makes 86 recommendations which the Committee feels are vital to ensure that the biodiversity crisis in Ireland is addressed in a meaningful way.

In addition, as part of continuous improvement of how Committees operate, the Committees' Secretariat Coordination Unit codified several financial scrutiny resources, including briefing templates for all budgetary engagements by sectoral Committees, and has developed a standard database for tracking the Estimates process (turnaround times, etc.) which has directly inputted to the reporting of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight. Other resources include an Estimates Process Procedural Note and a Historical Estimates Data Tracker.

Houses of the Oireachtas has responsibility for scrutiny of EU draft proposals, for proper transposition of EU legislation into Irish law and for holding the Government accountable for the decisions taken by Ministers at Council meetings. Much of the work in relation to EU Affairs is delegated by the Houses of the Oireachtas to the Oireachtas Committees.

In 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas received 156 EU legislative proposals and concluded consideration on 150. Nine political contributions were published by six committees, reporting on 13 separate legislative proposals. The Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach published two political contributions covering four European Commission proposals in December: (COM (2023) 332 and 333, COM (2023) 335 and 337) and proposes the multiannual financial framework for the EU for 2021 to 2027 and related matters.

Table 4: EU Legislative Scrutiny	Jan-Mar 2023	Jan-Jun 2023	Jan-Sept 2023	Jan-Dec 2023
Scrutiny of European Commission proposals				
Proposals received	27	79	114	156
Proposals where scrutiny was concluded	42	88	114	150
Reasoned opinions	0	0	0	0
Political contributions	3	4	6	9

Strategic Outcome 1: An Effective Parliament

Goal 2: Promote initiatives to support an effective legislative process in Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and Oireachtas Committees.

The Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA) provides independent legal services to the Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD and Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, members of both Houses, the **Parliamentary Committees**, and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission. The independence of the OPLA is given statutory effect by section 14C of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003. The OPLA is headed by the Chief Parliamentary Legal Adviser and the team comprises specialist lawyers, legal researchers, and administrators. The Office has four specialist legal teams:

- The Parliamentary Services Legal Advisory team.
- The Corporate Services Legal Advisory team.
- The Parliamentary Legislative Drafting team.
- The Private Members' Bills Legal Advisory team.

The OPLA's Step-by-Step Guide for Members outlines the services the OPLA provides to support them in their legislative work. The purpose of the service is to provide members of both Houses with high quality legal advice, legal research, legal policy analysis and legislative drafting assistance in the preparation of their PMB proposals. All legal advice is provided on a strictly confidential basis. Having an in-house team assist members has several positive aspects, by enabling members:

- to have a dedicated Legal Adviser and Legislative Drafter to assist them in the development of their policy into a legally sound, researched and considered legislative proposal.
- to be well informed of the law in the area concerned.
- to obtain advice on the legislative options they wish to propose.
- to have access to the technical specialised expertise needed for legislative policy development and drafting.

In this way, members are supported in their constitutional role as legislators by the provision of specialist legal services to enable them to bring forward legally sound legislative proposals. This support takes place from the initial advice, through to the legislative drafting of the Bill, its publication, and any specialist legal assistance required in respect of any amendments brought forward on their Bill.

Table 5: OPLA PMB Services

PMB proposals in receipt of drafting services	2023	2022	2021
<i>New files</i>	19	22	33
<i>Ongoing files¹</i>	16	17	25
<i>Completed files</i>	22	30	31
PMBs Drafted			
Draft PMBs issued to members	55	37	60
Settled PMBs issued to members	18	23	20
OPLA PMBs introduced to the Houses	6	11	19
PMB Pre-Committee Stage Scrutiny			
<i>New requests</i>	7	2	3

¹ Ongoing files/requests refers to files ongoing at the end of December 2023, 2022 and 2021, respectively.

Common policy areas advised upon or resulting in PMBs being drafted include:

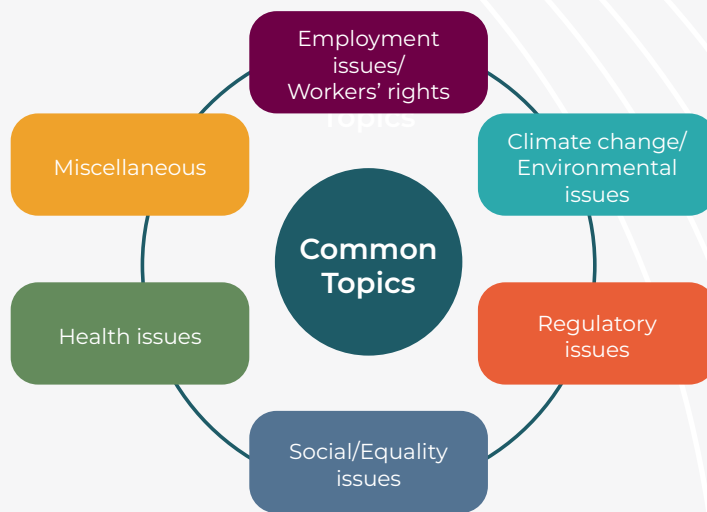


Figure 8: Policy Areas resulting in PMBs

The PMB Legal Advisory Team provides legal advice to members regarding policy proposals that they wish to develop into PMBs and provides advice at Committee Stage. In 2023, the team received 56 new PMB advisory files and completed 46 files for members. There were 41 ongoing PMB advisory files at the end of 2023. Of these, 22 (54%) were for TDs and 19 (46%) were for Senators.

- 19 new PMB proposals were assigned to the legislative drafting service.
- 16 ongoing files were with the legislative drafting service at the end of the year.
- 55 draft Bills and 18 settled Bills were issued to members.

During 2023, 11 OPLA PMBs were also published in either House. Six of these bills were settled in 2023, with the other five settled in previous years. A further 12 PMBs were settled by the OPLA but not introduced during 2023.

The OPLA has continued to be proactive in its engagement with members and parties in supporting their PMB development, and the Office has further delivered information/training sessions on 'PMB Drafting and the Legislative Process' to all parties in conjunction with the Oireachtas Training and Development Unit in 2023. Overall, feedback on PMB services from both members and Committees has continued to be very positive. Members who use the Houses of the Oireachtas legal services appreciate and value the service provided in formulating a robust PMB which is legally sound.

The OPLA also assists with the pre-Committee Stage scrutiny of PMBs. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and Dáil Éireann on Private Members' Bills, which was adopted by the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform on 5 December 2018 (the "MoU") establishes the pre-Committee Stage scrutiny framework. The MoU also provides that a waiver of Committee Scrutiny can be obtained in particular circumstances. The OPLA also assists members and Committees in scrutinising government policy through the provision of legal advice regarding government Bills which undergo pre-legislative scrutiny.

The OPLA issued 533 legal advices in 2023. Of these, 393 (74%) were issued to the Service, with 139 issuing to the Service on parliamentary and procedural issues, and 254 advices issuing to the Service on corporate issues. The remaining 140 (26%) of the advices issued to Committees.

During 2023, the OPLA provided a dedicated legal advisor to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Assisted Dying for the duration of that Committee's work. This advisor supported the work of the Committee by providing targeted briefings on legal issues pertinent to the work of the Committee, as well as addressing specific legal issues as they arose.

On 19 April 2023, the OPLA hosted, in conjunction with the Council of the Bar of Ireland, the OPLA and Bar of Ireland Legal Workshop for members. The Houses of the Oireachtas Chief Parliamentary Legal Adviser welcomed members of both Houses, members of the Law Library, political staff and staff of the Service to the event. Topics covered included the law on private papers, parliamentary privileges, coercive control and harassment, data protection, ethics in public office and the rules for politically exposed persons.



On 19 April 2023, The OPLA and Bar of Ireland held a legal workshop for members of the Houses.

Strategic Outcome 1: An Effective Parliament

Goal 3: Strengthen the delivery of research, analysis and information services to support the legislative, oversight and scrutiny functions of the Houses, Oireachtas Committees and members.



Tithe an Oireachtas
Houses of the Oireachtas

Seirbhís Leabharlainne 7 Taighde
Library & Research Service

The **Oireachtas Library** and **Parliamentary Research Service (PRS)** provide information and research to support the work of both Houses, Committees and individual members in respect of their parliamentary duties. The Library and Parliamentary Research Service's intranet site provides the parliamentary community with access to all online information resources and research briefings.

During 2023 the **Oireachtas Library** responded to 1,152 requests for information from members and other users, and together with the PRS produced 175 blog posts for members. The Library supported research across the parliamentary community with a media monitoring service and access to more than 15 academic databases and over four thousand peer-reviewed electronic journals. The Library supported research-intensive business areas (including Committees, OPLA and the PBO) with customised training and awareness sessions.

The Library processed 1,438 documents laid before the Houses (via the DocsLaid Portal) and made these available to members. The Library engaged with staff in departments and agencies who laid 84% of documents laid. The remainder of documents were laid by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Oireachtas Library continued to manage the parliament's heritage collections which date from the 16th century to the foundation of the state. Totalling almost 10,000 items, these collections include a variety of formats including historical monographs, maps, periodicals, cartoons, prints and pamphlets.

During 2023 the **Parliamentary Research Service (PRS)** supported members in their scrutiny of government legislation through its Legislative Analysis Service (LAS) including 27 Bills Briefings, 23 Bills Digests and seven pre-legislative scrutiny outputs of general schemes of Government Bills for Committees. The PRS also provided detailed scrutiny of four Private Members' Bills for Committees. Examples of Bills Digests, produced to support members in preparing for Second Stage debates on Bills in the Houses, include the following:

- Bill Digest: Family Courts Bill 2023, published on 1 March 2023.
- Bill Digest: Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe Access Zones)) Bill 2023 published on 20 July 2023.
- Bill Digest: Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2023, published on 21 November 2023.

During 2023 the PRS reviewed the Legislative Analysis Service including member and stakeholder engagement and an enhanced LAS service will commence in Q1 2024. Also, during 2023 the PRS commissioned Dr Liam Weeks, Department of Government in UCC, to conduct a study into the impact of Private Members Bills (PMBs). The study used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) to explore the potential impacts of PMBs. The analysis draws on a dataset of over 800 PMBs and interviews with stakeholders. The study has been completed and the report will be finalised in Q1 2024.

The PRS continued to deliver a commissioned research service to both individual members and Committees during 2023. The PRS produced 267 research briefings to individual members and 11 research briefings to support Committees' elective work programmes. The PRS assigned an expert Senior Researcher to support the work of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life. The PRS also supported the Members Survey undertaken by UCD.

The PRS completed 22 research outputs for Committees over the course of 2023. Seven briefings were to assist Committees in their pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS) of General Schemes of Government Bills. Four briefings were to assist Committees in their detailed scrutiny of Private Members Bills (PMBs). The PRS also produced 11 research briefing and other outputs (including presentations) to support Committees' elective work programmes.

The PRS produced a series of topical research briefings to inform members including the following:

- Spotlight: Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), and Sustainable Development: The Legal and Regulatory Framework in Ireland, published on 3 October 2023.
- L&RS Note, The Good Friday Agreement at 25, published on 27 April 2023.
- L&RS Note, Ireland and the Energy Charter Treaty, published on 5 December 2023.
- L&RS Note: Refugees in Ireland, the EU and Worldwide: the internal legal framework and refugees worldwide, published on 11 December 2023.

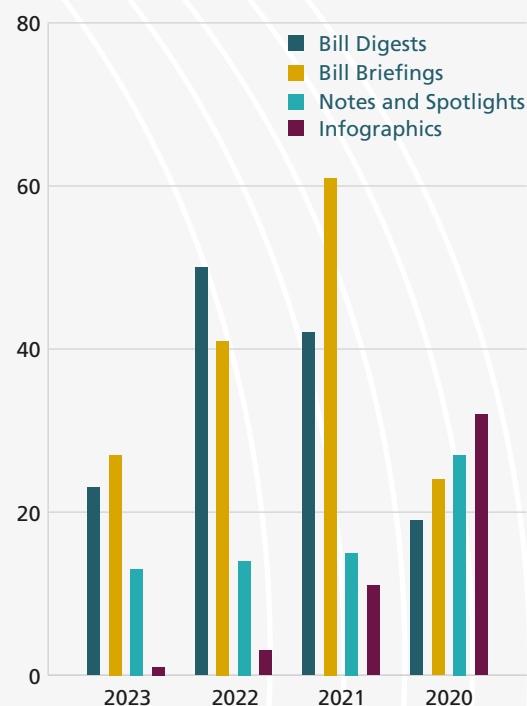


Figure 9: Parliamentary Library Research Service Research Publications

In 2023, a dedicated **Committee Secretariat** staff resource portal was launched where knowledge management resources are codified and published. In addition, eight Committee Policy Adviser group meetings took place, and six inductions of new Policy Advisers were successfully held. Moreover, five knowledge sharing sessions were held (financial scrutiny, EU COMs, pre-legislative scrutiny, parliamentary procedure and SOs, reporting and the legislative process). The Committees Coordination Unit continues to engage with the Library, the Parliamentary Research Service and the Parliamentary Budget Office to develop standardised guides to services.

The **Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)** has been established on a statutory basis by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2018. The objective of the PBO is to support the Houses of the Oireachtas and its Committees in relation to fiscal issues and the management of public finances. The establishment of the PBO on a statutory basis follows recommendations made in the OECD report Review of Budget Oversight Ireland (November 2015) and by the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform to improve Dáil Éireann's engagement with an oversight of the budget process.

The functions of the PBO are to provide the Houses and their Committees with fiscal and economic information, analysis, and advice that is independent and impartial relating to:

- The particular macroeconomic conditions in the State.
- Developments affecting public finances.
- The management of public finances.
- The financial implications of proposals affecting the public finances.

In addition, the Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas may assign additional functions to the Director of the PBO.

In 2023, the PBO produced 209 outputs, including:

- 93 publications (briefing papers, commentaries, notes, working papers, analytical tools, original and updated data visualisation presentations and infographics).
- 74 costing requests.
- Five briefings to Oireachtas Committees.

In addition, the PBO presented at 15 external events and presented at four events to Oireachtas members and staff. Moreover, the PBO provided support to Committees eight times during 2023.

The PBO carried out costing analysis, including a number of small but complex requests for new policies. There has been ongoing capacity building in the PBO by developing other analytical tools for forecasting and enhancing its data visualisation output.

The PBO's data visualisation presentations bring information to members in a visually attractive and accessible manner and they are often revised to provide up-to-date data and information. As these are interactive, they allow users to understand fiscal issues in a more comprehensive way and can allow members to consider their own policy preferences. For example, the PBO's tax and welfare tool allows users to design their own tax and welfare package and see the total effect, making technical material more accessible to members, Oireachtas staff and the public to improve the transparency of budget information.

Table 6: Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)	2023	2022	2021	2020
Total outputs	209	123	82	100
Publications				
Total publications	93	64	71	97
<i>Briefing papers/commentaries</i>	18	10	10	10
<i>Notes</i>	17	14	19	49
<i>Analytical notes/working papers</i>	2	3	1	1
<i>Analytical tools (including models)</i>	26	10	2	–
<i>Data visualisation presentations/infographics</i>	21	24	36	24
<i>Updates to existing analytical tools (including models)/ Data visualisation presentations/Infographics</i>	9	3	3	13
Other Outputs				
Costing requests completed ¹	74	39	–	–
Briefings to Oireachtas Committees	5	7	5	3
Presentations at external events (speakers)	15	8	6	–

¹ A new metric introduced in 2022.

The PBO published its Pre-Budget 2024 Commentary on 27 September 2023. The commentary provides members of the Oireachtas with an overview of the fiscal position and the macroeconomic circumstances that frame the budget and highlights key issues for consideration.

These outputs were followed by the PBO's preliminary review of Budget 2024 published on Budget Day on 10 October 2023. All PBO publications are made available on the [Oireachtas website](#). Printed copies of other PBO publications are also made available to members or provided to particular Committees, as appropriate.

On 11 October 2023, the PBO held a post-Budget stand in the Coffee Dock in LH2000. Staff members of the PBO provided information on the Budget and answered queries from members and staff on their budget queries. Recent PBO publications were also provided for additional information.

The PBO also engages in a range of public engagement and relationship-building activities, outlined under Outcome 3 of this implementation report.



PBO Staff at a pop-up information stand on Budget 2024.

Strategic Outcome 1: An Effective Parliament

Goal 4: Ensure the delivery of quality support services to members in a changing working environment.

Members' HR provides members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann with a range of HR services in respect of their staff to support their parliamentary work. Members and parties are the employers of these staff and have obligations to them as employers. The Unit has responsibility for the effective operation of the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance in partnership with the Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform who sets the terms and conditions of the Scheme. The services to members include the administration of payroll and the conditions for staff employed under the Scheme, as well as training. The Party Administrators/ Group Coordinators Forum operates as a consultation group in relation to issues affecting political staff.

At the end of 2023, there were 472.94 FTE members' and party staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance. Members' HR processed 96 new hires in 2023.

The **Members' Pensions Unit** provides for the administration of members' pensions under the Ciste Pinsean Scheme and under the Single Public Service Sector Pension Scheme. The Members Pensions Unit administers pension payments to 454 former members, spouses and dependents of former members of the Houses and MEPs.

The **Staff Pensions Unit** administers pensions arrangements, including calculations, for retiring civil service staff and manages pension queries from serving civil service staff. Eighteen pensions were processed in 2023.

The **Political Staff Engagement Plan** continued to be delivered by Members' HR throughout 2023. Actions carried out under the Engagement Plan in 2023 included:

- First contact emails to all new political staff pointing them to resources and information available to support them in their roles.
- In February 2023, Spectrum Life, the service provider, delivered an MS Teams presentation for political staff, in conjunction with Members' HR, to outline the service available through the Workplace Support Programme, and how to access these services.
- In February and March 2023, security briefings were provided to political staff by An Garda Síochána through the Superintendent's Section.
- Publication of a political staff newsletter, *In the House*, in March, July and December 2023.
- A pensions webinar for staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance was provided in March 2023.
- A face-to-face event which included information sessions from the L&RS, the PBO and the OPLA on their services and resources was held for members and their staff in October 2023.

The **Election Steering Group**, led by Members' HR, was established in January 2022 to oversee the planning process for the next election. In September 2023, the Management Board approved the Election Steering Group's report on the Service's Election Plan for the 34th Dáil and the 27th Seanad.

The report includes a review of the 2020 General Election Plans and Processes, consideration of developments since 2020 in services and processes and the key elements of the plan for the next election. The plan sets out cross-functional dependencies and identifies lead business units responsible for implementing the plan.

The **Members' Services One Stop Shop** provides members with a single access point for information on the services and resources available to support them in carrying out their parliamentary functions, including information on allowances and payments applicable to their position. It also provides information on the policies and guidelines governing the use of such resources. The Public Representation Allowance (PRA) forms part of the Parliamentary Standard Allowance (PSA) system of parliamentary expenses for members.

An independent audit is carried out annually on payments claimed under the scheme and the results of the audit presented to the Management Board and to the Commission's Audit Committee.

In December 2023, the Commission approved a proposal to establish a **Members' Feedback Forum** on the provision of services to members.

Strategic Outcome 1: An Effective Parliament

Goal 5: Ensure high standards of professionalism and corporate governance.

The Commission's three-year budget is €462m for the period 2022-2024. The allocation includes provision for costs associated with a general election; funding to support consolidation and advancement of the programme of parliamentary and organisational reform; and funding for continued investment in information technology.

The Service's Corporate Governance Framework is designed to support the achievement of the strategic goals outlined in the Strategic Plan 2022-2024, and to meet the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission's statutory and non-statutory obligations. There were 88 governance meetings in 2023.

The Commission held nine meetings in 2023. The Commission presented its Annual Report for 2022, including its audited annual accounts, to the Houses of the Oireachtas by the statutory deadline of 30 June 2023, in accordance with section 6(4) of the Commission Acts. The Commission also presented an annual statement of estimates for 2024 to the Dáil for noting by way of motion in accordance with section 13 of the Commission Acts. An overview of the Commission's work programme in 2023 is set out on pages 16-17 of this report.

The Commission's **Finance Committee** held four meetings in 2023. The Committee considered quarterly financial and performance reports and the draft statement of estimates for 2024 and made recommendations on these to the Commission.

	2023	2022	2021	2020
Commission	9	11	11	11
Management Board	17	22	28	19
Management Board debrief	26	33	24	72
Finance Committee	4	5	5	3
Audit Committee	4	5	5	3
Risk Management	27	23	26	58
Risk Forum	1	–	–	–

The Service's **Management Board** met 17 times during 2023. In addition, 26 Management Board debrief meetings were held.

The Management Board is assisted in its work by five **strategic committees**. The purpose of these strategic committees is to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to strategic and operational issues that have a cross-divisional dimension. Each committee is chaired by an Assistant Secretary, or by a person nominated by the Secretary General, and supported by Principal Officers. The Management Board further receives an oral update from each Committee chair at its monthly meetings and considers written reports on a quarterly basis.

Overall, the Management Board's strategic committees held 35 meetings during 2023. The following are the Strategic Committees of the Management Board:

- Governance, Performance and Accountability (GPA).
- Engagement, Sustainability and Campus Development (ESCD).
- People and Organisation (P&O).
- Technology and Digital Transformation (TDT).
- Coiste Straitéiseach an Oireachtais Dhátheangaigh (CSOD).

CSOD was established in 2023 to monitor and report on the Service's progress as we work toward a bilingual parliament.

The Office of the Commission and Secretary General (OCSG) supports the work of the Oireachtas Commission, Finance Committee, Audit Committee and the Management Board. The Office is also responsible for the Corporate Governance Framework of the Service, management of the customer service function, coordinating the Service's

three-year strategic plans, promoting risk management and performance review and reporting. The Head of the OCSG is the Service's Chief Risk Officer (CRO) and Head of Internal Audit (HIA).

The Service's updated **Customer Service Charter and Action Plan** and **Policy for Responding to Unreasonable Behaviour** were published on 9 November 2023. The Customer Charter sets out the organisations' commitment to providing high standards of service to all our customers. The Policy for Responding to Unreasonable Behaviour sets out how the Service will respond in instances where a person seeks to engage in an unreasonable manner with the Service. It has been developed in accordance with the Service's legal obligations to protect Service staff and to ensure their safety and well-being in the workplace.



The Houses of the Oireachtas Service Customer Charter and Action Plan.

The Service's **Risk Management Strategy and Framework** was revised in 2023. It is guided by best practice in the area. This includes guidance from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform's Risk Management Guidelines for government departments and offices. The overall goal of the Service's Risk Management strategy and framework is to ensure that all risk management activities contribute to the achievement of the Service's strategic objectives.

In 2023, the **Risk Office**, led by the **Chief Risk Officer (CRO)**, continued to promote a risk aware culture and support users in the management of their risks. In 2023, the CRO and the Risk Office:

- Held 27 meetings in relation to risk, including individual meetings with Principal Officers from Business Units across the Service. Key focus was placed on reviewing risks during these meetings, as well as raising awareness of the importance of timely reporting on risks.
- Supported five review meetings with Assistant Secretaries and the Secretary General on progress made on Action Plan 2023. Discussions during these meetings included consideration of continuing risks, challenges and opportunities in the context of the Service's commitments under Strategic Plan 2022-2024.
- Held an inaugural meeting of the Service's Risk Forum on 18 September 2023. The Forum serves as a useful platform for discussion and feedback on the latest challenges and best practices on risk management.

Moreover, in 2023, the TDT Committee continued to have high-level oversight of key risks relating to the Digital Transformation, with a particular focus on Cyber Security, considering risk reviews by Programme/Project Boards, and progress of the Digital Transformation Work Plan.

In addition to the work of the Risk Office it is important to note that the Commission, the Management Board and the Audit Committee all continue to have oversight and manage the impact of risks facing the organisation.

The **Audit Committee** met four times in 2023. The role of the Audit Committee is to ensure that effective arrangements are in place in the Service for governance, audit and risk management.

The functions of the Audit Committee include:

- Advising the Secretary General on financial matters relating to their functions.
- Advising the Commission on matters of corporate governance relating to its functions and report to the Commission in writing at least once a year on its activities in the previous year.
- Considering reports on the implementation of internal audit report recommendations twice yearly and review the work of the Internal Audit function.
- Considering risk materialisation reports.

The Audit Committee's Annual Report for 2023 can be found in **Appendix III**.

The Internal Audit function contributes to the oversight and accountability of the Service. The purpose of the Internal Audit Unit is to provide independent assurance to the Secretary General, as Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the Commission and Head of the Service, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems of internal control within the Service and to make recommendations for improvements, as appropriate. The Head of Internal Audit reports directly to the Secretary General. The Secretary General and the Audit Committee agree the Internal Audit Programme.

The **Finance Unit**, led by the **Chief Financial Officer (CFO)**, provides financial advice, information and analysis to the Secretary General, Management Board, Commission and line sections. The Commission's outturn for 2023 was €150.371m which was managed by effective budget monitoring and reporting. The Finance Unit processed 6,677 invoices, 3,266 expenses and 1,386 receipts for goods and services in 2023. Support was provided for 598 calls to the Finance Helpdesk in the same period. Significant work was also undertaken to ensure the efficient payment of salaries and pensions. The audited accounts of the Commission for 2023 are presented on page 130 of this report.

Ongoing pensions administration by HR Services included processing 17 staff retirements.

The **Procurement Unit** continued to provide support to business units in the procurement of goods and services and ongoing contract management. The Procurement Unit held 493 meetings with contract managers across the Service in 2023 and provided advice to business areas when requested.

During 2023, thirty-two procurements were brought to conclusion. These included Requests for Tender (RFTs), Requests for Quotes (RFQs), Office of Government Procurement (OGP) Frameworks and Market Sounds. At year end, there were a further 22 live procurements at various stages of completion.

The **Oireachtas Contracts Committee (OCC)** reviews contracts above specified values where it is proposed for exceptional reasons not to have a competitive procurement process; where only one tender was received in response to an

advertisement or invitation to tender; or where it is proposed not to accept the lowest priced tender. The Committee met on ten occasions in 2023 and considered 18 submissions.

The Service has a **Performance Evaluation Framework** in place that is aligned to the Strategic Plan for 2022-2024. Under this framework, the Management Board considered three Post-Project Benefits Realisation (PPBR) reviews during 2023:

- A Post-Project Benefits Realisation review of the Statements Application.
- A Post-Project Benefits Realisation review of DocsLaid.
- A Post-Project Benefit Realisation review of the Dáil Business Committee Report and Order of Business Module.

A PPBR review is a review of the extent to which the business objectives and benefits of a project have been realised, i.e., a review of actual benefits (non-financial) compared to planned benefits. A PPBR review also determines the extent to which the desired outcomes of the project have been achieved.

Four quarterly reports on Parliamentary Service Activities were also submitted to the Management Board in 2023. These reports present key activity metrics from across the Service.

The **Records Management Unit (RMU)**, led by the Head of Library and Research Services, has responsibility for freedom of information, data protection and records management.

Table 8: Records Management Unit	2023	2022	2021	2020
FOI requests received	129	120	125	200
<i>Non-Personal</i>	126	119	121	197
<i>Personal</i>	3	1	4	2
<i>Mixed</i>	–	–	–	1

The RMU co-ordinates all FOI requests received by the Service and engages with both querists and decision-makers. In 2023, 129 FOI requests were received and 141 were managed over the course of the year (the FOI requests managed in a year are not necessarily received in the same year). Included in this figure are requests that are handled outside FOI, requests withdrawn and those deemed invalid. The overall number of FOI requests received in 2023 was slightly higher than the two previous years. The Training Unit and the Records Management Unit (RMU) continued to provide ongoing training to FOI decision-makers, internal reviewers and to users of the eFOI system.

The RMU works closely with the cross-Service GDPR Working Group to achieve its annual work programme. The Records Management Unit (RMU) submits quarterly reports to the Management Board on **Data Protection**. In October 2023, the Management Board approved the Service's **Data Breach Incident Handbook**. In 2023, the Commission approved the **CCTV notice** for the Leinster House campus in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. The RMU successfully delivered its annual programme of data protection awareness sessions for members and staff. All sessions were well attended.

During 2023 the RMU remained committed to strengthening information governance through a best practice approach to records management. Working with all business units, the RMU completed its updating of the **File Plan and Retention Schedule**.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well Supported Parliamentary Community

Goal 1: Promote and support the health, wellbeing and resilience of the parliamentary community.

The Health and Wellbeing Group continued to support HR in the implementation of the **Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023**. The strategy, which was led by public health guidance, considered the blended working environment and provided specific supports on health and wellbeing issues that have arisen due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The priority is to ensure the health and wellbeing of all staff. While recognising that staff have a personal responsibility to manage their own health, both physical and mental, the Service, through the work of HR and the Health and Wellbeing group, continues to put together a range of supports to increase resilience and enhance work-life balance.

The Service will publish and implement a new **Health and Wellbeing Strategy in 2024**. Through the development of this new strategy, the Service will continue to demonstrate its commitment to providing a working environment that ensures the health and wellbeing of all staff is, as far as possible, reasonably protected. The new strategy will set out a number of outcomes to be achieved by the Service in meeting both individual needs and organisational needs, while taking into consideration the Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework.

The overall development of the strategy will ensure the Service continues to be well placed to meet future challenges through maximising the potential of its workforce and will support the continued development of the Service as an employer of choice.

The Health and Wellbeing Group organises monthly events and webinars. All events are recorded and made available for everyone to watch in their own time. Seven events took place in 2023.

Table 9: Health and Wellbeing Group: 2023 Monthly Webinars

January	Financial Planning for Retirement
February	Reduce Your Food Waste
March	Domestic Violence Awareness
March	Civil Service Staff Pensions
April	Menopause Awareness
June	Mental Health Champion
September	Cycling event
October	Avoiding Burnout

HR Services also advertises health and wellbeing seminars through OneLearning and the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) to staff across the organisation. In addition, the circulation of the staff newsletter, **Aon Scéal**, which began during Covid-19 to keep staff connected, continued during 2023. Three editions were circulated to the parliamentary community during the year. Starting from 2024, the circulation of the staff newsletter will fall within the remit of an Internal Communications Officer.

An updated **Attendance Policy** for the Service was approved by the Management Board in January 2023. The policy was updated and revised in line with the Civil Service's *Circular 14/2022 Revision of Working Hours in the Civil Service*. It also implements the recommendations from the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament in relation to providing more flexibility in managing long working hours.

In July 2023, the Service published a **Compensatory Leave Policy**. In introducing this policy, it is recognised that senior managers at Assistant Principal (AP) or equivalent, and Principal Officer (PO) or equivalent grades are often required to work late due to business requirements in the Service. Compensatory leave is intended for those grades to compensate for the working of additional hours during particularly busy times, over and above those normally expected of them, and which cannot be taken back through flexible working arrangements near the time of the additional work.

An **Induction Policy** was approved by the Management Board and introduced in November 2023. The policy has been developed to ensure a positive and consistent experience for new employees. It clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of HR Recruitment, line managers, sections, buddies, the Training and Development Unit and ICT. In addition, the policy introduces a new buddy system. Line Managers are asked to assign a buddy to new staff members who can show the new staff member around when they arrive.

A **Right to Disconnect Policy** was approved by the Management Board and introduced in the organisation in May 2023. The policy has been drafted in line with the Workplace Relations Commission's *Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect*. Within the policy, the Service recognises the unique nature of working in the national parliament, and the fact that hours worked in parliament are not standard hours. The right to disconnect means the right of an employee to not routinely perform work outside their normal working hours; the right not to be penalised for refusing to attend to working matters outside of their normal working hours; and the duty to respect another person's right to disconnect.

A renewed **People and Organisation Development (POD)** initiative for the organisation was launched at an all-staff meeting in November 2023. POD is a strategic initiative designed to enhance the capabilities of individuals within the organisation while fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth.



Seirbhís Thithe
an Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas Service

Forbairt Daoine
agus Eagraíochta
People and
Organisational
Development



Five streams will be rolled out as part of the POD programme:

- Manager Development Programme
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Leadership
- Parliamentary Excellence Programme
- Values and culture

POD is led by a cross-section Steering Group, with central coordination by HR Services, and oversight from the People and Organisation strategic committee. POD programmes are developed in consultation with Service staff. Focus groups on the initiative took place in January and February 2024.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well Supported Parliamentary Community

Goal 2: Reimagine the way we work and implement flexible and innovative blended working practices.

The Service is committed to supporting the ongoing learning and development of staff in order to ensure the capacity to meet key challenges and opportunities, and to remain a high-performing organisation. This commitment remains part of a long-term policy of supporting all staff across the organisation to achieve their full potential while enhancing organisational performance. The Service aims to be an organisation that is continually learning, systemically adapting to change and reviewing how to do things better.

In 2023, the Service published a **Learning and Development Strategy**, as well as a **HR People Strategy** for the 2023-2024 period.

The HR People Strategy was developed in consultation with staff and it outlines how the Staff HR team will assist the organisation to build an inclusive and well-supported parliamentary community. It also includes a range of actions to help the Service meet its goals of being an open, digitally transformed and bilingual organisation. It has three priorities:

1. Build Staff HR as a high-performing centre for the support of staff and the organisation.

2. Build the parliamentary workforce of the future.
3. Build the workplace and organisation of the future.

The Learning and Development Strategy sets out the ways the Service will deliver on its commitment to the ongoing learning and development of its staff. It will help the organisation to ensure that staff have the necessary skills and capabilities to meet the challenges and demands of work in the coming years.

Throughout 2023, the Training and Development unit continued to run a **Knowledge Sharing Programme** focusing on the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. The programme aims to give attendees an overview of the roles of the various sections and how they fit into the work of the Service as a whole. The sessions are held over MS Teams and are open to all staff to attend. Five webinars took place in 2023.

Table 10: 2023 Knowledge Sharing Programme Webinars

January	Members' HR and the One Stop Shop
February	Finance, Salaries and Procurement Units
March	ICT Unit
June	Facilities Management Unit and Safety and Sustainability Unit
July	Superintendent's Section

The Service's **Procedural Development Unit** was established in 2021 as a section with central responsibility to drive the implementation plan for Procedural Capacity and Knowledge Management. The work of the Procedural Development Unit is essential in ensuring that the Service can continue to manage the ongoing risk of loss of procedural skills, as well as possible diminution of procedural capacity. The development of the unit follows from the Management Board's approval, in 2019, of a Procedural Capacity Strategy. This strategy aims to develop procedural staff to become experts in, and custodians of, the procedures, precedents, rules and Standing Orders of the Houses of the Oireachtas and their Committees, and to advise impartially on the application of these procedures, precedents and rules.

In 2023 the **Procedural Development Unit** continued to design and deliver a number of training initiatives tailored to the specific procedural requirements of individual groups. These included:

- Introductory training for new Oireachtas entrants providing an induction into the role and work of the Houses from a procedural perspective.
- Tailored sessions for sections and political groups as requested, aimed at meeting their particular needs.
- Regular briefings for all temporary Clerks on procedural and business matters, offering an opportunity to learn how to clerk an item and to gain insight from experienced Clerks.
- A series of recorded webinars, available on OneLearning, aimed to introduce officials to the work of the Houses, providing introductory learning on the separation of powers, election of members, how business is organised, the legislative process, the parliamentary question process and the committee system.

- Focused training of departmental officials in the legislative process, both for staff actively engaged in the process, and for broader departmental learning.

Particular programmes delivered in 2023 have included a full-day course for the Department of Justice as part of their wider legislative training programme, lunch and learn programmes to the Department of Health and DPENDR, as well as a tailored session for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Management Board.

Table 11: Procedural Development Unit Training sessions 2023

Group	Attendees	Courses
Departmental Staff	590	15
Oireachtas Staff	102	8
Total	692	23

In 2023 the Oireachtas Service continued to roll out the **blended working practices** introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic. These practices support both organisational effectiveness and the wellbeing of the parliamentary community.

The Houses of the Oireachtas **Blended Working Policy**, approved by the Management Board in 2022, continued to be rolled out in 2023, with a review of its implementation being carried out during the year. In a survey to managers, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that they have had a very positive experience with blended working, with 97% agreeing that productivity in their section has remained the same or increased.

The Blended Working Policy is based upon the Central Civil Service Framework and aims to allow for the greatest level of flexibility while ensuring the Service can operate effectively as a parliamentary service. The following key principles inform the Blended Working Policy:

- Supporting the Business Needs of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Leadership and Management.
- Be an Employer of Choice.
- Transparency and Consistency.
- Health and Safety.

The policy will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis in line with legislative changes and other developments that may arise as part of the evolving blended working landscape. In addition, the operation of arrangements will be subject to review at section level in accordance with decisions of the Management Board or of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. A formal review of the blended working arrangements also takes place as part of the PMDS process.

The **Service's staff networks** play an important role in re-imagining the way we work. The networks are a way for staff to engage with and learn from their peers, through coffee mornings, guest seminars and other events. Network membership is arranged by associated grades, incorporating both generalist and specialist staff.

During 2023, the staff networks were reconfigured and now comprise the following:

- PO Network (Principal Officer and equivalent).
- Comhairle (Assistant Principal and equivalent grades).

- An Líonra (Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and equivalent grades).
- Meitheal (Executive Officer and equivalent grades).
- An Mol (Clerical Officer and equivalent grades).

The **PO Network** provides a Forum for Principal Officers (POs) and equivalent grades to discuss strategic and operational issues. Its purpose is to:

- Provide peer support and enhance communications, co-ordination and knowledge-sharing at senior management level across the Service.
- Facilitate and develop a shared understanding of strategic priorities, communications, operational and policy issues within the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.
- Provide a forum for the discussion, development, dissemination and review of corporate initiatives and policies.
- Act as a 'new developments group' that can provide an overview, and where required oversight, of key actions/initiatives that are being considered within the Service.

The PO Network met five times in 2023 in relation to a range of issues, including:

- PO Network AGM.
- Safety Statement and the Service's Attendance policy.
- Cyber Security.
- Finance and HR updates.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well Supported Parliamentary Community

Goal 3: Provide ongoing support and development opportunities to ensure we are an employer of choice.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service strives to provide high-quality parliamentary services to the Houses of the Oireachtas, their Committees, their members and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission. Our staff are our principal resource, and their experience and dedication to high-quality service are critical to the achievement of our goals. The Service's priority in this area is to place employee engagement, learning and development, and good communication at the centre of initiatives taken.

HR Services supports the development of organisational development programmes in response to gaps identified from staff engagement surveys and feedback forums. The unit also ensures that the Service's employment practices attract, retain, develop and engage a diverse and high-performing workforce.

At the end of 2023, the total number of staff (civil servants, state industrial, printers and office holders' staff) employed by the Service was 705 full-time equivalents (FTEs). There were 473 political staff FTEs, who are employed by members and political parties/groups on the payroll.

HR Services continues to provide a wide range of training and development opportunities to the staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, and to members and their staff. Training interventions and information seminars have continued to be delivered both in-person and via MS Teams throughout 2023. Training and learning interventions were provided in a broad range of areas encompassing technical, professional and personal development training.

There were 956 attendances at 297 courses delivered during 2023 (153 courses were delivered by OneLearning while the remaining 144 courses were organised by the Training Unit). Figures for training courses do not include language classes which are also provided. The Service also promotes and supports the central Refund/Advance of Fees Scheme. Thirty-six Service staff pursued courses under the scheme in 2023.

Table 12: Workforce Planning and Recruitment	2023	2022	2021	2020
Number of Staff (FTEs) (civil servants, state industrial, printers and office holder staff) ¹	705	674	637	596
Members' staff (FTEs) ¹	473	461	451	437

¹ As of 31 December 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020.

Key training initiatives provided to staff of the Service in 2023 included:

- Budget Management and Costing.
- Competitive Dialogue and Negotiated Procedures Master Class.
- Employment Law in the Public Sector.
- General Introduction to Open Data.
- Non-Violent Crisis Intervention.

Key training initiatives provided to members and their staff in 2023 included:

- Constituency Database training, online and in person.
- Conflict Resolution seminar for political staff.
- PMB Legislative Drafting: Training for members and members' Staff provided by the OPLA.
- Pensions webinar for staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance.

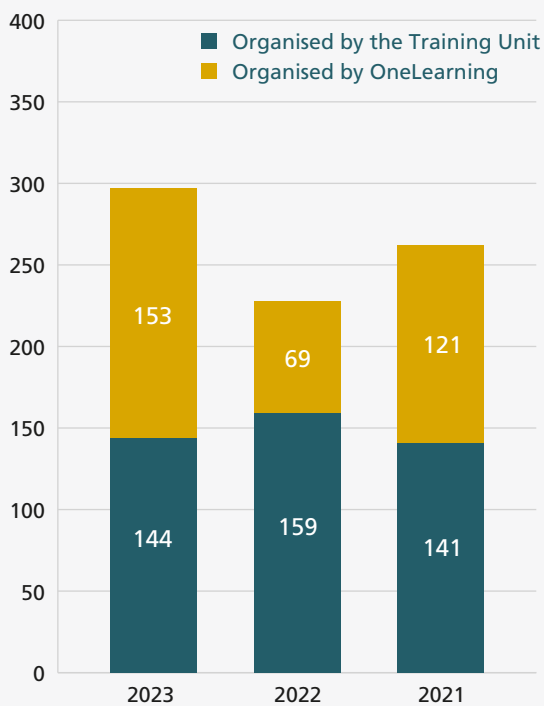


Figure 10: Staff Training and Development

The figures for training courses do not include language classes (figures for Irish language classes are provided under

section 5.5 of this report). These figures do not include webinars and recorded training sessions.

Key initiatives took place in 2023 that also provided support and learning opportunities to staff:

- **Fios**, the Service's Learning Management System, continued to be rolled out during 2023 after going live in December 2022. The system offers training opportunities including a bespoke Oireachtas e-learning course on Dignity at Work, and the opportunity for managers to assign staff to undertake compliance courses (including Data Protection and Protected Disclosures). Microlearning is also available on Fios, including through short 15-minute e-learning segments, with topics such as effective leadership, and health and wellbeing.
- Over **33 management and leadership courses** were advertised for civil service staff and rolled out on the OneLearning platform in 2023. A total of 13 managers availed of 12 of these courses.
- An **away day** took place in November 2023 for the senior management team to focus on internal communications, risk and strategy, and personal and professional development. The purpose of the initiative was to re-energise strategic thinking at senior management level including how the organisation will approach future challenges and opportunities.
- The **Openness and Inclusion Steering Group** monitors five work programmes focused on broadening recruitment channels for people from all backgrounds. The Service is also working on finalising a policy for a formalised internship programme for specialist civil service areas. This policy was approved by the Management Board in Q1 2024.

- **Willing Able Mentoring (WAM)** is a work placement programme which aims to promote access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities and build the capacity of employers to integrate disability into the mainstream workplace. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service was assigned one WAM placement during 2023.

In 2023 HR Services continued to implement a strategic recruitment approach to ensure the timely placement of new staff and bring recruitment competitions in-house for faster turnaround. The recruitment team focused particularly on the placement of specialist grades such as translators, researchers, and economists, creating panels for existing and future needs and expanding the advertisement of jobs from the Public Appointment Service (PAS) and Oireachtas channels to include more targeted websites based on the specialist stream of recruitment.

In 2023, an **Internal Communications Working Group (ICWG)** was established to review internal communication within the organisation, identify areas for improvement and develop an action plan to deliver these improvements.

The ICWG worked with external consultation to translate its findings into an **Internal Communications Strategy**, and an **Internal Communications Action Plan** for the Service for the 2023-2024 year. This strategy and action plan were circulated to staff in November 2023.

The strategy supports the mission of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to be an innovative and responsive parliamentary service. It aligns with the organisation's statement of values, and in particular the need to be people-focused and collegiate.

The strategy identifies four strategic outcomes for internal communication:

1. Sharing information.
2. Connecting people.
3. Listening to each other.
4. Aligning with the bigger picture.

An Internal Communications Officer post has been sanctioned by the Management Board to lead the delivery of the strategy and action plan. The strategy and action plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well Supported Parliamentary Community

Goal 4: Strengthen our culture of dignity and respect, diversity and inclusion.

The development of the Commission's first **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy** continued in 2023. The one-year strategy for the period 2024 was approved by the Management Board and the Commission in Q1 2024 and will be published in Q2 2024.

The EDI Officer, who was a member of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament, took the recommendations of that forum's report, as well as the legislative and policy context into account when drafting the EDI Strategy for the Oireachtas. In May 2022, the EDI team issued a survey to the parliamentary community as part of the consultation phase for the development of the strategy and included questions on the key equality and human rights issues affecting staff and the people we engage with.

The organisation's EDI Strategy and Framework set out key actions to address issues identified and will be a key driver for how the Houses of the Oireachtas Service meets its obligations under the **Public Sector Duty**. The next assessment of equality and human rights issues and the development of plans, policies and actions to address those issues will form part of the 2025-2027 three-year strategic planning cycle.

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 places a statutory obligation on all public bodies to put measures in place to:

- eliminate discrimination;
- promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services; and
- protect the human rights of its members, staff, and the persons to whom it provides services.

The **Public Sector Duty** relates to all members of the public, people who use our services, and our staff. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service strives to ensure that all of its services and policies are accessible to all of those with whom we interact, and that we engage with all our stakeholders in a respectful and constructive manner.

Since 2022, the Training and Development Unit has made the **Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Equality and Human Rights eLearning module** available to all members, political staff, and civil service staff.

During 2023, the Service continued to provide a range of supports to staff and members of the public. These include the key roles of the Access Officer, Disability Liaison Officer for staff, a dedicated EDI team and two in-house Irish Sign Language Interpreters.

The below reflects the range of activities and initiatives the Houses of the Oireachtas Service has in place, and engage in to support it to meet its Public Sector Duty obligations.

In 2023, the **Openness and Inclusion Steering Group** continued to further its educational, access and engagement agenda. The Steering Group has two distinct and equal aims: to improve diversity and inclusion across the nine equality grounds in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and to develop and monitor educational and engagement opportunities to increase access to the Houses of the Oireachtas using recruitment, placement, internship and apprenticeship models. The two aims are interlinked with the overarching objective to develop an open, inclusive and accessible national parliament and to become an employer of choice.

The work of the group acknowledges the increasing demand for diversity and inclusion in the workplace, as well as the need for additional pathways to employment. During 2023, there were six official placement programmes in the Service. These are:

1. Student Placement Programme for members.
2. Transition Year Programme.
3. Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme.
4. WAM (Willing, Able, Mentoring) Programme.
5. ISL and Trinity College Deaf Studies Programme.
6. Traveller and Roma Community Internship Programme



The **Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme** is an applied learning, development and socialisation programme for young adults with an intellectual disability. The programme is facilitated by the Service, which provides a workplace setting where these adults can learn and develop their skills to be 'work ready'. This is done in collaboration with KARE and WALK supported employment programmes, City of Dublin Education and Training Board, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The outcome of the programme is to support OWL graduates to find meaningful and viable part-time permanent employment in the wider Civil and Public Service through the OWL Graduate Programme.

As a learning programme, the OWL programme lends itself to a range of benefits for the Houses of the Oireachtas, and the trainees, while promoting a more integrated and diverse working environment. During 2023, the programme continued to expand and develop through working in partnership with other public sector bodies, including the Public Appointments Service, and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform.

On 5 July 2023, the third group of trainees graduated at an awards ceremony in Leinster House. Trainees were awarded a certificate from the Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD to mark their achievement. On 18 September 2023, the fourth (2023-2024) group of OWL programme trainees commenced their OWL journey in Leinster House.

Since the first iteration of the OWL programme in 2018, 17 OWL graduates have been employed across eleven

government departments and offices, including the Public Appointments Service; the Office of Government Procurement; the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Department of Social Protection; the National Shared Services Office; Revenue, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. Graduates are also employed in the private sector, while others have engaged in further education and training.

In March 2023, the OWL Programme won the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation award in the category of 'Workplace and organisation of the future' at a ceremony in St Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle. In February 2024, the programme was the recipient of the Advancing Disability Equality Award at the Irish Centre for Diversity's National Diversity and Inclusion Awards held at the Dublin Royal Convention Centre, and in March 2024, the programme was awarded a Good Practice Certificate at the European Public Sector Awards held in Maastricht.



The Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Training and Graduate Programme received an award at the eighth Annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards.



The third group of trainees graduated from the Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) programme.

The **Willing Able Mentoring (WAM)** is a work placement programme which aims to promote access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities and to build the capacity of employers to integrate disability into the mainstream workplace. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service was assigned one WAM placement during 2023.

During 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas facilitated two placements under the Department of Justice's **Traveller and Roma Community Internship Programme**. The Service is one of four pilot workplaces to support this programme.

An Autism-Friendly Parliament

Throughout 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas worked with AsIAM, Ireland's Autism Charity, to make the Leinster House complex more accessible for autistic people. The Service has developed a suite of resources for visitors to Leinster House, including a video guide, a comprehensive visitor's guide, sensory maps of the public areas in the complex, sensory support kits, and a dedicated webpage.



The Houses of the Oireachtas received accreditation as an *Autism-Friendly Parliament* by AsIAM, Ireland's National Autism Charity.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team and the Training and Development Unit also facilitated the delivery of 'Understanding Autism Awareness' training sessions. The aim of these sessions was to provide everyone with the necessary knowledge to provide supports to autistic people, and to support the work of the Joint Committee on Autism.

By the end of December 2023, 69% of the parliamentary community had completed the 'Understanding Autism Awareness Training' sessions.

In December 2023, The Houses of the Oireachtas achieved Autism-Friendly Accreditation from AsIAM. The charity will continue to measure our progress and help us to identify further steps we can take to support the ongoing improvement of the physical and sensory environment of the Leinster House complex.

Irish Sign Language Glossary of Parliamentary Terms

In order to enhance the access currently provided by the parliament to the Deaf Community, the Houses of the Oireachtas' **Irish Sign Language** team created an Irish Sign Language glossary of parliamentary terminology.

The ISL team collaborated with Deaf interpreting students from the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College and others in the Deaf Community to develop the glossary. The glossary comprises a list of approximately 80 terms specific to parliamentary proceedings and activities. This terminology is most often used in settings that would not carry the same meaning in other contexts.

The development of the ISL glossary of parliamentary terms was presented by the ISL team at the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters Conference 2023 on Jeju Island, South Korea in July 2023. The Irish Sign Language team launched the glossary of new signs for parliamentary terms on Oireachtas.ie in December 2023.

Dignity and Respect

Everyone in the Houses of the Oireachtas strongly supports a culture of dignity and respect in the parliamentary workplace, in which bullying, harassment and sexual harassment are unacceptable forms of behaviour.

The **Dignity and Respect Steering Group**, which includes representatives from political staff, the party administrator group, TDs and Senators and was established in March 2022, met twice in 2023. The Group was established by the Commission to oversee the ongoing operation of the **Dignity and Respect Policy** which provides a policy for members as employers to adopt in order to manage complaints of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment. The Steering Group Work Programme priority tasks for 2023 included:

- Continue to raise awareness of the Dignity and Respect policy and the services available to support the operation of the policy.

- Organise a Dignity and Respect Awareness Day to promote a culture of dignity and respect in the parliamentary workplace.
- Continue to consider reports from Members' HR Unit on the operation of the policy and the implementation of the Dignity and Respect Action Plan.

Training courses on dignity and respect matters were made available, including a 'Dignity and Respect' webinar and an e-learning course on 'Bullying in the Workplace'. In 2023, the Training and Development Unit also provided a Bystander Intervention Training e-learning module, and Spectrum Life provided a seminar on 'Conflict Resolution'. Additional training was also provided in April 2023 to the nominated Complaint Recipients by Members' HR and the OPLA.

In 2023, The Commission further approved the circulation of an anonymous Dignity and Respect Exit Survey to political staff who leave their posts.

Gender equality

On Monday 6 March, the Houses of the Oireachtas welcomed women from diverse, disability and minority groups across the country into the Dáil chamber to engage with the Women's Caucus on the theme: 'Gender Equality in Irish Politics'.



To mark International Women's Day the Oireachtas Women's Parliamentary Caucus hosted a debate on *Gender Equality in Politics*.

Each statement was addressed by a member of the Women's Caucus. A lottery was held to choose the groups (and speakers). One representative from each group made a 3-minute statement on 'Gender Equality in Irish Politics'. The groups chosen to address the event were:

- TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland) – addressed by Senator Annie Hoey.
- The Irish Traveller Movement – addressed by Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne.
- AkiDwA: National Network of Migrant Women – addressed by Senator Mary Fitzpatrick.
- EPIC (Empowering People in Care) – addressed by Deputy Patricia Ryan.
- ISSU (Irish Second-Level Students' Union) – addressed by Deputy Ivana Bacik.

The event was chaired by Senator Fiona O'Loughlin – the chair of the Women's Caucus. The overall aim of the event was to promote a more diverse and representative parliament and to mark a defining moment on the journey to 50/50 representation in Irish politics.

On 20 December 2023 the Houses of the Oireachtas Service published its second **Gender Pay Gap Report** in line with legislative requirements. The Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 regulations require organisations with more than 250 employees to report on the hourly gender pay gap in their organisation across the range of metrics. The Service chose 29 June 2023 as its snapshot date.

The mean gender pay gap for the Service for the period 30 June 2022 to 29 June 2023 was -4.09% for full-time staff and -18.41% for part-time staff. The median gender pay gap for the Service for the same period was -7.95% for full-time staff and -29.70% for part-time staff. The gender pay gap is the difference in the average hourly wage of men and women across a workforce, this includes basic pay, allowances and overtime.

In March 2023, the Commission approved the establishment **of an LGBTQI+ Caucus for members and former members** of the Houses. The purpose of creating the Caucus was to promote the achievement of LGBTQI+ equality and to advocate for initiatives that address issues affecting the LGBTQI+ community within the parliamentary community and society. Since its establishment, Caucus members have been developing strong relations with other parliamentarians, the Global Equality Caucus and NGOs.

At the heart of our strategic plan is a recognition that the people who make up our parliamentary community are our greatest asset. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service remains strongly committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. Houses of the Oireachtas Service staff (civil service and state industrial staff) have a wealth of knowledge and experience and are the key drivers of supporting an effective parliament.

The Oireachtas Service will continue to progress a number of initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion and will continue to monitor and report on gender representation.

Child Safeguarding

Under the requirements of the Children First Act 2015, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service has a **Child Safeguarding Statement** in place, supported by a **Child Safeguarding Implementation Plan**. In 2023, a Working Group of the Openness and Inclusion Steering Group raised awareness of child safeguarding. The group continued to develop, throughout the year, a suite of resources to highlight the role of the parliamentary community in the safe provision of Oireachtas relevant services. It is planned that awareness-raising events will be scheduled during 2024.

The Child Safeguarding Statement sets out a number of key principles and information on the role of the Designated Liaison Persons in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children in the parliamentary complex. The Statement also includes the contacts and procedures for reporting within the parliamentary complex. A Child Safeguarding Implementation Plan was also developed setting out actions to implement the Child Safeguarding Statement including the promotion of the requirements and supports in place.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well Supported Parliamentary Community

Goal 5: Develop a strategy to implement the recommendations of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament.

The Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament was established by the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghail TD to generate practical and achievable recommendations that could make the Houses of the Oireachtas a more inclusive, family friendly and gender sensitive workplace. Chaired by Dr Mary Upton, the forum presented its report in November 2021, marking a significant milestone. The report makes 51 recommendations, ten of which are considered priority.

These relate to five key areas, namely:

1. A Referendum to address remote working and proxy voting.
2. Increased representation of women on Oireachtas Committees.
3. Reduce long, late and unpredictable sitting weeks.
4. Increasing diversity in the parliamentary community.
5. Measures to ensure personal safety of members and their staff.

All of the recommendations include timelines for implementation, generally ranging from 12 months to three years. Early in 2022 the Service established a steering committee, chaired at Assistant Secretary level, to review the recommendations under three broad headings. Three sub-committees were established under these three headings, chaired at Principal Officer level.

1. Procedural: Some of the key recommendations considered include, for example, the establishment of a 'main' Dáil Committee; a proposal in relation to a Constitutional Referendum to amend Article 15 (to allow for remote and proxy voting); the introduction of a formal pairing system to facilitate members taking maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave, or travel for essential Government business; and the development of hybrid settings, regional hubs and revisions to standing orders.
2. HR: Some of the key recommendations include the Service addressing and facilitating long sitting hours in a more family-friendly way for staff, which could include additional staff, the use of rosters, and/or role re-design; as well as recommendations relating to the development of flexible and hybrid working arrangements, development of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, and recruitment and training initiatives.
3. Facilities and Accommodation: Some of the main recommendations in this area include accommodation for a new 'main' Dáil Committee, creating spaces for infant feeding, adequate infant changing facilities, provision of a dedicated Family Room for the children of members, a review of the crèche facilities and the accessibility of the campus.

Of note is that several recommendations involve discussions with other organisations, including the Government, who may need to take a lead role or be a consultative partner on recommendations.

Political involvement and ownership of the report's recommendations are achieved through regular reports to the Committee on Dáil Reform, the Seanad Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight (CPPO), the Dáil Business Committee and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

Examples of implementation of recommendations arising out of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament include:

- The Houses of the Oireachtas Blended Working Policy, based upon the central Civil Service Framework, was introduced in July 2022. The implementation of the policy was reviewed in 2023 and will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis in line with legislative changes and other developments that may arise as part of the evolving blended working landscape.
- In May 2023, in line with recommendations, the organisation introduced a Right to Disconnect Policy, drafted in line with the Workplace Relations Commission's Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect.
- The first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for the period 2024 was approved in Q1 2024. As the national parliament, the organisation strives to be a leader in creating an environment where diversity is celebrated, and where everyone is treated equally and fairly.
- The organisation has engaged with the OPW in regard to carrying out an accessibility audit of the Leinster House complex by the end of 2024.
- In line with recommendations, a suite of work placement programmes is in place in the organisation with an emphasis on equitable and transparent access, best practice standards and good learning outcomes.

Strategic Outcome 2: An Inclusive and Well Supported Parliamentary Community

Goal 6: Provide a safe, secure and accessible physical environment that meets the needs of the parliamentary community.

The overall responsibility for creating and maintaining a safe, secure and accessible physical environment starts with the Management Board and Secretary General. In order to enable the Management Board and Secretary General to deliver on their responsibility, the involvement and cooperation of all users of the Leinster House complex is required. Specific delegations, roles and responsibilities for managers and other stakeholders who use the complex are set out in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service Safety Statement.

The **Safety Statement** sets out the Service's commitment to safety, health and welfare at work and outlines the resources and designated personnel that have been assigned to help deliver on that commitment.

In addition to its own managers and employees, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service further works alongside and shares its premises with a number of other organisations. The Service's Safety Statement sets out the commitments the Service expects from everyone in the parliamentary community.

Work to help reduce health and safety risks on campus continued in 2023 following the establishment of the **Safety Team**, and of a new management system in 2022.

A crucial component of how this work is advanced is the **Health and Safety Committee**. The Committee, chaired at Principal Officer level by HR, acts as a forum at which safety representatives can consult with management and make representations on issues of health, safety and welfare in the workplace. The Service's Safety Statement also provides guidance on working safely and the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency.

Table 13: Health and Safety	Aug-Dec 2023
No. of Health and Safety committee meetings	2
Home ergonomic consultations completed	82
Internal safety audits completed	18

Collection of metrics on the Service's health and safety activities commenced in August 2023 and will continue to be reported upon in future annual reports.

The Safety Team helps to ensure that the control measures identified through the risk assessment process are actioned and then regularly monitors the campus to ensure they are still in place and to identify and mitigate any other risks. The team also facilitates specific risk reduction activities, particularly where specialist advice is required, for example ergonomic assessments and noise assessments.

They work with the Superintendent's section to implement fire safety practices including updating evacuation routes, maps and signage, providing Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs), and managing the appointment of fire wardens to help ensure safe evacuation for all throughout the campus.

Safety management is kept under ongoing review to ensure all measures take account of changing circumstances and are updated to reflect advice and best practice.

Accommodation remains a challenge for the Service. The Head of **Facilities Management and Business Continuity** has a lead role in providing accommodation and services to support a safe working environment, and in working to enhance services to members and to the public through the ongoing maintenance, conservation and upkeep of Leinster House and its grounds.

In 2023, the Head of Facilities Management and Business Continuity continued engagement with the OPW towards working to develop a long-term Estate Strategy for the Oireachtas complex. As part of this engagement, current and likely future needs are assessed on an ongoing basis. This includes assessment in respect of the forthcoming increase in Dáil membership following the next general election, and proposals made by the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament. This project is ongoing, and engagement will continue with the OPW.

The Head of Facilities is also responsible for business continuity planning and a process of consultation with business units took place in 2023 in advance of a Business Continuity Policy for the Service being progressed in 2024.

As part of the ongoing improvement to services across the campus, essential remedial works were carried out on the kitchen between July and September 2023. During this period, the Self-Service Restaurant and Members' Restaurant were closed. The works involved the complete replacement of electrical wiring, water and gas piping, and the replacement of flooring, some equipment, and replacement of electrical plant work.

The refurbishment project in the catering facilities is set to take place during summer recess 2024 as a mark of the Service's commitment to making the workplace safer and more efficient. These works are necessary to ensure continued compliance with food safety standards and improved workflows for staff within the kitchen. It is further expected that restoration works on Block C will be completed in 2024. Moreover, the Service will work with the OPW to commence work in Block D and to repair roofs over the main staircase and Dáil chamber.

The **Superintendent's Section** provides operational support and security for sittings of the Houses and the Oireachtas Committees, high-level parliamentary meetings and official events hosted by the Houses. A new **Superintendent of the Houses** was appointed in September 2023.

Security remained a risk for the organisation throughout 2023. A review of security arrangements was initiated following a security breach on the Leinster House complex on 3 June 2023, as well as a series of protests that took place on the Dáil's return on 20 September 2023. Upon completion, it is the intention of the Commission to address and implement any issues identified.

On 2 October 2023, An Garda Síochána presented a briefing to the Commission on the policing of the physical environment of the Houses of the Oireachtas and protest at its environs. On 14 December 2023, the Superintendent of the Houses further presented an oral update to the Audit Committee on the status of security measures for the Leinster House campus and the initiatives in place for protecting the physical safety of all members of the parliamentary community.

A review of security arrangements for the entire Leinster House campus will continue in 2024, building on the security reviews conducted by An Garda Síochána in 2023. It is further expected that a policy review in respect of access to the Leinster House campus will further be conducted by the Superintendent in consultation with the Facilities Management Unit and OPLA in 2024.

Moreover, An Garda Síochána, at the request of the Houses, will continue to provide in person briefing sessions with members in respect of personal security for themselves and their staff.

The **Tours Management app**, introduced in November 2022, continued to be rolled out successfully during 2023. The app allows members to book tours directly (without contacting the Superintendent's Unit). The app further allows members to manage bookings, amend and cancel bookings and also provides a history of previous booked tours. The Tour Review Group has continued to meet throughout 2023 to review the operation of tours.

During 2023, work continued on the new **Visitor Management System (VMS)**, with the system being made fully operational by Q1 of 2024. The VMS includes provision for:

- Pre-registration and self-service check-in, such as QR code scanning from mobiles.
- Notifying hosts of visitor arrivals and checking out, ensuring all appropriate health, safety and legal requirements are met.
- Linking to other systems such as the Tour Booking System, with the possibility of further integration with other systems in the future.

The new VMS also facilitates visitors who opt to use Irish when registering and checking in. Overall, the system helps support members in conducting their business effectively and ensures high standards of professionalism and corporate governance by offering a world class VMS experience. It also offers the possibility of comprehensive reporting which allows the Service to gather greater insights into the management of visitors and also contribute to the development of future strategies.

In May 2023, the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD and the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, established the **Task Force on Safe Participation in Public Life** to examine and make proposals on how to safeguard participation and promote civil discourse in political life. The Task Force met 11 times during 2023.

Members' HR provides secretarial services to the Task Force, including meeting administration, issuing requests for submissions, collating responses, and report drafting. At the end of September 2023, Members' HR also facilitated travel by the Chair of the Task Force to Westminster to be briefed on their security procedures.

Table 14: Meetings of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life¹	2023
Number of meetings	11
Number of sitting hours (hh:mm)	17:04
Number of meeting contributors (witnesses)	42
Number of written submissions received	30
No. of reports published	0

¹ *The Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life was established in May 2023.*

The Task Force contracted University College Dublin (UCD) to conduct a survey of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and their staff on the prevalence and impact of abuse, including online abuse and harassment. The survey was launched in Q1 2024. The Work Programme of the Task Force was completed in May 2024 when it presented its final report to the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD and the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, for further transmission to the Commission in 2024.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Goal 1: Strengthen public engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas, including through the use of digital communication technologies.

Numerous events and public engagement activities raising awareness of the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas took place throughout 2023. Digital communication technologies have continued to support these events.

The final initiative of the **Seanad100 – “Minority Voices, Major Changes” programme** took place in 2023, with a ceremony hosted in the Oireachtas Library reading room on 22 February, where the Institute of Public Administration publication *100 Bliain de Sheanad Éireann 1922-2022* was launched by the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer.

The publication was produced to commemorate and celebrate the centenary of Seanad Éireann and draws together contributions from current Senators and office holders, a former Senator, academics and researchers. The publication of this book, which gives the reader a valuable frame of reference on the first 100 years of the upper house, was the final initiative in a year-long programme to mark and celebrate for the centenary of the first sitting of Seanad Éireann.



The Houses of the Oireachtas marked **25 years of the Good Friday Agreement** with a range of public engagement events and initiatives during April and May 2023:

- Houses of the Oireachtas commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement with a showcase of Herstory’s ‘Peace Heroines’ exhibition to honour the Peace Women of Northern Ireland. The exhibition consisted of 14 double-sided panels along with nine portraits commissioned and curated by Herstory, celebrating the role of women in the building of peace in Northern Ireland from grassroots up to government levels.
- The Houses of the Oireachtas has looked back on the legacy of the Good Friday Agreement, producing a number of educational and informative textual and visual resources to mark its quarter-century anniversary. The Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement held a series of engagements with architects of the agreement, producing a report and web resource to reflect this series of discussions with politicians, diplomats and civil servants involved in the Agreement’s negotiation process.

- An **Oireachtas TV special** has also been produced to mark the anniversary, hearing from witnesses to the agreement, including former Taoiseach Mr Bertie Ahern and former TD and Minister, Ms. Liz O'Donnell.
- Parliamentary debates form the living history from which generations can learn from the past. An **educational resource** has also been produced entitled 'Exploring the Good Friday Agreement through Oireachtas Debates' drawing on debates surrounding the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement.
- On 23 May 2023, the day of the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, **former Taoiseach Mr Bertie Ahern addressed Seanad Éireann.**
- Also, on the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD, hosted 'When the Island Said Yes', a panel discussion on the Good Friday Agreement referendums of 1998. The panel discussion, moderated by journalist and broadcaster Sean O'Rourke, featured key players that contributed to delivering peace on our island. The audience was made up of serving and former members of the Oireachtas, Northern Ireland Assembly and Northern Ireland members of parliament, civic society and journalists who reported on the Good Friday Agreement talks and referendums.
- As part of the commemoration of the historic agreement, a series of hand-drawn portraits of '**Architects of the Good Friday Agreement**' by artist Shane Gillen was displayed in Leinster House. The ink and pencil portraits included portrayals of politicians, civil rights activists and community leaders who played a pivotal role in the peace process that led to the Good Friday Agreement.

A total of 54,529 people visited Leinster House in 2023. This is a marked increase from 2022, when there were 29,239 visitors to Leinster House, and more in line with pre-Covid 19 numbers, when approximately 100,000 people visited Leinster House annually.

Leinster House is one of the most culturally and socially significant buildings in the country and opening the doors of parliament on **Culture Night** plays a vital part in promoting civic engagement between the public and their political system. Approximately 500 tickets were made available to the public for the event on 22 September 2023. Irish Sign Language (ISL) and Irish language tours, alongside English language guided tours, were provided on the night. Musical entertainment was further provided by members of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann, Rathfarnham Ukulele Group, St Damian's National School Choir and Gloria, Dublin's LGBT+ Choir.

On 13-14 October 2023, Leinster House opened its doors once again for **Open House**, a celebration of great architecture, urban design and the people that contribute to the creation of built Dublin. Irish Sign Language (ISL) and Irish-language guided tours, as well as English-language guided tours, were provided, and the event was fully booked out on both days.



A View of LH2000 on Culture Night.



A tree was planted on the grounds of Leinster House as a living memorial to those who lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other key events and public engagement activities that took place during the year included:

- On 23 March 2023, the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, planted a tree on Leinster Lawn to commemorate the loss of lives to Covid-19. This event of remembrance was an opportunity to mark our resilience throughout the pandemic.
- On 5 July 2023, Foróige, Ireland's youth organisation, brought its digital showcase to Leinster House, where members of the Houses engaged with young people from around the country as they demonstrated youth work in virtual reality, coding, robotics, engineering, artificial intelligence and more.
- On 5 July 2023, the Houses welcomed a special young guest whose visit was arranged through Make-A-Wish Ireland, a children's charity which grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to give hope, strength and joy.
- On 10 November 2023, the National Bravery Awards 2023 took place. During the event, the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD presented 26 National Bravery Awards to individuals from across Ireland who

risked their own lives to aid others in peril.

- On 23 November 2023, to mark the 100th anniversary of the receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature award by W.B. Yeats, the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, hosted a special event in the Seanad Chamber in Leinster House.
- On 5 December 2023, an event took place marking 30 years since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland. The Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, hosted Bród 93/23 on 5 December to commemorate and celebrate the 30th anniversary of passing of legislation to decriminalise homosexuality in Ireland.



Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, hosted Bród93/23, an event to mark the 30th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland.

- On 13 December 2023, the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD unveiled a bust of Lord David Trimble in Leinster House to commemorate the Nobel Peace Prize awarded jointly to Lord David Trimble and Mr John Hume for their efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland.



Bust of Lord David Trimble, unveiled in Leinster House in December 2023.

The Houses of the Oireachtas X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook accounts saw another increase in followers in 2023. The use of Facebook and X livestreaming of parliamentary debates continues to raise public awareness of the work of the Houses. The Service's **Social Media Team** won gold for the organisation's X account in the 'state organisations' category at the annual Social Media Awards. Since 2018, the social media team received a total of 9 golds at the Social Media Awards.

The **Oireachtas.ie** website is the primary public engagement vehicle for the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas. It contains the outputs of parliament (e.g., live streams, the official report, legislation, Committee activity) and allows citizens to readily see who their elected representatives are, what they are saying in the Dáil, Seanad or Committees, how they are voting and, importantly, how to contact them. Collectively, members' profile pages are the second most visited areas of Oireachtas website, highlighting the importance of this information to external users.

A wide variety of parliamentary content is published and consumed each sitting day on Oireachtas.ie. This includes videos of parliamentary meetings, legislation, debates from both Houses and Committee rooms, Committee reports, corporate documents, press releases and schedules of business. In 2023, there was a 56% increase on 2022 in overall website traffic.

Table 15: Public Engagement and Access	2023	2022	2021	2020
Press releases issued	554	592	619	204
Facebook followers ¹	9,851	9,164	8,713	8,052
X/Twitter followers ¹	47,332	44,669	41,498	38,892
Instagram followers ¹	5,181	4,103	–	–
Visitors to Leinster House	54,529	29,239	1,874	13,302

¹ As of 31 December 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020.

Table 16: Oireachtas Website	2023	2022	2021	2020
Visits to the Oireachtas website	2,197,246	1,405,838	1,231,016	2,298,617
Website page views	5,608,400	4,661,853	4,576,635	6,611,405

¹ In October 2020 changes to cookie consent on Oireachtas.ie in order to implement GDPR requirements resulted in a reduction in the data available on page views and visits to the website.

2023 in summary:

- 2.197 million visits to Oireachtas.ie.
- 5.6 million page views.
- 480,000 page views of members' pages.
- 272,000 document downloads.
- 43 million minutes of live streaming consumed, including a record daily consumption of 8.8 million minutes on 11 July 2023.
- 6,380 documents published (excluding legislation).
- Approximately 1,100 email and phone queries from the public answered.

Figure 11 presents the minutes of LIVE streaming served to viewers of the Oireachtas website, the Oireachtas App and Oireachtas social media accounts. Over 43 million minutes were delivered in 2023 (an average of 828,297 minutes, or 13,805 hours, a week).

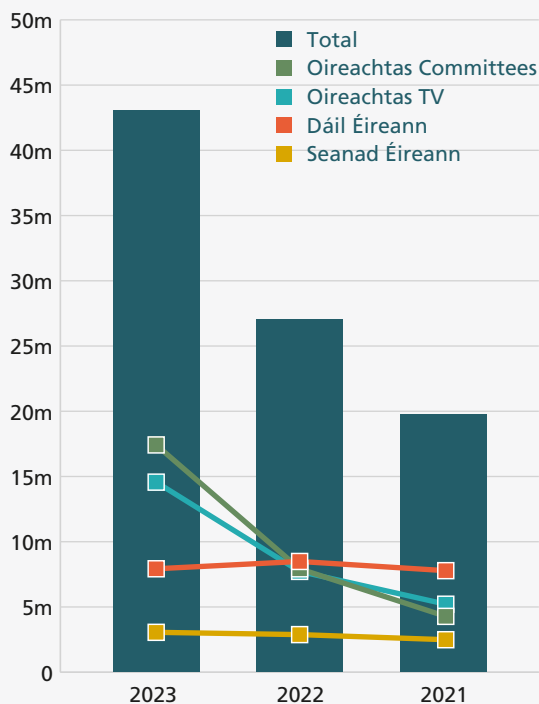


Figure 11: Oireachtas Live Streaming (minutes served to viewers), 2023

Due to exceptional public interest in seven Committee meetings involving representatives from RTÉ, the livestreaming figures for Oireachtas Committees more than doubled in 2023. Meetings took place on 28 June, 29 June, 5 July, 11 July, 13 July and 13 September. Mainstream media websites also embedded livestreams of these Committee meetings, increasing their reach and consumption.

During 2023, short videos of daily Topical Issues and Commencement Matters continued to be made available to view and download on the Oireachtas website. The availability of the edited video files has continued to allow media outlets to share the Houses of the Oireachtas content in a user-friendly and timely fashion. The edited video file is available to download for two weeks before being archived.

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin's output and information presence on the Oireachtas website continued to be developed over the course of 2023 to facilitate electronic publication and easy access for the public to all official translations and Rannóg an Aistriúcháin outputs.

Live streaming across six online channels was also successfully maintained throughout 2023. The address of President Joseph R. Biden Jr to a joint sitting of both of the Houses of the Oireachtas saw more than 261,944 minutes served to users during the event.

Improving **Oireachtas.ie** accessibility benefits all users, including those with disabilities, and we continue to enhance the site to support the full inclusion of visitors of all abilities. In 2023, Oireachtas.ie remained a strong performer in Ireland's Monitoring Report for the EU Web Accessibility Directive for 2023.

Notable enhancements to site accessibility in 2023 included improved tools for site navigation, ensuring consistency in how keyboard controls can be used by visitors who cannot rely on visual cues, and refinement of the site's structure to enable screen reading technology to work more efficiently. This has meant that complex page elements, including search result pages and the bill tracker on bill pages, are more accessible than ever.

The **Houses of the Oireachtas bilingual app** is another publicly available digital tool that supports citizen engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas. The app is available for Android and Apple devices. The app allows users to view proceedings, check the schedules, read Bills and search for public representatives on the go. In 2023, the app was downloaded 3,146 times.

In 2023, there were almost 1,600 users for the app each month on average, with approximately 165 daily users on average. The app is used more heavily on sitting days, and on 11 July 2023, the number of daily users of the app peaked at 1,937.

Oireachtas TV features both live and replay content in addition to content developed by the Service or provided by broadcast partners. It is available throughout Ireland on the following channels:

- Saorview Channel 22.
- Virgin Media Channel 207.
- Sky Channel 517.
- eir Vision Channel 504.
- Vodafone Channels 201, 207 (Dáil Éireann) and 208 (Seanad Éireann).

Oireachtas TV broadcasts major events and, since March 2016, provides access to an online archive that contains

daily videos of Dáil, Seanad and Committee debates. It also produces a range of programmes including documentaries, studio debates on important parliamentary events and historical talks. Oireachtas TV Around the Houses, is a monthly production looking back on some of the main events in the past month.

The Oireachtas TV Documentaries broadcast during 2023 included:

- National Bravery Awards 2023.
- Harry Clarke's Geneva window.
- Díospóireachtaí ón Seomra Léitheoireachta: An Pholaitíocht agus an Preas in Éirinn an lae inniu.
- When the Island Said 'Yes'.
- Oireachtas Essay Competition.

The Oireachtas TV Debate series broadcast during 2023 included:

- Oireachtas TV Budget 2024 Special.
- Monthly editions of Oireachtas TV Debates.
- Around the Houses – a monthly look back on main events around the Houses.
- TV Debate Special: The State of the European Union address with ISL interpretation.
- TV Debate Special: Strasbourg Special with contributions from Irish MEPs illustrating their work in parliament, including climate and financial concerns.

On 10 January 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas Broadcast and Channel Manager presented a seminar to the **Inter Parliamentary Engagement Network (IPEN)** entitled 'Parliamentary broadcasting – context, engagement and evolution – an Irish perspective'. Over 80 people attended the seminar online, with representatives from parliaments across the world in attendance.

Overall, in 2023, there were 1,030.4 hours of live broadcasting of Oireachtas proceedings. Replay of Committee proceedings made up 34% of total Oireachtas airtime.

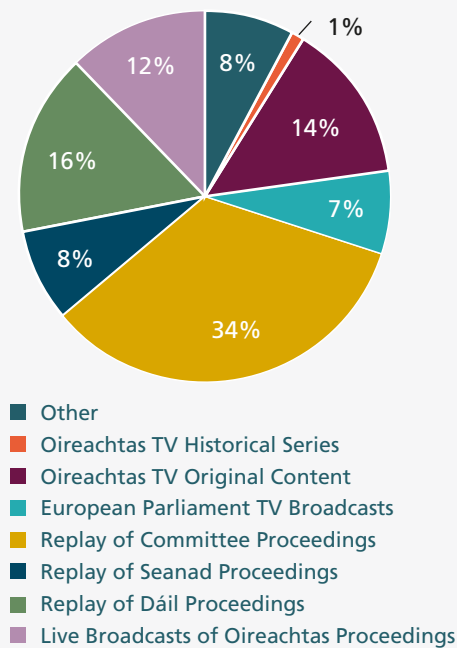


Figure 12: Content of Oireachtas TV, 2023

The Houses of the Oireachtas strive to provide the highest standard of ISL-interpreted parliamentary debates, discussions and documentaries. During 2023 Oireachtas TV presented Irish Sign Language (ISL) for all sittings. This included Leaders' Questions, parliamentary questions on policy and legislation and Commencement Matters with ISL interpretation.

The **Oireachtas Irish Sign Language (ISL)** team collaborated with the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin, to draft a new ISL glossary of parliamentary terminology. This unique initiative has resulted in 80 ISL signs being defined. The ISL team presented this project at the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) conference in July 2023.

In December 2023, the Houses of the Oireachtas Irish Sign Language team launched a glossary of new signs for parliamentary terms on [Oireachtas.ie](https://oireachtas.ie). The glossary comprises a list of approximately 80 terms specific of parliamentary proceedings and activities.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Goal 2: Further develop our education programme for primary, post-primary and third level institutions.

The **Oireachtas Education Programme** led by the Parliamentary Education Officer, provides access to online parliamentary education resources and to on-site workshops. The programme also promotes the role of the Houses among teaching professionals and with the public through the publication of education programmes on Oireachtas TV. While the target audience is second level students, the programme also has developed a number of initiatives for primary level students.

The Education Programme is made up of several strands that include the following:

- **The Transition Year (TY) Programme** is a formalised programme managed and coordinated by the Parliamentary Education Officer and designed to give students and insight into careers in the Oireachtas. There are three student intakes during the year in November and April with another week in March, which is delivered through Irish. The feedback on the programme from students is very positive. 30 students took part in the first week of the programme with a further 80 due to attend the weeks in 2024 involved in the Transition Year Programme for the school year 2023-2024.
- The Parliamentary Education Office continues to engage with **Rannóg an Aistriúcháin** on targeting educational activities at Irish-Medium schools, primarily through the Transition Year Work Experience Week, to promote the bilingual nature of the Oireachtas. In conjunction with Rannóg an Aistriúcháin and An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) a booklet on careers with Irish containing information about careers in the Oireachtas was produced.
- In conjunction with the **South Dublin Community Partnership** a programme for Transition Year students from DEIS schools in South County Dublin continued to be rolled out. 24 students from various schools took part in the 2023 programme.
- The **Parliamentary Education Workshops** which support Junior Cycle, Transition Year and Leaving Certificate students studying Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Politics, continued in 2023. Parliamentary Education Workshops for primary school pupils also continued in 2023 following the successful pilot in 2022. Primary schools also availed of on-site tours throughout the year. There were also visits from schools and colleges from Norway, Denmark, Germany and the United States.



Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD conducts a *Ceann-go-Ceann* webinar with secondary school students.

- During 2023, Senior Cycle Politics and Society students continued to engage in **the Ceann go Ceann programme**, both from their own classrooms, and on-site in Leinster House. The programme allows students and teachers to speak directly to the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD, the Leas Cheann Comhairle, Catherine Connolly TD and Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer via video link, and ask questions about Irish politics and the Oireachtas.
- The Oireachtas **Student Placement Programme**, administered by the Members' HR Unit, is a period of learning, and experience, offered to third-level students by academic institutions and facilitated by the Service. Student placements are temporary positions with an emphasis on practical training and applied learning where students can work directly with members of the Houses on work that is relevant to their studies. The student receives accreditation for the completion of the placement towards their final assessment in their course of study. The total number of students benefiting from the

Programme for the 2023-2024 academic year was 68 students from Institute of Public Administration (IPA), Technological University Dublin (TUD), University of Limerick (UL) and University College Cork (UCC).

Engaging with representative bodies for teachers is also a key element in developing the post-primary education programme.

As part of this engagement, on 21 October 2023, the Parliamentary Education Officer, together with the **CSPE** Teachers Association, hosted the annual CSPE Conference in Leinster House. Approximately 90 teachers from across the country attended the conference. The theme for the 2023 CSPE Conference was 'Ireland and the EU at 50'.

The event created an opportunity to connect teachers that promote CSPE with the aim of building greater understanding of the value of our political system, and also to secure a large cohort of advocates for the Oireachtas Education Programme and its resources. Support was provided on the day from the Library & Research Service, the Superintendent's Section and the Catering Team.

From the 14th-21st August 2023, 25 primary school teachers from around the country took part in a summer course designed to promote active citizenship and an understanding of the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Access to **online parliamentary education resources and to on-site workshops** in 2023 included:

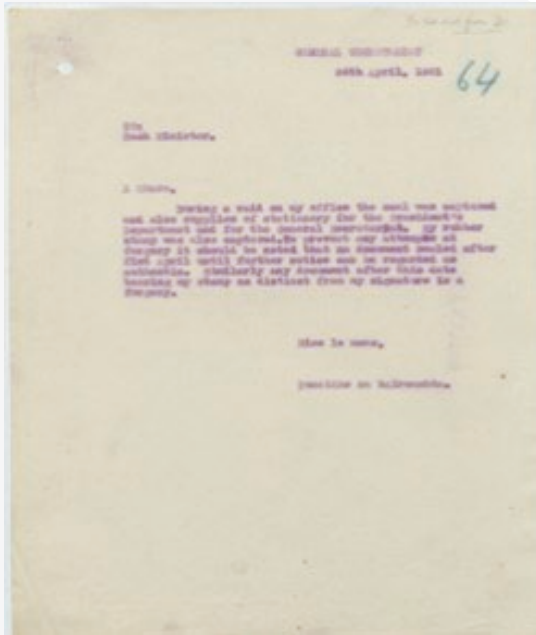
- Between January and December 2023 there were 94 on-site visits from school groups studying either Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) at Junior Cycle or Politics and Society at Senior Cycle.
- There were 53 online calls with schools from around the country between September and December 2023. The Ceann Comhairle took part in an online call with CSPE and Politics and Society students from four different schools.

Another important component of further developing our education programmes, the Education Officer participated in a range of public engagement activities throughout 2023:

- In March 2023, in association with Blackrock, Dublin West, Drumcondra and Kildare Education Centres, the Parliamentary Education Officer held a session with 5th and 6th class students from 126 schools and took them on a virtual tour of Leinster House. There were a huge number of students on the call. The students got a look inside Leinster House and also saw Leaders Questions and Committees at work.
- The Education Officer also attended the Politics and Society Teachers (PASTAI) and History Teachers (HTAI) conferences in October and November 2023 to promote resources provided by the Houses for students and educators. The Education Officer also attended the International Forum of Parliamentary Visitor Centres in North Macedonia in September and presented on the resources available for primary school students.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Goal 3: Establish a centralised Oireachtas Archive to safeguard and preserve the documents produced by the Houses of the Oireachtas.



A memo from Diarmuid Ó hÉigceartuigh, Clerk of the First Dáil.

This document was one of a series digitised and catalogued in a joint project between the Houses of the Oireachtas and the National Archives. It is a memo from Diarmuid Ó hÉigceartuigh (Dermot O’Hegarty), Clerk of the First Dáil and Secretary to the Dáil Cabinet (1919-1921), to each Minister noting that due to the capture of his seal and stationery by the British, that all letters issued by him after 21st April 1921 will bear his signature instead of his stamp. Any documents after this date that contain his stamp should be considered a forgery. The DE/2 and DE/4 documents and their catalogued metadata have been migrated into the New Archives Management System.

During 2023 the Oireachtas Archives acquired and installed an Archives Management System. Catalogued data and digitised documents from previous projects were migrated into this system. Advice on how to put the Oireachtas Archives on an established basis has been received and is under active consideration.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Goal 4: Enhance our engagement with Government Departments.

During 2023, the Service continued to enhance engagement with government departments and public bodies in relation to legislation and parliamentary procedures, including with the following:

- The Office of the Government Chief Whip.
- Government departments on the passage of legislation through the Houses, the processing of parliamentary questions and the daily business of the Dáil and Seanad.
- Government departments and public bodies on information for **Parliamentary Committees** and attendance at Committee meetings.

The **Procedural Development Unit (PDU)** continued to design and deliver a number of training initiatives, tailored to the specific procedural requirements of individual groups across the civil service. These initiatives included knowledge sharing sessions through departmental learning and the OneLearning platform among which were fifteen courses, which were delivered to departmental staff, focusing on training for officials engaged in the legislative process. A total of 590 attendees joined these courses in 2023.

The **Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)** engages with the Department of Finance, the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and with other government departments and bodies in relation to information on public finances. This provides the PBO with important insights into spending patterns for its own analysis and to better inform members of the Houses. Access to data from government departments is also essential to underpin robust budgetary analysis and costing work.

The PBO has also maintained its networks with government departments by continuing to implement a process in which it receives additional information on a monthly basis on departmental spending. In 2023, specific papers also leveraged departmental or agencies' data and contributed to relationship-building with line departments. This also includes engagement with some line departments, such as the Department of Social Protection, to access data for policy costing.

The PBO enhanced its links with government departments in 2023 by further developing analytical tools for forecasting and enhancing its data visualisation input.

PBO engagements with government departments in 2023 also included:

- In January 2023, the PBO made two presentations at events, one on 'Globalization and Extreme Events' at the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) Strategic Policy Discussion on Pre-empting Crisis; and one on the PBO's work at the C&AG's conference.
- On 27 April 2023, a member of the PBO staff presented on the topic of 'Fiscal Policy and Public Finance Sustainability' at the IGEES Strategic Policy Discussion (SPD).
- On 18 September 2023, PBO representatives met with officials from the Accounting Unit in Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform to discuss Central Government Accounting Standards materialising in 2024.

A strategic objective of the **Parliamentary Research Service** is increasing its engagement with the wider academic community. Managers of the Parliamentary Research Team are members of a public sector Research Managers Group and also participate in external research and evaluation advisory groups. The Parliamentary Research Service continues to develop links specifically with the science research community through seminars, secondments and outreach activities.

On 15 November 2023, to mark Science Week 2023, the Parliamentary Research Service, in partnership with Science Foundation Ireland, held a virtual seminar on Artificial Intelligence and Assisted Driving.

Highlights of **Oireachtas Committee** engagement with government departments include:

- **Legislative Scrutiny:** To assist sectoral committees and departments with adapting to the new 8-week timeframe for pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS), the Committees' Secretariat Coordination Unit initiated a series of informal meetings between the Committees' Secretariat and the PLS coordinator in each government department. As a result of this renewed focus on two-way dialogue, departments provide an informal, though regular, indication of what (if any) legislation is expected to be referred in coming months.
- **Financial Scrutiny:** To assist government departments and agencies to provide more consistent and timely briefings on revised estimates, the Committees' Secretariat published a guidance note for departmental briefings that was subsequently used by nine departments and agencies for the 2024 Estimates process. The Secretariat also hosted three MS Teams briefing sessions by staff of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (Performance Budgeting Unit) on the Public Service Performance Report (PSPR). The Secretariat has also engaged directly with the department on behalf of the Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and the Irish-speaking Community to facilitate the provision of the annual PSPR bilingually.

- **Monitoring of implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The Committees' Secretariat Coordination Unit collaborated with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (SDG Unit) to provide two briefings on the SDGs to members, members' staff and Oireachtas staff with a focus on engagement mechanisms and effective monitoring.
- **EU Scrutiny:** engagement between the Committees' Secretariat Coordination Unit and the Department of Foreign Affairs began on revising scrutiny guidance, with line departments on EU legislative proposals (COMs), and with the Department of An Taoiseach regarding updates on transposition of Statutory Instruments (SIs).
- The **Records Management Unit (RMU)** participates in the Data Protection Officer's Network, the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform's (DPENDR) Freedom of Information Central Policy Unit, Office of the Government Chief Information Officer's (OCGIO) eFOI and eDocs interdepartmental working groups to share the organisation's experience, ensure a consistent approach to compliance and contribute to the development of systems.
- **Rannóg an Aistriúcháin** works with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to maximise the availability of electronic translation support material.

A range of other Sections across the Service have continued its engagement activities with government departments:

- The **Finance Unit** has continued to engage with the Finance Officers Network.
- The **Procurement Unit** participated in a cross-departmental Procurement Officers Network for increased collaboration across Departments.
- The **OPLA** has continued to foster ongoing relationships with State legal departments and government agencies, as well as exploring possibilities for knowledge sharing, developing research networks and legal training.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Goal 5: Strengthen our EU, UK and other international relationships.

The Interparliamentary and Travel Unit, the Protocol Unit and the Committees' Secretariat support members in the ongoing development of interparliamentary relations. Our work on international parliamentary diplomacy continues to grow in strength. There were 33 **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)** Plenary and committee meetings attended in 2023. There were also two incoming delegations – a monitoring delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, who met with the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD, and a fact-finding mission by a member of the PACE Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development Committee. In addition to these meetings one Oireachtas member was appointed as a rapporteur on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and travelled to Azerbaijan in 2023.

There were Six Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) meetings (Winter Meeting, Annual Session, Autumn meeting, Two Election Observation Missions (EOM) and an Informal Network of Young Parliamentarians) attended in 2023.

On 13 April 2023, on invitation from the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD and the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, the President of the United States, his excellency Joseph R. Biden Jr, addressed a joint sitting of the Houses of the Oireachtas as part of his visit to Ireland. The President spoke of his Irish ancestry, of hope and unity, of his support for the Good Friday Agreement and many other matters related to Ireland.



President of the United States of America, H.E. Joseph R. Biden, addressed a joint sitting of the Houses of the Oireachtas.



President of the European Parliament, H. E. Roberta Metsola, addresses a joint sitting of the Houses of the Oireachtas.



The Houses of the Oireachtas hosted the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament from the member states of the Council of Europe.

President Biden is the fourth President of the United States to address the Oireachtas, following President John F Kennedy on 28 June 1963, President Ronald Reagan on 4 June 1984 and President Bill Clinton on 1 December 1995. The address, which took place in the Dáil chamber on Thursday, 13 April was broadcast live on Oireachtas TV and on Oireachtas social media channels.

On 2 February 2023, to mark 50 years of Ireland's EU membership, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, addressed a joint sitting of the Houses. Immediately after the joint address President Metsola took time to meet members of the Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus.

On 28-29 September 2023, the Houses hosted the **European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (ECP)** at the Convention Centre Dublin. Speakers and Deputy Speakers attended the two-day conference, which was delivered in partnership with colleagues from PACE.

The ECP brings together Presidents and Speakers of Parliament from:

- The 46 member states of the Council of Europe.
- States enjoying observer status or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.
- International parliamentary assemblies.
- The parliaments of central Asian and Maghreb countries also take part.

Some 485 attendees, representing 48 countries and eight international organisations, travelled to Ireland to attend the conference in the Convention Centre Dublin. Debates were held on the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; the challenges to representative democracy in volatile times; and equality and diversity in public representation.

The 2023 conference was opened with welcoming addresses by the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD and Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, who also held bilateral meetings with their counterparts from the parliaments of other Council of Europe countries.

Bilateral meetings are important for interparliamentary relations and serve to further strengthen our collaborative working relationships with international colleagues. In this regard, examples of other key engagements that took place during 2023 include:

- In February 2023, the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD, visited Japan to mark the 66th year of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Japan. The Ceann Comhairle met the Speakers of Japan's House of Representatives and House of Councillors.
- In February 2023, the Cathaoirleach led a delegation to New York, to attend the 2023 IPU Parliamentary Hearing at the UN.
- In February, the Ceann Comhairle welcomed a delegation led by H.E. Mr Igor Grosu, President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to Dublin.
- In March 2023, the Cathaoirleach led a delegation to Bahrain to attend the 146th IPU Assembly.
- In March 2023, the Ceann Comhairle travelled to Lebanon and the Cathaoirleach travelled to Sierra Leone and Liberia as part of the St Patrick's Day programme.
- In March 2023, at the invitation of H.E. Dr Anglu Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Ceann Comhairle led a delegation to Malta.
- In April 2023, the Ceann Comhairle welcomed the national leader of Belarus, Ms Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, to Leinster House.
- In April 2023, the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD and the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, attended the annual Speakers' Conference organised by the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Topics discussed included Russian aggression against Ukraine, the role of the EU in global cooperation of democracies and EU member states' dependence on totalitarian regimes.
- In June 2023, a delegation attended the Women Political Leaders Summit 2023 "Representation Matters" in Brussels, Belgium.
- In June 2023, a delegation attended the IPU Conference on Interfaith Dialogue "Working together for our common future" in Marrakesh.
- In June 2023, the President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, H.E. Annita Demetriou, addressed Seanad Éireann.
- In June 2023, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, H.E. Maura Healey, addressed Seanad Éireann.



Leas-Chathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Mark Daly, welcoming the Ambassador of France, H.E. Mr Vincent Guérend, to Seanad Éireann to mark Bastille Day.

- The Leas-Chathaoirleach, Senator Mark Daly welcomed the Ambassador of France, H.E. Mr Vincent Guérend, to Seanad Éireann to mark Bastille Day.
- During 23-25 July 2023, the inaugural **Speakers of the Isles Conference** took place in Kilkea Castle. The conference was hosted by the Ceann Comhairle. It demonstrated the shared commitment from across these islands to maintaining strong interparliamentary relations in a post-Brexit world. Participants included Clerks of parliaments and parliamentary officials from the UK, Guernsey, Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- On 28 June 2023, the Ceann Comhairle and a parliamentary delegation carried out official visits to Georgia and Lithuania.
- In July 2023, a delegation attended the IPU UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York.
- In September 2023, a delegation from the Ireland-China Parliamentary Friendship Group visited China.
- In September 2023, one member attended the IPU Science for Peace parliamentary meeting in Quy Nhon, Vietnam.
- In September 2023, members of the Dáil and Seanad took part in the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) Young Parliamentarians Conference in Ha Noi, Vietnam. The conference was an opportunity for young parliamentarians to get together to exchange good practices and to define common and innovative strategies to advance empowerment for young parliamentarians and youth.
- From 18 to 23 September 2023, the Ceann Comhairle welcomed a delegation led by H.E. Mr Dev Raj Ghimire, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Nepal to Ireland.
- In October 2023, the Ceann Comhairle attended the Second Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform in Prague. During the visit he signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and Dáil Éireann.
- In October 2023, the Cathaoirleach led a delegation to Luanda, Angola at attend the 147th IPU Assembly.
- In November 2023, a delegation attended the Global Forum – Women Leaders in Reykjavik, Iceland.
- On 8 November 2023, the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, attended the State Opening of Parliament at Westminster. Senator Jerry Buttimer became the first elected office holder from the Houses of the Oireachtas to attend the ceremonial event that formally marks the beginning of a session of the Parliament of the United Kingdom.
- In November 2023, at the invitation of László Kövér, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, the Ceann Comhairle led a delegation to Hungary.
- In December 2023, a delegation from the Ireland-UK Parliamentary Friendship Group visited London.
- In December 2023, the Ceann Comhairle led a delegation to attend the Doha Forum in Doha.

Table 17: International and Interparliamentary Functions	2023	2022	2021	2020
Outgoing Parliamentary Delegations¹				
IPU General Assemblies and related Meetings	7	3	5	10
PACE Plenary and Committee Meetings	36	35	68	58
Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE	5	6	15	13
Bilateral Meetings				
Incoming	5	9	1	1
Outgoing	7	4	1	–
Friendship Groups				
Incoming Parliamentary Friendship Groups	11	12	5	1
Outgoing Parliamentary Friendship Groups	5	4	0	0

¹ Outgoing Delegations include speaker-led delegations by the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach.

Table 18: Protocol Unit	2023	2022
Incoming visits	28	26
<i>Heads of State</i>	2	2
<i>Government Ministers</i>	9	5
<i>EU Commissioners</i>	2	6
<i>Ambassadors on official visits</i>	6	3
<i>Other distinguished visitors¹</i>	9	10
Support provided to conferences	2	5

Note: Collection of this data commenced in January 2022.

¹ Other distinguished visitors include visiting parliamentarians, MEPs and the heads of Advisory Bodies to the EU.

The Protocol Unit managed and supported 28 incoming visits and addresses to the Houses during 2023. The Unit's programme of work also included support provided to two conferences during 2023.

Europe Day takes place every year on 9 May. It celebrates peace and unity in Europe. The date marks the anniversary of the historic 'Schuman declaration' when French politician Robert Schuman set out his idea for a new form of political cooperation in Europe. 2023 marked the culmination of the EU50 programme which celebrated key milestones in the 50 years of Ireland's EU membership. To mark Europe Day in 2023, a number of events took place in Leinster House:

- The Ceann Comhairle unveiled the EU 50 'Into Europe' exhibition, displayed in Leinster House from 9-15 May 2023. The 'Into Europe' exhibition was a Royal Irish Academy Exhibition commissioned by Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).
- Statements on Europe Day were held in the Dáil.
- EU Commissioner Ms. Mairéad McGuinness addressed Seanad Éireann.
- EU member states' flags were displayed in the main hall of Leinster House.
- Leinster House was lit up in EU colours.

In light of Europe Day, a range of resources to support the goal to get citizens better acquainted with the work of the EU have also been produced across the Service. These include the update of the Europe Day page on the website, and the production of an Oireachtas TV Strasbourg Special with contributions from Irish MEPs discussing their work in the parliament.

Parliamentary Friendship Groups are a forum for building better understanding and mutual agreement, on a broad range of subjects, between members of national parliaments. Houses of the Oireachtas Friendships Groups function under the aegis of the Ceann Comhairle who nominates conveners to organise the groups' activities. There were 11 incoming and five outgoing Parliamentary Friendship Group activities in 2023.



The flag of the Sixty-Ninth New York Regiment, which President Kennedy presented on his address to the Houses of the Oireachtas in 1963.



The Houses of the Oireachtas hosted a meeting of the Ireland-United States Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Examples of activities of Parliamentary Friendship Groups in 2023 include:

- On 29 June 2023, members of the Irish-USA Parliamentary Friendship Group attended a meeting hosted by the Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, Senator Jerry Buttimer, in Leinster House to mark the 60th anniversary of US President John F. Kennedy's address to the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- On 5 October 2023, Lord Caine, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office, visited Leinster House to meet with the UK-Ireland Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Special Addresses to Seanad Éireann

The Protocol Unit supported special addresses to Seanad Éireann by the following distinguished visitors during 2023:

- The President of the GAA, Mr Larry McCarthy – 26 April 2023.
- European Commissioner, Ms Mairead McGuinness – 9 May 2023.
- Former Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern – 23 May 2023.
- The President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, H.E. Annita Demetriou – 14 June 2023.
- The Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, H.E. Maura Healey, – 27 June 2023.

The Irish Parliamentary Women's Caucus is a cross-party forum for Irish women parliamentarians to discuss and campaign on issues predominantly affecting women. In October 2023, the Caucus hosted a presentation with trade unions as part of the #StopTheStigma campaign, which highlights menopause and menstrual health-related conditions and need for workplace supports around them.

The **British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA)** was established in 1990 and expanded in 2001 to include members of the Senedd (then the Welsh Assembly), the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Crown Dependencies. BIPA provides a forum for discussion of issues affecting relations and a means to improved mutual understanding. The body usually meets twice a year, alternating venues between the UK and Ireland. BIPA Committees also conduct regular research and publishes reports on areas of mutual interest.

The **63rd Plenary of the BIPA** was held in March of 2023. The one-day meeting was held in the Northern Ireland Assembly Chamber at Parliament Buildings on the Stormont Estate in Belfast. Lawmakers from the Oireachtas and all the legislatures of the United Kingdom and the Crown Dependencies gathered to mark the 25th anniversary of the signature of the Good Friday Agreement. The keynote speakers were Mr Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach (1997-2008), and Sir John Holmes, Principal Private Secretary to UK Prime Ministers Sir John Major and Sir Tony Blair between 1995 and 1999.

The **64th BIPA Plenary** was held in St Helier, Jersey in May 2023. The assembly was addressed by, amongst others, Sir Timothy Le Cocq KC, the Bailiff of Jersey and President of the States Assembly, Deputy Kristina Moore, the Chief Minister

of Jersey, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, Minister of State at the Department of Finance, and Mr Steve Baker MP, UK Minister of State for Northern Ireland.

The **65th BIPA Plenary** was held in Kildare, in October 2023. The assembly was addressed by, amongst others, Michael McGrath TD, Minister for Finance, Ossian Smyth TD, Minister for State with responsibility for Public Procurement, eGovernment and Circular Economy, and the British Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Paul Johnston. The main theme was the transition to sustainable energy sources. The Assembly heard from a wide variety of stakeholders on this issue.

The five BIPA Committees met 29 times during 2023 (including meetings held in conjunction with plenary sessions). The committees published two reports and one interim report during the year. In May, Committee D (Environmental and Social Affairs) agreed a report on the 'Provision for Indigenous Minority Languages (IMLs) in the BIPA Jurisdictions'. The report noted that providing public services in indigenous minority languages (IML) such as Welsh and Irish is vital for visibility of IMLs and the sustainability of language communities. In May, Committee B (European Affairs) published an interim report on UK-EU Defence and Security Cooperation. In October, Committee A (Sovereign Matters) published a report on 'Protecting the Common Travel Area in the post-Brexit era' which highlighted some difficulties and potential issues arising from differing migration policies in BIPA jurisdictions.

The **Oireachtas National Parliament Office (NPO)** in Brussels represents both Houses of the Oireachtas to the European Commission, Council and Parliament and other EU institutions. The main role of the NPO is to report on EU-related issues of particular interest or importance to

the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas and its Committees. It also supplies targeted, summary information on European legislation and other matters. A key function of the NPO is to report on any subsidiary issues arising under the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty.

In 2023, the office organised a familiarisation visit to the European Parliament, European Commission, and Council of the European Union, investigating trends, developments, and the use of technology in translation, interpretation, the e-legislative process, and technology in chambers in October 2023, this was attended by seven senior staff, led by an Assistant Secretary General. In addition, it organised two familiarisation visits by twenty-four Committee staff to the EU institutions.

Further, the NPO produces a weekly Oireachtas Digest on Europe (ODE). These bulletins outline what is on the weekly agenda for the European Institutions. There were 41 weekly ODEs produced in 2023.

Sectoral Committees regularly engage in European Parliament-hosted interparliamentary committee meetings. In 2023 a total of 28 Committee members represented their Committees at 15 interparliamentary conferences or interparliamentary committee meetings hosted by the parliament of the holder of the EU presidency (Sweden and Spain) or by the European Parliament.

- Three members of the Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science attended the interparliamentary committee meeting on the European Citizenship Education. Two members of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters participated in the interparliamentary committee meeting on the participation of disabled persons in the electoral process.
- Two members of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters participated in the interparliamentary committee meeting on the participation of disabled persons in the electoral process. The Cathaoirleach of the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth participated online.
- The Houses were also represented by members attending the two interparliamentary conferences on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the EU (IPC on SECG), and both COSAC plenaries (the Interparliamentary Conference of EU Affairs Committees) in 2023.

The **Joint Committee on European Union Affairs** plays a key role in informing debate on the EU in Ireland. It considers important EU developments and initiatives affecting Ireland and ensures EU legislation and proposals are properly scrutinised.

Table 19: EU Interparliamentary meetings	Jan-Mar 2023	Jan-June 2023	Jan-Sept 2023	Jan-Dec 2023
Outgoing Parliamentary Delegations				
No. of EU IPCs/ICMs attended ¹	4	7	9	15
No. of members travelling	7	14	16	28

Note: The collection of this data on MIF commenced in January 2023.

¹ IPC: Interparliamentary Conferences. ICM: interparliamentary committee meetings.

In 2023 it focused on EU enlargement and held meetings with the North Macedonian, Moldavian and Georgian ambassadors to Ireland, as well as a parliamentary delegation from the Republic of Georgia and Mr Teimuraz Janjalia, Georgia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, to discuss their countries' applications to join the EU. It also focused on the EU's relationship with the UK post-Brexit meeting, amongst others, Mr Maroš Šefčovič, Vice President at the European Commission and UK Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Mr Paul Johnston. It met the Swedish and Spanish ambassadors to Ireland to discuss the priorities for their countries' EU presidencies.

During the year the Cathaoirleach of the Committee travelled to Kyiv as part of a wider delegation of Committee Chairs of EU countries to commemorate Ukraine's National Day of Independence and discuss its war with Russia and relations with the EU including its membership application. The Committee also marked Ireland's 50th anniversary of joining the EU by co-launching the 'Into Europe' exhibition (developed by the Department of Foreign Affairs) in the European Parliament in Brussels.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is an active participant in the **European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)**. ECPRD is an interparliamentary network for knowledge sharing and information exchange. Its members are the European Parliament; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and parliaments where the Speaker is a member of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament. The main activities of ECPRD are comparative information requests and seminars hosted by the member parliaments. The Parliamentary Research Service is the point of contact for the ECPRD in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In 2023 the Houses of the Oireachtas answered 171 requests for comparative information from other parliaments in the ECPRD network and made 11 requests. Staff from across the Service participated in eight seminars and webinars during the year on the following topics:

1. Innovation and digital transformation
2. New European economic governance
3. National recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) – parliamentary control of the government
4. Strengthening democracy – research for effective parliamentary scrutiny
5. Parliaments and Citizens' Assemblies
6. Parliamentary research services
7. ICT – safety and security
8. Upholding the rule of law and the role of parliamentary administrations.

The Parliamentary Research Service further ensures information about the Houses of the Oireachtas on the **Interparliamentary Unit (IPU) Parline** website is maintained and up to date. The details of parliamentary activities are provided on an annual basis. Changes such as results of by-elections to the Dáil and Seanad are also reported. Data on gender of members of the Houses of the Oireachtas is also used to report on the representation of women in national parliaments by the IPU.

The **Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)** continued to develop relationships with international networks of Independent Fiscal Institution (IFIs) and other Parliamentary Budget Offices, while developing further interaction with bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and EU institutions.

The **PBO's** international engagements in 2023 included the following:

- In June 2023, the Assistant Secretary and Director of the PBO presented to the ECPRD at the Gender Budgeting Network, and on the work carried out by the PBO.
- In July 2023, the PBO gave a presentation on its work at the IPVIS Conference in Westminster, London.
- In September 2023, the PBO Team provided regional and directional support at the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament in the National Convention Centre.
- In November 2023, members of the PBO attended the OECD IPFIN Annual Meeting in Paris. A PBO member gave a presentation entitled: 'Expenditure, VAT and Excise (EVE) Model: Dealing with uncertainty and an environmental application'.

The **Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA)** continuous development of its interparliamentary and international relationships in 2023 included the following:

- In May 2023, the OPLA gave a presentation to a delegation of the European Court of Justice during a visit to the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- In June 2023, the OPLA took part in the UK-Ireland Interparliamentary Lawyers Conference in Cardiff, Wales.
- In November 2023, the OPLA Parliamentary Services Legal Advisers gave a presentation on 'Providing legal services to Oireachtas Committees' to a delegation from the Parliament of Kenya.

The **Editor of Debates Office's** development of relationships with its UK counterparts included:

- In June 2023, staff from the Committees' Secretariat attended the Parliament Staff-to-Staff Summer Seminar in Nicosia, Cyprus co-organised by the

House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus and the Economic Governance and EMU Scrutiny Unit (EGOV) of the European Parliament. This engagement involved staff from 20 EU National Parliaments, as well as representatives from the European Parliament. The seminar aimed to strengthen capacity building and collaboration at the administrative level between the European Parliament and EU National Parliaments through the exchange of expertise and best practices on the 'European Semester', as well as on broader EU economic governance issues.

- In July 2023 the **Editor of Debates Office** took part in the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association Symposium held in the Isle of Man.
- in September 2023, the **Committees' Secretariat** participated in meetings and the annual conference of the Parliamentary and Assembly Procedural Officials Network (PAPON), a network of officials working for Parliaments and Assemblies in the British Islands and Ireland. This provided opportunities for knowledge sharing in relation to the delivery and management of procedural advice to members and the effective conduct of plenary and committee business.

During the seminar attendees shared expertise, opinions and suggestions on three thematic sessions; the progress and challenges in the implementation of National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) – with special focus on the integration of the REPowerEU Plan; the multiple economic repercussions of the conflict in Ukraine – national and EU policy responses and the ongoing reform of the EU Economic Governance Framework. In particular the role of independent fiscal institutions and how they can support parliamentary scrutiny.

Strategic Outcome 3: An Open, Engaged and Sustainable Parliament

Goal 6: Support the delivery of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Strategy, Climate Action Plan 2021 and the implementation of biodiversity initiatives.

A new **Sustainability** team was established in the Service in 2022 to reflect our increased obligations in this area. The sustainability team and the Facilities Management Unit have worked closely with the Office of Public Works (OPW) in 2023 to implement energy management projects and initiatives.

Over the last number of years, the organisation has made improvements to how we operate to reduce the impact we have on the environment. By 2022, the Service's energy-related greenhouse gas emissions had reduced to 1.6 million kg CO₂ eq. from our baseline emissions of 2.7 million kg CO₂ eq. Similarly, the organisation has improved our energy efficiency by 45% since 2009. The Service reports to the SEAI every year on energy consumption and activity.

The Service's **Climate Action Roadmap** was launched in December 2023. It sets out how the Service will continue to improve its environmental performance by using less energy and less resources in delivering its services. The Roadmap sets out how the Service will:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030.
- Improve the energy efficiency in the public sector from the 33% target in 2020 to 50% by 2030.



The Service will meet these targets by making changes to how the organisation thinks about and manages energy use on the Leinster House campus. This includes the leadership structures the organisation has in place, engaging and training staff, developing a better understanding of energy use and management, and working with the OPW to identify projects and programmes that will deliver sustained reductions. Priority projects over the next three years include:

- Completing an energy audit to better understand our consumption.
- Implementing a certified energy management system.
- Targeted energy management and awareness activities.

In addition, the Service will work with the OPW to:

- Make improvements in our worst-performing buildings.
- Optimise and upgrade our heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.
- Complete a solar PV feasibility study.
- Continue rolling out the LED lighting project.

The Assistant Secretary, Corporate and Members' Services, is the **Climate and Sustainability Champion** for the Service, leading on sustainability and climate action activities in the Oireachtas. As a member of the management board, they ensure that climate action and sustainability remain central to the business of the organisation.

The **Oireachtas Green Team** was established to help integrate sustainability into the way the organisation works. It brings together people from the sustainability, procurement, HR, catering and facilities management units who have specific roles in reducing our impact on the environment.

As well as the significant reductions the Service has made in energy use and carbon emissions, the organisation has also delivered changes in other areas, including commuting, procurement and resource use, to lessen the impact we have on the environment as well as employees committed to working together to promote sustainable approaches to the services we deliver.

In November 2023, the Service was one of the first organisations in Ireland to have achieved the **Smarter Travel Mark**, awarded by the National Transport Authority. In achieving the award, the Oireachtas Service is demonstrating a commitment to changing attitudes and behaviours regarding walking, cycling and public transport usage by implementing measures that facilitate, support and encourage sustainable travel options for our workforce and visitors.



The Houses of the Oireachtas was awarded the Smarter Travel Mark. The award recognises organisations that support active and sustainable travel for their workforce.

To reduce our impact on the environment across our value chain, the **Procurement Unit** has been considering green principles for selection and award criteria when procuring goods and services over the last number of years. The Service's Digital Transformation team continues to implement its Digital Parliament programme which, among other benefits, reduces reliance on paper. In addition, the Finance, Procurement and Salaries Units moved to paperless processes in 2021.

In December 2023, the Library and Research Service published an In Focus page on 'COP28 and Ireland's Climate Commitments'.

On the 14 December 2023, the **Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action** published its report on the examination of recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly report on Biodiversity Loss. The report contains 86 recommendations to ensure that the biodiversity crisis in Ireland is addressed in a meaningful way.

The Service will continue to make improvements in these areas, and others, in the coming years. Key to this will be monitoring and reporting performance so that we are always learning and ready to make changes when needed to help deliver our goal of a sustainable parliament.

Strategic Outcome 4: A Digitally Transformed Parliament

Goal 1: Continue to advance our cyber security capabilities.



Cyber Security Newsletter Icon

Cyber security remains a key focus for the Service. ICT Services have been essential to the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (the Service) for many years, and this has increased since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and with the normalisation of remote working.

Effective cyber security is critical to operations within the Service, as the impact of cyber-attacks continues to increase and become more sophisticated. Under the second iteration of the European Union's Networks and Information Security Directive, the Houses of the Oireachtas ensures that it has the necessary level of cyber security maturity and can demonstrate this.

The Oireachtas Cyber Security Strategy and Roadmap, aligned with the Service's Strategic Plan 2022-2024, was implemented throughout 2023. The strategy and roadmap have been developed with input and guidance from the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and cyber security specialists and are supported by the results of the Oireachtas cyber security maturity assessment conducted in 2021.

The strategy and roadmap are aligned with international security standards and best practices and comply with regulatory and legislative requirements.

The overarching objectives of the Cyber Security Strategy and Roadmap are to:

- Increase the security and resilience of ICT services.
- Successfully optimise and invest in technology and security resources.
- Deliver services that will reduce the likelihood of damage from cyber security incidents to the Oireachtas by early detection and improved response in an ever-changing threat landscape.
- Ensure compliance with Public Service Baseline Standards. Compliance with the Public Sector Cyber Security Baseline Standard will ensure the Oireachtas is moving towards a cyber security compliance driven model under the NIS2 Directive², which will be enforced from 2024.
- These objectives are being achieved and measured over time during each of the key initiatives developed within the Cyber Security Strategy. These initiatives encompass:
 - A Security Operations Centre.
 - Threat and Vulnerability Management.
 - ICT security and cultural awareness.

A Cyber Security Programme Board was established in 2023, and it met on a regular basis throughout the year. The Board is chaired by the Service's Deputy Secretary General with a focus on supporting the implementation of the Cyber Security Strategy.

The Management Board has continued to review key high-level risks that have been identified as significant in terms of Cyber Security. This process has been facilitated by the receipt of quarterly dedicated Cyber Security risk logs from the Cyber Security Programme Board.

To further support implementation of the strategy and roadmap, in 2023, the Service adopted a dedicated **Information Security Charter**, as well as a **Data Information Classification Policy** as part of the Charter.

In December 2023, the Commission approved the Information Security Charter for the Service. The charter outlines the Service's commitment to information security, as agreed by the Cyber Security Programme Board, the Management Board and the Commission. It serves as the foundation document for the Service's Information Security Programme. The Information Security Charter outlines five information security principles, which are apply to all within the organisation:

- Principle 1: Information is an Asset.
- Principle 2: Information Confidentiality, Integrity and Availability is Protected.
- Principle 3: Information Security is Everyone's Business.
- Principle 4: Information is Accessible with Minimum Disruption.
- Principle 5: Information Security complies with the Law.

The Data Information Classification Policy establishes specific requirements for correct classification and handling of information and data by all users within the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

The Chief Information Officer (CIO) will lead the Service's approach to security and ensure that these issues receive the attention and investment required.

Throughout 2023, a range of **cyber security initiatives** were also launched as part of the implementation of the Cyber Security Strategy. These included:

- Brief daily presentations to introduce the Oireachtas Cyber Security Awareness Initiative at the end of May 2023. These sessions focused on the current cyber security landscape and the aim to build increased awareness of cyber security within the Houses.
- The circulation of a Cyber Security Behaviour Assessment Survey during June and July 2023. The Survey achieved a total of 328 respondents, and its findings continue to inform the development of further activities for tackling cyber security challenges.
- The launch of the Service's first dedicated quarterly Cyber Security Newsletter in September 2023, with another edition being circulated in December 2023.
- The launch of Cyber Security Awareness month, in October 2023.
- The delivery of lunch and learn presentations by the Cyber Team on specific cyber topics, such as social engineering and password security.
- Presentation by guest speakers and cyber security experts on 24 October 2023.

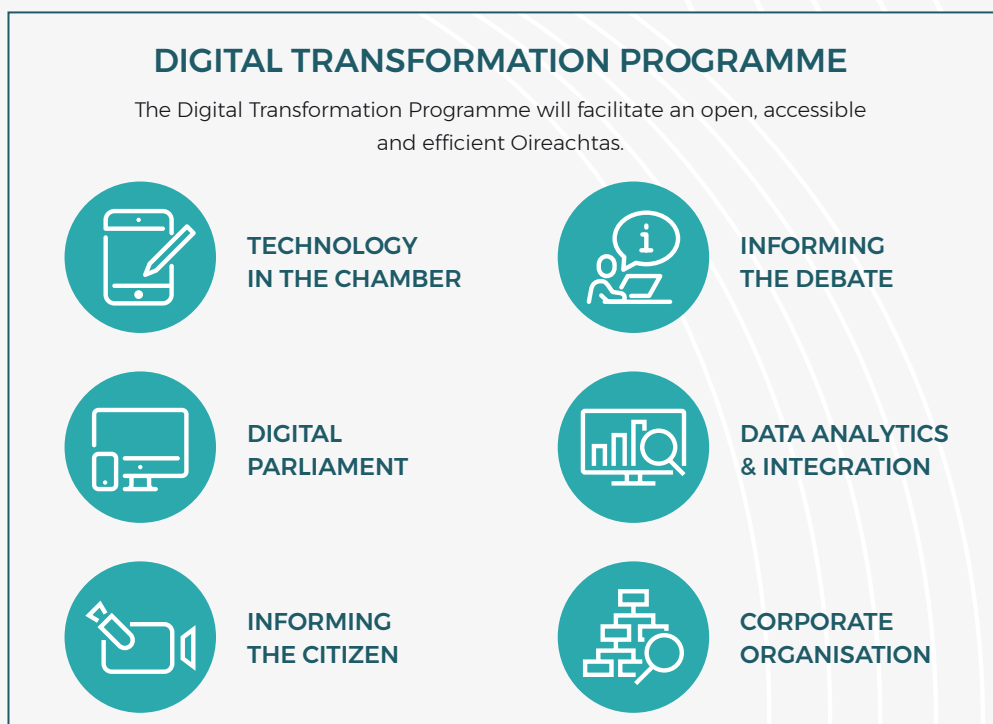
All of the specific cyber security initiatives and policies undertaken during 2023 addressed risks to the processes, people and technology of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Strategic Outcome 4: A Digitally Transformed Parliament

Goal 2: Progress the implementation of the Digital Transformation Programme

Throughout 2023, the Service's Digital Transformation Programme remained a key driver in transforming the way we work. Through this programme we have built resilience into our operating systems, enhanced public engagement and improved our efficiency and effectiveness. Prior investment under the programme enabled the Service to transition rapidly to a blended working model at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2023 was a building year for a lot of Digital Transformation projects. Below is a narrative of 2023 achievements which lists the projects developed, and/or in progress, in 2023. Some of these projects are scheduled to go live in 2024, as there are interdependencies with other projects.



Digital Transformation Programme – 2023 Achievements

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Chamber Business System. Business Process Testing of this system was near completion as of Q4 2023. • Implementation of hybrid meeting rooms: six Political Party Rooms, and Rooms 2 and 4 in historic Leinster House, were completed in 2023. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Signage and Committee Áis-Linn development completed Q3 2023. • Áis-Linn Calendar project went live in Q2 2023. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Committee Task Manager Phase 1 Work Items project completed Q4 2023. Phase 2 of the project – planner started development with both planned to go live together in Q4 2024 • Simultaneous Interpretation Booth expansion and upgrade completed. Four new booths added. |
|--|--|--|

The development of the Chamber Business Platform provides the overall data model, architecture and core screens for the **Dáil Chamber Business System**. The Chamber Business Manager provides access to the back office and in-chamber submodules for processing parliamentary business items to the staff of House Services and the Clerks in the chamber.

The Chamber Business System was undergoing testing in a Business Process Testing (BPT) environment by the Digital Team at the end of 2023, with the business area in charge of operating this system working on establishing processes and protocols in parallel with conducting BPT.

The Committee Task Manager, once live, will enable users to capture work of Committees in the form of digital work items, arrange these work items into long-term plans that can be distributed to members, simplify the handling of witnesses for Committee meetings, streamline the process of scrutinising EU legislative proposals, and assist with storage and distribution of Committee documents.

It will also enable us to increase the presence of the Irish language by issuing the weekly Committee schedule and agendas bilingually.

Phase 2 of the **Áis-Linn** Calendar project includes enhancements to **Topical Issues and Commencement Matters**.

- The system has the ability to automatically flag any selected Topical Issues or Commencement Matters to the member's calendar.
- Deputies may able enable or disable notifications regarding Topical Issues.
- Senators may enable or disable notifications regarding Commencement Matters.
- The enhanced functionality provides members with important additional information.

Áis-Linn Parliamentary Business

Calendar went live for members and their staff in in Q2 2023. Áis-Linn Parliamentary Business Calendar is a bilingual bespoke portal which enhances service delivery to members by providing them with a single Parliamentary Business Calendar, covering the scheduling of all Dáil, Seanad and Committee business. It also gives members various views of their calendars including any calendar conflicts, advanced filtering of items of

interest to them, and detailed meeting information. The Parliamentary Business Calendar has the ability to display and filter up to 12 different types of information.

The development of **Digital Signage** was ongoing throughout 2023, with Committee Digital Signage going live on 29 January 2024, and Chamber Digital signage in development as of early 2024. This modern digital signage solution enables the Service to present real time data bilingually from the Digital Parliament Platform modules to any location across the campus.

The following projects were in progress in 2023 under the **Corporate Organisation Programme**: Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP), Visitor Management System (VMS), Seanad Count Software project, and Unified Communications. In this regard:

- Significant investment of €3m (including the carryover from 2023 of some €2m of an unspent allocation for the project) is proposed to enable the procurement process and to begin delivery of the Enterprise Resource Planning project (ERP) in 2024.
- The Unified Communications project has received final sanction, and implementation was underway by Q4 2023. The project will continue to be rolled out in the first half of 2024. It will bring together various communication channels, such as voice, video, instant messaging, and file sharing, into the single MS Teams platform.

A number of additional projects have also been taken on by ICT for 2024, including **Reachtra** (a new system for managing the processing of legislation), and the **Seanad Count Software project**. Analysis is ongoing on Reachtra, with significant engagement with the Attorney General's Office. Final sanction for the Seanad Count analysis was given by the Commission in Q1 2024.

The consolidation of Achtanna.ie with Oireachtas.ie project is complete with Rannóg an Aistriúcháin planning for it to go live in 2024.

Strategic Outcome 4: A Digitally Transformed Parliament

Goal 3: Continue to implement innovative solutions to modernise our technical infrastructure in the context of a blended working model.

The organisation's openness and drive to implement new technology has resulted in the completion of a substantial number of innovative digital projects and solutions to modernise our technical infrastructure over the last number of months and the ongoing development of more.

Microsoft (MS) Teams was introduced to the organisation in March 2020 at an accelerated pace to support staff working from home during Covid-19. It has been widely adopted across the Oireachtas ever since and has played a vital role in enabling and supporting remote working. The MS Teams Mobile App was also provided to all users.

In 2023 there were:

- 105,089 virtual meetings held on MS Teams; this compares to 89,180 virtual meetings in 2022.
- 197,041 Teams calls, and overall, since MS Teams was introduced over 560,000 Teams calls have been made.
- Over 1.7 million chat messages.
- 357 private Committee meetings of which 274 (77%) had a virtual element.

Using MS Teams continues to support the parliamentary community in the context of a blended working model. During 2023, ICT further progressed a project to further harmonise the **voice over internet protocol (VOIP)** solutions for all users which will enhance the Service's ability to work as a blended workforce.

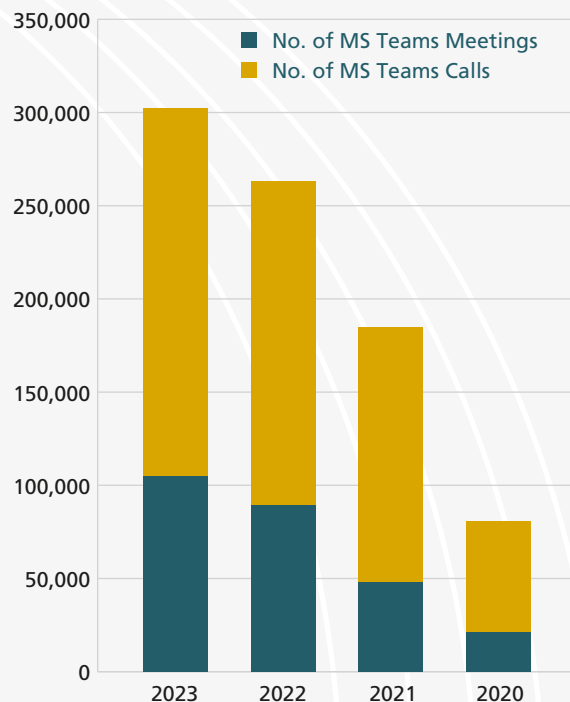


Figure 13: MS Teams usage

Table 20: ICT Helpdesk Support	2023	2022	2021	2020
Support provided for calls from staff of the Service	10,919	11,565	13,105	9,655
Support provided for calls from members and their staff	5,734	7,013	10,604	13,164
Total support provided for calls	16,653	18,578	23,709	22,819

The ICT Service Desk continue to support the day-to-day ICT operations and digital transformation applications. Overall, the ICT Service Desk provided support for 16,653 calls in 2023, a decrease of 10% percent of calls in 2022. This decrease in calls can be attributed to the growth in organisational culture awareness of digital practices, including those in relation to the blended working environment. Of the calls received in 2023, 66% were from staff of the Service, and 34% were from members and their staff.

ICT has also finalised the implementation of hybrid meeting rooms, including six Political Party Rooms, as well as Rooms 2 and 4 in historic Leinster House. These rooms are now equipped with state-of-the-art video conferencing and presenting equipment to facilitate in-person meetings and remote participation. Rooms 2 and 4 are primarily used for private meetings such as those held by the Committee on Parliamentary Privileges and Oversight (CPPO), the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform and the Dáil Business Committee in addition to interparliamentary and diplomatic meetings.

The Hybrid Meeting Room technology is one element of the overall new Technology in the Chambers contract which commenced in January 2022 following a procurement process. Further projects designed to adapt meeting spaces and offices in this same way will be progressed in 2024.

In 2023, ICT continued to deliver and integrate the new **Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS)** solution for the Oireachtas to complement the move to a mobile workforce and blended workplace. As part of this work, a provider-hosted Session Border Controllers for SIP trunk connectivity that allows integration with Microsoft Teams was procured. This has allowed the Oireachtas telephone system to be upgraded and migrated to Microsoft Teams in January 2024.

The MS Teams telephone system brings a range of benefits to support the organisation to enhance communication and collaboration. These include:

- Unified Communication – a single platform for instant messaging, online meetings and phone calls.
- Flexibility Enhanced Capability – this includes cloud voicemail with transcription and custom greetings.
- Reliability and Security.

The Digital Transformation Team made training available to staff in order to be able to progress this change.

Strategic Outcome 4: A Digitally Transformed Parliament

Goal 4: Provide effective and responsive technical supports to ensure resilience and continuity of service in our digital systems.

Given the Service's increased reliance on digital infrastructure to conduct business, the Oireachtas Service, during 2023, proceeded to plan for the migration to cloud services and storage and retrieval of data.

Prior to this, extensive consultation continued to take place with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and with other parliaments while also recognising the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) cloud computing advice. Furthermore, an extensive review of legal advice across multiple stakeholders and partners, to support the Houses of the Oireachtas Service in adhering to the principles of cloud services, was conducted.

A move to the use of cloud services, cloud data storage and cloud information protection services will improve the capability of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to provide effective and responsive technical supports to the parliamentary community and will greatly enhance our ability to prevent and respond to cyber-attacks or data breaches.

The Oireachtas Service has gained substantial experience in managing such transitions for members and staff, most recently with the deployment of new services to facilitate hybrid working during the Covid-19 pandemic with minimal time to plan. Key points in terms of service delivery and impact for this change are the following:

- a dedicated change management approach to help members and staff in the transition.
- a phased approach in moving services to the cloud.
- an assessment for each dataset on how it will move to the cloud. Different datasets will require different functionality and levels of protection.
- additional information protection security measures.

As the Digital Parliament Programme progressed in 2023, more services moved to the cloud. This has meant improved productivity, enhanced security, greater scope for collaboration, better performance, and greater reliability and resilience for IT services.

As part of this **Cloud migration**, a number of changes are continuing to be rolled out over 2024, some of which started during 2023. These include:

- Information Protection: Introduction of Sensitivity Labels.
- Moving Z: Drives to Microsoft OneDrive.
- Mail Migration: Moving Outlook to Microsoft Exchange.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Goal 1: Continue to implement the Rannóg 2024 Plan with the objective of publishing official translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas in a timely manner and clearing historic arrears.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is committed to enhancing its capacity to work through the first official language of the State, the Irish language.

In 2023, the Rannóg 2024 Steering Group was restructured as **An Coiste Straitéiseach an Oireachtais Dhátheangaigh (CSOD)** strategic sub-committee of the Management Board. Coiste Straitéiseach an Oireachtais Dhátheangaigh, chaired at Assistant Secretary level, monitors and reports on our progress as we work toward a bilingual Oireachtas. CSOD met six times in 2023.

During 2023, implementation of the **Rannóg 2024 Strategy** continued with the objective of publishing official translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas in a timely manner and clearing arrears of official translations.

Publication of Official Translations

There are six stages in the process of publishing official translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas:

- Stage 1: translation.
- Stage 2: first edit.
- Stage 3: final edit.
- Stage 4: proof.
- Stage 5: final check.
- Stage 6: publication.

Current Acts (2019-2023)

The position regarding the official translation of current Acts (Acts 2019-2023), as of December 2023, is as follows:

Year	Passed	Translated	Final Edit/ Completion	At Proof Stage	Published
2020	32	32	0	3	28
2021	50	50	1	34	15
2022	52	38	8	15	15
2023	30	19	10	8	1
Total	217	192	19	60	112

88% percent of all current Acts (2019-2023) have been translated (Stage 1) and 52% published (Stage 6).

Arrears Acts (1992-2018)

As of December 2023, the position regarding official translations of arrears Acts was as follows:

- There are 511 arrears Acts listed for translation. Of these, 192 Acts (6,489 pages) have been cleared. In terms of remaining workload, 62% of pages remain to be published.
- To date, clearance of years 2014 to 2018 has been prioritised, and progress for these years is therefore more advanced than for previous arrears years.
- From a strategic perspective Rannóg will concentrate, where practicable, on a prioritisation plan informed by themes, page numbers, and those Acts close to publication.
- A six-month plan came into effect in January 2024 and aims to have cleared 50% of 'legacy' arrears (1992-2018) and Acts by end-July.

Update on Rannóg 2024 Strategy

In late 2017, the Service employed the services of an external consultancy to carry out a capacity review of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin. The report was delivered in December 2018 and adopted by the Management Board. A strategy to implement the "Rannóg 2024" report was approved by the Management Board in early 2019. The strategy sets out the services provided by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin and the resources needed (39 FTEs) to support service provision, including clearance of arrears Acts.

In 2019, a settlement was reached between the parties in the Ó Murchú Case, relating to the availability of official translations. This included a commitment by the Service to publish all listed arrears within a 5-year period commencing on 31 July 2019. The number of arrears Acts listed was 511, ranging from 1992 to 2018. As of the end 2023, 192 of the listed Acts have been published.

The Rannóg 2024 Strategy, including a plan for clearing the arrears Acts, was approved by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission in April 2019. Arrears clearance projections in the strategy were based on receiving 230 pages per month from an external editing framework and 120 pages per month from an external proofreading framework. For internal phases of the process, projections were based on the 39 FTE complement recommended by PWC.

Despite considerable efforts by the Service to recruit the required staff numbers to clear the backlog, as of the end of 2023, staff levels in Rannóg remained at only 50% of the staff numbers recommended by PWC. Nonetheless, all of the legacy arrears Acts have been translated at the "initial" stage. The lack of sufficiently qualified staff has adversely affected progress at the subsequent stages of editing and proofreading the translated texts.

In light of the ongoing difficulty in obtaining sufficient staff to allow for the publication of all legacy arrears Acts, recent arrears Acts, new Acts and the other tasks the Rannóg is required to perform, in 2023, a review and update on the Rannóg 2024 strategy was conducted, with a revised strategy being proposed to the Management Board and the Commission for implementation.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Goal 2: Conduct a comparative study of bilingual parliaments to enable us to progress towards a bilingual Oireachtas.

To inform this Strategic Outcome the Oireachtas Library and Research Service (L&RS) was commissioned to carry out a comparative study of bilingual parliaments. The L&RS worked with Rannóg an Aistriúcháin to scope, plan and conduct the study. Work involved a review of documentation, a study visit to Wales and Malta by staff from Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, and two surveys of parliaments and legislative assemblies, including analysis of survey responses.

The study assumes that a state or region with more than one official language (or in which a second language is spoken by a considerable section of

the population) may have a bilingual parliament (i.e., a parliament in which all activities are carried out in two or more languages).

For the study, six key criteria for a bilingual parliament were identified. These are based on the main activities carried out by parliaments and the services provided to members of the houses and members of the public. Criteria included legislation, debates, services to members, public engagement, documentation and recruitment.

The L&RS identified twelve parliaments that met the criteria for a bilingual parliament. Responses were received from nine of those parliaments.

Completion of the analysis of responses took place in 2023. On the basis of the criteria identified as markers of a bilingual parliament, a number of conclusions and considerations emerged:

Table: 22

Criteria	Conclusion and Considerations
Legislation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ireland is in a good position internationally as regards the development of a bilingual parliament.
Legislative process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are two main approaches to processing legislation multilingually: 'co-drafting' and 'post-draft translation'. Ireland is the only jurisdiction among those surveyed using the 'post-publication translation' approach for the majority of Bills. In-house dedicated language support units can make a big difference to the bilingual legislative process.
Language Policy and Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ireland can provide a strong model in strengthening bilingual policy and strategy.

Table: 22

Criteria	Conclusion and Considerations
Plenary and Committee Debates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Houses of the Oireachtas aligns with other parliaments in that either language can be used in plenary and Committee debates. All bilingual parliaments will benefit from keeping abreast with the latest technological developments.
Public Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Ireland, any enquiries received are responded to in the language in which they are received. This compares well with other parliaments.
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Houses of the Oireachtas are consistent with other parliaments as corporate documentation is automatically provided by the Houses in both languages. A translated version of other documentation, such as Committee reports, may be provided on request but these are not automatically provided in both languages.
Staff Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlike the Houses of the Oireachtas, many staff are functionally bilingual and setting target levels is unnecessary. Some roles require staff to be bilingual, or competent in one or other of the languages.

On the basis of these conclusions and considerations, the study sets out a number of recommendations. These recommendations are structured under headings that reflect the main areas of activity anticipated in moving progressively towards a bilingual Oireachtas:

Table: 23**Principle 1 – Normalisation**

Recommendation:

- Equal use and visibility of both languages.

Principle 2 – Provision of Education and Support

Recommendation:

- Courses and conversation classes.

Principle 3 – Bilingual Processes and Procedures

Recommendations:

- New Interfaces and full bilingual internal documentation.
- Bilingual staff in every unit.
- Use of new technologies.
- Provision of access to interpretation service feed to media outside the Houses.

Table: 23**Principle 4 – Build bilingualism into the work of the Houses**

Recommendations:

- Irish language items on the Order of business.
- Priority Parliamentary Questions in Irish.
- Glossaries.

Principle 5 – Oversight and Development

Recommendations:

- Dáil and Seanad Steering Groups.
- Language Strategy and action plans.
- Tracking and reporting.
- Conferences and information exchanges.



Rannóg an Aistriúcháin hosted a Colloquium on Bilingual Parliaments.



Oireachtas Colloquium on Bilingual Parliaments

As part of the Service's work under this strategic goal, Rannóg an Aistriúcháin hosted representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas, Senedd Cymru, the Welsh Government, the First Legislative Counsel, Wales, and The Office of the Advocate General, Malta for the first '**Oireachtas Colloquium on Bilingual Parliaments**' on 10 and 11 July 2023. Themes covered in the Colloquium included legislation, service to members, communications and services to the public, recruitment, and language awareness and normalisation.

Planning is ongoing on organising the 2024 Colloquium.

The Management Board agreed that the recommendations of the comparative study, along with the Colloquium outcomes and the 'Gaeilge sa Teach' initiatives will be consolidated by Rannóg into a single 'Bilingualism Oireachtas Action Plan' with tasks, timelines and owners. Work on this process will continue to help chart a path towards functional bilingualism for the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Goal 3: Facilitate a progressive increase in the amount of Irish spoken in both Houses.

'An Ghaeilge sa Teach' Steering Groups, one for each House, were launched in 2022 to further the objective under **An Ghaeilge sa Teach 2021** to facilitate a progressive increase in the amount of Irish spoken in both Houses through the provision of supports to TDs and senators.

The terms of reference of the Steering Groups required them to examine the present position in regard to the use of Irish in the Chambers and to make proposals on opportunities to increase the use of the language. Matters that were examined by the Steering Groups included:

- Statistics on the current use of Irish in the Chamber.
- The structure of business.
- The identification of opportunities in the daily schedule of business.
- Possible incentives and encouragements.
- Supports and facilitation.

Full reports from both groups were delivered in 2023.

In respect of the **Steering Group recommendations on the use of Irish in the Dáil**:

- The Steering Group was of the view that there would be value in focusing initially on a main recommendation

under the theme of 'Learning Facilities/ Irish Classes'. It was proposed that a pilot project would be commenced with Irish language classes being offered to all, at suitable times, with a choice between individual or group classes. This would be a 6-month pilot project, with a period in the Gaeltacht being available at the end of the course. The process would be assessed at the end of the project.

- Regarding the Oireachtas community, the Steering Group recommended the appointment of a Bilingualism Officer, and that all campus signage be bilingual.
- Regarding Teachtaí Dála, the Steering Group recommended that Bills Glossaries be available electronically to members on the website pages associated with the relevant Bill and the Business of the Day, and members to be notified of that in a timely fashion.
- Regarding the media, the Steering Group recommended that a discussion take place between the Office of the Ceann Comhairle and representatives of the media in the Houses regarding media coverage of Irish-language speeches in the Houses.
- Other recommendations included that a monitoring group be established before 1 June 2023, to meet twice a year to monitor the implementation of all recommendations.
- Regarding increasing spoken Irish in the **Seanad**, the Steering Group recommended that:

- A target of 5% be achieved in the use of Irish in the Seanad before the end of 2024. This includes having bilingual staff available in the Library and the Press Office to support Senators in doing business through Irish.
- Senators to be encouraged to submit a question in Irish for 'Commencement Matters' as an additional question each week/month.
- Debates in Irish to be held every quarter on different topics.
- Regarding learning facilities, the Steering Group recommended, that Irish language workshops and classes focused on Oireachtas matters for Senators be organised.
- Other recommendations included the establishment of a monitoring group before the end of Q2 2023 to monitor implementation of the recommendations. A number of recommendations were also made concerning technological support in the Chamber.

Translation Services provided by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin has continued to provide a variety of **translation services** to the Houses of the Oireachtas Service in 2023, including:

- interpretation service for sittings of both Houses and, on request, for Committee meetings
- services for sittings including translating the daily sitting day Order Papers (agendas) for both Houses. This support is provided by a team of translators on a monthly rota basis



- services for Long and Short Titles for Bills on initiation
- translations of corporate documentation for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, press releases and members' correspondence.

Table 24: Rannóg Translation Services	2023	2022
Pages of translation of corporate documentation	439	129
Pages of translation of Committee documentation	353	210
Pages of press releases translated	69	48
Pages of all other translation (requests from members, OPLA)	382	78

Requests for translation are tracked to facilitate the collection of data on type and quantity of translation requests to Rannóg an Aistriúcháin from business areas across the Oireachtas Service.

In 2023, the capacity of the **interpretation booths** was increased to eight booths. This is another initiative aimed at supporting the use of Irish in the Houses.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Goal 4: Progressively increase the cohort of bilingual staff in the Service.

In 2023, the Service continued to move incrementally towards the goal of having bilingual staff available across all sections.

The recruitment team continued to recruit bilingual staff using all recruitment channels available. The organisation's primary source of recruitment of bilingual staff is through the Public Appointment Service generalist panels which include posts at Clerical Officer, Executive Officer and Higher Executive Officer.

The organisation's recruitment team actively engages with the Civil Service Mobility Scheme which provides opportunities to existing civil servants at these grades to transfer into the Oireachtas on a full-time basis. This scheme provides an opportunity for civil service staff to self-identify as having beginner, intermediate or advanced Irish language skills. The recruitment team can then request staff from this scheme.

The Service also provides an opportunity for all new staff who are willing to provide a service bilingually to self-identify through the staff induction process.

In 2023, the HR Unit conducted a survey of all staff to determine ability to provide business services through the Irish language. Of the 583 civil service staff who completed the survey, 88 (15%) have indicated an ability to conduct business through the Irish language.

Other progress made during 2023 include:

- Thirteen bilingual staff recruited.
- Staff have been recruited through an Aistritheoir Grád III competition run.
- A Parliamentary Reporter competition was completed. This competition included an option to be assessed for this role through the Irish language.
- Bilingual recruitment and assessment of impact on bilingual service delivery continue to be progressed to support our strategic outcome, 'Towards a Bilingual Parliament'.



Leas-Cheann Comhairle Catherine Connolly TD, with Head of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, Vivian Uíbh Eachach, and guest speaker Dr. Mícheál Mac Craith at a presentation in Leinster House on the life of Tadhg Ó Cianáin.

In keeping with the norms and standards agreed centrally between the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and trade unions, the Service worked to:

- (i) Develop a new paid undergraduate internship programme for business units that regularly hire entry level specialist grades, including Rannóg an Aistriúcháin. Contacts are ongoing between An Rannóg and third-level institutions on the best model for this programme. The initial focus will be on

translator and interpreter internships in the Rannóg, with the potential to develop generalist bilingual internships for other business units in the future.

- (ii) Scope the development of a paid graduate programme for translators and interpreters. This may take the form of a standard graduate internship, consisting of a fixed-term 1-2-year contract for a recent graduate with translator and/or interpreter qualifications. Alternatively, it may take the form of an apprenticeship, where the Service will offer a fixed-term contract to a candidate, pay for them to complete a specialist qualification during that period and offer them a permanent position at the end of the term, subject to success in a test and interview. As before, this process would be kept in line with the norms and standards referred to above.

The Service remains committed to the recruitment of bilingual staff so that services can be provided through Irish by generalist staff and specialist staff in all business units.

It is acknowledged, nonetheless, that requirements for staff with Irish language proficiency remain high. Staff with Irish language proficiency are also lost due to turnover and other opportunities across the wider civil service at higher level. Additionally, there remains a limited pool of candidates with the skill level required.

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin Recruitment

As part of the 2018 PWC review, staffing levels of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin were benchmarked with similar translation services and with other parliaments, and a recommendation was made to increase staffing levels to 39 translation staff. This was later increased to 40 to include a

CO. Despite intensive recruitment efforts since mid-2018, however, the Service has not succeeded in increasing staff numbers in Rannóg an Aistriúcháin or even compensating for staff turnover.

Staff numbers have only more recently returned to 2018 levels; in 2023, the section had 23 translation staff compared to 21.7 in 2018. This was an increase from 2022, when there were 19.6.

Following low candidate applications from Public Appointment Service competitions, the Service has also decided to run future campaigns in-house to facilitate a quick turnaround of the testing, interviews and clearance procedure, and more frequent competitions.

As noted above, the current recruitment environment remains a challenging one, as the Service is recruiting in direct competition with the EU institutions who – for the first time in 2020 – recruited a panel of translators to work in the Irish Language Unit of the European Commission's Directorate General for Translation based in Grange, County Meath.

The recruitment challenges are exacerbated by increased demand on Rannóg to provide a range of other services. While outsourcing has yielded some additional capacity, this has been limited and is not sufficient to make up for the shortfall in internal resources.

A new draft Houses of the Oireachtas Service Language Scheme was finalised and distributed to business heads in March 2023. Consultation on this was deferred, however, at the request of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media pending the implementation of a new standards system, as provided for in the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Goal 5: Develop initiatives to support members and staff in maintaining and improving their competence in spoken Irish.

In addition to recruitment initiatives, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service organises delivery of in-house Irish language classes for the parliamentary community. Classes are held at beginner and intermediate/advanced levels. Each class is 45 minutes' duration, and usually classes run from October to July with breaks at Christmas and Easter. Classes are held online via Microsoft Teams. Class levels are assigned on a self-assessment basis, i.e., each participant decides which class level they wish to attend. An online survey to ascertain interest in attending in-house Irish classes is issued on an annual basis.

A Certificate in Professional Irish is provided externally from Levels 3-6 through OneLearning for civil servants. Online Irish language learning resources are also promoted.

Work has also progressed on the range of services that the Houses of the Oireachtas provides bilingually, building on Straitéis na Gaeilge and the Oireachtas Language Scheme 2018.

The Oireachtas Irish language engagement events which took place as part of as part of Straitéis na Gaeilge in 2023:

- Rannóg an Aistriúcháin hosted a coffee morning to mark Seachtain na Gaeilge.
- On 27 April 2023, the Service's Management Board welcomed colleagues from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to Leinster House. Dr Aodhán Mac Cormaic, Stiúrthóir na Gaeilge, Director of Irish and Sadhbh Ó Cinnseala gave a presentation on the National Bilingual Policy.
- On 17 May 2023, Rannóg an Aistriúcháin organised a storytelling session in Irish with Máirín Mhic Lochlainn, who is currently Storyteller-in-Residence at the University of Galway.
- Rannóg an Aistriúcháin further organises periodic Irish Language Conversation Circle coffee mornings as a further opportunity for staff and members to meet up and converse in Irish.

Table 25: Irish Language Staff Training	2023	2022	2021	2020
Classes Delivered	111	99	110	42
Service Staff attendees ¹	346	269	256	149
Members' Staff attendees ¹	83	37	229	111

¹ Staff who attended multiple classes are counted in each class they attended.

Strategic Outcome 5: Towards a Bilingual Parliament

Goal 6: Adopt a 'Bilingualism through Technology' programme for the Service.

Straitéis na Gaeilge, 2021 states that it is the aim of the Service “to progressively develop into a functioning bilingual organisation, in which members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and the public will be actively facilitated in using the Irish language in their day-to-day business.”

During 2023, work was ongoing on the development and implementation of the policy of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service on the use of bilingualism in IT systems and applications. Development work considered IT systems and applications designed by, or for, the Service, and which are used by members, Departments and State agencies, and by the public.

The **Bilingualism in Technology Policy**, approved in December 2022 by the Management Board, aims to ensure early analysis of projects to guarantee timely identification of bilingual requirements. Carrying out a Bilingual Scoping Analysis (BSA) is at the core of this new approach. The BSA informs the functional design specification for the bilingual elements of a new project. The cost effectiveness of planning the bilingual requirement in the early stages of digital project planning is also important.

The Service aims to apply bilingualism in the design of ICT systems and applications in such a manner as to encourage and facilitate the use of the Irish language in accessing these systems. This includes adopting an integrated bilingual approach in system design, where feasible. An integrated bilingual approach involves presenting both official languages in proximity, where the context or technology allows. This may include having both language versions in the same publication or in the same interface rather than as two separate language entities.

Developments in technology

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin involvement in and contribution to the Digital Parliament Programme has been ongoing, and all member-facing and public-facing systems are being developed bilingually. This has included, for instance, the ongoing development of **Áis-Linn** during 2023.

This can also be seen in Rannóg an Aistriúcháin involvement with **Digital Signage and Oireachtas TV**.

For the return of the Houses following 2023's summer recess, a project was rolled out to provide bilingual captions on Oireachtas TV. The project runs in 3 phases:

- Phase 1 (September 2023) – Dáil Éireann static text to be bilingual.
- Phase 2 (January 2024) – Seanad Éireann and Committee static text to be bilingual.
- Phase 3 (Q4 2024) – All Dáil, Seanad and Committees text to be bilingual.

The Oireachtas Service is also currently rolling out a network of cross-campus digital signage screens. These screens will display relevant parliamentary information in real time. All digital screens will be bilingual with Irish and English versions of text interchanging in sequential format.

These 2 developments will greatly enhance the bilingual nature of the Oireachtas campus environment and will help the Service to put the Irish language and bilingualism front and centre of the on-screen presentation of Oireachtas business on the Oireachtas campus and on Oireachtas TV screens as viewed on campus and by the public.

The Houses of the Oireachtas bilingual app allows users to watch or listen to live proceedings from Leinster House, to read Dáil, Seanad and Committee schedules, and to view press releases. The app is available for Android and iOS.

Future development of systems such as Dáil journals, Seanad systems and Committee portals will also include bilingualism.

Achtanna.ie

The online database of the Acts of the Oireachtas and their corresponding official translations has been upgraded and updated throughout 2023, and formally relaunched in April 2024. The content in the database is in a usable and searchable format and new content will be uploaded regularly as it becomes available. The content is linked across language versions and the site will further facilitate the public and members of the Houses of the Oireachtas in accessing official translations of the Acts.

Financial Performance over the Commission's Three-Year Budget Framework 2022-2024

The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2021 provided funding of €462m to meet the costs associated with running the Houses of the Oireachtas for the three-year period 2022-2024. The table below summarises the financial position to date (June 2024).

Category	2022 Outturn €000	2023 Outturn €000	2024 Estimate €000
Dáil Éireann	48,319	50,844	54,159
Seanad Éireann	9,744	10,412	10,849
Oireachtas Committees	125	135	476
European Parliament	764	764	735
Pensions and Redundancy	14,172	14,320	13,910
Administration – pay & pensions	41,211	45,099	52,563
Administration – non-pay	27,136	31,159	35,865
TOTAL	€141,471	€152,733	€168,557

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS COMMISSION

ACCOUNTS OF THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS COMMISSION FOR THE PERIOD FROM 1 JANUARY TO 31 DECEMBER 2023

(kept in accordance with the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2021)

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Introduction

As Accounting Officer for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (“the Commission”), I am required each year to prepare the Appropriation Account, and to submit the Account to the Comptroller and Auditor General for audit.

In accordance with this requirement, I have prepared the attached account of the amount expended in the year ended 31 December 2023 for the salaries and expenses of the Commission, including certain grants, and for certain expenses in connection with the European Parliament.

The expenditure outturn is compared with the Statement of Estimates, prepared and published by the Commission in accordance with the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2021 (“the Acts”), of the amount of monies required by the Commission in respect of ongoing expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2023.

There was a surplus for the year of €24,448,426. There had been a significant impact on project activity by the pressures in recruitment of appropriate staff, and the need for additional analysis of requirements to ensure appropriate value for money. There was also a provision for a General Election in the period which was not required.

The accounts of the grant in respect of inter-parliamentary activities, the grant to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and the accounts of the Catering and Bar Services are presented in Note 7.

Grant funding of €12,679,936 in respect of Ciste Pinsean Thithe an Oireachtais is charged to subhead 2(i). The pension fund is governed by three trustees who are responsible for preparing an account and for ensuring the regularity of the

transactions. The account is separately audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

As part of the transition to wider accrual reporting based on International standards, intangible assets representing software acquisition and development have been identified separately for the first time. Accordingly, capital assets have been separated into two components on the face of the statement of financial position, and in the related notes, Intangible assets and Property, plant, and equipment. Comparatives have been restated to reflect this.

The Statement of Accounting Policies and Principles and notes 1 to 7 form part of the account.

Statement of Accounting Policies and Principles

The standard accounting policies and principles for the production of appropriation accounts, as set out by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in Circular 22 of 2023, have been applied in the preparation of the account and the associated notes 1 to 7.

The Commission is funded on a three-year statutory cycle under the Acts. The format of the account is specifically laid out in Schedule 1 of the Acts. In the event that there are differences between the format of the Commission Accounts and the circulars governing the rules and format of the accounts from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), I am legally obliged to adhere to the Commission Acts as this primary legislation takes precedence over administrative DPER circulars.

Statement on Internal Financial Control

Responsibility for System of Internal Financial Control

As Accounting Officer, I acknowledge my responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal financial control is maintained and operated by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service ("the Service").

This responsibility is exercised in the context of the resources available to me and my other obligations as Secretary General and Clerk of the Dáil. Also, any system of internal financial control can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, transactions authorised and properly recorded, and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or would be detected in a timely manner. Maintaining the system of internal financial controls is a continuous process and the system and its effectiveness are kept under ongoing review.

The position in regard to the financial control environment, the framework of administrative procedures, management reporting and internal audit is as follows:

Financial Control Environment

I confirm that a control environment containing the following elements is in place.

- Financial responsibilities have been assigned at management level with corresponding accountability;
- Reporting arrangements have been established at all levels where responsibility for financial management has been assigned;
- Formal procedures have been established for reporting significant control failures and ensuring appropriate corrective action;

- There is an Audit Committee to advise me in discharging my responsibilities for the internal financial control system;
- Procedures for all key business processes have been documented;
- There are systems in place to safeguard the assets.

Administrative Controls and Management Reporting

I confirm that a framework of administrative procedures and regular management reporting is in place, including segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. This includes the following elements:

- There is an appropriate budgeting system with an annual budget which is kept under review by senior management;
- There are regular reviews by senior management of periodic and annual financial reports which indicate financial performance against forecasts;
- A risk management system operates within the Service;
- There are systems aimed at ensuring the security of the ICT systems;
- There are appropriate capital investment control guidelines and formal project management disciplines.

Internal Audit

I confirm that the Service has an internal audit function with appropriately trained personnel, which operates in accordance with a written charter as approved by Management. Its work is informed by analysis of the financial risks to which the Service is exposed and its annual internal audit plans, approved by me and by the Audit Committee, are based on this analysis. These plans aim to cover

the key controls on a rolling basis over a reasonable period. The internal audit function is reviewed periodically by me and by the Audit Committee.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee operates in accordance with the terms of reference set out in the Acts. Its work is also governed by a written charter, approved by the Management Board and Audit Committee and is subject to regular review. Its responsibilities include advising on the form of accounts of the Commission as well as on risk management, internal audit, and internal controls.

I have put procedures in place to ensure that all internal audit recommendations are followed up and progress on implementation is reported on regularly to me, the Management Board, and the Audit Committee.

Procurement

I confirm that the Service ensures that there is an appropriate focus on good procurement practice in the award of all contracts and that procedures are in place to ensure compliance with all relevant guidelines.

The Service has provided details of 29 non-competitive contracts in the annual return in respect of Circular 40/2002 to the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform.

Non-compliance with procurement rules

The Service complied with the guidelines with the exception of 9 contracts (in excess of €25,000), totalling €1,499,169 (ex. VAT), in 2023 as set out below:

- 2 contracts with a total value of €773,381 were in relation to expenditure under an expired contract to allow for continuation of essential cleaning services during an ongoing procurement process;
- 1 contract with a value of €326,941 was in relation to the use of a venue for specific conferences where there was none other suitable;
- 1 contract with a value of €162,629 was in relation to the use of a short-term contract to allow transition to an in-house model;
- 1 contract with a value of €107,241 was in relation to the use of a contract extension to allow specialist consultancy to be obtained;
- 1 contract with a value of €36,761 was in relation to inadvertent overspending under a contract entered via a Request for Quotation process;
- 1 contract with a value of €36,611 was in relation to urgent specialist repairs to library materials resulting from flood damage;
- 2 contracts with a total value of €56,605 were in relation to drawdowns from OGP frameworks without complete documentation.

The above contracts have been included in the 40/2002 annual return referenced above.

All of the above contracts are being regularised, with five ongoing procurement processes in 2024, two completed processes, and two finalised expenditures.

Risk and Control Framework

The Service has a risk management strategy in place which ensures risk management activities contribute to the achievements of the Service's objectives and is aligned to the Service's corporate governance framework.

The Chief Risk Officer (CRO) has responsibility for the oversight of risk management at strategic and operational level, promoting a risk aware culture across the Service and reporting on risk management performance at least quarterly to the Governance Performance & Accountability Strategic Committee (GPA), Management Board and Audit Committee.

An eRisk system is in place to support this strategy, which identifies the key risks facing the Service and these have been evaluated and graded according to their significance. The outcome of these assessments is used to plan and allocate resources to ensure risks are managed to an acceptable level.

Ongoing Monitoring and Review

Formal procedures have been established for monitoring control processes and control deficiencies are communicated to those responsible for taking corrective action and to the Management Board and associated subcommittees, where relevant, in a timely way.

Review of Effectiveness

I confirm that the Houses of the Oireachtas Service has procedures to monitor the effectiveness of its risk management and control procedures. The best practice standard adopted is "ISO 31000:2009, Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines".

The Service's monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the system of internal financial control is informed by the work of the internal and external auditors, the Management Board and the Audit Committee which oversees their work, and the senior management within the Service responsible for the development and maintenance of the internal financial control framework. Risk management

and internal control is incorporated into normal management and governance processes and not treated as a separate compliance exercise.

Internal Financial Control Issues

No weaknesses in internal financial control were identified in relation to 2023 that require disclosure.

Oireachtas Catering and Bar Services

The Service has in its continued programme of reform and continuous improvement, further enhanced and developed the Catering and Bar Services control environment, financial management and procurement management in line with the Services standards.

The catering and bar services continued to manage this continuous improvement through its management structure – Restaurant Manager, Service staff and bookkeeper, with access to the Finance Officer and Chief Financial Officer. Accounts of the Oireachtas Catering and Bar Services are presented to the Management Board, Finance Committee and Commission on a quarterly basis.

Procurement compliance – the addendum to the 2023 annual 40/02 return details one contract with a value of €85,823, where expenditure was made without a valid contract during a tendering process where no admissible responses were received. This has now been regularised under Article 32 of EU Directive 2014/24/EU.

The financial results of the Bar and Restaurant activities are summarised in note 7.3. The Commission has procured the services of an external auditing firm to carry out a financial audit of the Bar and Restaurant Services Account on an annual basis.

An external audit was carried out in 2023 of the 2022 Account, giving a reasonable level of assurance which was presented to the Management Board and Audit Committee. Its recommendations were considered and implemented as appropriate during 2023.

Grant Accounts

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) draws down funds from the allocated budget contained in the Commission's Estimate. All BIPA expenditure is sanctioned initially by the BIPA Committee Clerk (Assistant Principal Officer) and then by the Principal Officer.

All Irish Parliamentary Association expenditure is sanctioned initially by the Head of the Inter-Parliamentary and Travel Unit (Assistant Principal Officer) and then by the Principal Officer or Assistant Secretary, as appropriate.

There is a system of detailed record keeping and bank reconciliation maintained monthly and balanced at year end for the Annual Account. A detailed explanatory record is made in regard to all payments (including credit card payments). Vouched records are retained of all expenditure.

Remote Working Control Issues

The organisation can confirm that risks arising from the impact of a blended working environment are addressed through its risk and control framework, and that procedures are in place to monitor the effectiveness of this framework. This includes review of controls on blended working arrangements and the impact on operations. These controls, both existing and those introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to be effective:

- Remote and blended working arrangements are now embedded within the organisation. The organisation as a whole, under central Government guidance and in line with other public sector bodies, has moved to a Blended Working model, with a 94% take-up of Blended Working from eligible staff as of Q4 2023. eLearning modules on Remote Working, Remote Working for Managers, and Chairing Effective Virtual Meetings were provided by One Learning and disseminated to staff. Each blended working application was discussed and reviewed by line managers as part of the blended working policy implementation, with specific challenges managed at a local level.
- The Houses of the Oireachtas Blended Working Policy, based upon the central Civil Service Framework, was introduced in July 2022. The implementation of the policy was reviewed in 2023, and will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis in line with legislative changes and other developments that may arise as part of the evolving blended working landscape. In addition, the operation of arrangements is subject to review at section level in accordance with decisions of the Management Board or of the Department of Public Expenditure, NPD Delivery and Reform. A formal review of the blended working arrangements is also place as part of the PMDS process at a local level.
- Section Safety Risk Assessments are carried out in respect of operating the organisation's blended working model, including through the completion of home ergonomic consultant assessments. These risk assessments are supplemented by ongoing campus monitoring by the

safety unit, and the Superintendent's section and by an annual external audit. Access to the remote working space is provided via a virtual private network using two factor authentications. Remote access to the network is provided to the same standard as onsite access to the network.

- As part of the National Remote Work Strategy, the organisation introduced a Right to disconnect policy in May 2023, guided by best practice guidance around wellbeing, working hours and the use of technology. It has been drafted in line with the Workplace Relations Commission's Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect.
- Chaired by the Head of HR and including representatives of staff of the Service, the Health and Safety Committee includes representatives of the Members, Political staff, contractors, and the media, representing all groups who comprise the Parliamentary Community. The Head of HR leads on safety, health and welfare related communications and working arrangements for staff.
- In January 2023, the organisation published its policy and Safety Statement 2023 to help deliver on its commitment to providing a safe and healthy workplace for everyone in the parliamentary community. This includes safety arrangements in respect of home working.
- Financial expenditure controls – there was an initial increase in expenditure (not originally anticipated in the Estimate for 2020) due to the impact of Covid-19 (for the provision of ICT equipment to support home working arrangements, Convention Centre, PPE supplies, extended maintenance and cleaning services, access to Health & Safety experts, staff

overtime etc.) and this was monitored closely by the CFO in consultation with all Business Managers and reported to the Management Board on a monthly basis. Such monthly expenditure reports continue to be provided to the management board on an ongoing basis. The Estimate for 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 have taken note of the changed environment and all costs anticipated have been provided for;

- Authorisation limits and rules did not change. The means of providing that authorisation and approval were adjusted to reflect a move to remote working. Verifications at transaction level continued, with the process and associated controls moved to a remote basis, but otherwise unchanged.



Peter Finnegan
Accounting Officer

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

20 June 2024

Accounting Policies and Principles

Basis of Accounts

The accounts of the Commission are prepared in accordance with the Acts and with accounting rules and procedures laid down by the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The Acts require that the Commission keep the accounts in such form as may be approved of by the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The Minister has directed that the accounts be kept in the form of an appropriation account.

Accordingly, the accounts are a cash-based record of the receipts and payments in the year compared with the amount of moneys stated in the statement of estimates that is (a) prepared and published by the Commission, (b) presented to Dáil Éireann, and (c) furnished to the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in accordance with the Acts.

The Commission provides funding and support to a number of entities whose results are not consolidated into the Commission's accounts as follows:

- **British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly** – The Commission provides a grant via subhead 2(e) to the assembly and details of the income and expenditure incurred are included by way of a note to these accounts (Note 7.1). The accounts are prepared on a cash basis.
- **Cumann Parlaiminteach na hÉireann (The Irish Parliamentary Association)** – The Commission provides a grant via subhead 2(d) and details of the income and expenditure incurred are included by way of a note to these accounts (Note 7.2). The accounts are prepared on a cash basis.
- **Catering and Bar Services** – The Commission employs staff who work

in the bar and restaurant and whose pay costs are charged to subhead 2(a), and receives a contribution from the operation of the catering and bar services. (Note 4). Details of the operation of the facilities are included by way of a note to these accounts (Note 7.3). The catering and bar services accounts are prepared on an accruals basis.

Reporting Period

The reporting period is the year ended 31 December 2023.

Receipts

Receipts of the Commission specified in Schedule 2 of the Acts are used by the Commission for the purposes of the performance of its functions (Note 4).

Payments

Payments consist of those sums which have come in course of payment during the year. Sums are deemed to have come in course of payment where the liability has been incurred, payment is due and the instruction for payment has been executed.

Where a liability has been incurred and payment is due (i.e., the liability has matured), payment is, where possible, completed before the year end to ensure the integrity of the Account. In cases where payment has not been effected and matured liabilities are outstanding at year end, the amount of such liabilities is reported in a note to the Account (Note 2).

Accruals

The account incorporates information of an accruals nature in the notes to the Account, including:

- an operating cost statement (Note 1), showing the total amount of resources consumed by the Commission in

the year,

- a statement of financial position showing the Commission's assets and liabilities at year end (Note 2), and
- explanatory notes providing details regarding capital assets, capital assets under development, the net liability to the Exchequer and commitments.

The statement of financial position includes the position at year-end in relation to the following:

- **Accrued expenses** – these represent all liabilities at the year-end date with the exception of liabilities in regard to remuneration and pensions. In the case of goods and services, an accrued liability is recognised when the payee has met the contractual requirement to provide the goods or services ordered. Amounts due for goods delivered, but not yet paid for, even if uninspected and not taken to stock, are treated as a liability. In the case of grants, a liability is recognised when the grantee has met all the requirements of the grant scheme but has yet to receive payment. Travel and subsistence liabilities are recognised when travel has been completed.
- **Prepayments** – payments made during the year of account to meet expenses which will arise in whole or in part in a subsequent financial year.
- **Accrued income** – this income due to the Commission at the end of the year of account which has yet to be received.
- **Deferred Income** – this represents income received by the Commission during the year of account for goods/services which it has yet to provide.

Capital Assets

Leinster House and all other properties occupied by Oireachtas staff and Members, excluding constituency offices, are managed, and accounted for by the Office of Public Works and are therefore not included in these accounts.

The opening and closing values of capital assets on the Commission's register and details of depreciation are shown by way of note to the statement of financial position (Note 2).

The following are not included in the statement of capital assets:

- assets that cost less than €318 acquired from 1 January 1995 to 31 December 2003;
- assets that cost less than €1,000 acquired from 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2020;
- assets that cost less than €10,000 acquired since 1 January 2021;
- heritage assets, on the basis that their value cannot be adequately expressed in financial terms.

Valuation of Assets

All assets are valued at cost.

Depreciation

Equipment, furniture, and fittings are depreciated on a straight-line basis at the following annual rates over their estimated useful lives:

- Furniture and fittings, and telecommunications equipment – 10%.
- IT equipment and software, scientific and laboratory equipment, and other office machinery – 20%.
- Major operational software systems – 10%.

Depreciation is charged annually on all assets.

Intangible Assets

The useful lives and associated amortisation rates of major classes of intangible assets have been estimated as follows:

Class	Useful Life	Rate of Amortisation
Software Licences	Licence Term 2-10 years	50%-10%
Acquired/ Developed Software	10 years	10%

Capital Assets under Development

Capital assets under development are included within capital assets in the statement of financial position, showing expenditure on assets being developed within the Commission, e.g., software development or construction projects.

Bank and Cash

Bank and Cash balance includes all commercial bank accounts balances (payroll and other related accounts) held at year-end which are funded by the Exchequer or receipts retained by the Commission (as set out in Note 4.1). Under the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003-2021, the Commission is obliged to retain all receipts. The note separately identifies PMG from commercial bank accounts (Note 2.3). The balance also includes petty cash balances.

Inventories

Consumables are stated at the lower of cost or Commission valuation (Note 2.4). High volume low value consumables are expensed at time of purchase. Consumables are generally expensed unless items have significant individual value or are subject to certain security considerations.

Net Amount due from the Exchequer

The net amount due from the Exchequer note shows the funding position of the Commission at the year end, taking into account the issues from the Exchequer on a cumulative/rolling basis. The breakdown of that figure in terms of bank/cash balances, debtors' receipts due and current liabilities are also shown (Note 2.9).

Commitments

A commitment is a contractual or legal obligation to pay that exists (on delivery for goods or services which have yet to be supplied) at year-end.

A note provides figures for all (global) contractual commitments likely to materialise in subsequent years under (a) procurement and (b) grant subheads, excluding commitments under €10,000 (Note 2.11) A separate note is provided giving details of any multi-annual commitments over €6,350,000.

Where the reported commitment level or projected project cost has varied by more than €500,000 compared with the previous year, the reason for the movement is explained.

Contingent Liabilities

A contingent liability arises in any situation where past or current actions or events create a risk of a call on the Exchequer funds in the future. Contingent liabilities are not recognised in the statement of financial position but are disclosed by way of a note unless the possibility of an outflow of resources is remote (Note 2.13).

Superannuation

Superannuation payments for former members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, former secretarial assistants employed by members of the Houses and Parties and former members of the European Parliament are met on a current basis by the Commission.

Superannuation payments for retired civil servants and catering and bar staff are met on a current basis from Vote 12 – Superannuation and Retired Allowances.

Foreign Currency Transactions

Transactions arising in foreign currencies are converted into Euro at the rates of exchange ruling at the dates of the transactions. Monetary assets and liabilities denominated in foreign currencies are translated into Euro at the year-end rates of exchange.

Other Notes to the Account

General Principles

In general, the other notes to the account aim to draw the attention of Dáil Éireann and of the Committee of Public Accounts to matters bearing on parliamentary control, or to provide fuller information about material transactions of an unusual nature recorded in the account e.g., losses, special or *ex gratia* payments, and extra remuneration. Except in the cases outlined below, notes are provided where an individual transaction, or a category of transactions taken together, involves a sum of €50,000 or more.

Where amounts lower than the threshold values are involved, notes are also provided where a serious issue of principle arises or where the Comptroller and Auditor General or Department of Public Expenditure and Reform consider that a note should be given.

Variations from Grant – Note 3 (Variations in Expenditure)

Note 3 provides explanations of variations on outturn versus original estimate provision. A note is provided where the variation relative to the original estimate provision:

- is €100,000 or more; and
- represents 5% or more of the subhead (25% in the case of administrative subheads); or
- represents a significant variation from the original estimate provision that does not meet the above criteria, but which warrants explanation.

The explanation distinguishes between the reason for the variation in the amount spent, and the funding implications e.g., under/overspend, requires a supplementary estimate, or virement. Notes in relation to variations in the categories of appropriations in aid are included on a similar basis.

Allowances and Overtime Payments – Note 5 (Staffing and Remuneration)

In the case of allowances and overtime payments, the details given in Note 5 include the total number of recipients of allowance and overtime payments in one or more categories, the number of individuals that received €10,000 or more and the maximum payment to an individual, if over €10,000.

Severance payments and Payroll Overpayments – Note 5 (Staffing and Remuneration)

Severance/redundancy and payroll overpayment amounts are disclosed where material.

Compensation and Legal Costs – Note 6 (Miscellaneous)

The components of the legal costs in respect of cases in which the Commission is or was involved are disclosed in Note 6.1. This does not include the cost of legal advice provided outside of legal proceedings. In cases, where cumulative legal costs incurred in the year of account exceed €50,000 (i.e., in situations where legal costs, in total, have exceeded €50,000 or where a single case exceeds €50,000), a note is provided with a breakdown of the total costs into:

- Legal costs,
- Legal costs awarded, and
- Compensation awarded.

Fraud or Alleged Fraud – Note 6 (Miscellaneous)

In the case of losses due to fraud or alleged fraud, information is supplied where;

- The total losses during the accounting period were €100,000 or more; or
- an individual loss was €10,000 or more; or
- for losses under €10,000, a serious issue of principle arises or where the Comptroller and Auditor General or DPER considers that a disclosure should be made.

Late Payments – Note 6 (Miscellaneous)

In the case of interest payments under the Late Payment in Commercial Transactions Regulations, 2012 (as revised in 2013), information is supplied (Note 6.3) where:

- the total of payments due was €10,000 or more; or
- an individual payment was €10,000 or more.

Petty Cash

Amount relating to petty cash are included in the bank and cash balance disclosure.

Grant and Miscellaneous Accounts – Note 7

Where relevant, accounts of grant funds financed from the Commission and of other miscellaneous accounts are presented in Note 7.

Comparative Figures

Some changes have been made to the presentation of items in the financial statements and the comparative figures have been reclassified where necessary on a basis consistent with the current year presentation.

Comptroller and Auditor General Certificate

Report for presentation to the Houses of the Oireachtas

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

Opinion on the appropriation account

I have audited the appropriation account of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for the year ended 31 December 2023, as required under the provisions of section 14 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003 (as amended).

In my opinion, the appropriation account

- properly presents the receipts and expenditure of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission for the year ended 31 December 2023, and
- has been prepared in the form prescribed by the Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform.

Basis of opinion

I conducted my audit of the appropriation account in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) as promulgated by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions. My responsibilities under those standards are described in the appendix to this report. I am independent of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission and have fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the standards.

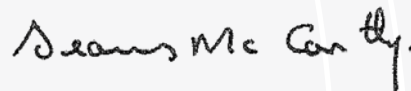
I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Report on information other than the appropriation account, and on other matters

The Accounting Officer has presented certain other information together with the account. This comprises the Commission's annual report, the Accounting Officer's introduction, and the statement on internal financial control. My responsibilities to report in relation to such information and on certain other matters upon which I report by exception are described in the appendix to this report.

Non-compliance with procurement rules

The Accounting Officer has disclosed in the statement on internal financial control that material instances of non-compliance with procurement rules occurred in respect of contracts that operated in 2023.



Seamus McCarthy
Comptroller and Auditor General

21 June 2024

Appendix to the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General

Responsibilities of the Commission and of the Accounting Officer

The Commission is responsible for the preparation of the annual appropriation account. The Accounting Officer is responsible for signing the appropriation account and the statement on internal financial control and submitting them to the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31 March following the end of the year of account. The appropriation account must comply with the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform's *Public Financial Procedures*, and with other directions of the Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform.

The Accounting Officer is also responsible for the safeguarding of public funds and property under his control, for the efficiency and economy of the Commission in the use of its resources and for the regularity and propriety of all transactions recorded in the appropriation account.

Responsibilities of the Comptroller and Auditor General

I am required under section 14 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003 (as amended) to audit the appropriation account of the Commission and to report thereon to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

My objective in carrying out the audit is to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the account is free from material misstatement due to fraud or error. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the ISAs will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from

fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the account.

As part of an audit in accordance with the ISAs, I exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. In doing so,

- I identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the account whether due to fraud or error; design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks; and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- I obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal controls.
- I assess whether the accounting provisions of the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform's *Public Financial Procedures* have been complied with.
- I communicate with the Accounting Officer regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiency in internal control that is identified during the audit.

I report by exception if, in my opinion,

- I have not received all the information and explanations required for the audit, or
- the accounting records were not sufficient to permit the appropriation account to be readily and properly audited, or
- the appropriation account is not in agreement with the accounting records.

Upon completion of the audit, I am obliged to attach to the account a certificate stating whether, in my opinion, the account properly presents the receipts and expenditure of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission and to refer to any material case identified in the course of audit in which

- the Commission has failed to apply expenditure recorded in the account for the purposes intended, or
- transactions recorded in the account do not conform with the authority under which they purport to have been carried out.

Information other than the appropriation account

My opinion on the appropriation account does not cover the other information presented with it, and I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with the audit of the appropriation account, I am required under the ISAs to read the other information presented and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the appropriation account or with knowledge obtained during the audit, or if it otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If, based on the work performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

Reporting on other matters

My audit is conducted by reference to the special considerations which attach to State bodies in relation to their management and operation. I report if I identify material matters relating to the manner in which public business has been conducted.

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission – Appropriation Account 2023

		2023 Estimate provision €000	2023 Outturn €000	2022 Outturn €000
1	Administration			
(a)	Salaries, wages, and allowances in respect of staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service	46,127	42,925	39,102
(b)	Travel and subsistence	477	426	268
(c)	Training and development and incidental expenses	1,621	1,143	903
(d)	Postal and telecommunications services	343	449	599
(e)	Office equipment and external IT services	20,460	18,612	15,847
(f)	Office premises expenses	5,508	3,504	3,113
(g)	Consultancy services and value for money and policy review	3,398	434	714
(h)	Parliamentary printing	774	551	551
(i)	Library and research services	1,588	1,025	883
(j)	Public relations and communications	373	273	294
(k)	Single Public Service Pension Scheme for members of staff of the Commission	178	–	–
2	Other services			
(a)	Payment in respect of catering and bar staff	2,615	2,174	2,109
(b)	Expenses of delegates to other parliamentary assemblies	681	722	262
(c)	Televising of proceedings of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann and other services	4,509	3,638	3,404
(d)	Grant in respect of inter-parliamentary activities	375	251	169
(e)	Grant to British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly	116	116	116
(f)	North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association	36	–	–
(g)	Termination allowances in respect of former Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas	2,137	–	1
(h)	Grant to Irish Parliamentary (former Members) Society	15	15	14
(i)	Grant in Respect of “Ciste Pinsean Thithe an Oireachtas”	15,752	12,680	12,901
(j)	Pension scheme for secretarial assistants	1,360	1,602	1,241
(k)	Single Public Service Pension Scheme for Members	1,185	39	29
3	Membership of Dáil Éireann			
(a)	Salaries of Members (including Office Holders and Chairpersons of Committees)	17,319	17,762	17,216
(b)	Payments in respect of secretarial assistance for members	29,449	25,493	23,594
(c)	Travel and Accommodation Allowance	3,120	2,980	2,960
(d)	Public Representation Allowance	3,100	2,994	2,983
(e)	Other allowances	2,638	1,614	1,566

		2023 Estimate provision €000	2023 Outturn €000	2022 Outturn €000
4	Membership of Seanad Éireann			
(a)	Salaries of Members (including Office Holders and Chairpersons of Committees)	4,571	4,738	4,552
(b)	Payments in respect of secretarial assistance for members	3,988	3,661	3,296
(c)	Travel and Accommodation Allowance	1,100	1,081	1,058
(d)	Public Representation Allowance	650	682	645
(e)	Other allowances	347	249	193
5	Membership of Oireachtas Committees			
(a)	Travel expenses	283	94	113
(b)	Other expenses relating to Committees	257	42	11
6	Membership of European Parliament			
(a)	Salaries of members of the European Parliament	–	–	–
(b)	Pensions of former members of the European Parliament	769	764	764
	Gross Expenditure	177,219	152,733	141,471
	DEDUCT			
	Receipts of the Commission (Note 4.1)	(2,400)	(2,361)	(2,191)
	Net Expenditure	174,819	150,372	139,280

Surplus

In accordance with the House of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2021, the Commission received a three-year funding allocation of €462m for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024. Gross expenditure in 2023 was €152.7m. The unspent allocation for the year 2023 was €24m and is carried over.

	2023	2022
Surplus	€24,447,119	€18,445,827



Peter Finnegan

Accounting Officer

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

20 June 2024

Notes to the Appropriation Account

Note 1 Operating Cost Statement 2023

	Note	2023		2022
		€000	€000	€000
Pay			111,837	104,805
Non pay			40,896	36,666
Gross expenditure			152,733	141,471
<i>Deduct</i>				
Appropriations-in-aid			(2,361)	(2,191)
Net expenditure			150,372	139,280
Changes in intangible assets	2.1			
Purchases		(3,923)		
Amortisation		2,226	(1,697)	182
Changes in property, plant, and equipment	2.2			
Purchases cash		(90)		
Depreciation		1,032		
Disposals cash (proceeds)		0		
Loss on disposals		2	944	517
Changes in net current assets				
Decrease in stock	2.4	38		
Increase in prepayments	2.5	(66)		
Increase in accrued income	2.7	(97)		
Increase in accrued expenses	2.12	32	(93)	(661)
Direct expenditure			149,526	139,318
Expenditure borne elsewhere				
Net allied services expenditure (cash)	1.1		28,237	27,414
Notional rents (non-cash)	1.2		5,616	5,616
Net programme cost			183,379	172,348

1.1 Net Allied Services Expenditure

The net allied services expenditure amount is made up of the following amounts in relation to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission borne elsewhere.

		2023 €000	2022 €000
Vote 9	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	100	103
Vote 12	Superannuation and Retired Allowances	6,397	6,345
Vote 13	Office of Public Works	5,793	5,426
Vote 43	Office of the Chief Information Officer	101	256
Central Fund:	Parliamentary Activities Allowances to Leaders	9,211	8,947
	Payments to qualified parties under the Electoral Acts 1992 to 2015	6,302	5,920
	Re-imbursments of Electoral Expenses	26	80
	Pensions in respect of former Cinn Comhairle (No. 38 of 1938, etc.)	307	337
		28,237	27,414

1.2 Notional rents

The notional rents figure above relates to State-owned accommodation occupied by the Houses of the Oireachtas and the amount of rent estimated by the Office of Public Works that it could earn based on the market rental values for such accommodation.

Note 2 Statement of Financial Position as at 31 December 2023

	Note	2023 €000	2022 €000
Intangible Assets	2.1	12,635	10,938
Property, plant, and equipment	2.2	661	1,605
		13,296	12,543
Current assets			
Bank and cash	2.3	(60)	(1,834)
Stocks	2.4	159	197
Prepayments	2.5	4,328	4,262
Other debit balances	2.6	1,550	1,297
Accrued Income	2.7	832	735
Net funding due from the Exchequer	2.9	2,228	3,955
Total current assets		9,037	8,612
Less current liabilities			
Matured liabilities	2.12	2,647	2,615
Other credit balances	2.8	3,718	3,418
Total current liabilities		6,365	6,033
Net current assets		2,672	2,579
Net assets		15,968	15,122
Represented by:			
State funding account	2.10	15,968	15,122

2.1 Intangible Assets

	Acquired and developed software €000	Assets under Development €000	Total €000
Gross assets			
Cost or valuation at 1 January 2023 ^a	18,930	4,024	22,954
Additions	–	3,923	3,923
Brought into use	122	(122)	–
Cost or valuation at 31 December 2023	19,052	7,825	26,877
Accumulated Amortisation			
Opening balance at 1 January 2023	12,016	–	12,016
Amortisation for the year	2,226	–	2,226
Cumulative amortisation at 31 December 2023	14,242	–	14,242
Net Assets at 31 December 2023	4,810	7,825	12,635
Net Assets at 31 December 2022	6,914	4,024	10,938

a On 1 January 2023, software acquisition and development assets were reclassified from 'property, plant, and equipment' to 'intangible assets'. Prior year comparative figures have been reclassified on the same basis.

2.2 Property, Plant & Equipment

	Equipment €000	Furniture and fittings €000	Office equipment €000	Total €000
Gross assets				
Cost or valuation at 1 January 2023^a	7,087	2,587	6,132	15,806
Additions	54	13	23	90
Disposals	(566)	(8)	(86)	(660)
Cost or valuation at 31 December 2023	6,575	2,592	6,069	15,236
Accumulated depreciation				
Opening balance at 1 January 2023	6,540	2,450	5,211	14,201
Depreciation for the year	329	47	656	1,032
Depreciation on disposals	(566)	(6)	(86)	(658)
Cumulative depreciation at 31 December 2023	6,303	2,491	5,781	14,575
Net assets at 31 December 2023	272	101	288	661
Net Assets at 31 December 2022	547	137	921	1,605

a On 1 January 2023, software acquisition and development assets were reclassified from 'property, plant and equipment' to 'intangible assets'. Prior year comparative figures have been reclassified on the same basis (Note 2.1).

2.3 Bank and cash

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
PMG Account*	(60)	(1,843)
Commercial bank account balance	–	7
Credit card	–	2
	(60)	(1,834)

* All PMG accounts transferred to the commercial Bank 'Danske Bank' from 1st October 2018.

Other Commercial Bank Accounts

The commercial bank accounts referred to above relate to appropriation account funds. The Oireachtas holds one additional commercial bank account. Money in this account is managed and administrated by the Oireachtas for the provision and operation of bar and catering facilities. No moneys paid from the Commission are transmitted through this bank account although some moneys are surrendered to the Commission under schedule 2 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003-2021 and as itemised in Note 4. The amount held at the end of 2023 is €501,087 and is not included in the account (2022: €358,554).

2.4 Inventories

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
Stationery	19	19
IT consumables	116	149
Other	24	29
	159	197

2.5 Prepayments

	2023 €000	2022 €000
Software support	3,707	3,694
Broadcasting & Communications	195	187
Library & Research	286	255
Administration	69	70
Estate management	4	2
Other Prepayments	67	54
	4,328	4,262

2.6 Other debit balances

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
Recoupable salaries	–	–
Recoupable travel schemes	8	2
Recoupable travel pass scheme expenditure	73	44
Other debit suspense items	1,469	1,251
	1,550	1,297

2.7 Accrued Income

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
IT services and support	46	45
Specific programme accruals	22	3
Administration expenses	764	687
Other Accruals	–	–
	832	735

2.8 Other credit balances

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
Amounts due to the State		
Income Tax	1,570	1,475
Pay Related Social Insurance	910	828
Professional Services Withholding Tax	332	216
Value Added Tax	47	52
Pension contributions	308	288
Local Property Tax	7	7
Universal Social Charge	308	281
	3,482	3,147
Payroll deductions held in suspense	210	265
Other credit suspense items	26	6
	3,718	3,418

2.9 Net Exchequer funding

at 31 December	Notes	2023 €000	2022 €000
Surplus		24,447	18,446
Exchequer grant undrawn		(22,720)	(20,531)
Net Exchequer funding due		1,727	(2,085)
Balance brought forward at 1 January		(3,955)	(1,870)
Net Exchequer funding		(2,228)	(3,955)
Represented by:			
Debtors			
Bank and cash	2.3	(60)	(1,834)
Debit balances: suspense	2.6	1,550	1,297
		1,490	(537)
Creditors			
Due to State	2.8	(3,482)	(3,147)
Credit balances: suspense	2.8	(236)	(271)
		(3,718)	(3,418)
		(2,228)	(3,955)

2.10 State Funding Account

	Note	2023		2022
		€000	€000	€000
Balance at 1 January			15,122	15,160
Disbursement by the Commission				
Estimate provision	Account*	174,819		
Surplus	Account*	(24,447)		
Net provision			150,372	139,280
Expenditure (cash) borne elsewhere	1.1		28,237	27,414
Non cash expenditure – notional rent	1.2		5,616	5,616
Net programme cost	1		(183,379)	(172,348)
Balance at 31 December			15,968	15,122

* Note: "Account" refers to the face of the Appropriation Account

2.11 Commitments

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
(a) Global commitments		
Procurement subheads	–	–
Grant subheads	–	–
Multi-annual commitments*	6,553	9,474
Closing balance	6,553	9,474

* The decrease in multi-annual commitments relates to reduced contractual commitments for digital transformation development expenditure.

2.12 Matured liabilities

at 31 December	2023 €000	2022 €000
Estimate of matured liabilities not discharged at year end	2,647	2,615

2.13 Contingent liabilities

The Commission is involved in a number of legal proceedings, which depending on the outcome, may generate liabilities.

Kerins v Dáil Éireann (module 2), which concerns the applicant's claim for damages, is ongoing. In 2022, the High Court heard and dismissed the applicant's motion for discovery that was brought in furtherance of this damages claim.

Notwithstanding the fact that the applicant's motion was dismissed, the High Court ordered that the respondent pay one-third of the applicant's legal costs. In late 2022, the applicant appealed substantive High Court decision directly to the Supreme Court and the respondent cross-appealed the cost order. The Supreme Court heard the substantive appeal over two days in May 2023 and judgment is reserved. Liability remains to be quantified.

Note 3 Analysis of administration expenditure

The final gross outturn in relation to the Commission was €24m less than the Statement of Estimate.

Significant variations

The following note presents an analysis of the administration expenditure of the Service and outlines the reasons for the underspend of (+/- 25% and €100,000).

1(c) Training and Development and Incidental Expenses

Estimate provision: €1.621m, outturn: €1.143m

The greater part of the underspend of €0.478m in this area relates to external information services for the translation section, and HR specialists expenditure, for facilitation services.

1(f) Office Premises expenses

Estimate provision: €5.508m, outturn: €3.504m

The underspend of €2m in this area relates to a project that did not proceed in 2023, as well as lesser than expected increases in utility bills and service charges from OPW.

1(g) Consultancy services and value for money and policy review

Estimate provision: €3.398m, outturn: €0.434m

The underspend of €2.964m was mainly as a result of unused contingency for legal costs.

1(h) Parliamentary printing

Estimate provision: €0.774m, outturn: €0.551m

The underspend of €0.223m on expenditure on parliamentary printing arose due to lower than anticipated demand for printing and graphic design.

1(i) Library & Research Services

Estimate provision: €1.588m, outturn: €1.025m

The underspend of €0.563m on library and research services arose due to impact on project work arising from capacity issues, and reprioritisation.

1(j) Public relations and communications

Estimate provision: €0.373m, outturn: €0.273m

The underspend of €0.1m on expenditure arose due to the fact that public events programming had been scaled back slightly.

1(k) Single Public Service Pension Scheme for members of the staff of the Commission

Estimate provision: €0.178m, outturn: €0m

The underspend of €0.178m on expenditure was due to the requirement to make provision for staff retiring as part of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme. This provision is no longer required, as it was confirmed in 2023 that civil service pensions paid under this scheme will instead be funded under Vote 12.

2(a) Payment in respect of catering and bar staff

Estimate provision: €2.615m, outturn: €2.174m

The underspend of €0.441m was due to delays in recruitment to fill vacancies.

2(c) Televising of Proceedings of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann and Other Services

Estimate provision: €4.509m, outturn: €3.638m

The underspend of €0.871m was due to the deferral of a specific project from 2023 into 2024.

2(d) Grant in respect of inter-parliamentary activities

Estimate provision: €0.375m, outturn: €0.251m

The underspend of €0.124m was due to a reduction undertaken in travel and interparliamentary activity

2(g) Termination allowances in respect of former members of the Houses of the Oireachtas

Estimate provision: €2.137m, outturn: €0m

The underspend of €2.137m occurred because a provision for election related termination payments was not required.

2(i) Grant in respect of “Ciste Pinsean Thithe an Oireachtais”

Estimate provision: €15.752m, outturn: €12.68m

The underspend of €3.072m occurred because a provision for election related termination payments was not required.

2(j) Pension scheme for secretarial assistants

Estimate provision: €1.36m, outturn: €1.602m

The overspend of €0.242m is due to a greater number of former staff presenting applications for preserved pensions than had been expected.

2(k) Single Public Service Pension Scheme for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas

Estimate provision: €1.185m, outturn: €0.039m

The underspend of €1.146m occurred because there was a lesser number of pensioner Members than was anticipated in the year

3(b) Payments in respect of secretarial assistance for members

Estimate provision: €29.449m, outturn: €25.493m

The underspend of €3.956m occurred because a provision for election related termination payments was not required

3(e) Other allowances

Estimate provision: €2.638m, outturn: €1.614m

The underspend of €1.024m relates to a requirement to make a provision for full drawdown of allowances, some of which were not claimed.

4(b) Payments in respect of secretarial assistance for members.

Estimate provision: €3.988m, outturn: €3.661m

The underspend of €0.327m arose due to reduced expenditure as a result of Members opting to take reduced amounts of TAA.

5(a) Travel

Estimate provision: €0.283m, outturn: €0.094m

The underspend of €0.189m was related to reduced Committee travel in the year.

5(b) Other expenses relating to Committees

Estimate provision: €0.257m, outturn: €0.042m

The underspend of €0.215m was related to reduced Committee activity in the year.

Note 4 Receipts

4.1 Receipts of the Commission

In accordance with the provisions of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2021, receipts of the Commission specified in Schedule 2 to the Act shall be used by it for the purposes of the performance of its functions.

The 2023 financial statements record total receipts of €2,360,780 retained by the Commission and offset against its gross expenditure. Receipts of €3,750 relate to Broadcasting services. The remainder of the receipts is comprised of receipts of €2,344,460 relating to pension related deductions on public service remuneration, a receipt of €12,500 relating to the submission fee for a private bill and freedom of information income of €70.

		Estimated €000	2023 Realised €000	2022 Realised €000
1	Sales of services of Broadcasting Unit	–	4	1
2	Net income from catering and bar services (Note 7.3)	–	–	–
3	Receipts obtained by the Commission in the performance of its functions (other than receipts in respect of expenses paid by the Commission on behalf of its members or members of staff that have been recouped by the Commission from the members or members of staff concerned)	2,400	2,357	2,190
	Receipts recognised in Appropriation Account	2,400	2,361	2,191
4	Members contributions under the European Parliament (Irish Representatives) Pension Scheme, 1979	–	–	–
	Total Receipts	2,400	2,361	2,191

Notes

Members' contributions under the European Parliament (Irish Representatives) Pension Scheme, 1979 are not included as a receipt as it is offset against pensions paid to former Members of the European Parliament under subhead 6(b) of the account. Since the elections of 2019, there have been no contributions made under the 1979 scheme.

Significant variations

Overall receipts from the Commission were €39,220 less than the Estimate. This represents a 2% variation, which is not significant.

Note 5 Staffing and Remuneration

5.1 Employee Numbers

Number of staff at year end (full-time equivalents)	2023	2022
Houses of the Oireachtas Service	705	674
Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members and Parties	473	461
Total	1,178	1,135

5.2 Pay – Houses of the Oireachtas Service

	2023 €000	2022 €000
Pay	38,964	35,635
Higher, special, or additional duties allowance	182	171
Other allowances	310	226
Overtime	1,588	1,390
Shift and roster allowances	539	518
Employer's PRSI	3,813	3,404
Total pay^a	45,396	41,344

a The total pay figure is distributed across subheads 1(a) and 2(a).

5.2 Pay – Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members and Parties

	2023 €000	2022 €000
Pay	22,311	20,645
Redundancy payments ^b	4	15
Overtime and extra attendance	4,109	3,719
Employer's PRSI	2,799	2,591
Total pay^c	29,223	26,970

b See Note 5.7 Severance/Redundancy.

c The total pay figure is distributed across subheads 3(b) and 4(b).

5.3 Allowances and overtime payments

	Number of recipients	Recipients of €10,000 or more	Highest individual payment 2023 €	Highest Individual payment 2022 €
Houses of the Oireachtas Service				
Higher, special, or additional duties allowances	43	4	23,481	22,806
Other allowances	103	1	77,057	66,356
Overtime	230	66	51,455	49,580
Shift and roster allowances	78	1	13,536	8,568
Number of individuals who received extra remuneration in more than one category	104	88	54,971	52,834
Scheme for Secretarial Assistance for Members and Parties				
Higher, special, or additional duties allowances	–	–	–	–
Overtime and extra attendance	538	200	15,442	14,893
Number of individuals who received extra remuneration in more than one category	–	–	–	–

5.4 Employee pay bands

The number of Commission employees whose total employee benefits (including basic pay, allowances, overtime; excluding employer PRSA, employer pension costs) for the financial year fell between €20,000 and €59,999 and within each band of €10,000 from €60,000 upwards are as follows:

This table refers to actual amounts paid out in the year and may differ from the point on salary at year end.

Pay Band		Number of Employees		Number of Employees	
		Houses of the Oireachtas Service		Secretarial Assistance for Members and Parties	
From	To	2023	2022	2023	2022
€20,000	€59,999	432	436	361	413
€60,000	€69,999	73	63	133	87
€70,000	€79,999	79	70	14	6
€80,000	€89,999	46	41	2	1
€90,000	€99,999	31	29	0	3
€100,000	€109,999	20	12	3	0
€110,000	€119,999	13	9	0	0
€120,000	€129,999	2	1	0	0
€130,000	€139,999	1	0	0	0
€140,000	€149,999	0	0	0	0
€150,000	€159,999	0	0	0	0
€160,000	€169,999	2	2	0	0
€170,000	€179,999	1	3	0	0
€180,000	€189,999	1	0	0	0
€190,000	€199,999	1	0	0	0
€200,000	€209,999	0	1	0	0
€210,000	€219,999	1	0	0	0
€220,000+		0	0	0	0

5.5 Other remuneration arrangements

Payments totalling €108,475 were paid to retired civil servants whose services were employed on various interview boards, and specialist parliamentary and governance tasks. The payments made were consistent with the principles of the Public Service (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Acts 2012.

The terms of the AHCPS/IMPACT (PCW 1% Restructuring Agreement) were implemented resulting in a total payment of €171,240 in 67 instances.

This account includes expenditure of €67,082 in respect of 2 officers who were serving outside the Commission for all or part of 2023 and whose salary was paid by the Department.

This account does not include expenditure in respect of 6 officers who were serving outside the Commission for all or part of 2023 in other Government Departments/Offices and whose salaries were not recouped by the Commission.

5.6 Payroll overpayments

	2023 €	2022 €
Overpayments	78,858	72,618
Number of recipients	38	24
Recovery Plans in place	23	13

No recovery plans were transferred to other Departments in the year.

5.7 Severance, Redundancy and Termination Payments

A total of €3,816 was paid out in 2023 in respect of severance payments and statutory redundancy to one staff member employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance..

The Oireachtas had no staff receiving severance payments and enhancement to their pension arrangements in 2023.

5.8 Remuneration and benefits of Accounting Officer

The Accounting Officer's remuneration and taxable benefits for the financial year was as follows

	2023	2022
Gross salary	215,194	201,494

The value of retirement benefits earned in the period is not included above. The Accounting Officer is a member of the Non-Contributory Pension Scheme for Established Civil Servants ("Pre-1995 Established Scheme") and his entitlements to retirement benefits do not extend beyond the terms of that scheme,

Note 6 Miscellaneous

6.1 Compensation and legal costs

6.1(a) Payments/Costs paid by the Service in the year

	Claims by				Total 2023	Total 2022
	employees		members of the public			
	Personal Injuries	Other	Loss or damage	Other		
Number of cases	4	–	1	2	7	15
	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
Department's own legal costs	–	–	240	1	241	141
Payments by/on behalf of Department						
Compensation	28	–	–	–	28	95
Legal costs	–	–	–	–	–	67
Other costs	5	–	2	1	8	27
2023 Total	33	–	242	2	277	330

6.1(b) Cumulative Costs of cases completed in 2023

	Claims by				Total 2023	Total 2022
	employees		members of the public			
	Personal Injuries	Other	Loss or damage	Other		
Number of cases	1	–	–	–	1	14
	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
Department's own legal costs	–	–	–	–	–	161
Payments by/on behalf of Department						
Compensation	28	–	–	–	28	95
Legal costs	–	–	–	–	–	67
Other costs	1	–	–	–	1	20
2023 Total	29	–	–	–	29	343

6.2 Fraud and suspected fraud

	Number of cases	2023 €000	2022 €000
Fraud	–	–	–
Suspected Fraud	–	–	–

6.3 Late Payment Interest and Compensation

	2023 €	2022 €
Total of interest and compensation paid	22,685	13,112

Note 7 Grant and Miscellaneous Accounts

7.1 Grant to British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly was established in 1990. Its membership consists of British and Irish Parliamentarians together with Parliamentarians from each of the Assemblies of Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Jersey, Guernsey, and the Isle of Man. Funding is provided by the UK and Irish Exchequers with bi-annual Plenary sessions alternating between Ireland and the UK.

ACCOUNT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 €	2022 €
Balance at 1 January	37,913	12,979
Grant [subhead 2(e)]	115,625	116,000
Miscellaneous	–	
Total Receipts	115,625	116,000
Payments		
Plenary sessions	123,463	81,128
Committees	15,153	9,101
Miscellaneous	918	837
Total Payments	139,534	91,066
Balance as at 31 December	14,004	37,913

7.2 Cumann Parlaiminteach Na hÉireann

Grant in respect of inter-parliamentary activities

Cumann Parlaiminteach na hÉireann (The Irish Parliamentary Association) operates under the remit of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission. The powers of the Irish Parliamentary Association are exercised by an Executive Committee which consists of the Ceann Comhairle, Chairman, the Cathaoirleach, Deputy Chairman and fifteen members of the Oireachtas. The role of the Association is to foster and promote understanding and contacts between Irish Parliamentarians and those of other countries.

ACCOUNT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 €	2022 €
Balance at 1 January	13,511	11,343
Grant [subhead 2(d)]	251,386	168,932
Members Subscriptions	1,733	3,092
Total Receipts	253,119	172,024
Payments		
Expenses associated with Irish delegations on foreign visits	75,157	35,524
Expenses associated with foreign delegations visiting Ireland	29,787	40,895
Inter Parliamentary Union Conference expenses	83,826	35,282
Other expenses	75,340	58,155
Total Payments	264,110	169,856
Balance as at 31 December	2,520	13,511

7.3 Accounts of the Catering and Bar Services

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2023

	2023 €	2022 €
Sales	1,276,840	1,134,928
Cost of sales	(817,961)	(707,711)
Gross Surplus	458,879	427,217
Expenses	(399,133)	(292,150)
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	59,746	135,067

**BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2023**

	2023 €	2022 €
Fixed assets	-	-
Current assets		
Stock	27,397	28,687
Debtors	60,670	79,234
VAT & Prepayments	3,247	17,606
Bank and cash	518,348	358,554
	609,662	484,081
Current liabilities		
Trade creditors	224,625	158,790
VAT	-	-
	224,625	158,790
Total net assets	385,037	325,291
Financed by:		
Cumulative surplus retained excluding subhead 2(a)	1,431,676	1,296,609
Surplus/(Deficit) current year excluding subhead 2(a)	59,746	135,067
Cumulative paid to date to Houses of the Oireachtas	(1,106,385)	(1,106,385)
	385,037	325,291

Notes to accounts:

- (i) Payroll costs of the staff of the Catering and Bar are borne directly by the Commission and are reflected at subhead 2(a) of the Appropriation Account amounting to €2,173,685 (2022 €2,108,547)
- (ii) An amount is remitted from the catering and bar accounts to the Commission on an annual basis and recorded as a receipt in the Commission's accounts (Note 4.1). The amount is calculated based on the retention of a bank balance in the account equivalent to an average of two months payments to suppliers. The amount remitted in 2023 was Nil (2022 Nil) due to the continuing increases in costs and the significant impact both this and the COVID-19 had on its finances.

Report on Compliance with the Provisions of the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act 1997 and the European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 580 of 2012)

This statutory instrument gives effect to Directive 2011/7/EU on Combating Late Payment in Commercial Transactions.

Period covered by this review: 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023

Statement of Compliance

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service complies with the provisions of the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act 1997 and the European Communities (Late Payment in Commercial Transactions) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 580 of 2012).

The Act has been implemented in full since 10 May 2002 within the Service. It is the policy of the Service to settle all invoices promptly with due regard to contractual terms where applicable, good financial and cash management practices and the provisions of the legislation.

Instructions have been issued by the Finance Unit to all staff processing payments to ensure that the provisions of the legislation are complied with. While the procedures are designed to ensure compliance with the Act, they can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance against material non-compliance with the Act.

Payments that fell due under the terms of the Act within the relevant period

In the period under review a total of 7,673 payments were processed with a total value of €35.2m. Of those payments 328 incurred penalties and interest under the Act totalling €22,685. 179 of these payments involved invoices in excess of €317.

Reduction of payment period to 15 days

With effect from 15 June 2009, the Service reduced its maximum target period for payments to suppliers from 30 days to 15 days to reflect a change in Government policy. Had the 15 day target been in place on a statutory basis, a further 1,888 payments would have incurred prompt payment interest, representing 4% of the total number of commercial payments processed from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

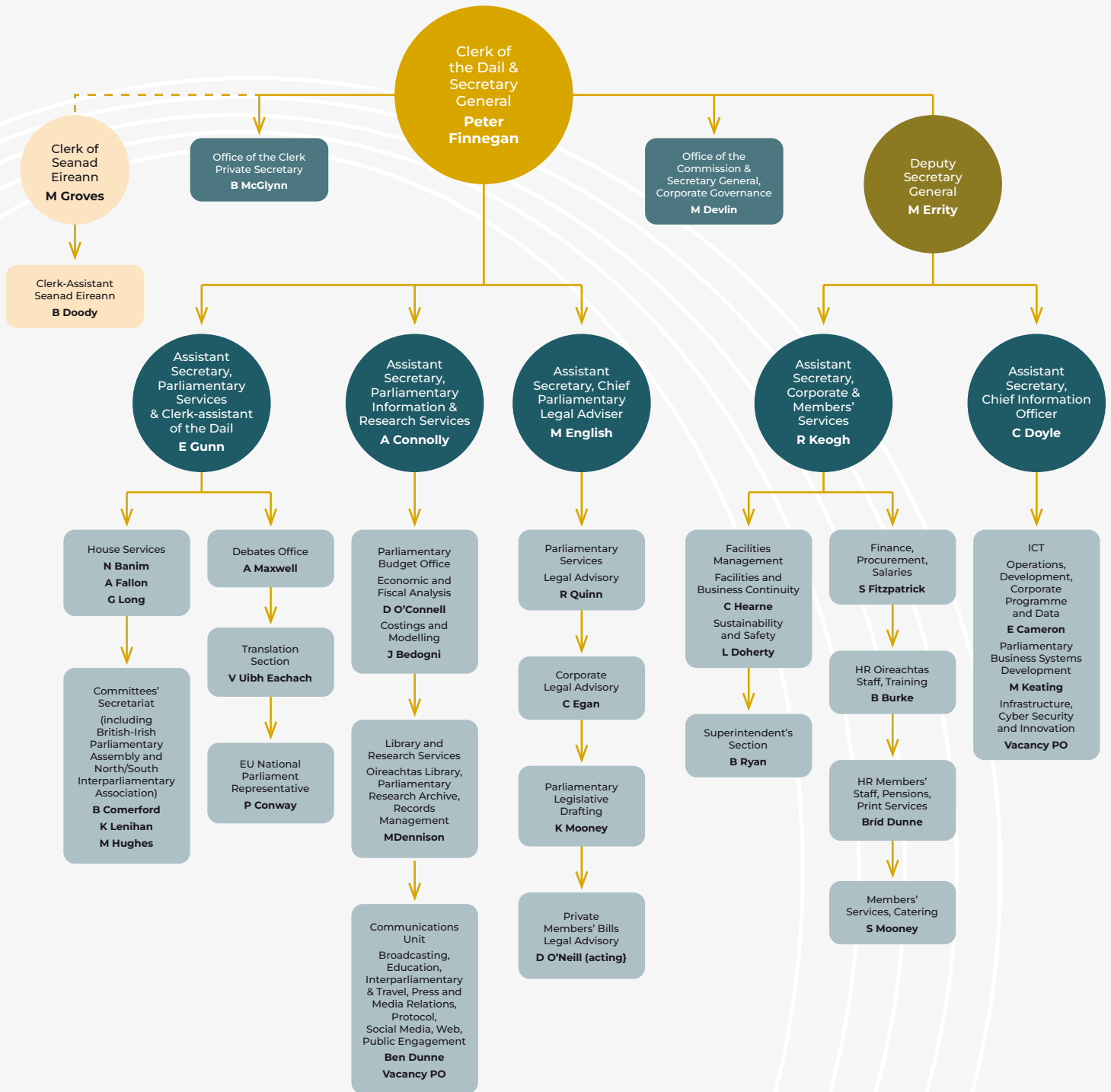


Rosemary Keogh,
Assistant Secretary,
Corporate and Members' Services

21 March, 2024

Appendix I

Houses of the Oireachtas Service Organisation Chart



Appendix II

Statement of Resources 2023 (civil service staff)

Grades	Total Numbers in place December 2023 Sanctioned Numbers 675
Secretary General	1
Deputy Secretary General	1
Assistant Secretary	4
Principal Officer	32
Assistant Principal	97
Senior Clerk	79
Administrative Officer	32
Junior Clerk	99
Clerical Officer	86
Advisory Counsel	15
Assistant Parliamentary Counsel Grade II	4
Deputy Editor	3
Assistant Editor	6
Parliamentary Reporter	38
Reporter (Communications/Web)	1
Senior Researcher	22
Researcher	2
Senior Parliamentary Librarian	2
Assistant Librarian	7
Senior Sign Language Interpreter	1
Junior Sign Language Interpreter	1
Aistritheoir Grád 1	4
Aistritheoir Grád 2	9
Aistritheoir/Attengaire Grád 3	10
Usher Grade I	3
Usher Grade II	10
Usher Grade III	47
Head/Deputy Head Services Officer	3
Services Officer	21
Services Attendant	1
Parliamentary Porter	3
Telephonist (Relief)	0.25
Cleaner	7
Specialist, Temporary and Other Staff* (see below)	1
Total Civil Service Staff **	652

* Senior Auditor

** Numbers are rounded

Appendix III

Audit Committee of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission



Pat McLoughlin
Chair of Audit
Committee

Chair of the Audit Committee's Statement

As Chair of the Audit Committee (the Committee) for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (the Commission), I am pleased to present the Committee's annual report for 2023. The Committee reports annually to the Commission and its report is included in the Commission's Annual Report that is laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and published bilingually on the Oireachtas website. This annual report covers the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 and was submitted to the Accounting Officer and to the Commission in accordance with the Audit Committee Charter.

Purpose and activity

The Committee was established in 2010 on a statutory basis under Section 14A of the *Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2021* (the Commission Acts). Details regarding the role and responsibilities of the Committee and the process for appointing its members are set out in the Commission Acts. The Committee advises the Commission on matters of corporate governance relating to its functions and also advises the Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (the Service) on financial matters relating to his functions.

During 2023, the Committee met on four occasions, twice virtually via Microsoft Teams and twice in-person. In April 2023, Deputy Mairéad Farrell stepped down as a member of the Committee and, subsequently, the Commission appointed Deputy Rose Conway Walsh to serve on the Committee.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Unit, led by the Head of Internal Audit, continued to support the Committee during 2023. The internal audit function continues to develop as a valuable in-house resource and provided the Committee with high quality reports during the year.

Risk Management

Risk Management is at the forefront of the considerations of the Committee. The Chief Risk Officer (CRO) and the Risk Office team further embedded the risk awareness culture across the Service during the year. This was achieved by providing training to staff of the Service and through co-ordinating actions and reports on risk management performance. In addition, in September 2023, the CRO and the Risk Office team held the inaugural meeting of the Service's Risk Forum. The Risk Forum was launched by the Secretary General of the Service, Peter Finnegan, and should be a useful space for staff of the Service to discuss challenges and best practices in risk management.

Security Arrangements

During the year, the Committee continued to monitor cyber security and the strategies adopted by the Houses of the Oireachtas to protect against cyber threats. To this end, the Committee received an update, at its April meeting, from the Service's Head of Innovation, Security, and Infrastructure on Oireachtas cybersecurity strategy and developments.

Similarly, the Committee received an update, at its December meeting, from the new Superintendent of the Houses on the status of security measures for the Leinster House campus and the initiatives in place for protecting the physical safety of all members of the parliamentary community.

Looking ahead to 2024

The Committee will continue, during 2024, to provide advice to the Commission and to the Secretary General on matters relating to their respective functions. The Committee will oversee the delivery of the internal audit workplan for 2024 and will review external audit reports to provide assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control systems.

An important aspect of the Committee's work in 2024 will be monitoring the response of the Service to the developing nature of the security risks faced by the Houses of the Oireachtas, and the parliamentary community more broadly, in terms of both cyber and personal security.

Acknowledgements

As indicated above, Deputy Mairéad Farrell stepped down from the Committee during the course of the year. I would like to acknowledge, with thanks, Deputy Farrell's valuable contribution to the work of the Committee. I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the work and commitment of my fellow members of the Committee during the year, including that of our newest member, Deputy Rose Conway Walsh.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the Commission, Secretary General, Management Board, and staff of the Service for their continued engagement and support.

Pat McLoughlin

Chair of Audit Committee

21 March 2024

Annual Report of the Audit Committee of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission 2023

1. Establishment and Membership of the Audit Committee

The Committee was placed on a statutory footing in 2010 by virtue of Section 14A of the *Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2021* (the Commission Acts). The Committee is composed of between five and eight members appointed by the Commission, as follows:

- one member of the Commission;
- at least one but not more than three other members of either House of the Oireachtas who are not members of the Commission;
- at least two but not more than three external persons nominated by the Secretary General, one of whom is designated by the Commission as Chairperson of the Committee, and
- one member of the staff of the Service nominated by the Secretary General.

On 29 July 2020, the Commission appointed the following members to serve on the Committee for the 33rd Dáil Éireann and 26th Seanad Éireann, in accordance with Section 14A of the Commission Acts. The Commission agreed that Mr Pat McLoughlin be reappointed as Chair of the Committee.

- Mr Pat McLoughlin: external member and Chair of the Committee
- Deputy Francis Noel Duffy: member of the Commission
- Senator Victor Boyhan: member of Seanad Éireann
- Deputy Mairéad Farrell: member of Dáil Éireann
- Deputy Emer Higgins: member of Dáil Éireann

- Mr Cyril Maybury: external member
- Ms Noreen Fahy: external member
- Mr Charles Hearne: member of the staff of the Service

In April 2023, Deputy Mairéad Farrell stepped down as a member of the Audit Committee and, on 8 May 2023, Deputy Rose Conway Walsh was appointed by the Commission to serve on the Committee.

2. Role of the Audit Committee

The role of the Committee is to:

- Advise the Secretary General on financial matters relating to their functions;
- Advise the Commission on matters of corporate governance relating to its functions; and
- Meet at least four times annually and report, in writing, at least once a year to the Commission on its activities in the previous year.

The Committee advises the Secretary General on financial matters relating to their functions, including:

- the proper implementation of public service guidelines on financial matters;
- compliance with Section 22 of the *Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1866*, Section 19 of the *Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993* and any other obligations imposed by law relating to financial matters;
- the appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission's procedures relating to public procurement, seeking sanction for expenditure and complying with that sanction, acquiring, keeping custody of and disposing of assets, risk management, financial reporting, internal audit, internal controls; and

- the form of accounts of the Commission for approval by the Minister for Finance.

The Head of Internal Audit and the Internal Auditor attend meetings of the Committee, save where the Committee otherwise decides. The Committee may also invite the person who has responsibility for financial matters in the Service (or any other person it considers appropriate) to attend specific meetings.

3. Reporting Period

The reporting period for the Committee is on a calendar-year basis to align with the reporting period of the Commission and its Annual Report for 2023, with which the Committee's Annual Report is published.

4. Audit Committee Activities in 2023

The Committee, for the 33rd Dáil and 26th Seanad, met four times during 2023 (26 April, 5 July, 15 November, and 14 December). The agendas and minutes of the Committee meetings are published on the Oireachtas website. Attendance at meetings by members of the Committee, in 2023, is set out in the Appendix to this report.

(a) Internal Audit Workplan 2023

The Internal Audit Workplan for 2023 was agreed by the Committee at its meeting in December 2022. This programme of work for the Internal Audit Unit may be adjusted from time to time in response to changes in the organisations business, risks, operations, programs, systems and controls.

The Internal Audit program of audits was selected using a risk-based approach agreed by the Secretary General and the Committee and communicated to the Management Board. This risk-based approach assists the targeting of limited Internal Audit resources to areas where greatest benefit can be obtained. Final audit reports, incorporating management responses, are provided to the Committee, the Accounting Officer, and to the Management Board.

(i) Report on the Internal Audit of the Oireachtas Postal Management System

At its meeting in July 2023, the Committee considered the report on the internal audit of the Oireachtas Postal Management System. The principal aim of this audit was to review and appraise the adequacy, reliability and effectiveness of the risk management, control, and governance processes in relation to the management of post within the Houses of the Oireachtas. The audit reviewed the management of all incoming, internal, and outgoing post through the existing channels of movement.

In reviewing this internal audit, the Committee recognised the importance, from a security perspective, of having robust postal management procedures in place for processing incoming, internal and outgoing Oireachtas post.

(ii) Report on the Implementation of Internal Audit Recommendations

The Committee considered reports on the implementation of Internal Audit recommendations, incorporating management responses. Following a review and follow-up process with management, 17 IA report recommendations were approved for closure by the Committee. In line with the policy for managing IA reports and recommendations, the Committee agreed to transfer three recommendations to the Management Board for oversight

and review. The Committee agreed that the 15 remaining recommendations will continue to be monitored by the IA Unit, in conjunction with the relevant business owners, and progress reports will be submitted to the Committee as appropriate.

(b) External Audit Reports considered in 2023

(i) Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OC&AG) Audit Reports

1. Report from the OC&AG on its annual audit of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Appropriation Account for year ending 31st December 2022

In November 2023, the Committee met a nominee of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OC&AG) and considered the 2022 OC&AG Report on the financial accounts of the Commission.

The Committee noted that the OC&AG audit had been conducted in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing (ISAs), with the aim of obtaining reasonable assurance that the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement whether due to fraud or error.

The Committee also noted that on 28 June 2023, the OC&AG issued a clear audit opinion on its annual audit of the Commission's Appropriation Account for year ending 31 December 2022.

2. Report of the OC&AG on the Ciste Pinsean Thithe an Oireachtais (Comhaltai) Account for year ending 31st December 2022.

The OC&AG's Report on the Ciste Pinsean Thithe an Oireachtais (Comhaltai) Account, prepared by the Commission for the year ending 31 December 2022 pursuant to the *Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993*, stated the auditor's opinion that the Account properly presented the transactions on the account for 2022, and the balance on the Fund at 31 December 2022. The auditor had no matter to report by exception.

(ii) Independent Auditor's Report to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission pursuant to the Public Representation Allowance (PRS) (S.I. No. 84 of 2010 and S.I. No. 149 of 2013)

In December 2023, the Committee considered the Independent Auditor's Reports on the Public Representation Allowance (PRA) for 2022. This audit is conducted annually by an external auditor. The PRA is payable to all Ministers and members of the Houses at rates applicable to each office.

The core purpose of the audit was to establish whether members had valid evidence of vouchers, receipts, and bills in respect of the amount paid to them for expenses which come within the allowable categories in the Regulations underpinning the PRA.

(c) Risk Management

The Committee recognises the importance of risk management within the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. During 2023, the Committee considered reports prepared by the Service's Risk Office on corporate risks identified across the organisation and the measures and mitigants put in place to resolve such issues.

The eRisk System continues to develop as a key risk management tool, supporting the ongoing process of identifying, assessing, mitigating, and reporting risk across the Service. A notable event during the year, from a risk management perspective, was the establishment of the 'Risk Forum' for staff of the Service, which held its inaugural meeting in September 2023. The Committee acknowledges the progress made by the Service during the year on further embedding a risk awareness culture across the organisation.

Cyber threats are a security risk for the Houses of the Oireachtas and, during the year, the Committee monitored the implementation of the *Houses of the Oireachtas Cyber Security Strategy*. In doing so, the Committee reviewed the progress made towards building a risk-aware and cyber-resilient culture within the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Committee acknowledges the initiatives operationalised by the Service in 2023 to mitigate the risk potential from cyber threats and to discharge its responsibilities under national and EU compliance standards.

The Committee also monitored developments for protecting the physical safety of all members of the parliamentary community and ensuring that the Leinster House campus is secure. Overall, the Committee is satisfied that progress was achieved in 2023 on further embedding and strengthening risk management in the Oireachtas Service and will continue to support the Risk Office in this vital role.

5. Representation on National and International Audit Networks

The Committee noted that the Internal Audit Unit continues to participate in the Heads of Internal Audit Forum (a public service Internal Audit network) and in a group of Heads of Internal Audit of Parliaments and Assemblies in Ireland and the UK to help ensure the Service is up to date with new initiatives.

6. Effective Discharge of Responsibilities in 2023

The Committee is satisfied that it has discharged its statutory remit effectively during 2023, pursuant to Section 14A of the Commission Acts.

Appendix: Attendance at meetings in 2023 by members of the Audit Committee

Member	Attendance
Mr Pat McLoughlin (Chair)	4/4
Senator Victor Boyhan	4/4
Deputy Rose Conway Walsh	3/3
Deputy Francis Noel Duffy	4/4
Deputy Emer Higgins	3/4
Ms Noreen Fahy	3/4
Mr Charles Hearne	4/4
Mr Cyril Maybury	4/4

Appendix IV

Bills Initiated in the Houses of the Oireachtas in 2023

No.	Bill Title
1.	Oil Emergency Contingency and Transfer of Renewable Transport Fuels Functions Bill 2023
2.	Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2023
3.	Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill 2023
4.	Criminal Justice (Engagement of Children in Criminal Activity) Bill 2023
5.	Civil Defence Bill 2023
6.	Remuneration Information and Pay Transparency Bill 2023
7.	Veterinary Medicinal Products, Medicated Feed and Fertilisers Regulation Bill 2023
8.	Commission for Future Generations Bill 2023
9.	Public Art Mural (Exempted Development) Bill 2023
10.	Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) (Amendment) Bill 2023
11.	Criminal Justice (Public Order) (Amendment) Bill 2023
12.	Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill 2023
13.	Commission of Investigation (Collusion of British State Forces) Bill 2023
14.	Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2023
15.	Electricity Regulation (Amendment) (Protection of Financially Vulnerable Customers) Bill 2023
16.	Standards in Public Office (Amendment) Bill 2023
17.	Court Proceedings (Delays) Bill 2023
18.	Environmental Protection Agency (Emergency Electricity Generation) (Amendment) Bill 2023
19.	Finance Bill 2023
20.	Health (Amendment) Bill 2023
21.	Representative Actions for the Protection of the Collective Interests of Consumers Bill 2023
22.	Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2023
23.	Unfair Dismissals (Increased Protections for Workers) (Amendment) Bill 2023
24.	Construction Safety Licensing Bill 2023
25.	Residential Tenancies (Deferment of Termination Dates of Certain Tenancies) Bill 2023
26.	Health (Assisted Human Reproduction) Bill 2023
27.	Tenancy Protection Bill 2023
28.	Illegal Israeli Settlements Divestment Bill 2023
29.	Electoral Reform (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2023

No.	Bill Title
30.	Criminal Justice (Juvenile Offenders) Bill 2023
31.	Civil Liability (Schools) Bill 2023
32.	Courts Bill 2023
33.	Local Authority Public Administration Bill 2023
34.	Rent Reduction Bill 2023
35.	Ministers and Secretaries (Attorney General) Bill 2023
36.	Legal Aid (Amendment) Bill 2023
37.	National Minimum Wage (Inclusion of Apprentices) Bill 2023
38.	Control of Exports Bill 2023
39.	Urban Tree Protection and Sites Locally Important for Ecology Bill 2023
40.	Electoral Reform (Amendment) and Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2023
41.	Social Welfare (Child Benefit) Bill 2023
42.	Climate Action and Biodiversity (Mandates of Certain Organisations) Bill 2023
43.	Electricity Regulation (Amendment) (Standing Charges) Bill 2023
44.	Ban Private Jet Aircraft from Irish Airspace Bill 2023
45.	Non-Fatal Offences against the Person (Amendment) (Spiking) Bill 2023
46.	Protection of Hares Bill 2023
47.	River Boyne Task Force Bill 2023
48.	Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill 2023
49.	Consumer Insurance Contracts (Amendment) Bill 2023
50.	Gradam an Uachtaráin Bill 2023
51.	Energy (Windfall Gains in the Energy Sector) (Temporary Solidarity Contribution) Bill 2023
52.	Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2023
53.	European Convention on Human Rights (Challenge to British Government Amnesty) Bill 2023
54.	Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Bill 2023
55.	Broadcasting (Restriction of Salaries) Bill 2023
56.	Criminal Justice (Search Warrant Oversight) Bill 2023
57.	Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023
58.	Education (Inclusion of Persons) Bill 2023
59.	Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2023
60.	Planning and Development (Climate Emergency Measures) (Amendment) Bill 2023
61.	Planning and Development (Provision of Public Housing) Bill 2023
62.	Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023
63.	Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2023
64.	Gas (Amendment) Bill 2023

No.	Bill Title
65.	Energy (Windfall Gains in the Energy Sector) (Cap on Market Revenues) Bill 2023
66.	Finance (State Guarantees, International Financial Institution Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023
67.	Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill 2023
68.	Commissions of Investigation (Amendment) Bill 2023
69.	Sex Offenders (Amendment) (Coercive Control) Bill 2023
70.	Finance (No. 2) Bill 2023
71.	Electricity Costs (Emergency Measures) Domestic Accounts Bill 2023
72.	Mortgage Interest Rates Cap Bill 2023
73.	Competition and Consumer Protection (Unfair Prices) Bill 2023
74.	Anaerobic Digestion (National Strategy) Bill 2023
75.	Developer Profits Transparency Bill 2023
76.	Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Bill 2023
77.	Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2023
78.	Local Government (Community Gardens) Bill 2023
79.	Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2023
80.	Civil Legal Aid (Neighbours' Dispute Mediation Services) Bill 2023
81.	Planning and Development Bill 2023
82.	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023
83.	Mental Health (Amendment) Bill 2023
84.	Capital Supply Service and Purpose Report Bill 2023
85.	The Royal Hibernian Academy (Amendment of Charter) Bill 2023
86.	Residential Tenancies (Deferment of Termination Dates of Certain Tenancies) (No. 2) Bill 2023
87.	Children (Amendment) Bill 2023
88.	Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) (Control of Nitrous Oxide) Bill 2023
89.	Digital Services Bill 2023
90.	Appropriation Bill 2023
91.	Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (The Family) Bill 2023
92.	Fortieth Amendment of the Constitution (Care) Bill 2023
93.	Criminal Justice (Promotion of Restorative Justice) (Amendment) Bill 2023
94.	Special Measures in the Public Interest (Derrybrien Wind Farm) Bill 2023
95.	Gender Recognition (Amendment) (Prisons) Bill 2023
96.	Social Welfare and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023
97.	Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill 2023
98.	Charities (Amendment) Bill 2023

Appendix V

Bills Passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas in 2023

No.	Bill Title
1.	National Cultural Institutions (National Concert Hall) (Amendment) Act 2023
2.	Oil Emergency Contingency and Transfer of Renewable Transport Fuels Functions Act 2023
3.	Criminal Justice (Mutual Recognition of Custodial Sentences) Act 2023
4.	Communications Regulation and Digital Hub Development Agency (Amendment) Act 2023
5.	Central Bank (Individual Accountability Framework) Act 2023
6.	Environmental Protection Agency (Emergency Electricity Generation) (Amendment) Act 2023
7.	Health (Amendment) Act 2023
8.	Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023
9.	Sex Offenders (Amendment) Act 2023
10.	Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023
11.	Finance Act 2023
12.	Courts Act 2023
13.	Social Welfare (Child Benefit) Act 2023
14.	Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Act 2023
15.	Regulation of Lobbying and Oireachtas (Allowances to Members) (Amendment) Bill 2023
16.	Road Traffic and Roads Act 2023
17.	Civil Defence Act 2023
18.	Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023
19.	Agricultural and Food Supply Chain Act 2023
20.	Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Act 2023
21.	Veterinary Medicinal Products, Medicated Feed and Fertilisers Regulation Act 2023
22.	Representative Actions for the Protection of the Collective Interests of Consumers Act 2023
23.	Energy (Windfall Gains in the Energy Sector) (Temporary Solidarity Contribution) Act 2023
24.	Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023
25.	Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023
26.	Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023
27.	Control of Exports Act 2023
28.	Screening of Third Country Transactions Act 2023

No.	Bill Title
29.	Electricity Costs (Emergency Measures) Domestic Accounts Act 2023
30.	Energy (Windfall Gains in the Energy Sector) (Cap on Market Revenues) Act 2023
31.	Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency Act 2023
32.	Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Act 2023
33.	Judicial Appointments Commission Act 2023
34.	Credit Union (Amendment) Act 2023
35.	Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act 2023
36.	Health Insurance (Amendment) Act 2023
37.	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023
38.	Appropriation Act 2023
39.	Finance (No. 2) Act 2023
40.	Electoral (Amendment) Act 2023
41.	The Royal Hibernian Academy (Amendment of Charter) Act 2023

Appendix VI

Meetings and Reports of Parliamentary Committees in 2023

Joint Committees of Both Houses		
Committee	Number of meetings held	Number of reports presented to the Houses
Joint Committee on Agriculture, and the Marine	50	2
Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration	36	4
Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action	68	5
Joint Committee on Disability Matters	62	1
Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	25	5
Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment	30	7
Joint Committee on European Union Affairs	24	0
Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach	55	9
Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence	23	1
Joint Committee on Health (including 8 meetings of Sub-Committee on Mental Health)	69	2
Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage	80	6
Joint Committee on Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement	27	0
Joint Committee on Justice	25	13
Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community	12	0
Joint Committee Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media	34	2
Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands	34	9
Joint Committee on Transport, and Communications Networks	46	1
Total	700	67

Select Committees of Dáil Éireann		
Committee	Number of meetings held	Number of reports presented to the Houses
Select Committee on Agriculture, and the Marine	4	0
Select Committee on Children, Disability, Equality, and Integration	5	0
Select Committee on Environment and Climate Action	5	1
Select Committee on Disability Matters	0	0
Select Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	5	1
Select Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment	5	0
Select Committee on European Union Affairs	0	0
Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach	11	4
Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence	3	1
Select Committee on Health	6	0
Select Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage	8	0
Select Committee on Justice	9	0
Select Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media	2	0
Select Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands	4	0
Select Committee on Transport, and Communications Networks	5	0
Total	72	7

Standing Committees		
Committee	Number of meetings held	Number of reports presented to the Houses
Committee on Budgetary Oversight	32	8
Coiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge	34	4
Committee on Members' Interests of Dáil Éireann	4	0
Committee on Members' Interests of Seanad Éireann	7	0
Committee of Public Accounts	39	0
Committee on Public Petitions and the Ombudsmen	32	0
Total	148	12

Special Committees		
Committee	Number of meetings held	Number of reports presented to the Houses
Joint Committee on Autism	27	3
Joint Committee on Assisted Dying	25	0
Total	52	3

Notes

- The **Parliamentary Committees** fall into four broad categories: Joint Committees, Select Committees, Standing Committees and Special Committees.

Joint Committees are established for the term of the Dáil and cease to exist when the Dáil is dissolved. These Committees are established to conduct oversight of the work of a government department and related policy matters according to the Orders of Reference given to them by the Dáil and Seanad. Joint Committees are composed of members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Select Committees comprise members of one House of the Oireachtas. Select Committees of Dáil Éireann, as listed in this Appendix, consider Bills, Estimates, Motions, international agreements, and other matters referred to them by Dáil Éireann.

Standing Committees (Joint or Select) are permanent Committees with specific responsibilities set out in Standing Orders.

Special Committees (Joint or Select) are established to examine a particular subject and usually cease to exist when they have completed their work and presented their final reports to the House(s).
- The number of reports presented in the tables includes Committee reports on review and oversight of public policy matters, financial scrutiny, EU scrutiny, pre-legislative scrutiny, and scrutiny of Private Members' Bills. Internal reports relating to the conduct of Committee business, such as its annual work programme, annual report, and reports on official travel undertaken by a Committee are not included in the tables.

Appendix VII

Commission Meetings and Attendance in 2023

The table shows the number of meetings held by the Commission, its Finance Committee and attendance at meetings in 2023.

January – December 2023		
Members	Meetings	
	Commission	Finance Committee
Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail, Ceann Comhairle (Chairperson)	9/9	
Senator Jerry Buttimer Cathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann (Deputy Chairperson)	9/9	4/4
Deputy Joe Carey	2/3	1/1
Deputy Francis Noel Duffy	6/9	
Mr Peter Finnegan, Secretary General (Chief Executive)	9/9	
Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor	8/9	
Deputy Louise O'Reilly	8/9	3/4
Senator Lynn Ruane	3/5	1/2
Senator Ned O'Sullivan	8/9	4/4
Deputy Jennifer Whitmore	7/9	
Senator Paddy Burke	7/8	
Deputy Michael Ring	6/6	2/2
Senator Rónán Mullen	4/4	0/2

Appendix VIII

Glossary of Terms

Áis-Linn – members' portal. A dedicated portal that delivers parliamentary business content and services to members of the Houses and their staff.

Commencement Debate (Seanad) – a matter brought forward by a Senator for discussion at the commencement of sittings of the Seanad relating to public affairs connected with a Department of State or to matters of administration for which a member of the Government or Minister of State is officially responsible.

Commission – the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission is the governing body of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (the Service). It oversees the provision of services to the Houses of the Oireachtas and members of the Houses.

Digital Transformation Programme – a programme of ICT investment to modernise systems and services in the Service through the application of digital technology.

Division – a formal vote on a motion in the Dáil or Seanad.

Joint Sitting – a sitting in which members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann sit jointly in one chamber for a special occasion, for example, when a visiting dignitary is invited to address both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The constitution, Article 13.7.1° grants authority to the President to address the Houses of the Oireachtas on any matter of national or public importance. A joint sitting of both Houses is normally held for such occasions.

A joint sitting usually takes place in the Dáil chamber.

Management Board (MB) – the Management Board of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service meets to consider and decide on matters of key strategic, operational, and financial importance, which may then be referred to the Commission as appropriate.

Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers (OPLA) – provides independent legal advice and services to the Houses of the Oireachtas and their Committees, the Chairs (Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach) of either House of the Oireachtas in respect of their functions, the Clerks of both Houses in respect of the operation of the Houses, and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

OneLearning – The Civil Service shared learning and development system.

Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) – provides independent, impartial information, analysis and advice to the Houses of the Oireachtas. It is a key source of financial and budgetary intelligence for members and in particular for the Committee on Budgetary Oversight as it conducts ex-ante scrutiny of all budgetary matters.

Parliamentary Questions (PQs) – questions submitted, for a written or oral response, by members of the Dáil to Ministers of Government relating to public affairs connected with their Departments or on matters of administration for which they are officially responsible.

The Plinth – Houses of the Oireachtas Intranet Platform.

Private Member – a member of the Dáil or Seanad who is not a Minister or member of the Government.

Private Members' Business – items of parliamentary business (Bills and motions) sponsored by Private Members rather than by the Government.

Private Members' Bills Drafting Service – legal drafting expertise available to members of the Houses in drafting Private Members' Bills. Parliamentary legislative drafters act on the instructions of members regarding the purpose and objective of a proposed Private Member's Bill.

Procedural Services – procedural services are those concerned with advice to the Chairpersons of the Houses and their Committees on the application of and compliance with Standing Orders, Rulings of the Chair and parliamentary conventions, as well as services provided by the Committees' Secretariat and the Procedural Offices – the Questions Office (Parliamentary Questions, motions), the Bills Office (managing the processing of legislation through the Houses – Bills, Amendments to Bills, Acts of the Oireachtas) and the Journal Office (maintaining the Journals of Proceedings, Standing Orders, Rulings of the Chair, Order Papers).

Recess – the period of time that the House(s) are not in session.

Sectoral Committees – Parliamentary Committees made up of members of one or both Houses, which “shadow” government departments. The sectoral committees undertake scrutiny of the work of the relevant government department and related policy areas, for example, the Joint Committees on Transport, Foreign Affairs, etc.

Special Committees – Parliamentary Committees established to examine subjects of particular importance or emerging issues and to propose recommendations, as appropriate, to the Houses.

Standing Committees – permanent Parliamentary Committees that are required by Standing Orders of either House to be established after a General Election; for example, the Committee of Public Accounts. They may be comprised of members from one or both Houses.

The Service – the Houses of the Oireachtas Service is the public service body that provides administrative services to the Houses of the Oireachtas and their Members. It is headed by the Secretary General and Clerk of the Dáil who is responsible for managing the Service on a day-to-day basis and for implementing Commission policies.

Topical Issue Debate (Dáil) – a matter brought forward by a member of the Dáil for consideration as a topical issue relating to public affairs connected with a Department of State or to matters of administration for which a member of the Government or Minister of State is officially responsible.