



Roinn an Taoisigh  
Department of the Taoiseach

**Strategy Statement 2017-2020**

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January 2018



# Our Strategic Priorities



## OUR MISSION AND VALUES

Our purpose is to help the Taoiseach and the Government to develop a sustainable economy and a successful society, to pursue Ireland's interests abroad, to implement the Government's Programme and to build a better future for Ireland and all her citizens.

Our work is guided by the Vision, Mission and Values of the Civil Service.

### Vision

- To provide a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland.

### Mission

- To offer objective and evidence-informed advice to Government, respond to developments, and deliver Government objectives while striving to achieve optimal outcomes in the long-term national interest.
- To serve citizens and stakeholders efficiently, equally and with respect, in a system that is open, transparent and accountable.

### Values

- A deep-rooted public service ethos of independence, integrity, impartiality, equality, fairness and respect.
- A culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money. The highest standards of professionalism, leadership and rigour.



As a discrete aspect of our Mission, we seek, not only, to ensure that these values are embedded in our own organisation as we work internally and externally; but also to provide leadership for the Civil Service as a whole as it engages with the public and with the political system. This includes our positive duty under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 to have regard to human rights and equality in the performance of our functions.

## OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

- Delivering the Executive functions of the Taoiseach and the Government
- Providing the Government Secretariat
- Supporting the Taoiseach in carrying out his duties as Head of Government, including in relation to the Oireachtas, Constitutional issues, Protocol, the European Council, the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council
- Working with the Office of the President and with the Oireachtas
- Engaging with the formulation and implementation of government policy, mainly through the system of Cabinet Committees, Senior Officials' Groups, the Programme for Government Office and the Parliamentary Liaison Unit
- the Office of the Taoiseach (as well as support for the Tánaiste)
- Support for Independent Ministers in Government
- the Office of the Government Chief Whip (who also has responsibility for the Central Statistics Office)
- Support for the Ministers of State assigned to the Department (with responsibility for Defence; for European Affairs; and for Data Protection)
- the Government Press Office
- the Strategic Communications Unit
- Providing briefing and advice to the Taoiseach on the full range of domestic policy issues and on international affairs (including through the work of the National Economic and Social Council)
- Supporting the Taoiseach and Government in the formulation and implementation of Ireland's EU, Northern Ireland and international policies, including coordination across the whole of Government
- Delivering support services through Corporate Affairs Division (HR, Finance, ICT and other services)

Through the Civil Service Management Board, and the Civil Service Accountability Board, we provide collective leadership of the Civil Service Renewal Programme, working closely with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

## **CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES AHEAD**

With its central role and mandate, the Department has a responsibility to ensure that policies developed uphold the Government's commitment to develop Ireland in a sustainable way which fosters economic development and social progress. It achieves this through its support to the Taoiseach and the Government including through the Cabinet Committee structure.

While economic recovery has been established, Ireland remains vulnerable to particular challenges and risks. We also face specific challenges to ensure that the recovery is felt by everyone and in all parts of the country. Legacy issues of the economic crisis remain - in particular housing, debt and underinvestment in healthcare and infrastructure.

Given its central role, the Department is concerned with all of the risks that feature in the National Risk Assessment. However, a number of risks are key to how we position and organise our support for Government and ensure that government policy is well-harmonised and responsive to domestic and global political, economic and social developments. The National Risk Assessment affects how we select our priorities and how we deploy our resources to deliver on objectives.

The Cabinet Committees established by the Government are:

- Cabinet Committee A (Economy)
- Cabinet Committee B (Social Policy and Public Services)
- Cabinet Committee C (European Union including Brexit)
- Cabinet Committee D (Infrastructure)
- Cabinet Committee E (Health)
- Cabinet Committee F (National Security)
- Cabinet Committee G (Justice and Equality)

The scope of the Committees encompasses the Government's national priorities, and the challenges Ireland faces in the coming years. The full Cabinet will also have occasional all day meetings devoted to strategic policy challenges facing the country.

The Department has taken on additional responsibilities including the establishment of the Strategic Communications Unit in addition to those relating to the Citizens' Assembly, Data Protection and a number of statutory inquiries. The Programme for Government also includes new initiatives in the areas of constitutional, institutional and regulatory reform. Arising from the work to date of the Citizens' Assembly and the work of the previous Constitutional Convention, the Government has published an indicative timetable for a number of referendums during 2018 and 2019.

## **OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

Based on our assessment of the environment, the following are the main priorities for the Department over the period 2017-2020.

**A. Support the Taoiseach and Government**

**B. Sustainable Economy**

**C. A Better and Fairer Society**

**D. Strong Relationships in Europe and in the World**

**E. Brexit**

**F. Planning for the Future**

## **A. SUPPORT FOR THE TAOISEACH AND GOVERNMENT**

*Providing excellent support services for the Taoiseach and Government.*

*Overseeing and reporting on implementation of the Programme for Government.*

*Helping to reform and enhance trust in the institutions of the State and ensure that the mistakes that led to the economic crisis will not recur.*

We will continue to deliver support to the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and the Government through the Government Secretariat, the Parliamentary Liaison Unit, the Programme for Government Office and the Cabinet Committee structure to ensure Government business is managed to the highest standards.

We will continue to support the Taoiseach in carrying out his duties as Head of the Government. We will continue to provide objective, well-informed advice and guidance to the Taoiseach and the Government on the full range of domestic policy issues and international affairs.

We will continue to adapt and strengthen our supports to ensure they are fully responsive to the requirements arising from Dáil Reform and to support effective minority government arrangements. We will play our part in the implementation of reforms, including, as appropriate, proposals for constitutional, political and institutional reform.

We will continue to be open to new and diverse ideas and opinions, and to adapt our processes to learn lessons from the past and to plan for the future. This will include facilitating ways in which the civil and public service listens to diverse opinions and specifically engages the voice of young people and women. We will seek to promote high quality debate to support the Government in devising and implementing policy.

We will engage with stakeholders about strategic risks facing the country and publish an updated National Risk Assessment each year. We will ensure that its potential in identifying risks and mapping their trajectory for the purposes of longer-term planning is fully realised.

We will continue to provide leadership on signature national projects such as Creative Ireland, Global Ireland 2025, Commemorations, Project Ireland 2040 and the North East Inner City initiative.

## **B. SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY**

*Sustainable economic development - jobs, growth, public finances, competitiveness, enterprise, trade and investment, full and quality employment, housing, infrastructure, regional and rural development and climate action.*

We will continue to ensure that sustainable growth and jobs are at the heart of Government policy. As the economic recovery continues, we will work to ensure that the benefits are shared across society, across all regions and in both urban and rural areas.

We will do this through the pursuit of prudent macroeconomic and fiscal policy, greater competitiveness, increased levels of investment, trade and exports, a supportive enterprise environment (including a new deal for the self-employed), increased levels of entrepreneurship, ongoing reform of the banking sector, pensions reform, further reductions in unemployment and increased participation levels, and an effective data protection regime, mindful of the risks arising from the current external context. We will support efforts to position Ireland to benefit from opportunities in the Digital economy.

We will also promote effective planning and delivery of infrastructural investments, including housing, in accordance with future needs, competitiveness and sustainable climate action objectives.

We will help drive delivery of Rebuilding Ireland, including new measures arising from the recent Review, the Government Action Plan for Jobs and Action Plan for Rural Development. We will also help formulate and deliver the national strategies including the forthcoming National Planning Framework, the ten year Capital Investment Plan and the Climate Change Mitigation Plan.

We will work with relevant Departments and agencies to help promote Ireland as an attractive location for business, investment, trade and tourism and to support economic opportunities and initiatives in key sectors.

### **C. A BETTER AND FAIRER SOCIETY**

*Helping to ensure that Government policies and services support a socially inclusive and fair society*

We will help to ensure implementation of reforms in health, education, justice and other public services as outlined in the Programme for Government, in particular through the relevant Cabinet Committees.

Through the Civil Service Renewal Programme, the Department will continue to support a professional and accountable civil service that is continuously improving and providing excellent service to the State and all of its citizens. One Strand of this Programme is the Strategic Communications Unit which aims to streamline communications across Government by collaborating with other departments. This will strive to ensure clear, simple, citizen focused communications and reduce overall costs and improve efficiencies.

We will seek to ensure that the position of vulnerable groups in society is taken into account and that the benefits of recovery and progress are felt across all sectors of society and that there is an effective cross-departmental response where required. We will lead and support whole-of-government structures to drive and monitor implementation of major policies, strategies and initiatives. These will include the Action Plan on Education, Better Outcomes Brighter Futures and targeted new initiatives that have both local and national benefits for citizens, for example in the North East Inner City area of Dublin.

There will be a focus on providing a safe and supportive environment for children, families and older people, including through continued reforms in the areas of housing, social services and the justice system. We will support the development of the Government's response to the Sláintecare Report on the future of the health service.

We will work through the National Economic and Social Council and other new engagement structures to ensure that a full range of views can input to the development of economic and social policy.

#### **D. STRONG RELATIONSHIPS IN EUROPE AND IN THE WORLD**

*Ensuring that Ireland plays a full and effective role in all aspects of the European Union, promoting and protecting our national interests while also contributing to progress and prosperity across the Union. Working to protect our interests, maximise our influence and increase our prosperity in a globalised world.*

The Department will continue to support the Taoiseach in his role as a member of the European Council and in his interaction with other Heads of State and Government and leading EU figures, across the full range of EU issues and policy areas.

We will work with other Government Departments and agencies and with partners at home and abroad to protect Ireland's interests, to maximise our influence both politically and economically, and to help increase our prosperity.

We will build on the success of recent years in repairing and further enhancing Ireland's reputation, in attracting foreign direct investment, and in growing our export trade. We will consolidate those gains and continue to secure investment and expand trade, notably into emerging markets.

In light of Brexit and as a small open economy, Ireland shall remain at the heart of Europe but continue to forge links and relationships with the wider world. We will maintain our traditionally strong relationships across Europe, with the UK and the United States, and further develop our links in all parts of the world, targeting priority regions and engaging with Ireland's worldwide diaspora.

The Global Footprint 2025 initiative will involve new and augmented diplomatic missions, as well as an increased presence of our investment, tourism, cultural and food agencies overseas.

We will continue to co-operate closely with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Justice and Equality, and Defence to ensure that Ireland's policies and capabilities in EU and foreign affairs, security and defence are appropriate and effective.

## **E. BREXIT**

*Ensuring that Ireland achieves the best possible outcomes across all four priorities identified by the Government – trade and the economy, the peace process, the common travel area and the future of the European Union with Ireland as a committed member.*

*Helping to maintain peace and develop relationships on the island of Ireland, and between Britain and Ireland, especially in the light of the challenges posed by Brexit.*

We will work with all relevant Departments and Agencies to ensure an effective whole-of-government approach to the Brexit negotiations that takes full account of the Government's negotiating priorities. Ireland must remain fully engaged and vigilant to ensure implementation of the guarantees secured by Ireland in the phase one negotiations. In this, we will work closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which has lead responsibility for Brexit.

We will support the Taoiseach in all relevant engagements with the Heads of State and Government of the other EU Member States, the EU institutions and bilaterally with the UK.

We will help to broaden awareness of the issues, challenges, priorities and opportunities presented by Brexit, including through mechanisms of stakeholder engagement and consultation, and on an all-island basis where appropriate. This includes engaging with all strands of opinion in Northern Ireland.

We will continue to support peace, prosperity and reconciliation on the island of Ireland, including supporting the Taoiseach in his engagements with the British Government and in the institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement (North-South Ministerial Council, British-Irish Council). This includes working to ensure restoration of the institutions including the devolved Assembly and power-sharing Executive.

We will work with other Departments and other relevant bodies to support the full implementation of all agreements relating to Northern Ireland and British-Irish relations.

## **F. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

As Ireland emerges from the economic crisis, and with so many uncertainties arising in the international environment, it is crucial to devote time and resources to thinking about and planning for the future.

Ireland must meet a range of long-term challenges in the coming years, including:

- Maintaining long term competitiveness in the face of unpredictable international trends in the areas of trade, investment, technology and taxation (on top of the known economic threats associated with Brexit)
- Possible changes in the orientation of the European Union
- Achieving the continued improvements in competitiveness and productivity required to sustain high living standards
- Delivery of major new infrastructure, including housing, broadband, healthcare, education, transport, energy and water
- Moving focus from negotiation to implementation of Ireland's international climate change commitments for 2030
- Sustainable development and the protection of the environment
- Successfully implementing migration and integration policies
- Demographic challenges, including pensions, infrastructure, funding of higher education and funding and reform of the health service

The current Programme for Government sets out an approach to meet long-term challenges which involves the development of a broad-based political and public consensus before a settled action plan can be developed. The Department will play a lead role in developing that process, including through the structured engagement process of preparing the National Risk Assessment and the wider advisory role of the National Economic and Social Council.

## **ACHIEVING OUR GOALS**

We aim always to learn and improve as an organisation.

We will continue to work on:

- improving our capabilities as an organisation
- developing our leadership and training programmes
- developing our capacity for strategic thinking and forward planning
- identifying major trends and risks and how they will affect Ireland
- being open and transparent in our work
- actively listening to ideas, interests and concerns from all sections of Irish society
- embedding cultural change and building trust with citizens.

Implementation of our Strategy requires that we effectively deploy the human, knowledge management, technical and financial resources available to us as a Department. The staff in Corporate Affairs Division and their work is therefore central to supporting delivery of our priorities.

We will implement the actions in the Civil Service Renewal Plan, including developing our strategic HR capability, strengthening performance management, accountability and communications, recognising excellence and innovation, strengthening policy-making skills and conducting an Organisation Capability Review.

In accordance with the Department's Corporate Governance Framework, we will integrate our risk management, strategic planning and business planning processes. Business processes will be subject to continuous review. We will further develop our risk management processes, including through engagement with the Department's Audit Committee.

There will continue to be a focus on cross-divisional and cross-Departmental working. Appropriate arrangements will be put in place to foster relationships and effective communications and to promote a shared understanding of priorities and associated interdependencies.

We will prepare a new HR Strategy in line with the recent Civil Service People Strategy 2017-2020 to underpin the delivery of this Strategy Statement. This will include:

- workforce planning, including policies for recruitment, promotion and strategic partnerships and/or staff rotation arrangements with other organisations
- incorporating training/succession planning into staff mobility planning
- continuing to invest in staff through learning and development, coaching and mentoring to strengthen capacity, organisational culture, values and leadership capability
- undertaking a training needs analysis
- continued implementation of employee engagement and well-being initiatives

Development of the new HR strategy will be underpinned by a Staff Consultation Initiative.

## APPENDIX 1: Programme for Government Commitments

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| COMMITMENT   |
| AN ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK FOR URGENT PRIORITIES   |
| Addressing long-term challenges requiring a broad based consensus at political and public level to include housing and broadband, climate change, pensions and long-term funding models in higher education and health   |
| Developing the process of Ministerial Strategy Statements by requiring consultation with key stakeholders - both in politics and outside - and formal tabling in the Dáil  |
| Linking this strategic planning framework more closely with the annual budgetary cycle   |
| A number of reforms that are complementary to this agenda include relaxing whipping rules, sharing ordering of Dáil business and others that are being managed by the Oireachtas Reform group operating under the chairmanship of the Ceann Comhairle.   |
| Develop extended opposition Dáil time and access to assistance in legal drafting of workable legislative instruments   |
| Develop agreed urgency procedures in the Dáil to prioritise certain Bills  |
| Develop a structured process for resolving differences between government and parliament   |
| Evolve varied levels of cooperation agreements ranging from 'consultative' to 'enhanced confidence and supply' which could be worked out with opposition parties willing to support stable government  |
| Evolve better methods of sharing information from Departments with Deputies  |
| Individual ministerial strategy statements will be considered by Government and by the Oireachtas before adoption in a manner which allows early input by parties to this agreement. Once settled, this would represent an agreed approach of the parties on the broad direction of policy for that Department.  |
| Formal consultation will be managed between the Taoiseach's Office and the appointed interlocutor for the group and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular leadership meetings</li> <li>• Ongoing relationships at portfolio level</li> </ul>   |
| Formal Early Warning Procedures will be developed across all Departments. Recognising that not all issues will allow early warning and prior consultation or agreement, parties shall operate to a protocol to permit differences to be triaged involving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice of concern giving time for response</li> <li>• Discussion involving representatives of the constituent parts of government.</li> <li>• The adoption of a common response when possible</li> </ul> Detailed arrangements will be further developed and agreed in this regard. |

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| <p>Where amendments to legislation are being tabled by a party to this agreement, it shall be done according to an agreed protocol involving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance notification to the Minister before the amendment is tabled</li> <li>• Agreement to give time for an assessment of feasibility and consequences before being put to a vote</li> </ul>  |
| <p>The Taoiseach will appoint a Cabinet Minister for Housing to provide political leadership on resolving the housing shortage and homelessness crisis. (First 100 Days Action)</p>  |
| <p>The Action Plan will be subject to key targets and deadlines and regular Cabinet review. Implementation will be overseen by the Taoiseach and his officials through a new Cabinet Committee on Housing, with quarterly progress reports published.</p>  |
| <p>The eighth report of the Constitutional Convention on economic, social and cultural rights recommended that the State progressively realise economic, social and cultural rights subject to maximum available resources, that this duty be recognisable by the courts, and that specific additional rights on housing be inserted into the Constitution. Due to the substantial questions raised on the balance of rights, proper governance and resources, we will refer this report to the new Oireachtas Committee on Housing for consideration.</p> |
| <p>As part of our smarter regulation agenda, the new Government will step up the use of impact assessments across Government, driven by a new specialised section within the Cabinet Secretariat. The new impact assessment guidelines will have to take account of impacts on rural Ireland as well as other socio-economic factors.</p>  |
| <p>The new Government intends to establish a Citizens' Assembly to discuss a range of constitutional and societal issues. Included in this will be a discussion on the future needs of, and the possibilities and opportunities for our ageing population.</p>   |
| <p>We will actively fulfil the Irish Government's mandate as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and, building on the substantial progress already made, will honour commitments under subsequent agreements including the 2014 Stormont House and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, which together provide a new political, social and economic framework for Northern Ireland.</p>   |
| <p>We will continue to work with the British Government and the US Administration to support the Executive Parties in Northern Ireland in the implementation of their commitments under these Agreements.</p>  |
| <p>We will actively pursue the implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions of 2008 and 2011 relating to the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombing atrocities.</p>  |
| <p>Building on the successful state visits of 2011 and 2014, we will continue to enhance Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom, including under the Good Friday Agreement, through the British-Irish Council and the annual summits between the Taoiseach and British Prime Minister. We will strengthen cooperation with all devolved administrations.</p>   |

We will deliver on the Irish Government commitments made in the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements which will aim to boost economic growth in the North West through the North West Gateway initiative, the upgrading of the A5 road and the further development of the Ulster Canal. We will continue to develop further cross-border Greenways and Blueways.

Working with the Northern Ireland Executive, we will undertake a review of the Narrow Water Bridge project to identify options for future development.

We will work through the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council to ensure that Ireland plays its part in resolving the many external conflicts facing the European Union today.

We believe that UK membership of the EU is beneficial for Ireland, the UK and the EU. We will use appropriate avenues to express the Irish Government perspective on UK membership of the EU.

Fundamental reform of the 32nd Dáil began with the election of the Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot and continues with the now established all-party committee on Dáil reform. In tandem with the Committee's work and recognising the role to be played by all TDs in a reformed Dáil and a new partnership between Government and parliament, we will work with all parties and groups to relax the application of the party whip system.

Committee chairs will be on a proportional basis using the D'Hondt system. Each member of the Oireachtas would, preferably, serve on one committee and a committee of selection will be established for determining same.

There should be a new, more focused committee structure, with exclusive time for committee meetings in the weekly agenda of the Dáil. Panels of outside experts will also be made available to assist committees in their work.

We support the establishment of a new Parliamentary Investigations Unit and an independent office to assist members and Committees on budgetary matters. We will also look to introduce a strengthened independent legal advisor to the Oireachtas.

We will support mandatory pre-legislative scrutiny for all new bills and post enactment review of legislation by Oireachtas Committees.

We will seek to prioritise committee reports in the Dáil and Seanad chambers and to introduce an improved system for monitoring committee attendance and participation.

We agree to measures to facilitate the establishment of more technical groups to allow the smaller parties and independents to play a fuller role in the Dáil and on Oireachtas Committees (with proportional allocation of speaking time).

We believe there is a need for a complete overhaul of the current order of business. We are in favour of establishing a Dáil Business Management Committee, chaired by the Ceann Comhairle, where representatives from each Political Party and Group will meet and agree the Dáil's weekly agenda.

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| <p>We will also support programmes for enactment for each Bill setting out a timeline for their passage through the Oireachtas (helping to avoid use of the guillotine).</p>   |
| <p>Any proposal to guillotine a debate on a Bill will require a certification from the Attorney General asserting the urgency of a Bill. It would then have to be approved by the Ceann Comhairle and would automatically trigger a Dáil vote.</p>                                 |
| <p>We would also like to see the grouping of votes at fixed times in support of family friendly working arrangements and the introduction of abstentions. Finally, we are committed to the continuation of the Dáil reform committee throughout the lifetime of the 32nd Dáil.</p> |
| <p>We will pursue the implementation of the Manning Report, as a priority.</p>   |
| <p>One key reform that is needed is to give a greater role and say in the development of Budgets to the Dáil and to individual Deputies. This will require enhanced transparency and cooperation on the part of the Government.</p>  |
| <p>We will examine the roles and responsibilities of Ministers of State, including how they function within the Departmental structure and with Cabinet Ministers.</p>   |
| <p>We will also consider the creation of an unpaid role of parliamentary private secretary.</p>  |
| <p>We will examine the balance of power and responsibility between the Government and Civil Service.</p>   |
| <p>All government ministers will appear before their relevant Oireachtas Committee on a quarterly basis, at a minimum. The Taoiseach will also appear before the Working Group of Committee Chairpersons twice a year to discuss matters of public policy.</p>                     |
| <p>The establishment of a new Parliamentary Investigation Unit will greatly enhance the ability of Oireachtas Committees to conduct investigative work and allow the Oireachtas to better hold relevant actors to account.</p>   |
| <p>Giving the Office of the Ceann Comhairle constitutional standing, as recommended by the Constitutional Convention</p>   |
| <p>We will establish a Citizens' Assembly, within six months, and without participation by politicians, and with a mandate to look at a limited number of key issues over an extended time period.</p>   |

**APPENDIX 2: Department of the Taoiseach Organisational Chart**

