Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Our Rural Future

Progress Report 1

2021

Prepared by the Department of
Rural and Community Development

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Foreword

I am proud to be publishing this *Our Rural Future* Progress Report, the first since the Government launched the new national rural development policy back in March 2021.

The publication of the policy was received extremely positively, both in rural communities here in Ireland and internationally, and with good reason. *Our Rural Future* is a holistic blueprint for rural development over the period 2021-2025 that outlines our vision for “a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development”. This document aims to have a transformative effect on rural Ireland.

The ambitious vision outlined in *Our Rural Future* can only be achieved through a concerted whole-of-Government effort. I am proud of the very high level of ambition shown across Government in the development of our 2021 Work Programme, and all the more when I note the level of delivery that has been achieved as detailed in this Progress Report.

We have seen record levels of investment in remote working infrastructure and other rural development projects such as outdoor amenities, active travel, and town centre supports, the publication of key national policies such as Food Vision 2030, and supports for businesses and organisations dealing with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. I have visited many towns and villages across the country in the last year and have seen the hugely positive impact this investment is having in revitalising rural areas.

We must look ahead with ambition and determination, to ensure our continuing national recovery is a balanced one which sees rural places not just survive, but thrive.

This Report outlines the real progress that has been made during 2021 to improve the quality of life for those living and working in rural area and I am positive that this momentum will continue into 2022, with details of new actions to be published in our forthcoming Work Programme for the new year.

I would like to thank my Government colleagues and their Departments for their ongoing enthusiasm and support in the implementation of *Our Rural Future*, as we continue in our mission to build rural communities that are vibrant, prosperous and sustainable.

Heather Humphreys, TD
Minister for Rural and Community Development

Glossary

AA	Appropriate Assessment
BCP	Broadband Connection Point
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CLÁR	Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais
CSP	CAP Strategic Plan
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
D/Education	Department of Education
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
D/Finance	Department of Finance
D/Health	Department of Health
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
D/Justice	Department of Justice
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DSP	Department of Social Protection
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
D/Transport	Department of Transport
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education Training Board
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
EU	European Union
EV	Electric Vehicle
FLAG	Fisheries Local Area Group
GIS	Geographic Information System
HEA	Higher Education Authority
IDA	Industrial Development Agency
IRC	Irish Research Council
IT	Institute of Technology
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
MAP	Maritime Area Planning
NBI	National Broadband Ireland

NBP	National Broadband Plan
NDP	National Development Plan
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NMPF	National Marine Planning Framework
NPF	National Planning Framework
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
NTA	National Transport Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGP	Office of Government Procurement
OPW	Office of Public Works
ORESS	Offshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme
ORIS	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental
PPN	Public Participation Network
REDF	Regional Enterprise Development Fund
REP	Regional Enterprise Plan
RRDF	Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
RTP	Regional Tourism Plan
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SWOT	Strength Weakness Opportunity Threat
TU	Technological University
TVRS	Town and Village Renewal Scheme
URDF	Urban Regeneration and Development Fund
WDC	Western Development Commission

Executive Summary

Introduction

Our Rural Future 2021-2025 is the Government's national rural development policy, and provides a blueprint for policy making for, and investment in, rural Ireland over its five-year lifespan.

The policy, which was published on 29 March 2021, outlines a vision for a thriving rural Ireland that is integral to our national economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing, which is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, and which recognises the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places, and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment.

As a whole-of-Government policy, *Our Rural Future* reflects the priorities set out in the Programme for Government and complements key national policies and initiatives such Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan, and the Climate Action Plan.

This alignment is reflected in the more than 150 measures set out for delivery over the lifetime of the policy; these are commitments that were developed in collaboration with departments and agencies across Government under key headings relating to digital connectivity, employment, rural regeneration, community participation, public services, climate action and sustainability.

Our Rural Future commits to the publication of annual work programmes, which will identify specific actions for delivery each year and provide the opportunity to add new measures to the policy as new issues and opportunities arise. Twice-yearly progress reports will provide detailed updates on the implementation of the commitments set out in the policy. This First Progress Report covers delivery of all actions included in the 2021 Work Programme, with further reports to follow every six months to 2025.

These reports are prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development, which has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of Our Rural Future, and are approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment.

Engagement

Our Rural Future was prepared following extensive consultation with rural communities and stakeholders, and the policy closely reflects the key opportunities and challenges identified by those living and working in rural Ireland.

In order to maximise the impact of *Our Rural Future* and to continue this level of engagement and communication with rural stakeholders and communities, the Department rolled out a series of initiatives in 2021. These included delivering on a number of commitments in the policy, such as the establishment of a Rural Youth Assembly and a Higher Education and Research Network, and the holding of a series of Rural Ideas Fora.

In addition, an *Our Rural Future* Implementation Advisory Group was established, made up of representatives of key Departments and rural stakeholders, and further bilateral engagements took place with a broad range of stakeholders.

These ongoing events and interactions will feed back into the consideration of future Work Programmes throughout the five-year lifespan of the Policy.

The Minister also held a series of *Our Rural Future* Roadshow events, which involved meeting with stakeholders and visiting projects supported under the policy in nine counties and on the offshore islands. This was an opportunity to meet with local communities and see how *Our Rural Future* is helping to revitalise towns and villages, promote remote working, and ensure balanced regional development.

International interest in the policy following its publication was strong, leading to engagement with representatives in other national administrations and with organisations such as the OECD. Ireland has accepted an invitation to host the OECD's International Rural Development Conference in 2022, on the theme of 'Building Sustainable, Resilient and Thriving Rural Places'.

Delivery

Implementation of commitments set out in *Our Rural Future* has been undertaken by all departments and agencies with assigned responsibility for the various policy measures. This is being supported by increased levels of investment in rural development, with the revised National Development Plan setting aside a total of €850 million for capital investment in rural development projects to 2025.

The *Our Rural Future* Work Programme for 2021 contained a wide portfolio of 216 actions for implementation across Government departments and agencies that contributed to, or in some cases completed, delivery of 128 of the 152 policy measures.

This Progress Report provides updates on the delivery of these actions, under the headings set out in *Our Rural Future*. These updates cover developments from the launch of the policy in March 2021 to the publication of this Report. Some 175 actions were scheduled for completion in 2021, while the remaining 41 actions were designated as 'Ongoing', with good progress reported across this category of actions.

Of the actions with a due date in 2021, a total of 139, or 79%, were completed at the time of publication. Delivery was incomplete, or delayed, on a total of 36 actions. The ongoing pandemic led to delays in a number of actions, such as projects requiring capital works and to planned events, while a significant number of other actions classified as delayed nonetheless showed significant progress towards completion. All actions marked as 'delayed' will be carried over and will be further reported on in the Second Progress Report midway through 2022.

In addition, progress has been recorded on a further seven policy measures not included in the 2021 Work Programme, meaning all but 17 measures in Our Rural Future are referenced in this Report. These additional measures are highlighted throughout the report with brown coloured headers.

High speed broadband installed in **182 schools**

National Connected Hubs Network launched on **31 May 2021**, with **200** remote working hubs already included

48% of IDA new investments going to regions

€7 million for **New Streetscape Enhancement Measures**

A further **€106 million** in Rural Regeneration Funding approved

267 organisations supported under the **COVID-19 Stability Fund**

455 projects approved under new **€70 million** Transitional LEADER Programme

52 projects approved under **National Just Transition Fund**

TU of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest established on 1 October 2021

New or expanded **Local Link Services** in Kerry, Leitrim and Laois-Offaly

€72.8m allocated to local authorities for first ever major **Rural Active Travel Programme**

First **Rural Youth Assembly** was held

Ár dTodhchaí Tuaithe
Our Rural Future

Highlights from Progress Report 1

Key measures delivered

The following is a selection of some notable Our Rural Future deliverables that were achieved across Government in 2021. Full details of these and all other updates begin at p11.

Remote Working:

- The establishment of the National Connected Hubs Network, currently comprising more than 200 hubs, and the provision of almost €9 million in supports under the Connected Hubs Fund (Measure 5.1/6.1).
- More than €28 million in funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for projects incorporating remote working facilities (Measure 7.1).

Employment and Careers:

- 48% of IDA investments announced in regional locations (Measure 22.1).
- Establishment of the Technological University: Shannon and Midwest, and the announcement of the Technological Universities in the West/North-West and South-East (Measure 27.1).
- Publication of an Interim Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (Measure 34.1), and an Action Plan for Apprenticeships (Measure 43.1).

Revitalising Towns and Villages:

- The new *Housing For All* policy introduced a range of measures aimed at addressing vacancy and dereliction in towns and villages (Measures 58, 59.1).
- Delivery of the €17 million Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme to develop outdoor dining capacity nationwide (Measure 47.2).
- €7 million Streetscape Enhancement Measure funded improvements more than 120 towns and villages (Measure 48.1).
- Funding of €2.6 million allocated to 26 towns for the development of the first ever Town Centre First Plans (Measure 147.1)

Enhancing Community Resilience and Participation:

- Supporting 267 organisations delivering critical services to vulnerable people within their community through the COVID-19 Stability Fund (Measure 69.1).
- Roll-out of phase one of the Community Volunteer Programme, in Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Louth and Meath (Measure 71.1).
- Establishment of the Rural Youth Assembly as part of the National Youth Assembly (Measure 73.1).

Improving Public Services:

- New or expanded Local Link services in Kerry, Leitrim, Tipperary and Laois-Offaly (Measure 91b.1).

- Launch of Local Community Safety Partnership Pilots in both Waterford City and County and Longford (Measure 99.1).
- Funding of €72.8 million provided for 340 active travel projects under the first major Rural Active Travel Programme (Measure 102.1).

Climate Transition:

- Establishment of Community Benefit Funds within the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (Measure 110).
- Publication of a National Residential Retrofit Plan as part of the Climate Action Plan 2021 (Measure 115.2).
- Approval of rehabilitation plans for 19 Bord na Móna bogs and restoration measures undertaken on more than 2,000 hectares of protected peatland (Measure 117).

Agriculture:

- Publication of Food Vision 2030, the new national agri-food strategy (Measure 121.1).
- Commencement of the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Amendment) Act 2021 in October, to change provisions of the Scheme relating to family-owned assets such as farms or businesses (Measure 134.1).

2021 Actions

Optimising Digital Connectivity

Measure 1	**Invest up to €2.7 billion in the rollout of the National Broadband Plan and explore how the initiative can be accelerated to deliver connectivity as soon as possible in rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: National Broadband Ireland under contract to DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
1.1	Continue roll out of the National Broadband Plan with construction commenced in majority of counties by the end of 2021.	Complete
Update: The rollout of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) is ongoing. National Broadband Ireland (NBI) has now commenced fibre construction in every county and are targeting to have passed a number of premises in every county by the end of 2022. As of 31 December 2021 over 285,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed or have surveys underway. NBI has also advised that premises are connected in Cavan, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Monaghan, and that from January 2022 there are over 54,000 premises available to order and pre-order across 21 counties.		
1.2	Finalise and implement measures to mitigate COVID impacts on 2020/2021 delivery.	Complete
Update: NBI are implementing a number of measures to help lessen the impact that these delays have had on the rollout. Such measures include: • Increasing the rate of pole replacement and duct remediation per month • Bringing in additional NBI resources • Earlier procurement of materials used in the build stages • Bringing in additional subcontractors As a result of actions taken by NBI the project continues to build momentum and month-on-month increases in premises passed are being recorded.		
1.3	Complete work with NBI on the potential to accelerate the National Broadband Plan and bring forward comprehensive proposals for approval.	Delayed
Update: DECC continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of the NBP roll-out. However, the primary focus is on addressing the delays which have arisen and ensuring that the NBI build programme gets back on track and is building momentum month-on-month.		
1.4	Finish delivery of the Broadband Connection Point Initiative.	N/A
Update: Duplicate measure – See Measure 16.1 for update.		

1.5	Commencement of the accelerated programme for the provision of high speed broadband to primary schools across the intervention area by end of 2022.	Complete
Update: Government and NBI have recently agreed to accelerate the roll-out of high speed broadband to some 679 primary schools across the State by the end of 2022, ensuring that by that time all schools across the State will have the necessary infrastructure to carry out their critical day-to-day educational activities unimpeded by poor broadband. Work on this initiative is ongoing, with 182 schools installed to the end of 2021.		

Measure 2	**Implement the National Remote Work Strategy to facilitate employees in working from home, or from co-working spaces, which will support the retention of skilled people in rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
2.1	Convene regular meetings of the Remote Work Strategy Interdepartmental Group to ensure that there is cross-departmental alignment to support the wider goals of the State.	Complete
Update: Four meetings of the Remote Work Strategy Interdepartmental Group have taken place over the course of 2021. The focus of these meetings was to drive the implementation of the Strategy's actions across Government.		

Measure 3	**Introduce legislation in 2021 to provide employees with the right to request remote work.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
3.1	Following public consultation period in May 2021, draft heads of Bill are anticipated by Q3 2021.	Complete
Update: Following public consultation and a review of international best practice, the General Scheme of the Bill is being finalised. The legislation will take a balanced approach, recognising that remote working is not suitable for everyone and every organisation. The new law will set out a clear framework around which requesting, approving or refusing remote work can be based. Cabinet approval for the drafting of Heads of a Bill was granted in January 2022 and following Government approval the General Scheme will be published. Pre-legislative Scrutiny will then be arranged with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The drafting process will be given priority over the coming months.		

Measure 4	**Map and publish a comprehensive picture of remote working facilities across the country, and the various facilities available in each, to ensure that future hubs are developed in a strategic way that meets demand and maximises utilisation in key locations.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD, Western Development Commission		
2021 Actions		**Status**
4.1	Data gathering to establish extent of remote working hubs across country.	Ongoing
Update: The National Connected Hubs network, together with the connectedhubs.ie platform, was launched on 31 May 2021. The National Hub Network Working Group initially identified and mapped over 400 remote working hubs throughout the country – this number has since increased to approximately 450, all of which will be invited to join the Connected Hubs Network. The work being undertaken by the WDC includes the development of a dataset for the national network's hub infrastructure which will be used to inform future decision making.		
4.2	Surveying of identified hubs to develop a comprehensive dataset of services and capacity, followed by mapping of these assets into a single, iterative, ArcGIS map published via the WDC. The first iteration is expected to include in excess of 200 hubs.	Complete
Update: The National Hub Network Working Group has identified and mapped over 450 remote working hubs throughout the country – approximately 200 of these are now onboarded onto the connectedhubs.ie platform (this number is rising on an ongoing basis). The locations of the onboarded hubs, together with the services and facilities they offer and the map location are available via the following link - https://connectedhubs.ie/index.php?/hubs/search.		
4.3	Engage with stakeholders (Central Statistics Office and DETE) to ensure data and maps are incorporated into wider data gathering on remote working demand and supply as part of Making Remote Work.	Ongoing
Update: There were four meetings of the Remote Work Strategy Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) during 2021 with this engagement between lead actors to continue during 2022. At the most recent meeting of the Group (11 November 2021) colleagues from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shared draft mapping data with other IDG colleagues – it was agreed that the presentation would be shared with IDG group members to allow ongoing engagement between relevant entities.		

Measure 5	**Establish a comprehensive and integrated national network of 400 Remote Working Hubs throughout the country, with shared back-office services and a central booking platform for users.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD, Western Development Commission		
2021 Actions		**Status**
5.1	Engagement with and onboarding of identified hubs to the National Hub Network and development of online platform.	Ongoing
Update: The National Hub Network Working Group has identified and mapped over 450 remote working hubs throughout the country – all of which will be invited to join the Connected Hubs Network. Approximately 200 of the 450 identified hubs have been onboarded onto the platform to date, with this number rising an ongoing basis.		

Measure 6	**Invest significantly in remote working facilities to support the retention of skilled people in rural communities and attract mobile talent to rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
6.1	A €5m Connected Hubs Fund will be launched to support small capital works to increase capacity and impact of existing hubs and Broadband Connection Points, as well as support the development of the National Hub Network.	Complete
Update: In July 2021, the Connected Hubs 2021 funding stream awarded close to €9 million in funding to over 100 successful applicants. Full details of funding allocations are available on the department's website. This funding supports the addition of capacity to existing remote working infrastructure in digital hubs and broadband connection points throughout the country.		
6.2	Make funding available to local authorities to run innovative marketing campaigns targeted at attracting remote workers and mobile talent under 2021 Town and Village Scheme.	Complete
Update: The Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) 2021 was adapted to allow for projects such as marketing campaigns targeted at attracting remote workers and mobile talent to their county/region; and promotion of specific town/villages to attract new customers and/or business investment. Donegal County Council was successful in its bid to secure support under the 2021 Scheme, with €90,000 allocated to support an integrated relocation marketing campaign showcasing Donegal as an ideal location for remote working. The campaign will encourage relocation to rural towns and villages across the county. Roscommon County Council were also successful in securing support under the 2021 Scheme, with €100,100 allocated to build the national and international profile of		

Roscommon and promote the county as a location for remote workers/mobile talent. It will build upon the Roscommon Bound "Global Rossie" platform to accelerate investment in the county's towns.		
6.3	As part of Budget 2022, examine the potential to introduce specific incentives to encourage remote workers to relocate to rural areas.	Delayed
Update: Funding has been allocated towards the delivery of this action in Budget 2022. DRCD is currently scoping the design of a potential incentive scheme to attract remote workers to rural areas, building on the Connected Hubs network.		

Measure 7	**Provide financial support to local authorities to bring vacant properties in town centres back into use as Remote Working Hubs.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
7.1	Projects supporting the roll-out of remote working facilities will supported under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, and will be a priority area of funding under the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.	Complete
Update: In 2021, seven RRDF Category 1 projects incorporating remote working facilities were awarded funding of €17.8 million, and a further 14 projects were awarded €10.2 million under Category 2. To date, the RRDF has now provided total support of €76.4m in funding for 58 projects that will develop or deliver hubs that will provide remote working facilities in rural towns and villages and their hinterlands. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) 2021 prioritised projects that bring vacant properties in town centres back into use as Remote Working Hubs. Successful applicants who receive funding for remote working facilities will be required to commit to a three-year membership of the National Hub Network. TVRS 2021 saw €6.2 million awarded to support 28 remote working projects. Twenty of these projects (€4.5m) relate to the transformation of sites which are currently derelict or vacant.		

Measure 9	**Establish a centralised cross-departmental knowledge base on the costs and benefits associated with the increased adoption of remote working to understand impacts on areas such as employment, transport, carbon emissions, broadband, and equality.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
9.1	Establish a consensus on the requirements of a knowledge base.	Complete

Update: A consensus was established as to the requirements of a knowledge base via the Remote Work Strategy Interdepartmental Group.		
9.2	Develop accessible online knowledge base.	Complete
Update: An online resource has been developed to promote cross-departmental/agency information sharing on remote work. It captures relevant material detailing the impacts of remote work on the impact areas listed in the action as well as overarching remote work reports and strategies, remote work baseline and survey data and remote work infrastructure.		

Measure 10	**Mandate public sector employers, colleges, and other public bodies to move to 20% home and remote working in 2021, with further annual increases over the lifetime of this policy.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DPER		
2021 Actions		**Status**
10.1	Publication of the Remote Working Framework.	Delayed
Update: It is intended that the Framework will be finalised over the coming months, following engagement with employee representatives. When this engagement has concluded and the Framework is agreed with the Civil Service Management Board, it will be rolled out to all civil service organisations.		

Measure 12	**Through IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta, promote and enable the uptake of remote working across their client base to support regional job creation.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE, DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
12.1	Enterprise Ireland's next 5 year Strategy is currently being developed and this will be incorporated into that strategy. The IDA, in delivering their 'Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021-2024' Strategy, will develop a value proposition on remote working and assist the preparation of a directory of remote working hubs.	Ongoing
Update: Enterprise Ireland published a new three-year strategy on 11 January 2022, which recognises remote working as a permanent and positive feature of the Irish workplace, resulting in change both for Irish enterprise and Enterprise Ireland. IDA continues to participate in, and contribute to, the DRCD-chaired working group on remote working hubs.		

In addition, IDA and LinkedIn published their fourth Labour Market Pulse survey in October 2021. The survey noted the share of remote job posts on LinkedIn in Ireland has increased rapidly since the pandemic began, although there are varying degrees to which tasks across occupations and sectors can be performed remotely. Remote job postings in Ireland are at a similar level to the global average (14% in Q3 2021). This was published across all IDA's media platforms. A sample of companies who have made remote jobs announcements in 2021 include Stripe, Square, IQVIA, Medallia, and 4Site. Many IDA clients companies are implementing hybrid working practices, combining remote and office based working.		
12.2	Údarás na Gaeltachta is in the process of developing 10 digital hubs (in addition to existing 20) and is also progressing a range of strategic capital projects across the Gaeltacht.	Ongoing
Update: In total 31 gteic hubs (Gaeltacht Digital Hubs) are planned and in development with 18 already operational or near completion. Remote working is supported through the gteic hubs in some of the most rural areas of the country and this initiative is a central part of the strategy of Údarás na Gaeltachta and is synergistic with the "Gaeltacht Glas" pillar of the strategy also. The Strategic Plan is available on the Údarás website. The end-of-year Údarás statement showed that 320 people were working in gteic hubs at the end of 2021.		

Measure 13	**Through the Tax Strategy Group, review the current tax arrangements for remote working in respect of (i) employees and (ii) employers, and assess the merits of further enhancements for consideration in the context of Budget 2022.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Finance		
2021 Actions		**Status**
13.1	The Tax Strategy Group will review current tax arrangements for remote working in respect of both employees and employers. The Group will take account of the economic, financial and organisational implications arising from the experience of remote working during the pandemic, and assess the merits of further enhancements for consideration in the context of Budget 2022.	Complete
Update: A review of the current tax arrangements was carried out as part of the 2021 Tax Strategy Group process and the resultant report was published in September [link here]. As part of Budget 2022, the Minister for Finance announced that an income tax deduction amounting to 30% of the cost of vouched expenses for heat, electricity and internet services in respect of those incurred while working from home can be claimed by taxpayers. This enhances and formalise existing arrangements that are currently operated by Revenue on an administrative basis and was provided for in Finance Act 2021.		

Measure 14	**Provide grants to retail businesses in rural towns and villages to establish an online presence to complement traditional footfall trade.**

Lead Delivery Body: DETE, LEOs		
2021 Actions		**Status**
14.1	Delivery of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme which offers a voucher of up to €2,500 (50% co-funded by the applicant) to help businesses develop their online trading capability.	Ongoing
Update: The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) continue to offer all available financial and development supports to local enterprises that meet the eligibility criteria. A total of 4,237 vouchers had been approved during the year to the end of November 2021, to the value of €9.18 million.		

Measure 15	**Develop Local Digital Strategies in each local authority area, to maximise the potential of improved rural digital connectivity for businesses and communities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
15.1	Provide support and assistance to local authorities to produce Local Digital Strategies to drive regional digital development.	Ongoing
Update: 18 of the 31 local authorities have published Local Digital Strategies. The remaining 13 are either pending publication or the local authorities are engaged in further research and drafting to align their strategies with recent national and European policy developments. DRCD intends to offer further support to all local authorities when the National Digital Strategy is published.		

Measure 16	**Expand the provision of free-to-use wireless internet connectivity in rural areas through the rollout of Broadband Connection Points and other initiatives such as the WiFi4EU public wi-fi networks and the Digital Innovation Programme.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
16.1	Establish a national network of approximately 300 community Broadband Connection Points in areas with poor connectivity.	Complete
Update: To date, more than 250 public Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are live and operational. Work is ongoing on a further 50 sites, the majority of which will be completed in the first half of 2022.		

16.2	Bring number of operational Wifi4EU hotspots to approximately 500, providing free public wi-fi services in areas of community life, such as town squares, libraries and other public buildings.	Complete
Update: 840 WiFi4EU hotspots are now live. It is estimated that 1,500 WiFi4EU hotspots will be live in Ireland by 2023. DRCD continues to co-fund and support this EU measure.		
16.3	Launch 2021 Digital Innovation Programme to encourage and facilitate local authority-led digital innovation projects to improve connectivity, trial new technologies or undertake new research.	Complete
Update: 20 projects were approved for funding under the 2021 Our Rural Future Digital Innovation Programme. A total of €1.2 million was awarded across two funding streams: • Innovation (to a maximum of €75,000) and • Scaling (to a maximum of €200,000). Projects had to focus on tangible measures to address rural issues. Among the successful applications were lifesaving initiatives around the use of ring buoys and defibrillators, environmental monitoring projects, smart farming, tourism, and infrastructure development.		

Measure 17	**Under the Schools Broadband Programme, review on an ongoing basis the availability of broadband services and upgrade schools broadband connectivity, including within the State intervention area where possible.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Education		
2021 Actions		**Status**
17.1	Work with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications for the provision of improved broadband connectivity to primary schools as identified under the National Broadband Plan Broadband Connection Point Programme.	Ongoing
Update: Under the National Broadband Plan Intervention Area implementation plan, some 679 primary schools currently on less than 40 Mbp/s connectivity are to be prioritised for NBI high speed broadband infrastructure by the end of 2022. Through the Schools Broadband Programme those schools will be upgraded to those services as soon as possible after the infrastructure is delivered. At the end of 2021, in excess of 100 of the 679 schools are live on the Schools Broadband network with high speed connectivity. Work is progressing on the balance of schools for delivery during 2022.		
17.2	Develop a broadband upgrade programme for Primary Schools not within the National Broadband Plan Intervention Area, or to receive enhanced connectivity through industry provision (year 1 of 2 year programme).	Complete
Update: D/Education secured funding under Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, supported through the EU NRRP facility, for a project to provide high speed connectivity to primary schools outside of the NBP Intervention Area, and where commercial provision will not connect.		

Installation commenced in 2021 to provide high speed connectivity to some 200 primary schools. A tender issued during 2021 resulting in contracts being awarded to 400 primary schools. Installation will commence in Q1 2022 with a view to all of those schools being live on the Schools Broadband network in Q2 2022. A further tender for services will issue in 2022.

Measure 18	**Increase the capacity for remote and blended learning to enable young people, in particular, in rural areas to access further and higher education courses through online learning while living in their local communities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DFHERIS		
2021 Actions		**Status**
18.1	Increase remote and blended learning to improve access to further and higher education	Ongoing

Update: Education Training Boards (ETBs) and service providers have worked intensively to ensure that Further Education Training (FET) continues to reach as many people across society as possible. Plans have been put in place over the last 18 months to broadly maintain FET activity at pre-pandemic levels. This has been achieved by finding ways to deliver essential practical and technical training onsite, continuing to support and engage with learners, offering blended learning solutions in the delivery of many courses and having an increased portfolio of online offerings, including via an expanded eCollege resource.

As an emergency response to COVID-19, eCollege was opened to public applications in March 2020, with 34,223 new entrants joining courses in 2020. Demand has sustained over 2021, with 29,000 new entrants on courses to November 2021. eCollege operates on a continuous intake basis and offers flexible, fully online learning opportunities leading to certification. As a fully online service, eCollege supports learners from across Ireland, including rural areas, to access further education. eCollege offers very flexible online learning and is ideal for those wishing to study at their own pace around their work and life commitments.

Measure 19	**Develop and implement a new 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy strategy so that everybody, regardless of age, can capitalise on the connectivity and opportunities presented by high-speed broadband.**	
Lead Delivery Body: Solas, DFHERIS		
2021 Actions		**Status**
19.1	Publication of 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.	Complete

Update: Adult Literacy for Life (ALL), a 10-Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy was launched on 8 September 2021, International Literacy Day. The Strategy aims to ensure that every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential.

The strategy outlines four key pillars under which a range of commitments are made in relation to supporting people with Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Skills Needs. These are:

- that people can understand their needs and where to go to meet them.
- that people can access all the learning and support they need.
- that the learning and support made available can expand to meet the literacy and numeracy challenge.
- that people and communities are empowered to make a real difference to their lives.

Measure 20	**Upskill and reskill workers in sectors undergoing transformational technological change to adapt to new roles and new ways of working.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DFHERIS		
2021 Actions		**Status**
20.1	Implement July Jobs Stimulus and Budget 2021 measures through the SOLAS Skills to Complete initiative, retrofitting training, additional upskilling and reskilling places on Skillnet Ireland and Springboard courses and new innovative postgraduate and modular programmes in higher education.	Complete

Update: Springboard+ 2021 was launched on 14 June 2021, with a combined total of 13,444 places on 408 courses available in the 2021/22 academic year under Springboard+ 2021 and Human Capital Initiative (HCI) Pillar 1. This includes courses in areas of new and emerging technologies such as Cybersecurity and Virtual Reality.

Under the July Stimulus package, funding of €15m provided 11,597 places on 538 Modular courses in 32 higher education institutions in 2020. A further 4,119 places were made available on these courses in 2021. All courses are shorter and more focused and offered in a flexible manner, allowing people to gain important skills without taking a considerable period away from the labour market. They represent a new route into lifelong learning, and provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities for those who need it, while ensuring that they remain close to the labour market.

Skills to Compete is an initiative by SOLAS, for activation, upskilling and reskilling for people displaced from their jobs as a result of COVID-19. The initiative is targeted at occupations in emerging growth areas, and provides for short courses (focused on transversal and transferable skills including CV preparation, interview technique, communications, management and supervision, and remote working); digital upskilling (digital capability assessments, linking individuals to a range of eCollege and other FET courses on digital skills and technology, and ensuring that all are equipped with the digital foundation to flourish in the future world of work); and education and training opportunities, to reskill at award levels 4-6 on the NFQ, where needed for specific sectors. Over 13,000 learners have attended Skills to Compete courses since Summer 2020.

20.2	Expansion of Skills to Advance programme.	Ongoing

Update: The participation figures for Skills to Advance in 2021 stood at 9,914 to the end of November 2021, an increase from 9,464 for all of 2020 and 5,712 in 2019.

This expansion in the programme in the past two years has been critical to allow an effective response to the external challenges including those arising from Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic and provide additional upskilling opportunities for those in low skilled employment or those seeking to avail of emerging opportunities.

Skills to Advance works collaboratively with the Education and Training Boards, employer bodies and key stakeholders to design, develop and cascade targeted regional and sectoral initiatives to provide these agile and relevant upskilling opportunities. These initiatives include Leadership and Management, Developing Leaders for Hospitality and Tourism, Green Skills and Digital Skills for Business Improvement.

Supporting Employment and Careers in Rural Areas

Measure 21	**Develop and implement a set of nine new Regional Enterprise Plans to support enterprise development and jobs growth in the regions.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
21.1	Process set up for nine Regional Steering Committees to appoint Project Delivery Teams to oversee the development and drafting of the new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024.	Complete
Update: Project Delivery Teams were established across the nine Regions to develop new Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) to 2024. The Department expects to complete the nine Plans in Q1 2022.		

Measure 22	**Target 400 IDA investments up to 2024 for regional locations and deliver 19 Advanced Technology Buildings in regional locations in line with the National Planning Framework.**	
Lead Delivery Body: IDA Ireland		
2021 Actions		**Status**
22.1	IDA Ireland's half-year results to be announced in July 2021 to include relevant updates.	Complete
Update: The IDA announced its half-year results in on 12 July 2021. The update detailed investments won up to end of Q2 – 62 of them new name investments – and associated employment potential of over 12,530 jobs. There was strong regional performance, with 68 of 142 investments (48%) going to regional locations, and continued resilience shown in existing FDI base despite the impact of COVID-19. A number of IDA Advanced Technology Buildings were made available for marketing, including locations in Monaghan, Galway, Sligo and Dundalk.		

Measure 23	**Deliver ambitious job creation and enterprise development targets for the indigenous sector in the strategies of Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Local Enterprise Offices to embed jobs growth more deeply within the regions.**	
Lead Delivery Body: Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs		
2021 Actions		**Status**
23.1	Enterprise Ireland's next 5 year Strategy is currently being developed and this will be incorporated into that strategy. The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have an ongoing strategy to promote employment growth across the 31 local authorities and are engaged with REDF Projects in each of the regions.	Ongoing
Update: Enterprise Ireland published a new three-year strategy on 11 January 2022. It sets out a target of 45,000 new jobs created by 2024, with two-thirds of those located outside of Dublin. The LEO strategy of job creation and enterprise development is ongoing. Data for 2021 will be published in the Impact Report and the Annual Employment Survey results which will both be available in Q1 2022.		
23.2	Launch of Údarás na Gaeltachta's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan which sets out a range of aims and objectives in overall support of the ongoing development of the Gaeltacht particularly in the realms of enterprise, community development and language planning.	Complete
Update: Údarás na Gaeltachta launched its Strategic Plan 2021-2025 in June 2021. The core theme of the Plan is *Enable, Strengthen, Sustain.* The Plan sets out a number of strategic objectives and strategic projects that supports their mission of fostering a sustainable Gaeltacht community where Irish is the main language, and where employment, society and culture make a world-class quality of life available. The Strategic Plan is available on the Údarás website**.** In addition, the end-of-year Údarás statement showed that 825 jobs were created in Gaeltacht companies in 2021. This led to a net increase in employment of 446, the highest such increase since 1996.		

Measure 25	**Promote awareness and the use of remote working hubs and enterprise centres across the country to support remote working and encourage local enterprise start-ups.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD, DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
25.1	Develop a shared brand identity for the National Hub Network leveraged through the online applications.	Complete

Update: The National Connected Hubs network, together with the connectedhubs.ie platform, was launched in May 2021. This platform offers a suite of booking, hub management and e-commerce applications to members of the Network. The Network will also facilitate the sharing of innovation, experience and best practices across the community. By creating a shared identity via the network, these supports will maximise benefit to member hubs, hub clients, employers, local communities and the wider economy.		
25.2	Launch of Network coinciding with promotional campaign.	Complete
Update: The National Connected Hubs network, together with the connectedhubs.ie platform, was launched in May 2021. During 2021 the focus of the National Hub Network Working Group has been to develop critical mass. With more than 200 remote working hubs now onboarded onto the connectedhubs.ie platform, the focus has now shifted to raising awareness of the network. To that effect a Connected Hubs marketing campaign launched in February 2022 to highlight progress to date and the availability of the connectedhubs.ie mobile app.		
25.3	Develop collaborative strategies with key stakeholders to promote hubs to diverse markets (SMEs, workers, etc.).	Ongoing
Update: With more than 200 remote working hubs now onboarded onto the connectedhubs.ie platform, the focus will now shift to raising awareness of the network, which will (as per action 25.2) include an upcoming marketing campaign to include the promotion of digital hubs to SMEs and remote workers. The work being undertaken by the WDC also includes the development of a dataset for the national network's hub infrastructure which will be used to inform future decision making, including the promotion of hubs to diverse markets where applicable (based on aforementioned dataset).		
25.4	Enterprise Ireland's next 5 year Strategy is currently being developed and this will be incorporated into that strategy. Local Enterprise Offices will promote the availability of remote working hubs and enterprise centres where available and appropriate.	Ongoing
Update: Enterprise Ireland published a new three-year strategy on 11 January 2022, which recognises remote working as a permanent and positive feature of the Irish workplace, resulting in change both for Irish enterprise and Enterprise Ireland.		

Measure 26	**Maximise our resources and strengths in the Green Economy to support employment opportunities for rural communities in areas such as renewable energy, sustainable tourism, energy retrofitting, the Bioeconomy and the Circular Economy.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM, DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
26.1	Hold regular cross-government bioeconomy policy implementation group meetings in 2021.	Ongoing

Update: The cross-government bioeconomy policy implementation group met four times in 2021.		
26.2	Hold first meeting of the Bioeconomy Forum.	Complete
Update: The Bioeconomy Forum met for the first time in July 2021 and again in October 2021. Further meetings are scheduled for Q1 and Q2 2022.		
26.3	Offer bioeconomy research opportunities by multiple funders including the Irish Research Council, EPA, DAFM, etc.	Ongoing
Update: Bioeconomy research funding opportunities have been offered by Irish Research Council (IRC), EPA, Marine Institute and DAFM in 2021. Other funders such as Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and Enterprise Ireland offer general funding opportunities, on an ongoing basis, that have bioeconomy in scope.		
26.4	Hold annual awareness raising event on bioeconomy in Ireland known as Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2021 (October 18-22).	Complete
Update: Bioeconomy Ireland Week was held from October 18-24 2021. Thirty events took place during that week.		
26.5	Offer opportunities for engagement by rural communities in bioeconomy through events held by bioeconomy clusters such as the Innovation Sprint Challenge being held by the Circular Bioeconomy South West Cluster in Q2 2021.	Ongoing
Update: In 2021, a pilot of the Circular Bioeconomy Industry Innovation Sprint pilot programme was launched as part of the delivery of the MSc Bioeconomy with Business course funded by Springboard+ and led by Munster Technology University (MTU), University College Dublin (UCD), Teagasc and the CircBio Research Group in MTU. This was an opportunity for industry and employers to engage with Masters level students to solve challenge and accelerate solutions to support bioeconomy actions within their businesses and/or communities. The 2021 pilot year was a success as 16 challenges were received from businesses and rural hubs and six were completed by a cohort of postgraduate students. The impact is that new business opportunities have been identified and validated with greater potential for new product / process improvement and job creation. The programme is planned for delivery for 2022 and is now seeking partnerships to further enable impact and continued skills development.		
Additional Measure 26 Update		
The National Retrofit Plan (see Measure 115.2) identifies an unprecedented €8 billion to support homeowners to retrofit their homes through SEAI retrofit schemes including energy poverty schemes. This will help to create high quality, sustainable jobs in communities throughout the country. This funding is available to 2030.		

Measure 27	**Roll out the development of the Technological University model to help support regional growth through the education and training sector and to act as an anchor for regional economic development, research and investment.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DFHERIS		
2021 Actions		**Status**
27.1	Approve Athlone IT/Limerick IT application for Technological University (TU) designation. Further applications to be considered upon submission.	Complete
Update: TU of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest was established 1 October 2021. A new TU in the West / North West (named Atlantic Technological University) was designated on 28 October 2021 with a view, subject to Oireachtas approval, to establishment on 1 April 2022. On 2 November 2021, the Minister announced a TU in the South East is to be established by 1 May 2022 subject to finalisation of remaining technical and operational matters under HEA assessment.		

Measure 28	**Develop an overarching Clustering Policy and Framework to advance strong and effective clustering and links between SMEs, multinational corporations and the third-level sector.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
28.1	Establish Steering Group to oversee development of the National Clustering Policy.	Complete
Update: DETE has established a Steering Group to provide oversight and bring experience and insights on clustering to bear on the development of the National Clustering Policy and Framework. The National Cluster Policy Steering Group is chaired by DETE, and membership is representative of Government departments and agencies that have an involvement in clustering. It also includes representation from industry, regional actors and clustering expertise. The Steering Group has formally met twice since its establishment in July 2021.		
28.2	Appoint Consultants to provide research and analysis to support development of the National Clustering Policy.	Complete
Update: DETE has appointed Grant Thornton to provide research and analysis, facilitation, and manage a wide-ranging stakeholder engagement process to inform the work of the National Cluster Policy Steering Group.		

Measure 29	**Examine, and take forward as appropriate, the recommendations of the SME Growth Plan to map out an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint for all SMEs, including rurally-based businesses.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
29.1	Establish Ministerial-led SME and Entrepreneurship Implementation Group to take recommendations forward, in conjunction with relevant Departments and Agencies.	Complete
Update: An SME and Entrepreneurship Implementation Group, chaired by Minister Damien English and Minister Robert Troy, was established in February 2021 to progress the recommendations arising from the SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan. Since then, the Group has been meeting with relevant Government Departments and Agencies with a view to taking the Growth Plan recommendations forward, and to identifying areas where significant implementation progress can be made over the coming year. The Implementation Group will continue to drive the implementation of policy actions in these key areas during 2022, which include SME access to finance, digital transformation, clustering and networks and SME management skills.		

Measure 30	**Deliver a suite of new measures to support the development of Social Enterprises in rural areas to increase their social, economic and environmental impact and contribute to job creation locally.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
30.1	Host a webinar/event on contribution of social enterprises to rural development	Complete
Update: A hybrid online conference on “Social Enterprise Opportunities for Rural Development” took place at the Kilmovee social enterprise in Co Mayo on 30 September 2021. The event, which was attended by 136 participants, was organised in partnership with the Western Development Commission. The event included a panel of leaders in social enterprise from across the country to discuss the opportunities and challenges for social enterprises in rural communities and featured video showcases of social enterprises contributing to rural development. Separately, DRCD commissioned a research report on *The role of Policy in unlocking the potential of Irish Rural Social Enterprises* via University College Cork, which will be published in early 2022.		
30.2	Include a focus on rural social enterprise in support programmes for social enterprises.	Ongoing

Update: All social enterprise support programmes are designed to ensure support for rural (and urban) social enterprises and their particular requirements though proactive efforts are made to ensure regional balance in terms of investment.

For example, support schemes such as the 2021 Capital Grants Scheme seek to ensure a wide geographic spread as part of assessment processes by encompassing all local authority areas via the Local Community Development Committees. Similarly, the Awareness Raising Initiative for Social Enterprises (ARISE) evaluation process has sought to ensure a wide geographic spread.

Other schemes seek to ensure programmes support a wide mix of social enterprises to ensure their local and specific needs are catered for, such as through the COVID-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme managed by the Irish Local Development Network locally.

Measure 31	**Expand the use of socially responsible public procurement contracts, where feasible, which will incentivise the engagement of social enterprises and Circular Economy organisations.**	
Lead Delivery Body: All Departments		
2021 Actions		**Status**
31.1	The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) incorporates socially responsible measures in its procurement solutions, including in the areas of energy provision, paper and print services, and electric vehicles. Each framework is assessed through a prism of green and social considerations when planning next generation frameworks.	Ongoing
Update: The OGP supports Programme for Government commitments in rolling out social, innovative and sustainable considerations in public procurement solutions. The OGP is currently providing support to the Environmental Protection Agency in communicating new green procurement guidelines to procurement practitioners. The OGP has many green frameworks in place including green electricity frameworks and options for purchasing electric vehicles. The Office is continually looking at further ways to incorporate relevant green criteria into our procurement solutions and has reviewed its frameworks through a prism of green and social considerations. The OGP will host a green procurement conference for clients and suppliers in 2022.		
31.2	The Strategic Procurement Advisory Group will continue to meet regularly. This group brings together officials from policy Departments with public procurement practitioners to share best practice and to facilitate public bodies in the process of incorporating social and environmental considerations into public procurement.	Ongoing
Update: The OGP chairs the Strategic Procurement Advisory Group (SPAG) which is examining the incorporation of green and social considerations (such as the inclusion of apprenticeship provisions or promoting access to social enterprises) into public		

procurement. In 2021, the OGP established an Environmental Subgroup of SPAG, co-chaired with the DECC, to consider initiatives to green public procurement (GPP).

One further initiative emanating from SPAG is the development of guidance on the inclusion of an apprenticeship/staff development provision within Public Sector tendering processes. OGP is working with the D/FHERIS and SPAG in this regard. The OGP has worked with DECC in the development of three GPP actions to accompany the whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy, to be brought to the Government shortly. One of these relates specifically to the circular economy, by encouraging the procurement of recycled office paper.

31.3	Action 9 of the D/Justice *Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy: Working to Change* commits the Department to open up supply chains to Social Enterprises and pledges a target of 10% of all Criminal Justice Sector procurement contracts for the provision of goods and services include social considerations. Action 8 commits the department to work with the OGP to develop guidance notes to facilitate the use of social considerations in relevant Criminal Justice Sector contracts. Both these actions will be commenced by Q2 2021.	Complete

Update: Both Actions 8 and 9 of the Working to Change Strategy commenced in Q2 2021.

Action 8: The Department of Justice initiated a cross-departmental pilot initiative supporting the use of social clauses in public contracts as well as investment in the Buy Social Movement. The pilot has received commitments to seek the required financial backing from partner departments. It is also being supported by the Office of Government Procurement. This cross-departmental, shared investment proposal was tabled at a SPAG meeting on 13 December. It is hoped that the pilot will be progressed in 2022.

Action 9: D/Justice's Social Procurement Policy has been completed and distributed to all criminal justice agencies. A policy paper has also been presented to the department's Financial Management Committee, and work is ongoing with our procurement side in respect of this. The department has also successfully completed their first procurement contract with Green Procurement clauses. The Irish Prison Service finalised a contract which included social criteria with two social enterprises that will recycle all prison mattresses. Moving forward, the Irish Prison Service, Probation Service and the Department of Justice will be reviewing contracts due for renewal and/or that are new to see how social criteria/clauses can be included. These clauses will award additional marks to successful bidders when they hire suitably qualified people with criminal convictions.

General Update: Departments across government continued to expand the use of socially responsible public procurement in 2021, through membership of the SPAG and the ongoing development of internal procurement advice and guidance around the consideration of social enterprises and circular economy in procurement processes. In particular:

For example, DRCD includes social clauses in relevant requests for tender such as in the case of the tender for social enterprise data collection and the purchase of sensory equipment for public libraries. D/FHERIS directors are asked annually to consider, where feasible, both Social and Environmental aspects when formulating tender proposals for the SOLAS Procurement Plan.

Measure 32	**Further develop the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and Ireland's Ancient East as regional tourism offerings and further diversify tourism opportunities by strengthening Ireland's image as an outdoor activity holiday destination to the domestic and international markets.**	
Lead Delivery Body: Fáilte Ireland		
2021 Actions		**Status**
32.1	Launch of funding awards under Stage 2 of Platforms for Growth for Activity Facility Centres at 22 locations nationally to enhance the visitor experience for water-based activities.	Complete
Update: In April 2021 Fáilte Ireland announced a €19 million investment for facilities at 22 locations for visitors taking part in water-based activities. The funding will be used to build world-class facility centres at 22 locations across the country where activities such as kayaking, surfing, paddle-boarding and open water swimming are a key visitor attraction.		
32.2	Support visitor attractions through significant funding awards under the Platforms for Growth Investment Grants Scheme for Immersive Heritage and Cultural Attractions.	Complete
Update: Under Fáilte Ireland's Platforms for Growth Investment Scheme for Immersive Heritage and Cultural Attractions, as announced in June 2021, four new and strategically important large-scale visitor attractions will be assisted to unlock regional dispersal of visitors and extend the tourism season in these regions beyond the traditional summer months. The unique attractions that have been offered Fáilte Ireland investment funding are: • Shannon Pot & Cavan Burren Park, Blacklion, Co. Cavan - €4.8m • Fort Dunree & Head, Buncrana, Co. Donegal - €9.3m • 'This is Ireland' North City Centre, Dublin 1 - €10m • Westport House Estate & Gardens, Westport, Co. Mayo - €20.2m		
32.3	Launch of the Shannon Navigation Tourism Masterplan.	Complete
Update: Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and 10 local authorities (Leitrim, Roscommon, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Galway, Clare, Tipperary, Cavan, Limerick City and County) jointly developed the Shannon Tourism Masterplan to realise the tourism potential of the Shannon region along the River Shannon and Shannon-Erne Waterway. Launched in March 2021, the Shannon Tourism Masterplan contains an action plan of projects that will require an estimated €76.5 million investment to realise the ambitions of the Masterplan over 10 years.		
32.4	Develop Regional Tourism Plans (RTPs) for each of Fáilte Ireland's brand regions.	Delayed
Update: Fáilte Ireland has prepared draft Regional Tourism Strategies (RTSs) for each of the four tourism brand regions. A Strategic Environmental Assessment is currently being undertaken on each of the RTSs for which public consultation is planned to commence in January 2022 and be completed in March, after which the Strategies will be finalised and published.		

32.5	Continue partnership with Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (DRCD) to support new and enhanced trail development and linkages to existing infrastructure and visitor attractions.	Ongoing

Update: Over the last three years, Fáilte Ireland has worked with DRCD on this scheme and has contributed €12m for the development, enhancement and maintenance of trails right across the country.

While 2021 was the final year of Phase 1 of the partnership agreement between Fáilte Ireland and DRCD, it is the intention of both parties to develop a Phase 2 of the partnership for the period 2022-2024.

Measure 33	**Strengthen the identity and branding of the Gaeltacht regions and develop a Tourism Strategy for the Gaeltacht areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
33.1	Continue development of “Gaeltacht na hÉireann” branding across businesses, organisations, language planning groups and Gaeltacht organisations in a range of different contexts. Work will also continue, in partnership with other key stakeholders, in further developing the Gaeltacht’s unique potential in the realm of cultural tourism.	Ongoing

Update: In 2021, an audit was completed on a cross-sectoral study of usage of the Gaeltacht na hÉireann brand. Arising out of that, a strategy and action plan to build value around the Gaeltacht na hÉireann brand across different sectors and stakeholders is currently being developed.

Measure 34	**Publish an interim Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism which will identify actions which can be taken in the short- term to promote sustainable tourism.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
34.1	Publication of an interim Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism.	Complete

Update: The Sustainable Tourism Working Group report and interim action plan was published in October 2021. The actions identified in this report aim to establish new research methods, which will increase the level of evidence available, and form a clear narrative for communicating about the sustainability agenda to build a better understanding and awareness among tourism stakeholders and the general public. It will also ensure that sustainability is taken into account in policy development, business

planning by the agencies and industry as well as in destination management and promotional activity.

Measure 35	**Publish and implement a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, through Comhairle na Tuaithe, to support access to, and responsible use of, outdoor recreational and leisure facilities for people of all ages, and increase employment opportunities in rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
35.1	Publication of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.	Delayed
Update: The National Outdoor Recreation Strategy is currently being developed in conjunction with Comhairle na Tuaithe. This stakeholder-led strategy is now being developed based on an expanded public consultation process and is expected to be finalised in the second half of 2022.		

Measure 36	**Invest in greenways, blueways, walking trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure to support the growth in outdoor recreational tourism.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport, DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
36.1	€50m has been allocated for greenways in 2021, this is the highest single year allocation ever. Work is continuing on nine greenways scheduled for completion in 2021, however, COVID has impacted progress on these projects, so it is likely to be 2022 and 2023 when these open to the public.	Delayed
Update: Progress has been slower than expected due to the COVID-19 restrictions on construction. 26 pre-construction projects are also progressing slower than anticipated due to staff resourcing issues (these issues will have been resolved by early 2022). From September 2021, Transport Infrastructure Ireland took over as the authorising authority for greenways. €60m is due to be allocated for greenways in 2022.		
36.2	The 2021 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme will provide funding of €14m for greenways, blueways, walking trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure.	Complete
Update: Under ORIS 2021, a total of €19 million was awarded across 357 outdoor recreation projects. Under Measure 1, €3.5 million was announced for 273 projects, with a further 84 projects approved for an additional €15.5 million under other measures. Earlier, funding of over €15.7m for 226 projects under ORIS 2020 was announced in Q1 2021.		

Measure 37	**Develop a pilot bicycle up-cycling initiative to support employment creation, to harness the potential of investment in greenways and to support the development of the social enterprise business model.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
37.1	Launch of three-year joint pilot scheme for upcycling of bikes and ebikes for those on low incomes and/or marginalised or disadvantaged, with possibility of further organisations to be included in initiative in 2022. Funding of €3m to be provided by D/Transport for this initiative which will be delivered by DRCD via the Community Services Programme.	Complete
Update: The pilot was advertised on 28 April 2021 with a closing date for receipt of applications 28 May 2021. The five applicants that were approved for support under this pilot initiative are as follows: • The Rediscovery Centre & Rothar Velo in Dublin 9. • Frontline Bikes/ Frontline Make Change in Dublin 8. • Treo Port Lairge CLG (aka Renew Enterprises) in Waterford. • The Life Cycle Consortium in Galway – Westside Resource Centre and An Mheitheal Rothar. • Sign & Cycle in Cork – Cork Community Cycles & Deaf Enterprises.		

Measure 38	**Expand the Walks Scheme to achieve a target of at least 80 trails, doubling the number from 2018.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
38.1	10 new trails will become operational under the Walks Scheme, with 283 new participants covering 174.2 kms.	Delayed
Update: 10 new trails were approved for inclusion in the Walks Scheme at the end of 2019. Nine of these walks have been audited and fully approved to join the Walk Scheme, with the remaining one to follow.		
38.2	Complete and publish independent review of the Walks Scheme, featuring an Action Plan developed to implement recommendations of review.	Complete
Update: An external review of the Walks Scheme was commissioned to examine the delivery and strategic development of the Scheme, and assess the role and resourcing of the Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) posts throughout the country. The reviewers were also required to consider the level of funding provided to the Local Development Companies to deliver the scheme. The Review Report was published in September 2021.		

38.3	Announce significant further addition of new trails to the Walks Scheme.	Complete
Update: A further 31 new trails were approved in principle to join the Walks Scheme under Phase 2 of the expansion in September 2021. This fulfils the commitment in the Programme for Government and Our Rural Future to double the number of trails on the Scheme to 80 trails. These trails will be formally brought onto the scheme by Local Development Companies who deliver the Walks Scheme locally and who will develop work plans for each of the individual landholders involved.		

Measure 39	**Explore the potential for the development of further tourist trails, including cross-border trails and initiatives.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
39.1	Complete trail audit and route identification for Beara Breifne Way.	Complete
Update: Project underway with consultant team led by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland appointed. The physical trail audit is now complete – the outputs of the audit are being worked into a draft report and will feed into the development of branding and interpretation framework. An environmental assessments report is being prepared and will be ready by end Q1 2022.		
39.2	Explore methodology and route options for the Irish Sea Way and Wild Atlantic Way Coast Path.	Delayed
Update: Initial scoping has been undertaken in relation to both projects. A tender for consultancy is to be developed and issued Q1 2022		
39.3	Delivery of eight new blueways in line with Blueways Ireland criteria.	Delayed
Update: The first accredited blueways will come to market in 2022 when eight blueways should achieve full accreditation. Fáilte Ireland is working on a suite of blueway activation supports to roll out to blueway stakeholders and industry.		
39.4	Progress the delivery of Phase 2 of the restoration of the Ulster Canal from Clones to Clonfad and continue the planning and design of Phase 3, from Clonfad to Castle Saunderson (DHLGH/Waterways Ireland)	Ongoing
Update: **Phase 1 Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson (Blueway):** This phase is complete. **Phase 2 Clonfad to Clones** includes the canal basin in Clones, access bridges and amenity areas. Substantial completion of the main infrastructure works is expected in quarter two of 2023. Feasibility and engineering studies have been completed. Planning permission for this phase is in place which will expire May 2023. An Integrated Design (Project Management) Team for this phase was appointed in mid-June 2021, and they continue to develop design proposals in preparation for tender/construction. The process		

to procure a Design/Build Contractor commenced in September 2021 and should complete in April/May 2022. Substantial completion of the main infrastructure works is expected in Q2 2023 with completion of additional tourism and recreational facilities expected by December 2023.

Phase 3 Castle Saunderson to Clonfad (Restoration)
This section of the Ulster Canal restoration will connect the 10km between Castle Saunderson to Clonfad and link the town of Clones by navigable waterway to the Erne System and onward to the wider waterway network of the Shannon-Erne Waterway, the Shannon Navigation, the Royal and Grand Canals towards Dublin and further south along the Barrow Line and Barrow Navigation.

The engineering feasibility and pre-construction stages of Phase 3 of the restoration has started with support of the Shared Island Fund, with the completion of these pre-construction stages envisaged by 2023. With planning permission already in place, Waterways Ireland has confirmed that it is now ready to accelerate cross border elements of Phase 3. It has split this blueway phase into four further sub-phases based on deliverability within planning approvals, engineering and construction economies and capacity. Three of the sub-phases will bring the restored canal south of the border from Fermanagh and will also extend it further to the West from Clones. The sub-phases involve substantive infrastructure, including new road bridges and layouts, a marina and restored heritage architecture.

In aggregate, a further 6.25km of canal would be restored, leaving a remaining phase of 3.75km to be addressed (when planning is extended) to conclude the link from Clones to Castle Saunderson.

Measure 40	**Develop a Dark Skies Strategy for Ireland, with a focus on the opportunities it can create for rural communities and employment creation.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
40.1	Research and engagement with key stakeholders.	Complete
Update: Desk research has been undertaken and engagement with key stakeholders, such as representatives of Dark Sky Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, was initiated in Q2 2021. Further in-depth discussions with additional stakeholders including DTCAGSM continued into Q4 2021.		
40.2	Initiate consultation mechanism in respect of the development of the Dark Skies Strategy.	Complete
Update: Desk research and preliminary consultations indicated the necessity for the establishment of a structured consultation with key stakeholders, including the DTCAGSM and Fáilte Ireland, in order to maximise complementarity and alignment with broader tourism policies and processes. Further substantive engagement of this group will progress in Q1 2022.		

Measure 41	**Implement a new National Heritage Plan, Heritage Ireland 2030, to identify priority actions in the heritage area.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
41.1	Publication of Heritage Ireland 2030.	Delayed
Update: The final draft of Heritage Ireland 2030 is undergoing environmental screening ahead of publication in early 2022.		
41.2	The National Parks and Wildlife Service will be leading on the drafting of the fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan as part of Heritage 2030. NPWS will be shortly inviting tenders for the provision of support to draft the new Plan.	Complete
Update: A consortium has been appointed to provide support in drafting the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP). A review of international, EU and national policies and strategies has been completed and the structure of the 4th NBAP is under development, for key stakeholder review in early 2022. A public consultation of the new Plan is planned for Q2 2022.		

Measure 42	**Identify opportunities for the Creative Industries in Ireland and maximise their potential to support employment in rural areas through the development of a roadmap to support the sector.**
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM	
Update: Údarás na Gaeltachta is working closely with the creative industries, both directly in support of the audio-visual sector, and also through its arts subsidiary, Ealaín na Gaeltachta. The gteic digital hub network is being developed as Ireland's biggest digital hub network, and opportunities for the creative industry within the network are being explored. During 2019 and 2020 the Creative Ireland Programme consulted extensively with industry bodies, business people, practitioners and academics in the fields of design and creative industries, and research and innovation, and with other Government departments, agencies and enterprise partners. A Roadmap for the Creative Industries has been drafted.	

Measure 43	**Publish a new Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 to ensure that we have a modern and responsive apprenticeship programme with a strong regional footprint which meets the needs of a changing economy.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DFHERIS		
2021 Actions		**Status**
43.1	Publication of Action Plan in April 2021.	Complete
Update: The Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025 was published in April 2021. Implementation has started with an emphasis on establishing the new delivery and governance structures.		

Measure 44	**Through a new Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025, support people to upskill, reskill and find employment through increased capacity and intensive activation and training.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DSP		
2021 Actions		**Status**
44.1	Publication of Pathways to Work Strategy.	Complete
Update: Pathways to Work 2021-2025 was published on 12 July 2021. The Strategy contains 83 specific commitments across five themes to assist people who lost their job during the pandemic, and those who experienced disadvantage in accessing the labour market prior to the pandemic.		

Measure 45	**Through the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, develop initiatives to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas, including through remote working options.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DCEDIY		
2021 Actions		**Status**
45.1	Under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, DCEDIY is responsible for an Employer Awareness Campaign that will develop a multi-faceted programme to promote awareness, among employers and other key stakeholders, of the opportunities represented by employees with disabilities. This includes funding the Open Doors Initiative to operate an Employer Information Service that provides an information and support service that helps remove the barriers encountered or perceived in the employment of people with disabilities.	Ongoing

Update: The Employers for Change service provided by Open Doors Initiative will continue to be funded in 2022. There remain plans to roll out an Employer Awareness Campaign in 2022.

Revitalising Rural Towns and Villages

Measure 46	**Deliver a range of strategic investment programmes over the lifetime of this policy that meet the needs of differentiated rural areas, including through the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, and an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
46.1	Announcement of €81m in funding for successful projects under Category 1 of the RRDF.	Complete
Update: In April 2021, the Third Call for Category 1 applications under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund was announced. 25 projects located around the country were successful, with funding of €84.5 million awarded to these projects, delivering a total investment of over €102 million. Three calls for Category 1 applications have now been completed, with a fourth call launched in December 2021, while a further three calls for applications have been completed in relation to Category 2. Arising from these calls to date under the RRDF: • 89 Category 1 projects have been approved for funding of €221 million for projects worth a total investment of €301 million. • In Category 2, 102 projects have been approved for funding of €55.8 million for projects worth €73 million. • In total, funding of €277 million has been approved to date for 191 projects worth a total of €374 million.		
46.2	Announcement of successful projects under third call for Category 2 applications to the RRDF (launched in Q2 2021), tailored to contribute to key targets and outcomes of Our Rural Future, in addition to existing objectives in the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan.	Complete
Update: The third call for Category 2 applications to the RRDF closed in July 2021. A total of €21.5 million in funding was approved for 27 landmark regeneration projects that will rejuvenate town centres, drive economic growth and footfall, combat dereliction, develop pedestrian zones and outdoor spaces and boost tourism in rural Ireland. The funding, which was announced on 6 January 2022, will bring these projects through the development stage and to the point where they are ready to commence works.		
46.3	Announcement of successful projects under the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme to contribute to key targets and outcomes in Our Rural Future (indicative funding of €15 million).	Complete
Update: The 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme will see €18.3 million invested to support renewal in 99 towns. Funding will supports remote working hubs, will tackle dereliction and vacancy and will further enhance amenities.		

Measure 47	**Prioritise rural development programmes to focus on supporting rural towns and villages to recover from the impact of COVID-19 in the short-to-medium term.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
47.1	Support initiatives through Town and Village Renewal Scheme and CLÁR Programme to support rural towns and villages.	Complete
Update: CLÁR is a targeted investment programme for rural areas which aims to provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects in areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population decline. Funding of almost €6.5 million was approved for 161 projects under the CLÁR 2021 programme. Of this, funding of over €2.3 million was provided for 52 projects under Measure 2 for community recreational areas where friends and families can socialise outdoors in safe, accessible, community spaces while respecting public health guidelines. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme, which supports small to medium capital projects which enhance the environment of town or village centres with a population of less than 10,000, was adapted to prioritise tackling vacancy in towns and villages, remote working and supporting town centre living in 2021. Grant funding for projects ranged from €20,000 to €500,000, up to a maximum of 90% of project costs. . A total of €18.3 million in will be invested in projects in 99 towns and villages.		
47.2	Support economic activity in towns and villages through a €17m programme to develop outdoor dining capacity nationwide. (DTCAGSM)	Complete
Update: The Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme is a €17m capital investment scheme, announced by Fáilte Ireland in March 2021, for developing outdoor dining capacity nationwide. The scheme, delivered in partnership between Fáilte Ireland and local authorities across the country, is in two parts: Part One (Outdoor Seating and Accessories Grants), which was administered by the individual local authorities, made grants of up to €4,000 (up to 75% of the ex-VAT cost of equipment purchased/installed) available to assist individual tourism and hospitality businesses meet certain costs associated with increasing their outdoor dining capacity for the summer of 2021 (e.g. outdoor tables, chairs, umbrellas, electric heaters, screens/windbreaks, plant stands and wooden platforms). Part Two (Local Authority Weatherproofing & Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme) made funding available for local authority-led projects to enable the development of permanent outdoor public dining spaces in towns and urban centres similar to those that exist in various European cities. A breakdown of the €9 million allocated to 38 locations under this part of the Scheme is available here.		
47.3	Provide additional support to local authorities to enhance outdoor spaces and cycling/walking infrastructure through the Additional Outdoor Infrastructure Fund. (D/Transport)	Complete
Update: An Additional Outdoor Infrastructure Fund was announced by the Department of Transport in April 2021 to help ensure a safe outdoor summer. The funding supported local authorities in enhancing outdoor urban space and improving walking and cycling		

infrastructure, assisting the safe re-opening of society as Ireland gradually emerged from COVID-19 public health restrictions.

A total of €13.28m was allocated to 30 local authorities under this funding programme to support approximately 240 projects.

Measure 48	**Provide funding to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts and street facades in towns and villages.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD, DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
48.1	Supports for shopfronts and streetscapes will be a priority area of funding under 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.	Complete

Update: The Streetscape Enhancement Measure was announced as a new measure under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in August 2021 with a fund of €7 million. Under this measure, property owners in over 120 towns and villages were provided with funding to improve the facades of their buildings, carry out artwork and install features such as canopies and street furniture.

In addition, DHLGH introduced a pilot 'shopfront stream' to the Historic Structures Fund (HSF), which provides capital grants for conservation works to eligible structures (protected structures, structures proposed or eligible for inclusion on the RPS, or structures within an Architectural Conservation Area). Under this pilot stream, applications were invited from owners of historic shopfronts for essential repairs and small capital works for the refurbishment and conservation of historic shop facades, windows, signage and other associated details to safeguard them and keep them in use.

In conjunction with the DTCAGSM, dedicated joint funding was also made available for applications from owners of Irish-language shopfronts. This stream has been incorporated into HSF 2022.

In conjunction with the Heritage Council, the DHLGH also delivers the Historic Towns Initiative which supports the heritage-led regeneration of towns across the country. Eligible works include street façade improvements. In 2021, the HTI provided funding of €1.5m to nine towns.

Measure 49	**Fund local authorities to adapt and improve outdoor public spaces for cultural events and activities all-year round, and support the recovery of the creative, cultural, entertainment and events sector.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
49.1	Delivery of the Outdoor Public Space Scheme 2021 which was launched in Q1 2021 and will fund capital projects for outdoor spaces which are flexible, innovative and facilitate year-round use. Projects will respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19 and support the recovery of the creative, cultural, entertainment and events sector as well as being future-proofed from a health and safety perspective.	Complete

Update: The *Outdoor Public Space Scheme 2021,* a new funding scheme to help local authorities open up and create public spaces and facilities dedicated to the arts, culture and festivals was launched on 11 February 2021.

Under the Scheme, local authorities were invited to propose capital projects for outdoor spaces which are flexible, innovative and facilitate year-round use. The funding responds to the challenges associated with COVID-19 and supports the recovery of the creative, cultural, entertainment and events sector as well as being future-proofed from a health and safety perspective. Up to €250,000 was made available to each local authority under the scheme from a total of €5 million.

At the of 2021, 18 local authorities had been awarded funding under this Scheme – Carlow, Clare, Cork City, Cork County, Donegal, Galway City, Kerry, Kilkenny, Laois, Longford, Mayo. Meath, Roscommon, Sligo, South Dublin, Tipperary, Wexford and Wicklow.

Measure 50	**Deliver major regeneration projects in towns with a population of over 10,000 which play an important role as key hubs in rural areas, through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
50.1	45 proposals were approved for a total of €1.3 billion in funding support under Call 2 of the URDF in March 2021. This second tranche of URDF-supported projects builds on the existing pipeline of projects from Call 1, and ultimately will contribute significantly to the transformative regeneration and development of large towns and cities, and to the achievement of NPF and Project Ireland 2040 objectives. €150m has been provided for 2021 to support the advancement of this programme.	Ongoing

Update: To date there have been two Calls for proposals under the URDF with a total of €310m allocated to date in respect of the 87 projects approved under Call 1. In March 2021, further support of €1.3 billion in respect of a further 45 proposals was approved under Call 2.

At this stage the Department's immediate focus is on ensuring early progress on these projects and in this regard is currently engaged in a series of meetings with local authorities to discuss their plans for the further advancement of the URDF supported countrywide programme of 142 transformative regeneration and development projects.

Measure 51	**Develop and deliver a collaborative Town Centre First approach to put town centres at the heart of decision-making where appropriate.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH, DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
51.1	Launch of Town Centre First Framework setting out actions to deliver Town Centre First Approach.	Complete

Update: An Interdepartmental Group (IDG) was established to progress the Town Centre First policy, chaired jointly by DRCD and DHLGH. A dedicated Advisory Group, chaired by the Minister of State for Planning and Local Government, was also established by DHLGH to support the work of the IDG. The purpose of the Advisory Group was to engage with a wider range of interests/stakeholders.

The IDG, through a panel of working groups, developed a set of recommendations which formed the basis for the development of the Town Centre First Policy document. The Town Centre First Policy was approved by Government in December 2021 ahead of its launch on 4 February 2022.

Measure 52	**As part of the Town Centre First approach, provide and resource dedicated local authority staff to support town centre renewal.**
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD	

Update: Funding for Town Regeneration Officers was announced in Budget 2022. These will be rolled out over the course of 2022, in line with the overall Town Centre First delivery. The role of the Town Regeneration Officer will be to support the establishment and ongoing work of Town Teams, ensuring development and delivery on the Town Centre First Plans. They will be a vital link between the Town Teams and the expertise within the local authority and other organisations, and facilitate the Town Teams in accessing funding.

Measure 56	**Engage the Approved Housing Bodies with responsibility for housing for older people to develop accommodation in town centres more suited for those with reduced mobility.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
56.1	Develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) Decision Support Tool for use by the Department, local authorities, approved housing bodies and developers which would score available sites on their appropriateness for housing developments for older people in line with Action 2.3 and Action 5.9 set out in "Housing Options for Our Ageing Population", published in 2019.	Delayed
Update: The business case for the GIS Decision Support Tool has been approved. The Project Plan envisages the work being completed in the first half of 2022.		

Measure 57	**Expand the Town and Village Renewal Scheme as an enabler to bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces and for residential occupancy.**
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD	
Update: The 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme included a new focus on prioritising projects that bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces and/or for residential occupancy. The scheme also expanded the upper grant limit to €500,000 to allow additional projects of scale.	

Measure 58	**Encourage greater use of the Buy and Renew Scheme and the Repair and Lease Scheme to combat vacancy and dereliction.**
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH	
Update: Action 20.8 in "*Housing for All*" commits to supporting local authorities to engage in targeted acquisitions of vacant and under-utilised properties under the Buy and Renew element of the social housing programme to support town and village renewal. In this regard, the Buy and Renew Scheme continues to support local authorities to tackle the twin aims of addressing dereliction in our cities, towns and villages while, in parallel, delivering much needed social housing, by providing capital funding acquire and remediate vacant properties and make them available for social housing use. Good progress has been made to date by local authorities in acquiring and renewing vacant properties across towns and urban areas. However tackling complex and challenging town centre renewal projects is a challenge for local authorities when the priority is to deliver new social homes at scale.	

Since the scheme was first introduced in 2016/7 c.700 properties have been purchased in this regard, given the commitment in *Housing For All* it is expected that progress will be continue in this area, as local authorities close sales on properties identified and put in place arrangements for their remediation to make them suitable for social housing use.

Measure 59	**As part of Budget 2022, examine the scope to introduce new supports and incentives for the refurbishment of vacant properties to increase town centre living based on the report of the pilot Town Centre Living initiative.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD, DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
59.1	The scope to introduce new supports and incentives will be examined through the Town Centre Framework process with a view to a commitment being considered under Budget 2022.	Complete
Update: In connection with the Town Centre First Policy, new funding streams were provided for under Budget 2022 which focus on tackling vacancy and dereliction problems within towns. *Housing for All* contains a range of commitments focused on addressing vacancy and the efficient use of existing housing stock and enabling the Town Centre First Policy. These include introducing both the Croí Cónaithe Towns Scheme and a Compulsory Purchase Order scheme to enable vacant homes to be made available on the open market, and measures to ensure that vacant public buildings are reused for housing.		

Measure 60	**Review and extend the regulations which exempt certain vacant commercial premises, such as "over the shop" type spaces, from requiring planning permission for change of use for residential purposes in accordance with housing activation and Town Centre First policies.**
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH	
Update: Revised regulations will be submitted to the Oireachtas for approval in February 2022 and will provide an immediate and seamless continuance of the existing exemption regulations which remain in force until 25 February 2022.	

Measure 62	**Identify potential State owned properties in rural towns and villages which can be used for community purposes.**	
Lead Delivery Body: OPW		
2021 Actions		**Status**
62.1	Identification of vacant properties in the ownership of the OPW that local authorities might wish to consider for future community use.	Complete

Update: In May 2021, the OPW wrote to 12 local authorities advising them of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme funding that is available from DRCD. This arose from engagement between officials from the OPW and DRCD in relation to this opportunity to renew some of the State's vacant stock and improve the landscape in towns and villages around the country.

The OPW offered the relevant local authorities an option to lease or purchase 24 of the 37 remaining former Garda station properties for community use, with a view to them applying to DRCD to avail of the funding necessary to refurbish the properties.

Heads of Terms have been agreed with local authorities on five of these properties where the local authority deemed they were suitable and expressed an interest. Leases are currently being drafted through the Office of the Chief State Solicitor.

Measure 65	**Support the take-up of Irish Water's Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020-2024, which will provide water and waste water growth capacity in smaller settlements that would otherwise not be provided for in Irish Water's capital investment plan.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
65.1	Irish Water will announce its initial selection of projects to advance to detailed design and project costings.	Complete

Update: 36 wastewater treatment plants have been selected for upgrade as part of the Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme. This forms part of Irish Water's commitment to supporting growth and development in local towns and villages throughout the country, while protecting the environment and safeguarding water supplies.

Irish Water announced these projects in September 2021 to enable local authorities to make plans on housing and development into the short and medium term supporting their regional and local development plans.

Measure 66	**Review the situation in relation to water services for towns and villages that are not currently on the Irish Water network.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
66.1	Prepare report on waste water requirements in villages and similar settlements that do not have public waste water infrastructure.	Delayed
Update: The completion of the report is a high priority and is expected to be finalised in Q1 2022.		

Measure 67	**Bring forward proposals for the development of a Policy on the Night Time Economy which will support the revitalisation of our rural towns, as well as our larger urban centres and cities, in the post-COVID recovery.**
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM	
Update: The Night-Time Economy Taskforce was established in July 2020 and sees a range of departments, agencies and groups working together to promote and develop a vibrant and sustainable night-time culture and economy. The report of the Taskforce was published in September 2021 and contained 36 practical recommendations in the area of regulation, licensing, planning, transport, safety and increasing the diversity of activities as part of the night-time offering. A robust implementation structure is currently being established to ensure that the recommendations are implemented in full and also, importantly, that the document remains current and that new ideas and new developments are included as the work progresses.	

Enhancing Participation, Leadership and Resilience in Rural Communities

Measure 69	**Refine and build on a range of programmes to support communities, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and charities to build their resilience and enhance their impact in the aftermath of COVID-19.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
69.1	Emergency funding of €10 million will be provided to community and voluntary organisations, social enterprises and charities through the 2021 COVID-19 Stability Fund, enabling these organisations to continue to provide critical front-line services in the face of reduced fundraising and trading opportunities resulting from COVID-19 restrictions.	Complete
Update: The COVID-19 Stability Fund 2021 was launched in May, and was targeted at organisations which deliver critical services to vulnerable people within their community but which faced closure or a loss of service due to the impact of the pandemic. Some 267 organisations were supported under the 2021 Stability Fund, with allocations published on gov.ie. Separately, the COVID-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme was successfully rolled out in early 2021. This is providing training and mentoring opportunities for social enterprises to adjust, diversify and adapt to the impact of COVID.		
69.2	Conduct a review of the Scheme to Support National Organisations that will put forward recommendations for consideration in development of the next iteration of the programme in 2022.	Complete
Update: A review of the Scheme to Support National Organisations was completed in Q3 2021. Further to the review recommendations, the design of a new scheme was approved for the period 2022-2025. The new Scheme will see an additional annual funding allocation of €800,000, bringing the overall allocation to in excess of €20.5 million over the lifetime of the Scheme. Further details on the new Scheme were published on 16 December and can be accessed via the Pobal website. The application portal is scheduled to open in February 2022.		

Measure 70	**Implement the National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025, which will support both volunteers and community-based organisations in rural areas and nationwide**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
70.1	Establish an Implementation Group and relevant Subgroups with representation from key Government Departments, State Agencies and Sectoral Stakeholders to oversee, monitor and measure progress in delivery of the Strategy.	Complete
Update: The Implementation Group for the National Volunteering Strategy was established in March 2021 and has met three times. Subgroups were established in April 2021 with a focus to oversee, advise and monitor the overall implementation of the Strategy. They assist in identifying key priority actions for implementation and advise on potential strategies for implementing those actions.		

Measure 71	**Establish a permanent volunteer reserve in local areas which can be called on by community and voluntary organisations and local authorities as required.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
71.1	Roll-out of Phase One of the Community Volunteers Programme, providing a service in 10 counties to respond to local needs beyond emergencies, such as festivals.	Complete

Update: The roll-out of phase one of the Community Volunteers was launched in September 2021. It is a Government-led, nationally-formulated initiative for the whole of Ireland which will be adapted to suit local needs and build resilience in our communities.

It offers a new way to bridge the gap between communities that need support and the people who want to help. It gives people the opportunity to get involved in local events and festivals while also supporting more urgent needs that arise unexpectedly, like the response to COVID-19. The pilot project is initially running in the following counties: Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Louth and Meath. It will roll out on a phased basis with 10 more counties joining in 2022.

There have been four events since the launch in 2021, they include:

- Halloween Family Fun Day in South Dublin
- Town Clean Up in Fingal
- Letterkenny Christmas Lights Switch On in Donegal
- Together for Christmas in Dublin City.

Measure 72	**Hold a regular series of Rural Ideas Fora to engage with rural dwellers to enable them to input on an ongoing basis to issues which impact on them and their communities, and to encourage their ongoing contribution to national rural policy innovation.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
72.1	Three Rural Ideas Fora events will be held on themes such as Climate, Sustainability and Just Transition, Revitalising Town and Villages, and Digital Connectivity and the Future of Work in rural Ireland.	Complete

Update: A series of three Rural Ideas Fora was held in Q4 2021:

Forum 1: Remote Working – An Opportunity for Rural Ireland (18 October)
Forum 2: Transitioning to a Climate Neutral Society (27 October)
Forum 3: Revitalising Towns and Villages (10 November)

The events were held virtually, each comprising a presentation, panel discussion, breakout session and plenary discussion. Approximately 280 people participated across the three events; recordings and supporting material are available to view on a dedicated page on the DRCD website.

Measure 73	**Establish an annual Rural Youth Assembly to allow young people living in rural Ireland to make an on-going contribution to identifying and influencing policy issues that impact on them and their future.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
73.1	Hold inaugural national Rural Youth Assembly event, to be developed in conjunction with Comhairle na nÓg and DCEDIY.	Complete

Update: The first Rural Youth Assembly took place on 16 November 2021, in a virtual setting, in partnership with Comhairle na nÓg and DCEDIY. Approximately 35 young people from rural areas, aged between 12-18 years, discussed issues of importance to them. These included the challenges and opportunities associated with living, studying and socialising in rural Ireland.

The Rural Youth Assembly will continue as part of the National Youth Assembly series from 2022.

Measure 74	**Build capacity for community development through provision of mentoring/training for community development leaders, with a particular focus on young people between the ages of 18 and 25.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
74.1	An assessment of training needs in the Community and Voluntary sector is underway as part of the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities Strategy. Phase 1 of this assessment, which involves the Local Community Development Committees in preparation for Local Economic Community Planning process, began in December 2020, and an initial report will be provided. This will be followed by similar assessments for Voluntary Boards and then smaller Community and Voluntary groups. The resulting reports will provide recommendations on how to address identified skills gaps.	Complete

Update: Project One, on the training needs of LCDC members, is completed and the report has been agreed by the Cross-Sectoral Group tasked with strategy oversight and implementation. DRCD are currently considering the report, with discussions now moving to how to begin to implement the recommendations of the report.

In addition, Project Two, on the training needs of voluntary boards of mid-sized non-profits, is underway. The desk review has been completed and current discussions are centering on the targeting respondents and survey finalisation. Project Two will be completed in early 2022, recognising a need to incorporate into the desk review and survey design updated research which reflects COVID-19 experiences, and also to explore the potential for collaboration with the Charities Regulatory Authority on the project.

Project Three, on the training needs of smaller community and voluntary organisations, will also be completed in 2022**.**

Measure 75	**Provide additional supports to assist community and voluntary groups to develop projects and access available funds – including by streamlining of grant applications.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
75.1	A new CLÁR Innovation Measure will be targeted at piloting new ideas which address specific challenges faced by communities in rural CLÁR areas.	Complete

Update: Funding for 18 projects to the value of €707,657 under the CLÁR 2021 Innovation Measure were announced on 8 November 2021.

A wide range of innovative projects across CLÁR areas were approved, including:

- SMARTlab Skelligs Living Iveragh, Co Kerry: To develop a Research and Development Innovation Centre of Excellence focused on STEAM, Design Thinking, Leadership and Youth-led Innovation - €50,000
- Cork County Council, Co Cork: Drone technology to assess areas in the event of a natural disaster, such as a flood, where the area can be hazardous to access - €21,355
- Comhairle Ceantar na nOileán Teo, Co Galway: establishment of Ireland's first Gaeltacht Retrofit Co-op - €50,000

Measure 77	**Implement a €70 million Transitional LEADER Programme for community-led rural development for the period 2021-2022, and develop and deliver a new LEADER programme to commence in 2023, in line with the next EU funding framework.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
77.1	Launch of Transitional Programme which was opened to applications from April 2021.	Complete
Update: The Transitional LEADER Programme commenced on 1 April 2021 with a total budget of €70m for period 2021 and 2022. Some 455 projects have been approved funding under the Transitional LEADER programme since it commenced.		
77.2	Engage with stakeholders on the next LEADER Programme and draft LEADER intervention.	Ongoing
Update: DRCD and DAFM continued to engage with stakeholders during 2021 in relation to the development of the new LEADER programme and 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plan.		

Measure 78	**Deliver the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) to the end of 2022, and develop a new SICAP programme to commence in 2023, following a review and consultation with stakeholders.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
78.1	Continue delivery of SICAP in 2021, resulting in funding of €39 million being used to assist over 2,200 community groups and over 23,000 individuals.	Complete
Update: SICAP has received a one-year extension and will now run until 2023. A new iteration of SICAP will commence in 2024 following a review and consultation with stakeholders. SICAP funding of €39 million was delivered in 2021 and has supported more than 2,300 community groups and 22,700 individuals. (Final figures for 2021 will be available in Q1 2022).		

Measure 79	**Increase the number of places on the Rural Social Scheme, TÚS and Community Employment Scheme to support rural communities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DSP		
2021 Actions		**Status**
79.1	Identify the provincial allocation of the 3,000 additional places on TÚS and Community Employment Scheme announced as part of the July Jobs Stimulus.	Complete
Update: Existing TÚS and Community Employment schemes submitted applications for additional quality placements following a call for expressions of interest. More than 2,600 placement opportunities have been allocated across all counties to date and are available to the long-term unemployed and those furthest removed from the labour market. DSP will continue to progress the allocation of additional placement opportunities in 2022.		
79.2	Continue to monitor the Rural Social Scheme to establish if the demand for places exceeds the number of places available.	Ongoing
Update: The Rural Social Scheme is monitored on a continuous basis in terms of scheme vacancies and demand. As at the end of 2021 there were 374 places available to new entrants on the scheme.		

Measure 80	**Support the development of social innovation as a means of addressing pressing social challenges.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
80.1	Support innovative approaches to addressing social challenges through support for organisations such as Young Social Innovators and Rethink Ireland.	Ongoing
Update: Young Social Innovators (YSI) and Rethink Ireland continue to be supported and grant-aided by DRCD**.** YSI were awarded is €150,966 under the Scheme to Strengthen and Support Volunteering for 2021. This is in addition to a previous allocation to YSI of €222,585 under the current iteration of the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) 2019-2022. Match funding to the value of €5.5 million was allocated to Rethink Ireland in 2021 under the Dormant Accounts Action Plan. Through the support of philanthropic donors and the Dormant Accounts Fund, Rethink Ireland have launched over thirty funds which address social issues, including Tech For Good, Community Resilience and Sustainability, Social Enterprise Development, Access to Education, Health, Mental Health, and Ability to Work (for people with disabilities).		

Among the funds launched this year was the Rural Recovery Fund 2021, supporting rural communities to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to build resilience for future challenges. Examples of other funds include the Glas Community Fund 2021, focused on building greener, sustainable communities in Ireland through social innovation, and the Ignite Midwest Fund 2021, created to specifically support organisations in the counties of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary working to tackle poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. More information on the projects supported under these funds can be found on **https://rethinkireland.ie/**		
80.2	Contribute to the establishment of Ireland's first National Social Innovation Competency Centre.	Complete
Update: DRCD is supporting the development of Ireland's first National Social Innovation Competence Centre, which is being funded by the European Union and led by a consortium involving Rethink Ireland and Genio. DRCD is also a member of the Steering Group of the National Competence Centre.		

Measure 81	**Provide investment for multi-purpose spaces in the community (e.g. community centres, libraries, and sports clubs) for a variety of activities, including leisure, community, cultural and services provision.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
81.1	The 2021 Community Enhancement Programme will provide funding of €4.5 million small grants to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas.	Complete
Update: The 2021 Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) launched in May 2021 with funding of €4.5m and provided small grants to voluntary or community groups. That Programme approved grant support to more than 2,100 organisations or groups. More recently, another round of funding, the €9m Community Activities Fund, was launched under the CEP to support groups impacted by COVID-19. This is currently being administered in each local authority area.		
81.2	The Small Scale Capital Works programme will support refurbishments in public libraries and the continued rollout of the My Open Library service.	Ongoing
Update: In 2020 DRCD provided €3 million in funding to support a Public Library Small Scale Capital Works Programme with €100,000 being allocated to each of the 30 library authorities. The department's funding was matched by library authorities to the value of approximately €1.1 million – giving a total investment of almost €4.1 million. By the end of 2021, 15 library authorities had fully completed their proposed projects and a further 12 have made significant progress. The remaining three local authorities are due to commence work in 2022. Funding of €105,896 was approved in 2021 for the upgrade and enhancement of existing libraries providing the My Open Library service and a further €221,260 was approved for new installations. In March 2020, the My Open Library service was available in 15		

branches prior to its suspension due to COVID-19 restrictions. The service is currently ready to open in 34 branches and it is expected to be available in 55 branches by the end of 2022.		
81.3	The CLÁR 2021 programme will include supports for Outdoor Community Recreation Facilities and a new measure to support Community Gardens and Allotments.	Complete
Update: Funding of over €2.3m for 52 Outdoor Community Recreation Facilities (Measure 2 CLÁR 2021) was announced on 30 August 2021 and €810,573 for Community Gardens and Allotments (Measure 3a) was announced on 8 September 2021.		
81.4	Support the development of sporting facilities through the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme. (DTCAGSM)	Ongoing
Update: The 2020 round of the SCEP, which closed for applications in March 2021, saw more than 3,100 applications submitted seeking over €200m in funding. This is the highest number of applications ever received. Approximately 1,000 of the submitted applications were for 'equipment-only' projects. These applications were assessed first and grants with a total value of €16.6m were announced in August 2021. Assessment of remaining applications is continuing, with allocations expected to be finalised early in 2022.		

Measure 82	**Further enhance the Public Participation Network and Local Community Development Committee structures to ensure that local communities are fully involved in, and contribute to, decisions affecting their local areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
82.1	Scoping by Pobal of the training needs of LCDC members, with recommendations on the development of a training and support package for LCDC Chief Officers, LCDC members and local authority staff which may include an LCDC membership manual and relevant guidelines.	Complete
Update: The scoping of the training needs of LCDC members is completed and the report has been agreed by the Cross-Sectoral Group tasked with strategy oversight and implementation. Discussions are now underway on the process of implementation of the recommendations of the report.		
82.2	Complete structural review of Public Participation Networks.	Delayed
Update: Progress is ongoing with an expected completion date in early Q1 2022.		
82.3	Commence development of a communications campaign to raise public awareness of the functions and work of PPNs.	Complete

Update: The development of this campaign has begun. A request for tender has been drafted and will be published in Q1 2022.		
82.4	Continue roll-out of national training programme for PPNs/Stakeholders so that all PPNs have participated in at least one cohort of training programme.	Complete
Update: The third of five regional training sessions has finished. The final two sessions are due to take place in January and April 2022. All PPNs have now participated in at least one training session.		

Measure 83	**Work in consultation with local community and voluntary groups and with local decision-making structures to help welcome and integrate newcomers to rural towns and villages and to support cohesion more broadly.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DCEDIY		
2021 Actions		**Status**
83.1	Comhairle na nÓg across the 31 local authorities are available for consultation on welcoming and integrating young newcomers to rural towns and villages and on supporting cohesion. Individual Comhairlí at local levels have developed specific actions on a voluntary basis in relation to welcoming migrants and other groups.	Ongoing
Update: Kildare, Meath, Tipperary and Roscommon Comhairlí have completed or initiated actions to welcome migrants, promote diversity and support cohesion. Other Comhairlí have committed to developing actions to support the participation of minority young people, including migrants, in Comhairle na nÓg.		

Measure 84	**Implement Culture and Creative Strategies in each local authority area, including "Culture Days", to showcase local cultural heritage.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
84.1	The Culture and Creativity Strategies in all 31 local authorities are currently being funded and implemented to support wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development of the creative sector.	Ongoing
Update: The Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022 is collaborating with all 31 local authorities to substantially enhance their reach through an investment that supports the		

implementation of Culture and Creativity Strategies with an allocation in 2021 of €6.6 million.

These strategies are aligned with the national ambition of the Creative Ireland Programme, but also unique to each local authority, reflecting the breadth of cultural and creative work being undertaken in each area, the vision and values of each local authority and their strategic priorities.

Close collaboration with local government has also been central to the Creative Ireland Programme's implementation of its flagship initiative, Cruinniú na nÓg, the national day of free creativity for children and young people. The investment in 2021 included €789,875 that delivered 637 projects under Cruinniú na nÓg, employing 900 creatives from the sector.

Measure 85	**Empower local communities and enhance community health and wellbeing by supporting heritage, arts, cultural activities and other activities to tackle social issues such as cohesion, rural isolation and mental health.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
85.1	In addition to the Culture and Creativity Strategies (Action 84.1), the Creative Ireland Programme will continue to provide support to local communities to tackle social issues, e.g. Creativity in Older Age Scheme to tackle social isolation amongst older people during COVID.	Ongoing

Update: In addition to the investment on wellbeing and social cohesion outlined in Action 84.1, the Creative Ireland Programme supported specific creative initiatives in 2021 including positive ageing, mental wellbeing, disability, diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives. The Creativity in Older Age Scheme to tackle social isolation amongst older people during COVID was continued in 2021.

In 2021, 81 projects were supported by Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYP) which focused on providing greater opportunities for the previously less heard or marginalised young people to engage with and experience the joy of creative activities.

The Programme also supported numerous initiatives to promote cultural inclusion and diversity.

- Projects such as Songs from Direct Provision in South County Dublin, amongst others, provided creative opportunities for people living in Direct Provision.
- The project Crown – Hair & Identity in Traveller Culture with Mayo County Council is an example from a number of projects that supported Traveller and Roma inclusion.
- Le Chéile – the Open Youth Orchestra of Ireland – and the first open national youth orchestra in the world – is a cross-border ensemble made up exclusively of musicians with disabilities which was developed by the Royal Irish Academy of Music with Creative Ireland funding.
- The Programme also works with partners to ensure that LGBTI+ adults and young people are visible, valued and included. This year saw a Virtual LGBT+ Awareness & Inclusion Youth Festival supported as part of Cruinniú na nÓg.

Collaboration with national organisations in the arts, culture, creative sectors has been central to the delivery of programmes, of which the above are just samples. Locally developed and community-led initiatives have been delivered directly into local healthcare facilities, schools, and communities across Ireland.

Measure 86	**Introduce a TidyTowns Special Award for the involvement of young people (aged 16-25 years) in TidyTowns projects**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
86.1	This award will be introduced for the 2021 SuperValu TidyTowns Competition.	Complete
Update: The Young Persons in TidyTowns Award, with a prize fund of €5,000 sponsored by DRCD, was introduced for the 2021 SuperValu TidyTowns competition and elicited a very encouraging response. At a ceremony on 12 November, Glaslough in Co Monaghan, Wicklow town, Cobh in Co Cork and Clohamon in Co Wexford were named as the four regional winners, with Glaslough taking the national title of the new award.		

Measure 88	**Undertake research to inform the particular needs of women, girls, LGBTI+, Travellers, Roma, migrants and those of migrant origin living in rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DCEDIY		
2021 Actions		**Status**
88.1	Publication of LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and across Europe: A two-phased Landscape and Research Gap Analysis in May 2021. Policy seminars, with stakeholders and policy-makers, will inform a LGBTI+ research needs analysis, based on the research gaps identified.	Complete
Update: This report was published on schedule in May 2021. Research needs will be identified over 2022.		

Enhancing Public Services in Rural Areas

Measure 89	**Increase the residential occupancy of rural towns and villages while enabling the Irish countryside to continue to be a lived-in landscape by adopting a balanced approach to planning, in line with relevant national planning policy and guidelines, while avoiding unsustainable ribbon and over-spill development from urban areas.**
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH	
Update: Progress is ongoing through the implementation of the National Planning Framework and the current review of all city and county development plans being undertaken by the majority of the 31 local authorities. This work will be further supplemented through the updated Section 28 Rural Housing Guidelines (Measure 90).	

Measure 90	**Update the Rural Housing Guidelines for planning authorities, to address rural housing in a broader rural development and settlement context.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
90.1	Prepare updated Rural Housing Planning Guidelines that will continue to allow for the development of homes in rural areas while also highlighting the need to manage certain areas around cities and towns in order to avoid over-development of those areas.	Delayed
Update: Updated statutory Section 28 guidelines on rural housing are currently being drafted by DHLGH to ensure consistency with new requirements and legislation at a national and EU level. Following the completion of screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment as well as screening for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment, the new draft guidelines will be issued in Q2 2022.		

Measure 91a	**Provide improved rural public transport services and pilot new transport initiatives for people of all ages and abilities living in rural areas, through:** **a) Developing and implementing a Sustainable Rural Mobility Plan to ensure all settlements over a certain size in terms of population have a service connecting them to the national public transport system.**

Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport, National Transport Authority

2021 Actions		**Status**
91a.1	In Q4 2020, the NTA commenced consultations on its "Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan". This stakeholder engagement which commenced with Local and Regional Authorities is being followed by a wider stakeholder engagement during Q2/Q3 2021. A public consultation is planned to commence in Q3/Q4 2021.	Complete

Update: The Connecting Ireland public consultation was launched on 29 October 2021 and ran until 10 December. Stakeholders and citizens were urged to review the NTA's proposals for their area and give their feedback to the NTA to guide the implementation of Connecting Ireland. Further information on Connecting Ireland can be found at https://www.nationaltransport.ie/connecting-ireland/.

Connecting Ireland proposes to specifically expand the public transport network in rural areas and to increase service levels. Under Connecting Ireland, the NTA is proposing an overall increase of approximately 25% in rural bus services as part of the five-year Connecting Ireland plan. Hundreds of rural villages and areas will for the first time be served by a viable public transport link.

Measure 91b	**b) Delivering expanded Local Link services and further integrating Local Link services with other existing public transport services through the roll out of the NTA Connecting Ireland Plan.**

Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport, National Transport Authority

2021 Actions		**Status**
91b.1	Announcement of additional services for Dingle Daingean Uí Chúis and Surrounding Areas.	Complete

Update: Following the 2020 enhancements to transport services across the Dingle peninsula, in April 2021 TFI Local Link further improved frequencies on routes 277 (Dingle – Ventry – Dunquin) and R73 (Dingle – Ballydavid). The enhancements to services on the Dingle peninsula also included the addition of some demand responsive trips including improvements to Route 74 Dingle/Annascaul. The enhanced TFI Local Link timetable also saw the introduction of two new low floored vehicles to the routes.

New TFI Local Link services in Leitrim
In June 2021, the phased roll-out of the enhanced Local Link network for Co Leitrim commenced as part of a pilot scheme between NTA/Local Link and the HSE. Developed in close collaboration with the HSE, the revised network is designed to meet the needs of

mainstream public transport users as well as the transport needs of passengers with disabilities, and those accessing (non-emergency) health care services in the county.

The revised and enhanced TFI Local Link network for] Leitrim will increase connectivity for towns and villages across Leitrim and improve integration with other public transport services on the national network. All services will be operated using accessible vehicles, a significant proportion of which are low-floor buses.

Enhanced TFI Local Link services in Laois-Offaly and Tipperary
During Q3 2021 TFI Local Link Laois-Offaly introduced the new 858 service connecting Portlaoise to Thurles and TFI Local Link Tipperary introduced an enhanced 828 service between Cashel and Portlaoise. These enhanced services provide greater connectivity and flexibility than ever before for the communities in Urlingford, Johnstown, Cullahill, Durrow and Abbeyleix. The interconnectivity of the routes provides a stronger link to national bus and rail networks in Portlaoise, Thurles and Cashel.

During Q4 2021 TFI Local Link Tipperary introduced revised timetables for the RRS Routes 855 Tipperary Town to Cashel via Cahir and Limerick Junction and for Route 896 Ballingarry to Thurles via Killenaule. These new timetables see an additional daily return trip for both services.

Measure 91d	**d) Developing and trialling a grant-aided Community Transport Service Scheme through Local Link to support otherwise unsustainable community services.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport, National Transport Authority		
2021 Actions		**Status**
91d.1	Complete existing pilot scheme (extended due to COVID). A review will then take place in 2022.	Complete

Update: The pilot of the six community car schemes, which was extended from 2020 to the end of 2021, will be reviewed by the NTA during Q1 2022.

Six pilot community car schemes were approved for 2020 in Cork, Kerry (two), Offaly, Longford and Mayo. COVID-19 impacts meant only one car was introduced in Kerry while the remaining five primarily operated as ‘collect and delivery’ services, delivering grocery shopping, prescriptions and other essential items to members of the community.

Measure 92	**Build on the work already undertaken to ensure that public transport services in rural and regional areas are accessible to persons with disabilities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport, National Transport Authority		
2021 Actions		**Status**
92.1	The NTA has set a target of having wheelchair accessible bus stops (one stop in each direction) in 43 towns with a population	Ongoing

	over 5,000. This would mean 50% of main towns would have a wheelchair accessible bus stop (one in each direction). Engagement with local authorities and Bus Éireann is ongoing.	
Update: A total of 23 bus stops are currently in construction phase. Three are in the design phase. Discussions are ongoing between the NTA and other local authorities on several more locations.		
92.2	Purchase of additional low floor buses, for Public Service Obligation (PSO) regional commuter routes up to 50km, to enable wheelchair users to board with normal ramp access and have a dedicated wheelchair space.	Ongoing
Update: Further single-deck regional commuter vehicles (coaches) have been purchased during 2021, with a dedicated wheelchair space. Twenty new vehicles of this type were added to Bus Éireann's PSO fleet in late 2021. New double-deck regional commuter vehicles (coaches) have also been purchased during 2021; the first 53 of these were added to Bus Éireann's PSO fleet in the second half of 2021.		
92.3	The NTA will continue to manage the upgrading of existing and older infrastructure and facilities, such as Victorian-era rail infrastructure.	Ongoing
Update: <u>Train stations</u> The construction of footbridges and lifts were completed in Carlow, Ennis and Edgeworthstown in 2021. Works on accessibility upgrades at Ennis including platform remodelling has recently started. <u>Bus Station Bus Bays</u> Accessible bus bays have been constructed at Rosslare, Killarney and Tralee and Waterford Bus Stations. Works providing wheelchair accessible bays and external accessibility improvements are completed in Tramore and are still proceeding at Ballina and Athlone Stations. Other stations such as Busáras, Dundalk, Parnell Place, Macroom, Ennis, Clonmel, Kilkenny, Mullingar and Longford are still being designed and some need planning applications.		
92.4	Irish Rail is rolling out Customer Service Officers (CSOs) on all Inter-city routes which will eliminate the advance notice requirement on such services. COVID delayed the hiring of the full complement of 120 new CSOs but it will continue during 2021, in line with public health advice.	Ongoing
Update: 93 Customer Service Agents have been redeployed or hired to be on the Intercity routes to assist passengers, with hiring continuing to meet the target of 120. This will allow a representative from Irish Rail to be on every Intercity train to assist passengers.		

Measure 93	**Work with An Post to identify the scope to channel additional services through the post office network.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
93.1	Subgroup on offline service to report to Government on deliberations regarding one-stop-shop approach for Government services.	Delayed
Update: The work of the interdepartmental group is at an advanced stage and the report will be submitted to Government in Q1 2022.		

Measure 94	**Explore the potential to develop a pilot scheme to support the use of rural pubs as community spaces and hubs for local services.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
94.1	Work to begin on the scoping and approval to begin operation of a pilot programme for the use of rural pubs as community spaces.	Complete
Update: Funding has been approved for a pilot scheme that would see rural pubs utilized as community spaces following engagement with the Vintners Federation of Ireland. An announcement of participating locations will follow in early 2022.		

Measure 95	**Undertake research on early learning and care, and school-age childcare needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities, and develop recommendations for future action.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DCEDIY		
2021 Actions		**Status**
95.1	Commission research on the needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities.	Complete
Update: This research is underway in partnership with DRCD and DETE, and is expected to be completed in Autumn 2022. The project will comprise two complementary phases; a phone poll of 500 households, and a qualitative focus group study. IPSOS MRBI were		

commissioned to undertake the poll, with fieldwork planned to commence in Q1 2022. The qualitative study will be commissioned later in Q1 2022. The study was awarded funding under Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) 2021 Research Fund.

Measure 98	**Introduce a new Policing and Community Safety Bill to redefine the functions of An Garda Síochána to include community safety.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Justice		
2021 Actions		**Status**
98.1	Publication of the General Scheme for the Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill.	Complete
Update: The General Scheme of the Bill was approved and published by Government on 27 April 2021 and referred for priority drafting and for pre-legislative scrutiny.		

Measure 99	**Roll out a Local Community Safety Partnership Pilot in a rural location.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Justice		
2021 Actions		**Status**
99.1	Establish Local Community Safety Partnership Pilot in Waterford City and County as the intermediate population density pilot. Local Community Safety Partnership Pilot in Longford County as the low population density pilot.	Complete
Update: Local Community Safety Partnership Pilots were established in both Waterford City and County and Longford by Q3 2021 and are currently in operation. These pilots will last 24 months and will be monitored and evaluated throughout that period.		

Measure 100	**Review and enhance the effectiveness and availability of community-based alert and property-marking schemes in partnership with rural stakeholders.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Justice		
2021 Actions		**Status**
100.1	These reviews will take place on a phased basis under the aegis of the Rural Safety Forum. The first element – a review of options for a retail alert scheme – has commenced and will be completed in Q3.	Complete
Update: The first element – the review of Belfast retail alert model and its possible application in this jurisdiction – has been examined by a subgroup of the Rural Safety Forum. Data protection and constitutional issues arising are now being considered by An Garda Síochána (AGS) with a view to reporting to the Rural Safety Forum at an early date. While the precise model adopted by the PSNI does not seem to be capable of being replicated in this jurisdiction, it is expected that a formal method of enhancing liaison between the retail sector and AGS can be developed. Two further reviews – on property marking and community alert schemes – will be progressed by D/Justice in 2022.		

Measure 101	**Provide greater clarity for local authorities and local communities, through a revised legislative framework, on how local CCTV schemes can be established while enhancing community safety and data protection safeguards.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Justice		
2021 Actions		**Status**
101.1	Publication of the general scheme of amending legislation. There will also be a parallel review to address any remaining issues. Consultation with Local Authority interest via the LGMA has taken place and further discussions will be arranged as part of the additional review.	Complete
Update: The General Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Digital Recording) Bill was published on 27 April 2021. The Bill is currently being drafted as a priority by Parliamentary Counsel. It is expected the Bill will be published early in 2022. An external review of Community CCTV (a Programme for Government commitment) is planned to ensure that lessons are learned in relation to the current scheme.		

Measure 102	**Invest in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport		
2021 Actions		**Status**
102.1	Funding of €72.8m for 340 active travel projects in 19 local authorities was announced in March 2021. The funding will be allocated to the local authorities through the NTA.	Complete
Update: In March 2021, €72.8m was allocated by the NTA to local authorities under the first ever major Rural Active Travel Programme. The National Transport Authority worked with the 19 local authorities to identify relevant projects for delivery under this programme and works are now ongoing.		

Measure 103	**Ensure that the Local Improvement Scheme is funded into the future.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
103.1	Deliver €10.5 million of funding for upgrade and maintenance of non-public rural roads and laneways through the Local Improvement Scheme in 2021.	Complete
Update: An allocation of €10.5 million was made in May 2021 representing a 5% increase on the 2020 allocation. A further €10.5 million was allocated in July, thereby doubling the initial allocation for 2021. This brings the total allocated since the scheme was reintroduced in 2017 to €80 million. The allocation for the scheme will rise to €11 million for 2022. Details with regard to scheme outline and county allocations will issue to local authorities in the new year when the scheme is formally launched.		

Measure 104	Adopt a whole-of-Government approach to the protection and promotion of the Irish language, in implementing the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and Action Plan, and enacting the Official Language Amendment Bill.	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
104.1	The second annual progress report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Irish Language will be published.	Complete
Update: This second report, published in October 2021, covers the 18-month period from 1 July 2019 to 31 December 2020 and reports on 180 actions to be completed by approximately 60 stakeholders over the course of the five-year plan. Significant progress has been reported regarding the implementation of actions in the plan. The report is available on https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/1418a-action-plan-2018-2022/		

Measure 105	Approve and implement an Irish language plan for each of the 26 Gaeltacht districts to strengthen Irish language usage by individuals, community, and businesses in these areas.	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
105.1	Approve the final 6 language plans for language planning areas.	Delayed
Update: 25 of the 26 language plans for Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas have been approved to date. Of these, five plans have been approved in 2021 and the final plan has been submitted to the Department for analysis.		

Measure 106	Develop Gaeltacht Service Towns situated in or adjacent to Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas which will play a significant role in providing public services, recreational, social and commercial facilities for those areas.	
Lead Delivery Body: DTCAGSM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
106.1	Approve six language plans for Gaeltacht Service Towns.	Delayed
Update: Two language plans relating to Gaeltacht Service Towns were approved under the language planning process in 2021. There is a further plan currently being analysed by DTCAGSM and awaiting approval. In total, four language plans for Gaeltacht Service Towns have been approved to date.		

Transitioning to a Climate Neutral Society

Measure 107	**Enact and implement the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill and set five-year carbon budgets to contribute to meeting Ireland's target of net zero emissions by 2050.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
107.1	Enact the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill.	Complete
Update: The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 was signed into law on 23 July 2021. A Commencement Order for its operation was signed by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications with effect from 7 September.		
107.2	Prepare recommendation on carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings for Government approval.	Delayed
Update: The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, establishes the framework for preparing carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. Before the end of February 2022, the carbon budget programme is to be finalised and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas for approval. Once the carbon budgets are approved, Government will set sectoral emissions ceilings determining how each sector of the economy will contribute to achieving the carbon budget.		
107.3	Adopt the first three five-year carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings.	Delayed
Update: The first three five-year carbon budgets will be adopted and take effect in the first half of 2022. Once the carbon budget programme is adopted, sectoral emissions ceilings, consistent with the economy wide targets, will be prepared for approval by Government. This is expected to take place in the first half of 2022.		

Measure 108	**Publish a new Climate Action Plan in 2021 and update on an annual basis.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
108.1	Finalise evaluation report from public consultation.	Complete
Update: The Climate Conversations report, published on 10 November at the launch of the National Dialogue on Climate Action, is available here.		
108.2	Publication of the 2021 Climate Action Plan.	Complete
Update: The Climate Action Plan 2021 was published on 4 November 2021. The plan will be updated and published on an annual basis, as provided for under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.		

Measure 109	**Develop new models of engagement with individuals, sectors, and regions on a structured dialogue basis so that the whole of society can contribute to the climate action process.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
109.1	Hold a national Stakeholder Engagement Forum to provide feedback from annual Climate Action Plan consultation, and discuss and showcase local engagement opportunities which will lead to mobilisation.	Delayed
Update: The first Climate Conversations Report was launched 10 November 2021. This captured the views of 3,800 members of the public, over 200 members from Public Participation Networks (PPNs) through workshops and meetings and the voices of more than 100 young people in the conversations supported by Comhairle na nÓg Network. It is an annual report. A National Stakeholders Forum and a Youth Climate Assembly are planned for Q1 2022, the latter of which will feed into the national forum. Both of these will become ongoing events taking place twice a year, with reports issued after each event.		
109.2	Conduct a national baseline study on Irish behaviours and attitudes around climate change awareness, engagement and activation of public.	Delayed
Update: The Environmental Protection Agency has completed the fieldwork on the Climate Change in the Irish Mind study and is progressing to the analysis phase. Stage 1 of this is complete and the outputs will be presented to all relevant departments and sectors.		

109.3	Establish an Interdepartmental Working Group to explore critical barriers and/or enablers that will support a new National Dialogue on Climate Action engagement model and annual Climate Action Plan consultations.	Delayed
Update: The establishment of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Engagement with Climate Action is a listed action in the Climate Action Plan and will be established in Q1 2022.		

Measure 110	**Enable community energy to play a role in reaching the target of generating at least 70% of electricity through renewables by 2030, through supports such as a Community Benefit fund and a community category within the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
110.1	Publish Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds.	Complete
Update: The Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds was published in July 2021. This handbook emphasis that communities must be fully involved in the decision-making process. Communities will shape the strategy to maximise the benefits of the funds for all members of the community. A particular focus of the funds is to support local initiatives that align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.		
110.2	Establish national register of Community Benefit Funds in Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS).	Complete
Update: The National Register of Community Benefit Funds (CBFs) in RESS is live with the first three projects having been set up on the public website. Over the coming year more RESS-1 projects will go live on the online map as their projects energise, register on the portal and begin paying into their respective CBFs. More information can be found here: https://www.seai.ie/community-energy/ress/map/		
110.3	Rollout of trusted intermediary services to support the development of community electricity projects.	Complete
Update: The first trusted intermediary is now in place supporting the RESS community projects as their first point of contact for queries. As the demand for trusted intermediary services grow additional resources can be put in place.		

Measure 111	Prioritise the development of microgeneration of renewable electricity, allowing people sell excess power back to the grid, through the establishment of a Microgeneration Support Scheme.	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
111.1	Launch of Microgeneration Support Scheme.	Delayed

Update: DECC held a public consultation on a Micro-generation Support Scheme (MSS) earlier this year. The consultation and summary report of submissions are available at gov.ie.

The pending introduction of a Clean Export Guarantee (CEG) tariff represents the first phase of a comprehensive enabling framework for micro-and small-scale generators in Ireland. This will allow them to receive payment from their electricity supplier for all excess renewable electricity exported to the grid which reflects the market value of the electricity.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) published a decision on an interim enabling framework for the CEG on 1 December 2021. This decision outlines the interim arrangements for the implementation of the CEG, including eligibility criteria and remuneration methodology. The CRU has decided that suppliers will set their individual CEG tariffs on a competitive market basis.

The CEG will become available upon the transposition of Article 21 of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) into Irish law and will be available to both new and existing micro- and small-scale generators who fulfil the eligibility criteria set out in the CRU decision.

The final design of the MSS received Government approval on 21 December 2021. This will see supports for new installations in the form of a capital grant for domestic and small non-domestic applicants, or a premium export tariff for larger non-domestic applicants. The final scheme design of the MSS will be published in early 2022 and the scheme will open on a phased basis.

Measure 112	Expand the Sustainable Energy Communities Network from 500 to 1,500 by 2030, to support local communities to be directly involved in energy projects.	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
112.1	Increase the number of Sustainable Energy Communities to 590 by end 2021 (i.e. an increase of 100 this year).	Complete

Update: There are now 600 Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) in place across the SEC Network.

Measure 113	**Launch further calls for projects to be supported from the Climate Action Fund.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
113.1	Launch further support from the Climate Action Fund through a community climate action programme.	Complete
Update: Through the Community Climate Action Programme, announced in November 2021, €60 million will be invested in community climate action projects and initiatives, as well as capacity building, over the next three years. This funding will be invested in two phases of €30 million, with the first phase involving two strands. Under Strand 1, €24 million is being provided to local authorities to support communities to build low carbon communities in a considered and structured way. Strand 2 involves the investment of €6 million to build community capacity in relation to climate action. Under this strand €5 million has been allocated to an open call for education, capacity building and learning by doing projects and €1 million has been allocated to Creative Climate Action.		

Measure 114a	**Continue to develop Ireland's approach to a Just Transition away from fossil fuels, including by:** **a) Preparing a Territorial Just Transition Plan for Ireland for the EU Just Transition Fund.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
114a.1	Preparation of report to support the development of the Territorial Just Transition Plan by consultants appointed by the European Commission (DG REFORM). This includes engagement with relevant stakeholders e.g. Government Departments and Agencies, the Midlands Regional Transition Team, the Just Transition Commissioner, local authorities, Regional Assemblies, Bord na Móna and the ESB, and the project Steering Committee.	Complete
Update: The reports to support the preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan as commissioned by the EC Structural Reform Support Programme have been completed. The appointed consultants engaged extensively with relevant stakeholders and the final reports were approved by DG REFORM in Q3 2021. DECC is using the deliverables to assist in preparing the territorial plan and programming.		

Measure 114b	**b) Commissioning additional research on Just Transition to consider future priorities and spatial and sectoral impacts.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
114b.1	Review recommendations contained in the reports of the Just Transition Commissioner and preparation of a Just Transition chapter in the 2021 Climate Action Plan.	Complete
Update: The Climate Action Plan 2021 has set out specific commitments on just transition, including key principles which the design and implementation of our climate action policies should follow. These commitments include Governmental actions in response to recommendations contained in the reports of the Just Transition Commissioner.		

Measure 114c	**c) Supporting projects under the National Just Transition Fund.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
114c.1	Finalise funding agreements with all successful projects through the Fund and ongoing engagement with successful projects.	Complete
Update: 52 National Just Transition Fund projects have entered into grant agreement with DECC and are delivering their projects. Details of all projects supported by the National Just Transition Fund can be found on: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed10d-just-transition-fund/. The department is working closely with the remaining applicants to finalise funding agreements.		

Measure 115	**Retrofit 500,000 homes and install 400,000 heat pumps across the country up to 2030, contributing to employment opportunities in rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
115.1	Develop and launch a new Community Activation Scheme.	Delayed

Update: DECC and SEAI are working to finalise the development of a scheme to enhance community activation with a view to its launch in early 2022.		
115.2	Publication of a National Retrofit Plan.	Complete
Update: A new National Residential Retrofit Plan was published on 4 November 2021 as part of the Climate Action Plan 2021. The Plan sets out measures designed to address barriers to retrofit in a number of key areas: driving demand and activity; financing and funding; and supply chain, skills and standards.		

Measure 116a	**Bring investment and job opportunities to coastal communities by developing the offshore renewable energy sector, including through:** **a) The finalisation of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
116a.1	Maritime Area Planning Bill to be approved by Government and enacted.	Complete
Update: The Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Bill completed passage through all stages of the Oireachtas on 17 December 2021. The Maritime Area Planning Act was enacted on 23 December 2021.		
Measure 116b	**b) The development of a new consenting regime for offshore energy.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
116b.1	Design of Maritime Area Consent (MAC) processes and guidance documents. MAC applications for first batch of offshore renewable energy projects will be submitted for assessment.	Delayed
Update: Consenting processes and corresponding guidance documents for industry are being prepared for public consultation in Q1 2022, following enactment of the Maritime Area Planning Bill. Applications for MACs will open in Q2 2022, followed by issuing of MACs in Q3, and ORESS 1 commencing in Q4.		
Measure 116c	**c) The development of an offshore transmission grid.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		

2021 Actions		Status
116c.1	Approval by Government of offshore grid policy framework.	Complete
Update: A new framework for Ireland's future offshore electricity transmission system was approved by Government in April 2021. The policy provides for a phased transition from the current decentralised offshore transmission system model to a centralised model over the course of this decade, to take place in line with the three scheduled offshore RESS auctions. The enduring centralised model, with transmission system assets to be planned, developed, owned, and operated by Ireland's existing electricity Transmission System Operator (TSO), EirGrid, has been identified as delivering maximum societal benefits.		
116c.2	Publication of offshore grid regulatory framework by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities.	Delayed
Update: Following on from the Government decision on an offshore grid policy framework, the regulatory policy for the first offshore renewable energy auction, ORESS 1, is on schedule for completion by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in Q2 2022. ORESS 1 is scheduled to commence in Q4 2022.		

Measure 116d	**d) Offshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme auctions.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
116d.1	Hold public consultation on draft terms and conditions for first Offshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme auction, ORESS-1, followed by approval by Government of final Terms and Conditions.	Complete
Update: Over 150 submissions were received by the ORESS 1 public consultation process. DECC plan to issue a formal response to these submission in Q1 2022, before seeking Government approval for final ORESS 1 Terms and Conditions in Q2 2022.		

Measure 117a	**Rehabilitate peatlands to contribute to reduced carbon emissions, carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity, including through:** **a) Funding investment of €108 million to repurpose 80,000 acres of bog in the Midlands as part of a major peatlands restoration plan.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DECC		
2021 Actions		**Status**
117a.1	19 rehabilitation plans for peatlands from Bord na Móna to be approved by the Regulator (NPWS).	Complete

Update: Work packages have been approved for all 19 bogs identified for rehabilitation in 2021 by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Scheme Regulator). Plans for the 2022 programme of works on a further 21 bogs in the Midlands region are being advanced. Rehabilitation measures were completed on nine bogs by the end of June 2021.		
117a.2	Rehabilitation works to commence on approved peatlands by Bord na Móna.	Complete
Update: Rehabilitation works has commenced on approved bog work packages for 2021. Rehabilitation equipment has been mobilised on 18 of these projects. Rehabilitation works are continuing through the winter 2021/22. Some of the measures such as the creation of the ponds/cells will be impacted by winter weather and ground conditions but many other measures such as blocking drains continue. The extent of the winter works will depend on the individual bog ground conditions. Monitoring and verification of the impact of the works is progressing, in particular for surface water monitoring. To date across counties Galway, Meath, Kildare, Westmeath, Offaly, Roscommon, Laois and Longford, 225 jobs have been assigned.		
117a.3	Complete six monthly report on progress.	Delayed
Update: As part of the robust governance and monitoring framework developed for the Scheme, Bord na Móna (Scheme Operator) is required to prepare and submit the following regular reports to both the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Scheme Regulator): - **Quarterly reports**: a progress report on the Scheme which is submitted within 30 days of the end of each Quarter of each year that the Scheme is in operation, covering all activities carried out in the preceding Quarter. - **Annual reports**: submitted within six months of the end of each year that the Scheme is in operation, the annual report will include data on the Greenhouse Gas and biodiversity indicators, the area restored under each Enhanced Rehabilitation Bog Plan, and the overall area restored in the year in question. On the basis of the quarterly and annual reports submitted by Bord na Móna, DECC compiles six-monthly reports that will be published on the departmental website. The first of these reports is in development and will be issued shortly.		
Measure 117b	**b) The national raised bog designated sites restoration programme to restore in the region of 25,000 hectares of raised bog.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
117b.1	Funding in 2020 enabled the commencement of peatland restoration measures on almost 1,900 hectares of raised bog on up to nine raised bog designated sites in the midlands region. With the funding provided in 2021, it is proposed to restore up to a further 2,500 hectares of protected raised bog.	Complete
Update: Peatland habitat restoration measures have been undertaken on a number of protected raised bogs Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) predominately in the midlands region within a project area of 2059ha in 2021.		

Restoration works are continuing on further sites with preparatory works, including habitat surveys and hydrological monitoring being undertaken along with consultation with stakeholders.

DHLGH has appointed Bord Na Móna to project manage and undertake the restoration works for this element of the NPWS programme as well as engaging local contractors to undertake the restoration works in certain sites across the raised bog SAC/NHA network.

Measure 118	**Develop a national policy on coastal erosion and flooding and maintain a multi-annual investment programme in flood relief measures to protect impacted communities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: OPW, DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
118.1	€89.9m allocated in 2021 to provide for Flood Relief Schemes to continue to progress as well as work on the review of flood maps to be updated and the Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme to progress. The allocation also provides funding for the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme which provides 90% of the costs to local authorities, as a demand-led scheme, to address localised flooding problems within their areas.	Complete

Update: Since 2018, a phased approach to scheme delivery has allowed the OPW to treble the number of flood relief schemes at design and construction to 90. This includes eight schemes where consultants were appointed in 2021. As at 26 November 2021, two flood relief schemes had reached substantial completion, providing protection to 1,570 properties. Construction is continuing on eight further flood relief schemes, and the review of the flood maps is ongoing.

Under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme, approximately €2.5m approximately was approved for local authorities to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas, bringing the total allocated under the scheme to more than €57 million since 2009.

Since the Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme was introduced in 2017, 28 homeowners have accepted an offer of financial assistance. Twelve of these homeowners have now completed the process of relocation to a new home, of which five relocated during 2021. The expenditure associated with the Scheme in 2021 is approximately €1.7m, which includes some funding to local authorities for remedial works as an alternative to relocation where feasible.

An Interdepartmental Group to develop a national co-ordinated and integrated coastal change strategy has been established by the Government. It will identify the measures to be considered for managing the projected impact of coastal change to our coastal communities, economies, heritage, culture and environment and will set out options and recommendations for the Government to consider. The OPW is jointly chairing the Interdepartmental Group with DHLGH. The Group is now engaged in preparing its report which is expected to be submitted to Government in early 2022.

118.2	An additional €18 million is allocated in 2021 for the maintenance and repair of river channels and embankments.	Complete
Update: The OPW has a statutory obligation to maintain Arterial Drainage Schemes in accordance with the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. This includes the maintenance of 11,500km of channel and 800km of flood defence embankments nationally. The original purpose of these schemes was to provide agricultural benefits. The operational programme of maintenance works is carried out on a cyclical basis with a portion of the assets being maintained each year. The output for 2021 was expected to meet the target of 2100km set under this programme of works.		

Measure 119	**Carry out a comprehensive review of Public Participation Networks and Local Economic and Community Plans, to ensure that they are fit for purpose for climate action.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
119.1	Guidelines for the implementation and monitoring of LECPs will be issued in line with the recommendations in the LCDC Review. These will include full consideration of Climate Action.	Complete
Update: The LECP Guidelines are completed and were launched in November 2021. An introductory session was held on 9 December attended by more than 300 LCDC members and local authority staff. Follow-on sessions are to be rolled out in Q1 2022 to all LCDCs to equip them with the necessary tools and skills to develop and implement their LECP. Full consideration of Climate Action is a cross-cutting theme throughout the Guidelines, with feedback from Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO) also incorporated into the guidelines. Responsibilities under EU directives are reinforced and include full consideration of the potential need for both Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) for LECPs**.**		
119.2	The review of PPN structures (Action 82.2) will ensure that PPNs provide communities with a voice regarding climate action policy.	Delayed
Update: This will be delivered in line with the expected completion of Action 82.2 in early Q1 2022.		

Measure 120	**Consider the needs of rural areas in the development of an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy which will seek to ensure that charging infrastructure stays ahead of demand.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Transport		
2021 Actions		**Status**
120.1	Publish national infrastructure strategy for electric vehicles.	Delayed
Update: Research informing the development of the strategy is underway and will be completed in Q1 2022. In addition, the delivery of the strategy is contingent on work ongoing in respect of the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) at a European level. Overall, it is expected that the EV Strategy will be ready for publication in early 2022.		

Supporting the Sustainability of Agriculture, the Marine and Forestry

Measure 121	**Develop and Implement a new Agri-Food Strategy to 2030, building on the success of the previous strategies.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
121.1	Publication of the new Agri-Food Strategy, and the setting up of a High Level Implementation Committee to oversee delivery of the Strategy.	Complete

Update: Ireland's new Food Vision 2030 Strategy was launched by the Government on 3 August 2021. Food Vision is a landmark for the Irish agri-food sector and has the potential to transform our agriculture, food, forestry and marine sectors in the period to 2030, with sustainability at its core.

Food Vision 2030 was developed by Committee of agri-food stakeholders using a food systems approach. Its vision is that Ireland will become a world leader in sustainable food systems by pursuing four missions:

- A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector
- Viable and Resilient Primary Producers, with Enhanced Wellbeing
- Food that is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad
- An Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Sector, Driven by Technology and Talent.

The High-Level Implementation Committee has been established and held its first meeting on 24 November 2021.

Measure 123	**Support farm diversification, including through the provision of the Options programme managed by Teagasc.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
123.1	Deliver a series of Farm Business Options webinars covering a range of diversification and renewable/energy options.	Complete

Update: Twenty Farm Business Options webinars were delivered between January and June 2021. Teagasc is developing a protocol for a Farm Business Innovation programme in 2022.

Measure 124	**Support research and development in areas such as agri-food, bio-based systems, smart agriculture and precision agriculture to promote and encourage innovation.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM, DETE		
2021 Actions		**Status**
124.1	DAFM to commit new grant award funding on a number of institutional-led research projects in Technology Readiness Level range 2-6 covering all of these areas on foot of (a) DAFM National Call 2021, and (b) DAFM co-funding nationally with other funders such as the Environmental Protection Agency, and internationally via Calls operated with other EU Member States and/or under the US-Irl R&D Partnership Programme.	Complete
Update: (a) Funding of €20million for 24 research projects arising from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Competitive Research Call 2021 was announced on 7 December 2021. (b) DAFM has entered into new arrangements with other national funders. (c) There have also been a number of European Research Area Networks (ERA NETs) with successful Irish partners and the US-Ireland R&D partnership programme has extended its topics to twelve areas of interest including on the bioeconomy.		
124.2	DAFM to undertake National Delegate and National Contact Point (NCP) functions for Cluster 6 of the new EU Horizon Europe Framework Research Programme to promote Irish researcher participation in applications relevant to these areas in the 2021 HEU Research Call.	Complete
Update: Information on project topics in the 2021-22 work programme for Horizon Europe (HEU) Research and Innovation framework was disseminated to the relevant research performing organisations. A new NCP and National Delegate is in place since October 2021 and is engaging with Irish Research Performing Organisations, industry and other organisations, including rural organisations, to promote and support Irish participation in applications relevant to these areas in the 2021/22 HEU Research Call.		
124.3	The following Enterprise Ireland programmes will continue to support this measure: 1) Commercialisation Fund Programme which funds the development of innovations at all stages of the commercial pipeline to the point where they can be commercialised as new products, services and/or companies 2) Innovation Partnership Programme which encourages Irish-based companies to work with Irish research institutes resulting in mutually beneficial co-operation and interaction. 3) In-Company RD&I Fund which supports the development of new or improved products, services or processes which will add a competitive advantage to the company.	Ongoing

	Enterprise Ireland will report on projects approved in the aforementioned areas at the end of the 2021.	
Update: Enterprise Ireland continued to run the Commercialisation Fund Programme and Innovation Partnership Programme in 2021. Due to the effects of the pandemic, approvals under various programmes including both of these programmes were lower than usual for the second year in a row. As of 15 December 2021, there were 41 approvals under the Commercialisation Fund and 59 approvals under the Innovation Partnership Programme. Enterprise Ireland also continues to run the In-Company RD&I Fund including the Business Innovation Initiative and the Agile Innovation Fund. To the end of November 2021 there were 19 approvals over €50,000.		
124.4	Establishment of the Timber Sector Leadership Group to establish the needs and requirements of the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) infrastructure for the sector from 2020 to 2030. Completion of report to assist Enterprise Ireland and DAFM to develop a business case with industry for funding an Industry Led Sustainable Timber Sector Innovation Facility.	Complete
Update: Enterprise Ireland has collaborated with DAFM and Coillte to establish the Timber Sector Leadership Group. This is an Industry-led Group which is assisting the agency and department to develop and implement five end market solutions. The key focus is to establish the needs and requirements of the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) infrastructure for the sector from 2020 to 2030 in response to the doubling of the timber harvest output from the €3 billion invested in forestry by Government since the mid-1980s. In February 2021, Enterprise Ireland, on behalf of the Group, hired Grant Thornton to undertake a detailed description of the Research, Development and Innovation needs of a sustainable timber supply chain in Ireland. The Report was delivered at the end of September 2021. Enterprise Ireland and the Forest Development Unit of DAFM have also been working through the report in order to develop a proposal which would cover the needs, the industry engagement, the types of structure, governance, and funding scenarios. It is intended to have a proposal developed for discussion with industry and the department by Q2 2022.		

Measure 125	**Explore the potential application of Living Labs in an Irish context, establishing innovation networks to identify and pilot tailored place-based initiatives for primary production, food and bio-based systems.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
125.1	Explore opportunity under the Common Agricultural Policy Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) development.	Ongoing

Update: Exploration of Living Labs, in an Irish context, is currently being undertaken via the task forces preparing the draft proposal, under Horizon Europe, for the European Partnership on “Accelerating farming systems transition: agroecology, living labs and research infrastructures”. In the frame of the partnership, important efforts will be directed to transforming the research framework to include living lab solutions, involving the various elements of the AKIS. The Draft Partnership proposal is due to be submitted to the European Union by March 2022.

Measure 126	**Implement Ag Climatise – A Roadmap towards Climate Neutrality for the agri-food sector.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
126.1	Ag Climatise consists of 29 actions across a number of different theme areas for implementation over the decade. The immediate priority is the establishment of implementation groups to deliver on priority actions.	Ongoing
Update: Due to developments around Climate Action Plan 2021 and new Nitrates Regulations, it was decided that DAFM would leverage existing groups and governance structures in the implementation of important actions. The implementation of Ag Climatise continues at pace, for example, some 36% of total slurry was applied by Low Emissions Slurry Spreading technology by the end of 2020.		

Measure 127	**Pilot a results-based agri-environment scheme to reward farmers for adapting to more sustainable methods of farming with a view to the development of a new agri-environment scheme capable of delivering broad environmental and biodiversity benefits that will align financial supports with climate objectives.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
127.1	Launch of the Results Based Environment Agri Pilot Project (REAP).	Complete
Update: The REAP pilot project opened in April 2021. Interest in participating in the project was significant. 4,900 applicants were approved for participation with results-based scorecards and payment applications were submitted by 3,750 approved participants.		

Measure 128	**Publish a successor forestry programme to deliver an ambitious afforestation plan, to achieve an afforestation target of 8,000 ha/year, with a particular focus on an increased farmer participation and habitat creation.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
128.1	Carry out SWOT and PESTLE analysis for new Forestry Strategy, including consultation process with relevant stakeholders.	Complete
Update: The SWOT and PESTLE analysis was finalized following consultation with the Forestry Policy Group and the COFORD Council (Council for Forest Research and Development). Project Woodland was launched in February 2021, with the objective of reviewing and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the forestry licensing system, as well as the creation of a shared national vision for trees and forests in Ireland and the development of a new Forest Strategy. It comprises four working groups that are each led by an independent chair and with members drawn from forestry industry and eNGO stakeholders on the Forestry Policy Group. Working Group 2 was tasked with the development of a cross-society vision of the role of trees and forests in Ireland's future and new Forest Strategy, based on the shared vision. The first task of the Working Group was in considering the 'As Is' state of forestry in Ireland which involved the conducting of a SWOT and PESTLE analysis for the new shared national vision and the Forest Strategy in Q2 2021.		
128.2	Implement the co-creation and engagement strategy and establish a shared vision for forestry.	Delayed
Update: Implementation of the co-creation and engagement strategy with a view to establishing a shared vision for forestry commenced at the start of Q3 2021. The comprehensive engagement and consultation process includes several stages, involving the engagement with citizens and communities across the country to gather their views and attitudes towards trees and forests. Relevant stakeholders were consulted throughout 2021 on draft preparatory documents, such as the SWOT/PESTLE analysis and the shared vision. Irish Rural Link (IRL) conducted a study with communities and interest groups on the role of forests in communities. Preliminary results of this study were provided to DAFM in November. IRL's engagement with focus groups, conducting further interviews and producing a final report are ongoing. In November, the market research agency Behaviour and Attitudes (B&A) conducted a survey including a demographically representative sample of 1,000 adults on attitudes to afforestation in Ireland. The first draft findings of this survey were provided to DAFM on 22 December. In December a preferred tender was selected for the provision of services to coordinate a two-day deliberative dialogue process and an online public consultation survey that will be based on the shared national vision and the development of the forest strategy. The youth		

organisation Foróige also agreed to facilitate and conduct an online deliberative dialogue with young people on the future of forests in Ireland.

Bilateral meetings were scheduled with key stakeholders at the end of 2021. These meetings will update stakeholders on the work to date on the forest strategy and listen to their feedback on the draft vision; what their vision is for forests and the future; and how they can help deliver both the vision and the strategy.

Measure 129	**Provide ongoing support for the development of the knowledge and skills base of the agriculture and forestry sectors by the Teagasc Advisory and Education Services.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
129.1	Teagasc Education Service: Teagasc will maximise intake into its Level 5 and 6 Green Cert programmes with a target enrolment of up to 2,500 in 2021. Teagasc will also deliver Level 5 and 6 forestry programmes, support collaborative arrangements with the higher education sector, and progress land sector apprenticeship opportunities.	Complete
Update: Teagasc reached its target enrolment of 2,500 for 2021. Teagasc also delivers Level 5 and Level 6 forestry programmes on an ongoing basis and continues to support collaborative arrangements with the higher education sector. Teagasc continues to progress its apprenticeship opportunities, with a focus on this in recent months and four key apprenticeship streams progressing.		
129.2	Teagasc Advisory Service: Teagasc will continue through its advisory service to provide a comprehensive advisory and support service to its clients across a range of areas, roll out initiatives such as Signpost Farms, discussion groups, and Options courses, and enhance its virtual services to farmers.	Complete
Update: Teagasc has continued to provide an advisory service and focused development programmes to 42,000+ clients, dealing with economic, social and environmental sustainability. This includes joint dairy development programmes with all dairy co-ops and will run Better Sheep and Tillage programmes. In the beef sector Teagasc runs the Future Beef programme aimed at suckler producers and also the Dairy Beef 500 programme. In parallel with this, a network of over 100 'Signpost Farms' has been established and will be used to deliver climate change and environmental messages to farmers. There is an increase to three organic specialists with an upskilling of one to two advisers in each Advisory Region to deal with expected increases in organic farmer numbers.		

Measure 130	**Develop the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2027, which will address existing and emerging challenges including climate action, environmental protection, generational renewal, viable farm incomes, and sustain vibrant rural areas.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
130.1	Draft CAP Strategic Plan and Draft Environmental Report to be issued for Public Consultation.	Complete
Update: More than 1,450 submissions were received in response to public consultation covering the specific objectives of the draft CSP, with 14 of those focusing on the draft Environmental Report.		
130.2	Final CAP Strategic Plan and Environmental Report prepared for submission to the Commission by 1 January 2022.	Complete
Update: The draft CAP Strategic Plan covering the period 2023-2027 was submitted to the European Commission on 31 December 2021.		

Measure 131	**Support generational renewal, including young farmers and women in agriculture, through measures including the CAP, taxation measures and access to finance initiatives.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
131.1	Common Agricultural Policy development on generational renewal and gender equality is ongoing in line with the scheduled submission date for the CAP Strategic Plan. Existing policies to support young farmers, including through the National Reserve, the Young Farmer Scheme, TAMS II, Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme and support for collaborative farming will continue as the CAP transitions to the new CAP in 2023. National initatives such as the Succession Farm Partnership Scheme and education and advisory services also complement a suite of taxation and financial support measures to help young farmers.	Complete
Update: The CAP Strategic Plan interventions on the Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers, the On-Farm Capital Investment Scheme, Support for Collaborative Farming and support for Gender Equality were submitted to the EU on 31 December 2021.		
131.2	Development of agri-taxation measures in consultation with stakeholders for inclusion in Budget 2022 Submission.	Complete

Update: Budget 2022 included the renewal of Stock Relief and Stamp Duty Relief for Young-Trained Farmers.		
131.3	Access to Finance initiatives are progressing including oversight of existing schemes such as the Future Growth Loan Scheme. Work is ongoing to replace the Brexit Loan Scheme with a loan scheme under the European Guarantee Fund. The Brexit Impact Loan Scheme is scheduled for delivery in Q3 2021.	Complete
Update: The Brexit Impact Loan Scheme is in place and offers unsecured working capital and investment finance up to €500,000, facilitating better accessibility to young farmers. This Scheme complements others such as the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which provides long-term investment finance with unsecured loans up to €500,000; and the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme, which provides finance for working capital and investment purposes, with unsecured loans up to €250,000.		

Measure 132	**Increase awareness and outreach across the farming community of programmes and initiatives to support the safety, health and wellbeing of farmers.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
132.1	Support the roll-out of the On Feirm Ground programme, to train 800 farm advisors in relation to farmer health and wellbeing.	Complete
Update: The roll-out of On Feirm Ground commenced in October 2021 is ongoing. The first groups of advisors have been trained and the training will extend into 2022. To date over 100 farm advisors have been trained.		
132.2	Launch the Accelerated Capital Allowances Scheme for qualifying farm safety equipment to support farmers with disabilities.	Complete
Update: The Scheme was launched in October 2021 and is now operational.		
132.3	Assess Farm Health and Safety and Wellbeing European Innovation Partnership proposals and launch successful projects.	Complete
Update: Eight Farm Health and Safety and Wellbeing European Innovation Partnership projects with a vaule of €1.8m have been selected to proceed to full implementation and are currently in the start-up phase.		

Measure 133	**Conduct a review of the means test for Farm Assist to ensure farmers receive the appropriate level of support through this scheme.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DSP		
2021 Actions		**Status**
133.1	Complete review of the means test disregards for the Farm Assist Scheme in line with commitment in the Programme for Government in time to feed into the 2022 Budgetary Process.	Complete
Update: This action was completed and a Technical Review of the Farm Assist Review was undertaken. Budget 2022 provides for an expansion of the list of agri-environmental schemes that attract a disregard for Farm Assist. The expanded list of agri-environmental schemes that attract a disregard was included in the Social Welfare Bill 2021. Further detail in relation to these schemes will be underpinned by Regulation in 2022.		

Measure 134	**Enact legislation implementing revised Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal Scheme) provisions in respect of assets which are family-owned and operated farms and businesses.**	
Lead Delivery Body: D/Health		
2021 Actions		**Status**
134.1	The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Amendment) Bill 2021 will be introduced to the Oireachtas in Q2 2021 with a view to enactment this year.	Complete
Update: The Nursing Home Support Scheme (Amendment) Act 2021 was signed into law in July 2021 and commenced in October. The primary amendment to the Scheme (more commonly known as the Fair Deal Scheme) will mean that after a period of three years, when calculating the cost of a person's nursing home care, the value of family-owned farms and businesses will no longer be taken into account.		

Supporting the Sustainability of our Islands and Coastal Communities

Measure 135	**Publish and implement a new cross-Departmental Policy for Island Development and associated action plans to ensure delivery of the policy, including in areas such as housing, health, energy, utilities, waste management, climate change, education, digital connectivity, employment, infrastructure and transport.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
135.1	Publication of draft policy and agreement of action plans with participating Government departments.	Delayed
Update: It had been initially envisaged that the new policy would be published in 2021. However, following engagement with island communities, it became clear that more time was required to develop the policy. The department has completed the consultation with the island communities and bilateral meetings with all relevant Government departments, and the policy draft is now expected to be ready by mid-2022.		

Measure 136	**Progress vital infrastructure development for our island communities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
136.1	Funding to be delivered to local authorities for the delivery of the minor capital works programme, with works completed by year end. These works comprise road improvements and marine works but also can include other small construction projects such as helipads, recycling facilities, slipway repairs, etc.	Complete
Update: A programme of works under the Minor Capital Works Programme was approved and carried out by the relevant local authorities. Just over €2m was spent on 31 projects through this programme during 2021.		
136.2	Following approval of the business case for pier development at Inis Oírr, the local authority will develop tender documents for the project. The remaining projects are in an early stage of development. Other major capital works, such as piers at Inis Meáin and at Machaire Rabhartaigh, will also be advanced.	Ongoing

Update: The local authority are advancing preparations for the tender process which includes the application for a foreshore licence, once received, tender documents can be issued. It is expected that work will begin on this project in the second half of 2022.

In relation to the projects for Inis Meáin and Machaire Rabhartaigh, the relevant local authorities are progressing these projects through carrying out preparatory works that will inform the various options to be evaluated in their business case.

Measure 137	**Establish a forum for ongoing dialogue between local authorities, relevant policy Departments and island communities.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
137.1	Hold discussions with local authorities with a view to establishing inter-agency forum in each local authority. A similar format will be rolled out for the Donegal, Sligo, Mayo and Galway islands to support the new islands policy.	Complete
Update: Discussions have been held with the relevant local authorities as part of the consultation for the Islands Policy. The local authorities are very open to having such a structure and expect to make further progress on its establishment during 2022.		

Measure 139	**Explore the potential for community-based enterprise hubs on islands not under the remit of Údarás na Gaeltachta.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
139.1	Development companies to explore the potential for community-based enterprise hubs as part of their programs to achieve their community support targets.	Delayed
Update: This issue formed part of the consultations with relevant Government departments for the Islands Policy. Development work on the Islands Policy is ongoing (See Measure 135).		

Measure 140	**Maximise the potential to utilise the islands as test-beds for innovative technologies (e.g. eHealth, micro-generation of renewable energy).**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
140.1	The potential for such projects will be discussed with relevant Departments, and driven as part of the development of the Islands Policy.	Delayed
Update: This has been discussed with the relevant departments and will be addressed through the action plan that will be published with the islands policy.		
140.2	The Small Scale Capital Works programme will explore the potential for installation of technology which facilitates public library collections and returns in island communities.	Delayed
Update: This programme did not proceed in 2021 and will be carried over to 2022.		

Measure 142	**Publish Ireland's first ever Marine Spatial Planning policy, setting out a clear vision for the future development of our marine planning system.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
142.1	The Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Bill is currently in development that will place the Marine Planning Policy Statement on a statutory footing.	Complete
Update: The MAP Bill was signed into law in December 2021 (see 116a.1).		

Measure 143	Following completion of the Marine Spatial Planning policy, bring forward Ireland's first National Marine Planning Framework which will introduce a planning system for managing the development of Ireland's maritime area in the same way that the National Planning Framework fulfils this function on land.	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
143.1	Put in place Ireland's national marine plan, the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF).	Complete
Update: The NMPF was approved by Government on 23 March 2021 and formally established on 20 May 2021 when it was announced by An Taoiseach at the European Maritime Day conference.		

Measure 144	Establish a marine planning oversight delivery board, Project Ireland Marine 2040, to provide leadership and oversight to the implementation of the National Marine Planning Framework, and implement the long-term overarching strategy to manage Ireland's seas for the benefit of all its people.	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
144.1	This delivery board will be established by the end of 2021.	Complete
Update: A Government decision in November 2021 established a Project Ireland Marine 2040 Co-ordination Group (Project Marine) under the aegis of the Project Ireland Delivery Board. The initial focus of that cross-government marine governance group will be to ensure alignment of marine planning (NMPF) and development activities (NDP) with an initial focus on ensuring alignment of marine planning and development activities. Arrangements for this Group have been finalised and the first meeting of the Project Marine Group will be in Q1 2022.		

Measure 145	Explore the potential for Coastal Partnership Groups to bring together the local coastal communities to address issues of concern, share best practice and resources, and facilitate communication between stakeholders.	
Lead Delivery Body: DHLGH		
2021 Actions		**Status**
145.1	Provision for sub-national marine spatial plans through a Designated Marine Area Plans (DMAPs) process is being put in	Complete

	place through the MAP Bill (Action 142.1). DMAP process will form the basis of a focus for Coastal Partnership Groups that will help development of sub-national marine plans. Expect potential Coastal Partnership Group members to begin being approached in before end of 2021.	
Update: The Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Bill, which provides for establishment of Designated Marine Area Plans (DMAPs), completed passage through all stages of the Oireachtas and was signed to create the Maritime Area Planning Act on 23 December 2021. The Coastal Partnership approach is still in development with the expectation that external parties will be involved towards the end of Q1 2022.		

Measure 146	**Continue to invest in coastal communities through the Fisheries Local Area Group (FLAG) scheme, providing support for investments by micro seafood enterprises and projects in the area of marine tourism and leisure and the wider marine sector.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DAFM		
2021 Actions		**Status**
146.1	Seven FLAGs to approve potential projects to the value of €1.6 million of European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) in their areas.	Complete
Update: The EMFF Programme's €12 million allocation to the seven Fisheries Local Action Groups is fully allocated. On 31 July 2021, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine announced the award of 62 grants worth €915,295 by the seven Fisheries Local Action Groups under EMFF Programme.		
146.2	Calls for expression of interest in the community-led local development under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund 2021-2027 (EMFAF) Operational Programme will be issued.	Delayed
Update: A call for expressions of interest for FLAG groups under Ireland's forthcoming Seafood Development Programme 2021-27 under the EMFAF is expected to issue in the first quarter of 2022.		

Implementation of the Policy

Measure 147	**Support rural communities to develop long-term cohesive Master Plans for their areas, to support an integrated place-based approach to rural development (aligned with Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, County Development Plans, Local Development Plans, and relevant national, regional and local policy objectives).**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
147.1	Funding of €2 million to be allocated to circa 45 towns for the development of Master Plans.	Complete
Update: Funding of €2.6 million was announced in December 2021 for the development of the first ever Town Centre First Plans. This first phase of funding will support 26 towns, each in a different local authority area, in mapping out their future development. Each local authority under the scheme will be provided with €100,000 to support the development of the plans. The funding will support each local authority, working with a collaborative Town Team, to develop a be-spoke TCF plan to guide the development of each town.		

Measure 148	**Develop an effective rural proofing model to ensure the needs of rural communities are considered in the development of Government policies.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
148.1	Initiate a scoping exercise for the development of a rural-proofing mechanism.	Complete
Update: Consultants have been engaged to examine the issue of rural proofing in Ireland. The ensuing report will present a series of recommendations on rural proofing mechanisms and is anticipated for completion in early 2022.		

Measure 149	**Support new research into rural development priorities, including in collaboration with Higher Education Institutions and other research funders and research organisations.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
149.1	Provide support to the North Atlantic Forum to enable holding of event on Sustainable Livelihoods.	Delayed
Update: The organisers of the North Atlantic Forum elected to postpone the 2021 event until 2022 in order to maximise its impact. DRCD will provide supports to the event when it is rescheduled.		

Measure 150	**Establish a Higher Education Institutions Network on rural development to ensure ongoing engagement with rural development experts over the lifetime of this policy.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
150.1	Establish a Higher Education Institutions Network on rural development to ensure ongoing engagement with rural development experts over the lifetime of this policy.	Complete
Update: The Our Rural Future Higher Education and Research Network was established and includes representatives from 22 Higher Education Institutions and relevant research institutions – the ESRI, NESC and Teagasc. The first meeting took place on 5 October 2021 and the Network will meet twice annually from 2022 onwards.		

Measure 151	**Enhance the sharing of information and best practice on rural development policy on a North-South basis and identify areas for further cooperation.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
151.1	Establish North-South Rural Policy Forum consisting of representatives of DRCD and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland.	Complete

Update: The North-South Rural Policy Forum was established in May 2021 and has convened twice, in a virtual setting, on 6 May and 12 November 2021.

The group discussed relevant rural policy issues and identified a number of shared challenges, opportunities and processes. There is commitment from both sides to enhanced cooperation and information exchange via the forum which can drive forward a cohesive bilateral relationship.

Measure 152	**Deepen engagement at international level on policy relating to rural development matters through increased participation, including at OECD and EU level.**	
Lead Delivery Body: DRCD		
2021 Actions		**Status**
152.1	Participate in OECD Rural Policy Working Party and relevant EU networks.	Ongoing

Update: Engagement with international policy groups has been significantly enhanced in the reporting period, with increased participation in OECD and EU level projects.

DRCD continues to represent Ireland at meetings of the OECD Working Party on Rural Policy, and has formally shared Ireland's rural policy experience with a variety of OECD and EU Member States.

Ireland has been selected as the host of the 2022 OECD International Rural Development Conference, titled 'Building Sustainable, Resilient and Thriving Rural Places'. This event will take place in September 2022 and will be attended by approximately 250 delegates from national governments, rural stakeholders and civil society.