



Oifig an
Rialaitheoir Pleanáil
Office of the
Planning Regulator

Draft Strategic Plan 2019-2024

Building a World-Class Planning Oversight Body



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Our purpose

To oversee the continuous enhancement of Ireland's planning process and its outcomes by driving the co-ordination of planning at national, regional and local levels, building a stronger knowledge base and ensuring regular reviews of the performance of planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

Foreword

Ireland's planning process has evolved since its establishment over 50 years ago in 1964 and is a key part of public policy aimed at ensuring the proper planning and sustainable development of our country for the common good. The planning process comprises four key elements, namely:

1. Preparation and adoption of statutory strategies, plans and policies by Government and Local Government;
2. Decision-making on individual planning applications and appeals in light of statutory plans and policies by local authorities and An Bord Pleanála;
3. Enforcement of the terms and conditions of planning permissions by local authorities; and
4. Oversight of the planning process, including undertaking of research, education and training by the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) to ensure national policies and legislative requirements are complied with.

The OPR was established in April 2019 on foot of recommendations made by the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments (the Mahon Tribunal) which was established by the Dáil in 1997 and which issued its fifth and final report in March 2012.

The Mahon Tribunal made 64 recommendations aimed at significantly enhancing the transparency of planning in Ireland against a backdrop of significant historical deficiencies in Dublin in relation to decision making on local authority development plans and other planning functions.

The Planning and Development Act, as amended, (the Act) gives the OPR a statutory basis to carry out three main functions:

- i. Independent assessment of all local authority and regional assembly forward planning, including development plans, local area plans and regional spatial and economic strategies;
- ii. Examination of the systems and procedures used by any planning authority, including An Bord Pleanála, in the performance of any of their planning functions, including assessing risks of maladministration or corruption; and
- iii. Driving national research, training, education and public information programmes.

While not a policy making body, the role of the OPR is to ensure that the implementation of planning policy and legislation by local authorities and An Bord Pleanála supports Government policy and statutory requirements, that effective programmes of research, training and public awareness in planning are in place to strengthen the planning process and that the wider public are effectively engaged in the planning process.

As a newly established independent public body, the focus of this first six year Strategic Plan for the OPR is on establishment of a successfully functioning and performing organisation, delivering on our legislative mandate outlined in the Act.

The establishment of the OPR represents an important milestone in the development of Ireland's planning process, which touches the lives of every citizen of this State, both in relation to meeting housing and physical and social infrastructural requirements and enhancing the quality of our environment and the essential economic functioning of the country.

Many citizens' experiences of the planning system arise from engagement with the process of making or participating in the decision making process of planning applications. In 2017, around 30,000 planning applications were made for a wide variety of proposed developments.

Effective decision-making needs a clear and coherent policy context and Project Ireland 2040 will therefore be the key planning policy that will inform the OPR in its statutory functions over the period of our Strategic Plan.

In recent years, there has been a welcome renaissance in plan-making, particularly at national and regional levels, building on the established patterns of plan-making at local authority level, of which there are now 31, down from the 88 planning authorities that existed prior to the Local Government Act 2014.

There has also been a renewed focus on innovation in the delivery of public services generally and planning services specifically, such as digital planning services that both represent value for money and deliver quality outcomes.

Furthermore, it is accepted that evidence should inform policy development, which in turn will shape practice on the ground.

The OPR exists to draw these elements together, ensuring the quality of Ireland's planning process is founded upon the implementation of agreed policies and that the delivery of planning functions is efficient, effective, outcome focused and participative.

We are one of the first countries in Europe to put in place an independent planning regulator, reflecting both a determination to learn lessons from the past but also to establish

new mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of new public policies that have developed in recent years.

These include the integrated development of national planning policies and corresponding capital investment and sectoral investment strategies such as Project Ireland 2040, which incorporates both a spatial vision and the means to realise it through a public capital investment programme.

In common with other public sector organisations, the OPR must also be agile in adapting to changes in society, customer expectations and new ways of working over the plan period. Our ambition is to build an organisation that is learning and development based, that communicates via modern channels and that is noted for its personal touch in engagement with citizens and stakeholders.

This Strategic Plan focuses on capitalising on the opportunities to apply best practice and progressive public sector and organisational design in building the organisation from the ground up, for example by conducting business and encouraging interaction digitally.

Our Strategic Plan has been developed with inputs from staff and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and with a view to delivering our strategic goals in ensuring that planning and development contributes to balanced and sustainable development, the supply of good quality housing and the implementation of Government policy and goals.

Implementation of this Strategic Plan will demand a high level of commitment from all of the staff in our developing organisation and I am confident that we are going to build a high-performing independent public body dedicated to supporting and enhancing Ireland's planning process and public confidence in it over the years ahead.

Niall Cussen

Chief Executive and Planning Regulator

Our Purpose, Vision and Values

The OPR's purpose is to oversee the continuous enhancement of Ireland's planning process and its outcomes by driving the co-ordination of planning at national, regional and local levels, building a stronger knowledge base and ensuring regular reviews of the performance of planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

Our **vision** is that by the end of this Strategic Plan period, the OPR will be in a position to conclude that Ireland benefits from a well co-ordinated planning hierarchy and that a wide-ranging, effective and well received programme of education, training and research on planning matters has been put into effect and that a culture of continuous improvement will be created in planning authorities driven by regular reviews of their performance.

Our **values** are as follows:

Independence: The OPR is committed to building an independent, fair and informed voice on planning matters, helping local authorities to achieve the outcomes envisaged in international, national and regional policies as they put in place statutory plans and advising the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government on the effectiveness of Ireland's planning process.

Professionalism: The OPR will build its ability to offer independent, fair and informed advice to other stakeholders in the planning process through its professionalism and capacity to gather key information and data and through an evidence-based approach will highlight the key trends and objectives in the planning area to ensure a strategic and co-ordinated approach to meeting the challenges of today and the future, such as housing delivery, reducing the energy intensity of development patterns to tackle the

drivers of climate change and taking advantage of significant changes approaching on how our transport systems will function.

Transparency: The hallmark of the OPR's approach will be to demonstrate transparency in everything we do, from the gathering of evidence and research data through our knowledge, public awareness and training programmes to the assessment of plans and in conducting of planning reviews. The public's confidence in Ireland's planning process depends on transparency in the process so that the public can see how policy and practice happens.

Engagement: The building of a new organisation from scratch is a strong opportunity to build a positive and lasting culture and so the OPR recognises that proactive engagement and a willingness to explore potential solutions is key to playing a successful role, mindful of the many complex and sometimes competing challenges to be met in the planning and development area.

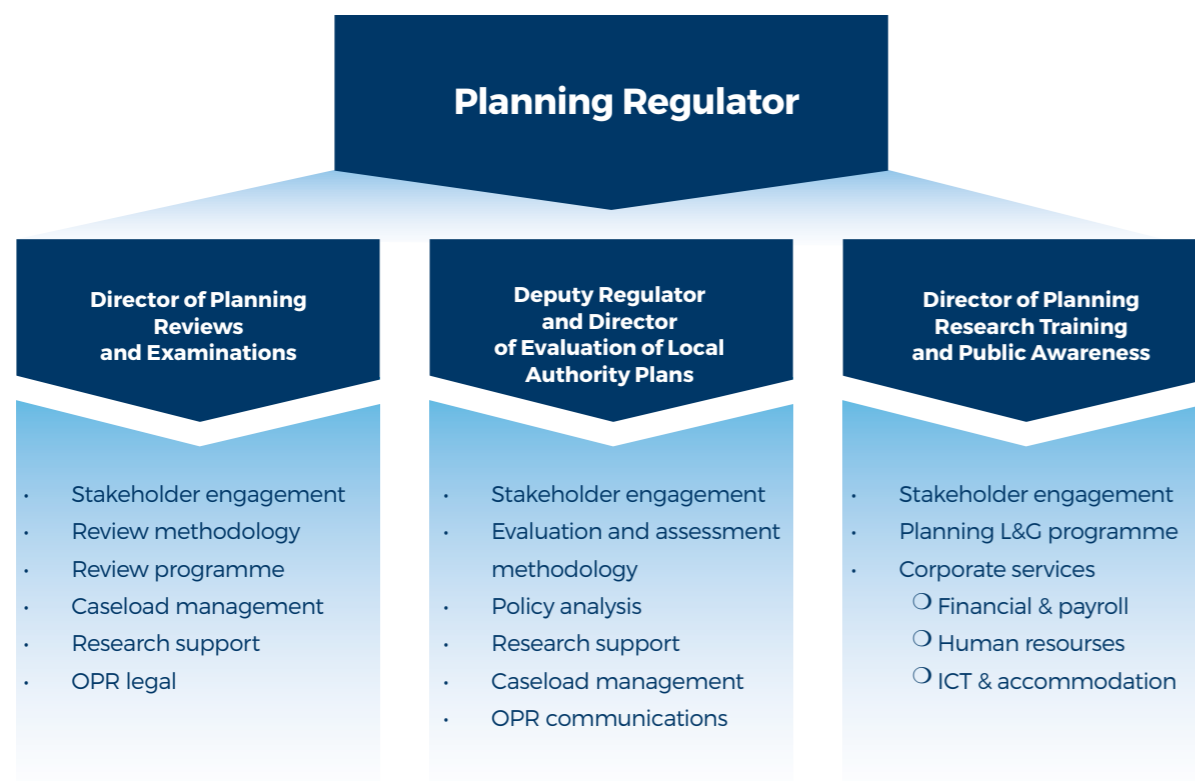
Customer Focus: The OPR is committed to delivering fair, effective, courteous and timely services to all its customers in line with the twelve Government 'Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service'.

The OPR is committed to dealing with customers without discrimination or prejudice. The OPR respects equality and human rights in accordance with Public Sector Duty principles and the relevant equality legislation. The OPR will accommodate diversity in providing services to our customers.

Our Organisation

The OPR is structured into three distinct areas in line with its statutory functions. The figure below outlines the structure of the organisation.

Office of the Planning Regulator Corporate Structure and Functions Map



The OPR was established to ensure that public interest is at the heart of Ireland's planning process and that through information, data and knowledge sharing between all the stakeholders in the planning process, we will continuously improve and enhance quality and effectiveness in the delivery of planning services by our planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála and all the various stakeholders.

The Oireachtas established the OPR and the Act clearly sets out our mandate, functions and powers as highlighted earlier in this strategy.

The OPR has come about both because of lessons that have been learnt from the past and a strong willingness by Government to strengthen effectiveness in the co-ordination of national, regional and local planning policies and initiatives to achieve agreed aims and objectives.

The establishment of the OPR also comes at a time when transformational new planning policies have been developed by Government – after extensive national consultation exercises – and these policies need to be put into practice, including:

- Securing compact urban development through the application of a target of 50% of future development of necessary housing, employment and other development categories taking place on lands regarded as previously developed (brownfield) and or infill development lands as opposed to greenfield development extending the existing built up areas;
- Preparing development plans and local area plans based on Housing Needs Demand Assessments where housing needs across the full range of those that need housing is planned for on an integrated basis and whose delivery is monitored to feed back into the spatial planning process; and
- Moving towards low carbon or carbon free development to support the achievement of binding international obligations on Ireland in relation to tackling the drivers of climate change.

Addressing these and other policies from the National Planning Framework, such as the National Strategic Outcomes, will require transformational change in approaches to and execution of planning policies and plan implementation at local level.

As a new organisation, the OPR will work closely with all the relevant stakeholders, including the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government and his/her Department, local authorities, including regional assemblies, An Bord Pleanála, environmental, business and community development focused groups and the professions engaged in the built environment and researchers to play a key driving role in securing these changes.

By establishing the OPR, the Government has made a clear commitment to establishing a visible national co-ordination point with the knowledge and expertise to advise local authorities on their plan-making functions and to support the necessary training, education and research activities to support evidence based planning.

Furthermore, the OPR will work to make sure that the public is effectively engaged in the planning process equipped with the necessary access to planning knowledge and data so that the public drives the making of policy to a more significant degree than at present.

Through the work of the OPR over the years ahead, more regular assessments of the effectiveness of our planning policies and practice will become possible to encourage and inform debate about how the process can be continuously improved meeting both the needs of the day and strategic aims.

Our Work

Independent assessment of all local authority and regional assembly forward planning

The core function of the OPR is to independently evaluate and assess statutory development plans and regional strategies, and variations to these, with a view to ensuring that the plan or strategy sets out an overall strategy for proper planning and sustainable development for the area concerned.

In line with the Mahon Tribunal recommendations, the OPR assumes this policy assessment and enforcement role which was heretofore invested in the Minister with responsibility for planning matters.

The OPR will independently evaluate and assess these statutory plans and strategies to ensure compliance with national, and regional, planning policies and objectives and will, in the first instance, provide the relevant planning authority with observations / recommendations with regard to how a draft plan should address legislative and policy matters including consistency with:

- The National Planning Framework;
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies;
- Statutory planning guidance issued by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, including any 'specific planning policy requirements';
- Planning policy directives; and,
- Other relevant legislative and policy matters.

Once the OPR has provided statutory inputs to the plan-making process, the relevant planning authority must outline how such inputs will be addressed, taking account of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

If an adopted plan is subsequently not consistent with any recommendations of the OPR, the Planning Regulator may issue a notice to the Minister recommending that powers of Direction, specified under section 31 of the Act, be utilised to compel the planning authority to address the matter.

The establishment of this new Office to oversee the development plan process and the planning system significantly enhances existing governance and oversight arrangements within the planning system with a view to ensuring that integrity of the system is upheld to the highest degree possible.

Coherence, integrity and public confidence in our planning process is fundamental because proper functioning in planning is critical to the ongoing development of all parts of the country – urban and rural, terrestrial and marine, ensuring that such development delivers proper planning and sustainable development – that is that development takes place in the right locations, in the right way and at the right time to meet the needs of our people while also simultaneously protecting the many qualities of our natural and built environment.

Examination of the systems and procedures used by any planning authority

Secondly, the OPR has also been given powers to examine systemic issues and performance in the planning process and accordingly will have a significant role to play in carrying out examinations of the operation of planning authorities, whether on its own initiative, at the request of the Minister, or on foot of complaints received.

The OPR will also be a standards body for planning in Ireland, reviewing the performance of all planning authorities and performing an important function in selecting individual local authorities for a closer examination of their performance each year and reporting on findings to the Minister and Oireachtas.

The OPR will be able to make independent and evidence-based recommendations to planning authorities and to the Minister where it considers that a planning authority:

- May not be carrying out its functions in accordance with the Act;
- Is not complying with guidelines or directions issued by the Minister;
- May be applying inappropriate standards of administrative practice;
- May be applying systemic discrimination in decision making; or
- May be operating in a manner where there is a risk of corruption or there are serious diseconomies or inefficiencies in the conduct of its functions.

It is important that the highest standards are applied by, and adhered to, at all times by all parties engaged in the planning system including planning authorities, public bodies, the construction and development sector, professional practitioners, private interests and the general public in the interests of the overall common good. A well-functioning planning system responds to the needs and demands of society. The planning system impacts on many aspects of our daily lives and therefore we need to ensure that it operates in the manner intended so that it can deliver quality in planning outcomes.

Driving national research, training, education and public information

Thirdly, the OPR will undertake research and conduct programmes of education, building on training undertaken by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and other organisations, and public awareness to underpin the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

This will include educational programmes for elected members and officials of planning authorities.

Research, training and public information functions will also be discharged by the OPR in maximising knowledge transfer between the 31 local authorities, 3 regional assemblies and An Bord Pleanála thereby maximising efficiency, effectiveness and consistency.

It is intended that the support and analysis provided via the OPR will assist all planning authorities to access the appropriate skills, resources and systems to perform effectively. Establishment of the OPR addresses the absence of a national focal point with a dedicated statutory remit in planning research since the demise of An Foras Forbartha in the 1990's.

The Mahon Tribunal recommended that the OPR would have a role in education, training, research and public awareness because of the beneficial impacts that these activities have on risks of inefficiencies or ineffectiveness in the delivery of planning services and avoiding risks in relation to corruption or the undermining of the integrity of the planning process. Establishment of the OPR creates an opportunity to build on, co-ordinate and complement the extensive range of existing research, training and public awareness activities, including:

- i. EU and international research organisations, such as ESPON and the OECD;
- ii. Government, through its departments and agencies, including those sponsoring multi-annual research programmes like the EPA and SFI;
- iii. Local Government;
- iv. Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), including the five Planning Schools on the island (UCD, TU Dublin, UCC, QUB, UU);
- v. Professional bodies concerned with the built environment, including the Irish Planning Institute and Royal Town Planning Institute;
- vi. Public sector institutes and associations such as the Institute of Public Administration and the Association of Irish Local Government;
- vii. Activities of non-governmental organisations focusing on planning and development;
- viii. Research and information gathering activities of private sector organisations; and
- ix. Research and information gathering activities of private individuals.

addressed in conjunction with stakeholders. Initial soundings taken in the development of this Strategic Plan point to the potential of such a group to:

- **Develop an accessible on-line planning knowledge and training resource point** that would be easy to navigate for both those engaged in the practice of planning as well as those, such as the public, who seek more information so they can participate more effectively in the planning process;
- **Deliver a strategic planning research programme** that meets both immediate and longer term knowledge requirements, such as understanding the requirements of climate assessment of plans and projects, new mobility technologies, the impacts of an ageing population and better plan implementation and project visualisation techniques to enable more members of the public to understand the implications of the various decision processes in planning.
- **Enable brokerage** between those seeking new data or insights into topical planning issues for policy development and practice delivery, such as Government, An Bord Pleanála and local authorities and those with capacity to meet such needs, such as the HEI sector or professional bodies with a research role; and
- **Dissemination of information about the benefits of, and achievements in, planning** – so that the general public can better understand, through local engagement, the broader function of planning and, importantly, their role in shaping the process.

One of the key challenges the OPR faces over the course of this Strategic Plan relates to the drawing together of the above in the context of what the various stakeholders in the planning process consider are key knowledge, training and public awareness needs, finding both what has already been researched and what remains to be delivered in relation to evidence, practice and/or awareness.

For this reason, the OPR intends to put in place a National Planning Knowledge Group to advise the Planning Regulator on the current state of our knowledge in relation to both pressing and strategic planning matters and gaps to be

Our Stakeholders

The OPR must work with and take account of the inputs of many stakeholders in the planning process, reflecting the interests of:

- **The public**, for whom the planning process exists and to ensure the proper planning and development of both urban and rural areas and at national, regional and local levels;
- **The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and his/her Department** with whom the OPR will work on a day-to-day basis in the delivery of our statutory mandate and in accordance with oversight and governance and financial management arrangements required of public bodies;
- **Planning authorities, An Bord Pleanála and Regional Assemblies, County and City Management Association (CCMA)**, who variously perform different plan-making and planning decision and other planning functions in accordance with national legislation and policy;
- **Related regulatory and oversight bodies with a mandate in the planning area** such as the Office of the Ombudsman (OO), Standards in Public Office (SIPO), the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) and similar bodies that the OPR must work with on a day-to-day basis in the discharge of our statutory functions;
- **The Oireachtas** through the work of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, will consider the OPR's reports in relation to local authority development plans;

- **The elected members of local authorities** across the country who have important policy making functions in planning and for whom training and information gathering programmes are essential to enhance planning outcomes;
- **Statutory consultees and key agencies with a statutory remit in the planning process**, whether at plan-making or decision stages and as regards their input to enhancing our planning process and providing feedback on the effectiveness of its functions and the outcomes it delivers;
- **Professional bodies and interest groups** engaged in the promotion of good standards in the management of the natural and built environment, including planning, architectural, engineering and surveying professions and various non-governmental organisations;
- **The Higher Education Institute (HEI) sector**, including the five planning schools on the island of Ireland, and other university and HEI faculties that provide a knowledge bank, research capacity and training functions in conjunction with the OPR;
- **Expert commentators and the media**, who are key to being informed by our work and communicating the importance of effective planning, of protecting our natural and built environments and building wider public awareness of and engagement in the pressing planning issues of the day and in strategic terms as well.

What You Told Us

In developing this Strategic Plan, we recognise and value the importance of hearing the views of our stakeholders and incorporating them into our vision of the organisation. Our goal is to build an agile and stakeholder focused organisation that is highly responsive and open to changes in its environment.

Furthermore, as part of its research, education and public awareness function, the OPR is strategically positioned within the planning system to become an important link between a variety of organisations and the public. We believe that through listening and taking your views on board we can achieve true organisational excellence and deliver meaningful programmes to the public.

From our establishment in early April 2019, we began our engagement with a variety of stakeholders to understand their visions and expectations in relation to the role of the OPR within the planning system.

Through this early engagement, we met with many of you to commence the creation of synergies and to establish learning networks facilitating sharing of knowledge to promote open and proactive cooperation among planning authorities, the HEI sector, non-governmental organisations, planning institutes, Government organisations and departments.

As part of this process, we have already learned that you would like to see the OPR build, develop and foster:

- Close and regular collaboration with stakeholders on topical and strategic planning matters and identification of gaps;
- The OPR functioning as a knowledge database and a 'go-to' organisation for planning resources;

- Promoting public participation throughout the development plan process;
- Maintaining a 'lessons-learned' and 'here-to-help' approach to promote transparency and accountability in planning;
- Participation in existing research programmes led by other bodies, such as 'Planning research agenda for Ireland' currently being carried out by UCC and RTPI as well as the creation of bespoke and meaningful research at its own behest;
- Designing and delivering training programmes for Local Authorities to promote a uniform approach and continuous improvements in the development plan process;
- Providing training in the use of Geographic Information Systems, with particular focus on rural housing policy and environmental data;
- Creating Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes and material for professional planners.

As an organisation, we strive to foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement and as part of our work to develop this Strategic Plan, we see the process of stakeholder consultation as a key element enabling the OPR to create a long-term vision that is meaningful and creates lasting and positive change.

We will further incorporate your views, suggestions and recommendations into our Strategic Plan, to ensure that it accurately reflects stakeholder expectations in relation to the role of the OPR within the planning system.

Goals and Actions

The key goals and corresponding delivery actions for the OPR over the strategic plan period are set out in this section and are:

Goal 1: Building a reputation as a clear, fair and independent voice on the effectiveness of Ireland's planning process

Goal 2: Creating a high-performing and efficient organisation that supports and enhances Ireland's planning process

Goal 3: Driving innovation and learning for all those that are stakeholders in the planning process

Goal 4: Building a resilient and agile organisation with a commitment to continuous learning

Goal 5: Focusing on the needs of customers and those with whom the OPR engages

Goal 1

Building a reputation as a clear, fair and independent voice on the effectiveness of Ireland's planning process

The Oireachtas legislated for the OPR to be an independent voice at the heart of the planning system, serving the public interest and playing its part along with other stakeholders in the planning process to ensure proper planning and sustainable development. The OPR will strive to achieve this and to be recognised by the public as a trusted, knowledge-based, constantly improving organisation, delivering valued and effective oversight of the planning system.

The OPR will ensure greater public clarity with regard to the role, and the benefits, of proper planning through education and awareness.

Actions	Milestones
Review, and issue recommendations, with regard to all draft statutory County Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Regional Spatial and Economics Strategies, as well as variations and amendments to same, to ensure compliance with national, and regional, planning policies and objectives.	<p>Evaluation of approximately 200 draft plans, variations, etc. on a (6-year) cyclical basis.</p> <p>Develop and implement, in consultation with key stakeholders, an effective and strategic assessment methodology for statutory plans to measure alignment with existing policy and regulatory requirements including climate and other factors.</p>
Effective and timely examination of complaints about the planning process, where these relate to systemic and policy co-ordination matters rather than individual cases which are the remit of An Bord Pleanála, the Ombudsman's Office, the Courts etc.	<p>Ongoing delivery of a high quality professional, accessible and timely complaints resolution service.</p> <p>We will work with contracted partners to deliver a high quality service that is also value-for-money for the Exchequer.</p>
Conduct effective and fair reviews of planning authorities' systems and procedures.	<p>In addition to carrying out reviews on foot of specific occurrences, we will conduct systematic reviews of authorities' broad performance in their planning functions.</p> <p>During the lifetime of this Strategy we intend to scale-up a review cycle so that each authority will be reviewed on a 6-year cycle.</p> <p>We will develop, in consultation with key stakeholders such as the Department, planning authorities and NOAC, a Planning Authority Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) within which agreed process and outcome targets will be developed for performance and effectiveness measurement.</p>
Be open and transparent in all our work.	<p>All recommendations, with regard to statutory plans, and all finalised reviews and examinations of planning authorities to be published on the OPR website.</p> <p>Annual publication of our Report on the effectiveness of Ireland's planning process in relation to both (a) policy co-ordination (b) effectiveness in the delivery of planning services and (c) enhancing our knowledge base to ensure public engagement and evidence based policy and decision making.</p>
Assist authorities, stakeholders and communities access and understand planning policy matters.	<p>Implement a national planning communications programme to enhance the public's access to information about the functions, responsibilities and benefits of good planning.</p> <p>Host relevant policy and guidance documents in accessible formats on a dedicated portal on our website.</p>
Be responsive to customer and stakeholder requirements and have effective working relationships with key stakeholders.	<p>Through the delivery of the highest levels of customer service and ongoing monitoring of requirements and trends in customers' issues.</p> <p>Proactive engagement to establish and maintain effective collaborative relationships with stakeholders, including through the establishment of dedicated fora.</p>

Goal 2

Creating a high-performing and efficient organisation that supports and enhances Ireland's planning process

The overall delivery of this Strategic Plan is reliant on our functioning as a high-performing organisation. We will build efficient systems and procedures to enable the organisation to discharge its statutory duties and effectively serve the public interest. The OPR will work in partnership with other key State bodies, such as the local authorities, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Office of Public Works, Irish Water, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National Transport Authority, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the National Monuments Service and Government departments, to share knowledge and information with the objective of enhancing the planning process.

Actions	Milestones
Ensure value for money and sound financial management in all aspects of our business.	Compliance with public spending codes, including procurement and financial management rules, ensuring accountability and transparency; Timely and accurate financial reporting.
Building a suite of ICT systems to ensure we perform effectively, engage extensively and discharge our statutory functions in good time.	Develop and implement an accessible on-line platform to disseminate planning knowledge, to provide a training resource point and easy access for the public to comment on draft development plans.
Implement governance structures that promote accountable and transparent decision making and that are in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Provide timely and accurate corporate governance reporting to the parent department; Ensure sound internal controls and establish a continuous monitoring mechanism for these through regular internal audits.
Support the work of the public sector through sharing of knowledge, improving procedures and closely collaborating with other public bodies to maximise effectiveness.	Regularly liaise with other regulatory bodies to build a common and shared best practice to effectively deliver services to the public.
Develop a communications policy with a particular focus on timely communication of changes in the planning system and topical issues with stakeholders.	Issue regular publications and hold information seminars for both, organisational stakeholders and the public.

Goal 3

Driving innovation and learning for all those that are stakeholders in the planning process

The Office of the Planning Regulator is uniquely empowered to drive research and education to enhance the delivery of proper planning and sustainable development to the public. We recognise the pivotal role that the OPR plays in strengthening public awareness of planning, its impacts on society, the environment and its power to create sustainable communities.

We believe that knowledge sharing, training and public participation are effective and impactful methods of creating lasting change and will be a focal point of our strategy to deliver this goal.

Actions	Milestones
Create synergies with other stakeholders, such as local authorities, planning institutes and department of housing, planning and local government, to identify existing shortfalls, create standards of best practice in planning and to inform OPR research programmes.	Conduct regular stakeholder meetings, draw on existing intellectual and corporate resources to arrange for the carrying out of research and educational programmes by partners that provide meaningful outcomes while ensuring value for money.
Establish a National Planning Knowledge Group, including planning authorities, the HEI sector, non-governmental organisations, planning institutes, government organisations and departments.	Identify knowledge gaps through collaborative research with key stakeholders in the planning system; Conduct stakeholder surveys and assess the implementation and functioning of planning policy in Ireland.
Provide educational programmes for specific stakeholder groups, such as the Elected Members, Directors of Service at Local Authorities, professional planners and Non-Governmental Organisations.	Identify target audience to address specific knowledge gaps; Design and deliver educational programmes, information points and resource materials with a particular focus on informing new local elected members in relation to their statutory duties and obligations under planning legislation and policy requirements; Arrange for the delivery of CPD-focused training for decision-makers in the planning process including officials and professional planners.
Improve public awareness of the planning process by disseminating information about the benefits of and achievements in planning.	Implement an interactive, ICT-driven solution enabling better participation by the public in the plan making process; Hold public information sessions to discuss topical planning issues and provide practical information on public participation in the planning process.
Deliver regular events for all stakeholders in the planning process focusing on promoting best practice in planning.	Organise annual events, including in conjunction with Planning Institutes, addressing specific areas of best practice developed within the previous period through OPR-driven research.

Goal 4

Building a resilient and agile organisation with a commitment to continuous learning

We are committed to achieving organisational excellence through empowering our people, developing strong systems and procedures and ensuring accountability and transparency in all aspects of our business. We will strive to develop the OPR as an organisation that is highly responsive to external changes and adapts to them while continuously maintaining high standards of performance.

Actions	Milestones
Attract and retain talented and motivated staff and develop our organisation through investing in our people and structures to ensure that it actively supports our strategic goals and values.	Build our staffing complement in line with our workforce plan and foster the culture of continuous learning through the provision of relevant and transferable training and development.
Continuously develop staff through a comprehensive performance-management and learning and development system.	Effective annual target setting for performance management and development of an annual learning and development plan, encompassing staff skills and experience in order to identify knowledge gaps.
Implement ICT infrastructure that is adaptable, secure and responsive to change.	Carry out regular IT audits to identify gaps and implement improvements and ensuring that data security is at the forefront of all IT projects.
Efficiently adapt to legislative and policy changes affecting the discharge of our functions.	Continuously monitor legislative and policy developments and provide appropriate training to staff.
Respond to changes in the regulatory environment, ensuring public interest is at the forefront of all decision making.	Create/participate in a network of regulatory bodies to allow early identification of upcoming changes.
Develop accredited CPD programmes for professional planners.	Engage in discussions with Planning Institutes to collaboratively develop CPD training programmes at the start of each calendar year.
Identify expected future impacts of the planning system on the environment, communities, transport and other relevant areas to proactively design meaningful solutions.	Through research, in partnership with stakeholders, and analysis of the implementation of planning policy, prepare annual forecasts in relation to future impacts.

Goal 5

Focusing on the needs of customers and those with whom the OPR engages

The OPR will ensure a customer-focused approach to all its services. We will actively engage with stakeholders and customers to gain a better understanding of their needs. We will continuously improve and develop our customer service interfaces, including through information technology.

Actions	Milestones
Maintain, review on an ongoing basis, and publicise a relevant and ambitious Customer Charter.	Charter to be easily accessible on our website, in both Irish and English, outlining our service commitments to our customers.
Continuously seek customer and stakeholder feedback to understand customer's experiences of the planning system and changing perceptions.	Conduct customer surveys to ensure customers are receiving the optimum service. Develop website functionality to allow customers engage with us in an efficient and user-friendly manner. Analyse data received through the complaints process to gain insights into issues arising.
Take a broad and strategic approach to communicating with our customers and stakeholders, using a range of tools and techniques including website and social media feeds.	We will maintain and develop our website and social media presence to ensure quality communication with our customers and potential customers and to increase awareness of the OPR and its functions.
At all times, we will provide information that is as clear and accessible as possible.	Reply to correspondence in clear plain language, free, wherever possible, from jargon and technical terms. Ensure that website content is written in plain English, as appropriate.
Ensure that all customer complaints are handled in the most effective, efficient and impartial manner.	Implement an internal code of practice for complaint handling.

Demonstrating Our Effectiveness

As part of our Strategic Plan, we will strive to continuously deliver high quality, efficient and measurable services to all our stakeholders and we recognise the importance of reporting on our achievements in a transparent, timely and accountable manner.

On a yearly basis, we will prepare and publish an Annual Report which will provide detailed information on our performance against targets set out in this Strategic Plan. In preparing the Report, we will report to you on numerous aspects of our business, such as:

- progress on the implementation of Government policy, such as the National Planning Framework;
- development plans and other plans and strategies assessed and matters arising;
- statistical information on complaint handling;
- benchmarking of performance of planning authorities;
- areas of ongoing research;
- educational programmes provided to stakeholders;
- financial performance and value for money; and
- organisational capability, including premises and resources available.

Performance in achieving our milestones will also inform the production of annual business plans for each functional area of the OPR. These annual business plans will also recognise, and provide for, the challenges, risks and opportunities presenting in our operating environment.

We also recognise the importance of maintaining high standards of corporate governance in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. We will

work closely with our parent department to demonstrate financial accountability, sound internal controls, fairness and transparency in the conduct of our business.

We will develop and implement an Oversight Agreement and a Performance Development Agreement, following the publication of this Strategic Plan, through which we will provide a further commitment in the implementation of sound corporate governance, including:

- establishment of a Risk Committee to ensure regular and thorough assessment of risks;
- establishment of a Finance and Audit Committee;
- implementation of a Procurement Register, ensuring regular monitoring of value for money.

Furthermore, we recognise the critical importance of measuring our performance through the satisfaction of our customers. We will maintain statistics to measure progress towards the service targets established in our Customer Charter. We will carry out consultations and surveys on an annual basis in order to continuously incorporate the views of our stakeholders into our targets.

In our work to build and operate an effective Office of the Planning Regulator, we anticipate that our efforts with all the wider stakeholders will create an even more effective planning process in Ireland for the benefit of the common good and the public interest.



**Oifig an
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