

Office of the Planning Regulator

Draft Strategy Statement

2026 – 2031

(for Public Consultation)

Contents

Introduction.....	3
About us	3
Our Purpose, Vision and Values	5
Our Organisation.....	7
Strategic Goals and Objectives	8

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Introduction

This is the draft second Strategy Statement for the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR).

This Strategy Statement has been prepared pursuant to section 31T of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), while pending the commencement of section 550 of the Planning and Development Act 2024.

About us

What is the OPR?

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) is an independent regulator, set up in April 2019 to oversee the planning system and drive continuous improvement in how planning is delivered in Ireland.

What is planning?

Planning is about deciding where homes, schools, businesses, roads, and parks should go so that communities grow safely and sustainably, while protecting our environment and heritage.

What does the OPR do?

The OPR supports Ireland to grow in a smart, fair, and sustainable way. We do this by supporting local authorities, elected councillors, and an Coimisiún Pleanála in their roles in planning. These are the tasks we do to achieve this:

- **Independently assessing local authority and regional assembly forward planning.** The OPR assesses statutory plans to ensure that they meet the policy requirements set by government. We publish these submissions to local authorities on our website. If a local authority doesn't resolve a serious issue, the OPR can make a recommendation to the Minister that certain measures are taken to make sure that national and regional planning policy is applied. This is governed by legislation.

- **Reviewing planning bodies' systems and procedures.** The OPR reviews the performance local authority planning departments and an Coimisiún Pleanála, making recommendations to support them in their roles.
- **Examining complaints about the overall planning system.** The OPR provides a fair and independent mechanism to examine citizen complaints related to the overall planning services delivered by local authorities. The OPR does not consider complaints related to planning applications or developments.
- **Conducting topical research on planning matters.** The OPR looks at emerging and topical planning issues and carries out research to help elected representatives and people working in the planning system. Our work highlights best practice and recent developments in the sector. We produce a quarterly legal bulletin, case studies and practice papers, all of which are available online.
- **Providing training for those working in the planning system.** The OPR provides training for people who work in planning, elected members to support consistent, high quality planning practice. All our training materials are accessible online.
- **Increasing public awareness of planning.** The OPR helps the public understand why planning matters in creating sustainable communities. We and provides a wealth of information online to help citizens engage with planning.

Our Purpose, Vision and Values

Purpose

Our purpose is to independently oversee and drive improvements in the planning system. We bring greater consistency, certainty, clarity and a longer-term focus to the national planning system by ensuring national policy is implemented and by delivering performance improvement, research, training and public awareness initiatives.

Vision

Our vision is that Ireland develops sustainably, supported by a planning system that enables the delivery of much needed homes and infrastructure, while also protecting our environment and heritage, as well as enhancing our communities.

Values

Independence

Independence is fundamental to the OPR's role in supporting confidence in the planning system. While we work constructively with a broad range of stakeholders, we maintain a clear functional independence in our core regulatory work. Our commitment to impartial and evidence-based evaluation, particularly in assessing statutory plans, ensures that our oversight is fair, credible, and independent. This independence strengthens trust in our work and reinforces the OPR's position as an authoritative and objective voice in the planning sector.

Citizen Focus

The public good remains the guiding principle of the OPR's work in strengthening Ireland's planning system to support sustainable national development. We are committed to securing better outcomes for citizens by promoting efficient and effective processes that support the delivery of development, while ensuring that our environment and amenities are protected. Central to this is our role in strengthening local democracy by supporting and promoting the leadership role played by local authorities in addressing the complex and evolving challenges of sustainable development.

Transparency

Transparency is fundamental to how the OPR operates and to our role as the trusted, authoritative source of information on Ireland's planning system. We are committed to openness, clarity, and accountability in all aspects of our work. By providing accessible, evidence-based information and communicating our decisions and processes clearly, we aim to strengthen public trust and support informed participation across the planning sector.

Collaboration and engagement

Collaboration and engagement are central to how the OPR strengthens the planning system. We work constructively with Government, local authorities and regional assemblies, other stakeholders, and the public to share knowledge, build capacity, and support informed participation. By fostering meaningful engagement and strong partnerships, we enhance coherence and consistency across the sector and reinforce the OPR's role as a trusted, independent leader in planning.

Professionalism

The OPR upholds the highest standards of integrity, expertise, and accountability in everything we do. Through rigorous corporate governance, evidence-based decision-making, and a commitment to continuous learning, we ensure that our work is dependable, consistent, and of the highest quality. This professionalism strengthens trust in the OPR and supports a culture of excellence across the planning sector.

Our Organisation

The structure of the OPR is that of a corporation sole. The Planning Regulator is the chief executive of the Office and is supported by an executive management team of four directors. The Planning Regulator is further supported from a financial management and risk oversight perspective by a finance, audit and risk committee, which includes external members.

The Office functions under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Our staff are independent civil servants of the State.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 introduces an advisory board to the OPR. Further to section 542 of the 2024 Act, the advisory board will consist of between five and seven members and will be mandated to consult with, guide and advise the Planning Regulator in relation to the strategic direction of the Office and monitor the implementation of the Corporate Strategy.

The advisory board, when requested to do so by the Planning Regulator, will consult with, guide and advise the Planning Regulator in relation to the performance of the functions of the Office and advise or make recommendations to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government affecting the functions of the Office.

This Strategy Statement has been prepared pending appointment of the advisory board by the Minister. Once appointed, this Strategy Statement will be consulted upon with the advisory board in accordance with the provisions of section 550.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goal 1: Oversee and ensure the implementation of Government planning policy

We will work with the 31 local authorities and three regional assemblies to support high standards in forward planning that aligns with strategic policy objectives, including Ireland's climate objectives, and supports sustainable growth and development.

Strategic Objectives

- Ensure Government policy on proper planning and sustainable development, including housing and infrastructure delivery is appropriately implemented through the statutory regional strategies and plans of the local government system.
- Drive best-practice and high performance across statutory forward planning processes including the use of analytical, monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track consistency and quality.
- Support the development of shared resources and data systems, and the adoption of new technologies, that the plan-making process can draw on and benefit from.

Strategic Goal 2: Drive and support performance improvement in the planning system

We will work with Government, local government, An Coimisiún Pleanála and the wider planning and development sector to further improve consistency in the planning process. By delivering training and practical support initiatives, we will instil best practice and build a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in the delivery of statutory planning functions.

Strategic Objectives

- Generate an enhanced culture of learning and development across the State planning sector to ensure greater understanding and consistency in the application of planning legislation and policy.
- Develop and implement a new programme of support measures, including frontline training and targeted improvement initiatives, designed to assist local authorities deliver planning functions.
- Provide national leadership and engage with stakeholders to promote best-practice, informed policy development, performance improvement, innovation and efficiency across the State planning sector, including through shared learning and the development of performance measurement systems.
- Examine the systems and procedures used by local authorities, regional assemblies and An Coimisiún Pleanála to deliver planning functions and undertake reviews of their organisation and management as considered necessary.

Strategic Goal 3: Enhance public awareness, support consistent planning practice and inform policy through evidence.

We will improve public awareness on topical and strategic planning issues and provide a trusted source of information to the State planning sector. We will achieve this through practice-focused research, the analysis of key trends and data and by ensuring the public, practitioners and policymakers have access to clear, reliable information on planning and development issues.

Strategic Objectives

- Promote informed understanding, commentary and debate on how Ireland's planning system serves the public good by enabling sustainable development and supporting housing delivery, infrastructure provision, placemaking, climate resilience and environmental protection
- Produce high-quality research and analysis on planning policy, practice and emerging trends, thereby providing reliable information for policymakers and practitioners while also serving as a clear and trusted source of information for the public
- Engage with relevant stakeholders in the planning and development sector to inform the work of the OPR, including Government, planning bodies, higher education authorities, professional representative institutes and sectoral representatives
- Collaborate with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to develop integrated digital systems that consolidate planning, development, infrastructure and environmental data. Which will ensure Government's strategic planning and infrastructure investment is supported by robust, up-to-date and coordinated mapping and data

Strategic Goal 4: Drive excellence through our people, organisation and governance

We will continue to develop our organisation and invest in our people. The OPR will continue to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, demonstrating financial accountability, robust internal controls, fairness and transparency in the conduct of our business.

Strategic Objectives

- Maintain a supportive and flexible workplace where equality, diversity and inclusion, public sector duties and accessibility are truly embedded in our organisational values, policies and practices through citizen-centric service delivery.
- Provide development opportunities to our staff through a learning and development programme and performance management system, including upskilling and reskilling to support business needs.
- Ensure continued robust governance, financial and risk management to safeguard resources and reputation and ensuring strong accountability to the Taxpayer.
- Play our part in delivering on climate objectives in line with the Climate Action Plan.
- Attract and retain highly skilled and professional and diverse workforce to deliver on our mandate and to respond in an agile manner to changing demands.
- Develop a new ICT Strategy and leverage the use of AI to gain efficiencies in the delivery of our services, in line with the Government 'Guidelines for the Responsible Use of AI in the Public Service'.

Strategic Goal 5: Deliver high-quality customer service

We will continue to serve the public in our role as an independent voice at the heart of the planning system and in doing so we are committed to excellence in customer service. While a citizen focus is at the forefront of everything the OPR does, we also proactively engage with Government departments, local authorities, An Coimisiún Pleanála, and other planning and development related stakeholders as our valued customers.

Strategic Objectives

- Maintain the highest standards of courtesy, fairness, impartiality and professionalism in all our customer interactions, in line with the twelve Government Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service and Better Public Services Strategy.
- Deliver on our functional responsibilities as an outward-facing and customer-centric organisation that engages proactively to establish and maintain effective collaborative relationships with stakeholders across the planning and development sector.
- Continue to ensure that transparency is a cornerstone in everything the OPR does while also working within the planning system. This will build greater levels of trust, clarity, consistency, accessibility, accountability and participation, including through harnessing digital technology and innovation.