Good morning Chairperson and thank you for your invitation today.

Public Accounts Committee

Opening Statement by
Ms. Anna Shakespeare, CEO

Thursday 12 December 2019
Good morning Chairman and thank you for your invitation today.

I am accompanied by Jerry Murphy, Deputy Chief Executive who has been with the organisation since 2005 and Brian Lehane, Chief Financial Officer, who joined in July 2018.

I was appointed as Chief Executive of Pobal in August this year. I joined Pobal from St. Michael’s House where I was Chief Executive since 2015.

Pobal values the role of this committee and we are here to account for and to apply the lessons of this process.

Pobal is a not for profit, registered charity and a company limited by guarantee without share capital. Pobal’s board is appointed by Government, under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Established in 1992, Pobal has developed in response to Government priorities over 27 years. On behalf of Government, our work supports valuable services in marginalised communities.

Our core role is to deliver an effective programme and grant management service, to create an inclusive society where Government and communities work together.

In 2018, Pobal managed 25 Programmes, primarily for four Government Departments1. The areas, groups and communities we support are outlined in the briefing document we have submitted to the Committee.

In managing these programmes in 2018 Pobal;

- Disbursed €694.7m, an increase in expenditure of €79.7m (13%) over 2017.
- Supported 2,500 Community Groups and almost 32,000 individuals through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).
- Channelled funding to 4,832 Early Learning & Care Services, supporting approximately 81,899 families with reduced fees through the Community Subvention Programme.
- Approved 19,000 participants for the Seniors Alert Scheme.

We were 442 staff in 2018, and 46% of us are based outside Dublin. We operate our programmes efficiently. Our administration spend for 2018 was €29.94m or 4.10% of budget.

Pobal’s budget has evolved to deliver programmes of work in line with Government policy and requirements which make a difference to people’s lives. Funds disbursed moved from €257 million in 2011 to €695 million in 2018. This reflects changes in Irish society and Government’s commitment to supporting civil society with these changes.

As CEO, my vision for Pobal is to deliver a value for money service for Government and to make a difference for people and communities. The landscape of Irish society has altered significantly, redefining who we are and how we live. Working with community and voluntary organisations, Pobal aims to build capacity locally and to support sustainable, resilient communities.

---

1 We administer these programmes on behalf of Pobal’s lead Department, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Health/HSE and a number of EU bodies.
In a world increasingly fraught with social challenges, the importance of a strong network of natural community supports is a critical component of individual and collective wellbeing. It enables us to meet the challenges of the future.

Pobal is committed to ensuring our processes deliver verifiable management of taxpayer’s money, while offering user friendly and effective support to all stakeholders.

Our supports assist community organisations meet their legislative, governance and financial management requirements. We also provide practical help such as Helping Hands workshops and Managing Better Guides. Where possible we utilise information technology to reduce the administrative burden on community organisations.

We have seen remarkable changes across the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare sector in Ireland in recent years, including the development of the ‘First 5’ strategy and the National Childcare Scheme of which Pobal is Scheme Administrator.

We are proud of our work but we know we do not always get things right. We welcome the oversight of the Comptroller and Auditor General and this Committee. This process is important in reminding us of our purpose, and to identify areas for improvement and learning.

The Committee is aware the Comptroller and Auditor General highlighted two issues in our 2018 Annual Financial Statements. I accept the need for improvement in our procurement processes, with non-compliance on a proportion of expenditure of goods and services in 2018. Pobal and I, personally, take this matter extremely seriously. A corrective action plan is in place with targets and timelines for completion.

The second note to the accounts relates to Chapter 16 of the 2018 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, which examined, inter alia, the administration by Pobal of early learning and childcare funding programmes; two of the recommendations in the Chapter were directed to Pobal. However we understand this Chapter will be considered in greater detail at a future meeting of this Committee.

**Conclusion**

Looking ahead, in 2020 the Department of Rural and Community Development will undertake a Periodic Critical Review of Pobal under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. This is the first review under the 2016 Code.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has also indicated it will undertake a major operational review of all its early years programmes and the operating model in the early learning and care sector.

We look forward to both reviews and implementing any recommendations for change and improvement.

The entire team at Pobal, work hard to deliver for the communities from which we come and where we live. It is an important part of our organisational culture that we exist for families and communities who not only need the services and programmes we administer, but who in real terms pay for these services.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today and my colleagues and I are happy to take any questions you may have.