

Opening statement

From: Hubert Loftus, Head of Planning and Building Division, Department of Education and Skills

To: Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Topic: “The lapse in time between the announcement of the construction of new schools and their completion”

Date: 17 April 2018

I am pleased to have the opportunity to meet with you today, together with colleagues, to assist the Committee in its examination of the timelines involved in the delivery of new schools.

I am joined by my following colleagues from the Department’s Planning and Building Division:

Helen O’Neill, Technical Manager, Professional and Technical Section

Brian Power, Principal Officer, Forward Planning Section

The Department has already provided the Committee with a written submission in relation to this topic. Some key points to note from the submission are:

1. The overall scale of the school building programme which during the period 2010 to 2017 involved the completion of 365 large-scale projects (of which 218 were new school buildings) to provide of the order of 130,000 permanent school places. In addition, over 1,900 projects were completed during this period under the Department’s Additional Accommodation Scheme which resulted in the provision of almost 60,000 school places.
2. New schools are large-scale projects that involve significant investment. As an example, the cost of delivering a new 16-classroom primary school is in the order of

€6.5 million (excluding site costs) and in the order of €22 million for a new 1,000 post-primary school. The planning and delivery of large-scale projects is managed as part of the multi-annual school building programme. The delivery process for a new school typically involves site identification and acquisition prior to appointment of a Design Team, progression through architectural design including planning permission and then tender and construction.

3. Throughout all stages of this delivery process, there are a range of factors and external dependencies outside the Department's control that can impact on delivery timelines on individual projects and the ability to achieve the Department's published indicative timelines for same. Delays can occur in site acquisition, planning, design and construction. The Department keeps in regular contact with schools in relation to such matters.
4. As part of ongoing efforts to improve and streamline information on its website, a single list will be published (in county order) that sets out the current status of all large-scale projects being delivered as part of the school building programme. This list will be updated on a regular basis to reflect the progression of projects through architectural design, tender and construction as part of the €8.4 billion investment in school buildings under the National Development Plan 2018 to 2027.

In its published work programme, the Committee indicated that it wanted the Department's Forward Planning Section to be part of the discussion on this topic. The role of this Section is to analyse demographic and enrolment trends and anticipate future demand for school places. It uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to assist it with this work. Brian Power, Principal Officer is available to talk to you in more detail on the work of the Forward Planning Section

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to invite the Committee to the Department's Planning and Building Division in Tullamore to see at first-hand how new schools are planned and delivered including getting an overview on:

- The Geographic Information System that is used for planning school provision
- The delivery of school building projects and the various delivery mechanisms that are used for same

I am happy to answer further questions arising and welcome discussion of the issues.

END