

Opening Statement by Seán Kyne T.D.,

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development

to the Select Committee on Rural and Community Development

25th April 2018 at 17:00

I thank the Chairman and members and I am very pleased to be able to join the Committee today in considering the Revised Estimate for the Department for 2018. I want to emphasise, as the Minister has done, the importance of putting in place a sustainable basis for long term national development. I welcome the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework, and I look forward to working with my colleagues across Government to deliver on the objectives set out in those documents.

As I set out at my appearance at this Committee last November, my responsibilities in the Department include:

- oversight of the work of the Western Development Commission,
- working with Local Authorities to prepare in a practical way for the roll out of rural broadband,
- responsibility for active citizenship through Public Participation Networks and volunteering,
- responsibility for the Charities Regulatory Authority, excluding appointments of members of the board of the authority, and
- responsibility for the Control of Dogs Act.

I also have responsibility for the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. In this regard, I am sure the Committee will welcome the reference to that initiative in the National Planning Framework, and the investments in the National

Development Plan which will support the development of the Western region more generally.

In relation to broadband, as members will be aware, our goal in the National Broadband Plan is to achieve 100% coverage of high speed broadband across Ireland. While my colleague, Minister Naughten, is working to progress that objective, my Department is working with local authorities to ensure there are no local barriers to deployment and in identifying priority areas for roll out. A provision of €2 million has been allocated to my Department for this task in 2018 under Subhead A9.

The Department also has lead responsibility for developing the relationship between the State and community and voluntary sector and for setting the policy framework for the sector. A sum of €12.7 million has been provided for in the 2018 Estimate to support the Community and Voluntary sector under Subhead B3.

This funding supports volunteer centres and volunteer information services nationwide, as well as a number of national organisations such as Volunteer Ireland. The funding of all these organisations is designed to strengthen and foster volunteerism in Ireland, building a support structure for volunteering locally from the bottom up. This is key to the Department's citizen engagement objectives and supports the spirit of participation in communities.

The scheme to support national organisations in the community and voluntary sector, SSNO, is a key element of the State's support for the role of the sector. The SSNO provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national organisations in the sector, with a focus on organisations that provide supports to those who are disadvantaged.

In this context, I was very pleased to be able to launch the Trust.Ie recruitment programme, a pilot project being driven by Volunteers Centres- particularly from the Dublin City, South Dublin and Galway County centres - which aims to support smaller local charities around Board recruitment. This is particularly helpful given my role in oversight for the Charities Regulator.

The Revised Estimates provide for just over €4.4 million in current funding in 2018 for the Charities Regulator. The Charities Regulator is Ireland's national statutory regulator for charitable organisations. It is an independent authority which was established in 2014 under the Charities Act 2009 and now comes under the remit of my Department. The general function of the regulator is to regulate charitable organisations operating in Ireland in order to increase public trust and confidence in their management and administration. The Regulator is independent in the performance of its statutory functions.

I am delighted to be working with Minister Ring in this new Department, and am very conscious of the critical role that this Department can play in supporting our overall national development, particularly in respect of rural and community development.