

Opening Statement from the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys T.D.

I am seeking approval for the Revised Estimate for 2020 which will enable my Department to continue its important work in the areas of rural development and the islands, community development, and charities regulation.

The social and economic impacts of the Covid pandemic have been dramatic, and individuals and communities right across the country are facing very challenging times.

However, throughout the crisis, our strong sense of community has meant that those in need of support have been getting the assistance they require. I want to thank the individuals, the volunteers and the numerous community and voluntary organisations across the country who have helped the response to the pandemic. Working together has ensured support for those in need throughout this difficult period.

The impact of the pandemic has also presented huge economic challenges right across the country. I strongly believe that the schemes and programmes operated by my Department will support the recovery of rural economies, and to enable resilient communities.

I also believe that this funding is an important element in achieving the fair and regionally balanced recovery to which Government is committed.

2020 Revised Estimate - High Level Figures

The Department's functions are delivered across 3 programme areas (i) Rural Development, which now includes the Islands (ii) Community Development and (iii) Charities Regulation.

Gross expenditure of €364.8 million is budgeted for 2020, which consists of €196.2 million in current expenditure and €168.6 million in capital expenditure.

In terms of the split across programmes:

- €171 million is allocated for the rural development and the islands programme;
- €189 million is allocated for the community development programme; and
- €4.6 million is provided for the Charities Regulatory Authority.

This Revised Estimate includes €30m in once-off current funding to support the community and voluntary response to the pandemic and €17 million in once-off capital funding provided through the July Stimulus Package.

Rural Development Programme

The Rural Development allocation supports a range of schemes that invest in the economic and social development of rural areas and communities.

For 2020 I have allocated €88 million in capital funding for the Rural Regeneration and Development area. This will allow funding of €53 million for projects under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), €25 million for Town and Village Renewal and €10m for the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme.

Together, these investments in rural regeneration and development are having a hugely positive impact on rural areas:

- The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund has now approved funding of €166 million towards 139 projects.
- The Town and Village Renewal scheme, which includes €10 million in stimulus funding, is being targeted at projects which can support community and economic resilience in towns across Ireland in the context of the COVID pandemic.

- The Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme is also important in terms the Covid-19 response, helping to provide quality outdoor facilities for rural areas that can also support the domestic tourism offering.

I have allocated €40 million in capital funding to the LEADER Programme for 2020, an increase of €10 million on the 2019 allocation. At the end of August almost 3,300 projects and over 800 rural enterprises have been approved for funding.

The projects being supported, such as community development projects, agri-food based initiatives, and tourism enterprises, all contribute to the long-term economic and social development of rural areas.

Other important funding for Rural Development includes around €11m for the Islands, €10 million for the Local Improvement Scheme and €5 million for the CLÁR programme.

Community Development Programme

Moving now to the community development programmes, the €148 million allocation consists of €133 million in current expenditure and €15 million in capital expenditure. With this funding the Department administers a range of programmes supporting both individuals and the broad Community and Voluntary sector.

I proposed to allocate €46.9 million to the Community Services Programme, an increase of €700,000 on the 2019 allocation. This funding will benefit over 400 community organisations and 1,900 people across the country. CSP funding has continued throughout the pandemic and a €1m support fund is in place for those organisations most in need.

I plan to allocate €44 million to the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, an increase of €800,000 on 2019. This will ensure continued support for over 2,200 organisations and 27,000 disadvantaged individuals. Many of those engaged with SICAP will be most impacted by the crisis, and it is vital that we continue to support these individuals.

Other key provisions include, €16 million for Supports for the Community and Voluntary Sector; €9.5 million for the Community Enhancement Programme; €7.2 million for libraries development; and €7m for the cross-border PEACE programme.

Of particular importance in 2020 is the once-off €27 million allocation for Covid Supports under the Dormant Accounts Fund. This has seen well over 500 charities, C&V organisations and social enterprises benefit from substantial funding to make up for lost fundraising and revenue generation. This has been a very timely and important support for many organisations providing vital services to people right across the country.

Before closing, I would like to introduce my colleague Minister of State Joe O'Brien whose responsibilities include Community Development and Charities, including the programmes just mentioned such as CSP and SICAP.

With approval, this Revised Estimate will enable us to continue to deliver for the rural economy, and for communities right across Ireland – and help ensure that we achieve a fair and balanced recovery as we emerge from this crisis.

We are both happy to answer any questions and look forward to a constructive discussion.