

Introduction

I want to thank the Chair and the Committee for this opportunity to present details of this Supplementary Estimate for my Department.

The Supplementary Estimate is required to provide the necessary funding of €926.606 million for the Electricity Costs Emergency Benefit Scheme and €12 million for the Business Solar Scheme, both in the Energy Transformation Programme area.

The Supplementary Estimate will also reallocate €67.4 million in savings identified across the Department's four programme areas to provide additional capital funding for the National Broadband Plan. This funding is required as the programme will exceed its planned delivery for the year. The additional activity is allowing the programme to continue to claw back in 2023 delays in roll out in previous years.

The reallocation for the National Broadband Plan is possible due to savings identified within the following Subheads:

Programme A: - Climate Action and Environmental Leadership

- A.4 Environmental and Climate Research (€0.6m)
- A.8 Just Transition (€3.1m)

Programme B: - Energy Transformation

- B.4 Residential/Community Retrofit Programme (€27.7m)
- B.6 Other Energy Programmes (€0.7m)
- B.7 Energy Research Programmes (€10.6m)
- B.15 Residential Retrofit Loan Guarantee Scheme (€2.3m)

Programme C: - Circular Economy Development

- C.4 GSI Services (€2.5m)
- C.6 Waste Management Programmes (€10.8m)

Programme D: - Connectivity and Communications Delivery:

- D.4 Other Communications Infrastructure (€2.7m)
- D.6 National Cyber Security Centre (€3.5m)
- D.7 Emergency Alert System (€2.9m)

The Select Committee for Environment and Climate Action will consider the reallocation of funding from Programme A, B and C along with the additional funding for the Electricity Credit scheme and Business Solar Scheme tomorrow.

National Broadband Plan

The Covid-19 pandemic Level 5 restrictions resulted in significant delays for National Broadband Ireland in progressing the rollout of the National Broadband Plan throughout the Country.

National Broadband Ireland has also faced further complexities working with existing networks which have also impacted on progress. This includes challenges arising in rolling out fibre broadband in a rural environment such as significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles and remediation of ducting.

To address this, a Remedial Plan was adopted in December 2022. Under this Plan, National Broadband Ireland committed to delivering a cumulative target of 185,000 premises passed by the end of January 2024.

This year National Broadband Ireland has endeavoured to make up some of the ground lost during the previous two years. This has resulted in the rollout of the new high-speed fibre broadband network being ramped up significantly with rollout being completed in additional an additional 5 deployment areas than originally provided for. Connection subsidy is required to fund an additional 14,000 connections more than was provided for in the original budget estimate.

Progress to date

At the end of October 2023, significant additional progress has been made with National Broadband Ireland reporting that design is completed on over 432,200 premises; over 202,000 premises can place an order or pre-order for connection through broadband service providers, and over 191,000 premises are passed and available for immediate connection. Over 58,300 premises have now been connected, with National Broadband Ireland connecting approximately 3,500 homes each month.

The Government and National Broadband Ireland agreed to accelerate the rollout of high-speed broadband to some 672 schools across the State in the Intervention Area. This acceleration is on target to be complete by the end of 2023. This will ensure that all schools across the State will have the necessary infrastructure to carry out their critical day-to-day educational activities unimpeded by poor broadband. At the end of October 2023, the necessary infrastructure is installed in 669 Primary Schools in the Intervention area, with 29 installed by other operators as agreed with the Department of Education and the remaining installed by National Broadband Ireland.

Along with the connected schools, 283 Broadband Connection Points, which are publicly accessible sites, have been installed and the wireless high-speed broadband service has been switched on in these

locations through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Conclusion

The delivery of high-speed broadband for the citizens of Ireland is necessary for the continued economic and social development of this country, and the additional funding of €67.4m furthers this delivery.

I am happy to take questions from the Committee on any aspect of this additional capital funding requirement as it relates to the National Broadband Plan.

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