

*Houses of the  
Oireachtas Service*



Coimisiún Thithe  
an Oireachtais  
Houses of the  
Oireachtas Commission

# **Strategic Plan 2016-2018**

## *A Parliament for the People*



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## Message from the Ceann Comhairle

On behalf of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission it is my great pleasure to present this Strategic Plan which sets the strategic direction adopted by the Commission for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service for the period 2016 – 2018.

On accepting the honour and privilege to serve as Ceann Comhairle, following my election by secret ballot, I committed to overseeing implementation of a programme of parliamentary reform, founded on the needs of the times, that would better serve the Houses of the Oireachtas, their Members and the people they represent.

It is clear that there is a considerable degree of consensus on the need for parliamentary reform. All Members have expressed support for the reform programme we are now implementing. These reforms are focused to enhance the workings of the Houses and give Members greater opportunities to engage more meaningfully in the policy-making process. It now falls to the Houses and their Members to make effective use of these new opportunities to ensure that the reforms take hold. As Oireachtas Members we have a collective responsibility to drive the reform programme.

The vision set out in this Strategic Plan, *A Parliament for the People*, gives expression to this shared sense of purpose. The Plan sets out the goals and objectives that will be pursued by the Service, under the direction of the Commission, in support of this vision.

In particular it reflects our commitment towards achieving our overarching objective of providing effective support services to the Houses of the Oireachtas, their Committees and to Members of the Houses in undertaking their constitutional roles. It also reaffirms our commitment to communicating the work of the Houses to the public in more accessible forms and in so doing strengthening engagement between the people and their Parliament.

Throughout the lifetime of this Plan there will no doubt be new challenges to overcome as well as new opportunities arising. I am confident that the Service can successfully adapt to manage new situations and changing priorities as they arise.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary General and the staff of the Service for their work as they set about implementing this Strategic Plan. As we look to the future, I am confident that by focusing on the objectives set out in the Plan, and with the support of all Members of the Houses, we will succeed in our endeavours as we continue to pursue our vision of *A Parliament for the People*.

**Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD**

*Ceann Comhairle*



## Foreword by the Secretary General

I am pleased to present my first Strategic Plan in my capacity as newly appointed Clerk of the Dáil and Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. The Plan has been developed in consultation with the staff of the Service and the Commission.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to the important role played by my predecessor, Mr. Kieran Coughlan, in the establishment of the Commission and in the developments initiated under his stewardship.

This Plan outlines the values that will inform how the Service will fulfill its statutory mandate together with its objectives and priorities for the next three years. The Plan identifies four key strategies for the Service, namely to -

- Support the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Parliamentary Reform Agenda,
- Support Members in their Constitutional roles,
- Promote Accessibility and Public Engagement, and
- Develop our Capability and our Staff.

The Plan has been developed in the context of a comprehensive programme of parliamentary reform. This includes the election of the Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot for the first time, the establishment of a Business Committee comprising representatives of all groups to plan and arrange the Business of the Dáil, the appointment of Committee Chairs using the d'Hondt system and significant changes to parliamentary procedures.

Future reforms will include the establishment of the Independent Parliamentary Budget Office and the development of an enhanced role for the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Advisor, both of which will strengthen the capacity of Members to perform their parliamentary functions.

An important objective of this Plan is to increase public understanding and improve perception of the work of the Houses and their Members. In this regard the Plan includes a number of measures to promote greater public accessibility and engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas, including the further development of the Oireachtas website and Oireachtas TV channel and new initiatives in education.

Our ability to deliver high quality services to the Houses, Committees and Members is critically dependent on our staff. We are fortunate in having highly motivated and committed people with a wide range of skills working in our organisation. During the period of this Plan we will create a working environment where leadership and high performance are rewarded, and where our staff can develop both personally and professionally.

On 21 January 2019 we will commemorate and celebrate the Centenary of the First Sitting of Dáil Éireann. As we prepare to mark this important date in our political history, I look forward to working with the Members of the Dáil and Seanad and our staff to build on the achievements of the past so that the Houses of the Oireachtas are equipped to meet the challenges ahead.

**Peter Finnegan**

*Clerk of Dáil Éireann and Secretary General*



# Our Operating Environment – Challenges, Opportunities, Risk Management

## The Houses of the Oireachtas Governance Structures

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service (the Service) is the public service body that administers the National Parliament of Ireland (the Houses of the Oireachtas) on behalf of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (the governing Board).

The Commission is a statutory corporate body and is independent in the performance of its functions. It comprises Members of the Dáil and Seanad, together with the Secretary General, and is chaired by the Ceann Comhairle (11 Members in total).

The policy making and oversight roles of the Commission as set out in the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Acts 2003 to 2015 are ‘to provide for the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas; to consider and determine policy in relation to the Service; to oversee the implementation of that policy by the Secretary General; and to act as governing body of the Service’.

Operating under its statutory framework, the Commission provides the resources, systems of governance and policy direction for the administration of Parliament by the Service. It operates under a three year statutory budget allocation from the Central Fund. The current three year allocation is €369m for the period 2016-2018.

The statutory function of the Service is ‘to provide advice and support services to the Commission, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and their Committees and to the Members of the Houses’.

The Service is headed by the Secretary General who also holds the position of Clerk of the Dáil. The role of the Secretary General is set out in section 16 of the Commission Acts 2003 to 2015. The Secretary General is a member of the Commission and is also accountable to it for the implementation of its policies.

The Commission is accountable to the Houses of the Oireachtas and presents Annual Reports of its work together with Estimates and Accounts of its expenditure. Its Accounts are audited by the C&AG on an annual basis. The Commission has two key Committees, a Finance Committee and a statutory Audit Committee. The Finance Committee monitors expenditure and budgetary performance. The Audit Committee advises the Secretary General on financial matters and advises the Commission on matters of corporate governance.

Our key stakeholders are the 218 Oireachtas Members and their staff, Office Holders, Service staff, the public, Government Departments, the Office of Public Works, and the media. There are currently 485 Civil Service posts sanctioned by the Commission. There are approximately 416 political staff engaged by Members and parties.

## Key Challenges

### Supporting the Houses and their Members

The key challenge for the Service is to maintain a high level of services to the Houses and their Members to meet increasing demands and to manage expectations having regard to available resources (people and money) and accommodation.

### Open Parliament

In order to help build greater public understanding and trust in the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Commission is committed to creating a more Open Parliament by enhancing public engagement and bringing Parliament closer to the people it represents.

### Implementing Parliamentary Reform

On 26th May 2016, Dáil Éireann approved the Report of the sub-Committee on Dáil Reform which identified a package of reforms to strengthen the Houses and their Committees. The Commission is committed to supporting the implementation of these reforms as a key goal of the period of this strategy.

The political landscape has changed greatly since the General Elections with more power vested in Parliament to plan and make arrangements for its own business. A new Business Committee has been established (chaired by the Ceann Comhairle) comprising both Government and Opposition TDs, who together plan the Dáil business on a weekly, sessional and yearly basis. This change has had a major impact on the way we do business as, with increased power, comes increased responsibility and accountability.



The putting in place of structures and supports to implement these reform measures, the management of day-to-day engagement with Oireachtas Officer Holders and Members, combined with providing the appropriate technological supports to Members to enable them conduct their parliamentary duties and to enable flexible and efficient working conditions, are key goals of the period of this strategy.

### **Expanded Committees system**

The Committees system is an integral part of the parliamentary process. It is a key mechanism for discussing policy issues on an all-party basis and for enhanced public and stakeholder engagement, thereby allowing the Houses of the Oireachtas to deal with matters that are difficult to deal with in plenary session, such as taking evidence from witnesses.

For instance, the Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) undertakes the scrutiny of public funds and reports to Dáil Éireann. Scrutiny by the PAC of Secretaries General of Government Departments is based on audits and examinations carried out by the C&AG on behalf of the Dáil.

To enhance parliamentary scrutiny throughout the annual budgetary cycle, a new Budget Oversight Committee has been established, and a new Independent Parliamentary Budget Office is to be set up. A new Irish Language Committee has been established, as was a Special Committee on the Future of Healthcare. A Committee on Housing was established immediately after the General Election, which has since presented its report to the Dáil. Other ad-hoc special purpose Committees may be set up during the period of this strategy. These are clear mechanisms for improving engagement between politics and the people that will help to enhance the understanding of the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### **Technological Changes**

Investing in technology has been a key strategic objective of the Service over the past number of years. The Service has recruited key specialist ICT personnel in support of this objective. A project is underway to replace the systems supporting the Dáil and Seanad Chambers and Committee Rooms; to upgrade/replace and integrate systems in key procedural areas vital to the running of the Houses and their Committees; and to strengthen our in-house technological and project management expertise.

The Houses of the Oireachtas ICT Unit has an ambitious vision to transform the current ICT landscape within the Service to one that can provide an innovative technology platform that truly supports the business of its 1,200 internal users. This investment in our key processes, systems and in-house ICT expertise will continue throughout the period of this strategy.

### Georgian Leinster House

Georgian Leinster House, seat of Dáil and Seanad Éireann, is a historic property under the care and management of the Office of Public Works (OPW). A programme of vital structural and restoration works to the property, including to the Dáil and Seanad Chambers, is planned from 2016 and will continue throughout the period of this strategy. Ensuring the uninterrupted smooth running of the Houses and their Committees during the works programme presents significant logistical challenges for the Commission, as will the provision of alternative accommodation for relocated staff and services, and additional accommodation to facilitate the engagement of additional staff allocated to support the parliamentary reform measures.

### Key Opportunities

Our staff are our principal resource and their experience and dedication to service are central to the achievement of our objectives. Staff, at all levels in the organisation, are passionate about their work in supporting the National Parliament.

The Service is fully committed to the opportunities that the practical actions identified in the Civil Service Renewal Plan present to strengthen the Service's capacity, capability, accountability and leadership. The Service will continue to deepen its professional and specialist knowledge and expertise by matching skills needs analysis with best practice recruitment and selection and by continued investment in the development of our people.

The 21st of January, 2019 marks the Centenary of the First sitting of Dáil Éireann. The commemoration of this event presents an opportunity to promote greater understanding and interest in the Houses of the Oireachtas and to create broader engagement with the people about the role and importance of Parliament. During the period of this strategy, the Commission will develop initiatives and activities aligned with the overall approach to the Decade of Centenaries that will leave a legacy and demonstrate a lasting value to the Oireachtas and the public.

## Risk Management

The overall goal of the Service's risk management policy is to ensure that all risk management activities contribute to the achievement of the Service's strategic objectives; that the risk policy is aligned with the Service's business continuity plan; and that the policy articulates the Service's approach and expectations in relation to the management of risk across the organisation.

The Service encourages the taking of controlled risks, capitalising on new opportunities and using innovative approaches to further the interest of the Service and to achieve the business objectives, provided that the resultant exposures do not infringe on the operating procedures or legal and regulatory requirements of the Service.

The Service's Risk Management Committee is the primary champion of risk management at strategic and operational levels and is responsible for developing and maintaining the policy and strategic approach to risk in the Service. All staff members have a responsibility for identifying and managing risk.

## Our Vision, Our Mission

### Our Vision

A Parliament for the People

### Our Mission

To provide high quality parliamentary services to the Houses of the Oireachtas, their Committees, their Members, and to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission



## Our Values

### Statement of Values

#### Organisational Values

We are committed to ensuring that the following values inform our work and working relationships and reflect an ethos of professional excellence for our organisation:

<b>Leadership:</b>	We provide our people with the leadership, skills and knowledge they need.
<b>Integrity and Impartiality:</b>	We provide our services with efficiency, and we act and take decisions in an open, fair, impartial and transparent manner.
<b>Excellence:</b>	We are committed to providing high quality services to achieve our objectives.
<b>Accountability:</b>	We are accountable for our actions and our decisions, which we base on the principles of good governance and best practice, and which are open to scrutiny.
<b>Accessibility:</b>	We are committed to promoting accessibility and public engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas, including the provision of accurate, clear and helpful information.

## Our Strategic Goals

### Four strategic goals

**Support the Houses  
of the Oireachtas &  
the Parliamentary  
Reform Agenda**

**Support Members in  
their Constitutional  
Roles**

**Promote Accessibility  
& Public Engagement**

**Develop our  
Capability and our  
Staff**

### By end 2018:

- We will have a more effective Parliament that is better equipped to perform its Constitutional functions.
- We will have responded to the needs of Members to enable them to be effective parliamentarians and public representatives.
- We will have a Parliament that is more open and accessible.
- We will have strengthened the capability of the Service and its staff so that we can deliver on our strategic goals.
- In 2019, we will be ready to commemorate the Centenary of the First Sitting of Dáil Éireann and have a Parliament that will make our people proud.



# Strategy Map

## VISION

A Parliament for the People

## MISSION

Our mission is to provide high quality parliamentary services to the Houses of the Oireachtas, their Committees, their Members, and to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

## VALUES

Leadership; Integrity and Impartiality; Excellence; Accountability; Accessibility

## STRATEGIES

C H A L L E N G E S & R I S K S

### Support the Houses of the Oireachtas & the Parliamentary Reform Agenda

#### GOALS

The sittings of the Houses and their Committees are continuously and effectively supported.

High quality procedural capacity in place across the Service.

Parliamentary reform agenda implemented, including, Members being provided with increased support for Private Members' legislation and budgetary scrutiny by Parliament.

To provide the Houses of the Oireachtas with the infrastructure and logistical services it needs for sittings and Members' and staff accommodation.

### Support Members in their Constitutional Roles

#### GOALS

To provide Members with the high quality services they need to perform their parliamentary and representational duties.

To provide Members with more flexible and effective ICT services to enable them to do their work.

### Promote Accessibility & Public Engagement

#### GOALS

Greater public understanding, trust and pride in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

An Open Parliament that strengthens its engagement with the people.

### Develop our Capability & our Staff

#### GOALS

High performing, engaged and motivated staff.

Good corporate governance.

Development of innovative ICT solutions to support our work.

Economic, efficient and effective use of resources.

O P P O R T U N I T I E S

# Strategy Implementation

## Implementation

### Delivery

We will deliver the strategies and goals of this plan through our business planning framework. We will prepare a Corporate Business Plan setting out the tasks, targets and assigned responsibilities for delivery of the actions to which we have committed.

We will also prepare business plans and supporting strategies for the delivery of actions in individual policy areas of the Commission, including in the areas of Communications, Library & Research Service, and ICT. These plans will be integrated with our Corporate Business Plan.

### Measurement

We will measure our progress and achievements in implementing this plan through periodic formal reviews by the Secretary General of the delivery of our Corporate Business Plan. Senior managers in the Service will be accountable in these reviews for the delivery of tasks assigned to them.

We will also measure the success of our achievements through the satisfaction levels of our key stakeholders, including Members, Office-Holders and staff.

### Reporting

The Secretary General will report annually to the Commission on the implementation of this Strategic Plan. The Annual Report of the Commission will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

**Business Planning Framework****Strategic Plan 2016 to 2018**

Formal Reviews by the Secretary General on delivery of Corporate Business Plan

**Corporate Business Plan 2016-2018**

Local Business  
Plans

Local Business  
Plans

Local Business  
Plans

Local Business  
Plans

Reform Delivery  
Plan (IRDP)

**All Staff PMDS Job Holder Forms**

# Achieving Strategy Outcomes

## Strategy 1

Support the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Parliamentary Reform Agenda

### Outcome

Office-Holders, Chairpersons and Members receive high quality advice and support services

<b>Priorities</b>	<p>To provide high quality advice and services to support the Houses and their Committees</p> <p>To support and implement parliamentary reform recommendations, including by establishing an Independent Parliamentary Budget Office and strengthening the capacity of the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisor</p> <p>Maintain and further develop capacity to effectively support Committees across all of their functions</p> <p>To have a sufficient number of staff with a high standard of procedural knowledge and experience</p> <p>To transform the technologies supporting the work of the Houses and their Committees</p>
<b>Measures</b>	<p>Level of satisfaction with advice and services provided</p> <p>Benchmarking against other comparable Parliaments</p> <p>Independent Parliamentary Budget Office established by mid 2017</p> <p>Increased capacity in the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Advisor</p> <p>Number/% of reform measures implemented</p> <p>Level of satisfaction with operation of parliamentary reform measures</p> <p>Number/% of staff providing procedural support</p>
<b>Risks</b>	<p>The proceedings of the Houses and their Committees fail to take place as scheduled</p> <p>Failure or misapplication of parliamentary procedures</p> <p>Inadequate resources, funding or accommodation to support and operate parliamentary reform measures</p> <p>Project Management failure</p>
<b>Key Projects</b>	<p>Parliamentary Reform</p> <p>Independent Parliamentary Budget Office</p> <p>Expanded role of Office of the Parliamentary Legal Advisor</p> <p>Technologies in the Chambers project</p> <p>Parliamentary Workflow Systems projects</p> <p>Procedural Knowledge Initiatives</p>

## Strategy 2

Support Members in their Constitutional Roles

### Outcome

Members of the Houses are provided with the advice and support services they need to enable them to perform their parliamentary and public representative duties efficiently and effectively

<b>Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide high quality advice and services to Members</li> <li>To provide Members with the allowances and pension arrangements available to them under legislation</li> <li>To provide support to Members in their role as employers</li> <li>To provide support to Members to participate in inter-parliamentary activities</li> <li>To provide Members with the technology supports they require</li> </ul>
<b>Measures</b>	Level of satisfaction of Members with the advice and support services provided
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to provide Members with adequate services to facilitate them in performing their parliamentary and representational duties</li> <li>Inadequate funding to provide required services</li> </ul>
<b>Key Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee Assistance Service for Members' staff</li> <li>Print Facility Strategy 2016 - 2020</li> <li>Library &amp; Research Service Strategy 2016-2018</li> <li>ICT Enterprise Architecture</li> <li>Technology in the Chambers/Committee Rooms project</li> </ul>

## Strategy 3

### Support Accessibility and Public Engagement

#### Outcome

A public that is well informed and more engaged with its Parliament

<b>Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop and implement a new Communications Strategy</li> <li>To redevelop the Oireachtas.ie website</li> <li>To further develop and promote “Oireachtas TV”</li> <li>To develop a programme for the 2019 Centenary Commemorations of the First Sitting of the Dáil</li> <li>To support the greater use of Irish in the Oireachtas</li> <li>To provide improved access to people with disabilities</li> <li>To engage with the OPW and relevant stakeholders on the structural and restoration works programme for Georgian Leinster House</li> <li>To develop plans for improved visitor facilities on completion of the restoration works</li> </ul>
<b>Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results of commissioned research-based public surveys</li> <li>New Irish Language Scheme published</li> <li>New Oireachtas.ie website launched in 2017</li> <li>Level of social media engagement</li> <li>Plan for Centenary commemorations in place</li> <li>Sittings of the Houses and their Committees continue uninterrupted during the restoration works programme</li> </ul>
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure of Communications Strategy to achieve its objectives</li> <li>Website failure</li> <li>Inadequate funding</li> <li>Restoration works to Georgian Leinster House not completed on schedule due to the scale of the works necessary</li> <li>Access to Leinster House complex impeded</li> </ul>
<b>Key Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications Strategy</li> <li>Oireachtas TV</li> <li>Website Redevelopment project</li> <li>Parliamentary Archive project</li> <li>Restoration of Georgian Leinster House by OPW</li> <li>Programme for 2019 Centenary Commemorations of the First Sitting of the Dáil</li> </ul>



## Strategy 4

Develop our Capability and our Staff

### Outcome

An organisation with a focus on continuous improvement, high performance and learning

<b>Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To deliver our Strategic Plan 2016-2018</li> <li>To maximise the performance, potential and skills of our staff</li> <li>To recruit additional expertise where required</li> <li>To map, improve and protect key processes and ICT systems</li> <li>To implement public/ civil service reform plan actions</li> <li>To maintain a high standard of corporate governance</li> <li>To consult and respond to new situations and changing priorities</li> </ul>
<b>Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number/% of Corporate Business Plan actions delivered</li> <li>New streamlined performance management system in place</li> <li>Extent of skills gap closed</li> <li>Organisation development plan initiatives implemented</li> <li>Civil Service Renewal Plan actions supported</li> <li>Staff survey results</li> <li>Efficiency reviews completed</li> <li>Completion of process mapping project in 2017</li> </ul>
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to deliver on our strategic goals</li> <li>Failure to motivate and retain high quality and experienced staff</li> <li>Inadequate funding</li> <li>Failure of external contractor</li> <li>Non-compliance with statutory obligations</li> <li>ICT security breach</li> </ul>
<b>Key Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Business Plan 2016-2018</li> <li>Integrated Reform Delivery Plan</li> <li>Learning and Development Strategy</li> <li>Digital Transformation Strategy Programme of projects</li> <li>ICT Infrastructure &amp; Operations Programme of projects</li> <li>Records Management Programme</li> </ul>

# Organisation Chart

