



Deputy Aidan Farrelly
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To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth what preparatory work is underway within her Department to contribute to the planned review of the National Development Plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Farrelly,

I refer to the parliamentary question above and apologise for the delay in responding to you.

My Department is undertaking steps in a number of areas in preparation for the review of the National Development Plan. Details of these are set out below.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

Tusla's capital expenditure is ramping up due to significant pressure on residential care and special care services. Tusla are purchasing houses in line with their Strategic Plan for Residential Care 2022-2025, and the capital budget secured for 2025/2026 represents an increase of over 60% on 2024 funding levels. My Department and Tusla's 2024 NDP submission envisages a step-change increase in capital investment in the period 2025-2030. A key focus will be the continued purchase of properties to develop as additional residential care units. Tusla are updating their Estates Strategy and this will help form the basis of the revised 2025 NDP bid.

Early learning and childcare

The National Development Plan identifies access to quality early learning and childcare as a component of National Strategic Objective 10. Capital funding has been allocated to the early learning and childcare sector under the NDP. This will enable significant investment in early learning and childcare.

Some €89 million has been allocated to the early learning and childcare sector between 2023 and 2026, which is being delivered under the Building Blocks Capacity Grant Schemes. The primary focus of the Building Blocks Capacity Grant Schemes is to increase capacity in the 1-3 year old, pre-ECCE, age range for full day care. Appraisal of applications for this scheme considers the supply and demand in the area around the proposed projects. The most recent scheme, the Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme was launched on the 4th of November 2024. Applications for this scheme have now closed and an appraisal process is underway. The primary focus of the Extension Grant Scheme is to increase capacity in the 1-3-year-old, pre-Early Childhood Care and Education, age range for full day care. €25m will be made available this year to deliver additional capacity under the Scheme and I expect to announce the outcome of the application process in the coming weeks.



Future capital expenditure measures are being considered in the context of the Programme for Government, which includes commitments to forecast demand, deliver public supply within the childcare sector where required, and to provide capital investment to build or purchase state-owned childcare facilities to create additional capacity in areas where unmet need exists. A forward planning model is in development to support this work.

The Programme for Government marks a significant shift in the policy direction in relation to public delivery of early learning and childcare. There is a commitment for the first time to public provision and to capital investment to build or purchase State-owned facilities. Some early scoping work has been carried out to explore options to introduce a segment of public provision. This will require much more detailed and extensive policy development and design in order progress to implementation stage, having regard to the wider policy emerging policy context as set out in the Programme for Government. I expect that this work will form part of my Department's contribution to the upcoming review of the NDP.

Disability services infrastructure

In relation to specialist disability services infrastructure, my Department is overseeing the development by the Health Service Executive (HSE) of a multi-annual Strategic Infrastructural Plan for Disability Services. This plan is being developed in alignment with the National Disability Strategy, the Disability Services Action Plan 2024–2026, and the Progressing Disability Services (PDS) Roadmap. Findings arising from the early phases of this work will support my Department's contribution to the formal NDP review, which is scheduled for July 2025.

The strategic plan will be informed by population trends and regional service needs and will be structured around four key pillars of disability services: residential, day services, children's services, and respite services.

My Department has also tasked the HSE with bringing forward a near term pipeline of capital projects in order to optimise investment.

In parallel, my Department remains committed to ensuring the sustainability and effective use of capital investment in disability infrastructure. This includes addressing legacy deficits, supporting the transition to community-based models of care, and ensuring alignment with the broader implementation of Sláintecare and the commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).

This preparatory work is essential for informing future capital funding agreements and long-term investment strategies to shape the delivery of high-quality, person-centred disability services over the next decade.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Norma Foley', is written over a horizontal line.

Norma Foley

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth