



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

Office of the Planning Regulator Activity Report

Quarter 1 of 2025



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Introduction

This is the twentieth of a series of quarterly activity reports (QARs) that the Office of the Planning Regulator (the OPR) will publish on its website as an overview of the nature and extent of its functions across its statutory mandate.

These are:

- I. Evaluation of the statutory plans of the local government system;
- II. Reviews and examinations of local authority systems and procedures used in the delivery of planning services to the public; and
- III. Undertaking programmes relating to training, education, research and public awareness in relation to the benefits of planning.

Evaluation of Statutory Plans

The OPR is responsible for independently assessing city/county development plans (CDPs) and local area plans (LAPs) at three key stages: issues paper, draft plan and material alterations. The OPR also considers any proposed variations to existing CDPs or amendments to LAPs. OPR submissions may include recommendations, observations or advice.

In Q1 of 2025, 15 consultations on statutory plans opened for public consultation. These consultations related to:

- One material alteration to a CDP;
- Seven variations to existing CDPs;
- Three draft LAPs; and
- Four material alterations to LAPs.

OPR Submissions on Statutory Plans

In Q1 2025, the OPR made 13 submissions to local authorities. Table 1 below sets out a breakdown by plan-type. In Q1 the majority of submissions related to variations to existing CDPs and to LAPs at material alterations stage.

Submissions on Statutory Plans	
Issues Paper for Variations to CDPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues paper for Variation No. 1 to the County Donegal Development Plan 2024-2030 	1
Variations to CDPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variation No.1 to the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 Variation No. 1 to the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028 Variation No. 4 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027 	3
Material Alterations to Proposed Variations to CDPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Material alterations to Variation No. 1 (Kilcullen Settlement Plan) to the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 Material alterations to Variation No. 2 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 	2
Draft LAPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gort Local Area Plan 2025-2031 Kiltiernan-Glenamuck Local Area Plan 	2
Material Alterations to LAPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrick-on-Shannon Local Area Plan 2025-2031 Carrick-on-Suir Local Area Plan 2025-2031 Longford Town Local Area Plan 2025-2031 Wicklow Town-Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025-2031 Dundalk Local Area Plan 2024-2030 	5
Total:	13

Table 1 | Submissions on Statutory Plans

OPR Submissions by Regional Area

Local authorities are divided into three regional areas, represented by three regional assemblies:

- The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA);
- The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA); and
- The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA).

OPR submissions during Q1 2025 related to all regional assembly areas. Figure 1 below shows the number of submissions made on consultations within each regional assembly area.

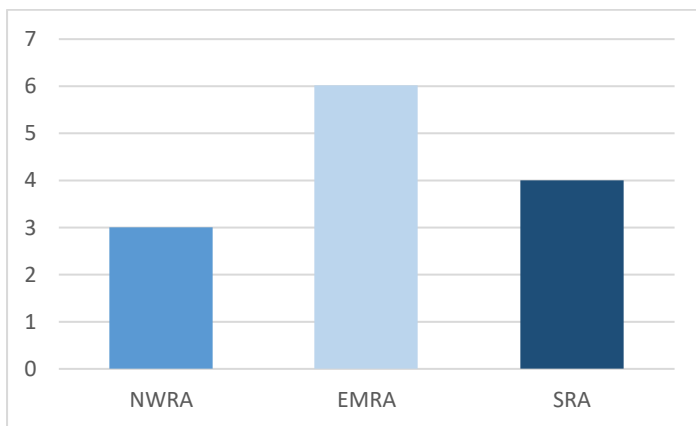


Figure 1 | OPR Submissions by Regional Assembly Area

OPR Recommendations and Observations

The OPR may make recommendations or observations in its submissions at the draft and/or material alterations stage. Due to the high-level nature of issues papers, the OPR does not make observations or recommendations at this stage.

Recommendations issued by the OPR relate to clear breaches of relevant legislative provisions; the national or regional policy framework; and Government policy, as set out in the Ministerial Guidelines under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act). The local authority is required to implement or address recommendation(s) made by the OPR.

Observations take the form of a request for further information, justification on a particular matter, or clarification regarding particular provisions of a plan on issues that are required to ensure alignment with policy and legislative provisions. The OPR requests that local authorities action an observation.

Table 2 below sets out the number of observations and recommendations made by the OPR in Q1 2025.¹

Recommendations and Observations made by the OPR			
	Submissions (number):	Recommendations (number):	Observations (number):
Variations to CDPs	6	14	5
Draft LAPs	2	4	5
Material Alterations to Draft LAPs	5	15	10
Total:	13	33	20

Table 2 | Recommendations and Observations made by the OPR

OPR Recommendations and Observations: Legislative Categories

The evaluation and assessment of plans considers the following legislative and policy matters:

- Consistency with the National Planning Framework (NPF);
- Consistency with the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES);
- Consistency with the relevant Development Plan (DP);
- Relevant guidelines for planning authorities made under Section 28 of Act, including consistency with specific planning policy requirements (SPPR) specified in those guidelines;
- Consistency with the National Transport Authority (NTA) Transport Strategy (TS) (if in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA));

¹ As the OPR does not issue recommendations or observations at issues paper stage these figures do not relate to submissions made at issues paper stage.

- Consistency with the legislative provisions for statutory plans as provided for under the Act; and
- Consistency with legislative provisions in relation to Climate Action.

A breakdown of the recommendations and observations made in Q1 by legislative category is contained in Tables 3 and 4 below. As recommendations can cover more than one legislative provision, the numbers presented in these tables (Table 3 and 4) differ from the total number of recommendations listed above in Table 2.

OPR Recommendations	Number
Consistency with NPF	13
Consistency with RSES	33
Consistency with DP	21
Consistency with NTA TS for GDA	-
Policy Matters re Section 28 Guidelines	28
Consistency with Legislative Provisions	13
Consistency with Legislative Provisions re Climate Change	10
Other	4
Total:	122

Table 3 | OPR Recommendations

OPR Observations	Number
Consistency with NPF	1
Consistency with RSES	3
Consistency with DP	3
Consistency with NTA TS for GDA	-
Policy Matters re Section 28 Guidelines	2
Consistency with Legislative Provisions	-
Consistency with Legislative Provisions re Climate Change	1
Other	5
Total:	15

Table 4 | OPR Observations

Adopted Plans: Outcome of OPR Submissions

Once a plan has been adopted, the OPR has four weeks to assess the plan as adopted and determine whether the plan aligns with national and regional policy and has satisfactorily addressed the recommendations made by the OPR.

Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 and Maynooth and Environs Joint Local Area Plan 2025-2031 were adopted by planning authorities in Q1 2025. The Office made 21 recommendations in total at the draft and material alterations stage of these two plans. The recommendations were satisfactorily addressed for the Maynooth and Environs Joint Local Area Plan 2025-2031. However, consideration of the Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031 was ongoing at the end of Q1 2025.

In addition, five variations were made in Q1. Of these, the OPR completed its assessment of three: Variation No.1 to the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028; Variation No. 3 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027; and Variation No. 3 to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, with no further action required. The OPR's assessment of Variation No. 1 (Kilcullen Settlement Plan) of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and Variation No. 4 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 was ongoing at the end of Q1.

In Q1 2025 the OPR completed its assessment of two LAPs and one variation which were adopted in December 2024: Flemington-Balbriggan Local Area Plan; Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024-2030; and Variation No. 6 to Monaghan CDP 2019-2025. The recommendations were satisfactorily addressed with no further action required.

Draft Directions

Further to Section 31AM of the Act, where the OPR is of the opinion that a plan has been made in a way that is not consistent with any recommendations made by the OPR and that the plan has been made in a manner which fails to set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned, the OPR may deem that it is merited for the Minister to issue a direction. In Q1 2025, the OPR did not issue any draft directions.

Final Directions

The OPR issued a recommendation to the Minister of a final Direction on two plans in Q1 2025: the Ballina Local Area Plan 2024-2030 and Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030. The direction process was ongoing for these plans at the end of Q1 2025.

***Note:** The OPR's submissions and recommendations to the Minister can be found on the [OPR's website](#). Please note that final directions are only published once the direction process has been complete.*

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement with Local Authorities

During Q1, the OPR continued to engage with local authorities, meeting with Cork City Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Waterford City and County Council. This engagement allows the OPR to answer queries or discuss key matters regarding proposed plans, and to provide additional information, such as policy updates, which may support the work of the local authority during the plan-making process.

Plans Evaluation Forum

The OPR hosted one meeting of the Plans Evaluation Forum, in March 2025, which enabled discussions between all organisations on statutory plans subject to public consultation over that period.

Reviews and Examinations

Local Authority Reviews Programme

Through its statutory reviews programme, the OPR fulfils an important oversight and monitoring role in relation to the systems and procedures used by local authorities in the performance of their statutory planning functions.

Roscommon County Council

Following engagement with the Council and Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Roscommon planning review was finalised and published.

Overall, the review report underlines a fundamental necessity for Roscommon County Council to create additional capacity within its planning department to ensure the delivery of quality planning services.

The report also reflects on the Council's performance across a range of functions, making 14 recommendations to ensure the Council provides quality planning services in the face of current and future additional demands.

Galway County Council

A planning review of Galway County was initiated during Q1. In doing so, the OPR met with the Council's planning department to provide an overview of the process and to commence the information gathering phase of the review.

Longford County Council

A Longford planning review was also initiated during Q1. As above, the OPR met with the Council's planning department to provide an overview of the process and to commence the information gathering phase of the review.

Local Authority Monitoring

The OPR continues to engage with previously reviewed local authorities in relation to the implementation of recommendations:

- South Dublin County Council – six-month progress update;
- Meath County Council – six-month progress update;
- Offaly County Council – 12-month progress update; and
- Waterford City and County Council – 12-month progress update

In general, monitoring indicates that review recommendations are being implemented, or progressed, across the various local authorities, notwithstanding ongoing resourcing challenges being experienced within the local government sector.

Examinations (Case Handling)

Case Activity

The OPR provides a service to the public in relation to a variety of planning-related case types including queries or general information requests, submissions on aspects of the operation of the planning process, and complaints about the delivery of planning services.

During Q1, a total of 66 cases were received and 58 cases were closed by the OPR, detailed by month in Figure 1.

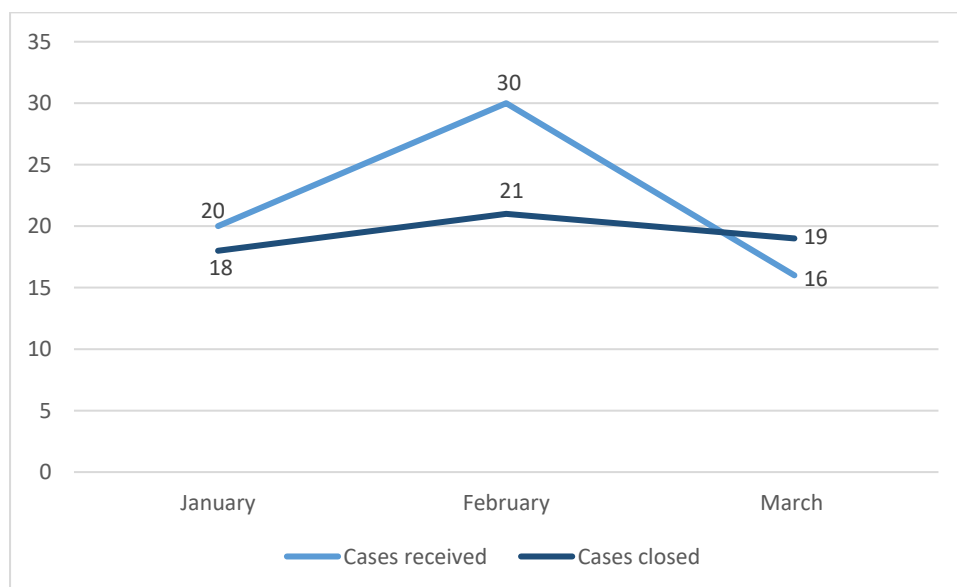


Figure 1 | Cases Received vs. Cases Closed Q1, 2025

The 58 cases closed in Q1 are classified as follows:

- 29 complaints;
- 26 queries (including 2 Oireachtas queries); and
- 3 submissions

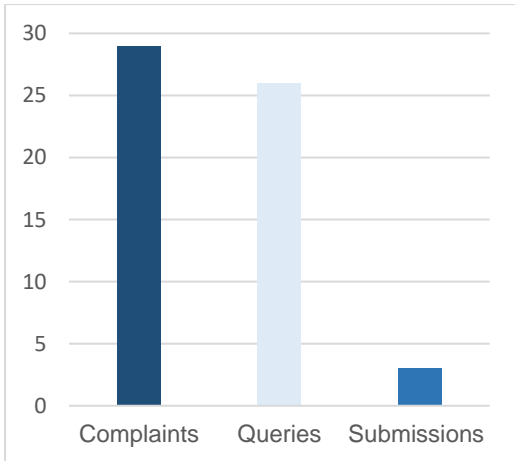


Figure 2 | Case Types

While some cases may be handled in a relatively straightforward manner, many will involve the consideration of voluminous and complex technical detail. Often, especially with regard to complaints, processing can be time consuming, involving a series of correspondence with the customer and/or the relevant local authority.

While a broad range of themes arose in the OPR’s case handling during Q1 a number of dominant themes prevailed. As can be seen in Figure 3, the most common single theme was ‘individual planning case’ (occurring in 20% of cases) followed closely by issues associated with ‘statutory plan-making’ (15%) and ‘enforcement/unauthorised development’ (15%). Some cases may contain multiple themes.

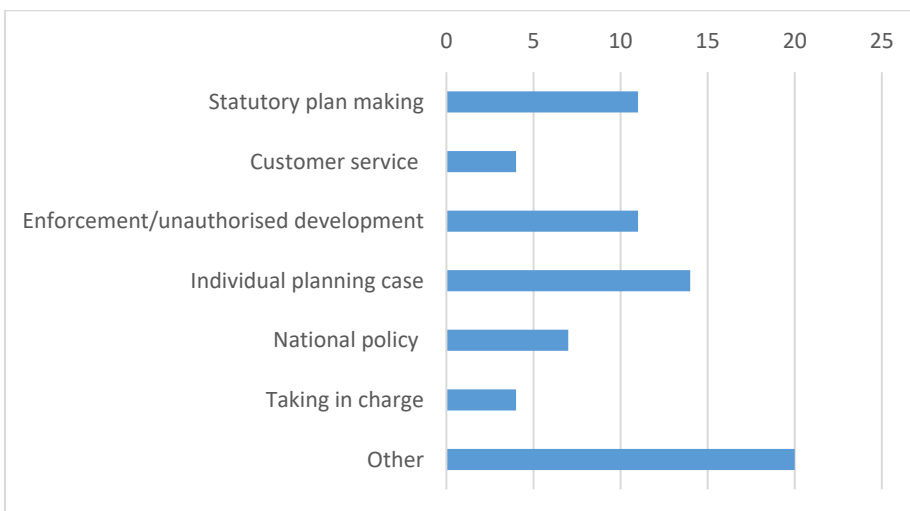


Figure 3 | Main Themes of Cases Closed²

² The theme ‘Other’ includes: An Bord Pleanála, EIA/SEA/Habitats Directives, exempted development, online planning services, pre-planning (Section 247) meetings, development contributions, legal and ownership issues, impropriety, material contraventions and short-term letting.

Complaints

The statutory provisions are precise regarding the types of complaints that fall within the OPR's remit to examine. For a complaint to be considered examinable by the OPR, it must relate to the organisation of the local authority and the systems and procedures used by it in the performance of its planning functions.

Accordingly, of the 29 complaints closed, based on the procedural matters raised, the Office gave preliminary examination to nine complaints during Q1. None of these complaints were upheld.

Research, Education, Training and Public Awareness

Councillor Training

In Q1 in line with the OPR's statutory mandate to conduct education and training programmes for members of planning authorities and regional assemblies in respect of matters relating to proper planning and sustainable development, the OPR delivered two bespoke planning training webinars for elected members in conjunction with the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG).

The first webinar titled '*Learning from Judicial Review Proceedings*' was delivered in January. The webinar followed a similar format to previous OPR training events with a presentation followed by a Q&A element. The presentation was delivered by Rory Ferguson and Jonathan Moore of Fieldfisher LLP. They provided an overview of relevant case law and highlighted key learnings for elected members in the context of their statutory plan-making function.

A recording of the webinar was uploaded to the OPR's website together with the presentation. In this instance the OPR also prepared and published a guide to the recording so that interested parties could see at a glance where Fieldfisher dealt with specific items in the recording and could tailor their viewing to focus on the items of most interest to them.

The second webinar titled '*Community Benefit Funds and Renewables*' was delivered in March and dealt with:

- Planning Ireland's Climate and Energy Transition: Community Benefits;
- Community Benefit Funds under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme; and
- Community Benefit Fund Management.

The presentations were delivered by:

- Paul O'Neill, Principal Officer with the Planning Advisory Division of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC);

- Jesus Vazquez Solis from the Renewable Electricity Division of DECC;
- Suzanne Kearney, Assistant Chief Executive Officer; and
- Elaine Barrett, Community Benefit Fund Coordinator of SECAD Partnership CLG.

The presentations were followed by a Q&A session. A recording of the webinar was uploaded to the website together with the presentations.

Local Authority and Regional Assembly Staff Training

In Q1 in line with the OPR's statutory mandate to conduct education and training programmes for staff of local authorities in respect of matters relating to proper planning and sustainable development, the OPR delivered a webinar titled '*Built Heritage and Town Regeneration*'.

The presentations dealt with:

- Safeguarding and Enhancing our Historic Towns: An Integrated Approach to Regeneration; and
- Promoting Development within Historic Towns: The Westport Story.

The presentations were delivered by:

- Mona Hallinan, Architectural Conservation Advisor with the National Built Heritage Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and
- Simon Wall, Senior Architect with Mayo County Council.

The presentations were followed by a Q&A session. A recording of the webinar was uploaded to the OPR's website together with the presentations.

Publication of Educational Material for Local Authority and Regional Assembly Staff and Other Key Stakeholders

During Q1, the OPR hosted a meeting of the Planning Law Bulletin Steering Group and agreed the case selection for the seventh edition of the *'Learning from Litigation'* bulletin. Thereafter the OPR engaged with legal practitioners to draft the case summaries. The cases included:

- DAA PLC v Fingal County Council [2024] IEHC 589;
- Friends of the Irish Environment Company Limited by Guarantee and Ors v the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Ireland and the Attorney General and Ors [2024] IEHC 588;
- Pat O'Donnell and Company v Dublin City Council and Uniphar PLC [2024] IEHC 671; and
- Baile Bhrúachlain Teoranta and Ors v Galway County Council [2024] IEHC 604.

The seventh edition of the *'Learning from Litigation'* bulletin was published in Q1. This edition was shared with stakeholders and promoted extensively via the OPR's LinkedIn account. It is intended that the legal bulletin will be published on a quarterly basis.

Implementation of the Learning and Development Strategy for Local Authority Planning Staff

In Q1 work continued on the implementation of the Local Authority Planning Sector Learning and Development Strategy. The OPR met regularly with the Local Authority Services National Training Group's (LASNTG's) Secretary and Planning Advisor and participated in meetings of the Planning Services Training Group (PSTG). The PSTG is a pillar under the LASNTG and is responsible for the development and delivery of training courses to meet the training needs of the local government planning services sector. In Q1 the following progress was achieved:

- The courseware content for the four planning fundamental courses was reviewed and new presenters were identified. Dates for the delivery of training over the period April-November 2025 were confirmed with LASNTG's Regional Training Centres and local authority Training Officers were notified about the forthcoming training and the procedures for online booking;

- A further ‘*Train the Trainer*’ course is being organised for sector and former staff at the Ballycoolin Regional Training Centre;
- A request for quotes was issued to three training providers for the development and delivery of a planning specific technical report writing course. It is intended that a provider will be appointed in Q2 with course delivery in Q3 and Q4;
- Engagement is ongoing with the Southeast Technological University Carlow regarding refinements to their current Certificate in Energy Sustainability Course to meet the training needs of planning staff. If these amendments can be accommodated access to the course could be made available in September; and
- Discussions are ongoing also regarding the establishment of a Focus Group for the scoping out of an Urban Design Course.

Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources

The Steering Group, established by the DHLGH, to coordinate and oversee the development of a Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources met in February. The OPR is a member of the Steering Group. The aim of the Ministerial Action Plan is to increase the pool of planning and related expertise and to bring forward new talent to meet present and future needs. The OPR is responsible for chairing Working Group one on education and co-chairing Working Group five on innovation and efficiency. Both groups were established and held their first meetings.

Initial Consortium Steering Group on Planner Apprenticeship Project

The OPR is represented on the Initial Consortium Steering Group (ICSG) on Planner Apprenticeships. This group comprises representatives from the DHLGH, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the CCMA, the LGMA, An Bord Pleanála, the OPR, the Irish Planning Institute and the private sector. The aim of the group is to develop and submit a proposal to the National Apprenticeship Office for the development of a planner apprenticeship. Throughout Q1, the OPR continued to engage with stakeholders to progress the apprenticeship proposal.

Stakeholder Engagement

National Planning Knowledge Group

The National Planning Knowledge Group (NPKG) held its first meeting of 2025 in February.

During the course of the meeting the OPR provided:

- An overview of the updates proposed to the NPKG's Terms of Reference;
- An overview of the research projects being progressed in accordance with the Strategic Planning Research Programme; and
- An update on the planning training and educational work being undertaken for local authority and regional assembly elected members and staff.

Representatives from the DHLGH provided an update on:

- Various research projects that have been commissioned by the DHLGH;
- The expected timeline for the adoption of the revised NPF and publication of revised '*Housing for All*' housing targets; and
- The progress that has been made since the enactment of the Planning and Development Act 2024.

Representatives from Ulster University delivered presentations on Generative AI in Planning Education. Members of the NPKG also highlighted upcoming events and provided updates on relevant research projects. The launch of the new visual mapping tool, the National Census Atlas, by the All-Island Research Observatory at Maynooth University was also highlighted.

OPR Research Output

During Q1 the OPR advanced work on a number of research projects identified within the Strategic Planning Research Programme (2023-2025) some of which were long-term projects carried over from the original Strategic Planning Research Programme (2020-2022).

Strand One (Planning Issues) Projects

In Q1, the UCD research team finalised updates to the research report on the '*Understanding Rural Housing Dynamics*' and issued the third draft of the report, incorporating references to the NPF revision and programme for government action. The report is under review by the Steering Group, which comprises DHLGH and OPR. The Steering Group will issue final comments/edits early Q2 with a view to finalising the research report.

In Q1, the OPR progressed work in partnership with the Climate and Environment Policy Unit in the DHLGH on the research project relating to the examination of the Annex II EIA Thresholds and Criteria in Ireland in the context of the planning legislation. The research report lead authors were Fieldfisher and environment expert input was provided by Fothergill TC Ltd. During Q1, the OPR led in the coordination of the final editing, proofreading and graphics; the report is expected to be fully signed off in May 2025 and available to the Climate and Environmental Policy Unit for their use as part of consultation on new planning regulations.

Following receipt of a request from the DHLGH at the end of Q4 2024 to prepare an addendum to the '*Research Report on Legal Costs in Planning and Environmental Judicial Reviews*', the OPR engaged Fieldfisher LLP to conduct further analysis of the evidential base contained in the original report. This analysis was undertaken to support the work of the Inter-Departmental Group on Environmental Legal Costs. The addendum report was finalised in Q1 and submitted to the DHLGH.

Strand Two (Planning Performance) Projects

In Q1 work was progressed on Case Study Paper CSP07 dealing with '*Quarries and the Local Authority Development Plan*'. The text was finalised, following extensive proofreading, and the graphic design was completed. The document is ready for publication in Q2.

During Q1, the OPR continued to participate in the Steering Committee for the EPA-Pro-Health SEA Project. This project seeks to develop a Toolkit for Proportionate and Consistent Consideration of Population and Human Health in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). In Q1 the OPR supported the in-person workshops with Irish SEA Practitioners, health experts, plan-makers and the online workshop which included international experts. The workshops sought to examine the emerging '*Health in SEA*' toolkit. The draft toolkit was circulated to the Steering Committee for review. It is anticipated that the research report will be finalised in Q2/Q3.

Strand Three (Planning Practice) Projects

Following the completion of a procurement process in Q1 the OPR procured MacCabe Durney Barnes to prepare a Practice Note on Development Plan Monitoring. An initial briefing was held with the contractor and work commenced on the establishment of a Steering Committee, preparation of an inception report and workshop design. It is anticipated that the workshop will be held in Q2 and the draft practice note will be finalised in Q3-Q4.

Communications and Digital Analytics

In Q1 the Communications team continued to support the OPR across media, social media and events. Some highlights included:

- An Oireachtas briefing was held on 21 March 2025. There was good engagement with Members of the Oireachtas on matters in relation to the work of the OPR.
- To support implementation of the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources, the Communications team provided Secretariat to Working Group 1 Planning Education and were a member of Working Group 2 Planning Recruitment.
- The Communications team responded to media queries regarding the work of the OPR. Work continued promoting planning matters and planning as a career of choice, welcoming the inclusion of '*planner*' on the critical skills list.
- The Communications team published their quarterly newsletter for stakeholders in March 2025.
- We integrated [Planning in Numbers 2023](#) into our website, testing a new way of viewing this report, in addition to PDF format.
- The OPR continued our engaging social media calendar promoting events and resources to raise awareness of resources and activities underway. There was a large increase of followers on LinkedIn and a small decrease on X followers during Q1 2025, as outlined below. This aligns with the OPR's prioritisation of LinkedIn as a platform during this period:
 - **LinkedIn:** 4194 followers. Increase of 378 on last quarter.
 - **X:** 2513 followers. Decrease of 69 on last quarter.



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