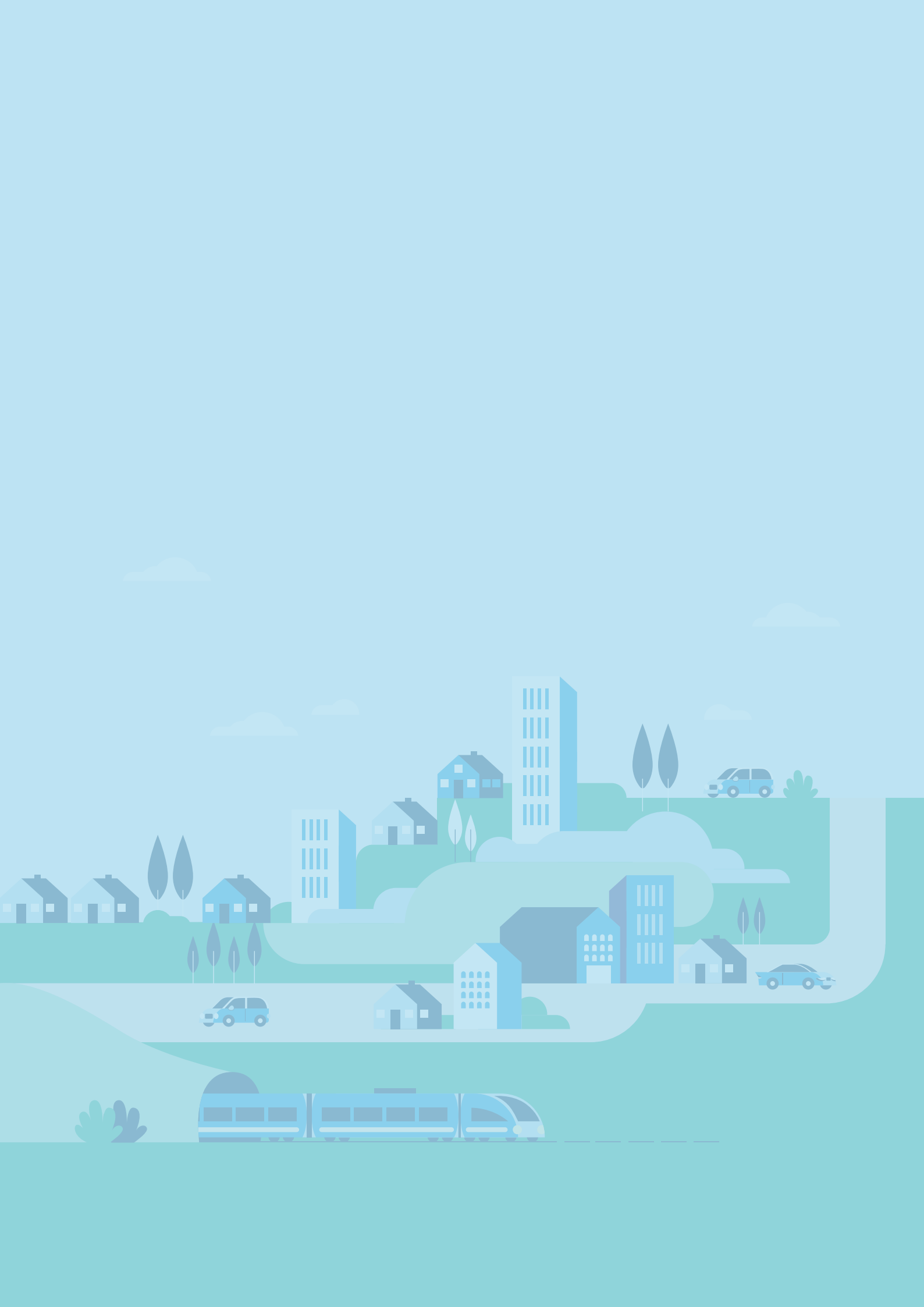




Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

Strategy Statement 2026 – 2031





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Introduction

This is the second Strategy Statement for the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR).

This Strategy Statement has been prepared pursuant to section 550 of the Planning and Development Act 2024.

OPR Role in Planning Policy Implementation

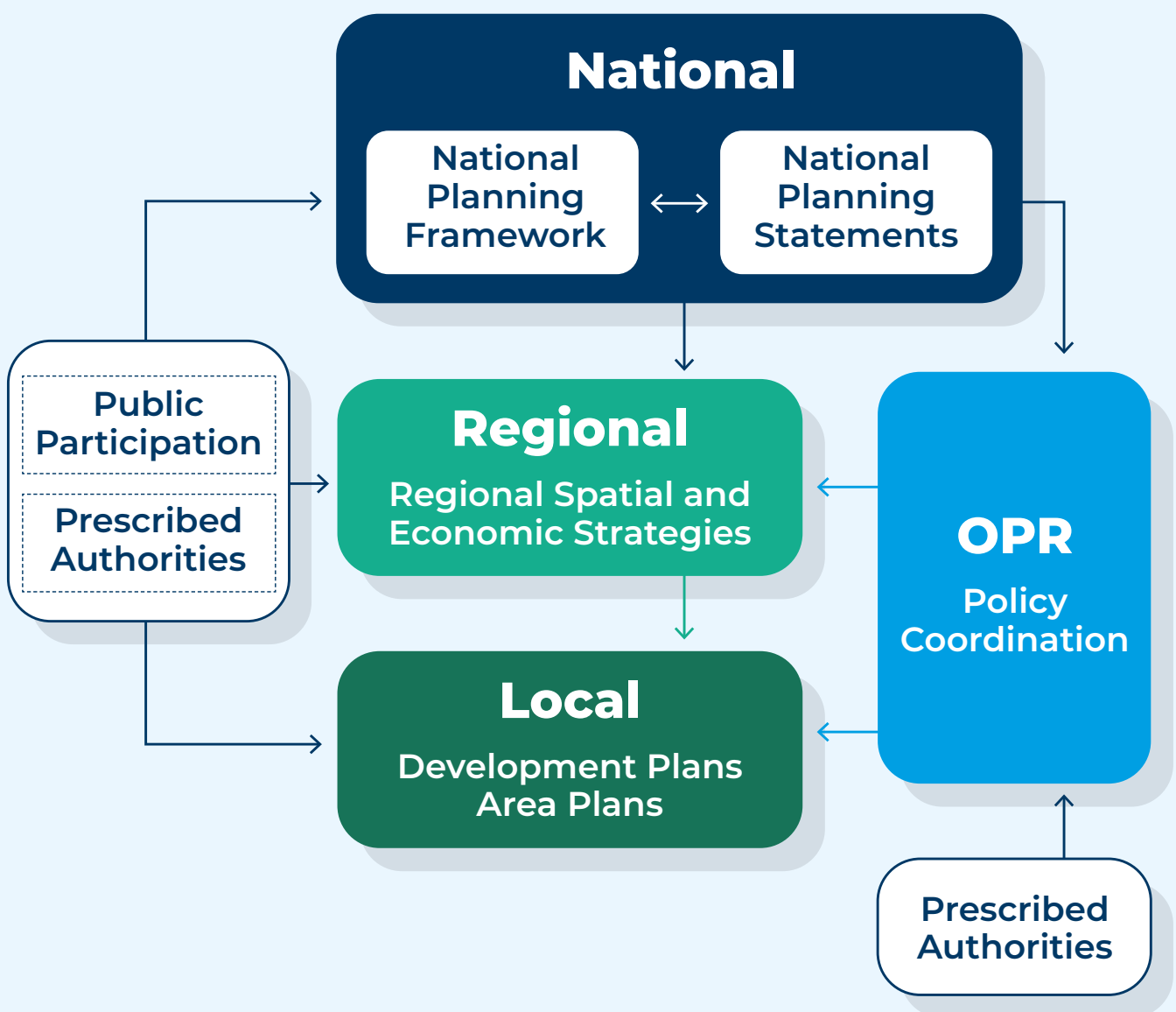


Figure 1 | OPR role in planning policy implementation

About Us

What is the OPR?

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) is an independent regulator, set up in April 2019 to oversee the planning system and drive continuous improvement in how planning is delivered in Ireland.

What does planning mean?

Planning is about deciding where homes, schools, businesses, roads, and parks should go so that communities grow safely and sustainably, while protecting our environment and heritage.

What does the OPR do?

The OPR supports Ireland to grow in a smart, fair, and sustainable way. We do this by supporting local authorities, elected councillors, and An Coimisiún Pleanála in their roles in planning. These are the tasks we do to achieve this:

- **Independently assessing local authority and regional assembly forward planning.** The OPR assesses statutory plans to ensure that they meet the policy requirements set by government. We publish these submissions to local authorities on our website. If a local authority doesn't resolve a serious issue, the OPR can make a recommendation to the Minister that certain measures are taken to make sure that national and regional planning policy is applied. This is governed by legislation.
- **Examining complaints about the overall planning system.** The OPR provides a fair and independent mechanism to examine citizen complaints related to the overall planning services delivered by local authorities. The OPR does not consider complaints related to planning applications or developments.
- **Conducting topical research on planning matters.** The OPR looks at emerging and topical planning issues and carries out research to help elected representatives and people working in the planning system. Our work highlights best practice and recent developments in the sector. We produce a quarterly legal bulletin, case studies and practice papers, all of which are available online.
- **Providing training for those working in the planning system.** The OPR provides training for people who work in planning and elected members to support consistent, high quality planning practice. All our training materials are accessible online.
- **Increasing public awareness of planning.** The OPR helps the public understand why planning matters in creating sustainable communities. We provide a wealth of information online to help citizens engage with planning.
- **Reviewing planning bodies' systems and procedures.** The OPR reviews the performance of local authority planning departments and An Coimisiún Pleanála, making recommendations to support them in their roles.



Niall Cussen, Planning Regulator

Foreword From The Planning Regulator

This is the Office's second Strategy Statement since our establishment in 2019.

The lifetime of our previous Strategy Statement saw the OPR grow from its start-up phase, with just a handful of employees, into a recognised and reputable organisation that is fulfilling a wide-ranging mandate to oversee and drive continuous improvement within the planning system. This has been achieved through the energy and commitment of OPR staff and the successful relationships that have been built across the wider sector.

As a national oversight body, implementation of top-class governance and corporate management structures has been vital in building the organisation. In this regard, I am pleased that the Office is widely recognised for its best practice in governance, a fact which is demonstrated annually through clean Comptroller and Auditor General reports.

With support from a strong corporate spine, the Office is responsible for statutory functions that assist Government in ensuring the proper planning and sustainable development of the State.

These include:

1. ***Acting as an independent and trusted advisor to Government*** on planning matters
2. ***Ensuring proper coordination in forward planning*** between the plans and strategies of the local government system and implementation of Government policy
3. ***Supporting ongoing improvements in planning practice and procedure*** by delivering training, best practice guides, practical research and conducting independent performance reviews designed to assist local authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála working in a fast-paced and changing operational environment; and
4. ***Assisting members of the public in seeking information*** on the operation of the planning system and addressing queries and concerns in relation to how the system works.

Our first strategy enabled many achievements. These included overseeing a new round of city and county development plans made in the light of the Government's first National Planning Framework (NPF) published in 2018.

Many of these plans will be capable of meeting enhanced needs for housing identified as part of the Government's first revision of the NPF published in July 2025. Over our next strategy, we will ensure that as plans are periodically updated, that they will reflect significantly increased developmental needs for housing, infrastructure and renewable energy as highlighted by Government.

We also developed and introduced new systems for reviews of planning bodies, which shaped Government reforms leading to the establishment of An Coimisiún Pleanála and the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resourcing, which is aimed at addressing capacity and efficiency constraints in the planning sector.

We initiated the first national training programme in planning for the 949 local authority elected members and over 1,500 local authority planning staff as well as publishing a range of public information resources including information leaflets, explainer videos and information sheets.

Under the lifetime of this new strategy, the OPR intends that its programme of planning reviews needs to evolve, acknowledging the capacity and resourcing context within which local authorities operate. In this regard we will build on the strong foundation established through OPR training initiatives and drawing on the reviews programme's successful model of direct engagement, we will develop targeted support initiatives for the State planning sector to assist in the consistent application of new policies and legislation arising from Government initiatives and reforms.

Proper planning is strongly recognised in Government policy, and by many other interests, in supporting the competitiveness of our economy, the quality of life enjoyed by our communities and the sustainability and the physical quality of our environment. Planning for the future is therefore critical. It must take heed of wider changes in society to remain relevant and effective. Government wants and expects the planning process to be an agile enabler of sustainable change linking engagement, investment and implementation in housing delivery, decarbonisation and place-making. Preparation of this second strategy has therefore taken account of:

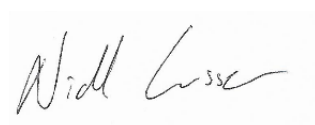
- Developments in Government policy in relation to planning, including implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024 which has given the Office additional functions and responsibilities
- Economic, social and environmental considerations relevant to planning, including population growth, increased housing demand, infrastructure and development needs and climate action commitments. In this regard, the necessity for the State planning system, and its processes, to be efficient and agile in adapting to rapidly changing requirements is at the forefront
- The extensive knowledge base within the OPR, built from evaluating statutory plans, conducting planning reviews, delivering research programmes and training outputs, and drawing on collaborative insights from across the sector; and
- The needs of our stakeholders, particularly local authorities as they manage a range of demands on their planning functions in a changing policy and legislative context.

Digital transformation will continue to enhance efficiency and effectiveness across the planning system, with the recently introduced nationwide online planning application systems now accounting for almost 90% of all planning applications. Further developments in digital national planning systems, including digital dashboards to track development and infrastructure needs to inform Government policy, and harnessing the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) based systems, will be key areas of focus for the OPR in our second strategy.

We will also roll-out further training and developmental supports such as best practice guides for approximately 2,000 staff that make up the 31 local authority planning departments, the regional assemblies and An Coimisiún Pleanála. We will support the expansion of pathways for professional planning education in Ireland.

Our Strategy Statement has been developed with inputs from staff, Government and a wide range of stakeholders to support, through proper planning and sustainable development, the delivery of housing and infrastructure.

Implementation of this Strategy Statement will also draw upon and further develop the high level of professionalism and work commitment from our staff.



Niall Cussen

Chief Executive and Planning Regulator

Our Purpose, Vision And Values

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to independently oversee and drive improvements in the planning system. We bring greater consistency, certainty, clarity and a longer-term focus to the national planning system by ensuring national policy is implemented and by delivering performance improvement, research, training and public awareness initiatives.

Our Vision

Our vision is that Ireland develops sustainably, supported by a planning system that enables the delivery of much needed homes and infrastructure, while also protecting our environment and heritage, as well as enhancing our communities.



Figure 2 | OPR values



Independence

Independence is fundamental to the OPR's role in supporting confidence in the planning system. While we work constructively with a broad range of stakeholders, we maintain a clear functional independence in our core regulatory work. Our commitment to impartial and evidence-based evaluation, particularly in assessing statutory plans, ensures that our oversight is fair, credible, and independent. This independence strengthens trust in our work and reinforces the OPR's position as an authoritative and objective voice in the planning sector.



Citizen Focus

The public good remains the guiding principle of the OPR's work in strengthening Ireland's planning system to support sustainable national development. We are committed to securing better outcomes for citizens by promoting efficient and effective processes that support the delivery of development, while ensuring that our environment and amenities are protected. Central to this is our role in strengthening local democracy by supporting and promoting the leadership role played by local authorities in addressing the complex and evolving challenges of sustainable development.



Transparency

Transparency is fundamental to how the OPR operates and to our role as the trusted, authoritative source of information on Ireland's planning system. We are committed to openness, clarity, and accountability in all aspects of our work. By providing accessible, evidence-based information and communicating our decisions and processes clearly, we aim to strengthen public trust and support informed participation across the planning sector.



Collaboration and engagement

Collaboration and engagement are central to how the OPR strengthens the planning system. We work constructively with Government, local authorities, regional assemblies, other stakeholders, and the public to share knowledge, build capacity, and support informed participation. By fostering meaningful engagement and strong partnerships, we enhance coherence and consistency across the sector and reinforce the OPR's role as a trusted, independent leader in planning.



Professionalism

The OPR upholds the highest standards of integrity, expertise, and accountability in everything we do. Through rigorous corporate governance, evidence-based decision-making, and a commitment to continuous learning, we ensure that our work is dependable, consistent, and of the highest quality. This professionalism strengthens trust in the OPR and supports a culture of excellence across the planning sector.

Our Organisation

The structure of the OPR is that of a corporation sole. The Planning Regulator is the chief executive of the Office and is supported by an executive management team of four directors.

The Planning Regulator is further supported from a financial management and risk oversight perspective by a finance, audit and risk committee, which includes external members.

The Office functions under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Our staff are independent civil servants of the State.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 introduces an advisory board to the OPR. Further to section 542 of the Act, the advisory board will consist of between five and seven members and will be mandated to consult with, guide and advise the Planning Regulator in relation to the strategic direction of the Office and monitor the implementation of the corporate strategy.

The advisory board, when requested to do so by the Planning Regulator, will consult with, guide and advise the Planning Regulator in relation to the performance of the functions of the Office and advise or make recommendations to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government affecting the functions of the Office.

This Strategy Statement has been prepared pending appointment of the advisory board by the Minister. Once appointed, this Strategy Statement will be consulted upon with the advisory board in accordance with the provisions of section 542.



Figure 3 | The four OPR directorates

What You Told Us

We are grateful to all those who took the time to engage and respond to the draft Strategy Statement shared for public consultation.

We received a number of submissions from across Government, the local government sector, the planning profession, infrastructure providers, environmental bodies and members of the public which were constructive, thoughtful and detailed. They demonstrate a strong level of engagement with the work of the OPR and a shared commitment to improving the effectiveness of Ireland's planning system.

Overall, stakeholders expressed broad support for the strategic direction of the OPR and for the clarity of purpose set out in the draft Strategy Statement.

There was strong feedback on the importance of achieving greater consistency in planning practice across planning authorities. Stakeholders emphasised the value of shared approaches to common challenges, supported by data, guidance and capacity building across the planning and local government sector.

A further theme highlighted the importance of the full breadth of the planning system. Stakeholders emphasised that planning outcomes are shaped not only by local authorities, but also by infrastructure providers, prescribed bodies, Government departments and the wider development sector.

Submissions noted the need for further information on the regulatory process, the role of the OPR within the statutory process and how OPR regulatory oversight, research and training support activity lead to better planning outcomes.

Capacity and capability within the planning sector also emerged as key theme. Submissions emphasised the importance of ongoing training, guidance and peer learning as key to supporting consistent and high-quality decision-making. The value of the training and performance mandate of the OPR was highlighted with strong support for expanding accessible and flexible learning approaches, including digital platforms, and for continued investment in professional development.

Finally, submissions highlighted the value of continued engagement, transparency and communication. Stakeholders welcomed the OPR's collaborative approach and noted further opportunities for structured engagement.

These insights have informed the development of this Strategy Statement and will guide the OPR approach to further strengthen our effectiveness as an independent regulator and support a well-functioning planning system.

Strategic Goals

Strategic Goal 1

Oversee and ensure the implementation of Government planning policy

We will work with the 31 local authorities and three regional assemblies helping them to support high standards in forward planning for future development, meeting strategic policy objectives including Ireland's climate and environmental objectives, and support sustainable growth and development.

Strategic Goal 2

Drive and support performance improvement in the planning system

We will work with Government, local government, An Coimisiún Pleanála and the wider planning and development sector to further improve consistency in the planning process. By delivering training and practical support initiatives, we will promote best practice and build a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in the delivery of statutory planning functions.

Strategic Goal 3

Enhance public awareness, support consistent planning practice and inform policy through evidence

We will improve public awareness on topical and strategic planning issues and provide a trusted source of information to the State planning sector. We will achieve this through practice focused research, the analysis of key trends and data and by ensuring the public and policymakers have access to clear, reliable information on planning and development issues.

Strategic Goal 4

Drive excellence through our people, organisation and governance

We will continue to develop our organisation and invest in our people. The OPR will continue to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, demonstrating financial accountability, robust internal controls, fairness and transparency in the conduct of our business.

Strategic Goal 5

Deliver high-quality customer service

We will continue to serve the public as an independent voice at the heart of the planning system and in doing so we are committed to excellence in customer service. While a citizen focus is at the forefront of everything the OPR does, we also consider Government departments, local authorities, An Coimisiún Pleanála, and other planning and development related stakeholder organisations as our valued customers.

Strategic Goal 1

Oversee and ensure the implementation of Government planning policy

We will work with the 31 local authorities and three regional assemblies to support high standards in forward planning that align with strategic policy objectives, including Ireland's climate and environmental objectives, and support sustainable growth and development.

Strategic Objectives

- Ensure Government policy on proper planning and sustainable development, including housing and infrastructure delivery is appropriately implemented through the statutory regional strategies and plans of the local government system.
- Drive best-practice and high performance across statutory forward planning processes including the use of analytical, monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track consistency and quality.
- Support the development of shared resources and data systems, and the adoption of new technologies, which the plan-making process can draw on and benefit from.

Key Deliverables

- Regional spatial and economic strategies, city and county development plans and area plans that enable delivery of the National Development Plan, National Planning Framework, and National Marine Planning Framework, in line with Government policy objectives.
- Effective knowledge transfer between plan-making authorities to assist in the implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024. Therefore, ensuring Ireland's planning system is plan-led.
- Gathering and reporting plan making related data and making it available in digital format.

Strategic Goal 2

Drive and support performance improvement in the planning system

We will work with Government, local government, An Coimisiún Pleanála and the wider planning and development sector to further improve consistency in the planning process. By delivering training and practical support initiatives, we will promote best practice and build a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in the delivery of statutory planning functions.

Strategic Objectives

- Taking account of the operational context for planning authorities, work with Government and wider stakeholders in the development and application of shared objectives and key performance indicators under the proposed Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Planning Excellence Framework.
- Generate an enhanced culture of learning and development across the State planning sector to ensure greater understanding and consistency in the application of planning legislation and policy.
- Develop and implement a new programme of support measures, including frontline training and targeted improvement initiatives, designed to assist local authorities in delivering planning functions.
- Provide national leadership and engage with stakeholders to promote best-practice, informed policy development, performance improvement, innovation and efficiency across the State planning sector, including through digital transformation in service delivery and data management and sharing.
- Examine the systems and procedures used by local authorities, regional assemblies and An Coimisiún Pleanála to deliver planning functions and undertake reviews of their organisation and management as considered necessary.

Key Deliverables

- Work with the wider sector to deliver training programmes for planning bodies and other key stakeholders. Update and implement the planning sector learning and development strategy to include An Coimisiún Pleanála and other key stakeholders.
- Develop a new programme of directly delivered supports to local authority planning departments to improve consistency in planning performance across the sector. The programme will include collaborative workshops, peer-to-peer learning, guidance documentation, practice notes, procedural templates, etc. The OPR will create an online practitioners' portal containing practical resources designed to assist authorities in the delivery of day-to-day planning functions.
- Promote existing pathways for professional planning education, supporting the delivery of the apprenticeship in planning model and the work of the Planning Services Training Group. Encourage leadership development supports for planning staff.
- Work in collaboration with the sector and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to deliver continuous improvement and innovation across planning service delivery. Drive best-practice and performance in line with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's intended National Planning Excellence Framework and the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resourcing, including the development of effective performance measurement systems.
- Examine complaints received in relation to systemic planning matters. Conduct comprehensive reviews of planning bodies' systems and procedures as considered necessary. The implementation of OPR review and examination recommendations will be monitored. Wider learnings in relation to improved procedures will be disseminated across the State planning sector.

Strategic Goal 3

Enhance public awareness, support consistent planning practice and inform policy through evidence

We will improve public awareness on topical and strategic planning issues and provide a trusted source of information to the State planning sector. We will achieve this through practice focused research, the analysis of key trends and data and by ensuring the public, practitioners and policymakers have access to clear, reliable information on planning and development issues.

Strategic Objectives

- Promote informed understanding, commentary and debate on how Ireland's planning system serves the public good by enabling sustainable development and supporting housing delivery, infrastructure provision, placemaking, climate resilience and environmental protection.
- Produce high-quality research and analysis on planning policy, practice and emerging trends, thereby providing reliable information for policymakers and practitioners while also serving as a clear and trusted source of information for the public.
- Engage with relevant stakeholders in the planning and development sector to inform the work of the OPR, including Government, planning bodies, higher education authorities, professional representative institutes, sectoral representatives, etc.
- Collaborate with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to develop integrated digital systems that consolidate planning, development, infrastructure and environmental data, including data standardisation, transparency and integration. This will ensure Government's strategic planning and infrastructure investment is supported by robust, up-to-date and coordinated mapping and data.

Key Deliverables

- Deliver a national programme of research to inform policy and practice on strategic planning matters, with the support of the National Planning Knowledge Group, including the publication, dissemination and communication of such research outputs.
- Support the delivery of a National Infrastructure Database as envisioned in the Report of the Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce.
- Develop and maintain user-friendly digital platforms and engagement tools that enable the effective capture and timely sharing of planning knowledge, guidance and data. These will also support stakeholders, practitioners and the public to access consistent, authoritative information and engage effectively with the planning system.

Strategic Goal 4

Drive excellence through our people, organisation and governance

We will continue to develop our organisation and invest in our people in line with our strategic priorities. The OPR will continue to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, demonstrating financial accountability, robust internal controls, fairness and transparency in the conduct of our business.

Strategic Objectives

- Maintain a supportive and flexible workplace where equality, diversity and inclusion, public sector duties and accessibility are truly embedded in our organisational values, policies and practices through citizen-centric service delivery.
- Provide development opportunities to our staff through a learning and development programme and performance management system, including upskilling and reskilling to support business needs.
- Ensure continued robust governance, financial and risk management to safeguard resources and reputation and ensuring strong accountability to the taxpayer.
- Support the establishment and effective operation of the OPR Advisory Board.
- Attract and retain a highly skilled, professional and diverse workforce to deliver on our mandate, and to respond in an agile manner to changing demands.
- Develop a new ICT Strategy and leverage the use of AI to gain efficiencies in the delivery of our services, in line with the Government 'Guidelines for the Responsible Use of AI in the Public Service'.

Key Deliverables

- Expand and enhance our People Strategy and develop a multi-annual learning and development plan.
- Retain and develop a high calibre workforce, which will drive the delivery of our expanded statutory mandate to the highest standard.
- Ensure compliance with relevant legislation and policy, including but not limited to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (Public Sector Duty); the Regulation of Lobbying Act; Protected Disclosures Acts; the Public Spending Code; requirements for Public Procurement; the Climate Action Plan and 'Better Public Services' the Government's Public Service Transformation Strategy.
- Proactively support climate action initiatives in line with the Government's Climate Action Plan.
- Provide governance and financial assurance to stakeholders through a continuous programme of internal and external audits and documented oversight via the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.
- Design a new ICT Strategy, including strong cyber-security protocols and integrity of OPR ICT systems and processes.
- Develop an AI roadmap including appropriate governance and assurance frameworks for OPR regulatory functions, as commensurate with available human and financial resources.

Strategic Goal 5

Deliver high-quality customer service

We will continue to serve the public in our role as an independent voice at the heart of the planning system and in doing so we are committed to excellence in customer service. While a citizen focus is at the forefront of everything the OPR does, we also proactively engage with Government departments, local authorities, An Coimisiún Pleanála, and other planning and development related stakeholders as our valued customers.

Strategic Objectives

- Maintain the highest standards of courtesy, fairness, impartiality and professionalism in all our customer interactions, in line with the 12 Government Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service and Better Public Services Strategy.
- Deliver on our functional responsibilities as an outward-facing and customer-centric organisation that engages proactively to establish and maintain effective collaborative relationships with stakeholders across the planning and development sector.
- Continue to ensure that transparency is a cornerstone in everything the OPR does while also working within the planning system. This will build greater levels of trust, clarity, consistency, accessibility, accountability and participation, including through harnessing digital technology and innovation.

Key Deliverables

- Continuous implementation of the commitments set out in our ambitious Customer Charter, which will be reviewed and updated. Quality standards for service delivery, in relation to customer response times, Irish language, accessibility, and plain English will be set and monitored through an updated customer service action plan. Quality customer service will be continuously reviewed within each of the OPR directorates.
- Ensure that all cases raised with the OPR are handled in the most effective, efficient and impartial manner. While this includes complaints about planning bodies, the OPR is also committed to assisting all customers who contact us in relation to queries, information requests or areas of concern.
- The ongoing creation of synergies with the broad range of stakeholders involved in the planning system through various liaison and working-group forums.
- Continue to make information about the planning system and its processes accessible to citizens. We will translate complex statutory information and evidence-based planning knowledge into clear and consistent guidance for practitioners and stakeholders. We will achieve this using reliable information, data, case studies and visualisation tools.
- Support digital inclusion by developing and introducing a new website to deliver an enhanced user experience with secure and accessible public and business facing portals and dynamic public awareness, training and education tools.

Measuring Effectiveness

As part of our Strategy Statement, we will strive to deliver high quality, efficient and effective service to our stakeholders to improve and enhance the planning system.

We will continuously measure our success in delivering our strategic goals through the following key metrics:

- Develop an annual Performance Delivery Agreement in addition to the multi-annual Oversight Agreement with our parent department
- Develop and publish Quarterly Activity Reports
- Produce and publish an Annual Report and Annual Financial Statements providing details of our performance
- Translate the goals within this Strategy Statement into detailed, annual business plans with key deliverables, tasks and timelines across specific business areas, which will be reviewed for progress on a regular basis
- Review and report on governance and compliance requirements in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies
- Report as required to the Oireachtas and the Minister
- Conduct regular internal and external audits to provide assurance as to the robustness of our systems of internal control
- Proactively engage with stakeholders through open dialogue and cooperation through all our business areas

Resources and Key Dependencies

Acknowledging and welcoming the OPR's expanded statutory mandate on foot of the Planning and Development Act 2024, it will be essential that the organisation is appropriately resourced to deliver on its functions to the required standard. We will ensure the most effective deployment of resources to achieve our strategic goals while continuously engaging with our parent department to secure the necessary further resources to deliver on our expanded statutory mandate.

Public Sector Duty

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty place a statutory obligation on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect human rights of staff and of those to whom they provide services. The duty is set out in section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 and puts equality and human rights at the core of how public bodies carry out their functions. The OPR recognises this duty, and these principles are embedded in the way we conduct our work and are reflected in our values, policies and procedures.

The OPR will ensure that our people strategy, wellbeing programme and learning and development plan continue to include training relevant to our Public Sector Duty obligations, including dedicated human rights and disability awareness training. We will promote our Reasonable Accommodation Passport and support disabled employees who require workplace adjustments or accommodations.

We will foster a safe working environment which promotes equality, is respectful and inclusive and promotes inclusive policies such as Dignity at Work, Menopause in the Workplace, Right to Disconnect and Blended Working. We will support our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group in promoting and enhancing EDI in our workplace.

The OPR will maintain a citizen focus on everything we do. We are committed to harnessing digital technology and innovation and to ensuring our website is accessible to the widest possible audience, regardless of technology or ability.



**Oifig an
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