

Construction 2020

A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector

May 2014



BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
ARNA FHOILSIÚ AG OIFIG AN tSOLÁTHAIR

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Foreword

The Government was elected to deliver reform, renewal and recovery. This is arguably more relevant to the construction sector than to most.

Many factors contributed to the economic catastrophe that hit this country. Many, if not most, of them – lax political management, reckless lending and borrowing, speculative greed, short-term thinking, poor planning and low standards – were features of our boom-time approach to property development and construction.

The legacy – lost jobs, unmanageable mortgages, debt overhang, negative equity, houses on flood-plains, shoddy and sub-standard apartments, ghost estates – remains all too human and real.

We are working our way through it, and we will continue to do so.

But it is time for a fresh start, one in which the lessons learnt from what went wrong are applied to the creation of a renewed and vibrant construction industry fit for the future.

That is what this Strategy is about.

Ireland needs a strong and sustainable construction sector.

We need good quality homes to live in. High-quality commercial developments to underpin economic recovery and growth. Infrastructure fit for the future, whether in telecommunications, water or energy networks.

We need people gainfully employed and equipped with world-class skills. Competitive companies able to access the funding they need. Mortgages available on reasonable terms, and consumers confident of high standards and proper oversight.

We need a planning system that supports that vision – that makes sure that we are building the right things, in the right places, and that we are not placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of urgently needed and appropriate development.

This Strategy is also about jobs.

We have set ourselves the ambitious objective of returning the economy to full employment by 2020, and in doing so, replacing all of the jobs lost during the crisis. Having successfully exited the bailout, we have said our top focus for this year will be on getting people back to work.

This Strategy is an essential part of that effort.

We are determined to help all of those on the Live Register find meaningful and rewarding employment. We are making important progress, but there are still tens of thousands of people with a background in construction without work.

We will continue to do all we can to assist their return to the workforce, including through extending the use of social clauses in public contracts and helping them update and renew their skills.

An appropriately sized construction sector can help to deliver jobs across the country, not just to those directly involved in the industry, but to the manufacturing, retail and professional sectors that it supports.

It can help to underpin the future competitiveness of the country, ensuring that we continue to be well-positioned to attract the inward investment that has been so important to our economic development.

In this Strategy we have set out a focussed programme of action to deliver a strong, sustainable, well-financed, competitive and innovative approach to construction and housing, building to the highest standards, at realistic levels and with consumer protection at its heart.

Implementing it will require a big effort – both inside and outside Government - and a whole-of-Government approach.

We are determined to ensure that it is advanced with the determination, energy and commitment it deserves.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Enda Kenny". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Enda Kenny T.D.
Taoiseach

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eamon Gilmore". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Eamon Gilmore T.D.
Tánaiste

1. Introduction

Our Vision

Ireland needs a competitive, innovative, dynamic, safe and sustainable construction sector; one that makes its full and proper contribution to the economy and to job creation, and one that is based on best practice and capable of delivering the economic and social infrastructure we need to build to sustain a prosperous future.

This Strategy sets out steps to take us closer to that goal over the immediate and longer term.

It builds on the detailed framework for accelerated recovery of the sector published by Forfás last year¹, as well as on progress since, including the Government’s policy statement on construction of July 2013.

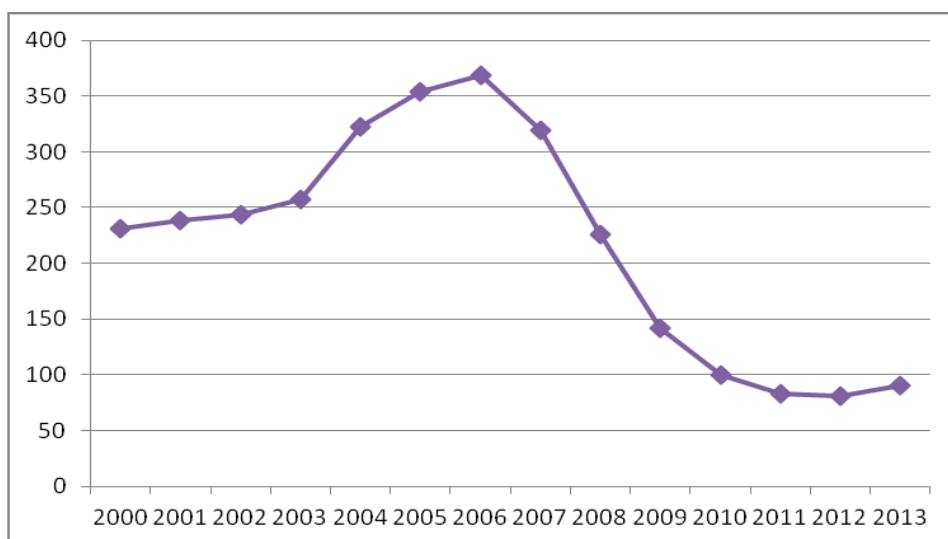
The Strategy aims both to increase the capacity of the sector to create and maintain jobs, and to deliver a sustainable sector, operating at an appropriate level. It seeks to learn the lessons of the past and to ensure that the right structures and mechanisms are in place so that they are not repeated.

The Government is committed to working with industry and other interested parties to deliver this strategy. We expect industry to play its part, to step-up to the mark and deliver a world-class and competitive construction sector.

Having grown too big during the boom, the sector is now seriously underperforming, both in terms of economic contribution and in employment. This is a cause of concern.

By 2012, the volume of production in building and construction had fallen to less than a quarter of the 2006 peak, and it remains less than half of the volume seen in the year 2000.

Index of the Volume of Production in Building and Construction (Base 2010 = 100)



Source: CSO

¹ Ireland’s Construction Sector: Outlook and Strategic Plan to 2015 (Forfás, 2013)

A properly functioning and sustainable construction sector is important for us all.

In the immediate term it can help drive recovery in the domestic economy, creating and sustaining direct and indirect jobs across the country. It can facilitate the return to work of the many unemployed people with a background in the industry, reducing the number of construction workers on the Live Register.

It is also essential to the future social and economic well-being of the country – if we are to have the housing and infrastructure we will need in the years and decades to come, we need to be planning for and building them now.

Failure to do so will constrain our future potential for growth.

This Strategy, therefore, has a particular focus on steps that can be taken in the immediate future to ensure that necessary and sensible development can take place, and that it is not held back by unnecessary obstacles.

It moves us closer to the world-class, competitive and dynamic sector we want to see in Ireland.

Construction and development is a complex process in which many factors, actors and influences are in play. All need to be in balance if the process is to work efficiently.

This Strategy therefore addresses issues including:

- a strategic approach to the provision of housing, based on real and measured needs, with mechanisms in place to detect and act when things are going wrong;
- continuing improvement of the planning process, striking the right balance between current and future requirements;
- the availability of financing for viable and worthwhile projects;
- access to mortgage finance on reasonable and sustainable terms;
- ensuring we have the tools we need to monitor and regulate the sector in a way that underpins public confidence and worker safety;
- ensuring a fit for purpose sector supported by a highly skilled workforce achieving high quality and standards; and
- ensuring opportunities are provided to unemployed former construction workers to contribute to the recovery of the sector.

Getting People Back to Work

The Government has said that 2014 is the year for jobs, and getting our people back to work is our unrelenting focus. This vital task lies at the heart of this Strategy.

One of the major tragedies of the downturn has been the number of construction workers with valuable knowledge and skills that have lost their jobs or have left the country to find work elsewhere.

At the peak of the boom in 2007 over 270,000 persons were directly employed in the sector, by 2012 this figure was below 100,000.

Many of them have, as yet, been unable to find a way back into our workplaces.

As we look to rebuild and renew it is worth recalling what that means in real terms – if only to ensure that we never again allow ourselves to reach crisis point.

In the years between 2006 and 2010, the number of employed bricklayers fell by nearly 82%, the number of labourers by more than 78%. Employment of plasterers was down by 71%, architects by 61%. No other sector was so devastated by the storm that was unleashed on the country.

A key focus of this strategy is, therefore, getting ex-construction workers off the live register and back to work.

We have a duty to remember and to learn from our experiences, but also to look to the future and to the opportunities ahead.

There are good reasons to believe that the situation has stabilised, and that there is now scope to grow over the years ahead.

The Government will continue to play its full part, including through our capital spending programme and the initiatives contained in Budget 2014, and we look forward to industry and all stakeholders doing so too.

In bringing forward this Strategy we are very conscious of the need to ensure that growth is sustainable, and that it avoids the type of over-heating we have seen before. For that reason, it would not be appropriate to set a target size for the sector.

It is important nonetheless to be able to measure how it is performing, and to benchmark it against international norms. According to analysis undertaken by Forfás, the construction sector contributed just 6.4% to GNP (5% of GDP) in 2012.

In comparison with other countries - and taking on board long-term trends for Ireland - an economy of our size, with our remaining infrastructure deficits and positive demographics, could be capable of sustaining a construction industry equivalent to around 12% of GNP (10% of GDP).

It will take time for this recovery to take place, but we expect that significant headway can be made over the lifetime of this Strategy.

We can also expect renewed activity to deliver more jobs, including for those on the Live Register.

In our Medium Term Economic Strategy we projected that, in a baseline scenario, employment in the economy as a whole would rise to over 2.1 million by 2020. In such a scenario - and drawing on experience and international comparison - it is not unreasonable to expect that employment in the construction sector could increase by 60,000.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that development in the sector is reasonable and that it is underpinned by the best available data. We will ensure that mechanisms are in place to address any imbalances that may emerge.

In acting now, we can lay the groundwork for a world-class, competitive, safe and dynamic sector operating to the highest standards and in line with best practice.

2. A Strategic Approach to Housing

In recent years in Ireland there has been little connection between the construction and supply of houses and any measured, sustainable level of demand.

In 2006, at the peak of the housing bubble, some 93,419 housing units were completed across the country, 19,470 of them in Dublin. In 2013 a total of 8,301 homes were completed with just 1,360 in Dublin.

These figures reflect how wildly the pendulum has swung.

As a result, we continue to have an over-supply of homes in many parts of the country – including some houses that will never be occupied or sold – coupled with rising prices and rent levels in key urban areas especially in parts of Dublin, evidence of a growing and significant under-supply.

Neither approach is sustainable.

In addition, since the boom, a number of factors have resulted in a lack of activity and mobility in the housing market. These include weak consumer confidence and uncertainty; high levels of unemployment; difficulties accessing credit; build-up of unsold stock and a large number of vacant units; a collapse in prices and negative equity; mortgage arrears; and people's understandable wish to maintain tracker mortgages.

Economic uplift should contribute to unlocking a number of these, and the Government will continue in its work to rebuild the banking sector and to support and assist those in mortgage distress.

We will also continue to work to address legacy issues arising from the boom, including in regard to ghost estates, pyrite, and developments such as Priory Hall.

But it is also clear that, as set out in our Medium Term Economic Strategy, we need to develop an overall strategic approach to housing supply – one that is evidence based, and that equips local and national authorities with the tools they need to detect emerging imbalances and to take the steps necessary to correct them at an early stage.

Taking a Measured Approach

The first necessary step in mapping out a strategic approach for the medium term is to look at the likely demography of the country in years to come. Considerable work has already been done in this regard.

According to the CSO, the number of households grew by 13% between 2006 and 2011, and it has been projected that it will increase by 5% between 2011 and 2016, resulting in some 85,000 additional households in a mid scenario.

A recent report from the Housing Agency on future housing supply requirements for the period 2014 to 2018 suggests a total requirement of just under 80,000 dwelling are required across 272 urban settlements nationally, an average of 15,932 units per annum over the five years (ranging from 9,526 in 2014 to 20,853 in 2018). It estimates that 47% of total supply over the period is required across the Dublin Region. The report also notes that 57% of all households in the Dublin region over this period will be for one and two persons, while a further 18% will be for three person households. This has consequences for the type of housing supply we will need.

Recent analysis by the ESRI has estimated that, in coming years, increases in population will result in the formation of at least 20,000 new households each year, each requiring a separate dwelling. In addition, a number of existing dwellings will disappear through redevelopment or dilapidation. The results suggest an ongoing need for at least 25,000 new dwellings a year over the coming fifteen years.

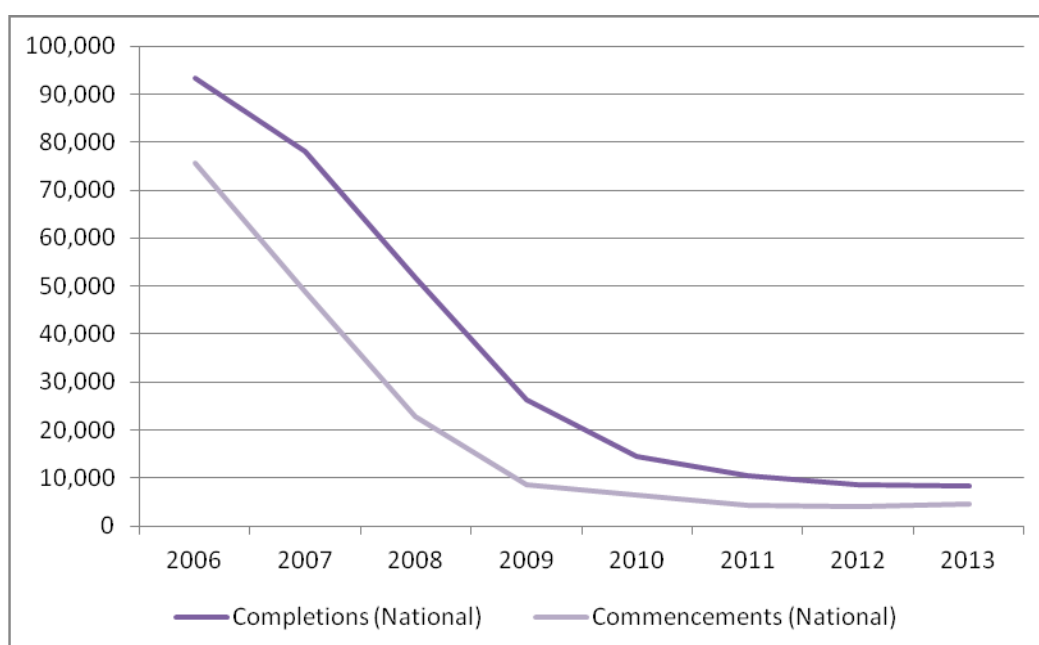
Against this background just 4,042 residential units were commenced in 2012 (19% in Dublin) and just 4,708 in 2013 (31% in Dublin).

This is clearly far from an appropriate level of activity.

If adequate resources were available, in the period from 2017 onwards, completions could more than double to between 20,000 and 25,000; or in the region of an additional 15,000 units a year.

Such a level of investment will be necessary in the next decade if the ongoing demographic change in Ireland is to be accommodated.

National Housing Commencement and Completions 2006-2013



Source: DECLG

Demographic changes, including an aging population and a continued decline in the average household size, suggest that smaller units may be required in the future. Projections indicate that 1 and 2 person households will account for approximately 55% of housing supply requirements in the years ahead.

To help establish a firm benchmark the ESRI, supported by NAMA and the IBF, is currently undertaking deeper research which will examine demographic drivers of demand in coming years – the likely size, composition and location of the population – as well as macro-economic factors influencing supply. This research will also consider micro-economic barriers to increasing supply to meet prospective demand, and the role of credit in the future housing market.

The result of this research will be an important input into the work that lies ahead.

Maintaining a balanced and measured approach will be an ongoing and vital task. We will continue to subject projected demand and supply requirements to monitoring and evaluation so as to ensure that they remain appropriate. Where imbalances emerge, we will take early action to address them.

Creating a National Framework for Housing Supply

The absence of real-time data from across the country, and a means to interpret and correct it, was a significant contributory factor to the disastrous supply and demand mismatch that characterised our house building throughout the boom years.

This cannot be allowed to happen again.

We will, therefore, ensure that we have the robust, reliable, timely and accurate data we need to underpin a more strategic approach for the future.

We will maintain, in one place, a comprehensive and up-to-date supply database – including figures on house completions; commencement notices; planning permissions; vacancy levels; and the National Housing Development Survey – to be analysed against projected demand, broken down on a national and local basis, with information on housing types and sizes a key feature.

This national framework, which will be put in place urgently using existing provisions in Section 10 of the Planning Act 2000, will enable us to take regular stock of developments in any location across the country, to identify emerging problems at an early stage, and to intervene to tackle them.

We will ensure that planning legislation equips us with the tools necessary to do so.

The result will be that, for the first time, the country will have a robust framework for housing supply, preventing any possible return to the disastrous practices of the past.

The Department for the Environment, Community and Local Government will oversee, implement and manage this new approach, together with the Local Authorities and other interested parties.

To ensure transparency and adequate monitoring, there will be an annual publication on the framework outlining a breakdown of projected supply against projected demand, and any actions required to address potential mismatches. The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will update the Government on the contents of the publication in June each year.

Where residential development is proposed in an area it is important that accompanying infrastructure requirements, such as the need for schools provision, are taken into account at an early stage. In this context relevant Departments and Agencies will feed into this process. For example, the Department of Education and Skills utilises a Geographical Information System to analyse demographic data in order to determine the areas where additional school accommodation may be required. A variety of sources are used in this analysis, including census data, school enrolment data, and child benefit data obtained from the Department of Social Protection.

Supply Issues in Dublin

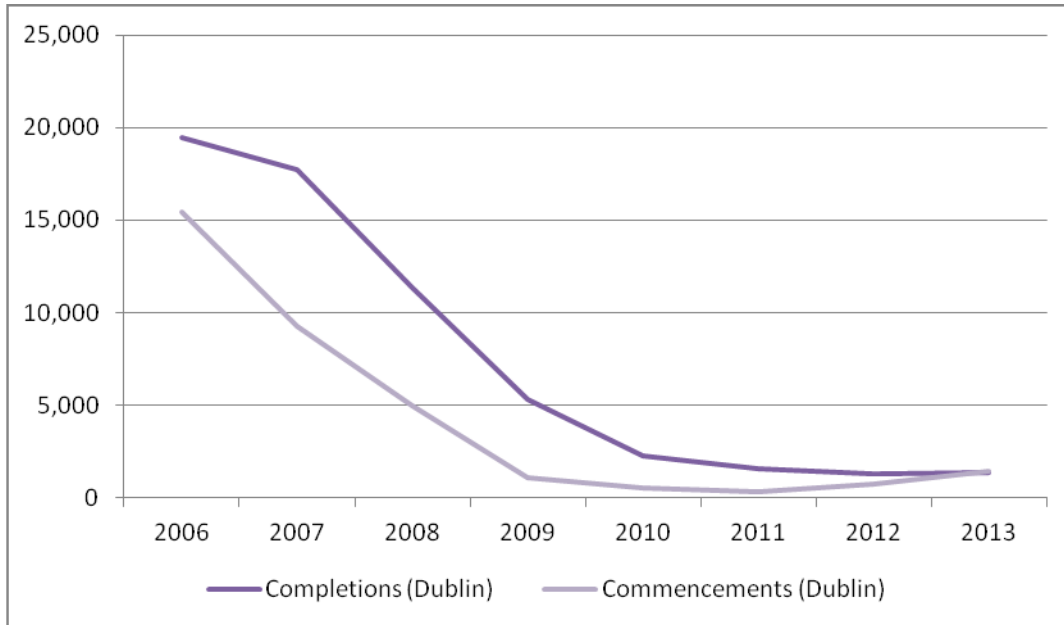
In many locations outside Dublin, evidence points to a continuing over-supply of housing – with vacancy rates remaining well above what is regarded as normal in a functioning market².

We recognise however that there are particular concerns about housing supply in Dublin. Since the peak of the boom, housing output in Dublin has fallen dramatically to a position where in 2013 only

² Census 2011 revealed an estimated total vacancy rate across the country of 11.5% (excluding holiday homes). A typical rate in a functioning market would be expected to be about 4.5-6%.

1,360 homes were completed in Dublin – about 16% of the national total. Just 1,451 units commenced in Dublin last year.

Dublin Housing Commencement and Completions 2006-2013



Source: DECLG

In addition to questions of supply, there has also been a reduction in mobility in the housing market. For a variety of reasons – including negative equity, a wish to protect tracker mortgages, uncertainty about future developments in price, and financing constraints – the number of second hand houses being placed on the market has fallen significantly. Fewer households than would normally be the case are seeking either to trade up or to downsize, constraining mobility in the market.

The result has been increased upward pressure on prices for the limited supply that is available, and knock-on consequences for rents where demand is outstripping supply.

The CSO’s monthly Residential Property Price Index showed an increase of 14.3% across all property types in Dublin in the twelve months to March 2014. The PRTB’s Rent Index showed an annual growth in rents in the capital of 7.6% last year.

Given concern about the level of supply in the Dublin area, the four local authorities are already working together to identify housing developments that have planning permission and that are capable of being delivered in the short-term. They are also exploring what steps may be necessary to facilitate them.

In this work, they are seeking to leverage to maximum advantage existing public infrastructure investment, including transport, which has been put in place in recent years.

They have estimated that there are already 2,000 hectares of land zoned for housing in Dublin, with 1,000 hectares of these comprising large blocks of land in both brownfield and greenfield locations well served by public transport and other essential infrastructure. At conservative estimates these lands have the potential to accommodate upwards of 30,000 units of accommodation in the Dublin region, across the four local authority areas.

The other 1,000 hectares zoned residential, while currently in more peripheral or infrastructure-poor – areas, could also make a contribution to supply over time.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government will work actively with the four Dublin Local Authorities in this regard. It will oversee the early establishment of a **Housing Supply Coordination Task Force** for Dublin, with an immediate focus on monitoring trends in the supply of viable and market-ready approved developments and acting on those trends where supply is believed to be below what is required. It will work closely with industry and other parties, including those responsible for key infrastructure, to identify and address any obstacles to viable and appropriate development.

Private Rented Sector

While home ownership remains for many the preferred choice for housing, the private rented sector almost doubled in size between 2006 and 2011 and approximately 1 in 5 households in the country are now renting privately. This is likely to remain a significant part of the housing landscape into the future.

Rents in the large urban areas are increasing and this is leading to acute affordability issues for some tenants. The Housing Agency advises that there is a serious and increasing shortage of rental accommodation in Dublin city. A shortage of rental accommodation has both social and economic impacts. Affordability issues cause financial hardship for families and a lack of availability at a reasonable price can become a major barrier to employment creation and impact on our competitiveness and attractiveness for foreign investment. While increasing housing supply will help to address this in the medium to long term, we will continue to consider rent affordability in the short term.

People who rent their homes are just as entitled to high standards as those who buy. We are therefore committed to ensuring a strong, sustainable, professional and well-regulated private rented sector.

All landlords have an obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with the minimum standards provided for in law. Responsibility for enforcing the regulations rests with local authorities, supported by a dedicated stream of funding allocated by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government from the registration fees income received under the Residential Tenancies Act. Every City and County Council carries out inspections and the Department keeps standards under review and engages actively to ensure their enforcement.

In February last year, Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations came into effect in full for all rented accommodation, resulting in the phasing-out of the traditional 'bedsit'-type accommodation, modernising requirements for sanitary, heating and cooking facilities. Local Authorities are expected to have a particular focus on raising awareness and enforcement in this regard, especially to alert tenants to the protections afforded to them in law.

Inspections are crucial. Last year, Dublin City Council published its first report into the Inspection Programme undertaken into Pre-63 rented properties in the city. Following an initial inspection of 268 properties across six areas of the city, a total of 1,801 bedsits were found. In excess of 90% of these were not in compliance, with follow up action taken by the Council.

We will continue to support local authorities in this vital work.

We are aware that the issue of deposit protection is a persistent source of complaint for some tenants. In the Programme for Government, we committed to establishing a tenancy deposit protection scheme to improve management of deposits and provide for speedy resolution where disputes arise.

We will provide for this in law this year, ensuring that a fair, transparent solution is put in place that will benefit both tenants and landlords.

It is clear that the make-up of Ireland's housing market, including the share of different tenures, will continue to change over time, with the private rented sector playing an important role in housing those who cannot afford to buy their own homes as well as those who prefer not to. We need to ensure that renting is a secure, stable, and viable option for those who choose it.

A range of accommodation types are required to meet market demands, and there are economic opportunities, for example, for the supply and provision of purpose-built student accommodation and accommodation suitable for older people.

The private rented sector is characterised by small scale landlords. Attracting large scale investment in professionally managed residential property, for example using Real Estate Investment Trusts and other options for long-term investment, can have an important role to play in helping to deliver the professional high-standard sector that tenants deserve. We look forward to the report of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) on the future of the private rented sector, which is expected later this year. A key element of their research is to assess the economic, policy and taxation treatment of the sector with a view to making recommendations to encourage more and larger scale investment in order to increase the supply of good quality, secure and affordable rented accommodation.

Indirect costs associated with accommodation are also important to consider. The requirement for all properties offered for sale or rent to have a Building Energy Rating (BER) was introduced from January 2013. To date, over 421,000 homes have received a BER certificate, providing the occupants with valuable information on how to improve their energy efficiency, and thus reduce their energy bills. We want to ensure that, in accordance with the National Affordable Energy Strategy, everyone can afford to heat and power their homes to an adequate level. As a result we will establish a working group to explore whether it is feasible to introduce minimum thermal efficiency performance standards for properties offered for rent. Such a change, if introduced, would reduce energy poverty, improve health and minimise emissions from the private rented sector.

Social Housing

Ensuring every citizen has access to suitable housing is a key policy goal of Government.

The Summary of Social Housing Assessments published in December showed that 89,872 households were assessed as qualifying for housing support as of May 2013. Of these, single person households make up the largest household type (44%), followed by single adults with a child or children (30%). Social welfare was the only source of income for 72% of households and 75% were living in private rented accommodation, with two-thirds in receipt of rent supplement.

The Government will continue to prioritise the delivery of good quality social housing, including the return to mainstream local authority housing construction this year; enhancing the role of the not-for-profit sector in the provision of social homes; and continuing to work with NAMA, the Local Authorities, and approved housing bodies to maximise delivery of units owned by NAMA or its debtors for social housing over the lifetime of the Government.

We will identify the best ways to deliver social housing for the years ahead through the development of a comprehensive strategy for Social Housing, setting out a vision for the sector.

It is estimated that in the region of 5,000 new Social Housing units will be provided in 2014 through leasing and existing capital programmes. This includes completion of mortgage-to-rent

arrangements; the continued transfer of units owned by NAMA or its debtors; completion of existing building and acquisition programmes; and transfers under the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Budget 2014 contained innovative housing measures, and announced an additional €30m investment in local authority housing. This €30m investment is expected to provide a substantial number of new and refurbished homes for people on housing waiting lists. Approximately half of this investment will enable the construction of new infill developments in areas with the highest demand for social housing.

In March the Minister for Housing and Planning launched a two year €68m local authority home building initiative, which will build some 449 new social homes for families in need of housing. This investment represents the first return to new mainstream local authority house building since the beginning of the financial crisis.

Details of a €15m fund to bring vacant local authority houses back into use were announced in April. This fund will bring 952 vacant local authority units back into beneficial use, providing high quality homes for people in need of housing, while also providing employment through labour intensive activity.

This year will also see the completion of a three year €100m investment that will provide 800 units for older people, people with a disability or people without a home.

We are currently in the process of rolling out a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) which, in addition to helping to remove barriers to employment for recipients, will contribute to the creation of a higher quality private rented sector through improved standards.

The contribution of the not-for-profit sector in the provision of social housing will be facilitated by introducing legislation to regulate the sector. Regulation will enhance the ability of approved housing bodies to attract private finance.

The use of PPPs to support housing regeneration projects stalled during the crisis. Leasing has provided opportunities to ensure the provision of appropriate housing solutions.

Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000

We are actively reviewing the social and affordable housing elements of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, and have already engaged in a full consultation of the public and other interested parties. The review, which we will shortly conclude, is examining a range of options to ensure that Part V is delivering as intended.

Part V currently requires developers to enter into arrangements with local authorities to support the provision of social and affordable housing through a number of options: provision of units, on- or off-site; provision of land; or cash contributions. The measure was conceived at a time of record levels of housing output, and was originally designed to provide a supply of social housing units for local authorities, and importantly to provide an element of tenure mix.

As a result of the economic downturn, there has been a collapse in construction activity and in house-building in particular. Without a properly functioning construction sector, there is no dividend for social housing, and the result is a lose-lose situation in which very low levels of housing construction deliver very little in terms of social housing.

At the same time, demand for social housing has risen sharply since the onset of the economic crisis. The Part V mechanism therefore has the potential to again be a significant contributor to social housing in the context of a recovering housing market.

In any new arrangements, we will ensure that there continues to be a reasonable and balanced contribution to social housing from private development - Part V has contributed to increased social integration and more sustainable mixed-tenure communities, and the preference will be for the delivery of units on site.

We will also ensure simplicity, clarity and transparency for developers, local authorities, and the public.

There are strong possibilities for partnerships between developers and the approved housing body sector that can augment the workings of Part V, and taken together with early engagement with the local authority, can ensure the efficient delivery of all elements of a development.

Homelessness

The Government continues to focus on tackling the root causes of homelessness maintaining an integrated and efficient approach to service delivery across the relevant agencies.

In February 2013, the Minister for Housing and Planning published the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement in which the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 was outlined. The statement emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. The availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing is essential in ensuring sustainable tenancies and ending long-term homelessness.

The Minister established a Homelessness Oversight Group for the purpose of reviewing the progress of the approach being advocated in the Homelessness Policy Statement, identifying obstacles and proposing solutions. The Group's First Report was published in December 2013. In February 2014, the Government approved the establishment of a designated Homelessness Policy Implementation Team and an implementation unit which will support it. The team is tasked with implementing the Homelessness Oversight Group's First Report. This includes the preparation and publication of a structured, practical plan to make the transition from a shelter-led to a sustainable housing-led response to homelessness and to achieve the 2016 goals for homelessness. This will be a practically focused delivery plan to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation for homeless households within the next three years and mobilise the necessary supports. It will contain actions that will be direct, immediate and solutions based, and will prioritise the accommodation of rough sleepers and homeless families. The plan will also drive social housing issues such as the allocation and refurbishment of social housing. In addition, all potential stock across appropriate owners and holders, which might be usable, will be explored for its possible contribution. The Implementation Team will report on this plan to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy on a quarterly basis.

Legacy Issues

The Government has already taken significant action to deal with some of the worst legacies of the boom.

Last year, we secured agreement on a Resolution Framework to deal with Priory Hall – one of the worst examples of boom-time practices – which will help the residents to move forward.

The Pyrite Resolution Act was enacted in December, and since the end of February the Pyrite Resolution Board has been taking applications for assistance from homeowners who have been affected by damage from pyrite. We now have the structures in place to deliver reasonable and sustainable solutions to those affected. In October last, the Government approved €10 million for a remediation scheme, with further funding to be provided later this year.

We will also continue to deal with the ‘Ghost Estates’, which remain a blight on many parts of the country. We will continue to implement the Action Plan on Unfinished Housing Developments, including through the €10 million Special Resolution Fund announced in Budget 2014.

This is intended to encourage the resolution of remaining unfinished developments in the National Housing Development Survey 2013, and particularly those not likely to be resolved in the normal way by developers or owners because of the presence of specific financial barriers.

It will be particularly targeted to address the remaining unfinished developments with residents living in them and, in particular, any developments that local authorities identified, for the purposes of the Local Property Tax waiver, as being in a seriously problematic condition. It will help to address deficiencies in public infrastructure, such as roads, footpaths, public lighting and open spaces, unlocking the potential for developers to invest additional capital in finishing out the housing element of the development.

In addition we will continue to drive the process of Site Resolution Planning of unfinished developments by developers, landowners and their funders in finding the most appropriate uses for these developments. Some 553 resolutions were progressed in 2013 alone.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR HOUSING SUPPLY AND ANNUAL STATEMENT OF PROJECTED HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

1	We will put in place a National Framework for Housing Supply, ensuring a balanced approach in which the supply of housing is matched with projected demand, and in which emerging imbalances can be identified and rectified at an early stage. This will be placed on a statutory footing and will require the publication of an annual National Statement of Projected Housing Supply and Demand to be published each June.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014; Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities; CSO; DES; The Housing Agency; other stakeholders

HOUSING SUPPLY COORDINATION TASK FORCE FOR DUBLIN

2	We will establish a Housing Supply Coordination Task Force for Dublin with an immediate focus on addressing supply-related issues. It will work closely with industry and other parties, including those responsible for key infrastructure such as schools, to identify and address any obstacles to viable and appropriate development.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014; Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Dublin Local Authorities; DES; The Housing Agency; other relevant agencies

AVAILABILITY OF QUALITY DATA

3	We will assess existing construction and property data sources for appropriateness including identifying any gaps and quality shortcomings and how they might be addressed.	
	Timeline	Q3 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; The Housing Agency; CSO

HOUSING MOBILITY

4	We will examine the key barriers to housing mobility and make recommendations to Government.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; D/Finance

PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

5	We will develop a national policy towards professionalising the private rental sector, to include issues such as investment, standards and regulation.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; The Housing Agency

FAIR AND TRANSPARENT TENANCY DEPOSIT PROTECTION SCHEME

6	In line with our commitment in the Programme for Government, we will legislate for a fair and transparent tenancy deposit protection scheme.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

PRIVATE-RENTED AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

7	We will establish a working group and invite public comment on the feasibility and impact of setting minimum thermal efficiency performance standards in properties offered for rent or lease in the residential and commercial sectors.	
	Timeline	Q1 2015
	Responsible Body	DECLG; DCENR; SEAI

SOCIAL HOUSING

8	We will publish a Social Housing Strategy setting out a vision for the sector, and we will introduce legislation to regulate the Approved Housing Body sector.	
	Timeline	Q3 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities; The Housing Agency

PART V OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000

9	We will conclude our review of Part V requirements, ensuring that it is delivering as intended, and will bring forward any necessary legislative change on foot of the review.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities

HOMELESSNESS

10	The Homelessness Implementation Plan will be published in Q2 2014, and we will implement the key recommendations of the Homelessness Oversight Group's First Report in Q2 2016.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Q4 2016
	Responsible Body	DECLG; DSP; HSE; Local Authorities

LEGACY ISSUES

11	We will continue to implement the Government Action Programme on Unfinished Housing Developments and specifically the Budget 2014 Special Resolution Fund.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; DSP; Local Authorities

3. Planning

Proper planning helps us to make the right strategic choices for the future of development in the country. It ensures that we are building the right things in the right place, and that everyone has a chance to contribute to shaping the built environment we share.

Planning also helps us to maximise the benefit we gain as a society from investment in public infrastructure, whether in transport, water or schools.

Across Ireland, effective planning has been at the heart of the rejuvenation of cities and towns and has identified investment and job creation opportunities through a place based and place making approach.

A fit for purpose, flexible, effective and proactive community led planning system is a vital support to a properly functioning construction and development sector and to the wider economy.

An absence of good planning and strategic thinking in past years has served Ireland and its citizens badly, and because of some poor past decision-making, we will be dealing with certain legacies for years to come. It is vitally important therefore, having learnt the lessons of what went wrong in the past, that we can be sure that they are applied in our planning and development laws and practices into the future.

We need to ensure local authorities are equipped to better engage with the development process, improving certainty around the scale and location of key development requirements and also around the infrastructural delivery side.

The goal is to secure a proactive approach to planning, in which planning authorities actively engage with land and property owners, Approved Housing Bodies, and infrastructure providers in securing agreed planning goals and outcomes.

A more engaging "active land management" approach is needed.

To set an overall national direction, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will shortly bring proposals to Government on a national planning framework. This will be an important statement of how we see the future economic, social and physical development of the country taking place.

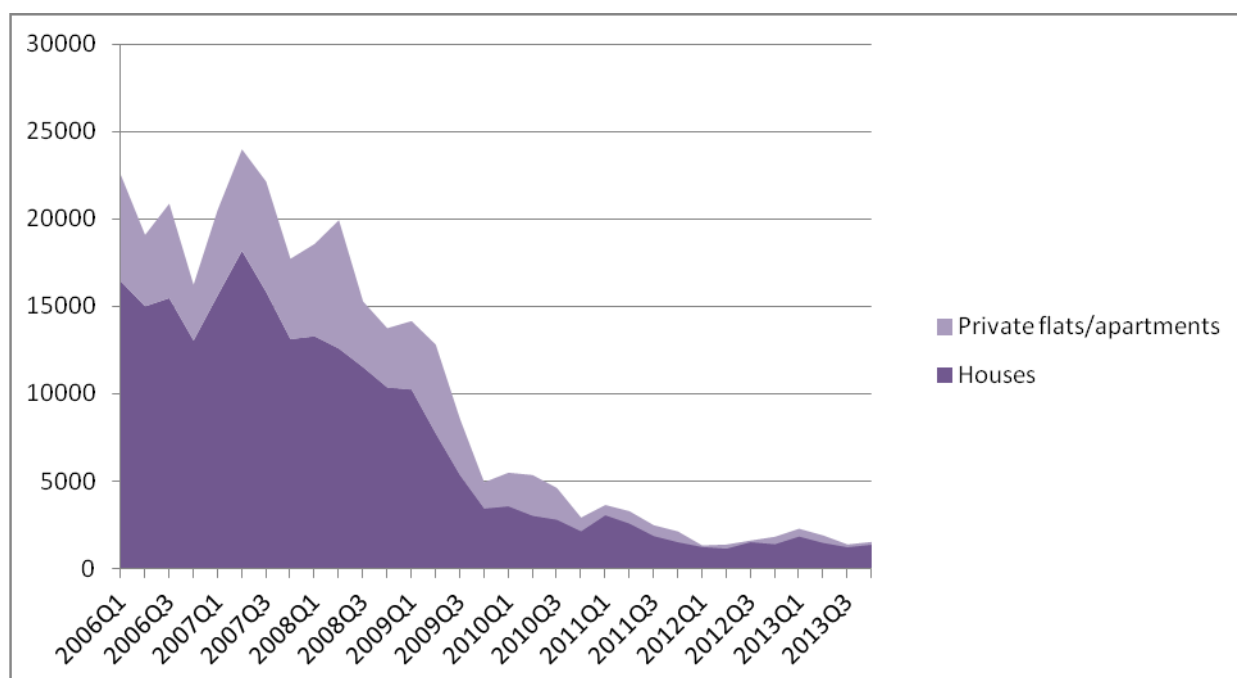
We will also shortly publish a general scheme of a Planning Bill, along with a new Policy Statement on Planning, to implement the planning recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal and other planning concerns, and to establish an independent planning regulator. The Office of Planning Regulation will provide for independent review of Local Authority plans, have investigative powers, and help to raise public awareness of the planning system and processes.

Together, a national planning framework, a Policy Statement on Planning and a new Planning Bill, will build on previous improvements to the planning process and ensure that, through proper planning appropriate development requirements are both identified and approved efficiently, ensuring both sustainable development and economic recovery.

We are also considering carefully whether there are proactive steps that could be taken in the immediate term to increase the level of construction, consistent with proper planning, to encourage economic activity and to reduce pressure for supply in some areas.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure will consider these matters as appropriate.

Units for which Permission was Granted (Number) by Type of Dwelling and Quarter



Source: CSO

Development Contribution Schemes

New development often requires infrastructural investment and that investment has to be paid for.

Development contributions have played, and will continue to play, an important role in enabling capital investment by local authorities in transport, community facilities, amenities and cultural facilities.

The changed economic circumstances of recent years have already been reflected in contribution rates. Reductions in capital and construction costs, as well as a general scaling back of capital investment requirements driven by more realistic assessments of future development needs, led to the issue of revised guidelines on development contributions in 2013.

These have delivered substantial reductions in development contributions, with Dublin local authorities, for example, reducing their contributions for new planning applications by 26%.

However, it has not thus far been possible for the holders of existing planning permissions to avail of these reduced contribution levies without revisiting the planning process.

We will therefore ensure that current arrangements are amended so that lower rates of contributions can have retrospective effect for existing planning permissions that have yet to be activated and will legislate to this effect.

Greater Certainty and Flexibility in Planning

The Government is committed to protecting the integrity of the planning system as a public good.

The current Regional Planning Guidelines that co-ordinate local authority plans will be replaced by more broadly based Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies from 2016. These will create an

opportunity for the local authorities and the key infrastructure providers and economic development agencies to co-ordinate their work in relation to identifying and progressing key development opportunities.

In the meantime however, we want to ensure that the planning process is appropriately flexible and adaptive in anticipating and addressing changing economic circumstances, while at the same time achieving strategic objectives.

To maximise the benefit that flows to the public from monies invested in capital intensive infrastructure – including transport – local authorities have tended to require higher densities in areas close to such infrastructure.

However, in current economic circumstances, in such locations greater flexibility may be warranted in the early stages of new larger-scale developments in order to ‘kick start’ a valuable project that might otherwise not be market-viable. This should only be possible where there is a commitment to achieving higher densities and sustainable development overall.

We believe that this approach should be actively considered and advanced by local authorities, especially in Dublin.

In current economic circumstances, the financial viability of higher density projects outside of city centre or mature high-value residential locations has become fragile at best. Where appropriate and in line with sustainable development into the future, flexibility around overall densities will be considered.

Similarly, there are existing planning permissions for developments – whether residential, commercial or industrial, that have become unviable due to developments in the market that nevertheless might with modification - for example to change the number of apartments vis-à-vis ‘own door’ houses in a given residential scheme - be able to proceed.

When such changes are contemplated, it is important that third parties, including other local residents, have the opportunity to have their voices heard. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for planning permissions to be changed without such an opportunity being available.

At present, a planning authority must make a decision on a planning application within two months of receipt, and An Bórd Pleanála has a statutory objective of deciding or disposing of appeals within 18 weeks (with a provision for a longer period if required, for example in the case where an oral hearing takes place).

We will rapidly examine and decide whether there is scope to provide a more streamlined process in certain cases, for example for ‘repeat’ or ‘change of house type’ applications – e.g. from houses to apartments - and will bring forward any proposed new arrangements in the new Planning Bill.

There are many areas of land zoned for housing on which planning permission has been secured, but on which no development has taken place. In some cases, this is because the developer is no longer operating or financially able to proceed.

However, there may also be cases where land with planning permission is being held in the hope of onward sale and speculative gain without there being any intention by the owner to develop. This is not in the wider public interest.

We will enable local authorities to introduce a ‘use it or lose it’ provision, making it possible for them to require applicants for housing developments of scale to indicate the development schedule for the specific housing project. Where the relevant project does not commence in line with the schedule, without reasonable justification, planning authorities will be empowered to apply measures, including reduction of the term of the permission, so as to expedite delivery of approved development schemes.

In addition, drawing on experience of the Strategic Infrastructure Act, we will ensure that planning authorities engage actively on proposed developments of scale, ensuring they enter into pre-planning discussions with developers in a timely manner where these are sought, detailing required documentation.

Uninhabitable Properties and Vacant Sites in Urban Areas

There is a shared public interest in ensuring the most efficient use of land, as a scarce resource, especially in urban areas.

In recognition of the importance, in particular, of the central areas of our historic cities, in Budget 2014 we extended the Living City Initiative, subject to EU approval, to encourage more people to refurbish existing buildings for residential or retail purposes.

This was intended not only to help stimulate activity in the construction sector, but also to improve the vibrancy of our cities and to overcome the problems arising from the existence of vacant rundown properties in urban areas.

We will also examine approaches to ensure the best economic use of properties and sites in urban areas.

In the first instance we will consider removing any incentive in existing arrangements for commercial rates to allowing a property to deteriorate.

Currently, an occupied commercial property is subject to commercial rates, and a habitable unoccupied property is subject to 50% of commercial rates. However, an uninhabitable unoccupied property, or a vacant development land, is not liable for rates at all.

This could offer an incentive to a developer or owner to render a property uninhabitable - for example by removing a stairs or lift - rather than developing it.

Furthermore, in the context of encouraging economic development, a strong case has been made for enabling local authorities to impose a levy on vacant sites in Dublin.

To support economic development in urban areas, we will examine the possibility for enabling a local authority, should it wish to do so, to adopt measures that incentivise the use and development of vacant sites.

In considering such a provision, we will seek to ensure that it does not lead to obstacles to future development and job creation.

Strategic Development Zones

Since the introduction of the Planning and Development Act 2000 it has been possible for the Government to create 'Special Development Zones' (SDZs) where development is of particular economic or social importance to the State.

Effective SDZs – for example in the Dublin Docklands area and Adamstown – can make an important contribution to economic recovery.

There have been concerns, however, that there are undue delays and rigidities built in to current arrangements that prevent the type of fast-track approach they are intended to achieve.

We will undertake a short focused review of existing arrangements, involving all relevant stakeholders, with a view to making any necessary improvements as quickly as possible.

POLICY STATEMENT ON PLANNING POLICY

12	We will bring proposals to Government on the development of a national planning framework and publish a policy statement on planning.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

PLANNING BILL

13	We will publish a general scheme of a Planning Bill to implement the planning provisions of the Mahon Tribunal, to enable the establishment of an independent Planning Regulator and to make provision for other planning-related measures identified in this Strategy.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG

DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

14	We will ensure that developers can avail of reduced development contributions for existing planning permissions that have yet to be activated and will legislate to this effect.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

15	As fiscal circumstances improve we will relax restrictions on local authorities' use of development contribution funds in local authority possession to invest in essential infrastructure, in line with overall fiscal rules.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	D/Finance

IRISH WATER

16	Irish Water will submit a draft Connections Policy to the Commission for Energy Regulation for approval (involving public consultation) that will replace funding of water and waste capital infrastructure works through development contributions.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	Irish Water and the Commission for Energy Regulation

REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

17	We will establish new Regional Assemblies which will have responsibility for preparing new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, with input from key infrastructure and economic development agencies, replacing the previous Regional Planning Guidelines.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

FLEXIBILITY ON DENSITY TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

18	We will work with Dublin local authorities in supporting a ‘kick start’ initiative for prime development areas where extensive infrastructure investment has taken place. This will include flexibility around early phase densities in new larger-scale developments subject to the achievement of higher densities in later phases to underpin sustainable development.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG

ENHANCED AND STREAMLINED PLANNING AND APPEALS

19	We will examine the scope for more streamlined planning and appeal processes for the amendment of existing planning permissions and will provide for any new arrangements in the new Planning Bill.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

ENSURING PLANNING PERMISSIONS ARE ACTIVATED

20	We will enable local authorities to require applicants for planning permission for housing projects of scale to indicate the development schedule and where the development is not commenced in line with the schedule, without reasonable justification, to modify the duration of the permission.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

IMPROVING PLANNING ENGAGEMENT

21	We will introduce and develop an enhanced customer service approach for all participants at all stages in the planning process, including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing for greater emphasis on e-planning and acceptance of e-fees; • Developing new shared service approaches in relation to specialist skills requirements; and • Drawing on experience of the Strategic Infrastructure Act, ensuring that planning authorities engage actively on proposed developments of scale and that they enter into pre-planning discussions in a timely manner where these are sought, detailing required documentation. 	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities

PROPERTIES AND VACANT SITES IN URBAN AREAS

22	We will consider removing incentives that existing arrangements for commercial rates may offer to owners to keep or render properties empty.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; DPER; Local Authorities

23	We will examine the possibility of enabling local authorities, should they wish to do so, to adopt new measures to incentivise the use and development of vacant sites.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ZONES

24	We will undertake a short review of existing arrangements for Strategic Development Zones with input from stakeholders, and will make any necessary improvements as quickly as possible. This will include exploring ways to streamline processes and considering allowing the use of the provisions of the Strategic Investment Act in parallel with a SDZ.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; NAMA, Irish Water, New Era and other interested parties

REGISTRY OF LAND OPTIONS		
25	Drawing on international best practice we will legislate for and introduce a registry of options on land for development purposes to ensure market transparency.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body	Property Registration Authority; DJ&E; DECLG; OPW

4. Commercial Sector

The availability of a good supply of commercial premises is a key requirement for economic progress. Lack of sufficient supply has the potential to damage our competitiveness, drive up rents, and could persuade internationally mobile companies to locate in other countries.

We need to ensure the removal of any blockages preventing the necessary development of office, industrial, manufacturing and logistics facilities taking place. The planning authorities will continue to address the critical infrastructure deficit issues required to deliver necessary commercial facilities.

The private non-residential building sector has seen the value of construction output collapse from unprecedented levels reached during the boom years. Issues that have hindered development in the commercial property market include an overhang of stock, access to finance, and high levels of indebtedness amongst developers.

As a consequence, there has been a serious lack of new anticipatory development over the past 4-5 years, including advance development of high quality office solutions that could help secure future FDI investments of scale in Dublin.

However, there are signs of market recovery and increasing confidence associated with the FDI pipeline.

Foreign Direct Investment

The IDA has identified locations where there are no suitable quality property solutions to meet the needs of FDI investors. In order to boost regional development and win new business, the IDA will influence the private sector, where appropriate, to fund, construct and deliver the required facilities to win investments for the regions. However, in many urban locations, the gap will need to be closed and in this context, IDA will work with bodies such as the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). To meet the immediate needs of FDI, IDA will build new advanced manufacturing facilities in Waterford and Athlone, and an office facility in Letterkenny.

Solutions will require public and private sector co-operation and initiatives. IDA Ireland is continuing to engage with the private sector, where achievable, to ensure an adequate supply of high quality property solutions to meet future enterprise investment needs. The Government will continue to explore opportunities for alternative co-financing options, including through targeted use of the ISIF.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund

The National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) is to become the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) with a mandate to invest on a commercial basis to support economic activity and employment in Ireland. Legislation giving effect to this change is expected to be enacted before the 2014 summer recess. In parallel, a business plan for the ISIF is being developed for approval by the new NTMA Board, and this business plan is expected to be finalised over the coming months.

The ISIF may have a very important role to play in the Commercial Sector and, in particular, in FDI related developments. During the process to develop an economic impact framework for the ISIF, this has been identified by the IDA as the biggest need from its perspective. This is a real gap, which the ISIF may be well positioned to fill, particularly if equity investment is required.

NAMA

For its part NAMA will continue to collaborate with the IDA in order to identify suitable property held as security for NAMA loans and facilitate engagement with NAMA debtors with a view to developing, selling or leasing such property in support of FDI projects.

Subject to the designation of the area as a commercially workable Strategic Development Zone, a particular focus of attention will be the Docklands area of Dublin. This area is expected to require significant new development over the medium term, particularly of commercial office space to accommodate the continued expansion of the financial services sector and the creation of new business and technology hubs.

NAMA's ongoing collaboration with the IDA in providing suitable commercial property has facilitated decisions by a range of companies to invest in Dublin and elsewhere, creating the potential for these companies to double their Irish workforce over time.

NAMA will continue to facilitate joint venture projects (involving its debtors or properties held as security for its loans) together with suitable counterparties who can provide financial, operational or other resources in support of such projects, with the ultimate objective of securing new investment and promoting employment opportunities.

Availability of Data

The commercial sector has traditionally suffered from a lack of reliable data. We have seen improvements in this area, notably with the publication of the Commercial Leases Database by the Property Services Regulatory Authority in October 2013. This database makes the relevant details of letting agreements and rent reviews in the commercial property market publically available for the first time.

We will explore ways to further enhance the availability of data on commercial properties, including by giving consideration to the preparation of a census of commercial property to be conducted by local authorities.

INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY ISSUES

26	Planning authorities will identify and address crucial infrastructural capacity issues required to deliver development plan objectives.	
	Timeline	Q3 2014
	Responsible Body	Local Authorities; Irish Water

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

27	IDA will build new advanced manufacturing facilities in Waterford and Athlone, and office space in Letterkenny. The organisation is also monitoring the available property stock in other urban locations, where the private sector is not active.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	IDA

28	NAMA will continue to facilitate engagement between its debtors and the IDA in order to increase the availability of property suitable for FDI needs, specifically focusing on the availability of office property in Dublin and, where commercially viable, providing development funding for new stock.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	NAMA; IDA

AVAILABILITY OF DATA

29	We will explore ways to further enhance the availability of data in the commercial sector, including by giving consideration to the preparation of a census of commercial property to be conducted by local authorities.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; CSO; Local Authorities; IDA

5. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability

Energy efficiency is an important aspect of the construction sector, with a vibrant retrofit industry providing multiple benefits spanning the climate, energy, health, local government and education sectors. In addition, retrofit works have been shown to be particularly job intensive. A focus on energy retrofitting could therefore have a significant impact on job creation.

Commercial

The Large Industry Energy Network (LIEN) and the Energy Agreements Programme is a well-established networking and information programme for large industrial energy users run by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Now in operation for over 16 years, it engages over 160 of the largest energy users in ongoing relationships, including site visits, workshops and seminars, special working groups and networking clusters, and annual energy performance reporting. LIEN members share information on energy-saving technologies and techniques to maximise savings and maintain competitiveness.

Energy spend across the LIEN is approximately €800 million and accounts for in the region of 60% of all industrial energy usage.

The Energy Agreements Programme supports large industry to implement an energy-management system through the new ISO 50001 standard. Consistent annual saving across the Network averages between 2% and 3% per annum, accounting for annual energy savings of €16 million and above. Cumulative savings of in excess of 30% have been achieved to date.

Competitiveness is a key concern of Government and industry alike. The SEAI's focus continues to be on promoting energy efficiency and associated cost reduction programmes throughout small and large business sectors. Over 200 SMEs have participated in a wide range of activities including energy assessments, small business training, EnergyMap training and a number of networking events.

The recently established Energy Efficiency Fund will kick-start the type of investment necessary to support the clear opportunity that exists in the public and commercial sectors, and will have €35 million in Exchequer funding to allow competitive proposals for energy efficiency projects to be financed. The aim is to attract matching funding from the private sector, such that the overall amount available for investment is at least greater than €70 million.

We have published the National Energy Services Framework to help develop the energy efficiency market in the non-domestic sector throughout Ireland. This Framework sets out the roadmap through which energy efficiency projects and specifically Energy Performance Contracting process are undertaken, both in the public and private sector.

A key objective behind the development of the Framework is to address more complex, and potentially deeper, retrofits than is possible using existing approaches to procurement. This is necessary given our 2020 energy and climate targets.

In order to demonstrate that the national framework is robust and has the capacity to deliver at scale, we have identified a suite of Exemplar projects that will test the Framework, while demonstrating an ability to be replicated elsewhere. The first tranche of exemplar energy efficiency projects was launched in June 2013. Collectively, the exemplar projects will see investment of up to €55m in energy saving measures, resulting in annual savings of €7m. There are currently 21

exemplar projects (11 public and 10 private sector). Regular workshops monitor progress and a total of €480,000 in technical assistance has so far been committed across these projects.

We believe the phased introduction of improved thermal efficiency standards in the commercial sector, linked to the Building Energy Rating (BER) system and mirroring those already in place for the public sector³, would stimulate additional renovation activity over time, reduce energy use and decrease emissions from the building sector – not to mention meeting compliance with Article 19 of the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU) on removing split incentives.

Residential

Since its launch in 2009, the Better Energy Programme has provided Exchequer support to enable the energy efficiency retrofitting of over 250,000 homes, realising annual energy savings to homeowners of over €76 million. This year will see a further €57 million spent by the programme – in the process supporting 3,100 jobs. Importantly, over 100,000 of the homes that have received Exchequer supports have been low-income homes at risk of energy poverty.

Energy efficiency remains the best way to offset energy costs, while making homes more comfortable to live in. We will continue to support the ongoing improvement of homes across Ireland through the Better Energy Programme.

Existing Irish building stock generally does not perform well in terms of energy efficiency, with 18% of emissions in the non-traded sector coming from buildings. One way of improving the thermal efficiency performance of existing housing is to explore whether it is feasible to introduce a consequential improvement requirement on all homes being substantially renovated. With the publication of *Code of practice – Methodology for the energy efficient retrofit of existing domestic dwellings* (SR 54) by the National Standards Authority of Ireland, we have a world-leading reference document for upgrading Irish buildings. A consequential improvements requirement would ensure that homes are improved at an appropriate point in their lifecycle, while reducing the additional cost of doing so for homeowners.

Sustainability and Conservation

In line with the Government's sustainable development policy "Our Sustainable Future", launched in June 2012, and the objectives of Europe 2020, there is a need to support regeneration and the reuse of our existing built environment assets and to protect Ireland's built heritage.

A fund of €5 million under the Government's Stimulus Capital Programme, is being made available in 2014 to local authorities to fund a new scheme developed by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht – the Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme. This scheme is being developed to assist with the repair and conservation of structures that are protected under the Planning and Development Act 2000. This scheme seeks to leverage private capital for investment in a significant number of labour-intensive, small-scale repair and conservation projects across the country and support the employment of skilled and experienced conservation professionals, craftspeople and tradespersons.

The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) is a joint undertaking by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland based on a renewal of the existing Heritage Towns designation to promote the heritage-led regeneration of Ireland's historic towns. A pilot phase of the HTI commenced in February 2013 in three towns, Listowel, Westport and Youghal. The Historic

³ Regulation 15, S.I. No. 542/2009 European Communities (Energy End-Use Efficiency and Energy Services) Regulations 2009, refers.

Towns Initiative Framework Manual which sets out the steps to follow when undertaking a heritage-led regeneration project of a town was also launched in February 2013 and the pilot phase is due to conclude in May 2014. This initiative is complemented by the Living City Initiative which aims to seek to promote the regeneration of urban historic areas by focusing on encouraging people back to the centre of Irish cities to live in historic buildings and encouraging the regeneration of the retail heartland of central business districts. This initiative will assist in preserving existing heritage assets, stimulate heritage-led regeneration and add to the long term sustainable development of these locations.

SUPPORTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY - COMMERCIAL AND PUBLIC SECTORS

30	Review the National Energy Services Framework and update as required.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DCENR
31	We will continue to support the Exemplar Projects on energy efficiency as they move through the Framework procurement steps to progress the ambition of transforming Ireland into one of the most energy efficient economies in Europe.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DCENR
32	Publish report on public sector energy usage.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	SEAI

SUPPORTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY - RESIDENTIAL

33	We will oversee implementation by local authorities of a programme of works to improve the quality and enhance the energy efficiency of the existing local authorities housing stock.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities with relevant Departments and Agencies
34	Provide €57 million in Exchequer supports to further stimulate energy saving activity in the residential sector and implement a publicity campaign so that those who can avail of this are aware of the supports.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DCENR

35	Working with key stakeholders we will examine the feasibility and impact of introducing consequential improvement regulations that would require homeowners undertaking major renovation work to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes.	
	Timeline	Q2 2015
	Responsible Body	DECLG; DCENR; SEAI

6. Infrastructure and Public Investment

An exchequer capital programme amounting to €17 billion was agreed by the Government for the 5 year period 2012-2016. This €17 billion of Exchequer investment is directed at addressing critical infrastructure investment gaps in order to aid economic recovery, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. The sectors prioritised for investment in the Framework include education, health, jobs and enterprise. In 2014, the mid-way point of the Framework, the State will invest some €3.3 billion through the Exchequer. A further €6.5 billion will be spent between 2015 and 2016.

The level of investment provided in the period to 2016 took account of the fact that most of the economy's key infrastructural deficits had been addressed through a massive capital investment of more than €70 billion over the preceding decade. The focus of the investment, therefore, was on creating the framework conditions in which the enterprise sector could thrive. Investment, for example, in the transport network, in water services and in science and innovation will increase productivity in the economy and deliver long-run economic benefits. This is the infrastructure that is needed for the future.

Delivery of infrastructure funded by the exchequer and the PPP programme to improve economic performance can also result in valuable employment benefits, including for those currently on the Live Register.

The extent of this benefit depends in part on how particular expenditure is invested - different types of public construction projects have different levels of labour intensity. For example, smaller scale projects such as school building and repair, or smaller local and regional road-works, tend to be more labour intensive than major national infrastructural projects. Importantly, much of the capital programme is geared towards these types of smaller, more labour intensive projects.

Substantial progress has been made to date with the schools PPP bundles, and the Department of Education and Skills is exploring ways to enhance and extend the provision of school buildings using a variety of approaches.

Job creation statistics gathered during the delivery of School Bundle 3 PPP project have been used to develop metrics to inform the development of Social Clause conditions. These clauses are discussed later in the chapter.

Significant investment is also being directed towards enterprise supports which have been shown to have the highest direct employment impact.

The creation of Irish Water forms part of the Government's reform programme to create a secure, efficient and sustainable water supply. In addition to the national metering programme – an ambitious infrastructural project supporting up to 1,600 local jobs – there is a significant opportunity presented by the establishment of Irish Water to support capital investment in our water and waste water infrastructure to meet our needs for now and into the future.

Stimulus

Since the capital plan was launched in 2011, the Government has been able to announce a number of increases to its infrastructure investment through the introduction of a new PPP pipeline and the use of the proceeds from the State asset and lottery licence transactions.

This additional investment is expected to support significant numbers of jobs across the country. The previous analysis of each sector indicates that the investment in the PPP pipeline may support in the

region of 13,000 direct jobs and many more indirect jobs. In addition to this, it is envisaged that the additional Exchequer funding of €150 million announced in June 2013 can support up to 3,000 jobs.

These initiatives will of course also create much needed social and economic infrastructure and aid economic recovery. The Exchequer projects, in particular, involve mostly smaller scale capital works which are known to be labour intensive.

The public capital investment framework is currently being reviewed in parallel with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure. Following this, a new five year capital envelope will be set. The review will seek to ensure that the investment framework remains consistent with the priorities of Government including supporting employment creation.

Major Capital Projects

We are committed to ensuring that projects agreed by Government are delivered in a timely manner. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will report on major capital projects and their stage of development. We will ensure that Government Departments and Agencies work with local authorities and other stakeholders to deliver major projects in a timely manner while ensuring appropriate engagement with key stakeholders and local communities.

Social Clauses

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in conjunction with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), has been working on the development of conditions of contract governing the requirements for apprentices and the long-term unemployed, so-called Social Clauses. This is being done in line with EU legislation governing procurement, and a pilot scheme to test compliance with the legislation, and more importantly to maximise impact, has been rolled out for the schools programme devolved to the NDFA. The intention is that results from the pilot would inform more wider application where appropriate and in particular on the new PPP programme, in order to help reduce the level of the long-term unemployed across the country and to provide training opportunities for the youth unemployed.

Three contracts have been awarded in the pilot and work has commenced on the first signed.

The Contractor has up to three months from the beginning of work on site to report on compliance and numbers. Therefore it is expected that there will be reasonably clear indications as to the performance of the clause on the first contract by June 2014.

It is important that there should be mechanisms to evaluate these measures and to provide independent verification that those engaged under social clauses meet the fundamental requirements. The Office of Government Procurement is engaged with the NDFA and the Department of Social Protection on developing such suitable arrangements.

Social clauses are also being used in the enabling works on the Grangegorman site complex given its importance as an urban regeneration project with significant local impact. In the last quarter of 2013, the Grangegorman Development Agency awarded four contracts with a combined value of €40m. To date, there are 247 persons employed on the site of whom 33, or 13%, are from Dublin 1 or Dublin 7.

A number of social clauses have also been included in the water metering contracts. The employees of any managing contractor (including employees in its supply chain) must include:

- 10% of employees of small enterprises (companies with fewer than 50 employees and annual turnover not exceeding €25m and/or a balance sheet not exceeding €25m);

- 10% of employees to be people recruited from the unemployment register; and
- 5% of employees to be apprentices, graduates or school leavers.

There are currently approximately 1,150 people employed on the domestic metering programme, with over 60% of these workers either working in a local SME, from the Live Register, or a school leaver, apprentice or graduate.

Public Works Contract

A review of the public works contract is underway. Formal engagement with stakeholders commenced in late 2013 with three stages in the review:

- identification of performance issues, including data gathering;
- recommendations to Government of any changes necessary; and
- the incorporation of any changes into the contracts.

We will ensure this review is completed by end of Q2 2014 and that proposals are brought to Government in a timely manner to implement any necessary changes arising from this review.

Flooding

The OPW has developed a Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme, which lies at the core of the assessment of flood risk and the long-term planning of the flood risk management measures throughout the country. Detailed flood mapping of Ireland's main river systems, produced under the CFRAM Programme, will be completed this year. The programme is focused on 300 areas of potentially significant risk. Separately the OPW has been tasked with reporting to Government on options for flood forecasting and flood warning.

The EIB will be available to help to mobilise financial resources in order to contribute to reconstruction efforts and to support longer term coastal defence and flood risk management programmes.

Following consideration of a report on the severe weather that affected Ireland from 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014, the Government announced a decision to make a sum of up to €70m available for a programme of repair and remediation works following storm and flooding damage. This includes works on roads and other transport infrastructure, coastal protection and flood defence, and local authority and community infrastructure.

Farm Investment

We will provide for a major new on-farm investment support measure in the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 to be submitted to the European Commission by mid-year. This public support will leverage substantial new investment activity (e.g. in slurry storage, animal housing and equipment) in rural areas and will support the "smart, green growth" objectives of Food Harvest 2020. The tentative funding allocation for this measure is over €290m which would leverage investment of over €725m; the scope to further enhance this measure over the lifetime of the RDP is currently under consideration.

PUBLIC CAPITAL PROGRAMME

36	Develop and publish investment plans for 2015-2019.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DPER
37	Explore mechanisms for private financing and greater use of Public Private Partnership models for infrastructure procurement while continuing to meet VfM criteria, and report quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DPER; D/Finance

MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

38	Provide a report to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure on a quarterly basis on key infrastructural projects, provided by Departments, including their status, and put in place a mechanism for publishing the information by the end of 2014.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DPER

SOCIAL CLAUSES

39	The Government is committed to the use of social clauses and as a priority will extend the use of social clauses in public works contracts and will keep their operation under review to ensure their on-going effectiveness.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DPER and Procuring Authorities
40	Through Pathways to Work the Department of Social Protection will report on the success of social clause provisions with a view to supporting the implementation of social clauses where appropriate.	
	Timeline	Q3 2014
	Responsible Body	DSP; DPER; DES; NDFA

PUBLIC WORKS CONTRACT

41	Complete a review of public works contracts and arising from the review bring proposals to Government and implement any agreed changes.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Q3 2014
	Responsible Body	DPER; Office of Government Procurement

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND DELIVERY PROGRAMME

42	The national planning framework and the proposed Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will be developed to include a robust infrastructure investment and delivery programme linked to the public spending review cycles of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the investment programmes of all relevant infrastructure agencies including, inter alia, Irish Water, National Transport Authority, National Roads Authority, ESB, Bord Gáis, Eirgrid, and the Departments of Education and Skills and Health.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DPER; DECLG; Local Authority

FARM INVESTMENT

43	We will provide for a major new on-farm investment support measure in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 to be submitted to the European Commission by mid-year.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	DAFM

7. Financing Growth

A functioning construction sector and property market cannot exist without a ready and appropriate supply of financing.

The reality of recent years - through the linked crashes in the banks and in the construction sector – is that securing finance has become a constraint on otherwise viable and sustainable development projects.

It is recognised that there has been limited appetite to engage in property development. Capacity in the sector has been badly damaged through the crisis. Confidence in making a profit in this sector remains low.

Our efforts to deal with wider issues affecting the sector in this strategy will help to stimulate developer and banking confidence. It is clear that funding must be made available to meet demand and to grow as demand grows.

Credit specific impediments need to be identified and addressed while maintaining strong regulatory practices. Supporting the availability of credit alone will not generate results unless the demand for houses can be met by increased supply. This will only come when confidence in the sector re-emerges and where a holistic approach to tackling any barriers is taken.

The rebuilding of the domestic banking sector continues, and as part of that process, we will engage with new entrants to the market and require greater transparency from existing market participants. In addition, NAMA and the ISIF can potentially play an important role in the development of the construction sector.

The availability of sufficient quantities of credit to support renewed activity in the sector requires:

- Viable development proposals from promoters;
- Evidence of proposed supply matching prospective purchasers' expectations;
- An adequate level of equity available at the level of the developers;
- Sufficient return to meet the level of risk being undertaken;
- An appropriate risk appetite by the financial institutions and other potential financial providers; and
- Appropriate and transparent lending policies and applicable processes by banks.

Conditions under which borrowers can secure mortgage finance have tightened considerably. In conjunction with ensuring that mortgage lending decisions are undertaken on a prudential basis by financial institutions, we need to see an appropriate and sustainable supply of mortgage lending to support the market.

We are acutely conscious of the origins of some of the problems we are now seeking to address – especially the role that reckless lending played in inflating the property bubble and the all too real difficulties many of our citizens continue to face in supporting boom-time mortgages.

We are utterly determined that there can be no return to the catastrophic practices that wreaked such havoc on the country and on people's lives.

However, we do need to ensure that the conditions necessary to facilitate recovery in the construction sector, and the building of the infrastructure the country needs to secure its future well-being, are in place.

Development Finance

It would be wholly wrong to encourage an inappropriate risk-taking approach to development lending, as characterised the worst years of the boom; but an overly cautious and risk-averse approach is also economically damaging.

We will therefore work with the banks to ensure an appropriate balance is being struck.

We will engage with the banks, NAMA and other interested funding providers to ensure the availability of sufficient development finance to support a sustainable construction sector.

In particular, a High Level Working Group chaired by the Department of Finance will be established to explore the issue of sustainable bank financing for the construction sector. An interim report will be brought by this Working Group to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability by Quarter 2, which:

- Establishes current levels of development finance provision;
- Identifies obstacles to increasing development finance provision, and options to address them; and
- Explores how best to facilitate the resolution of disputes over the availability and terms of development finance.

The Committee will receive updates and discuss the availability of finance on a quarterly basis, and will, if necessary, determine further steps that need to be taken to ensure a properly functioning market.

In seeking to reinvigorate the construction sector, it is important to have equity in the project financing mix. Therefore, this Working Group will also examine whether the gap between the amount of development finance being offered by banks, and the amount required to execute projects is appropriate, and whether there are steps that can be taken to address this gap. For example, if a developer can secure only two-thirds of what is required for a project, the risk is that the project, however economically viable and necessary, will not go ahead.

The Working Group will explore what options may exist to help to support the availability of complementary sources of financing, e.g. mezzanine finance, on viable terms and facilitate the provision of financing by specialist funds and NAMA (with regard to the property it holds as security for its loans); and the scope for attracting more foreign capital into the development finance area. To the extent that there are financing gaps which can be filled on a commercial basis, the ISIF will consider addressing such gaps subject to its overall investment mandate.

NAMA

NAMA will continue to provide new advances to complete development property held as security for its loans, or to commence new projects on land it holds as security for loans. NAMA has already advanced €500m towards such developments and approved an additional €500m, making a total commitment of €1 billion to date. It will advance an additional €1.5 billion towards Irish development projects over the next three years, making total advances of €2.5 billion. These advances will continue to be provided on a commercial basis and will target sectors where supply shortages are most acute.

NAMA will facilitate the construction of up to 4,500 new houses and apartments in Dublin over this period, in addition to office developments that support FDI needs and some related retail development, all subject to commercial viability. Over the next five years or so, NAMA has identified the potential for the land and property to which it is exposed to yield up to 22,500 units – both

houses and apartments. NAMA will facilitate significant development in the Dublin Docklands and other main urban centres. The approval and drawdown of funds towards the Docklands will be predicated on the delivery of, amongst other things, a commercially workable Strategic Development Zone for the Docklands.

NAMA will continue to be guided by clear objectives to obtain the best achievable financial return for the State, including the generation of transactions which contribute to the renewal of sustainable activity in the property market and to the social and economic development of the State, while also pursuing its clear commercial objectives.

In particular, in 2014, NAMA will continue to focus on progressing development projects and advancing significant funds to enhance and complete commercial and residential projects. This includes the completion of properties which are currently under development and the development of land in anticipation of future supply shortages and growing demand.

Through its deployment of working capital, NAMA is directly supporting 15,000 jobs in Ireland in trading businesses linked to its loans in the property, hotel and leisure, retail, healthcare, manufacturing and agriculture sectors. NAMA will continue to provide such support in line with the on-going management of its portfolio.

Where the development of property held as security for NAMA loans is dependent on significant new infrastructure, such as the provision of water and waste water facilities to the Strategic Development Zone in the Dublin Docklands, NAMA will explore options to support the funding of such infrastructure, subject to commercial viability.

European funding

We will increase our engagement with the European Investment Banks (EIB) and European Investment Fund (EIF) in developing and implementing mechanisms designed to maximise the provision of financing to SMEs, including in the construction sector.

There were almost €1.2 billion worth of EIB project signatures and loan approvals in Ireland in 2013, including signature of the N11/N7 motorway PPP for €72m and approval of the Dublin Cross City Luas Project for €150m. This represents an increase of just over one-fifth on 2012 levels, which were, in turn, up significantly on the previous year.

The numbers of projects also increased compared to 2012, and covered a wider range of projects in numerous sectors - energy, education, infrastructure, PPPs, SME Financing, Corporate and EIF Development Capital Fund.

However, we continue to see room for stronger EIB support, for example in the areas of SME access to finance and flood works, and this will remain a top priority for us over the period ahead.

The Investment Plan agreed by the European Council in June 2013 was designed to mobilise the €10 billion increase in the EIB's capital base. This will support a 40% increase in its lending capacity for 2013-2015, bringing annual EIB lending volumes to between €65 and €70 billion.

Construction Sector Capacity

The capacity of the construction sector has been badly damaged during the collapse. Construction contractors can face a number of constraints that can impact on a contractor's ability to finance projects. These can include withdrawal of overdraft facilities, lack of credit availability from builder's suppliers, and the impact of the commencement of the Construction Contracts Act.

There is a need for stronger Irish construction companies and in particular for financially viable companies capable of taking a project from initiation to completion. Part of the solution to achieving this goal may involve viable companies receiving an equity injection. There may be an opportunity for the ISIF to invest in Irish construction companies that are seeking to scale up and expand into international markets.

The availability and cost of performance bonds remains a constraint on the sector. We will work with industry to develop a solution involving existing banks or new players to provide greater levels of performance bonds.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has already issued Circular 07/13 in relation to reducing the level of bonds required on public works contracts.

As part of the work with the EIB and NPRF on trade finance, we will look at, amongst other things, the issue of accessing performance bonds, including in the construction sector.

Mortgage Financing

The market will not provide houses and apartments unless it believes there are sufficient numbers of people in a position to buy them.

In the abnormal housing market in Ireland in recent years, we have seen lending volumes decline dramatically. The banks are highlighting the lack of supply of houses in particular urban areas as a contributing factor for the lack of drawdown of approved mortgage facilities. We have also seen cash transactions dominating the small number of sales taking place.

The significant numbers of cash buyers are an indication of a dysfunctional housing market. Cash buyers continue to play a strong role in the residential property market in Ireland, according to many reports accounting for approximately half of the market in 2013, potentially crowding out mortgage buyers. A sign of a return to a proper functioning residential market will be a significant reduction in the proportion of cash buyers.

We want to see a return to sustainable levels of mortgage lending, as part of a healthy market. This means mortgage products being available to potential purchasers with an ability to support repayments. Mortgage lending decisions must be undertaken on a sustainable and prudential basis by financial institutions and conform fully to regulatory requirements, both in relation to the financial institution itself, and also with regard to the safeguarding of the borrower's interests.

Mortgage figures for 2013 show that the number of loans drawn down fell on an annual basis. In 2012, 15,881 mortgages were issued to the value of €2.636 billion. In comparison, in 2013 some 14,985 mortgages were issued to the value of €2.495 billion.

Residential Mortgage Loans

	First-time Buyer Purchaser	Mover Purchaser	Residential Investment Letting	Re-mortgage	Top-up	Total Drawdowns
2013	7,535	5,340	597	292	1,221	14,985
2012	8,648	4,921	591	455	1,266	15,881
2011	6,300	4,241	509	1,137	2,005	14,273
2010	10,619	6,533	1,161	2,722	6,631	27,666
2009	12,684	9,395	3,018	5,774	14,947	45,818
2008	19,946	20,444	13,226	21,374	35,315	110,305
2007	30,469	32,864	20,861	25,937	47,967	158,098
2006	37,064	45,585	28,141	26,565	66,598	203,953
2005	37,879	46,760	25,856	25,944	64,821	201,260

Source: IBF/PwC Mortgage Market Profile

A key issue is to ensure that there will be sufficient credit available when the supply of houses is increased. There will be an ongoing role to monitor availability of credit in the retail sector.

We will work with mortgage providers and the Central Bank of Ireland to ensure transparency around mortgage lending, including volumes of lending; greater clarity on the application and approval process; loan-to-value ratios; and loan to disposable income ratios.

We will also study other international models of mortgage financing, with a view to learning from best practice. A report on this, along with any recommendations, will be brought to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability.

Other countries, such as the UK and Canada, have supported the development of “mortgage insurance” markets to support bank mortgage lending, particularly to First Time Buyers. Mortgage insurance allows banks to share the risk of mortgage lending, either with the public sector (the UK’s “Help to Buy Scheme”) or with private sector insurance companies (as in Canada), with the aim of increasing banking lending in general or to target groups.

Mortgage insurance can also be used as an incentive to encourage banks to adopt standardised, prudent lending practices (income to loan ratios, high quality documentation etc.), opening up new and lower cost funding sources for the banks. The conditions of mortgage insurance can be changed in order to help avoid credit-fuelled property booms and busts.

Consideration will be given to the concept of a mortgage insurance scheme and how it might benefit new housing completions in the Irish market. The objective of any scheme would be to ensure adequate availability of mortgage finance on affordable terms for new completions, particularly for First Time Buyers, as the economy recovers, and in doing so to provide the certainty needed to support greater levels of investment in new housing.

The introduction of any such measure will be contingent upon the preparation of an Economic Impact Analysis (EIA) for consideration by the Minister for Finance. This exercise will be completed by the end of July. The EIA will assess the design parameters under which such a measure might best operate in the context of the Irish housing market e.g. limits on time, restricted to first time

buyers/owner occupiers, focussed on new housing, the appropriateness of a price cap, regional/geographic restrictions etc. The EIA will draw lessons from mortgage insurance initiatives undertaken in other countries, including in the US, UK, and elsewhere in Europe.

Mortgage Arrears

Since taking office, the Government has put in place a comprehensive strategy to address the problem of mortgage arrears built around the following pillars:

- Innovative personal insolvency reform
- Comprehensive advice and guidance
- A mortgage to rent scheme
- Mortgage resolution strategies
- Associated targets for the banks

Implementation of this strategy is now of prime importance. In that regard, the new personal insolvency system and the full implementation of the Central Bank Mortgage Arrears Resolution Targets - or MART - are fundamental.

It is no longer acceptable for banks to apply short term solutions to cases where there has been a fundamental and long term change in the position of the borrower.

Durable long-term restructures will have to be applied having regard to the circumstances of individual cases.

Data published by the Department of Finance and the Central Bank would appear to demonstrate some success by the lenders in addressing the accounts in early arrears and in putting in place appropriate measures to prevent borrowers from going into arrears.

However, it is now necessary for banks to significantly build on this in 2014.

We will continue to work to support those who find themselves in mortgage difficulties, including through monitoring the performance of the six banks that are part of the Central Bank's MART process, in delivering sustainable solutions to borrowers.

Ensuring an appropriate Tax Code

A haphazard approach to tax measures to incentivise the construction sector, as well as the open-ended nature of reliefs, are generally accepted to have contributed to the property development boom and the country's economic problems.

All property-related tax reliefs were subjected to a comprehensive review, and the decision was made to abolish every one of them.

The Minister for Finance has made it very clear that no new property-related reliefs can be introduced unless they are accompanied by an ex-ante or post-ante evaluation, and all future reliefs must have a guillotine, at which time they would cease.

During 2013, two property-related tax incentives were announced, both of which are targeted at owner/occupiers rather than investors:

- The Living City Initiative; and
- The Home Renovation Initiative.

An ex-ante cost benefit analysis has already been conducted on the Living City Initiative, which concluded that the proposed initiative would be beneficial. An application seeking EU State Aid approval was submitted in March 2014. The initiative is subject to a commencement order and the scheme is expected to begin in 2015 (subject to State Aid approval) and will be in place for a period of 5 years.

The Home Renovation Incentive was commenced on the day following the publication of Finance (No. 2) Bill 2013 and will run until 31 December 2015. The scheme will be subjected to an ex-post evaluation. This incentive represents a measured response to the significant downturn experienced by the construction industry and the provision is designed to stimulate increased activity and boost employment in the sector.

We will not repeat the mistakes of the past and introduce uncosted and inappropriate tax incentives. Nevertheless, it is important that the tax rules applying to the sector are fit for purpose and are appropriate to current circumstances.

As part of the Budget 2015 process, we will examine the tax code as it applies to the construction and property sectors to ensure it is optimal in terms of current policy priorities and goals. This will include a broad consideration of the rules applying to the sector. The avoidance of uncosted and inappropriate tax incentives is of paramount importance.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCING FOR THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

44	<p>A High Level Working Group chaired by the Department of Finance, bringing together the banks, NAMA and other key stakeholders, will be established to explore the issue of sustainable bank financing for the construction sector. In the first instance, this Group will bring an interim report in Quarter 2 to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability and a final report in Q3 that will;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish current level of development finance provision; • Identify obstacles to increasing development finance provision, and means to remove them; and • Explore how best to facilitate the resolution of disputes over the availability and terms of development finance. <p>The Cabinet Committee will receive updates and discuss the availability of finance on a quarterly basis, and will, if necessary, determine further steps to be taken to ensure a properly functioning market.</p>	
	Timeline	Q2 2014, Q3 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; NAMA; NPRF; CBI; other key stakeholders

45	<p>The High Level Working Group will also specifically examine non-bank financing options including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addressing gaps between the amount of development finance being offered by banks, and the amount required to execute a project; • drawing on international best practice in relation to new and innovative financing structures, including the hybrid models involving non-bank actors; • supporting the availability of complementary sources of financing for housing and commercial projects, e.g. mezzanine finance and equity finance, on viable terms and facilitate the provision of financing by specialist funds, NAMA, and ISIF; and • exploring the scope for attracting more foreign capital into the development finance area. <p>The Cabinet Committee will receive an initial report in Q2 2014 and a final report in Q4 2014.</p>	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; NAMA; NPRF; other key stakeholders

46	<p>NAMA will advance up to €2 billion in development funding over the next three years, in addition to the €500 million that has been already advanced, to complete or commence new development on property held as security for its loans, subject to commercial viability. This funding will be advanced directly by NAMA or through appropriate commercial partnerships.</p>	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	NAMA

47	<p>NAMA will focus on projects that address particular supply shortages, e.g. it will facilitate the construction of 4,500 new houses or apartments in the Greater Dublin Area, office space in the Dublin Central Business District and projects in other key urban areas, subject to commercial viability. A core focus will be development in the Dublin docklands, subject to the delivery of a commercially viable Strategic Development Zone.</p>	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	NAMA

EUROPEAN FUNDING

48	We will increase our engagement with the EIB and EIF in developing and implementing mechanisms designed to maximise the provision of financing to SMEs, including in the construction sector.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; D/JEI; EI; NPRF; ISIF

PERFORMANCE BONDS

49	As part of the work with the EIB and NPRF on trade finance, we will look at, amongst other matters, the issue of accessing performance bonds, including in the construction sector.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; DPER; DJEI; EI

MORTGAGE LENDING

50	We will work with mortgage providers and other relevant parties to ensure transparent and sustainable mortgage lending, including volumes of lending; greater clarity on the application and approval process; loan-to-value ratios; and loan to disposable income ratios. This work will be reported quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; CBI

51	We will examine international best practice and develop proposals for additional models of mortgage financing in Ireland, including the concept of a mortgage insurance scheme, to ensure sustainable levels of mortgage lending in the medium term, and report to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability in November 2014.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; DECLG; The Housing Agency

ENSURING AN APPROPRIATE TAX CODE

52	As part of the Budget 2015 process we will examine the tax code as it applies to the construction and property sectors, including a broad consideration of the rules applying to the sector. If these are not fit for purpose they should be refined, improved, abolished or replaced as appropriate.	
	Timeline	Q3 2014
	Responsible Body	D/Finance; Revenue Commissioners

8. Standards, Regulation and Enforcement

Given recent experience, it is particularly important that we ensure that the construction sector operates to the highest standard. This is vital if the sector is to regain and retain public trust.

We cannot tolerate the type of past practices that resulted in so much misery for so many people.

We have already taken steps to ensure enhanced accountability and we will continue to build on these.

Appropriate regulation, with consistent application by relevant Government Departments and Agencies and across the local authority areas, is fundamental to the development of a sustainable industry.

We envisage a competitive industry which puts consumer interests and protection to the fore. An industry which builds to a very high standard, is compliant with all regulations, and is tax compliant.

Industry has a significant part to play in avoiding a recurrence of past mistakes and must contribute appropriately to ensure a renewed and optimal sector fit for the future.

We will continue to work to eliminate fatalities and serious injury to workers in this sector. It is important that as economic activity and employment improves in the sector that worker safety standards are maintained. Planning for a return to employment growth in construction needs to be accompanied by vigilance and adherence to best practice to avoid workplace accidents.

We will continue to work to ensure there is co-ordination and co-operation between Government Departments and Agencies with enforcement responsibility within the sector to ensure projects are delivered to a high standard of quality, with due care for the safety and health of workers.

Building Regulations

New Building Control (Amendment) Regulations came into effect on 1 March 2014, which strengthen the current arrangements in place for the control of building activity.

Requirements include:

- drawings to be submitted to the local building control authority;
- design to be undertaken and certified by competent professionals prior to works commencing;
- owners to formally assign a competent builder to undertake and certify the works;
- owners to formally assign a registered professional as an Assigned Certifier; and
- statutory certificates of compliance from designers, builders and assigned certifiers to confirm compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations.

Other key aspects of the building control reform measures that are underway include:

- an electronic administration system, for which the initial phase of development went live in March 2014, is advancing with a view to using on a pilot basis by year end; and
- implementation of a report on independent review of arrangements for registration of architects, published on 24 September 2013.

While ensuring improved standards and quality, it will continue to be possible for those who choose to do so to self-build or engage in direct labour.

In relation to enforcement and inspection, work is underway on the agreement of common protocols and consistent approaches to Building Control activity across the local government sector and preparations for the transition to service delivery models, incorporating regional and shared services structures. These will have regard to workplace safety and health compliance.

Statutory Register of Builders, Contractors and Construction Trades

Statutory registration has the potential to contribute significantly to the quality of the built environment while providing public contracting authorities with an objective means of assessing compliance with legal obligations.

The Construction Industry Register Ireland or CIRI is up and running since early March 2014 on a voluntary basis, and will be placed on a statutory footing by 2015.

Prior to the establishment of the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI) there was no way for consumers to distinguish construction companies, sole traders and builders who met the required obligations from those who did not.

The register accommodates the full spectrum of building construction and is designed for construction practitioners including of all company sizes, partnerships and sole traders. An Industry Code of Ethics applies together with defined obligations for registered members to adhere to. An ongoing Continuing Professional Development obligation for members also applies.

The registration scheme will accord with competition law, including strong quality assurance checks and provide strong consumer protection.

Consumers have every right to expect that the buildings they buy - or the professional services they pay for - will comply with statutory requirements.

The register will provide consumers with an assurance that all listed builders, contractors and tradespersons have met all registration requirements.

In addition, to further protect consumers, we will consider and report on potential forms of redress for consumers, including the potential for latent defects insurance.

Tackling the Shadow Economy

Revenue and other relevant State agencies will continue their work combating shadow economy activity, including in the construction sector. Tackling the shadow economy is a corporate priority for the Revenue Commissioners, with some 25% of compliance resources dedicated to this area. During 2013, Revenue conducted 1,078 audits of the construction sector yielding in excess of €36 million to the Exchequer.

The Hidden Economy Monitoring Group (HEMG), chaired by Revenue, as a non-statutory group, and including State agencies, business representative bodies and trade unions, identifies initiatives to tackle the shadow economy. The HEMG has decided that one of its areas of focus in 2014 will be the construction sector. It is vitally important that industry play an active role in tackling shadow activity right across the sector, through supporting the work of the HEMG and in a wider context.

The new Department of Social Protection Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014-2018, launched in April, aims to stop fraud from entering the system in the first place; increase the likelihood of finding incorrect or fraudulent claims and quickly correcting these; and strengthen the sanctions for

those who are caught. To inform the development of the strategy an external and internal consultation process was undertaken, which involved among others, members of the Hidden Economy Monitoring Group, including those representing the construction sector. In line with key messages arising from the consultation, a focus of the strategy is the targeting of the shadow economy and the sectors and individuals who have potential to operate in it. In particular, the Department will work collaboratively with the other key statutory compliance and enforcement agencies and the sectoral representative bodies in respect of the construction sector. In conjunction with Revenue and other compliance agencies, it is proposed to undertake high visibility site visits and inspections on construction sites where such projects are being publicly funded. Specific risk criteria will be applied to those individuals and companies targeted for reviews. Inspections will also be conducted on once-off builds, using data from new building regulations to be operated by Local Authorities for planning permissions.

The Government has been proactive in ensuring compliance with clauses in the Public Works Contracts used for all major school building projects. In April 2013, the Department of Education and Skills appointed contractors to conduct audits on school/college builds to verify compliance. Reviews of educational construction sites are undertaken and any irregularities uncovered forwarded to the relevant authorities for follow up action. The Department also provided an on-line complaint system. Some 13 audits are completed with a further audit ongoing. Arising from these audits, five projects have been referred to the Revenue Commissioners, one to the Department of Social Protection and one to the National Employment Rights Authority.

During 2013 the Health and Safety Authority carried out 3,000 inspections in the construction sector to ensure compliance with workplace safety and health requirements. This also helps to reduce the shadow economy.

Budget 2014 also includes a focus on combating the shadow economy by requiring those availing of the Home Renovation Incentive to use tax compliant contractors. Revenue launched a dedicated online system in April 2014, that will record details of the work done by the contractor and payments made by the property owner and will ensure that the latter receives tax relief for works carried out as quickly and seamlessly as possible. Incentivising the use of compliant contractors to carry out construction contracts helps to reduce the competitive disadvantage that legitimate businesses face versus those contractors who operate in the shadow economy.

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE THROUGH ROBUST REGULATION		
53	We will ensure effective implementation of Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2013, and introduce a wider package of building control reforms to accompany the new regulations to ensure stronger consumer protection.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities

54	We will develop an Agreed Operational Framework for Building Control Authorities to standardise work practices, systems, procedures and decision-making in relation to oversight of building control activity across the local authority sector and to move towards a risk-based approach to inspections by building control authorities by September 2014.	
	Timeline	Q3 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; Local Authorities

55	We will bring forward Heads of a Bill by end 2014 to enable the Construction Industry Register, Ireland's register of contractors, builders and tradespersons, to operate on a statutory footing by 2015.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG; DPER

56	In collaboration with key stakeholders in the public and private sector, we will consider and report on potential forms of redress for consumers and homeowners, including the potential for latent defects insurance.	
	Timeline	Q4 2014
	Responsible Body	DECLG

57	Complete implementation of the Construction Contracts Act	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	DPER

SHADOW ECONOMY

58	Revenue and other relevant State agencies will continue their work combating shadow economy activity, including in the construction sector, and, as part of that work, will continue to engage, as appropriate, with business representative groups through the work of the Hidden Economy Monitoring Group and through bilateral meetings. Representative bodies will be asked to support the work of State agencies by engaging through the HEMG and other fora, and by providing intelligence.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	Revenue; DSP; NERA; HSA

9. Improving Education and Skills – Helping Create Jobs and Reduce Unemployment

It is essential that the construction industry is fit for purpose, and is supported by highly skilled and well qualified workers.

It is also important that any new jobs created are available and accessible to those who are unemployed, and that their wealth of experience and talent can contribute to our recovery. A key focus of this strategy is to facilitate moving ex-construction workers off the live register, back to the workplace.

According to the most recent CSO data (Q4 2013) some 43,600 persons unemployed were previously employed in Construction (17% of the total), of which 34,000 have been unemployed for more than 12 months.

These figures may not give the full effect of the unemployment problem for former construction workers – any former construction worker who later engaged in short-term employment in another sector would now not be classified as a former construction worker.

We cannot allow economic recovery to bypass those on the live register. Getting the unemployed back to work is a key Government priority. *'Pathways to Work'* sets out a new vision for our welfare and employment services. Unemployed people can now avail of client profiling, early group engagements, one-on-one interviews, skills and experience assessments, and training and work placements, as we continue to roll out one-stop-shop Intreo offices nationwide.

We need to ensure that those on the live register engage in education and training and that their skills are aligned to the sectors evolving needs. The Department of Education and Skills is providing funding through SOLAS, the new Further Education and Training Authority, and the Higher Education Authority for a number of targeted training and education interventions to support unemployed people building on their skills and experience with new qualifications in areas where employment opportunities are expanding.

MOMENTUM was rolled out by the Department of Education in 2013. MOMENTUM supports the provision of free education and training projects to allow up to 6,500 long term jobseekers to gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growing sectors. It is intended to provide a minimum of 2,000 places for young people in 2014 under a new iteration of the MOMENTUM Programme.

The Springboard initiative launched in 2011 as part of the Government's Jobs Initiative was introduced in recognition of the fact that many of the jobs which were being lost in sectors such as construction, would not return even as the economy recovered, and that people previously employed in these sectors would find that their qualifications and skill sets did not match the skill requirements of emerging growth sectors. To date some 15,500 people have enrolled on Springboard programmes.

The tender for the 2014 round of Springboard, in February sought proposals for programmes in a number of construction areas such as: management and non-wet trades with specific reference to operating and competing internationally, engaging the potential of ICT, Building Information Modelling (BIM), 'greening' of construction, management capability and chartered surveying. While there is at present an excess of labour supply, these areas are examples of certain niche skills which

are in short supply. The new Springboard call provides an immediate opportunity for professional associations and firms from the construction sector to partner with education and training providers to submit programme proposals for funding to fill skills gaps.

There needs to be a positive disposition on the part of industry to supporting the return of the unemployed to work. Every effort should be made to encourage this – and to ensure that employers are aware of incentives, such as JobsPlus (under which they can receive €7,500 - €10,000 for recruiting a person unemployed for more than 12 months). Employer engagement is paramount in getting people back to work. We must ensure that potential employers view the live register as a valuable resource providing a pool of well qualified and highly skilled potential workers.

There is a need to ensure appropriate skills and expertises are available to facilitate a competitive construction sector now and into the future. There is also a need to increase the attractiveness of the sector, ensuring it appeals to young talent. We need to ensure skills are aligned to the increasing need for ICT within the sector, for example clean room industry and productivity enhancing Building Information Modelling (BIM) systems, which are of particular importance in providing suitable infrastructure for IDA supported industries.

In the medium-long term, a sustainable, competitive and innovative sector will require a close partnership between education and training providers and industry in which both are prepared to shoulder responsibility. There are well established links between industry associations in the construction sector such as Engineers Ireland and the Society of Chartered Surveyors and third level institutions in the development and accreditation of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Such relationships are the key to ensuring the continuous alignment of programmes with changing skills needs.

A review of the system of apprenticeships in Ireland, in line with best international practice, has been undertaken. Recommendations of particular relevance to the construction sector include:

- a move away from a generic placement at Level 6 of the national framework of qualifications for all apprenticeship programmes;
- that the curriculum for each family of trades, as a group, is reviewed and updated as a matter of urgency;
- that an upper and lower ceiling on recruitment levels should be examined, so that programmes are tailored to labour market needs, while avoiding future skill shortages; and
- that opportunities for progression should be strengthened and a master craftsman qualification considered.

The Apprenticeship Review Group's report was submitted in December 2013 and published on the Department of Education and Skills website in January 2014.

The implementation of the report's recommendations is being considered in the context of establishing a framework for a future expanded apprenticeship system. Initially, this involves Departmental engagement with SOLAS, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, representatives of business and trade unions and representatives of providers of further and higher education. Stakeholders are being consulted and arrangements are being developed for implementation of the recommendations. An implementation plan, which will cover how existing apprenticeships will be further developed and how progress will be made on developing apprenticeships in new sectors, will be finalised by mid year.

We will advance appropriate recommendations for the construction sector early this year to ensure that our young people have the best possible apprenticeship programmes as demand for skilled labour increases.

In addition, the review of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme qualifications certification (FETAC/QQI) is important to the industry particularly with regard to the mobility of the workforce. It enables easy recognition of professional qualifications for workers entering the country and also for Irish firms carrying out work in other member states.

SUPPORTING SKILLS AND EDUCATION

59	The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) to identify future skills needs in the sector and implement targeted measures to ensure we can meet demand. Priority will be given to addressing skills gaps identified.
	Timeline Q4 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body EGFSN; SOLAS, HEA
60	Address skills gaps relating to the ‘greening’ of construction by ensuring the implementation of the Build-Up Skills Ireland roadmap actions including the piloting of training initiatives.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body DES; DECLG; DCENR; Third Level Institutes; Industry representative bodies
61	Undertake targeted promotion of the Skillnets pilot ManagementWorks management development training initiative for SMEs to the construction sector to maximise take-up from the sector which is currently low.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body DES; Industry representative bodies
62	Links between construction sector firms, professional bodies and education and training providers should be further enhanced to ensure programmes are continuously aligned with emerging skills needs.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body Industry; Third Level Institutions; SOLAS; HEA
63	Continue international graduate placement programmes that have received a strong industry endorsement including the Enterprise Ireland Graduates for International Growth programme, IBEC Export Orientation Programme and Farmleigh Fellowships, and actively promote to the construction sector.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body EI

64	Through the preparation and gradual implementation of the Further Education and Training strategy we will work to ensure the alignment of provision to the needs of enterprises for vocational type training in the construction sector.
	Timeline Q2 and Ongoing 2014
	Responsible Body DES

SUPPORTING LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED

65	We will work with the construction industry to ensure employers are aware of incentives to recruit long-term unemployed, and work with industry to develop proposals to support the return of long-term unemployed construction workers to the workforce.
	Timeline Q3 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body DSP; Industry

APPRENTICESHIP REVIEW

66	We will consider the recommendations of the Apprenticeship Review Group and consult with relevant stakeholders on how particular recommendations could be implemented and seek expressions of interest from sector and industry groups that wish to support and have critical mass to participate early in the commencement of the new apprenticeship model. We will advance appropriate recommendations for the construction sector this year to ensure that our young people have the best possible apprenticeship programmes as demand for skilled labour increases.
	Timeline Q2 2014 and Ongoing
	Responsible Body DES

10. Competitiveness, Innovation and Internationalisation

The Action Plan for Jobs is a mechanism to drive competitiveness. The 2014 plan commits to an increased focus on competitiveness in all parts of the economy in 2014. Many firms are still confronted by high costs. Others are dealing with legacy issues that make accessing funding for investment extremely challenging. Still others lack the capabilities to take advantage of growth opportunities. Through the Cabinet Committee system, notably the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs, the Government will monitor progress on competitiveness issues identified by the National Competitiveness Council and others, and will consider further actions to improve Ireland's international competitiveness and examine initiatives to make it easier to do business in Ireland. This work will include actions to: review the key competitiveness issues for business, including in particular cost competitiveness, and take action on key challenges identified; review key challenges in terms of the ease of doing business in Ireland and take action on issues identified; and ensure that for each quarter, Government considers a report on competitiveness issues and progress in addressing them.

Our vision is for a competitive construction industry based on best practice. We need a competitive, innovative, dynamic and sustainable construction sector serving domestic needs and also gaining traction in overseas markets. We will continue to explore ways to drive internationalisation and exports in the sector. For example, ISIF will in time consider investing in Irish construction companies that are seeking to expand into international markets.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) works intensively with prospective construction sector exporters in areas such as market research, management training, partnering, and exposure to peer client experience and in-market supports. Enterprise Ireland supports include long and short-term Client Management Development Programmes, including a *Management4Growth* programme and *Business Accelerator* programme and Strategic Consultancy; a 'Marketing Sales Strategy Review' process; and a Lean Start programme.

Technology advances in materials, construction methods, ICT, and global communications are transforming the sector. Building Information Modelling (BIM) has become a powerful tool in driving efficiencies and increased productivity in construction and is rapidly becoming a standard requirement internationally. EI has recently commenced a BIM Start programme, which is the first stage of a three part programme that will support companies to develop a strategic roadmap with the aim of successfully integrating their products and services into the information needs of designers and contractors. Improvements in innovation and efficiency also include the optimisation of the use of e-planning systems. Adoption of new technologies, modern methods of construction and delivery processes will be crucial for sustainable competitive construction enterprises.

Increased productivity through improved training and skills and through the adoption of technology can make significant cost, building performance and project delivery differences. Construction costs are a key issue for a competitive industry. It is important that increased cost competitiveness represents a structural rather than a cyclical shift. Measures to reduce the costs of professional services, for example The Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011, which increases competition in the legal services market by removing unnecessary restrictions on the way legal services can be delivered, supports the reduction of costs for all sectors of the economy, including the construction

sector. This is particularly important for the construction sector given requirements for works such as conveyancing and work on leases by the legal industry.

E-Conveyancing

A key component of the property market involves the processes that are used to secure the transfer of title between a purchaser and a vendor more commonly referred to as conveyancing. Since the Law Reform Commission first highlighted the importance of moving towards a system of e-Conveyancing in 2005, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) has significantly advanced its range of online eRegistration services following its transition to a fully electronic national register of property ownership (e.g. 4,000 online fee-paying business transactions per day and 60% of all discharges of mortgages being lodged electronically and completed within 2 days of lodgement). The PRA continues to work on the roll out of electronic registration initiatives. Despite this the process of conveyancing, taking into account time taken by all players in the process to secure a change in ownership in property, remains largely paper based and takes a disproportionate amount of time for the title to transfer to the new owner once the terms of a transaction have been agreed. Significant delays can arise from requisitions on title which the purchaser’s legal representative is required to make before the sale is closed – this can involve up to 60 separate headings.

Therefore, a system of eConveyancing which harnesses modern technology to assist in the timely transfer of property ownership would provide a more modern, efficient, cost effective and secure system to support transactions in the property market in the future. Moving to a full eConveyancing system will require a number of further elements over and above existing and planned developments to be put in place to provide for the secure transmission of communications, the management and disbursement of funds between parties and the creation and management of digital signatures. It is recognised that such work will require representatives of the legal profession, the banking sector and the relevant statutory agencies to work together closely, and could build on work already completed on this issue under the aegis of the Law Society.

SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION AND TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS		
67	Continue to support the expansion of construction firms into international markets, in particular through measures supporting capacity building in management and training and through the overseas support of Embassies and Enterprise Ireland offices.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	EI
68	Continue promotion of the Enterprise Ireland Lean Start Programme and advance construction companies onto the following stages, Plus and Transform. Implement a BIM staged development programme to support companies advancing to Level 2 BIM capability.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	EI

69	Work with industry organisations to promote the use of BIM and develop the appropriate technical skills amongst Irish construction firms so that they can successfully compete in markets where BIM is widely adopted or a requirement.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body EI / Industry Representatives

SUPPORTING COLLABORATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

70	Develop a public sector pilot Market-Led Clustering Programme to stimulate collaboration between Irish based construction sector firms, other relevant industry sectors and the research community, which would act as a demonstrator internationally of Ireland’s capabilities in pre-commercial product and service development, servicing national level policy goals particularly in the context of the Current National Reform Programme (especially climate change targets). Such a project should encompass activities from applied research to pilot production (e.g. smart infrastructures or smart homes).
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body DJEI and other Government Departments

71	Accelerate engagement by construction sector firms with third level institutes and continue to promote available programmes including Innovation Partnerships, Innovation Vouchers, Industry Fellowships, and Strategic Partnerships to support R&D projects in collaboration with the third level sector.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body EI / Industry Representative Bodies / DES / HEIs

72	Science Foundation Ireland to promote relevant research themes, collaborative between researchers in Irish HEIs and relevant industries, in thematic research funding calls: Energy Efficiency and environmental sustainability; water and waste.
	Timeline Q2 2014
	Responsible Body SFI

73	In collaboration with key stakeholders (the legal profession and the banking sector) we will review and report on the steps required to deliver a system of eConveyancing in Ireland, including the resource implications and timeframes for delivery.
	Timeline Ongoing
	Responsible Body DJ&E, Property Registration Authority and other relevant Government Departments and stakeholders (including D/Finance, DECLG; and Local Authorities)

11. Implementation and Oversight

This strategy will not succeed without steadfast implementation of each of the 75 actions. Through the Action Plan for Jobs process and through the Cabinet Committee system, most notably the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs, we will ensure that a whole of Government approach is taken to implementation.

The Cabinet Committees on Economic Infrastructure and on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability will deal with issues specific to their remit.

Many of the actions we have outlined here are of necessity focused on the immediate challenge of driving recovery in a sector that has real potential to create sustainable employment. Aligned with these are actions to ensure that the sector remains on a sustainable growth path, delivering our housing and infrastructural needs efficiently, competitively and at the highest standards of innovation, quality and professionalism.

To this end, we will establish a Construction Sector Group, chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach, to support delivery of this strategy, and to engage with industry in relation to specific developmental issues for the sector.

IMPLEMENTATION AND OVERSIGHT		
74	The Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs will consider construction and property related issues once a quarter, and other Cabinet Committees will consider issues relevant to their remit on a regular basis.	
	Timeline	Ongoing
	Responsible Body	D/Taoiseach
75	Launch a Construction Sector Group to support the implementation of this strategy, with a focus on near term actions. The work of this group will feed into the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs. The group will be established for one year at which time it will be reviewed.	
	Timeline	Q2 2014
	Responsible Body	D/Taoiseach

Summary of Actions by Quarter

Quarter 2 2014

Action Point	Responsible Body	Timeline
Put in place a National Framework for Housing Supply, ensuring a balanced approach in which the supply of housing is matched with projected demand, and in which emerging imbalances can be identified and rectified at an early stage. This will be placed on a statutory footing and will require the publication of an annual National Statement of Projected Housing Supply and Demand to be published each June.	DECLG; Local Authorities; CSO; DES; The Housing Agency; other stakeholders	Q2 2014; Ongoing
Establish a Housing Supply Coordination Task Force for Dublin with an immediate focus on addressing supply-related issues. It will work closely with industry and other parties, including those responsible for key infrastructure such as schools, to identify and address any obstacles to viable and appropriate development.	DECLG; Dublin Local Authorities; DES; The Housing Agency; other relevant agencies	Q2 2014; Ongoing
Examine the key barriers to housing mobility and make recommendations to Government.	DECLG; D/Finance	Q2 2014
In line with our commitment in the Programme for Government, we will legislate for a fair and transparent tenancy deposit protection scheme.	DECLG	Q2 2014
We will conclude our review of Part V requirements, ensuring that it is delivering as intended, and will bring forward any necessary legislative change on foot of the review.	DECLG; Local Authorities	Q2 2014
The Homelessness Implementation Plan will be published in Q2 2014, and we will implement the key recommendations of the Homelessness Oversight Group's First Report in Q2 2016.	DECLG; DSP; HSE; Local Authorities	Q2 2014 and Q4 2016
We will bring proposals to Government on the development of a national planning framework and publish a policy statement on planning.	DECLG	Q2 2014
Publish a general scheme of a Planning Bill to implement the planning provisions of the Mahon Tribunal, to enable the establishment of an independent Planning Regulator and to make provision for other planning-related measures identified in this Strategy.	DECLG	Q2 2014 and Ongoing
Ensure that developers can avail of reduced development contributions for existing planning permissions that have yet to be activated and legislate to this effect.	DECLG	Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014

<p>Irish Water will submit a draft Connections Policy to the Commission for Energy Regulation for approval (involving public consultation) that will replace funding of water and waste capital infrastructure works through development contributions.</p>	<p>Irish Water and the Commission for Energy Regulation</p>	<p>Q2 2014</p>
<p>Work with Dublin local authorities in supporting a 'kick start' initiative for prime development areas where extensive infrastructure investment has taken place. This will include flexibility around early phase densities in new larger-scale developments subject to the achievement of higher densities in later phases to underpin sustainable development.</p>	<p>DECLG</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing</p>
<p>Examine the scope for more streamlined planning and appeal processes for the amendment of existing planning permissions and provide for any new arrangements in the new Planning Bill.</p>	<p>DECLG</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>
<p>Enable local authorities to require applicants for planning permission for housing projects of scale to indicate the development schedule and where the development is not commenced in line with the schedule, without reasonable justification, to modify the duration of the permission.</p>	<p>DECLG</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>
<p>Introduce and develop an enhanced customer service approach for all participants at all stages in the planning process, including by: providing for greater emphasis on e-planning and acceptance of e-fees; developing new shared service approaches in relation to specialist skills requirements; and drawing on experience of the Strategic Infrastructure Act, ensuring that planning authorities engage actively on proposed developments of scale and that they enter into pre-planning discussions in a timely manner where these are sought, detailing required documentation.</p>	<p>DECLG; Local Authorities</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>
<p>Consider removing incentives that existing arrangements for commercial rates may offer to owners to keep or render properties empty.</p>	<p>DECLG; DPER; Local Authorities</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>
<p>Examine the possibility of enabling local authorities, should they wish to do so, to adopt new measures to incentivise the use and development of vacant sites.</p>	<p>DECLG</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>
<p>Undertake a short review of existing arrangements for Strategic Development Zones with input from stakeholders, and make any necessary improvements as quickly as possible. This will include exploring ways to streamline processes and considering allowing the use of the provisions of the Strategic Investment Act in parallel with a SDZ.</p>	<p>DECLG; NAMA, Irish Water, New Era and other interested parties</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>
<p>Drawing on international best practice legislate for and introduce a registry of options on land for development purposes to ensure market transparency.</p>	<p>Property Registration Authority; DJ&E; DECLG; OPW</p>	<p>Q2 2014 and Ongoing 2014</p>

Complete a review of public works contracts and arising from the review bring proposals to Government and implement any agreed changes.	DPER; Office of Government Procurement	Q2 2014 and Q3 2014
Provide for a major new on-farm investment support measure in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 to be submitted to the European Commission by mid-year.	DAFM	Q2 2014
A High Level Working Group chaired by the Department of Finance, bringing together the banks, NAMA and other key stakeholders, will be established to explore the issue of sustainable bank financing for the construction sector. In the first instance, this Group will bring an interim report in Quarter 2 to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability and a final report in Q3 that will: establish current level of development finance provision; identify obstacles to increasing development finance provision, and means to remove them; and explore how best to facilitate the resolution of disputes over the availability and terms of development finance. The Cabinet Committee will receive updates and discuss the availability of finance on a quarterly basis, and will, if necessary, determine further steps to be taken to ensure a properly functioning market.	D/Finance; NAMA; NPRF; CBI; other key stakeholders	Q2 2014, Q3 2014 and Ongoing
The High Level Working Group will also specifically examine non-bank financing options including: addressing gaps between the amount of development finance being offered by banks, and the amount required to execute a project; drawing on international best practice in relation to new and innovative financing structures, including the hybrid models involving non-bank actors; supporting the availability of complementary sources of financing for housing and commercial projects, e.g. mezzanine finance and equity, on viable terms and facilitate the provision of financing by specialist funds, NAMA and ISIF; and the scope for attracting more foreign capital into the development finance area. The Cabinet Committee will receive an initial report in Q2 2014 and a final report in Q4 2014.	D/Finance; NAMA; NPRF; other key stakeholders	Q2 2014 and Q4 2014
Work with mortgage providers and other relevant parties to ensure transparent and sustainable mortgage lending, including volumes of lending; greater clarity on the application and approval process; loan-to-value ratios; and loan to disposable income ratios. This work will be reported quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability.	D/Finance; CBI	Q2 2014 and Ongoing
Complete implementation of the Construction Contracts Act.	DPER	Q2 2014
Through the preparation and gradual implementation of the Further Education and Training strategy work to ensure the alignment of provision to the needs of enterprises for vocational type training in the construction sector.	DES	Q2 and Ongoing 2014
Consider the recommendations of the Apprenticeship Review Group and consult with relevant stakeholders on how particular recommendations could be implemented and seek expressions of interest from sector and industry groups that wish to support and have critical mass to participate early in the commencement of the new apprenticeship model. We will advance appropriate recommendations for the construction sector this year to ensure that our young people have the best possible apprenticeship programmes as demand for skilled labour increases.	DES	Q2 2014 and Ongoing
Science Foundation Ireland to promote relevant research themes, collaborative between researchers in Irish HEIs and relevant industries, in thematic research funding calls: energy efficiency and environmental sustainability; water and waste.	SFI	Q2 2014

Launch a Construction Sector Group to support implementation of this strategy, with a focus on near term actions. The work of this group will feed into the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs. The group will be established for one year at which time it will be reviewed.	D/Taoiseach	Q2 2014
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Quarter 3 2014

Action Point	Responsible Body	Timeline
Assess existing construction and property data sources for appropriateness including identifying any gaps and quality shortcomings and how they might be addressed.	DECLG; The Housing Agency; CSO	Q3 2014
We will publish a Social Housing Strategy setting out a vision for the sector, and we will introduce legislation to regulate the Approved Housing Body sector.	DECLG; Local Authorities; The Housing Agency	Q3 2014 and Ongoing
Planning authorities will identify and address crucial infrastructural capacity issues required to deliver development plan objectives.	Local Authorities; Irish Water	Q3 2014
Through Pathways to Work the Department of Social Protection will report on the success of social clause provisions with a view to supporting the implementation of social clauses where appropriate.	DSP; DPER; DES; NDFA	Q3 2014
As part of the Budget 2015 process we will examine the tax code as it applies to the construction and property sectors, including a broad consideration of the rules applying to the sector. If these are not fit for purpose they should be refined, improved, abolished or replaced as appropriate.	D/Finance; Revenue Commissioners	Q3 2014
Develop an Agreed Operational Framework for Building Control Authorities to standardise work practices, systems, procedures and decision-making in relation to oversight of building control activity across the local authority sector and to move towards a risk-based approach to inspections by building control authorities by September 2014.	DECLG; Local Authorities	Q3 2014
Work with the construction industry to ensure employers are aware of incentives to recruit long-term unemployed, and work with industry to develop proposals to support the return of long-term unemployed construction workers to the workforce.	DSP; Industry	Q3 2014 and Ongoing

Quarter 4 2014

Action Point	Responsible Body	Timeline
Develop a national policy towards professionalising the private rental sector, to include issues such as investment, standards and regulation.	DECLG; The Housing Agency	Q4 2014
Continue to implement the Government Action Programme on Unfinished Housing Developments and specifically the Budget 2014 Special Resolution Fund.	DECLG; DSP; Local Authorities	Q4 2014

Establish new Regional Assemblies which will have responsibility for preparing new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, with input from key infrastructure and economic development agencies, replacing the previous Regional Planning Guidelines.	DECLG	Q4 2014
IDA will build new advanced manufacturing facilities in Waterford and Athlone, and office space in Letterkenny. The organisation is also monitoring the available property stock in other urban locations, where the private sector is not active.	IDA	Q4 2014
Explore ways to further enhance the availability of data in the commercial sector, including by giving consideration to the preparation of a census of commercial property to be conducted by local authorities.	DECLG; CSO; Local Authorities; IDA	Q4 2014
Review the National Energy Services Framework and update as required.	DCENR	Q4 2014
Publish report on public sector energy usage.	SEAI	Q4 2014
Oversee implementation by local authorities of a programme of works to improve the quality and enhance the energy efficiency of the existing local authorities housing stock.	DECLG; Local Authorities with relevant Departments and Agencies	Q4 2014 and Ongoing
Examine international best practice and develop proposals for additional models of mortgage financing in Ireland, including the concept of a mortgage insurance scheme, to ensure sustainable levels of mortgage lending in the medium term, and report to the Cabinet Committee on Mortgage Arrears and Credit Availability in November 2014	D/Finance; DECLG; The Housing Agency	Q4 2014
Bring forward Heads of a Bill by end 2014 to enable the Construction Industry Register, Ireland's register of contractors, builders and tradespersons, to operate on a statutory footing by 2015.	DECLG; DPER	Q4 2014
In collaboration with key stakeholders in the public and private sector, consider and report on potential forms of redress for consumers and homeowners, including the potential for latent defects insurance.	DECLG	Q4 2014
The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) to identify future skills needs in the sector and implement targeted measures to ensure we can meet demand. Priority will be given to addressing skills gaps identified.	EGFSN; SOLAS, HEA	Q4 2014 and Ongoing
Develop and publish investment plans for 2015-2019	DPER	Q4 2014
The national planning framework and the proposed Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will be developed to include a robust infrastructure investment and delivery programme linked to the public spending review cycles of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the investment programmes of all relevant infrastructure agencies including, inter alia, Irish Water, National Transport Authority, National Roads Authority, ESB, Bord Gáis, Eirgrid, and the Departments of Education and Skills and Health.	DPER; DECLG; Local Authority	Q4 2014

Quarter 1 2015

Action Point	Responsible Body	Timeline
Establish a working group and invite public comment on the feasibility and impact of setting minimum thermal efficiency performance standards in properties offered for rent or lease in the residential and commercial sectors.	DECLG; DCENR; SEAI	Q1 2015

Quarter 2 2015

Action Point	Responsible Body	Timeline
Working with key stakeholders examine the feasibility and impact of introducing consequential improvement regulations that would require homeowners undertaking major renovation work to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes.	DECLG; DCENR; SEAI	Q2 2015

Ongoing

Action Point	Responsible Body	Timeline
Provide a report to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure on a quarterly basis on key infrastructural projects, provided by Departments, including their status, and put in place a mechanism for publishing the information by the end of 2014.	DPER	Ongoing
Ensure effective implementation of Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2013, and introduce a wider package of building control reforms to accompany the new regulations to ensure stronger consumer protection.	DECLG; Local Authorities	Ongoing
As fiscal circumstances improve we will relax restrictions on local authorities' use of development contribution funds in local authority possession to invest in essential infrastructure, in line with overall fiscal rules.	D/Finance	Ongoing
NAMA will continue to facilitate engagement between its debtors and the IDA in order to increase the availability of property suitable for FDI needs, specifically focusing on the availability of office property in Dublin and, where commercially viable, providing development funding for new stock.	NAMA; IDA	Ongoing
Continue to support the Exemplar Projects on energy efficiency as they move through the Framework procurement steps to progress the ambition of transforming Ireland into one of the most energy efficient economies in Europe.	DCENR	Ongoing
Provide €57 million in Exchequer supports to further stimulate energy saving activity in the residential sector and implement a publicity campaign so that those who can avail of this are aware of the supports.	DCENR	Ongoing
Explore mechanisms for private financing and greater use of Public Private Partnership models for infrastructure procurement while continuing to meet VfM criteria, and report quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure.	DPER; D/Finance	Ongoing
The Government is committed to the use of social clauses and as a priority will extend the use of social clauses in public works contracts and will keep their operation under review to ensure their on-going effectiveness.	DPER and Procuring Authorities	Ongoing

NAMA will advance up to €2 billion in development funding over the next three years, in addition to the €500 million that has been already advanced, to complete or commence new development on property held as security for its loans, subject to commercial viability. This funding will be advanced directly by NAMA or through appropriate commercial partnerships.	NAMA	Ongoing
NAMA will focus on projects that address particular supply shortages, e.g. it will facilitate the construction of 4,500 new houses or apartments in the Greater Dublin Area, office space in the Dublin Central Business District and projects in other key urban areas, subject to commercial viability. A core focus will be development in the Dublin docklands, subject to the delivery of a commercially viable Strategic Development Zone.	NAMA	Ongoing
Increase our engagement with the EIB and EIF in developing and implementing mechanisms designed to maximise the provision of financing to SMEs, including in the construction sector.	D/Finance; DJEI; EI; NPRF; ISIF	Ongoing
As part of the work with the EIB and NPRF on trade finance, we will look at, amongst other matters, the issue of accessing performance bonds, including in the construction sector.	D/Finance; DPER; DJEI; EI	Ongoing
Revenue and other relevant State agencies will continue their work combating shadow economy activity, including in the construction sector, and, as part of that work, will continue to engage, as appropriate, with business representative groups through the work of the Hidden Economy Monitoring Group and through bilateral meetings. Representative bodies will be asked to support the work of State agencies by engaging through the HEMG and other fora, and by providing intelligence.	Revenue; DSP; NERA; HSA	Ongoing
Address skills gaps relating to the ‘greening’ of construction by ensuring the implementation of the Build-Up Skills Ireland roadmap actions including the piloting of training initiatives.	DES; DECLG; DCENR; Third Level Institutes; Industry representative bodies	Ongoing
Undertake targeted promotion of the Skillnets pilot ManagementWorks management development training initiative for SMEs to the construction sector to maximise take-up from the sector which is currently low.	DES; Industry representative bodies	Ongoing
Links between construction sector firms, professional bodies and education and training providers should be further enhanced to ensure programmes are continuously aligned with emerging skills needs.	Industry; Third Level Institutions; SOLAS; HEA	Ongoing
Continue international graduate placement programmes that have received a strong industry endorsement including the Enterprise Ireland Graduates for International Growth programme, IBEC Export Orientation Programme and Farmleigh Fellowships, and actively promote to the construction sector.	EI	Ongoing
Continue to support the expansion of construction firms into international markets, in particular through measures supporting capacity building in management and training and through the overseas support of Embassies and Enterprise Ireland offices.	EI	Ongoing
Continue promotion of the Enterprise Ireland Lean Start Programme and advance construction companies onto the following stages, Plus and Transform. Implement a BIM staged development programme to support companies advancing to Level 2 BIM capability.	EI	Ongoing

<p>Work with industry organisations to promote the use of BIM and develop the appropriate technical skills amongst Irish construction firms so that they can successfully compete in markets where BIM is widely adopted or a requirement.</p>	<p>EI / Industry Representatives</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Develop a public sector pilot Market-Led Clustering Programme to stimulate collaboration between Irish based construction sector firms, other relevant industry sectors and the research community, which would act as a demonstrator internationally of Ireland’s capabilities in pre-commercial product and service development, servicing national level policy goals particularly in the context of the Current National Reform Programme (especially climate change targets). Such a project should encompass activities from applied research to pilot production (e.g. smart infrastructures or smart homes).</p>	<p>DJEI and other Government Departments</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Accelerate engagement by construction sector firms with third level institutes and continue to promote available programmes including Innovation Partnerships, Innovation Vouchers, Industry Fellowships, and Strategic Partnerships to support R&D projects in collaboration with the third level sector.</p>	<p>EI / Industry Representative Bodies / DES / HEIs</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>The Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs will consider construction and property related issues once a quarter, and other Cabinet Committees will consider issues relevant to their remit on a regular basis.</p>	<p>D/Taoiseach</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>In collaboration with key stakeholders (the legal profession and the banking sector) we will review and report on the steps required to deliver a system of eConveyancing in Ireland, including the resource implications and timeframes for delivery.</p>	<p>DJ&E, Property Registration Authority & other relevant Government Departments & stakeholders</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

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