



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Lár Bailte ar dTús  
Town Centre First

# Town Centre First

## Annual Implementation Plan 2023





**“THE TOWN CENTRE FIRST POLICY  
AIMS TO CREATE TOWN CENTRES  
THAT FUNCTION AS **VIABLE, VIBRANT**  
AND **ATTRACTIVE** LOCATIONS FOR  
PEOPLE TO **LIVE, WORK AND VISIT,**  
WHILE ALSO FUNCTIONING AS THE  
SERVICE, **SOCIAL, CULTURAL** AND  
**RECREATIONAL HUB** FOR THE LOCAL  
COMMUNITY”.**



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# Summary

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# Town Centre First - Policy Approach

The Town Centre First Policy was published in February 2022 fulfilling a key action in The Programme for Government which recognised the need for, and committed to, the development of a co-ordinated, strategic approach to town centre regeneration that would maximise the impact of the Government’s considerable investment in urban regeneration.

This Town Centre First policy, informed by the model in Scotland, encourages Government Departments, Local Authorities, businesses, and communities to put town centres at the heart of decision-making.

There is a strong national policy framework in place to support a Town Centre First approach, from the overarching aspect of Project Ireland 2040, through to specific policies on climate action, housing, and rural development.

As the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic, and cultural development of Ireland, Project Ireland 2040 set out Ireland’s high-level strategic objectives for spatial planning over the period to 2040. The delivery of these objectives under Project Ireland 2040 are supported by the detailed updated capital investment plan, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030, and the 20-year National Planning Framework (NPF).

## National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework is the Government’s high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country to 2040. This is in the context of an expected additional one million people (over 2016) living in Ireland by 2040 and an additional two-thirds of a million people working here. The NPF frames the development and implementation of regional spatial and economic strategies, county and city development plans and local area plans across the country for the years ahead.

The aim of revitalising our towns and urban areas is strongly reflected in the objectives and priorities of the National Planning Framework.

## National Development Plan

The updated National Development Plan 2021-2030, published in September 2021, mirrors the national strategic objectives of the NPF, and provides specific funding measures to support the compact growth agenda, strengthened rural economies and communities, and sustainable transport. The updated plan identifies specific investment vehicles that will support the Town Centre First policy.



## Our Rural Future & Housing for All

Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021 - 2025 represents the Irish Government's blueprint for the post-COVID recovery and development of rural Ireland over the next five years. It provides the framework to achieve the vision of transforming the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas.

Our Rural Future contains a number of key commitments that deliver on the aim to support the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages to contribute to local and national economic recovery, and to enable people to live and work in a high-quality environment.

Housing for All highlights the overall housing growth required each year in the next decade rising from 24,600 in 2022 to some 40,500 by 2030. Housing for All has specific pathways on addressing the vacancy and efficient use of existing housing stock and also the provision of a Town Centre First policy that aligns with the objectives of the NPF.

Both Our Rural Future and Housing for All have reflected the concept of Town Centre First which gives an operational focus to the ambition flowing from the NPF in relation to Ireland's towns and villages.

**The Town Centre First policy has the potential to facilitate Local Authorities, businesses and communities to avail of the supports and opportunities for town centres and to put town centres at the heart of their decision-making. As part of this, each town (and village) can understand its own unique position and chart their own response to the emerging challenges and opportunities.**

There is clearly an opportunity now for a Town Centre First policy to further support a strategic approach to town centre regeneration that ties the national policy framework to local expertise. It can ensure that an understanding of local opportunities and challenges will more effectively support the utilisation of existing buildings and unused lands for new development, and better address issues of vibrancy and future function, while promoting residential occupancy. The next section highlights some of the specific opportunities for towns as part of this process.

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# Ireland's Towns

The National Planning Framework and Our Rural Future set out a vision to develop thriving Irish Towns which are integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development. This vision is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, and recognises the diversity of individual towns, the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in places and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment.

## A Sense of Place

Our towns and villages are valuable economic, social and cultural assets. They provide us with a sense of place and belonging, while also being central to our tourism product. The built heritage of towns and villages is key to a community's sense of place and to attracting both visitors and new residents. The relative attractiveness and vibrancy of towns and villages has also become an increasingly key element in competitive advantage and in driving economic investment; Foreign Direct Investment is increasingly influenced by the quality-of-life towns can offer to prospective talent.

## A Sense of Pride

We have a sense of pride in our towns and villages. Each town is unique, varying in their size, characteristics and central function. They remain the lifeblood of local economies, supporting business and generating employment opportunities. Towns and villages provide important administrative, social, community and recreational functions. They support clusters of local services, have a significant share of homes and jobs, and act as transport hubs.

## Challenges

Regardless of the level of vibrancy of each of our towns, they all continue to face an array of challenges to their ongoing function and purpose. There is a need to reverse the pattern of stagnation or decline of many towns, which may require the identification and establishment of new roles and new functions, the enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities or a greater emphasis on services, hospitality, and social interaction.

The challenges include the provision of greater employment opportunities, the effect of vacant and derelict properties on the vitality and attractiveness of towns, the impact of out-of-town and online shopping on town centre retail, and the closure of services where providers have found it is no longer viable to maintain such services. In many places there has been a general drift away from town centre living and town centre commercial activity, which has had a "hollowing out" effect on some of our towns.



## Opportunities for Towns & Villages

While the changing environment in which towns and villages operate presents distinct challenges, a wide range of opportunities to drive future growth and development have also been identified.

- Climate Change and Adaptation of our Towns
- Digital Transformation and New Ways of Working and Living
- Demographic Change and Housing Choice in Towns
- Experience-Led Retail
- Regeneration of Public Space
- Sustainable Mobility
- Realising the Existing Cultural and Heritage Assets of Places
- Gaeltacht and Gaeltacht Service Towns
- Empowered, Inclusive and Engaged Communities

## A Vision for Irish Towns

This Town Centre First policy will empower local communities and businesses, working with Local Authorities, to develop plans to maximise the strengths and assets of their town. These plans will also provide a link to the objectives in the statutory development plans and local area plans that are relevant to each town.

- **Places that are shaped by the communities that live there, where local residents and the business community are enabled to plot the future for their own towns and villages**
- **Towns that embrace the opportunities presented by technology, climate action and demographic change**
- **Places that are the fulcrum of economic, social, cultural, and recreational activity, with a sustainable mix of commercial, retail, service, and hospitality offerings**
- **Town centres that reflect the current and future needs of the local community, with quality public realm, sustainable mobility infrastructure and green spaces that facilitate vibrant, connected local communities and economies**
- **Vibrant, accessible, and lived-in town centres that are home to young and old, which are not seen as a second-best option to more peripheral locations.**



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# Introduction

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# Background to the Implementation Plan

To date some of the key strategic implementation actions that have taken place which drive Town Centre First approach and enable preparation of Annual Implementation are as follows:

## 26 Pilot Towns - Town Centre Masterplan Initiative (Phase 1)

The Town Centre Masterplan Initiative (Phase 1) intended to complement the approach of yet to be published Town Centre First Policy, by providing funding to ensure development and delivery of these Master Plans in selected towns to demonstrate the Town Centre First process at an early stage. The delivery of the plans to be done alongside the roll-out of the Town Centre First process and to be linked to the implementation structures developed for the policy.

This initiative provided funding of €100,000 to support the development of each Town Centre Masterplan and the associated analysis required.

## Town Centre First Policy

The Town Centre First Policy was published in February 2022 fulfilling a key action in The Programme for Government which recognised the need for, and committed to, the development of a co-ordinated, strategic approach to town centre regeneration that would maximise the impact of the Government's considerable investment in urban regeneration.

## Town Centre First National Office

The Town Centre First National Office was established as a joint initiative of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Housing, local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) in collaboration with the Local government Management Agency (LGMA) and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA). Funding for the National Office comes from the Housing for All implementation fund.

## Town Regeneration Officer Network

Through funding provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development Local Authorities have been provided with the opportunity to recruit for the role of Town Regeneration Officer as detailed in Town Centre First Policy. A key role of these Town Regeneration Officers (TRO) will be to facilitate the establishment, training, and ongoing work of Town Teams by providing technical, communication, administrative and project management supports. The Town Regeneration Officer will be a key conduit between this multi-disciplinary team in the Local Authority and the Town Teams.

The Town Centre policy identifies more than 33 initial strategic actions across all stakeholders which will be substantially progressed in the initial implementation phase from 2023 to 2025. There are a number of key elements to the plan-led placemaking approach in Town Centre First and these will require significant foundational groundwork and planning, including



scoping, generation of research evidence, stakeholder engagement, piloting and evaluation in order to ensure that their implementation is successful. Data and evidence will underpin and guide the implementation of Town Centre First throughout and it is essential that decisions about implementation, particularly on the actions to drive policy approach, are based on strong and sound information. Much of this foundational work is expected to be undertaken within the initial implementation period. For reasons of prioritisation, resources and other considerations, the sequencing of some actions will not be fully completed but all will be significantly advanced in this first phase of implementation.

#### **The Town Centre First Annual Implementation Plan (2023–2025):**

- **Provides a summary overview of Town Centre First, including the major actions to be delivered**
- **Identifies the lead and partner(s) who will implement initial actions and articulates the key output to be achieved by 2025 for each action, alongside a clear schedule of associated annual milestones**
- **Provides an overview of the structures that will support implementation**
- **Describes the processes for reporting on implementation; and**
- **Summarises implementation challenges, risks, and mitigations.**

The Implementation Plan, in setting out milestones for 2023, 2024 and 2025, is a key mechanism to plan and sequence the actions, as well as to communicate more widely about what is likely to be advanced when.

The development of the Town Centre First Implementation Plan (2023–2025) was led by the LGMA Town Centre First National Office and overseen by the Town Centre First Sponsors Group. This Group comprises the Department of Rural & Community Development, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the LGMA Town Centre First National Office. This Group agreed the broad structure of the Implementation Plan and its individual members engaged with officials within their respective Departments, State Agencies and with partners (where appropriate) to examine their actions, agree key outputs over the initial implementation phase and chart the associated milestones for the period 2023–2025.

# Overview of Town Centre First

## Vision, Priorities, Principles & Framework for Action

“The Town Centre First policy aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community”.





## Principles

The principles which underpin Town Centre First are drawn from Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021-2025.

- **People-centred:** Recognising the centrality of people, to enable them to increase their capability and confidence to achieve progress together, based on their rights and aspirations.
- **Sustainable:** Promoting and developing sustainable rural communities, economies, and environment and linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Participative and Inclusive:** Building active participation, fostering social cohesion amongst all communities, and prioritising the needs of those experiencing social or economic exclusion, including rural isolation.
- **Integrated:** Ensuring consistency with strategies across national and local government to achieve complementarity of objectives and actions and to ensure coordinated delivery.
- **Progressive:** Building on significant positive progress as well as retaining the flexibility necessary to capitalise on emerging opportunities.
- **Rural-Urban Interdependence:** Recognising the functional interdependence between urban and rural areas, and the economic and social interactions between the two. With this in mind, the policy seeks to reframe the narrative around rural Ireland to reflect the integral role which rural areas play and their economic and social importance to our national development.

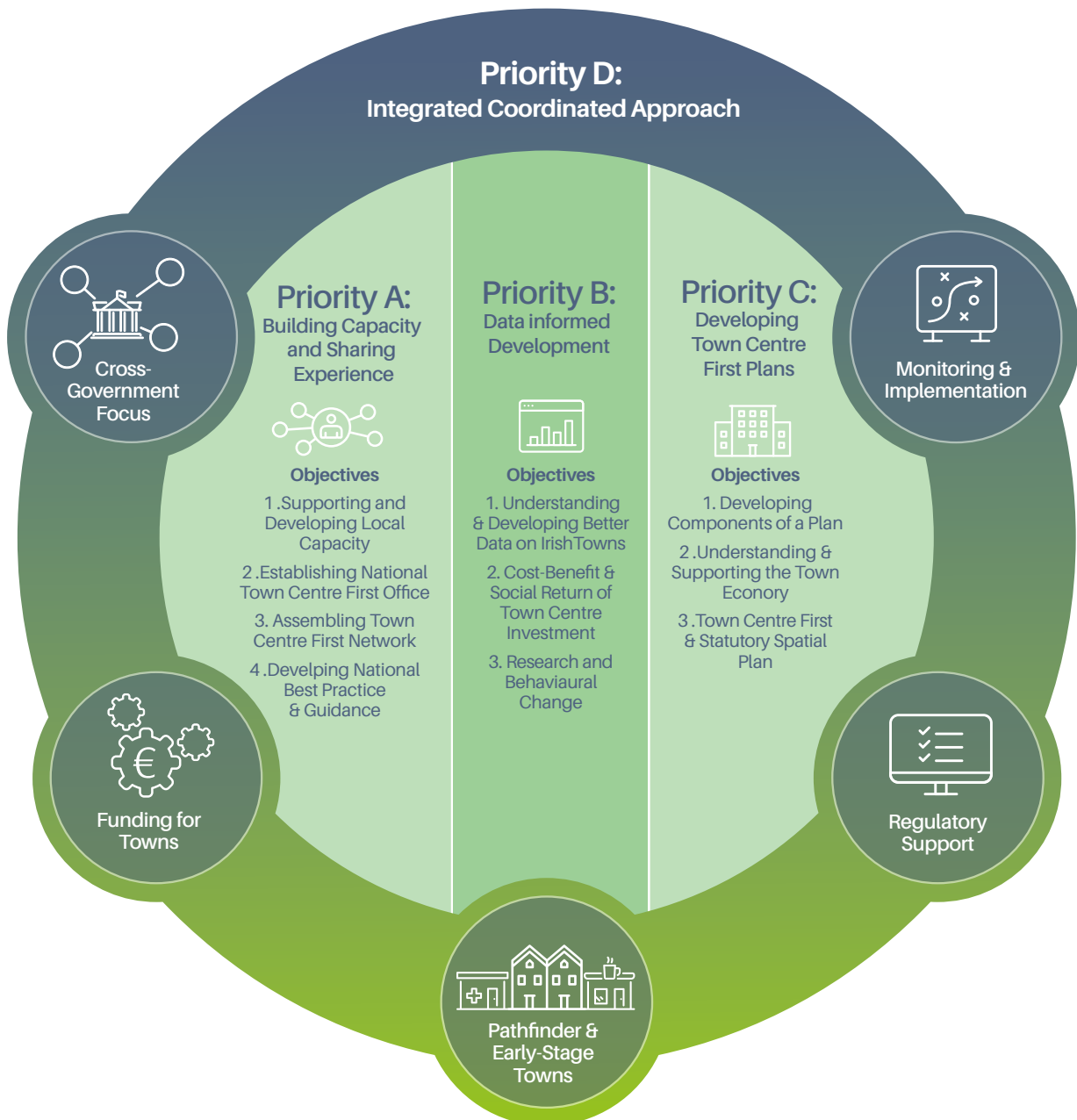
These principles are consistent with the State's commitments to progressing human rights and equality in Ireland.

The policy aligns in design and implementation with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

# Framework for Action

The four Priorities will be delivered through ten interlocking Objectives (under Priorities A, B and C) and five Supporting Pillars (under Priority D). Under each Objective and Supporting Pillar, Strategic Actions are set out. This is the framework for action for the duration of Town Centre First and forms the basis to monitor implementation. Over 33 actions to be progressed over the first three years have been identified. By and large, these actions represent additionality and will complement existing work on-going in regeneration and placemaking in Irish towns.

As a living policy with a built-in review after three years, it is expected that new specific actions for delivery in the medium- to long-term will be added as implementation progresses.





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# Actions and Milestones

# Priority A: Capacity Building and Sharing Experience

## Task A1: Support and Develop Local Capacity

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Action No. 1</b> Support the establishment (where the equivalent does not exist) and operation of Town Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish Town Teams in line with Town Centre First Policy in all 26 Pilot Towns</li> <li>Undertake analysis of process of development of Town Teams across 26 Pilot Towns</li> <li>Review examples of best Practice in Town Regeneration and master planning in Ireland</li> </ul>	Town Regeneration Officer Local Government Sector, DHLGH and DRCD	Competence to assemble and coordinate Town Teams in line with Town Centre First Policy and inform development national guidance for Town Teams
<b>Action No. 2</b> Develop a skills building programme to increase the capacity and capability of Town Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather data of best practice in Town Centre Masterplan Initiative for 26 Pilot Locations</li> <li>Document experience of community capacity and where deficits exist</li> <li>Undertake analysis of existing community development resources and programmes across government and in other jurisdictions</li> <li>Gather understanding of communities and capacity through engaging with all stakeholders at National &amp; Local Level</li> </ul>	Town Regeneration Officer and the National TCF Office Local Government Sector, DHLGH and DRCD	Baseline understanding of capacity & capability to inform development of Town Centre First Skills Programme
<b>Action No.3</b> Provide Town Regeneration Officers, supported by multi disciplinary teams in each Local Authority area, to drive the implementation of TCF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete recruitment of TRO as per DRCD Guidance</li> <li>Undertake survey as regard recruited TRO's based on previous experience &amp; background. Compile analysis on resourcing of Town Centre First Policy/ regeneration within Local Authority Network</li> </ul>	Local Government Sector National Town Centre First Office, DHLGH and DRCD	Detailed understanding of best practice in approach and resourcing of Town Centre First Policy within Local Government Sector



## Task A2: Establishing National Town Centre First Office

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.4</b> Establish a dedicated National TCF Office to assist in policy delivery and implementation of the TCF actions, and to co-ordinate stakeholder engagement at a national level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish National Town Centre First Office within Local Government Management Agency</li> <li>Recruit Staff associated with National Town Centre First Office</li> <li>Develop Annual Implementation Plan for Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Drive Recruitment of Town Regeneration Officers by Local Authority Sector</li> <li>Lead establishment &amp; Coordination of Town Regeneration Officer Network.</li> <li>Develop Communication Strategy for implementation of Town Centre First National Office</li> </ul>	<p>LGMA, DRCD and DHLGH</p>	<p>Town Centre First National Office to lead implementation of Town Centre First Policy, its review and policy progression</p>

## Task A3: Develop Town Centre First Network

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.5</b> Establish and support a collaborative National TCF network to ensure consistency and best practice in the roll-out of the TCF policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish TRO Network structure to share progress/best practice in implementation of Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Through Communication Strategy define communication with TRO Network</li> <li>Establish progress reporting tool.</li> <li>Monitor plans for TCF Pilot towns to ensure adherence to TCF Principles</li> </ul>	<p>National Town Centre First Office, Local Government Sector, DHLGH and DRCD</p>	<p>A Town Centre First Network ensuring consistency and best practice in the roll-out of Town Centre First Policy</p>

## Task A4: Developing National Best Practice & Guidance

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities 2023 and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.6</b>  <b>Develop a new national Toolkit to support the implementation of the TCF Policy by providing a range of examples of best practice and available resources to guide implementation. The Toolkit will include:</b></p> <p>(vi) A TCF Web Portal to provide an accessible and central dashboard to navigate the TCF Framework including the National Toolkit, National Policies, Sectoral supports, available funding and specific enabling tools nationally</p> <p>(vii) Specific strands targeting key factors such as urban development, economic purpose, social function, digitalisation, sustainable mobility, community engagement and climate action</p> <p>(viii) A national, integrated and scaled-up Health Check Model which utilises existing progress through the Heritage Council's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check approach and builds a national database on our towns</p> <p>(ix) A best practice model for developing a TCF Plan that can be adapted to suit the characteristics of all towns and inform future investment decisions</p> <p>(x) Varied examples (Pathfinder Towns/ Case Studies) of successful, vibrant, revitalised town centres</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish TCF SharePoint for TROs. Begin to accumulate data from Pilot towns to develop an updated health check model. Gather info and content for case studies of pathfinder/pilot towns</li> <li>Engage with existing data collection processes being undertaken by government Departments with a view to integrating same into Town Centre First Process</li> <li>Define pillars of Town Centre First approach in 26 Pilot Towns and review their implementation and project potential</li> <li>Through 26 Pilot locations undertake detailed review of processes undertaken in Understanding Place</li> <li>Undertake review of existing methodology's in Health Checking nationally &amp; internationally to inform development of integrated &amp; scaled up Health Check Model</li> </ul>	<p><b>National TCF Office,  Government Departments,  State Bodies,  Academic Institutions,  Sectoral Bodies,  Practitioners</b></p>	<p><b>New national Toolkit to support the implementation of the TCF Policy</b></p>
<p><b>Action No.7</b>  <b>Develop and share exemplary/ operational practices of TCF through a National TCF Awards scheme and host events that provide networking opportunities at a national level</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake review of existing National Award schemes for Irish Towns to inform development of Town Centre First National Awards.</li> <li>Review current exemplars of best practice in town regeneration and placemaking with a view to defining methodology for assessing best practice and categories of same with context of Town Centre First and an awards scheme</li> </ul>	<p><b>National TCF Office,  DRCD, DHLGH,  Local Government Sector</b></p>	<p><b>National Town Centre First Awards scheme and associated events</b></p>

# Priority B: Data Informed Development

## Task B1: Understanding & Developing Better Data on Irish Towns

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Action No.10</b> Map existing and emerging data for towns in order to provide an on-going evidence base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review best practice across government for systems capable of mapping key data outputs and develop business case for a similar system for TCF</li> <li>Identify key datasets relevant to Towns which would provide on-going evidence base as mapped data</li> </ul>	National TCF Office DHLGH, DRCD, academic institutions, CSO, State Bodies	Portal of mapped existing and emerging data for towns in order to provide an on-going evidence base to support Town Centre First approach
<b>Action No.11</b> Establish a dedicated and on-going TCF research and evidence base platform which can be shared at a national level by towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake Gap Analysis of current research with respect to Irish Towns</li> <li>Define areas of current research and evidence at national level by engaging with academic institutions and state bodies</li> <li>Develop methodology for sharing of research and evidence along with review of platform solutions suited for access by towns</li> </ul>	National TCF Office DHLGH, DRCD, Academic Institutions, State Bodies	Town Centre First research and evidence base platform which can be shared at a national level by towns
<b>Action No.12</b> Identify agreed data measurement requirements with respect to social and economic outcomes, digitalisation skills and climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake Gap Analysis of data measurement with respect to Irish Towns</li> <li>Define key datasets that can be developed to support Town Centre First implementation in areas of social and economic outcomes, digitalisation skills and climate action</li> <li>Undertake review of Digital Blue Print process as carried out in 26 Pilot locations as part of Town Centre Masterplan Initiative</li> </ul>	National TCF Office DHLGH, DRCD, Academic Institutions, State Bodies	Comprehensive approach to data measurement of Irish Towns with respect to social and economic outcomes, digitalisation skills and climate action

## Task B2: Benefit & Social Return of Town Centre Investment

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.13</b> Commission research to inform the assessment of the costs, benefits and social return of investment in town centres, which will better inform public policy interventions that impact and shape investment decisions in our towns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake review of existing assessments of the costs, benefits and social return of investment in town centres</li> <li>Define research opportunities associated with Town Centre First approach to Irish Towns</li> <li>Using Town Centre First Plans arising from Town Centre Masterplan Initiative to highlight areas of research to inform the assessment of the costs, benefits and social return of investment in town centres</li> </ul>	<p>National TCF Office DHLGH, DRCD, Academic Institutions</p>	<p>Research based assessment of the costs, benefits and social return of investment in town centres in context of Town Centre First Policy</p>
<p><b>Action No.14</b> Develop &amp; establish an appropriate town centre impact methodology to assess the impact of development and investment on town centres, for applicability within the statutory planning system and the public spending code</p>	<p>DHLGH will work with DPER, the Local Government Sector, DRCD and the National TCF Office to develop assessment tools that address the impact of development and investment on town centres</p>	<p>DHLGH DPER, Local Government Sector, DRCD, National TCF Office</p>	<p>Town centre impact methodology to assess the impact of development and investment on town centres</p>

## Task B3: Research & Behavioural Change

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.15</b> Promote existing exemplars and current models which illustrate successful Town Centre living and explore how to encourage behavioural change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake detailed review of pilot towns under Town Centre Living Initiative</li> <li>Develop through Town Centre First Network case studies based on Town Centre Living Initiative Towns</li> <li>Highlight funded projects through Town Centre Living Initiative and success in addressing vacancy and promoting town centre living</li> </ul>	<p>National TCF Office DHLGH, DRCD, DETE, Research Institutions</p>	<p>Promotion of detailed case studies and examples of successful projects in Town Centre Living</p>

# Priority C: Developing Town Centre First Plans

## Task C1: Developing Components of a Plan

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Action No. 16</b> Promote and assist towns to develop a TCF Plan which will also align with the National Planning Framework approach to compact urban growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through Town Centre First Network establish clear approach to development and structure of Town Centre First Plans in accordance with Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Through Town Centre First Network establish clear understanding of role and function Town Team in the development of Town Centre First Plans in accordance with Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Review process through Town Centre Masterplan Initiative 26 No. Pilot Towns</li> </ul>	Town Team supported by the Town Regeneration Officer and multidisciplinary team in the Local Authority LGMA, DHLGH, DoT and DRCD	Development of TCF Plans aligning Town Centre First Policy along with the National Planning Framework approach to compact urban growth

## Task C2: Understanding & Supporting the Town Economy

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Action No. 17</b> Support the implementation of local and national economic initiatives in the TCF Plan including enabling and collaboration measures for employment generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review opportunities for rural employment generation as discussed in Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy and Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Engage with employment and enterprise stakeholders to develop on current opportunities and identify potential others in rural Irish towns</li> <li>Review Town Centre Masterplan Initiative Pilot towns for potential employment generation initiatives. Undertake review of Digital Blueprint reports developed for each location</li> </ul>	Local Government Sector, National TCF Office Government Departments, State Bodies, Sectoral Bodies	Consistent Methodology for the development of Town Centre First Plans
<b>Action No. 18</b> Enable a consistent methodology for the development of TCF Plans by each town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through Town Centre First Network develop understanding of key roles and actions associated with them within Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Through Town Centre First Network develop understanding of overall structure to Town Centre First Plans detailed within Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Through Town Centre First Network highlight vision, challenges and opportunities within Town Centre First Policy. Focusing on how Town Centre First Plans can bring these concepts into reality for Irish towns</li> </ul>	National TCF Office Local Government Sector, DRCD and DHLGH	Consistent Methodology for the development of Town Centre First Plans

## Task C3: Town Centre First & Statutory Spatial Plans

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.19</b> Ensure TCF plans and initiatives are informed by and supported in relevant statutory development plans and local area plans in order to integrate TCF plans with the statutory planning system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comply with published updated Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities, June 2022, that incorporate the need for development plans to take account of and form the policy basis for action orientated TCF plans</li> <li>• Common strategic policy objectives of National Planning Framework, Our Rural Future and Town Centre First are reflected in statutory development plans and local area plans</li> </ul>	<p>Local Government Sector DHLGH, Town Regeneration Officers, DoT</p>	<p>Town Centre First Plans integrated with the statutory Planning System</p>
<p><b>Action No.20</b> Ensure that Guidelines for the preparation of County Development Plans incorporate the need to take account of TCF plans when drafting statutory plans</p>	<p>Support published updated Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities, June 2022, that incorporate the need for development plans to take account of and form the policy basis for action orientated TCF plans</p>	<p>DHLGH Local Government Sector, Town Regeneration Officers</p>	<p>Guidance Published</p>



# Priority D: Coordinated Approach to Delivery

## Task D1: Funding For Towns

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Action No.21</b> Provide targeted TCF funding through Government investment programmes such as the URDF and RRDF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake review of previous town masterplan initiatives and exemplars of best practice to develop understanding of how regeneration was funded through Government Investment Programmes</li> <li>Through Town Centre Masterplan initiative identify project potential arising from Town Centre First Plans and how same are funded through Government Investment Programmes</li> <li>Document funding programmes available through Government Investment Programmes and barriers to implantation in Town Centre First Plans or Town Teams</li> </ul>	National TCF Office Local Government Sector, Funding Providers, DRCD and DHLGH	Number of successfully implemented projects arising from Town Centre First Plans funded through Government investment programmes

## Task D2: Regulatory Supports

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<b>Action No.22</b> Update the planning regulations that exempt certain vacant commercial properties from requiring planning permissions to change of use for residential purposes, to extend the timeline to 2025 and to include certain classes of public houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2018 Planning Regulations reviewed and extended up to 2025 and amended to include a new use class 12 (public house)</li> <li>Monitor and analyse the implementation of planning exemptions to date</li> <li>Record Development activity in urban areas to highlight success of measure in addressing vacancy and dereliction in Irish Towns</li> <li>Develop exemplars and successful case studies to act as exemplars to increase awareness of planning exemptions as a measure to address vacancy and dereliction</li> </ul>	DHLGH	Number of vacant commercial properties availing of planning exemptions that are brought back into re-use
<b>Action No.23</b> Develop guidance relating to protected structures to encourage the use of such properties for repurposing and/or refurbishment for residential accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support online hub to provide guidance for owners of protected structures on funding and supports.</li> <li>Support Dublin Civic Trust to develop a suite of materials on conservation works for historic properties</li> <li>Publish Technical guidance @Improving Energy Efficiency of Traditional Buildings' on energy retro-fitting of historic buildings</li> </ul>	DHLGH	Technical guidance on Improving Energy Efficiency of Traditional Buildings' on energy retro-fitting of historic buildings published

## Task D3: Pathfinder & Early-Stage Towns

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.24</b> Identify a number of towns to act as early priority demonstrators of the TCF process – Pathfinder Towns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake review of previous placemaking and regeneration initiatives to identify best practice in Town Master Planning</li> <li>Develop case studies across a number of different size towns based best practice of previously progressed regeneration projects</li> <li>Based on 26 No. pilot towns associated with Town Centre Masterplan Initiative select a cross section (population scale) of best practice in implementation of Town Centre First Policy</li> <li>Promote best practice in case studies through national events and campaigns relating to town regeneration and master planning</li> </ul>	<p>National TCF Office</p> <p>Local Government Sector, DRCD and DHLGH</p>	<p>Town Centre First Pathfinder Town Case Studies</p>
<p><b>Action No.25</b> Identify and support towns where stakeholders require greater capacity building and support to engage with the TCF approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through Town Centre First Network establish understanding of capacity within communities along with deficiencies in support for communities in 26 No. Pilot Towns of Town Centre Masterplan Initiative</li> <li>Engage with community stakeholders to understand supports currently available to communities</li> <li>Identify gaps in supports for communities engaging with Town Centre First and with sectoral stakeholders drive development of appropriate supports</li> </ul>	<p>National TCF Office</p> <p>Local Government Sector, DRCD and DHLGH</p>	<p>Town Centre First informing development of community capacity building and supports</p>
<p><b>Action No.26</b> As part of a pathfinder programme to be initiated as part of a Croí Cónaithe (Towns) fund, TCF will promote an integrated approach to both a Towns Serviced Site programme alongside adaptive. re-use supports to be delivered through Local Authorities to enable the delivery of more housing choice and encourage town centre living</p>	<p>Monitor and Support two schemes launched in 2022, under the Housing For All/Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Ready to Build (Serviced Sites) scheme for New Homes, and;</li> <li>the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant for vacant and derelict properties</li> </ul>	<p>DHLGH</p> <p>Local Authorities</p>	<p>Number of vacant properties availing of the Croí Cónaithe Towns fund that are brought back into use</p>



## Task D4: Monitoring & Implementation

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.27</b> Establish a National Oversight &amp; Advisory Group (NOAG) to oversee the delivery and implementation process and to provide a shared forum for engaging across Government</p>	DHLGH and DRCD will work with, the National TCF Office, Local Government Sector, State Bodies, Government Departments and Expert Bodies to engage with National Oversight & Advisory Group (NOAG) to oversee the delivery and implementation process and to provide a shared forum for engaging across Government	DHLGH and DRCD National TCF Office, Local Government Sector, State Bodies, Government Departments, Expert Bodies	National Oversight & Advisory Group (NOAG) for implementation of Town Centre First Policy
<p><b>Action No.29</b> Produce an Annual Implementation Plan to guide delivery at a national level and monitor delivery through regular Progress Reports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and agree framework for implementation of Town Centre First Policy for Implementation Phase 2023-2025</li> <li>Agree structure and approach for Annual Implementation Plan and Progress Reporting</li> <li>Produce Town Centre First Annual Implementation Plan</li> </ul>	National TCF Office NOAG, Local Government Sector, DRCD and DHLGH	<p>Clear Framework for implementation of Town Centre First Policy.</p> <p>Report on First Phase Implementation Planning period. Review Report for overall progress of Policy Implementation</p>
<p><b>Action No.30</b> Provide Annual Progress Updates on the Implementation Plan to the Cabinet Committee on Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agree structure and approach for progress updates on the Annual Implementation Plan</li> <li>Produce Town Centre progress update on Annual Implementation Plan</li> </ul>	National TCF Office NOAG, Local Government Sector, DRCD and DHLGH	<p>Report on First Phase Implementation Planning period. Review overall progress of Policy Implementation</p>
<p><b>Action No.31</b> Carry out a review of the effectiveness of this Town Centre First policy Approach every three years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Record progress on implementation Plan in context of annual review with a view to overall implementation phase review</li> <li>Undertake review of all actions and progress in initial implementation phase 2023-2025, with a view to informing future of Town Centre First Policy</li> </ul>	National TCF Office NOAG, Local Government Sector, DRCD and DHLGH	<p>Review report on effectiveness of Town Centre First Policy along with recommendations for development of policy</p>

## Task D5: Cross-Government Focus

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.8</b> Provide support to Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authority Housing Teams to develop suitable accommodation in town centres for people with specific requirements including older people, citizens with a disability and smaller households. The Housing Agency will also put in place supports and accommodation suitable for Housing First, as part of the Social Housing Programme</p>	<p>The Housing Agency will work with DHLGH, the Local Government Sector, and the AHB's to develop suitable accommodation in town centres for people with specific requirements including older people, citizens with a disability and smaller households. The Housing Agency will also put in place supports and accommodation suitable for Housing First, as part of the Social Housing Programme.</p>	<p>Housing Agency Local Government Sector, AHB's, DHLGH</p>	<p>Suitable accommodation in town centres for people with specific requirements including older people, citizens with a disability and smaller households. Supports and accommodation suitable for Housing First, as part of the Social Housing Programme.</p>
<p><b>Action No.9</b> The LDA will support the Town Centre First policy objectives in the developments they are involved with in towns with a population of over 10,000 people</p>	<p>LDA will work with DHLGH, to support objectives of Town Centre First policy in the developments they are involved with in towns with a population of over 10,000 people</p>	<p>Land Development Agency DHLGH</p>	<p>Integration of objectives of Town Centre First Policy in LDA developments in towns with population over 10,000 people</p>
<p><b>Action No.28</b> The Regional Assemblies will support Local Authorities in delivering the objectives of the Town Centre First policy through proposals to utilise ERDF funding for urban development.</p>	<p>DHLGH and Regional Assemblies will work with, the Department of Public Expenditure &amp; Reform, Local Government Sector, to support the delivery of the objectives of the Town Centre First policy through proposals to utilise ERDF funding for urban development</p>	<p>Regional Assemblies LGMA, DHLGH, DPER, Local Government Sector</p>	<p>Proposals to utilise ERDF funding for urban development to support the delivery of the objectives of the Town Centre First policy</p>
<p><b>Action No.32</b> Implement and apply tools to assess the impact of investment by Government Departments and their agencies on Town Centres in terms of economic, social, cultural and sustainability parameters</p>	<p>DHLGH and DRCD will work with, the Local Government Sector, State Bodies, Government Departments and Expert Bodies to develop assessment tools that address the impact of development and investment on town centres</p>	<p>DHLGH and DRCD Local Government Sector, State Bodies, Government Departments, Expert Bodies</p>	<p>Town centre impact methodology to assess the impact of development and investment on town centres</p>

Related TCF Policy Action	Key Activities and Milestones 2023	Lead and Partner(s)	Key Performance Indicators
<p><b>Action No.33</b> Explore approaches to collaborating with linked cross-Government programmes and initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify complementary Actions in Strategy and Policy across other Government Departments, State Bodies and Sectoral bodies as documented in Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021-2025</li> <li>Develop engagement structures with other Government Departments in order to progress common policy objectives with a view to integrating work into Town Centre First approach to towns</li> <li>Develop communication strategy to manage communication with various groups and organisations to help embed Town Centre First Masterplan approach</li> </ul>	<p>National TCF Office, DHLGH and DRCD Government Departments, State Bodies, Sectoral Bodies</p>	<p>Funding and project support for Towns the subject of Town Centre First Plans, driving integrated approach to Towns</p>





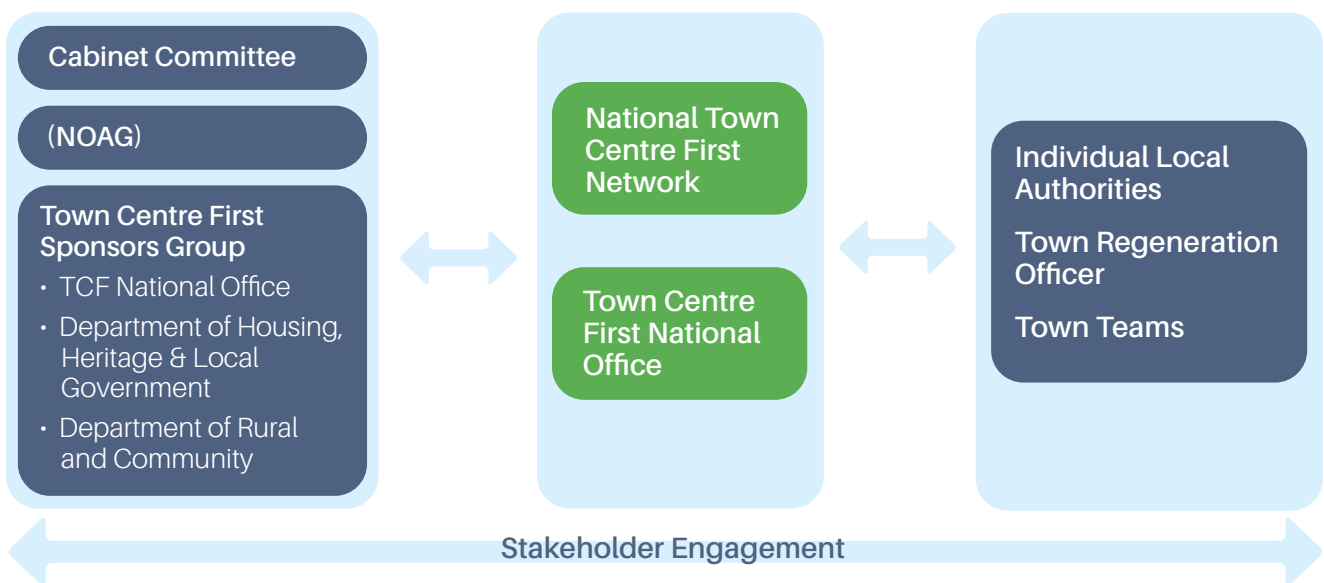
# 4

# Supporting Implementation

# Supporting Implementation

Town Centre First recognises the importance of strong collaboration between Government Departments, State Agencies and others in the pursuit of better outcomes for towns, local communities and businesses. It acknowledges the interconnecting areas of work, and that towns, local communities and their businesses benefit most when the work of all stakeholders at national and local levels is integrated. The Department of Community and Rural Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage along with LGMA Town Centre First National Office will provide national leadership of this collective effort and ensure that national policy dovetails with local implementation. Implementation of Town Centre First is a shared responsibility across Government.

## Town Centre First Implementation



### Implementation Structures

Implementation structures for Town Centre First will be delivered within the above implementation framework. This enables a coherent approach to priorities and objectives in the delivery of the Town Centre First Policy. The implementation structures provide for an extensive enabling network for Town Centre First. These structures bring together stakeholders across Government Departments, State Agencies, and the community and will include the voices of all. This connects national policy, local planning and project delivery.

### Cabinet Committee

The oversight of and accountability for the implementation of Town Centre First ultimately rests with the Cabinet Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Cabinet Committee is chaired by Deputy Stephen Matthews and comprises 9 No. Deputies and 5 No. Senators. The Cabinet Committee is supported by a Senior Officials Group, which meets in advance of Cabinet Committee and provides cross-departmental coordination. Cabinet Committees refer substantive issues to Government for approval. An Annual Policy Progress Report will be prepared and submitted through the Town Centre First Sponsors Group for consideration by the Cabinet Committee.

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## National Oversight and Advisory Group

Ensuring support from across Government Departments and agencies is important to deliver a whole-of-Government approach. A National Oversight and Advisory Group (NOAG) will be established to monitor and guide the delivery process and provide a shared forum for engaging across Government and national stakeholders.

The Group may include Government Departments, the Local Government sector, agencies central to supporting towns, other experts, and sectoral, business and community representatives as appropriate. The National TCF Office will provide ongoing updates to, and be guided by, the NOAG.

An Annual Implementation Plan, underpinned by regular Progress Reports, will be used to guide the work of the National Town Centre First Office at a national level and to monitor implementation of the policy. The Annual Implementation Plan will be produced by the National Town Centre First Office with oversight and agreement from the National Oversight and Advisory Group. The National Town Centre First Office will report to NOAG on the delivery of the Implementation Plan. The Plan should be underpinned by Key Performance Indicators to assist in monitoring progress.

## Town Centre First Sponsors Group

The Town Centre First Sponsors Group comprises senior officials from the Government Departments leading implementation of cross-cutting action areas in Town Centre First. The Sponsors Group proposes annual priorities in response to emerging needs. Senior officials from the Department of Community and Rural Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage along with the LGMA Town Centre First National Office, who have lead responsibility for Town Centre First Policy,

This Group will spearhead the coordination and monitoring of implementation of Town Centre First and ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place to support implementation.

## Town Centre First National Office

A dedicated National Town Centre First Office established within Local Government Management Agency with funding support and external expertise as required. The Office will specifically drive the delivery of this Town Centre First policy and deal with the range of actions referenced.

## Town Centre First Network

In order to support the Town Regeneration Officers and ensure best practice across all areas, a collaborative TCF network will be established. The national network of TROs will be drawn from every Local Authority area and be co-ordinated by the National TCF Office.

The role of the network will be to ensure consistency in the roll-out of the TCF policy nationally by respective Town Teams, share experience and good practice, provide a key instrument of delivery for the National TCF Office, and to report back on implementation. The network will explore how to build the capacity of towns that have been less successful in getting local stakeholders to collaborate and/or access funding support.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement with stakeholders will be central to the successful implementation of Town Centre. Virtually every action will require communication and consultation with partners outside of Government Departments and State Agencies, including communities and business, the wider public, organisations representing different sectors of economy, and voluntary organisations and other organisations with special expertise relevant to the particular action area, social partners, and others. In some instances, there are standing groups of representatives which can help to inform and guide implementation. While it is not possible to list every stakeholder for each action, it is implied that widespread engagement will be a key feature of the implementation of this Strategy.

In particular, special efforts will be made to develop approaches to engaging with communities and the local economy so that their experiences and preferences remain central to the implementation of Town Centre First. The Implementation Plan outlines specific milestones to progress a framework for plan-led placemaking to be accompanied by guidance and training on methodologies and mechanisms relevant to Irish Towns.

# Processes for Reporting on implementation

## Reporting Progress

An Annual Progress Report, charting the status and progress of actions, will be prepared

by the Town Centre First National Office and submitted to the National Oversight and Advisory Group. The Annual Report will focus on the achievement of the actions overall, with a particular focus on the high-level priorities, strategic tasks and supporting pillars of Town Centre First Policy. The Town Centre First aims (see below). Supplementary indicators relevant to Town centre First will also be developed.

### Town Centre First aims:

By 2025, a more integrated and co-ordinated approach to the development of Irish Towns; with a central, co-ordinating lead, benefitting each of the various investment programmes and policy supports cumulatively.

By 2025, actions to make optimal use of investment outlined in the National Development Plan through:

- Developed capacity and experience gained
- Implementing projects from vision Plans of Towns
- Necessary National and Regional Structures being in Place
- Data of process demonstrating the progress of Town Centre First concepts.

## Town Centre First Review

Town Centre First covers the period from 2023 to 2025. While the overarching vision is set for the enduring approach to plan-led placemaking in Irish towns, the detailed actions in the Policy and Implementation Plan are focused on the first three years. For accountability and continued relevance, a review of the Policy will take place within three years. An updated implementation plan will take account of the progress of the first implementation phase, respond to emerging challenges or barriers, and reflect new actions required to address issues affecting the towns and villages around Ireland.





**Lár Bailte ar dTús**  
Town Centre First

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