



REAL ESTATE

The Office of the Planning Regulator: Role and Functions

by **Elaine O'Connor**

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26th October 2023 | by Elaine O'Connor

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) was established in April 2019 pursuant to recommendations made by the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments.

The purpose of the OPR is to ensure that Ireland's 31 planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála deliver their planning functions to the highest standards and that they implement and adhere to Government planning policy.

Work of the OPR to date

Since its inception, the OPR has been busy implementing its objectives as highlighted by the following statistics:

- In 2020, 45 submissions were made to local authorities and 198 cases were received by the OPR. Of the 198 cases received, 129 were complaints, 50 were queries and 19 were submissions.
- In 2021, 46 submissions were made to local authorities and a total of 261 cases were received by the OPR.
- In 2022, 44 submissions were made to local authorities. A total of 248 cases were received by the OPR and 234 cases were closed. Of the 234 cases closed, 121 were complaints; 67 were queries and 46 were submissions.

In the first half of 2023 the OPR made 27 submissions to local authorities. A total of 84 cases were received by the OPR and 93 cases were closed. The 93 cases closed in the first half of 2023 included 52 complaints, 20 queries and 21 submissions

Role of the OPR

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, gives the OPR a statutory basis to carry out three main functions:

Evaluation of Statutory Plans

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

Planning Reviews and Examination

The OPR provides a service to the public in relation to a variety of planning related case types, including queries or general information requests, submissions on aspects of the operation of the planning process, and complaints about the delivery of planning services. Following a review, the OPR may make independent and evidence-based recommendations to local authorities and to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Education, Training and Research

One of the aims of the OPR is to promote the public's engagement in the planning process and to enhance knowledge and public information. The OPR and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have published a series of planning leaflets dealing with all aspects of the planning system including how to prepare and lodge a planning application, how to make a planning appeal, requirements for change of use, building extensions, garages, domestic sheds, agricultural development, etc.

Whilst the OPR's oversight function is an improvement to the planning framework in Ireland and it is clear that the planning process will benefit from its strategies, the OPR needs to be borne in mind by developers, architects and planners.

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About the Author



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