



Bord um Thionóntachtaí Cónaithe
Residential Tenancies Board

RTB Statement of Strategy 2023-2025





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Foreword from the Chair and the Director of the RTB

The RTB last published a strategic plan in 2018. This was intended to guide the progress and direction of the organisation over the five-year period to the end of 2022.

That plan anticipated that there would be significant change across the residential rental sector over the period of the plan and that the RTB would need to be responsive and agile in the face of expected challenges. As we look back over the past five years, we can certainly say that change has been a constant for the RTB. As we look to the coming three years of this new Statement of Strategy, we are clear that, in the context of the ongoing housing crisis in Ireland, this will continue to be the case.

Under our previous strategic plan, the RTB pursued a range of objectives intended to help improve the rental sector and to develop the effectiveness of the organisation. Our intention was to make progress across five main areas: focus on the customer; deepen our understanding of the sector; empower stakeholders with information; be an effective regulator for the market and ensure we have the organisational supports in place to deliver for the sector.

We acknowledge and appreciate the efforts made by the staff of the RTB and by the Board to progress this agenda. We also acknowledge the ongoing support of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, particularly in supporting the Board to develop the management and leadership capacity of the organisation through upgraded, and additional, senior management posts.

Of course, the major event which nobody could predict in 2018 was the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This disrupted the plans and operations of every public body in Ireland when it arrived in March 2020. For the RTB, implementing emergency legislation designed to protect tenants during the pandemic dominated our work in 2020 and 2021. In common with society more generally, existing plans and expectations had to take a back seat to the immediate need to respond to this overarching priority. Despite these demands, the RTB also commenced new investigative functions during this time, intended to ensure that landlords who engage in improper activities are held to account through a system of financial sanctions and publication.



In addition to the implementation of emergency legislation, we also had to adapt to new ways of working - remote working for staff and meetings of the Board, as well as moving to remote hearings for dispute resolution. The flexibility and adaptability of the organisation in addressing these challenges was critical in maintaining our services during the crisis period of the pandemic.

During 2022, the RTB as an organisation began to come out of the shadow of the pandemic. This meant that we could return to some of the important developmental work that was impacted by the pandemic. That said, Ireland remains in the grip of an ongoing housing crisis and the challenges of this for Government and for society remain a major national concern. The RTB continues to work with the Department, and with our other stakeholders, to play our part in responding to the housing crisis as it affects the residential rental sector. This will remain a central concern for us over the period 2023-2025.

During 2022 and 2023, we have also been working to resolve issues that arose with our online registration system. We acknowledge that these have caused significant difficulties for landlords and agents, and we regret that this has been the case. Addressing these performance and technical issues to ensure that the RTB has streamlined customer service processes and supporting technology in place to support all of our functions is a major focus of our work during 2023 and into 2024.

This Statement of Strategy reflects the input of a wide range of stakeholders, internal and external to the RTB. We truly appreciate everyone's input and we have carefully considered everything we have heard. We have worked to strike an appropriate balance between the different views expressed and we hope we have succeeded in incorporating the key public interest concerns into our objectives and planned actions. We also hope we have struck the right balance between our ambition, as a public body, to make a difference to the public through our work, and the need to further develop our capacity and capability to deliver these results.

During the lifetime of this strategy, the RTB will celebrate 20 years since its establishment in 2004 – this is something we plan to mark in an appropriate way. We look forward, with our Board and staff, to building on this legacy as we continue to create real public value through our work to 2025, informed by the ongoing involvement, and support, of our key stakeholders.



Tom Dunne

Chair of the RTB



Niall Byrne

Director

Who we are

What is the Residential Tenancies Board?

The Residential Tenancies Board, also known as the RTB, is a public body (established in 2004 as the Private Residential Tenancies Board). The Residential Tenancies Act, 2004 (as amended) sets out our various functions and powers. In summary, our role is:

- ✓ to maintain a national register of tenancies,
- ✓ to facilitate the resolution of disputes between tenants and landlords,
- ✓ to take action to ensure compliance with rental law,
- ✓ to provide relevant information to the public, tenants and landlords to ensure tenancies run smoothly; to provide reliable research, data and insights to inform policy; and
- ✓ to provide advice to the Minister on the rental sector.

Originally limited to private tenancies, expansion in our functions over recent years has seen our remit expand to now include:

- ✓ tenancies provided in the private rental sector,
- ✓ social housing tenancies provided by approved housing bodies (AHB) sector,
- ✓ the cost rental sector, and cost rental tenancies,
- ✓ student specific accommodation.



What we do

Maintain the Register of Tenancies

The register is the foundation stone to regulating the sector. All private residential landlords, approved housing bodies, cost rental landlords and landlords of student specific accommodation must register their tenancies with the RTB. A registered tenancy protects both landlord and tenant rights and provides a mechanism to resolve disputes where these occur.

New legislation commenced in April 2022 requires landlords to register their tenancies with the RTB every year, within one month of the anniversary of when the tenancy began. This process of annual registration allows the RTB to gather more accurate and detailed tenancy and rent data which enables more effective regulation of the rental sector and better informs policy.

Resolve disputes

We offer a choice of binding resolution to landlords and tenants in dispute: mediation or adjudication with the option to appeal the outcome to a tenancy tribunal. We carry out this quasi-judicial function in an equitable and fair manner, favouring neither tenants nor landlords.

Our telephone mediation service has proved to be the fastest and most effective dispute resolution process. We are amongst the regulators leading the way in providing a mediation option and driving adoption of these services through remote and online access. Due to the success of mediation in resolving disputes, in November 2022 we introduced mediation as the primary default route for resolving disputes.

RTB Core Services

Ensure compliance with rental law

The RTB has powers to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in defined forms of 'improper conduct'. We also enforce registration requirements to ensure that the register is complete and accurate. In acting to ensure compliance, we aim to use our powers in ways that are effective and proportionate. We are committed to further developing our approaches to defining and managing regulatory risk as part of our commitment to being the highly effective rental regulator.

Provide information, research, data and insights

We provide reliable information to the public, tenants and landlords on their rights and responsibilities in terms of both living in, and providing accommodation in, the rental sector.

We also provide authoritative data on the sector, such as the Rent Index, which allows us to monitor trends and inform the public as to rent levels and movements.

We also develop insights to inform the Minister and other stakeholders as to the impact of policy changes and to help the RTB develop and refine our regulatory interventions.

Our Mission, Vision and Values for Effective Regulation

Our Mission

“We support the residential tenancy sector by registering tenancies, resolving disputes, ensuring compliance with rental law, and providing reliable information, data and insights to inform policy”

Our Vision for Effective Regulation

- RTB register of tenancies is complete and accurate - everything that should be registered is registered.
- Tenancy rights, responsibilities and obligations are promoted, understood and protected.
- Tenancy disputes are resolved as early and efficiently as possible with outcomes which are fair to the parties.
- Rents and other required payments (deposits and advanced payments) are set and charged at the correct levels.
- Tenancies are terminated in the correct way and offered back to tenants in the required circumstances.
- Compliance failings are identified, challenged and addressed by the RTB
- The impact of policy and regulatory interventions is monitored and research and insights are informing policy.
- The RTB can demonstrate that it delivers public value.

Our Values



How we developed our Statement of Strategy

In May 2022 we began work on our strategy statement. The RTB Board agreed a framework for the process, and a working group was established, chaired by the Director. Our vision and mission guided the development of our strategy. Their role is to highlight and explain what we do as a public body and to state our ambition to achieve important public interest objectives. However, we cannot develop a strategy in isolation from the world in which we operate. Therefore, we also considered our operating environment, our values, our strengths and weaknesses as an organisation, and what our stakeholders and staff are telling us about how we can deliver enhanced public value.



Stakeholder consultation

Internally, we consulted with all our staff and with the RTB Board. Following these engagements, a draft of our strategic priorities was developed for wider consultation with key stakeholders and the public. You can read more about our consultation process in our published consultation report on www.rtb.ie

The RTB is committed to good practice across all of its governance responsibilities. This includes demonstrating accountability and value for money in respect of our expenditure.



What did we consider in our operating environment?

2019-2022 was a significant period of change for the RTB. We implemented developments to our registrations system and also implemented legislative change to support the sector during the pandemic. Like the rest of the world, we adapted to the challenges which the COVID-19 pandemic presented to our ongoing operations and ways of working. Stabilising our registrations system and reviewing how new technology can better support RTB's functions will be a major focus for this new Statement of Strategy.

Our research tells us that tenant/landlord and tenant/agent relations are generally perceived to be positive and satisfactory. Disputes and problematic behaviours by tenants and landlords represent only a small proportion of the many positive relationships that exist across the Rental Sector. However, each negative experience is significant for the people involved and undermines confidence in the stability of the sector. The role and contribution of the RTB must be to be highly effective in resolving disputes as well as proactive in confronting deliberate non-compliance with rental law, including where breaches of rental controls are happening.



Economic and Political backdrop to the rental sector

The RTB recognises that Government has implemented various measures to help address the current challenges of availability and affordability within the residential rental sector. The Government's current national plan to 2030, 'Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland', was published in September 2021. This sets out the wider policy approach for housing, including the rental sector, and refers to the role of the RTB in regulating and supporting that sector.

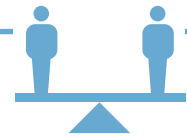
Despite the ongoing efforts of many actors, we expect that, for the term of this Statement of Strategy, supply and affordability of rental accommodation, amongst other issues such as breaches of landlord and/or tenant obligations, will continue to be significant challenges for the residential rental sector and for our key stakeholders. Our data also tells us that small, private landlords are exiting the rental market, and that agents are playing a greater role in managing tenancies. At the same time, student accommodation is under pressure while social housing tenancies are set to increase in number.

We expect that uncertainty will remain a challenge in the RTB's operating environment for the coming three years and that we may see further policy intervention within the sector. Thus, it is important that the RTB can quickly adapt to environmental changes and that it has the capability and capacity to implement necessary changes to its operations and systems. We also need to stay aware of how changes in our environment could impact on our financial position over time.



Governance and wider public accountability

As a public body operating under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the RTB is required to comply with the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*, as well as other legislation which places compliance requirements on the organisation. The RTB is committed to good practice across all of its governance responsibilities. This includes demonstrating accountability and value for money in respect of our expenditure. We are also conscious of the need to align with the broad Public Sector Reform Agenda, including important goals in relation to Sustainability and Digital development.¹



Human Rights & Equality – Public sector duty

The Public Sector Duty is a legal obligation on public bodies, contained in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of public sector staff and service users. RTB, as a public body, is committed to respecting and advancing this duty.

RTB operates to clear principles of equality and non-discrimination in how we carry out all of our work. This includes how we interact with members of the public who use our services and how we, as an employer, interact with our own staff, including how we recruit staff through an objective and bias-free process. We have had an Equality and Human Rights Group in place for some time and this Group plays an important role in how we progress the public sector duty within RTB.

We recognise that there is more we can, and should, do to deepen our reach in order to fully serve all of our stakeholders across Irish society. Recognising the increasing diversity of Irish society, the RTB must continue to develop our capacity to respond to the resulting changes in society and to ensure that we, as a public body, are available and accessible to everyone in Ireland who needs our services and support. We need to be ambitious about this agenda and, while recognising that deepening our reach in a meaningful way will take time and effort, we must also strive, with external partners, to make early progress and to maintain momentum over time.

Among other developments, we plan to bring our new website up to a high standard of accessibility, to increase access to RTB information in additional languages, and to increase our efforts to engage with groups in society who are harder to reach, to ensure that people are aware of their rights and obligations under rental law.

¹ Connecting Government 2030.

Our Strategic Priorities:

In this strategy, we are committing to working, over the coming three years, to making the RTB the most effective it can be at delivering on our four core “service areas”:

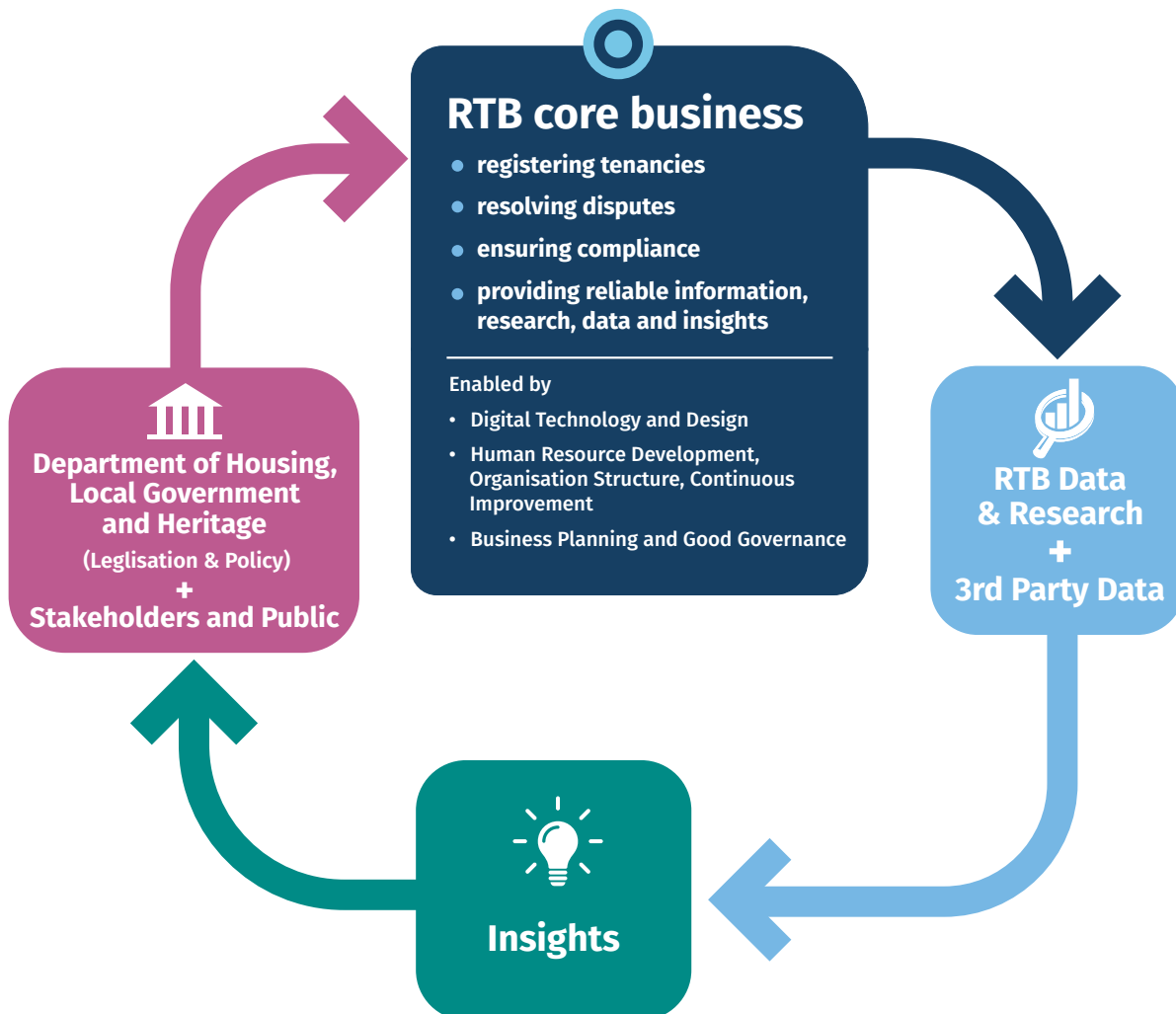
- **registering tenancies,**
- **resolving disputes,**
- **ensuring compliance, and**
- **providing accurate information, research, data and insights to inform the public and policymakers.**

All of our priority actions during 2023-2025 will be centred on these core service areas and on delivering demonstrable gains in performance in relation to each.

Taken together, our actions under these four areas will see the RTB create positive impact for the public in keeping with our mission and our ambition as a public body which carries out important functions in the public interest.

These results can only be delivered if we also address the key enablers of effective organisational performance – human resource development, organisation structure, information technology, legislation, business support, planning and governance. Without a parallel focus on these enablers, our performance as an organisation in each of our core service areas will not reach the level to which we aspire and which the public requires.

The following diagram shows how all of these elements relate to each other.



Service Area 1:

Registering Tenancies



Our target outcome is that every tenancy which should be registered is registered through a streamlined and efficient process and that the register is accurate and reliable.

Our actions in this service area will include:

- We will pursue full resolution of current technical issues with our registration platform so that it is fully capable of supporting annual registration of tenancies.
- We will focus on the improvement of our current approach to quality customer service and standards so that the public can interact with us easily and experience customer service standards of which we can be proud.
- We will put in place streamlined processes through which we will support landlords and agents to complete our registration processes.
- We will invest in the management and maintenance of the register in recognition of the central part the register plays in providing our most important data and analysis on the rental sector.

Service Area 2:

Resolving disputes



Our target outcome here is that disputes are resolved as early as possible and that parties to the dispute consider the process transparent and reflective of rental law.

Our actions in this service area will include:

- Encouraging and promoting use of mediation as the default route to dispute resolution on the basis that this is in the best interests of parties to disputes.
- Examining how the RTB currently intervenes in possible illegal evictions and determine how this could be improved in the interests of greater effectiveness, timeliness and impact.
- We will put in place (based on an earlier pilot programme) additional processes to support early compliance with Determination Orders.
- We will develop and publish enhanced statistics on our processing and completion times for dispute cases.
- We will work to reduce dispute resolution timelines while maintaining the quality of our quasi-judicial decision-making processes.

Service Area 3:

Ensuring compliance



Our target outcome here is that voluntary compliance is promoted while serious non-compliance and deliberate improper conduct by landlords is identified and addressed by RTB, using powers in effective and proportionate ways.

Our actions in this service area will include:

- We will operationalise the RTB's Regulatory Risk Policy, as adopted by the RTB Board in 2022.
- We will review how we currently identify and respond to non-compliance with registration requirements and rental law, and ensure that proactive and effective processes are in place to address non-compliance.
- We will utilise our powers, including sanctions, where we identify instances of serious and deliberate improper conduct by landlords, including the non-registration of tenancies.
- We will collaborate with other public bodies to ensure appropriate sharing of information as well as new forms of multi-agency working to enhance the effectiveness of our compliance work.

Service Area 4:

Providing accurate information, research, data and insights to inform the public* and policymakers



Our target outcomes here are:

- that accurate information is easily accessible at the right time to tenants, landlords and agents to help support compliance, to help prevent disputes arising, and to support sustainable tenancies, and
- that RTB is recognised as a reliable and authoritative source of accurate and up to date data on the rental sector and is sharing insights to actively inform policy.

Our actions in this service area will include:

- Redeveloping our website for ease of use and comprehensiveness of information, including provision of information in multiple languages.
- Becoming more effective and timely in making recommendations to the Minister on the operation of the legislation and providing policy advice on matters relevant to the residential rental sector.
- Deepening our reach and engagement with groups in the rental sector who are harder to reach, thereby making our services more inclusive.
- Developing a programme of proactive outreach involving regional and local engagement by RTB with landlords, tenants and agents.
- Reviewing our capabilities in data analysis and applied research to ensure we have the skills, tools and knowledge to analyse our data and to create meaningful insights to inform policy and the public.
- Examining how we can collaborate with other public bodies to ensure appropriate sharing of information to inform our own insights.
- Becoming a leader in the use of, and publication of, open data in line with public policy in this area.

*including landlords, tenants, agents, other advocacy, and representative bodies.

Key enablers of effective organisational performance

To ensure the actions under each of our four service areas are progressed and the relevant outcomes achieved, we are clear that the key enablers of organisation performance must receive timely attention and, where needed, the requisite investment.

Our actions in terms of the essential enablers will include:

- A detailed, annual business plan that will identify each action, step to be taken, resources to be used and target outcomes.
- A detailed organisation development review to design and implement a new target operating model for the RTB which aligns our structure with our strategy.
- Investing in strategic human resource development to ensure that our recruitment, retention, talent management, and people development policies create an organisational culture that is values-driven and committed to high performance and to serving the public interest.
- Putting learning and development to the forefront so that we build a flexible, adaptable and cross-trained workforce that is committed to delivering continuous improvement and better outcomes for the public we serve.
- The development of a future digital pathway for the RTB which maps out a coherent and achievable way forward for the RTB to be a fully digital organisation across all of our service areas and supporting functions.
- Investment in the governance of the organisation with a focus on assurance processes and enterprise risk management.
- Working with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to advise on how the Residential Tenancies Acts should be reformed in the interests of clarity, simplicity and administrative efficiency.
- Reviewing the strategic financing of the organisation to determine (a) the core funding required to maintain the organisation and (b) the development funding required to build the highly capable RTB of the future.
- Building climate action awareness within the organisation and ensuring that the RTB adopts a positive and proactive approach to climate action across all aspects of its functions and operations.
- Examining how we manage all aspects of external compliance in the RTB to ensure that we are fully meeting all obligations falling on us under external legislation and guidance, including the key areas of data protection, freedom of information, official language law, human rights and equality law.

Delivering on our objectives and ensuring success

The delivery of the objectives in this Statement of Strategy will be dependent on a range of factors. Critically important in terms of future success is a focus on our people.

We will need to reconfigure existing resources in line with our strategic priorities from a structural perspective. We will also invest in the capabilities our people. It is critical that the right people, with the right knowledge, tools and supporting processes are in place to efficiently and effectively deliver on our functions under the Residential Tenancies Act.

The implementation of this strategy will be monitored and reviewed by the RTB Board and the Executive Leadership Team. In addition, a performance delivery agreement is in place between the RTB and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, which includes processes for monitoring performance on an annual basis. Full details as regards progress will also be published in each year's Annual Report.

The objectives set out in this Statement of Strategy represent an integrated three-year programme of development with some actions being delivered over more than a single year. The specific strategic objectives to be advanced each year, adapted as may be required by Government priorities and external developments, will inform the RTB's annual Business Plans for each of the three years of the strategy. Through these Business Plans, we will ensure that progress is maintained and that our strategic objectives are advanced over the three-year life of this Strategy.



