

I'm really pleased to be here today because it's the first opportunity that I've had in the week and a bit that I've been Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, to be at a public event.

I'm going to further go against all of the rules of making an engaging start to a speech by opening the speech by a set of figures, but these figures really do demonstrate why the Benefacts project and the work that has been done, led here by Patricia, is so important.

And those figures speak to the amount of investment that goes into this sector and to the scale of it. The total amount of funding that goes through the not-for-profit and the NGO sector here in Ireland is approximately €6billion. There is approximately 100,000 people involved in that sector and around 18,000 different organisations. And out of the total funding that goes through this sector approximately €4billion of that funding is made available through Government from the Exchequer. All of that goes to explain why an initiative like this is very important, why it's needed and why my own department and my predecessor Minister Howlin made a decision to co-fund this project with a number of other very important benefactors.

We did that in recognition of the scale of the sector, of the funding that goes through it, and its importance. For the first time, Benefacts has found a way to bring all of this contribution into a single portal, allowing wider stakeholders in our country to understand it and to appreciate it too. And that really leads on to three points that I'd like to make in my few words to you before I hand over to Patricia to allow her to demonstrate the site and the value that it will bring.

Increased transparency

And the first point that I want to make is an initiative like this really fits so strongly into the commitment that my department and the government has to increase transparency to allow stakeholders in the country to be more aware of how initiatives are funded, the different bodies that are involved in funding, and the relationships that are in place between this sector and the taxpayer. But we do all of that with the ongoing appreciation of how important this sector is. If I look at all of the different things that make up the rich tapestry of Irish society and community life, all of which feed into our economy, the NGO sector and all of the different elements that make up the figures that I mentioned earlier on, make a hugely valued contribution to Irish life. And the reason why an initiative like this is being co-funded by my own department and by the government is primarily because we appreciate that, we appreciate the contribution, but

alongside that we have a need to make clearer and clearer to the country at large what the contribution is that the tax payer makes to those organisations.

Collaboration with and among nonprofits to deliver value

And that leads on to the second point that I'd like to make. Something that I became aware of when getting ready for this event, and I've had the opportunity to talk to Patricia about it today as well, is how important the engagement now is from all of the organisations that participate in this initiative, how important that is and the need to maintain it and grow it in the future. And I was really struck by seeing how that a forum was put in place to allow engagement with the broad sector as this initiative was being put together, to hear their views on how it would work, and to really make sure that this initiative doesn't take the place of collaboration but in fact enhances the collaboration that is there. And that's really important to me as Minister because the bit that I think about every day and the last number of days that I've had since I began this job is what we want to do with every cent that the public makes available to public services, regardless of how they're delivered is find ways to improve the outcomes that the recipients of those services receive, whether they are patients, whether they are people who are participating in a sporting club, whether they are people who are participating and benefitting from the advocacy or the lobbying aims of an organisation, all we want to do is make sure that people who need those services to be delivered well, that every opportunity is given to make sure that that service is given as well as is needed. And that's why an initiative like this is so important.

Exploiting open data

And then the final point I want to make is this fits very well alongside the number of initiatives that my department also has under way in relation to the whole open data world. I see so clearly already the multiplicity of data sources that are running into our country, the fact that in many cases they sit in different silos, they sit in different streams, and the huge benefit that is to be there gained by integrating that together by allowing people who receive services, people who fund services, people who deliver services, to be more aware of how rich the data is that is generated by them engaging with each other. And we now have initiatives underway through the Central Statistics Office, through the Office of Government Procurement, that will be looking to make data

more broadly available to everybody and to do that with the objective that making sure that the outcomes that citizens receive that we can make those outcomes even better and we can ensure that we're contributing to the better kind of society that I think everybody in this room wants and that I as a member of this government am determined to make sure we can play our part in making it happen.

Conclusion and thanks

So I just want to conclude on that point, but also conclude with a note of thanks to everybody, I want to acknowledge all the organisations that have played a role in funding this whether it be Atlantic Philanthropies, the Ireland Funds, I want to again thank Patricia and Ian [Duffy] and all of their teams, for the contribution that they have made, and the leadership that they have made in getting this initiative to this point.

And then I want to acknowledge all of the organisations that are here today, that are going to be participating in this initiative. I think it's a very healthy and positive sign that you're all here today to welcome this initiative, to participate in it, and I'm sure the reason that you're here is the same reason that I'm here which is that we want to find new ways of working together, that can deliver better outcomes for the people who we all serve. So thank you for being here, and I want to wish this initiative and everybody who's involved in it, the best of luck in the future, I can assure you that if I do have the opportunity to come back here again I'll begin with an inspiring quote from a film or a television series as opposed to a set of figures.