

Mr Darragh O'Brien TD
Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Custom House Quay
Dublin 1

11 February 2022

Dear Minister,

I write to you on behalf of Transparency International Ireland in relation to The Review into Certain Planning Matters in Respect of Donegal County Council prepared by Rory Mulcahy SC.

While it is understood you are examining the report and will be bringing the matter to Cabinet for consideration, in the interest of transparency and public confidence in the planning system, the report should be published without any further delay. It is particularly important that the public is informed of any remedial or risk-mitigation measures that may have been taken to date or are anticipated on foot of the report's findings or recommendations.

As you are aware, Mr Gerard Convie, formerly a senior planner in Donegal County Council, reported his concerns to various Ministers of your Department before former Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Alan Kelly TD, initiated the Review of Planning Matters in Respect of Donegal County Council in 2015.

The Report of the Independent Review has been with the Department since June 2017. It is critical that any findings and recommendations by Mr Mulcahy SC in relation to systemic weaknesses in Donegal County Council's planning department be acted upon and any evidence of wrongdoing is brought to the attention of appropriate statutory agencies.

Furthermore, we are sure that you agree with your predecessors and colleagues on the need for transparency and accountability in local government. Our view is that the publication of this report will help restore public faith in the integrity of the planning system.

As the findings of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments (Mahon Tribunal) showed, planning is a particularly high-risk area for irregularities. Our 2019 National Integrity Index on local authorities, which assessed the systems and practices in place to promote integrity and prevent corruption in local government in Ireland, also identified transparency in planning among the areas requiring the most attention.

Given the high risk of corruption in this sector and existing gaps in the ethics and integrity framework highlighted by the Mahon Tribunal, it is essential that the public is informed of the steps being taken by your Department to respond to the findings of the Mulcahy Report.

Yours sincerely,

John Devitt
Chief Executive