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# CornerStone

The magazine of the Homeless Agency

ISSUE 31  
JUNE 2007

## 9 Delivering homes, sustaining communities

Will the new housing policy statement deliver?  
Five experts give their views



## note from the editor



### Its time to get the numbers right

In this issue, we report in the news section that the 2006 census seems to have hugely over-estimated the number of housing association homes, and under-estimated the number of private rented homes. This is a major problem, which could lead to wrong policy decisions being made in the future.

For example, according to the census, the total amount of social housing (local authorities plus housing associations) increased by over three-quarters between 2002 and 2006, whereas the true increase was probably less than one quarter. If you believe the census figure you might think that everything in the social housing garden is rosy and we're well on the way to providing housing for everyone. But the truth is (as we report on page 5), social housing output is falling further and further behind its targets.

If that weren't enough, there's also a difference between the total number of local authority homes as counted by the census compared with figures from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). The census says 105,500 but the DoEHLG comes up with about 109,800. The difference is equivalent to the total local authority housing stock for about three county councils so it is not insignificant.

On top of all that, it's not just the census that's causing problems. According to the DoEHLG, the number of homes completed in 2006 was 15% greater than in 2005. But according to the Central Statistics Office the increase was less than 3%! So the DoEHLG says house building is on the increase, but the CSO says it's levelling off.

The reason for the discrepancy is that a completion is counted when the ESB connection has been made, and the CSO reckons that about 5,000 homes were finished in 2005 but weren't connected by the ESB until early 2006, so the CSO has taken 5,000 units off the 2006 total and put them in the 2005 total.

It a big difference. Because if you believe the DoEHLG, it could be time to put the brakes on house building if a slump in prices is to be prevented. But if you believe the CSO, it's steady as she goes, towards a nice soft landing.

So the DoEHLG and the CSO disagree about the number of housing associations homes, the number of local authority homes and the total number of homes built last year.

Good quality data is essential for good quality policy, so if we want good quality policy, it's time to get the numbers right.

#### Simon Brooke

Editor of CornerStone · Housing and Social Policy Consultant

The Homeless Agency is a governmental body launched in May 2001 which is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and delivery of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area. The staff team is advised by a consultative forum, and reports to a board of management comprising representatives from the statutory and voluntary sector. The agency brings together a range of voluntary and statutory agencies that are working in partnership to implement agreed plans on the delivery of services

to people who are homeless, assisting them to move rapidly to appropriate long term housing and independence. A major task is the implementation of the third action plan *A Key to the Door* covering the period 2007–2010. The Homeless Agency co-ordinates all homeless services in the Dublin area; delivers some direct services; provides training and other supports; monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of services; carries out research; and administers funding to homeless services.

# CornerStone

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#### DESIGN

Identikit Design Consultants

#### PRINTING

New Oceans

The views expressed in CornerStone do not necessarily represent the views of the Homeless Agency, its management board, or consultative forum

**HOME  
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feature article

## Delivering homes, sustaining communities

The first major statement of housing policy for 20 years was published in February

Five experts give their views

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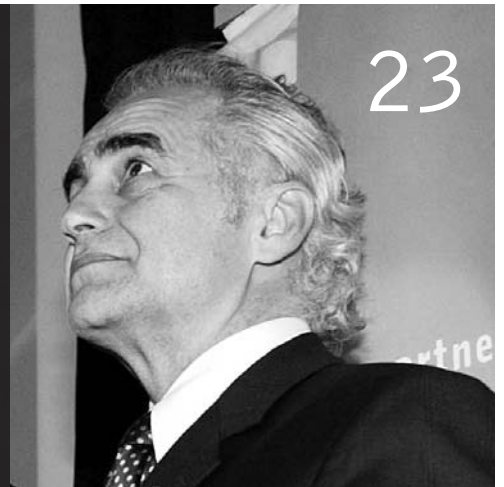
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# Choices

The Homeless Agency Partnership hosted *Choices* on Wednesday April 4th in the City Hall, Dame Street, Dublin 2 from 9.30am to 2pm. *Choices* focused on the training, educational and employment options available to people who have experienced homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness in Dublin. The main objective of the day was to offer an opportunity to those working in homeless service provision and to people who are experiencing homelessness to learn about the training, education and employment options available and also to provide a source of information, support and advice.

*Choices* opened with presentations from people who are experiencing homelessness and homeless service providers including: Homeless Agency, FEANTSA, Focus Ireland Spokes Project, Business in the Community Ready for

Work Programme and the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC) Foundations Project.

*Choices* had a very welcoming atmosphere with guitar players and DJs from the CDVEC Project and also Mary O'Donnell who provided a very tranquil setting in City Hall with her harp playing.

*A Key to the Door*, the Homeless Agency action plan on homelessness in Dublin 2007–2010 sets out ten core actions under three strategic aims including: prevention; the delivery of quality and effective services at a local level; and the provision of long-term housing and accommodation with appropriate supports.

One of these ten core actions is to increase the voice of people who are experiencing homelessness as a means of both delivering better services and helping maximise the level of control that people who are homeless have over

their own lives. *Choices* provided a platform for people who are experiencing homelessness to discuss their views and opinions in relation to the training, education and employment options available to them.

The following organisations provided information and advice at *Choices*: Homeless Agency, FÁS, Focus Ireland – Spokes Project, Merchants Quay Ireland, PACE, Eve Holdings, CDVEC, Dolebusters, National Learning Network – Fresh Start, Liberties College – Solo Project, Business in the Community (Ready for Work Programme), Local Employment Services, Volunteering Ireland, Citizen Information, Combat Poverty Agency, National Adult Literacy Agency, Dublin Adult Learning Centre, Library Council of Ireland, MABS Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Refugee Information Service and CentreCare. ■

# Safetynet



Mary Harney T.D., Minister for Health and Children on Friday May 4th 2007 announced the launch of *Safetynet*, primary healthcare for people who are homeless.

Speakers at the launch, which was held at the Homeless Agency, included leading professionals working within homelessness in Dublin: Dr Austin O'Carroll, GP and chair of the *Safetynet* steering group, Mr Frank Mills, national planning specialist – social inclusion, Health Service Executive, and Mr Cathal Morgan, director of the Homeless Agency.

The aim of the *Safetynet* programme is to offer a comprehensive primary health

care service targeted at people who are experiencing homelessness in Dublin and to make health services more accessible to people by locating medical and social support services in the agencies and services where people who are homeless can attend for support.

The service is currently operating in over ten locations throughout Dublin in voluntary and statutory organisations and general practices including the Capuchin Centre, Crosscare – Longford Lane Night Service, Depaul Trust – Aungier Street,

Depaul Trust – Back Lane Hostel, Depaul Trust – Tus Nua, Depaul Trust – Clancy Night Shelter, Dublin Simon – Detox, Dublin Simon – Emergency Shelter, Merchants Quay Ireland Open Access Primary Health Care Unit. Other key partners include Health Service Executive, Mountjoy Family Practice, Inchicore Family Practice, Multidisciplinary Healthlink Teams, Assertive Community Care Evaluation Services (ACCES) Mental Health Service and Dental Services for people who are homeless.

The project is described as ‘*Safetynet*’ because it offers essential medical support to people who are homeless and who may not be in contact with mainstream services. The service is primarily targeted at people experiencing homelessness who are not linked into or in contact with medical services. On that note, the service also works to improve links and access to mainstream health and social services for people who are experiencing homelessness. ■

## Women’s Services Development Group seminar

The Women’s Services Development Group was formed in mid 2006 to develop and improve the capacity of services to respond effectively to women with high support needs. The specific objectives of the group are:

- To identify what services and bed capacity are available for women,
- To map high and low threshold services for women,
- To identify what gaps exist in service provision and policy for women,
- To support the implementation of the holistic needs assessment and care planning in women’s services
- To identify issues affecting women in homelessness.

Members of the group include representatives from voluntary and statutory accommodation and support service providers.

The group hosted a seminar in early March, which examined specific recommendations for the development of services for women with high support needs who are experiencing homelessness

in Dublin. The seminar was chaired by Liz Lennon, director of Focused Solutions and was attended by over 50 people from a range of services.

There were three presentations from representatives of the Women’s Services Development Group: Samantha Priestly from Depaul Trust, Ger Kane from the Multi-disciplinary Health Team and Caroline Maher from Dublin Simon. They discussed the objectives of the group, research recommendations, the number of people with high support needs and also a map of services for women with high support needs.

Dr Catherine Comiskey provided an overview of the Dochas report, *Hazardous Journeys to Better Places* and examined the positive outcomes and negative risks associated with the care pathways before, during and after admittance to the Dochas Centre at Mountjoy Prison. Kate Richardson and Kirsten Jones provided an overview of the 218 service in Glasgow which is provided by Turnaround, an experimental Turning Point Scotland project, which works with women with high support needs.

Four workshops were held which discussed domestic violence and violence against women, mental health and dual diagnosis, health issues, sexual health, sexuality and pregnancy, and drugs/alcohol addiction.

Initial feedback has been very positive and the seminar was regarded as being very successful. Recommendations generated in these workshops will form the basis of a seminar report and a strategic plan for the development of services for women with high support needs. ■

### Voter registration drive

The Homeless Agency issued supplementary registration application forms to all service managers in residential services with letter outlining procedure and the necessary measures for a person who is experiencing homelessness and in contact with their service, to be added to a supplement to the Electoral Register. ■

## Factsheet for candidates

All nominated candidates for election, councillors and political party press offices have been contacted with a detailed factsheet from the Homeless Agency outlining accurate information in relation to homelessness in Dublin including the vision of the Homeless Agency Partnership, three strategic aims of

the action plan and also facts relating to the number of people experiencing homelessness in Dublin from *Counted In, 2005*. The factsheet also highlights the remaining challenges for people who are homeless and also provides an overview of emerging issues that impact on homeless services in Dublin.

Also included with factsheet was a card outlining the vision with contact information of the Communications and Information team in the Homeless Agency, should any councillor or nominated candidate require further information. ■

# Census erroneous!

## Housing association tenancies over-estimated by more than 250%!

**C**ornerStone welcomed the inclusion of a new question in the census that gave official recognition to housing associations. But we didn't think so many people would answer it!

The most recent Census 2006 report (*Census 2006 Principle Demographic Results*, available from [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)), states in Table 38A that 50,480 households live in housing 'rented from a voluntary body'. But the actual figure is between 18,000 and 19,000 households (see box on right). So the census is very wide of the mark – by a factor of more than 2½ in fact.

So if the housing association figure is over-estimated by 31,500, that means another tenure or tenures must be under-estimated by 31,500, which is a lot of tenancies. So where were these households really living if they weren't housing association tenants?

They're unlikely to be owner-occupiers – you'd expect owner-occupiers to know that they don't rent their homes. They're not likely to be local authority tenants either. Apart from anything else because whilst the census and the DoEHLG disagree about the number of local authority homes, the difference is a lot less than 31,500.

The census questions (see box below) may hold a clue.

Amazingly enough, in the actual census questions there was no mention of the expression 'private rented'! If you

### The total number of housing association tenancies

The first survey of Irish housing associations was undertaken in 1983 (*Voluntary Housing in Ireland*, P Geoghegan, 1983, The Housing Centre) and it came up with a total of about 1,850 homes. Statistics from the DoEHLG show that between then and the end of March 2006, about 16,044 housing association units were built under the various funding schemes. Let's add another 1000 to take account of possible inaccuracies. That gives a total of about 19,000 housing association tenancies when the 2006 census was carried out.

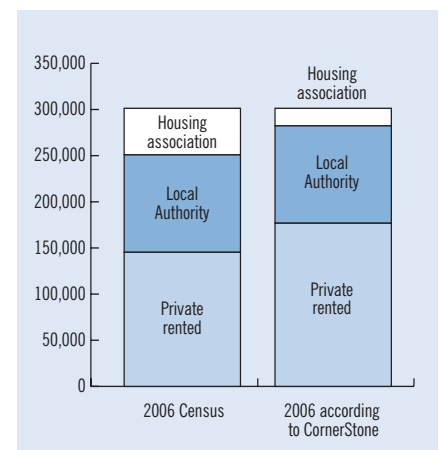
were a private rented tenant you had to define yourself negatively by saying that you were a renter but not from a local authority or voluntary body. And since many people probably had no idea what a 'voluntary body' was, it would not be surprising if some private renters ticked the 'voluntary body' box.

It's a bit like trying to find out how many people live in Leinster by asking them whether they live in Connacht, Munster or Ulster.

So it begins to look as though 31,500 households may actually have been private renters. And there's some supportive evidence for this. Tenancy registration statistics from the Private Residential Tenancies Board suggest that the 2006 Census underestimated the size of the private rented sector. Also, published census data shows that between 2002 and 2006 the private rented sector actually reduced as a proportion of all housing – from 11% to 10%. Most commentators

consider that to be a very surprising result. But if you adjust the published figures (you have to adjust the 2002 figure too, to take account of the estimated housing association stock then) the sector increased from 10% to over 12%, which many would say is much more realistic.

The chart below illustrates the difference.



## The census questions about housing tenure

### What is the nature of occupancy of your household's accommodation?

- Owner occupied where loan of mortgage repayments are being made
- Owner occupied where no loan or mortgage repayments are being made
- Being purchased from a Local Authority under a Tenant Purchase Scheme
- Rented from a Local Authority
- Rented from a Voluntary Body
- Rented unfurnished other than from a Local Authority or Voluntary Body
- Rented furnished or part furnished other than from a Local Authority or Voluntary Body
- Occupied free of rent (caretaker, company official etc)

This shows that according to the census there are 11,000 more social rented homes (local authority and housing association) than private rented, but according to *CornerStone* there are really 50,000 less social rented homes than private rented.

And if you look at the change between 2002 (the last census) and

2006, the differences are even larger. According to the census, the total amount of social housing increased by over three-quarters between 2002 and 2006, whereas according to *CornerStone* the increase was less than one quarter.

This might seem like nerdy nit-pickery, but it's really important. Census data is widely used for monitoring trends.

So whilst the census figures tell us that social housing has now overtaken private rented housing, the truth is that the private rented sector is still bigger than the social rented sector and the gap is actually widening.

This means that anyone formulating housing policy based on census data had better be very careful indeed. ■

## Is RAS private or social – or pricial or sovate?

As the number of units provided under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) increases, it's time to decide how RAS should be categorised. Should RAS accommodation be classified as private rented housing or local authority social housing, or a hybrid? This is important because whilst current total RAS figures are very low, it is anticipated that they will increase significantly in the future.

The Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)

claims that RAS accommodation should be counted as local authority social housing and does so in the most recent Housing Statistics Bulletin. It is true that RAS tenants pay rent to their local authority. But the local authority is not their landlord – their landlord is the private owner of the accommodation.

More importantly, RAS tenants are eligible for local authority housing waiting lists. Surely if RAS accommodation is local authority social housing, RAS tenants would not be eligible for local

authority housing waiting lists? If you're accepted on a local authority housing waiting list, then surely by definition you are not in social rented housing?

To be fair to the department, the question of housing tenure is not an easy one, and across Europe there are many hybrid arrangements that are difficult to classify. But it is really difficult to see how RAS could possibly be categorised as local authority social housing, and there may well be an argument for placing RAS accommodation in a category of its own. ■

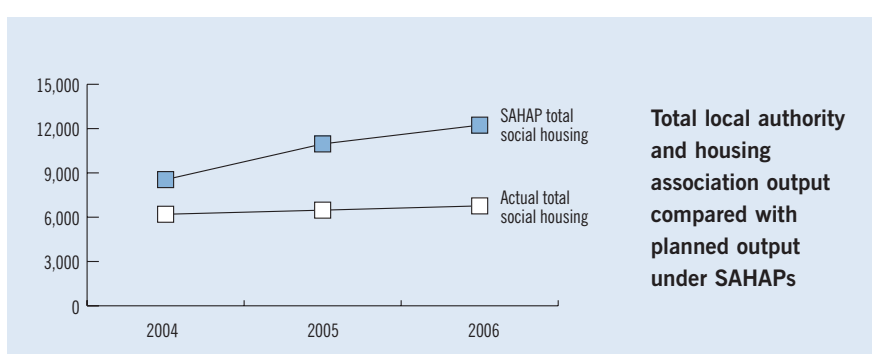
## Social housing output falls further behind targets

The headline in the press release announcing the latest housing statistics bulletin from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government declared, '60% increase in Part V units'.

True, but as ever, not the full story.

Remember social and affordable housing action plans (SAHAPs)? These are five year plans that all local authorities were asked to prepare in 2004. The graph below compares the planned output under SAHAPs with the actual output.

The top line shows what was supposed to happen under the SAHAPs – it shows the total social housing output (local authority and housing association, including all



social housing provided under Part V). The bottom line shows what actually happened. Note: the bottom line includes RAS (see news item above) – if RAS was not included the actual social housing output in 2006 would be lower than in 2005!

In 2006 the actual total was only 4% greater than 2005, and only a little over half the planned total; and as you can see the gap between the plan and the actual result is widening. In other words social housing performance against the plans is getting worse.

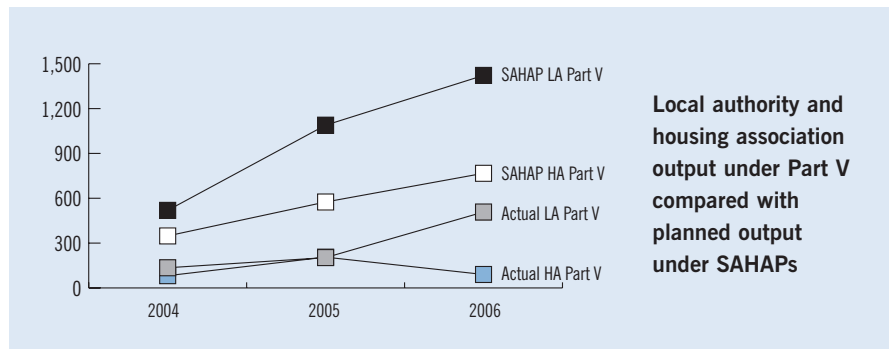
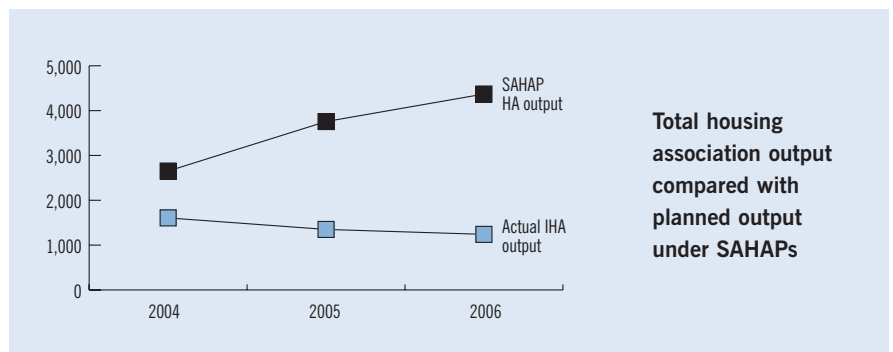
## Housing associations

But if you look beneath the surface, the picture becomes even more gloomy. Housing association output has *dropped* for the third year in a row – output in 2006 was 25% lower than in 2003. For years housing associations have been calling for the cumbersome unwieldy approval arrangements to be streamlined, but thus far to no avail, and these depressing figures are the result.

### Part V

The good news is that local authority homes produced under Part V (the 20% of most new developments that can be reserved for social or affordable housing) more than doubled in 2006 over 2005 and are at least heading in the right direction. But housing association output under Part V in 2006 was less than half than in 2005 and *only 12% of the planned output*.

This dismal performance suggests that the targets set out *Towards 2016* are fast disappearing over the horizon.



And it will of course in turn impact hugely on homelessness since the success of the Homeless Agency's

action plan *A Key to the Door* is heavily dependent on an increasing supply of social housing. ■

There wasn't room in the last issue to tell you about the *National Development Plan 2007–2013* ([www.ndp.ie](http://www.ndp.ie)) or for that matter the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*, ([www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)), so because *CornerStone* aims to provide readers with synopses of the relevant bits of all important reports, we're covering both here. As you will see, these two reports and *Towards 2016* are all interdependent to a degree so we hope that what follows will clarify rather than confuse.

# National Development Plan 2007–2013

The latest National Development Plan, *Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All* was published in January 2007 and sets out an ambitious €184 billion programme over the next seven years. The plan states that its housing policy approach is set out in *Towards 2016* (see *CornerStone* Issue 28) and *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* (see *CornerStone* Issue 30).



Investment under the Housing Programme section over the period of the plan will total €21 billion. This will

be divided between social housing and renewal; and affordable housing and targeted private housing supports. €17 billion will go to social housing; this will aim to deliver 60,000 new units of social housing (local authority + housing association + RAS). €4 billion will aim to fund and 80,000 units of affordable housing and targeted private housing supports. ■



# National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016

This plan, which was published in February 2007, focuses on poverty and implementation of its actions aim to support *Towards 2016*.

The plan commits to a review of progress on the implementation of the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* (published in 2001). It says that a revised government strategy on homelessness will be published during 2007, and long-term occupancy of emergency homeless accommodation will be eliminated by 2010. This appears to take part of the Homeless Agency's vision and apply it nation wide.

As far as housing is concerned, it repeats commitments made in *Towards 2016*, and adds some specifics that appear on the face of it to be very ambitious:

- 32,000 households will benefit from RAS by 2009.
- A survey of local authority housing stock will be carried out by the end of 2008, leading to:
  - A programme of regeneration for all run-down estates nationwide between 2007 and 2016.
  - Making adequate central heating systems available in all local authority rented dwellings by the end of 2008.
- Local authorities will provide housing associations with land for 3,000 dwellings by the end of 2009.
- Minimum standards in the private rented sector will be updated by mid-2007 and effectively enforced.

*CornerStone* will monitor all this closely.

The plan also contains some specific commitments targeting older people and people with disabilities.

## Older people

- Future social and affordable housing action plans will address older people's needs in a more strategic manner.
- New protocols for inter-agency co-operation where there is a care dimension.
- Services to provide enhanced home security, energy conservation and other measures will be provided to some 5,000 people per year.

## People with disabilities

- A national housing strategy for people with disabilities will be developed by the end of 2009. ■

# Morphological agglomerations

## ...or urban sprawl to you and me

According to the most recent SCS housing study enticingly entitled, *Urban Sprawl and Market Fragmentation in the Greater Dublin Area* there are far too many of these morphological agglomerations, so the commuter belt now stretches over 100 kilometres from Dublin through south Leinster and into south Ulster. This, the report acidly points out, is contrary to the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines.

The reason for this urban sprawl, according to the authors is simply that for years not enough housing has been built in Dublin. So lots of people working in Dublin have had to go

In case you were wondering, a morphological agglomeration is an enumeration district or ward that contains a minimum of 7 persons per hectare.

*SCS Housing Study 2007: Urban Sprawl and Market Fragmentation in the Greater Dublin Area* by Brendan Williams, Brian Hughes, and Patrick Shiels is the third report for the Society of Chartered Surveyors and was published in January 2007. You will find it at [www.scs.ie](http://www.scs.ie)

elsewhere to live, because (a) there isn't enough housing in Dublin and (b) [as a result of (a)] it's too expensive. Consequently, to meet this demand, more and more houses have been built outside Dublin, in counties such as Kildare, Meath and Wicklow.

However, whilst Dublin still has a lot of catching up to do, the amount of house building in the four Dublin local authorities has increased dramatically in the last few years, so the trend is in the right direction.

But what's wrong with urban sprawl anyway? Perhaps it's just its nasty name? Surely if we called it a semi-rural neighbourhood area then it would be all right wouldn't it? Well no, say the authors, and they list urban sprawl's problems:

- Increased land and property prices in Dublin – (reduced housing affordability);
- Congestion (traffic, population, without adequate transport infrastructure);
- Rapid unmanaged peripheral expansion (without social infrastructure);
- Increased levels of pollution and energy usage (reduced environmental quality);
- Quality of life of individuals and communities reduced, and
- Time-loss issues associated with commuting.

They note that in many places, especially in outer Leinster and South Ulster, there is near-total dependency on the private motorcar, and that at the same time, existing suburbs served by public transport

such as Dundrum are experiencing a resurgence in population growth.

They are critical of the failure to integrate housing with other policies such as land-use and transportation which they say, '...poses major problems for accessibility, sustainability, and quality of life.' Also they lay the blame for dynamic but unstable housing development on 'major problems in managing the land supply process.'

Following from this analysis, the authors daringly make all sorts of predictions for the Dublin housing market:

- Demand for housing in Dublin will remain strong in line with continuing rising population and employment trends.
- If housing supply in Dublin begins to meet demand, then households currently spending far too long on the daily commute may begin to move back to Dublin.
- House price increases in 2007 are likely to be in single figures.
- There may be different price trends in different market segments (e.g. second hand homes, apartments)

- In some areas house prices will go up (or down) more than in others.
- Location will once again become crucial 'with weaker locations distant from primary employment centres negatively affected.' In other words if house prices are going to fall they'll fall first near the edge of the commuter belt unless there's a big factory nearby.

So, if you were thinking of buying a house in Athy or Drogheda in the near future you would be well advised to think again. ■

## How many homeless in Europe?

Good question! And no-one knows, not least because there's no agreed definition of homelessness which means that everyone could be measuring different things. But if the recommendations in *Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level* are implemented then that might all change.

The report was commissioned by the European Commission (the civil service of the EU) and carried out by the University of Dundee, with the assistance of GISS e.V., Germany and Resource Information Service, UK.

The authors sum up the problem succinctly: 'Homelessness and housing deprivation exist in all European countries and yet there are few official statistics on homelessness, and those that do exist are rarely comparable between different countries. The lack of clear data on the extent of homelessness makes an understanding of its nature, causes and the effective action needed to tackle it all the more difficult.'

So they set out to address these difficulties and make recommendations to all EU members about **defining** homelessness; about **what** to measure in order to assess the nature and extent of homelessness; and about **how** to measure homelessness.

Of course the very fact of aiming to produce common definitions and approaches means taking account of different languages, and different cultural and policy contexts so it's a major piece of work. It is by the authors' own admission a 'technical' report and it is 347 pages long.

*Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level* is at [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_inclusion/docs/2007/study\\_homelessness\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2007/study_homelessness_en.pdf)

You may be wondering what happened to FEANTSA's work on this – the ETHOS typology on homelessness and social exclusion (see *CornerStone* issue 25). Well ETHOS is basically incorporated in this report, which covers a much broader territory.

As well as many detailed recommendations on measurement, *Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level* includes a group of overarching recommendations aimed at national (or regional) authorities:

1. Prepare a national Homelessness Monitoring Information Strategy developed in consultation with all relevant Ministries and stakeholders.
2. Identify (or establish) a co-ordinating mechanism or agency for homelessness data collection.
3. Adopt the harmonised definition of living situations and homelessness from this report as a basic framework for data collection.
4. Adopt the set of standard core variables from this report and their definition as a basic set of variables to be employed in data collection.
5. Adopt a national definition of services for homelessness.
6. Establish and maintain a directory/database of services for homeless people.
7. Ensure that funding for homeless service providers requires the provision of basic anonymised data on clients and provide funding to facilitate this as necessary.
8. Establish a strategy for collection of data from service provider client registration systems.
9. Ensure added value of data collection for the services and homeless people.

You can see from the above that the Homeless Agency has already implemented a number of these and others are contained in the *Review of the Implementation of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies* produced by Fitzpatrick Associates and published early last year. The authors also provide a number of recommendations concerned with implementation that are aimed at the European Commission. The report concludes in ringing tones: 'By being better able to measure homelessness, there is the potential to use this information to dramatically improve the quality of life of hundreds of thousands of some of the most excluded, vulnerable people across the EU.' ■

# DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

Will the new housing policy statement deliver?  
Five experts give their views



*Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* can be downloaded from [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie). Click on 'Housing Policy Statement' near the top of the box on the right hand side headed 'updates'.

*Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, which was launched in February this year, is the first major statement of housing policy since *Social Housing – the way ahead* was published in 1995, and it has been widely debated by housing enthusiasts. For this issue we asked five experts to respond to the statement, each commenting from a different standpoint. But first we've included an abridged version of the synopsis from the last issue, to remind you what it's all about.

The actions in *Delivering homes, sustaining communities* appear under eight headings:

## 1 HOUSING NOW – DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

- New planning guidelines on preparation of development plans are being finalised.
- Innovative ways of linking new school provision to development of residential areas will be explored.
- Housing strategies will be further developed to ensure better information on nature and location of demand for housing.
- Research is being carried out under the auspices of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism to consider issues arising from increased ethnic and cultural diversity.
- A 'use it or lose it' scheme will be introduced through new legislation that will give local authorities powers to accelerate development of land zoned for housing.
- A Property Service Regulatory Authority will be set up to regulate the auctioneering/estate agency business, managing agents, property letting agents and others.
- The review of minimum standards in the private rented sector has already begun, and measures to improve local authority enforcement of these and other aspects of regulation will follow.

# DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

## 2 HOUSING SERVICES

- There will be 4,000 extra starts/acquisitions during the period 2007–2009 above the 23,000 already committed in the Housing Policy Framework. This will bring total starts/acquisitions to 27,000 units (20,000 local authority; 6,000 housing association (referred to as 'voluntary and co-operative housing sector' in the statement; 1,000 Rental Accommodation Scheme [RAS]).
- In addition full implementation of RAS will bring in more units.
- 17,000 affordable homes will be produced during 2007–2009.
- Housing advice centres will be established in all the larger local authorities. Advice work will focus on determining eligibility for affordable housing; assessing the need for other housing support.
- Legislation will be introduced to allow people to appeal a housing decision made about them by a local authority.

## 3 PATHS TO HOME OWNERSHIP

- 40,000 affordable homes will be delivered during the period of the National Development Plan (2007–2013).
- Eligibility for affordable housing will be determined by local authorities based on local circumstances, within parameters set by the DoEHLG.
- The Affordable Homes Partnership has commissioned a study to consider ways in which affordable housing might be enhanced including an examination of the concept of 'affordable renting'.
- A new 'incremental purchase' scheme will broaden access to home ownership for lower income groups (see page X of this issue).
- Legislation to enable the sale of apartments to tenants is currently being drafted.
- It is intended to introduce versions of tenant purchase for housing association tenants.

## 4 SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPORTS

- A new way of assessing housing need is being developed involving a two stage process: a preliminary assessment to identify those with a short-term need, and a second stage which will examine long-term need.
- Sustainable community proofing will be introduced for all new projects. The Centre for Housing Research will develop an appropriate toolkit and publish best practice guidance.
- The role of housing associations (voluntary and co-operative housing sector) will be developed:
  - Housing associations will have greater involvement in home ownership options (e.g. 'incremental purchase')
  - Rationalised and streamlined funding arrangements will be introduced
  - Improved regulatory structure will be introduced

## 5 SUPPLY OF HOUSING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

- Inter-agency protocols will be developed for the most vulnerable groups (e.g. homeless people, people with addictions, people with mental health issues).
- Housing strategies and housing action plans will reflect specific strategies for different special needs categories.
- Promote long-term accommodation and associated care supports
- Develop more effective and transparent funding for accommodation and supports for homeless people.
- Eliminate long-term residency in emergency hostels by 2010.

### Homelessness

- There is enough emergency accommodation in major urban areas and the primary objective now is to provide transitional programmes and long-term accommodation with appropriate supports. Funding mechanisms will be retargeted to reflect this.

#### The DoEHLG will:

- Update existing homeless strategies.
- Continue with the establishment of a National Homelessness Consultative Committee.
- Ensure that homeless fora are made more effective.

### Travellers

- The DoEHLG will continue to facilitate strategies to accelerate provision of accommodation for Travellers and will continue to work through the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee.

### Older people

- A role for RAS in provision of housing for older people will be considered.
- DoEHLG will encourage the expansion of 'financial contribution schemes' where private housing is part exchanged for social rented accommodation.

## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

- Local authorities will include a specific strategy reflecting their response to accommodation needs of older people and will specifically outline role of housing associations.
- New protocols for inter agency co-operation where there is a care dimension will be introduced.
- Revised grant schemes for older people in private housing will be implemented.
- A cross-departmental team on sheltered housing will be established.

### People with a disability

- Much of this is covered in the sectoral plan described in CornerStone issue 29.
- The grants scheme for people with a disability in private housing will be reviewed.

## 6 HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL

- A new nation wide approach to regeneration of run down local authority estates will be undertaken.
- A Sustainable Communities Fund is being established to provide revenue funding to local authorities to support housing renewal and improving the housing stock, and to address anti-social behaviour.
- Local authorities are now allowed to apply the revenue received from sales of houses to programmes of regeneration, remedial works and planning maintenance.
- The DoEHLG will continue to provide funding to local authorities for improvement schemes.
- Ten yearly audits of housing stock will be undertaken, with a benchmark audit being conducted in 2007/08.

## 7 MANAGING AND MAINTAINING SOCIAL HOUSING

- Allocation policies will be reformed.
- Rents policy across all social housing options will be rationalised.
- Supports available to local authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour will be strengthened.

## 8 INSTITUTIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATION REFORMS

- Better systems of co-ordination and joint working between different players involved in the provision of housing and development of communities will be introduced.
- Housing action plans will be placed on a statutory footing and will be improved.
- Local authorities are now required to engage in a process of active land management that will ensure that the right amount of land is available for housing in the right locations.
- The Housing Management Initiative will involve the setting up of an incentivised system for housing authorities to encourage and promote best practice in the meeting of housing objectives.

# It talks the talk, but...?

## DÁITHÍ DOWNEY

Launched in February 2007, the new housing policy framework *Building Homes, Sustaining Communities* is billed as the government's vision for housing policy over the coming years that will meet the challenges of the 21st century. It's a highly produced document that on initial

reading suggests it's perhaps the most comprehensive articulation of policy to date for how and where we live now and into the future.

*Building Homes, Sustaining Communities'* policy parameters are wide ranging and embrace many issues that link the local to the global. For



Dáithí Downey is deputy director of the Homeless Agency

## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

Overall, the policy statement is mostly coherent in relation to homelessness and actions to be undertaken to eliminate it.

example, it argues that quality housing is the bedrock of communities upon which local civic values and neighbourliness are erected and maintained. It also recognises the key function of quality, affordable housing to economic progress through continued foreign direct investment, international competitiveness and labour mobility. It talks of building the types of communities 'suitable for our fast changing society: communities where people are happy to live and in which residents can participate and prosper' (p3). The language (as you might expect from a policy 'statement') is both prosaic and aspirational and places the concept of home as central to the overall message. The challenge is to make the language used meaningful through stated actions and in fairness the framework document goes some way to convincing the reader that delivering the vision is not just possible, but likely. It does so by deploying a twin-track approach.

On the one hand the policy's articulation of the suite of proposed actions to build sustainable communities, address housing need and improving choice and responsibility is made through the prism of the broader vision for the development of Ireland outlined in *Towards 2016* (Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015) namely 'a dynamic, internationalised participatory society and economy with a strong commitment to social justice, where economic development is environmentally sustainable and internationally competitive'. Within this, the policy statement recognises the need for a 'step change' in the provision of housing support. Echoing the earlier work of the NESC (*Housing: Performance and Policy*, 2004, and *Developmental Welfare State*, 2005), this is to be a step-up to an improved, more holistic model of provision based on a life-cycle approach that ensures tailor-made delivery of services to meeting housing and social needs as people move through childhood, working age and elderly life stages.

On the other hand, the second track of the policy statement's approach sets out actions focussed on improving the effectiveness of the delivery of housing programmes. These are the institutional and implementation reforms that will be made in order to ensure delivery of the 'vision' thing – and in short they are likely to quickly become regarded as the measure of success or failure of this policy framework in the next few years.

As such, there are a number of actions of immediate interest to the homeless sector. Possibly the most keenly awaited action is the arrival of a revised national Homeless Strategy. Beginning with the establishment of a new National Homelessness Consultative Committee (whose first meeting was held in April 2007), the new policy will seek to achieve, *inter alia*, a more effective operation of homeless fora; improve the co-ordination of service delivery to homeless persons and produce better working on an inter-agency basis through the use of protocols; provide long-term accommodation and associated care supports for persons capable of independent living as well as persons assessed as being not capable; continue to provide the funding necessary to support service provision while also developing a more effective and transparent local funding mechanism for both the required accommodation and care elements and work to eliminate long-term homelessness by 2010.

There are other actions that carry significant opportunities to end homelessness by 2010. Without going into too much detail, they include the commitment to frontload the social housing supports set out in the National Development Plan that aims to commence and acquire 27,000 new social homes by 2009 as well as ensure continued support for the Rental Accommodation Scheme and targeted measures for special housing needs. Also there will be additional powers given to local authorities to create joint entities to provide housing services, and to develop and procure housing. Notably, the proposal to bring forward legislation to place local authority Housing Action Plans (HAPs) on a statutory footing and deploy them through a rolling three-year implementation plan holds out the greatest opportunity – and some might say risk – to the achievement of improved output in physical infrastructure required to end homelessness. The policy statement proposes the next round of five year HAPs be specifically informed by and include local 'strategies for special needs' aka Homeless Actions Plans and Traveller Accommodation Plans. This holds out the prospect of the Homeless Agency Partnership's highly evolved action plan to 2010 *A Key to the Door* being put on an equivalent statutory footing as the housing strategy element of each local authority development plan. For many, this would ensure a more programmatic, resourced and target-based planning process to delivery homes for the

## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

homeless. For others, it risks 'politicising' homeless provision even further as local areas raise successful planning objections and the resulting nimbysism deters further homeless service development locally.

Perhaps this concern reflects Irish society's inconsistency on the issue of exclusion, poverty and homelessness during this period of economic growth, wealth creation and spiralling house prices. Whether *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* successfully

avoids the contradictions of articulating future actions to tackle social exclusion and homelessness within an overall discourse on home ownership, privatisation, competitiveness and personal choice and responsibility found throughout the policy statement is another matter. Overall, the policy statement is mostly coherent in relation to homelessness and actions to be undertaken to eliminate it. It talks the talk. Time will tell if it succeeds to walk the walk.



## Something old, something new?

DECLAN REDMOND

While it is easy, and sometimes fun, to make cynical comments about official government policy, it should be remembered that the pronouncement of policy is important for it allows us to see how policy has developed and gives us some form of yardstick by which to measure progress. So, what are we to make of the long-awaited statement on Housing Policy, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*? The first and most obvious thing to be said is that it is in effect a summation and codification of policy over the past ten years and in that respect it is welcome. However, close observers of the Irish housing scene will find little that is genuinely new and innovative, or that has not been signalled in some form. Over the past decade housing policy has, in my own view, developed in an ad-hoc and reactive way to the dynamism of the housing market. *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* gives the impression that policy has developed in a rational way underpinned by some overarching set of principles. However, what are these principles? Well they are really the same as they have been for a long time, which is to say that the housing needs of the country are to be primarily met by the market. What has changed is that as the housing market has radically changed over the past decade, the nature of government interventions has had to change, with the development of an 'affordable' housing policy and the alteration of the private rented market through RAS as examples. The fundamental emphasis of policy, it seems, is that supply of housing should be speedier, albeit in a planned fashion.

There are, however, some emphases in *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* which are very welcome. The stress on urban planning, urban design and the need to improve the quality of the built form is perhaps the first time such aims have been stated in housing policy or at least so strongly. Historically, the emphasis has been on delivering for housing need and demand and quality has taken a back seat. Likewise, the emphasis on sustainable communities is to be welcomed, although it is a flexible concept which can mean different things to different people. For example, the section on the regeneration of social housing and the stress on mixed tenure in regeneration is not a neutral policy option but in fact the cause of differing interpretations of what a sustainable community is or might be. More generally, it is definitely a sign of the times when an official publication speaks of choice, a phrase redolent of Blairite policy in the UK and perhaps, Progressive Democrat policy here. If choice means greater options and flexibility then that is a good thing. However, the more general notion of choice as a key principle is controversial, as it is a notion which begs all sorts of awkward and old-fashioned questions about equality and justice, words absent from this document. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to allow the odd cynical thought an airing. In a system where the market is so dominant the quality of policy-making and, in particular, the quality of policy-implementation, is crucial. Have we arrived at a point where the stated aims of public policy bear substantial resemblance to the reality of policy implementation?

Dr Declan Redmond lectures in the School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy at University College Dublin

...close observers of the Irish housing scene will find little that is genuinely new and innovative

## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

# A game of housing Jenga?

CAROLINE McGRATH

Caroline McGrath is  
director advocacy at  
Focus Ireland



...in the  
absence of  
entitlement,  
choice is  
meaningless.



One of the sticking features of the policy document is the theme of choice. What does choice mean?

Take the position of one family who Focus Ireland works with. After years in emergency accommodation and two years in private rented accommodation, Mary and her young family were offered a local authority house – and was faced with a difficult choice. Mary was aware that if she stayed in her private rented accommodation she would no longer be a priority for social housing and her landlord could sell up at any point. On the other hand she had real concerns about the house offered as she was not permitted to view it and the area it was in. Influenced by the need for security of tenure for her young family after years of upheaval, Mary made a choice and moved. Inside weeks Mary had left the house following consistent intimidation and direct attacks on her family. She now had a further choice – register as homeless and go to emergency accommodation provision or stay with family – she choose the latter dreading a return to emergency provision and moving back to the city centre away from school and family networks.

After weeks with family and no offer to alternative accommodation (Mary was deemed to have voluntary surrendered her tenancy – *it was her choice*), and no longer able to be supported by family she was back to emergency accommodation – two years, two tenancies and back to where it started.

Can any of these decisions be considered to be choices in any reasonable sense of the word? I would argue not. As Peter King writing recently about UK housing policy notes, ‘choice means the existence of meaningful alternatives’. We must distinguish between choice and need – and be careful not to allow intolerably difficult decisions in the absence of basic needs being met to masquerade as choice.

In particular the needs of vulnerable households who require supported housing provision have been poorly served in the past. Positively, the housing policy statement recognises the importance of the need for long term housing with supports. However the language used in other parts of the report referencing ‘long term accommodation with necessary care supports’ is less clear and seems to imply the further reinforcement of the age old position of bricks and mortar provision as a housing issue and supports as a health related need. The reality is far less clear cut –

Focus Ireland currently provides supported housing to over 400 households around the country Focus both directly and in partnership arrangements with local authorities and other voluntary sector housing providers. In all instances Focus Ireland provides supports to these households but not care.

There is a need for policy to recognise that vulnerabilities arising from addiction, homelessness, disability or social exclusion can limit a persons capacity to sustain a tenancy, but this does not necessarily require ‘care based’ intervention. Certainly access to appropriate health or care services is critical but this is different from the housing based social and personal support services that some people need to prevent future homelessness.

Housing needs assessment is critical to appropriately identifying and responding to need and the commitment a new means of assessing housing need within the policy statement is welcome. However significant challenges remain in developing an assessment which does not simply function as a mechanism of gate keeping scarce housing supports (whether social housing, income supports or affordable housing) but which effectively assists vulnerable households in accessing the assistance they need. For this to happen the process must incorporate assessment of housing *and* related support needs, a transparent appeals mechanism and critically move to a position where people have an entitlement to have a basic needs met to...in the absence of entitlement, choice is meaningless.

Choice also presupposes access to relevant information to inform decision making This applies not just at an individual level but in developing policy positions. In this the policy statement on housing is striking in the omission of any financial analysis underpinning policy positions. Thus for example it is impossible to effectively look at systematic reform of funding for housing supports for people on low incomes, or to make any real assessment as to the impact of levels of vacant housing or changes in fiscal treatment of second home ownership might have in the absence of a clear benchmark on housing finance from which to develop such analysis. In its absence such central questions remain unanswered and new policy development becomes a series of moves in a game of housing jenga, with little understanding of how the movement of one piece will affect the totality.



## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

# An adequate stock of new dwellings is crucial

HUBERT FITZPATRICK



Hubert Fitzpatrick is director of the Irish Home Builders Association

In order to meet the stated objective of *Delivering Homes, Sustainable Communities* – that every household should have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at a tenure of its choice – the key requirement must be to ensure that an adequate stock of new dwellings continues to be provided so as to ensure that demand is met. With increased housing output over the past ten years, house price inflation has now moderated resulting in minimal house price inflation at the current time.

Today Ireland's housing industry is delivering four times as many houses per 1,000 population than the European average and the ESRI points out that the demand for housing may average 72,000 units annually between 2007 and 2001.

However, key data currently available points to a substantial reduction in volume of new house completions in the years ahead. Housing units granted planning permission in 2006 showed a 33% drop from 2005. Registrations of new houses under the House Building Guarantee Scheme for the first two months of 2007 illustrate a reduction of 33% over the same period last year, while the Dublin area has experienced a more severe reduction of 57%. These key trends must be addressed in the short-term so as to enable the objectives of the Government's policy document to be attained.

Among the issues to be addressed is the planning system. Regrettably, the Department's document fails to address in any detail the complex and cumbersome planning process that currently operates for the delivery of housing. Regional Planning Guidelines adopted countrywide took a pessimistic view of population growth over the 2002–2016 period and predicted that population by 2016 would be 4.4 million people. The most recent CSO statistics highlight current population of 4.23 million people in 2006 and further predict that a population of 5 million will be reached by 2016.

However, the Department policy document indicates that the majority of people satisfy their housing need in the private sector and acknowledges that the level of private provision is dependent on government support through:

- Capital investment in infrastructure;
- Planning and regulatory regimes which facilitate the efficient operation of the market; and
- Support to households under the fiscal and income support regimes

In order to deliver an affordable dwelling of good quality suited to the needs of every household in a good environment and as far as possible at a tenure of its choice, the planning system must be tackled to address the various bottlenecks that exist in relation to the development plan process, inadequate population targets established within the development plan process, the planning application process itself and the unnecessary delays encountered throughout the process. The key issue of resources at local authority level must be tackled so as to ensure that the planning process operates in as smooth a manner as is possible. The availability of staff resources to An Bord Pleanála must also be addressed in facilitating the Board to deliver timely decisions within its objective timeframe of four months.

One of the major housing policy issues is the implementation of Part V for delivery of social and affordable housing. The key reason for failure of Part V to deliver substantially increased numbers of housing units is the lack of a consistent approach countrywide for negotiating agreements for delivery of units. Despite the DoEHLG issuing Guidelines to local authorities for implementation of Part V, numerous local authorities countrywide pay lip service to the Guidelines issued, resulting in unnecessary delays in concluding Part V agreements. The time, delays and cost to both the local authorities and developers in trying to reach agreement for compliance with Part V is wasteful of resources. Surely a simpler mechanism can be secured so that Part V can be implemented in a more timely manner and in a more consistent approach. It is difficult to see how some 17,000 affordable homes can be delivered over the period 2007 to 2009 under the Government's programme with the current difficulties in relation to implementation of Part V persisting.

I welcome the recommendation in the Department policy document that a new means of assessing social housing need will be put in place.

...the planning system must be tackled to address the various bottlenecks that exist in relation to the development plan process...

## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

According to most recent government figures, approximately 48,000 persons are on local authority housing waiting lists. A more thorough assessment of housing need should be undertaken in order to determine and indeed ensure that no duplication and double counting of qualifying applications arises.

While the objective is to meet the needs of some 140,000 households over the period of the National Development Plan 2007–2013, the construction industry will welcome greater use of design build approaches to public sector projects going forward and indeed potential for creation of Joint Ventures for the development of social and affordable housing. The Affordable Housing Scheme should be re-evaluated and terms revisited so as to ensure that existing subsidies available to approved affordable home applicants can be maintained within the system and used to further assist affordable home buyers in the coming decades.

While the policy document refers to the requirement that lands zoned and serviced for housing purposes are used in a timely fashion, the Irish Home Builders Association / Construction Industry Federation has undertaken a review itself of available lands

zoned, serviced and ready for development. Significant lands that have been zoned and serviced will not be granted planning permission because Local Area Plans have not been adopted by the planning authority. Any lands that are zoned under Development Plans should be capable of being developed within the lifetime of the plan. Where Local Area Plan has not been prepared, there should be a requirement on the local authority to adopt the Local Area Plan within a reasonable timeframe of not more than two years from adoption of the County Development Plan.

Implementation of the policy document will require agreed co-operation and action from the planning and housing units in the DoEHLG and planning authorities so that the necessary implementation processes are brought forward to deliver housing at the required levels over the coming years. Supply constraints need to be resolved in order to improve accessibility for first time buyers and young families into the property market in the medium to long term. This will entail changes in both planning and housing processes to ensure effective delivery of supply of both private and public housing within the lifetime of the National Development Plan.



# We need structures capable of joined up thinking

CLLR MARY MURPHY

Councillor Mary Murphy is chair of Dublin City Council's Housing, Social and Community Affairs Strategic Policy Committee

**T**he content of *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities* reflects and brings together a recent consensus about the direction of housing policy. As such it is long overdue and uncontroversial. The strategy moves on some policies. Commitments to housing advice and a new mobility scheme for older people and recognition of the role housing policy plays in integrating migrant communities are all welcome.

The main theme of sustainable communities is the most important challenge facing any government housing strategy. Research commissioned by Dublin City Council from UCD confirms that the issue for apartment dwellers is not only the quality of apartments but also access to public and commercial services, transport, health, leisure and education. Dubliners have not yet taken a leap of faith to have confidence in greater density and high rise living. They will not do so until government, Dublin City Council, developers and other stakeholders inspire that confidence by delivering sustainable communities.

The real debate needs to focus on what is required to implement the various strategies and in particular to achieve the level of integrated planning and delivery required to achieve sustainable communities. This requires governance structures capable of joined up thinking. Such structures are required at three different levels.

- What is required first and foremost is national level leadership and a framework of integrated action at ministerial level. This has been sadly lacking in the present government. The lack of co-ordinated planning to meet education needs in growing populations is but one example that this government is not yet developing sustainable communities. The latest policy statement offers little credible hope that this will change.
- What is also required is a parallel local framework of regional and local governance with the capacity to plan and deliver sustainable communities. Despite various governance initiatives in the past two decades

## DELIVERING HOMES SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

there is still no coherent institutional arrangement capable of bringing together the statutory co-operation necessary to achieve effective regional and local planning and delivery. Regional co-ordination cannot be achieved without a Dublin Regional Authority with sufficient decision making capacity in both transport and planning. Such an authority would eliminate such unsustainable proposals as running the metro north on stilts or on a ground line through Ballymun, a decision narrowly avoided only because of the proximity of the election. Local leadership could be delivered through a directly elected mayor capable of seeing beyond vested interests of institutions.

■ An implementation strategy also requires local authorities to break down internal silo mentalities. Recent initiatives in Dublin City Council brought together, at political and management levels, the planning and housing functions of the city to work together on developing guidelines on sustainability and quality apartment living. More could be done to achieve integrated working through Strategic Policy Committees.

The traditional Irish attachment to home ownership is well reflected in the housing strategy. The 'incremental purchase scheme' mooted in the statement signals a new shared equity scheme allowing new or transferring tenants to staircase tenant purchase of council homes. If this is the signalling of new policy on tenant purchase it is welcome. It reflects the Labour Party initiative 'Begin to Buy' which would allow initial equity to be purchased and then increased as financial circumstances improve. Opening up greater possibilities for tenant purchase has however implications for retaining numbers of social housing stocks and this needs to be factored into the equation. If however the incremental purchase scheme is a limited initiative that introduces yet more anomalies and inequities for tenant purchase schemes it must be questioned. While the document confirms a sale of flats scheme it is frustrating that the Minister has procrastinated so much in making it happen.

Of course the various affordable housing schemes are the government's main strategy for widening house purchase. The challenge in Dublin city remains to provide such homes though Part V, but also to make such homes realistically affordable to low to middle income families (that is those earning in and around the average industrial wage or under €34,000 per annum). A Begin to Buy initiative would give such families a step into affordable housing in Dublin City.

The focus on home ownership cannot be at the expense of social housing and tackling homelessness. The challenge is to take on the ambitious but

achievable target of ending long term homelessness by 2010 while at the same time monitoring and improving the quality of present emergency and transition accommodation. Likewise while the statement claims to be building on the 2004 NESC housing report the scale of ambition for social housing does not match NESC's targets and there even questions as to whether the 2004–2008 targets for social housing can or will be realised.

Two other important issues do not in my view receive the attention they deserve in *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*.

### Achieving a social mix

Sustainable communities are mixed communities, mixed in age, class and ethnicity. All recognise the need to achieve greater social mix and the challenge of turning around regenerated formally 100% local authority housing complexes like Ballymun and O'Devaney Gardens. Recent legislation in the 2007 Social Welfare Act to restrict rent allowance in all regenerated areas can be likened to using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. There is real fear that particular low quality apartment blocks with high concentrations of private rented accommodation risk being the slums of tomorrow. A more honest and holistic approach would consider how to spread all forms of social housing more evenly across the city. A debate is urgently needed on how we can avoid creating new concentrations of poverty but still respect the right to supplementary welfare and the necessity to live in particular neighbourhoods. Attention needs also to be paid to achieving social mix in council acquired properties under the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

### Integrating migrant communities

The role housing policy can play in integrating migrant communities should not be overlooked or underestimated. As a result, roughly one-third of the overall foreign-born population is located in Dublin, and 45.6 percent of work permits issued in 2004 were for Dublin (International Organisation for Migration, 2006). Lack of access to social housing means migrants live in the private sector – up to four times more likely than the norm in Ireland – and suffer poor quality of hostels and low quality private rented accommodation. The 2006 census data will inform us as to whether there are uneven spatial concentrations of particular ethnic minority groups. If there are it is not necessarily problematic. What would be problematic is if clusters of low income or poor ethnic minorities are developing. This needs to be monitored and social housing policy adapted to on such a challenge. ■

The focus on home ownership cannot be at the expense of social housing and tackling homelessness.

# Open Door?

A research study, *Open Door?* set out to find out whether the new Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) could improve living conditions for one parent families. **Bob Jordan** reveals the findings.



Bob Jordan is director of Threshold

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The research, which was carried out by OPEN (One Parent Exchange & Network) and Threshold and was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency, used a variety of methods including focus groups and a survey of 50 one parent families living on rent supplement.

Tenants who have been on rent supplement for 18 months or longer and who have a long-term housing need are eligible for the RAS scheme. According to Census 2006, there are 189,213 lone parent family units in Ireland. At the end of March 2007, 8,934 (62%) of the total 14,426 lone parents in receipt of rent supplement were on the payment for 18 months or longer and could therefore be assessed for RAS.

## Rental Accommodation Scheme: introduction and progress to date

The Government introduced the new Rental Accommodation Scheme in 2004. Under the scheme, local authorities are responsible for meeting the long-term housing needs of people who have been on rent supplement for 18 months or longer. Housing is provided through a mixture of private rental housing, social housing, housing provided by voluntary housing associations and new-build Public-Private Partnership projects (PPPs). Local authorities engage in contractual arrangements with existing and new landlords to provide accommodation under the scheme.

## The implications for the physical health and mental well-being of children deprived of an area to exercise and play and perhaps socialise with other children are stark.

The Government's stated intention is that RAS will improve security and affordability, and ensure compliance with statutory minimum dwelling standards. One of the key advantages for tenants is that differential rents apply which means that people can take up employment while still receiving help with their housing costs. A welcome change in new Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 means that a person assessed in need of housing under RAS may take up full-time employment and continue to be paid rent supplement.

A total of 32,087 rent supplement tenants were on rent supplement for 18 months or longer at the end of 2006 and could therefore be assessed for RAS. Transfers to date have been relatively slow but are picking up. A total of 6,119 former rent supplement cases had been accommodated by the end of March 2007: 3,449 tenants were transferred to RAS, made up of 2,249 voluntary housing tenants and 1,200 tenants in private rented accommodation; and a further 2,670 were transferred to other social housing options. No national figures exist on the numbers of lone parents transferred to date, but preliminary data suggests that significant numbers of one parent families have been transferred in Dublin.

Problems experienced by one parent families currently in receipt of rent supplement indicates that RAS will only be a successful longer-term housing option if it raises private rented accommodation standards and makes rented homes more family friendly.

### Problems with standards and safety

Poor building construction, a lack of smoke detectors and fire escapes, landlord inaction on repairs, flimsy locks, doors and windows, and anti-social behaviour were all cited as standards and safety concerns.

Some lone parents surveyed were living in accommodation which was poorly constructed or structurally unsound. For example, one lone parent was living with her two year old son in a house with a garage attached, the roof of which caved in during her tenancy. One of the three bedrooms in the house was located over the garage and so became unsafe. Her landlord did not secure or repair the roof before the end of her tenancy.

Concerns about fire safety were raised by many tenants, in particular the need for smoke detectors and additional escape routes. By law smoke detectors must be fitted in every housing unit as well as communal areas such as halls and landings of apartment blocks. But many lone parents surveyed lived in accommodation with only one exit door (mainly apartments or flats in converted houses).

In other cases, landlords' actions had compromised the health and safety of the tenants, for example, by failing to maintain gas boilers or ensure adequate ventilation. In one home, the

landlord held the keys to all the window locks; the windows were permanently locked so the tenant had no means of ventilating the dwelling and no means of escape in the event of fire.

A number of lone parents raised security concerns. Several had been burgled or knew of attempted burglaries in the immediate area. Some worried that they couldn't make their homes secure: windows were often loose in the frames and doors were made of flimsy materials. A number of participants reported having no locks on front, back or patio doors.

For others, security or safety was hampered by anti-social behaviour in the local area, in particular groups of teenage boys loitering and drinking outside their homes. One lone parent had a football kicked against her windows and front doors regularly but felt too intimidated by the teenagers to complain.

Problems with standards and safety were often compounded by the inappropriateness of the accommodation to family needs.

### Unsuitability for family living

A lack of storage space, clothes washing and drying facilities, and play space for children were all critical concerns.

One-parent families need more storage space for clothes, toys, household items and food, as well as more food preparation space in the kitchen, than a single person renting accommodation of the same size. The need for storage was particularly acute in relation to bulky items such as prams and buggies, bicycles, vacuum cleaners and children's toys. The lack of storage extends to the amount of kitchen cupboards. Some one parent families could not do a weekly shop run which added to the costs of running a household.

Lack of access to clothes washing facilities for an indefinite period of time is unacceptable under the regulations governing the private rented sector. Most households surveyed had a washing machine. However, some reported waiting weeks for their landlords to repair old and worn out washing machines. One lone parent described how for six weeks she transported dirty clothes from her rented house in her son's toy wheelbarrow to wash them in her parents' home, while she waited for her landlord to replace the old washing machine. In the end, she decided to pay for a new washing machine from her own pocket.

Many lone parents living in apartment complexes and converted houses did not have access to adequate drying facilities, such as outdoor washing lines or tumble dryers. Some respondents living in accommodation with balconies placed wet laundry on clothes horses outside or next to radiators. Others could not do this due to restricted space or because neighbouring residents discouraged it as unsightly.

Access to secure outdoor play space was also a difficulty. Many lone parents renting apartments could



## RAS has many positive features, particularly in increasing incentives for people to take up employment.

not let their children outside unaccompanied, as the only outdoor area surrounding the apartment block was a car park. The implications for the physical health and mental well-being of children deprived of an area to exercise and play and perhaps socialise with other children are stark.

The above problems added to health and financial worries. A lack of access to adequate laundry facilities meant that some tenants were reliant on expensive commercial laundrettes. Poor or inefficient heating systems added to heating bills. Low temperatures coupled with inadequate ventilation led to the growth of damp or mould, leading to health concerns for children with pre-existing respiratory problems such as asthma.

### Recommended improvements to the Rental Accommodation Scheme

OPEN and Threshold make a number of practical recommendations to improve the standard and suitability of accommodation provided under the Rental Accommodation Scheme. A key recommendation is that for families accommodated under RAS, parents should not be required to share bedrooms with their children. Other recommendations relate to information provision, standards and enforcement, maintenance and repairs, play space, and changing family needs.

Local authorities should ensure that tenants transferring to the RAS are fully advised of their rights and their obligations to the landlord and to the local authority. At a minimum this should be provided in a booklet; this could also usefully include simply explained maintenance advice and the guides for the heating, cooking and other appliances. Where practicable, local authorities should consider holding information seminars for tenants prior to the commencement of their RAS tenancy.

Local authorities should significantly increase inspection of properties to establish compliance with both fire and dwelling standard regulation standards; this applies to all private rented tenancies, not just those with tenants eligible for the RAS. Inspections should be carried out by trained staff, and particular attention should be focused on properties suspected of failure to comply.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) should improve its monitoring and reporting of standards enforcement activity, and ensure that adequate resources are provided to facilitate a high level of inspection activity. Updated minimum dwelling standards regulations should be finalised and published as soon as possible. The DoEHLG should also revisit the issue of tax incentives for refurbishing rental properties; in particular, a scheme to incentivise private landlords to refurbish properties for long-term rental under the RAS would be of value.

The maintenance of appliances is the subject of much tension between landlords and tenants. The prevalence of short-term tenancies in the private rented sector has made appliance provision by landlords the norm, and RAS contracts of four years or less are likely to reflect standard practice. However, with longer-term RAS arrangements, different approaches can be considered. For example, were tenants supported financially to purchase their own 'white goods', they would be responsible for maintenance, limiting landlord's maintenance responsibilities to basic appliances such as the boiler.

RAS contracts should require landlords to undertake annual inspections of appliances, security and safety devices, and to maintain them in good working order. Landlords with five or more units in the RAS should be required to have a nominated contact point for tenants regarding repairs with appropriate maintenance personnel on retainer.

Another issue is access to secure outdoor play areas for children. In the context of increasing recognition of the importance of physical activity for children, this must be considered an important criterion in the allocation of accommodation. Geographical location is important to facilitate childcare arrangements, school or other activities, as well as proximity to extended family and friends who can often provide critical family support.

Local authorities must recognise these needs in making allocations to families, including responding to situation where the family is residing in substandard accommodation, or where their landlord doesn't want to be part of the RAS. It must also be noted that families' needs change and evolve over time, as size and composition evolves.

### Conclusion

RAS has many positive features, particularly in increasing incentives for people to take up employment. But local authorities are currently challenged in sourcing accommodation of appropriate size, configuration or location to suit eligible families, and social housing still remains the better option for many one parent families.

Recent initiatives by the DoEHLG to update minimum dwelling standards regulations and introduce new guidelines for local authorities on the enforcement of standards are most welcome. Also welcome is the DoEHLG's recent consultation paper on introducing new design standards for apartment complexes, which raises some of the issues around storage and study space addressed in the research study.

Together these measures may significantly impact on the future viability of private rented accommodation as a longer-term housing option and accelerate the roll-out of good quality accommodation under RAS. ■

# Incremental purchase: expanding pathways to home ownership



One of the new initiatives contained in *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, was the incremental purchase scheme. **Dermot Coats** explains what it's all about.

## FURTHER READING

Prezza, M. and S. Constantini (1998). 'Sense of Community and Life Satisfaction: Investigation in Three Different Territorial Contexts.' *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* **8**: 181–194.

Sirgy, M. J. and T. Cornwell (2002). 'How Neighborhood Features Affect Quality of Life.' *Social Indicators Research* **59**: 79–114.

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Dermot Coates is a researcher at the Centre for Housing Research

## The story so far

Since independence, the State has traditionally played a significant role in the Irish housing market. This has taken many forms, from the provision of social rented accommodation to assisting prospective owner-occupiers. These latter schemes were initially introduced in the 1930s with localised tenant purchase arrangements, but since *A Plan for Social Housing* (1990), the nature and scope of such schemes has become increasingly diversified in order to better target different categories of need.

The National Economic and Social Council reviewed the challenges facing social and affordable housing (sections 6.4 and 6.5) in *Housing in Ireland: Performance and Policy* (2004). This report recognised the valuable innovations in public policy in recent years. However, the Council also argued that a gap remained in relation to supply-side supports for affordable housing and recommended a 'wider range

of graduated supports for intermediate households'. Among the specific measures suggested in pursuit of this objective were the following:

- Improving the current provision of affordable housing for purchase, and
- The introduction of partial (shared) equity schemes

The initial *Housing Policy Framework – Building Sustainable Communities*, published in 2005, committed the Government to the development of paths to homeownership so that this tenure would be available to as many people as possible where this is their preferred option. The framework also stated that the Government would support access to housing by first-time buyers from low-income groups. Under the terms of *Towards 2016*, the social partners endorsed the principles set out in the framework and stated that they would focus upon 'maintaining the impetus for



...it will afford prospective purchasers the opportunity to start on the path to home ownership...



the process of purchasing one's house provides a mechanism for the accumulation of equity over a lifetime

the delivery of housing at affordable prices to the market; including through State supported schemes, and other appropriate innovations, such as measures to support first-time buyers'.

### What is incremental purchase?

The principal objective of this scheme is to facilitate existing or prospective local authority tenants in becoming homeowners and it is targeted at low-income households for whom the purchase of their first (or 'starter') home would be too great a financial burden currently. The proposed Incremental Purchase Scheme develops the shared equity concept whereby tenants can use their rental payments to accumulate an equity stake in return for assuming responsibility for the maintenance of their dwelling.

Shared equity has been a feature of State interventions in the market in the UK for a number of years but heretofore, this has not been available in Ireland. As an alternative to the UK Government's Shared Ownership scheme, private developers offer a shared equity scheme on behalf of housing associations. Unlike shared ownership, the purchaser buys the majority of the equity at commencement from the developer – say 90 per cent – and the remainder at a later date; there is generally no interest charge or rent on the deferred equity.

According to *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities* (2007), the new scheme will deliver a range of potential benefits to purchasers. Firstly, it will afford prospective purchasers the opportunity to start on the path to home ownership immediately as opposed to the requirement under the tenant purchase scheme that he/she must wait for a specified period. In doing so, this will help to protect against future house price increases. Further benefits include the following:

- Provide consumer choice by creating a more flexible and graduated system of housing supports,
- Encourages a long-term commitment to the community,
- Provides an effective means of saving,
- Establish from the outset an element of mixed tenure in new estates, and
- Establish a sense of ownership and responsibility for the management and maintenance of property amongst participants.

On the basis of the above, it is useful to make a number of brief observations which draw upon selected international readings. Firstly, the purchase of a house is likely to be a household's largest single consumption with the house itself representing a tool for financial investment. In this context, Malpass (2005) has noted that the process of purchasing one's house provides a mechanism for the accumulation of equity over a lifetime (i.e. an opportunity to save/invest). In opening this up to those low-income households for whom the purchase of a house is not a feasible option, the new scheme could go some way to facilitating these households in accumulating equity at

an earlier stage than was otherwise possible. Secondly, the relatively small mortgage credit element of any purchase will potentially ensure a more complete credit supply schedule. In effect, by enhancing the access to the capital market (i.e. by means of reduced cost of repayments), a social welfare gain is realised – this takes the form of facilitating access to the mortgage credit for low-income borrowers (Chinloy and MacDonald, 2005). Finally, there is a significant body of research available that indicates that an improvement in the upkeep of homes in a particular area contributes to a greater sense of community, higher neighbourhood satisfaction and, in turn, an increased likelihood of participation in local groups, etc. (for instance, see: Prezza and Constantini, 1998; Sirgey and Cornwell, 2002).

### More benefits for the purchaser

The new scheme is expected to be targeted at those households in – or applying for – social housing with sufficient means to finance modest annual repayments but for whom existing homeownership supports, such as affordable housing and shared ownership, may not be viable. This will be achieved by setting the costs of incremental purchase in a range between the differential rent and the cost of purchasing under any of the affordable housing supports. It is also intended to incorporate a degree of flexibility, which will facilitate differing mixes of repayment amounts and periods, in order to better meet the varying needs of individual households.

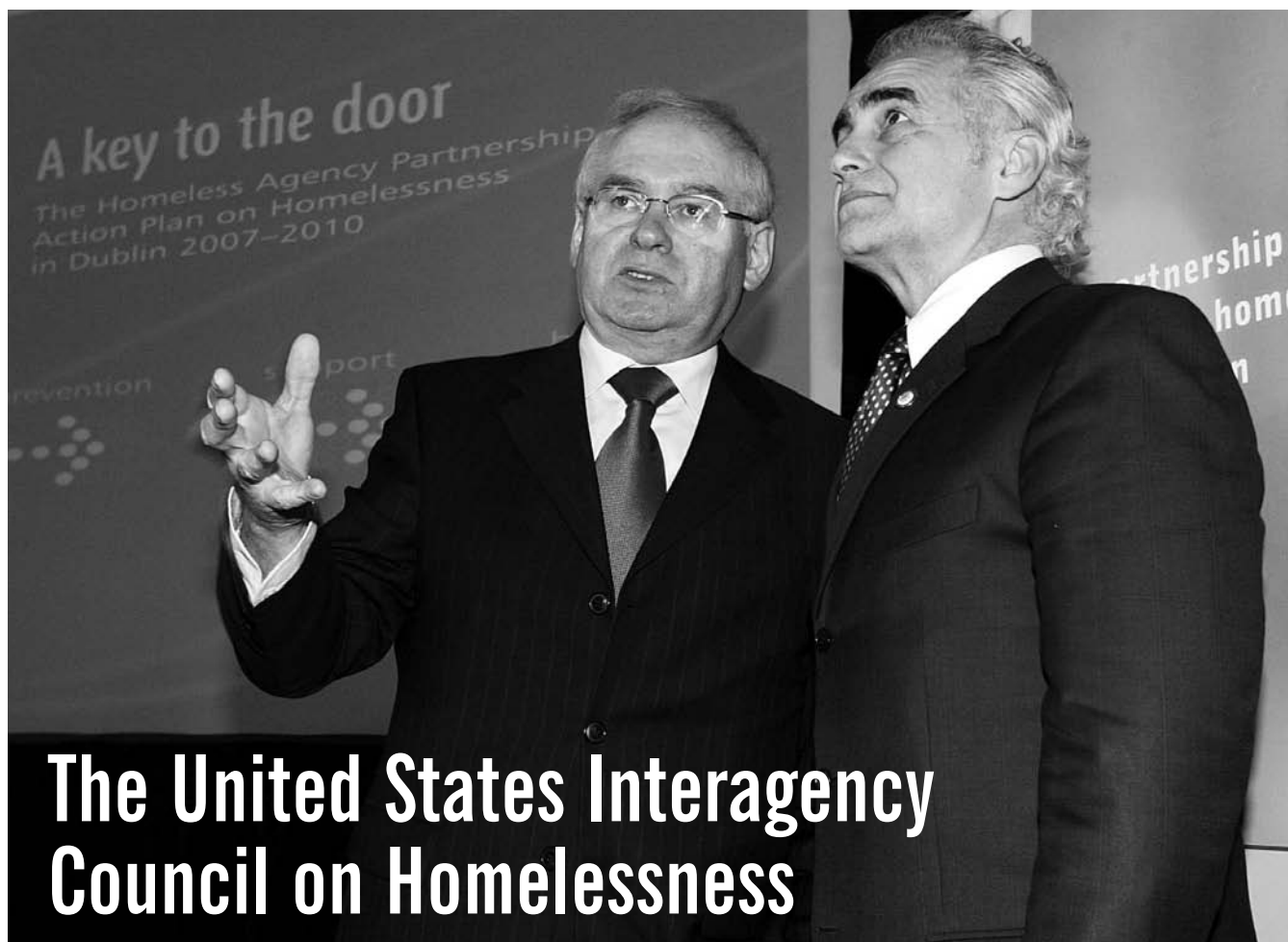
In addition to lower monthly repayments and the other benefits outlined earlier, this scheme has the potential to deliver a number of further benefits to prospective purchasers. In the first instance, it will facilitate purchasers in accumulating equity in an appreciating asset by means of an interest-free loan. Given that the NESC identified the need for a deposit as a major obstacle to home purchase for low-income households, the proposed scheme will be beneficial in assisting purchasers to accumulate equity which can be used as a deposit when trading-up in the future.

The issue of the 'sustainability' of homeownership for low-income households has become increasingly topical in both Ireland and abroad in recent years. Research undertaken by the centre indicates that the incidence of arrears among purchasers under Shared Ownership and the other schemes tend to be quite high. The use of an interest-free repayment structure, for instance, will lower the monthly costs to purchasers and thus, is expected to improve the sustainability of homeownership.

Finally, in the current interest rate environment it is expected that the new scheme should be effective in shielding purchasers from the full effect of future interest rate rises given the relatively small role to be played by mortgage credit. ■

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders or the board of management of the Centre for Housing Research.*





## The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

Noel Ahern TD, Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal with Philip Mangano, executive director, USICH

USICH is a bit like the American version of the Homeless Agency but with a national brief, and serving a population of 300 million instead of 4½ million. Its executive director **Philip Mangano** was in Dublin for the launch of the Homeless Agency's action plan in February, and when the launch was over he talked to **Fran Cassidy**.

**P**hilip Mangano has been described by his supporters as inspirational, and as someone who changed the whole dialogue and approach to homelessness in America.

Whether one wholly agrees with him or not, he proved to be a generous, well-versed and thought provoking interviewee. What follows is a very truncated version of a much longer interview.

### From funding to results oriented investment

'I think that the most significant mindset change in our country was when we moved from twenty years of funding programmes that served homeless people endlessly, to investing in the results that moved people out of homelessness. That juxtaposes funding with investing because when you invest you expect a return on the investment, and the return that we are looking for is in the lives of homeless people – that they will move off our streets and out of languishing in our

shelters, and into a home to establish an independent life with a trajectory towards self sufficiency.

'The current President's management agenda calls for any Federal investment to make three criteria: it has to be data driven; performance based, and most important in relation to homelessness, it needs to be results oriented. You invest in the policy that is created on the basis of data and research and then you implement the policy and monitor it.

### Chronic homelessness

'We dusted off the research available to us. The work of Dr Dennis Culhane in the 1990s helped us to understand that a cohort of about twenty percent of all homeless people were long term in shelters and ricocheting among homeless programmes. He called this 'chronic homelessness'. What he also determined was that the other eighty percent of homeless people in shelters came in and out of homelessness for relatively brief periods, no more than 47 days in a two year period, and managed to get back out of

homelessness without much support or investment. It is the inappropriate policy formulation of the past which only saw people primarily experiencing chronic homelessness and misread that as the entire population. We thought we had to make an investment of the depth required for the person who is mentally ill for the whole homeless population. What we know through research is that people get out of homelessness on their own pretty rapidly.

**I ask providers who have resisted, rejected and ridiculed Housing First one question: what service can be more efficiently and effectively delivered on the street or in a shelter than to someone living in their own place?**

### Resources are misdirected

'We have learned from Dennis Culhane's more recent research on families that there is a tendency to serve the higher functioning and leave behind and spend the least money on the lowest functioning families. It should be just the opposite. But what happens is that families are chosen to go into transitional housing programmes on the basis of how well they are functioning. Will they be able to meet the norms and the obligations? Will they be compliant to the rules? If yes then they go in. They're absorbing all of the generous resources of transitional housing, while the other families who couldn't be compliant over time are not getting as many services. It is exactly the opposite of what has been happening historically on the homeless individual side, when we were spending more money on the lower functioning people but spending it on crisis interventions rather than on solutions. In terms of families we are spending more money on the higher functioning and less on the lower functioning. We need to make that correction.

'We made Culhane's original research the basis of a national priority of public policy on homelessness and constellated policy around people experiencing chronic homelessness. Another factor in creating our policy was a book called *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell wrestles with addressing big social problems, and the fact that we rarely have exactly the right resources to resolve these. What characteristically happens is that we take the limited resources and dissipate them across the entire breadth of the big social problem, and it's never enough to produce results. In fact by dissipating the resources that way, we reify a status quo that isn't working and that is progressively getting worse.

'So the challenge for the policy maker is how to use those modest resources and make a big impact on the social problem. What Gladwell argued is that you should invest through intelligent action on the most visible expression of the big social problem. And

generally that is the aspect of the problem that everybody says is an intractable.

'When you create change in what everybody thought was intractable, you begin to create a *tipping point* for the entire problem. There is a re-moralisation that change is possible. Success with the 'impossible' attracts investment for the more tractable aspects of that big social problem.

### Housing First

'There was a recent study on homeless families done by a researcher at Van Der Bilt University. She studied two groups. One was a group of families that went into transitional housing and stayed there on average for eighteen months, which was very costly. Another was a group of families who didn't go to transitional housing but directly into permanent housing. The housing outcomes were exactly the same.

'Housing First is one of the key innovative ideas that brings us to an end of the managing of homelessness. Previously people would incrementally move through certain elements of care and support, preparing themselves to eventually be restored to housing. It sounds great in theory, but what Housing First does is change that equation. It says the first thing to do is to place the person in housing and then deliver the services to the person in that housing. I ask providers who have resisted, rejected and ridiculed Housing First one question: what service can be more efficiently and effectively delivered on the street or in a shelter than to someone living in their own place? There's never once been a response to that, which I believe means that there is no service that can be better delivered in the randomness of street life or the insecurity of shelter life than in the stability of one's own home.

'Part of the premise of Housing First is that you engage people in whatever situation they are in on the streets. It's an especially appropriate strategy and innovation for people experiencing chronic homelessness. We have the research, it's irrefutable, it works for them. These also tend to be the most expensive people in the population.

### The future of emergency shelters...

'Until we know what works for everybody, of course, there would be a role for emergency shelters because we are trying to reduce the number of people on the streets not through death but through solutions and we know that exposure to the elements for people with very complex psychological and physical ailments can lead to death. So emergency shelters have a role right now. Will they have a role deep into the future? We're not sure yet because we don't know whether this innovation or some other innovation will come along and make them obsolete. I would hope that we would all want emergency shelters to become obsolete. Emergency shelters only declare an emergency. They are not part of the solution. They simply are a hold until we figure out how to get the job done, and it has taken us far too long to figure out how to get the job done.

## Prevention

'We need to stop people from falling into homelessness. In Massachusetts we started doing research at the front door of homeless programmes to find out who is coming in. We came to realise that more than half of the people were coming into the front door of homeless programmes from the back door of other systems – from care, incarceration, military service and treatment. What could be a more inappropriate discharge, from one system of dependency to another, when we had just expended a lot of taxpayer money on foster care, on prison, on psychiatric treatment or on substance abuse treatment. We should have expected a result from those systems in terms of bringing stability into that life and instead they were discharging people directly into homelessness.

'One of the pieces of work we did in Massachusetts was to disengage the front door of homelessness from the back-door of those other systems. Otherwise we're enabling the mainstream systems to continue to be inappropriate in their discharges.

And we need to open the back-door of homelessness into housing. The danger I think for the homeless person, because ultimately they are the customer, has been the lack of creativity that has been extended to ending their homelessness. If we all wait for there to be a sufficient supply for permanent affordable housing created by somebody or for poverty to come to an end before we deign to have homeless people back out of our homeless programme, we do homeless people a grave disservice. We can't wait for there to be sufficient housing, we need to be proactive in creating that housing.

## The end of the flophouse<sup>1</sup>

'I remember in my youth nobody talked about homelessness. We had a few people in New York City, down in the Bowery<sup>2</sup>, but at night they would pay two dollars for a flophouse. We've come to recognise that we dismantled a system of residential capacity that worked for a lot of the people who are now on our streets and in our shelters. During the economic boom periods of the 1980's and 1990's a counter-intuitive thing happened. Firstly homelessness increased dramatically. The second thing was that real estate became so valuable that many of the lodging houses, and rooming houses – those Single Room Occupancies – were lost. But the demand for them stayed the same. So emergency shelter beds increased dramatically to accommodate this.

## Affordable housing for people with no income

We knew that we could induce the private sector to create housing for people who earn sixty percent of median income and if you gave the some tax credits you could bring them all the way down to maybe thirty percent of median income. That was a great

accomplishment. But homeless people are between zero and twenty percent of median income. The private sector cannot get there. The government needs to be involved in creating and inducing the creation of housing specifically for homeless people.

**We can now say it is economically irresponsible to have homeless people on our street because they are more costly to the state then if they were living in housing.**



In my country there's lots of people who talk about 'affordable housing'. What we've come to realise is that affordable housing is a relative term. The term can mislead the public into thinking that if we are creating affordable housing, then that must be for those on the lowest income. In fact it's not. And the term that we should now be using is housing that's affordable to certain groups of people. You might have housing affordable to minimum wage workers, housing affordable to police officers and firefighters, and then you need to have affordable housing for people in the 0 to 20 percent median income.

'Many of our resources are targeted specifically to creating new housing units aimed at homeless people – that are affordable to people on zero to twenty percent of median income. We need to be more creative. We don't want to put this on homeless people by characterising them as deficient – it's their disabilities that keep them from responding to what we've done, nor do we want to be critical of the private sector because they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. We need to be more creative in getting the nomenclature right, in getting the investment targeting correct to remedy homelessness.

## Homelessness is economically irresponsible

'The old arguments were that it is morally wrong to have people on our streets, bad for the quality of life of the community or for business, or that we don't want our children seeing that. We can now say it is economically irresponsible to have homeless people on our street because they are more costly to the state then if they were living in housing. That brings the argument a quantum leap forward. There may be those who can ignore or be indifferent to the moral and spiritual arguments but I've never met a public official who could ignore the economic realities. Now we have the data that indicates the irresponsibility of the management of homelessness which is why there is so much political will in our country now to end it'. ■

<sup>1</sup> A cheap run-down hotel or boarding house

<sup>2</sup> A long-established faith based shelter



# CornerStone Questionnaire

**Cathal Morgan**

Director, Homeless Agency

**When and why did you first get involved in the area of homelessness?**

Many moons ago, I visited a friend who had just started volunteering in a Dublin hostel. I had grown up in a small country village and I must say I was taken aback at the level of poverty experienced by people and just how little by way of state intervention there was. I was hugely impressed by that voluntary organisation and most especially the people working there, whom in the main were volunteers giving of their time to 'do something'! Later I worked in a high support unit for out of home adolescents. I learned quite quickly that the issue or threat of being homeless is much more to do with personal, relationship or family breakdown than it is to do with the lack of a roof over ones head or bricks and mortar.

**Has your understanding of homelessness changed since then?**

Yes. When I worked in the area of drug misuse I came to see quite clearly that we are not only dealing with the effects of poverty and the so called heroin crisis in the '80s, but that there remains generations of peoples and communities whom continue to suffer from those affects today. In my view, the issue of homelessness and the tremendous catch up required in terms of appropriate service responses as well as community development is not divorced from that reality.

**What one policy initiative would make the most difference to homelessness people?**

Implement *A Key to the Door!*  
Seriously, lets think about the vision of *A Key to the Door* for a moment ...  
'By 2010, long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin!' The question for us all is ... do we really believe in this vision and are we really prepared to realise it (as in, put our money, time and effort where our mouth is and meet our commitments)? The answer has to be yes ... we are obliged to do so! I would say that we absolutely need to agree and work together on achieving integrated working, much closer collaborative working across the sector, and the delivery/availability of high quality services and accommodation types to progress people out of the need to remain in emergency accommodation and sleep rough.

**What have you learnt from homeless people you have met?**

The one common theme emerging from my engaging with people whom experience social exclusion of one kind or another, is that they want a change in their circumstances and are not looking for charity but a right to a service which will help assist with that change.

**Do you think poverty and homelessness will always be with us?**

It doesn't have to be.

**What's the difference between NGOs and the statutory sector?**

People working in the NGO and the statutory sector do their absolute to provide good quality service provision and want by and large to make a change to the lives of those who are real need. I think there are all sorts of challenges to working in large institutional settings, particularly statutory ones, where you have to balance a variety of needs, priorities as well as policy perspectives, which sometimes makes it difficult to respond in real time. It is often said that the NGO sector have, to their distinct advantage, the ability in being able to respond more quickly to need and there are examples, which would demonstrate this. The real challenge here is one of understanding and about maintaining a momentum on both sides which are complementary, inclusive and which demonstrate real partnership working to resolve differences whether real or perceived. The signatories to *A Key to the Door* is but one example of this.

**Which matters most, charity or political change?**

You can achieve real political change in order to make the lives of both the individual and the community better only in so far as it is underpinned by a real sense of charity, compassion and fairness.

**What would you do if the homelessness problem was solved and you were no longer needed?**

Probably write and read poetry and maybe grow some grapes. ■

CornerStone is distributed free by the Homeless Agency. If you know someone who would like to receive CornerStone, or you would like your own copy, contact:

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