

Action Plan For Housing and Homelessness



**Rebuilding
Ireland**



This is an initiative of the Government of Ireland



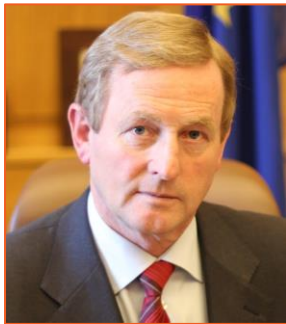
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Foreword by An Taoiseach



In forming the current Government, I was determined that the housing challenge was going to be addressed fully and finally which is why it was positioned as a key objective in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*.

The publication of this Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, well within the timeframe of 100 days set out in the Government Programme, underpins our commitment to end the housing shortage and to tackle homelessness.

Ireland has been here before in terms of needing to provide good quality housing to meet our people's needs. In the past, we showed ourselves to be capable of rising to the challenge and I am committed to ensuring that we will do so again, in a manner that delivers strong, sustainable communities.

This Plan sets out a clear roadmap to achieve the Government's goals to significantly increase and expedite the delivery of social housing units, boost private housing construction, improve the rental market, and deliver on the commitment to see housing supply, in overall terms, increase to some 25,000 new homes every year by 2020.

Ending rough sleeping and the use of unsuitable long-term emergency accommodation, including hotels and B&Bs, for homeless families, are key priorities that take precedence within the Plan.

The range of actions set out in the Plan is ambitious, both in the scale of investment of some €5.5 billion in social housing and housing infrastructure, but also in its pursuit of appropriate reform, acknowledging the need for new thinking if we are going to deliver the kind of housing that people want, in the right places and in a manner that they can afford.

Just as the drafting of this Action Plan has been a collaborative process involving a wide range of interests, so too will its implementation rely on all stakeholders, including Government departments, local authorities, housing agencies, voluntary bodies, and the construction sector, to achieve its ambitious goals.

In order to ensure its success, the key targets of this Action Plan will be subject to regular Cabinet review. The Cabinet Committee on Housing, which I chair, will actively oversee its implementation.

This is a cross-Government plan, which also stretches beyond into the local government and voluntary sectors. I am committed to ensuring that it results in us achieving our critical national ambition of ensuring that all of our people have access to quality and affordable housing, either through their own endeavours or with the support of the State.

An Taoiseach,
Enda Kenny, T.D.
July 2016

Foreword by the Minister



I was appointed as Minister with specific responsibility for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to focus intensively on the challenge of tackling the housing crisis.

The Government's mission is to ensure that everyone can access a home, either on their own or with State support. We are determined to deal with the dramatic under-supply of housing and the problems it generates for families and communities.

I have described the problems faced by our people, particularly in our urban centres, as an emergency situation. None of us can fail to be moved by the plight of people who are homeless, especially families and children living in hotels, and people who are sleeping on our streets.

These are particularly visible examples of our broken housing sector, but no less urgent are the challenges faced by households who face the loss of the home they currently live in, or the lives kept on hold as people struggle to access the housing and rental market.

Rebuilding Ireland, an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, comprises five pillars of concerted actions right across Government – addressing homelessness, accelerating social housing, building more homes, improving the rental sector and utilising existing housing.

A key priority is addressing the unacceptable level of homeless families and long-term homeless people in emergency accommodation, by providing rapid housing delivery, alongside measures to support those at risk of losing their homes.

A truly ambitious social housing programme of 47,000 units to 2021 will be delivered with funding of €5.35 billion.

We have also put in place a €200m Infrastructure Fund to open up large sites where homes are needed and where homes are now going to be built.

In addition, we have increased the levels of Rent Supplement and the Housing Assistance Payment to give people, who need it most, more security to remain in their homes.

The output of private housing will increase, by enhancing the viability of construction, in order to double the completion level of additional homes in the next four years to deliver the 25,000 homes or more we need annually.

We will develop a strategy for a viable, sustainable and affordable rental sector, with early legislative actions to protect tenants and landlords.

We will also ensure that available existing housing is used to the maximum degree possible.

Achieving these goals will rebuild Ireland in a way that affects every aspect of our lives. Good housing anchors strong communities, a performing economy and an environment of quality.

This Plan will be driven by the Government in a way that will be visible, tangible and totally focused around results on the ground – more homes, at an affordable price, in the places where they are needed and a reduction in the numbers of homeless people in hotels and emergency accommodation.

The publication of this Plan is only the beginning and the implementation has already started. I am establishing a special Housing Delivery Office within my Department which will play a key role in the implementation of this Plan. There will also be a new Housing Procurement Unit in the Housing Agency and the role of local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies will be critical. So that the Plan's delivery is grounded in reality, I am establishing a Stakeholder Forum that will act as a vehicle for continuous feedback on the practical experience of implementation.

This Plan fulfils the strong commitment made in the *Programme for a Partnership Government* to deliver an action plan for housing in the first 100 days. Working with my colleague Damien English T.D., Minister of State for Housing and Urban Renewal, its preparation has been informed, in particular, by the *Report of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness* published last month and by extensive engagement with key stakeholders. I wish to record my appreciation to all those who shared their thoughts and ideas with my Department and with me directly and I also wish to thank my Government colleagues for their vital support in putting this Action Plan together.

Rebuilding Ireland is a far-reaching and ambitious programme. By actively and constructively working together, we will accelerate supply and transform housing in a way that will affect every community in Ireland. I am determined that visible evidence of this Plan's effectiveness will be seen across the country in the months and years ahead.

Simon Coveney, T.D.
Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
July 2016

Overview of the Action Plan

Why we need an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness

Housing is a basic human and social requirement.

Good housing anchors strong communities, a performing economy and an environment of quality.

Since the economic collapse in 2008, very low levels of housing have been constructed, especially in the main cities and urban areas where they have continued to be needed.

Our economy has recovered quickly and increasing population and employment mean that a significant increase in new homes is needed for a growing and working economy, and to address the significant level of social housing need.

Under-provision of housing, whether by insufficient construction of new housing or existing housing not being used to its full potential, is one of the last significant legacies of the economic downturn to be tackled. While it has been a major focus for Government over the past five years, it is apparent now that the actions taken to date, while important steps in their own right, have not delivered a response of the scale and speed required.

Construction 2020 - A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector and the *Social Housing Strategy 2020*, both of which were published in 2014, contain measures to address issues and constraints in the construction and development sectors and in the provision of a range of social housing outcomes, respectively. The packages of actions being delivered through these Strategies are having a positive impact, but not at the pace necessary to meet current pressures and pent-up demands.

Accelerating delivery of housing for the private, social and rented sectors is a key priority for the Government. Ensuring sufficient stable and sustained provision of housing that is affordable, in the right locations, meets peoples different needs and is of lasting quality is one of the greatest challenges facing the country at present. The solutions to this challenge are wide-ranging and require a number of immediate-, medium- and long-term actions to increase delivery and address underlying structural issues that, up to now, have been obstacles to creating a more stable and sustainable housing market.

The response to current housing challenges must be of sufficient scale to address both the pent-up demand from years of under-supply of new housing and the projected needs over the coming years.

While this Action Plan does not represent the first effort in recent years by the State to respond to housing challenges, it represents a significant step forward in accelerating the delivery of housing units in the right locations and to facilitate sustained provision into the long term.

Core Objectives of the Plan

The overarching aim of this Action Plan is to ramp up delivery of housing from its current under-supply across all tenures to help individuals and families meet their housing needs, and to help those who are currently housed to remain in their homes or be provided with appropriate options of alternative accommodation, especially those families in emergency accommodation.

This Plan sets ambitious targets to double the annual level of residential construction to 25,000 homes and deliver 47,000 units of social housing in the period to 2021, while at the same time making the best use of the existing housing stock and laying the foundations for a more vibrant and responsive private rented sector. Achieving the aim of accelerated delivery will contribute to the following core objectives:

- Addressing the unacceptable level of households, particularly families, in emergency accommodation;
- Moderating rental and purchase price inflation, particularly in urban areas;
- Addressing a growing affordability gap for many households wishing to purchase their own homes;
- Maturing the rental sector so that tenants see it as one that offers security, quality and choice of tenure in the right locations and providers see it as one they can invest in with certainty;
- Ensuring housing's contribution to the national economy is steady and supportive of sustainable economic growth; and
- Delivering housing in a way that meets current needs while contributing to wider objectives such as the need to support sustainable urban and rural development and communities and maximise the contribution of the built environment to addressing climate change.

In order to meet these objectives and society's valid expectations of the steps the State should be taking to address a dysfunctional and under-performing housing sector, we will need to mobilise and deploy the right mix of resources and actions to increase housing output, particularly at more affordable prices, encourage the delivery of more and better rental options, keep people in their homes and bring vacant and under-utilised properties back into full use.

The development of this Action Plan is a central component of the *Programme for a Partnership Government* and its preparation has been informed, in particular, by the *Report of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness (June 2016)* and extensive engagement with key stakeholders. Continued collaborative engagement will be a hallmark of the implementation phase to ensure that the ambition of the Action Plan is fully realised. A specific forum for stakeholder engagement for the implementation phase will be established and chaired at Ministerial level.

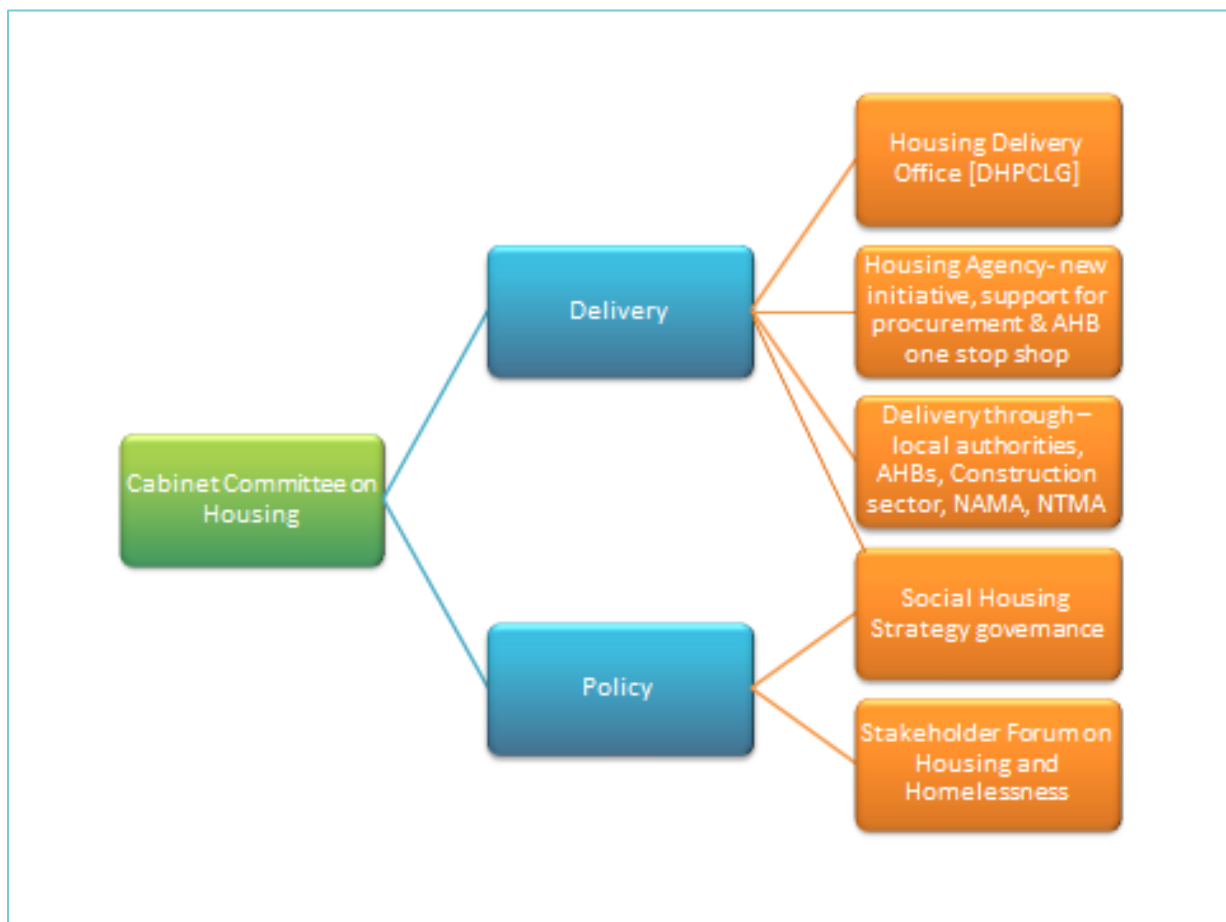
A special Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach, has been established to oversee both the development and implementation of this Action Plan. Monthly updates on housing activity will be published and overall progress reports on the Plan will be published on a quarterly basis.

A high-level Housing Delivery Office is being established within the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG) to support local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and all stakeholders involved in the delivery of housing projects and to drive delivery of some of the key ambitious private and social housing elements of this Action Plan. This Office, which will be staffed by project management, procurement and technical experts and which will report directly to the Secretary General, will work across the range of stakeholders to accelerate housing delivery, both private and social, on key sites, identify further mechanisms to accelerate delivery, and support the roll-out of complex construction projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery.

A Housing Procurement Unit will be established within the Housing Agency to provide a procurement centre of excellence and advice in support of local authorities and AHBs in the accelerated delivery of their social housing programmes. This new Unit will work with local authorities and AHBs to build their capacity and expertise to meet the scale and complexity associated with the ambitious programme of delivery in this Action Plan. It will be available to co-ordinate project development and project briefs in local authority areas, and will also be in a position to manage the design and tendering processes for local authorities and AHBs, as required, including the procurement of consultants and contractors.

The following figure summarises the governance and oversight arrangements for the delivery of this Plan.

Figure 1: Governance oversight of the Action Plan



Key Action Areas

Providing housing is the result of complex interactions in terms of land supply, development finance, market viability, industry capacity, various regulatory systems and above all the needs of house buyers and tenants. All of these areas require attention to restructure a dysfunctional and under-performing housing sector. The emphasis in this Plan is therefore on action, which will be taken across a number of main areas of change and reform:

Table 1: Key Action Areas

Area of action	Examples of initiatives
Financing/ Viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €5.35 billion funding over the period to support the delivery of 47,000 units of social housing by end-2021, including new initiatives to supply homes for families currently in emergency accommodation • €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to provide enabling infrastructure that opens up large sites for early development by housing providers, with potential to develop 15,000-20,000 new homes • Complementary NTMA large-scale infrastructure development finance fund for on-site works by developers • Opening up land supply and low-cost State lands • Funding of increased limits for rent supplement and Housing Assistance Payment from 1 July 2016 • Introduction of an affordable rental scheme • Measures to support greater provision of student accommodation
Regulatory Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed up the planning process by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Allowing large housing applications to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála ◦ Streamlining "Part 8" procedures for local authority and approved housing body housing proposals ◦ Removing barriers to re-using vacant properties • Bringing forward a strategy for the rental sector by end-2016 • Putting the National Planning Framework on a statutory footing • Potential for further legislative measures in relation to mortgage arrears to be examined
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Housing Delivery Office in DHPCLG will drive delivery on key lands (including pathfinder projects) and the Housing Agency will spearhead a new procurement centre of excellence, provide a one-stop-shop for the AHB sector and engage in directly procuring units from the private sector • Delivery of 20,000 homes by NAMA • Expanded and accelerated Rapid-Build Programme to deliver 1,500 social housing units • New NTMA Special Purpose Vehicle to deliver additional social housing as part of mixed-tenure developments • Overhaul of the social housing design, approval and delivery procedures to ensure swifter decision-making and cutting unnecessary time delays • Tripling of the target for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin and extend the approach to other urban areas • Accelerated HAP delivery • Facilitate more households with Mortgage to Rent • Resourcing An Bord Pleanála and local authorities to ensure that they meet their statutory deadlines

Area of action	Examples of initiatives
Supporting measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced supports for homeless families with children • Enhanced supports for homeless people with mental health and addiction issues • New initiative to provide access to independent expert financial and legal advice for people facing serious mortgage arrears • Measures to support construction innovation and skills • Better management of social housing stock through rapid re-letting of vacant units and introduction of Choice-Based Letting

The *Programme for a Partnership Government* recognised the difficulties faced by first-time buyers in accessing mortgage finance and the pressure this has placed on the rental market. This in turn may be hampering the recovery of the residential construction sector. As a complement to the structural actions set out in this Plan, the Government is working with the Central Bank, as part of its review of its mortgage lending limits, to develop a new “Help to Buy” scheme to ensure availability of adequate, affordable mortgage finance or mortgage insurance for first-time buyers as new housing output comes onstream. Work on the design of this scheme is ongoing in the context of Budget 2017.

Five Key Pillars of the Plan

These high level actions will support a range of actions across the five key pillars of the Action Plan, illustrated in Figure 2;

Figure 2: Five Pillars of the Action Plan



The actions proposed under each of these five pillars can be summarised as follows:

Pillar 1 – Address Homelessness

Provide early solutions to address the unacceptable level of families in emergency accommodation; deliver inter-agency supports for people who are currently homeless, with a particular emphasis on minimising the incidence of rough sleeping, and enhance State supports to keep people in their own homes.

Pillar 2 – Accelerate Social Housing

Increase the level and speed of delivery of social housing and other State-supported housing.

Pillar 3 – Build More Homes

Increase the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices.

Pillar 4 – Improve the Rental Sector

Address the obstacles to greater private rented sector delivery, to improve the supply of units at affordable rents.

Pillar 5 – Utilise Existing Housing

Ensure that existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible - focusing on measures to use vacant stock to renew urban and rural areas

Many of these actions are inter-related and inter-dependent. In outlining the actions, this Action Plan contains key targets and deadlines for delivery by a number of Government Departments, local authorities and other bodies which will be subject to regular Cabinet Committee review.

Pathfinders

What people want to see most flowing from this Action Plan is increased delivery of housing on the ground. This will require implementation of all the actions outlined in the Plan. However, in order to provide visible evidence of the Plan's capacity to drive the delivery of the homes that people need, where they need them, a series of Pathfinder Projects will be the focus of particular attention, to test and demonstrate the Action Plan's effectiveness.

Tackling Homelessness

- By mid-2017, emergency hotel and B&B type accommodation for families will only be used in limited circumstances and will have been largely replaced by suitable permanent family accommodation by delivering additional housing solutions including through an expanded Rapid-Build Housing programme;
- The targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin will be tripled and the housing-led approach will be extended to other urban areas; and
- Additional supports will be provided to tackle the complex needs of homeless people, including in relation to mental health and addiction.

Delivering Social Housing

- Five demonstration projects will be selected across the local authority sector as exemplars for the remainder of the sector in the integrated achievement of all the key objectives of this Action Plan, with a focus on efficient delivery, cost effective and responsive design, mix of types and tenure, and re-use of existing stock and/or brownfield development land that regenerates urban areas.
- These projects will be followed by a biennial Social Housing Delivery Awards competition organised in conjunction with the key local authority, tenant, housing and built environment professions, in order to both highlight and champion excellence in the delivery area.

Innovation in Delivering Mixed Social and Affordable Housing

- Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council will progress a mixed tenure development of 150 units for social and affordable rental housing purposes on a joint venture basis with an Approved Housing Body, utilising a ready-to-go site.

Acquiring Vacant Homes for Social Housing

- Commencing immediately, the Housing Agency will work towards acquiring 1,600 vacant homes from the investment or loan portfolios of banks and other financial institutions over the period to 2020, so that they can be added to the stock of social housing.

Affordable Rental

- An Affordable Rental Scheme will be finalised in order to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. The Scheme is at an advanced stage of development and will be finalised by end Q3 2016, for roll-out by potential housing providers thereafter.
- Subject to the finalisation of the Scheme by Government and market take-up thereafter, the commitment by the Government of €10m in annual funding will be harnessed to deliver at least 2,000 rental properties over a range of projects by 2018, from which pathfinder projects will be drawn.

Removing Infrastructure Blockages

- Inactive zoned housing sites with planning permission will be activated starting from 2017 through €200m of pump-priming funding under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF).
- In tandem with LIHAF, the expanded social housing programme will support local authority and AHB delivery on these sites and the associated investment in water infrastructure by Irish Water, transport infrastructure by Transport Infrastructure Ireland and school provision in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, will be progressed in parallel.
- By end 2016, 15-20 sites will be identified with the capability to deliver at least 15,000-20,000 new homes over the following three years, as exemplars for the co-ordination and delivery of plan-led housing development.

Releasing State Lands

- DHPCLG will work with local authorities to select and progress three key sites in local authority ownership for master-planning and delivery of at least 3,000 new homes over the 2017-2021 period in Dublin and other key regional cities.
- A programme will be put in place under a State Lands Management Group to identify and release further sites from the ownership of other public bodies for master-planning and making them available to a variety of scales of developers with the potential to deliver at least 500 homes initially in 2017 and building up incrementally after that to a potential capacity for provision of up to 1,000 homes annually by 2021.

Providing Homes Cost Effectively

- A competition will be held to champion best practice, efficient and cost effective design to enable the delivery of high quality homes in sustainable communities at an affordable level. Designed to demonstrate high quality, affordable, efficient design and construction, this initiative is aimed at challenging designers and housing providers to come up with an innovative and high quality design and delivery approach that is both fully building standard and regulation compliant. The design must also be capable of delivering new homes for less than €200,000 ("all in" delivery cost net of site cost), on foot of which a suitable State site will be provided for delivery of the homes within 18 months.

Planning for Starter Homes

- Local authorities, through their Housing Strategies, will be tasked to develop demonstration projects on privately owned sites for the provision of starter homes, reflecting a more progressive approach to such strategies which are required under Part V of the Planning and Development Acts.

More Accommodation for Students

- 500 new student accommodation places will be developed in the new Dublin Institute of Technology campus in Grangegorman in Dublin to establish a model for funding that will be rolled out to other locations.

Meeting Older People's Housing Needs

- Dublin City Council will submit a detailed proposal for a large-scale (50-60 home) project for accommodating older people by end 2016 as a demonstration project in parallel with similar proposals in other local authority areas.
- Competitions will be run, focusing on three distinct areas with the aim to apply the winning solutions in a new housing/retrofit project:
 - Smart technologies in housing for older people;
 - Adaptation of existing houses to meet the needs of older people; and
 - Lifetime communities.

Urban and Rural Renewal

- The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) will be used to develop new models and design solutions under a new Repair and Leasing Initiative (RLI) for re-using vacant city and town centre premises for residential use and rental purposes.
- DHPCLG and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) will work together to provide funding for a range of demonstration projects across the country as part of the €30m Town and Village Renewal initiative to support local authorities in bringing people back into town and village centres.

Housing for People with Disabilities

- In continuing to support the Department of Health (DoH) and Health Services Executive (HSE) in the programme of transitioning people from congregated settings to community-based living, through ring-fenced housing capital provision, DHPCLG has earmarked a fund of €10m for this purpose in 2016 and a call for proposals has issued to the sector. Further capital funding will be provided in 2017/2018 for this programme, if required.
- A pilot project in Laois/Offaly involving 15 people commenced in 2015, as part of an initiative to support the transitioning of people with low- and medium-support needs from HSE mental health facilities to more appropriate community-based arrangements. The project, which is being part-funded by DHPCLG and the HSE on a 50/50 basis, includes a new model of support with the introduction of a Mental Health Tenancy Sustainment Officer. A comprehensive evaluation of this pilot project is currently being finalised by the Housing Agency and will be considered by DHPCLG, DoH and the HSE, to inform future policies and measures to support community living arrangements by people with mental health issues.

Conclusion

In response to the complexity and diversity of the issues within the housing sector presently, which are examined in detail in the next section, Table 2 sets out the overarching priorities to be addressed by this Action Plan. These are expanded on in each of the Pillars which follow and detailed actions are set out in Appendix 1, while a summary of how these respond to the principal recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness are set out in Appendix 2. In addition, a summary of the key elements requiring legislative underpinning is set out in Appendix 3, while Appendix 4 sets out a short summary of the National Planning Framework, currently being developed.

Table 2: Key actions to be delivered under the Action Plan

Pillar objective	Key actions
<p>Provide early solutions to address the unacceptable level of families in emergency accommodation; deliver inter-agency supports for people who are currently homeless, with a particular emphasis on minimising the incidence of rough-sleeping; and enhance State supports to keep people in their own homes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that by mid-2017 hotels are only used in limited circumstances for emergency accommodation for families, by meeting housing needs through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and general housing allocations, and by providing new supply to be delivered through - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ An expanded Rapid Build Housing programme [1,500 units] ◦ A Housing Agency initiative to acquire vacant houses [1,600 units] • Triple the targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin and extend the housing-led approach to other urban areas • Enhance supports for homeless families with children • Enhance supports for homeless people with mental health and addiction issues • Ensure an adequate supply of emergency accommodation nationally • Extend tenancy sustainment measures nationwide • Increased Rent Supplement and HAP limits • New initiative to provide access to independent expert financial and legal advice for people facing serious mortgage arrears • Potential for further legislative measures in relation to mortgage arrears to be examined • Facilitate more households with Mortgage to Rent
<p>Increase the level and speed of delivery of social housing and other State-supported housing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47,000 social housing units delivered by 2021, supported by investment of €5.35 billion • Accelerated Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) delivery • NTMA Housing Fund to deliver increased housing supply • Mixed-tenure developments on State lands and other lands • Establishment of a Housing Delivery Office and Housing Procurement Unit • Extensive supports for Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies • Streamlined approval processes • Housing for specific groups: meeting the needs of the vulnerable

Pillar objective	Key actions
<p>Increase the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubling of output to deliver over 25,000 units per annum on average over the period of the Plan [2017-2021], aided by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opening up land supply and low-cost State lands ○ Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund ○ NTMA financing of large-scale “on-site” infrastructure ○ Planning reforms ○ Putting in place a National Planning Framework and land management actions ○ Efficient design and delivery methods to lower housing delivery costs ○ Measures to support construction innovation and skills
<p>Address the obstacles to greater private rented sector delivery, to improve the supply of units at affordable rents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for a viable and sustainable rental sector • Introduce legislation on balanced arrangements for tenancy terminations • Review the standards for rental accommodation • Enhance the role of the Residential Tenancies Board • Introduce an Affordable Rental Scheme • Encourage “build to rent” • Support greater provision of student accommodation
<p>Ensure that existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible - focusing on measures to use vacant stock to renew urban and rural areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better management of social housing through rapid re-letting of vacant units (Voids) and introduction of Choice-Based Letting • A review of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme • Housing Agency purchases of vacant houses held by banks and financial institutions • Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative • Removing regulatory barriers to re-using vacant properties • Urban regeneration, including Living City Initiative • Village and rural renewal initiatives • Continuation of work to resolve unfinished estates

Context for this Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness

Government policy on housing in Ireland has for many years aimed to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, every household can access secure, good quality and affordable housing suited to its needs and located within sustainable communities.

The provision of quality housing in the right locations underpins wider national and regional economic and social progress, not least by ensuring that our cities, towns and villages are successful and attractive places to live and work.

Housing is one of the biggest areas of household expenditure. However, the costs of housing for all households, whether renting or owning, should not be disproportionately expensive. Affordability must therefore be a central element of all housing and related policies, with a view to ensuring that housing costs are just and reasonable and that volatility in price, as seen in the past, is avoided. However, quality is also an important objective. A home must be well-designed, durable, adaptable to changing needs and energy efficient. A well-built home is a significant investment.

Housing and Wider Public Policy

Housing is important for Government policy to address in the social, economic and environmental areas because:

- **Housing is basic human requirement**, but left to its own devices the market would not ensure all households are housed appropriately or at all, which is the principal reason for the existence of a social housing programme;
- **Ensuring good standards in housing provision is a key element of achieving wider planning and environmental aims**, in all areas, urban and rural;
- **Housing is a core sector of the economy**, with important links to employment and banking. It is important to acknowledge that the links between the financial sector and housing have been a source of very considerable economic volatility in the recent past;
- **Inflation in rental and purchase markets** drives wage growth, thereby eroding competitiveness, and diminishes affordability, which places pressure on household budgets;
- **Excessive housing costs have demographic impacts**, including a tendency for households to defer important lifecycle choices in order to prioritise home purchase;
- **Rising rents cause homelessness by** driving low-income households out of the market, leaving such households with little choice other than to seek access to social housing. Rising rents can also cause low-income households to be concentrated in certain areas.

Housing provision is also a policy area where there are competing and sometimes conflicting interests. For example, increasing house prices may increase the wealth of some households but can also increase costs for other less well-off households. The State therefore has an important role in overseeing, regulating and managing the housing sector to achieve balanced outcomes which satisfy and support social, economic and environmental objectives.

Housing Challenges

As an integral part of preparing this Action Plan, a number of pressing challenges relating to the current profile of the housing sector in Ireland have been considered.

The Housing Sector

Over the past 20 to 30 years, as Table 3 below indicates, housing provision has moved from a model where a significant share of overall annual housing delivery was accounted for by direct provision of mainly local authority housing, often in large public housing schemes, with the remainder provided by the private housing market across a range of housing types, to a model where housing provision has been predominantly provided by the private market, with social housing delivered thereafter through various rental sector schemes.

Table 3: Market and Non-Market Housing Provision, 1975 - 2015

Year	Market	%	Non-market	%
1975	18,098	67	8,794	33
2005	75,398	93	5,559	7
2014	10,501	95	515	5

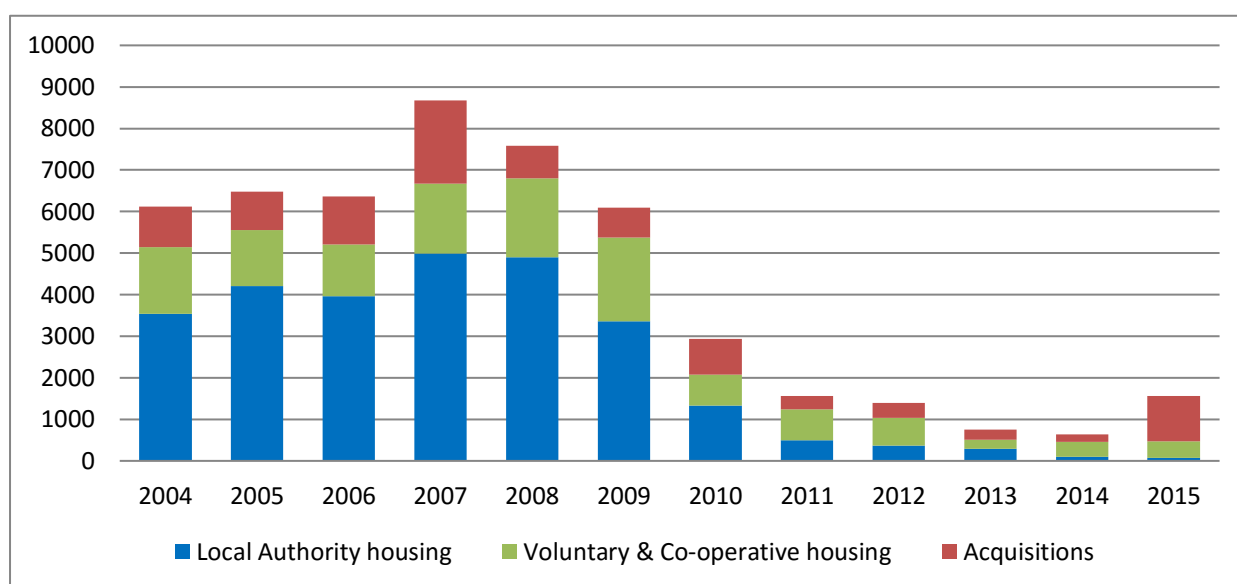
Source: Professor P.J. Drudy, *Report of the Committee on Housing and Homelessness*, June 2016

Social Housing

Graphs 1 and 2 illustrate the degree to which demand for social housing has been met by private landlords through a number of schemes administered by Local Authorities on behalf of the Government, such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).

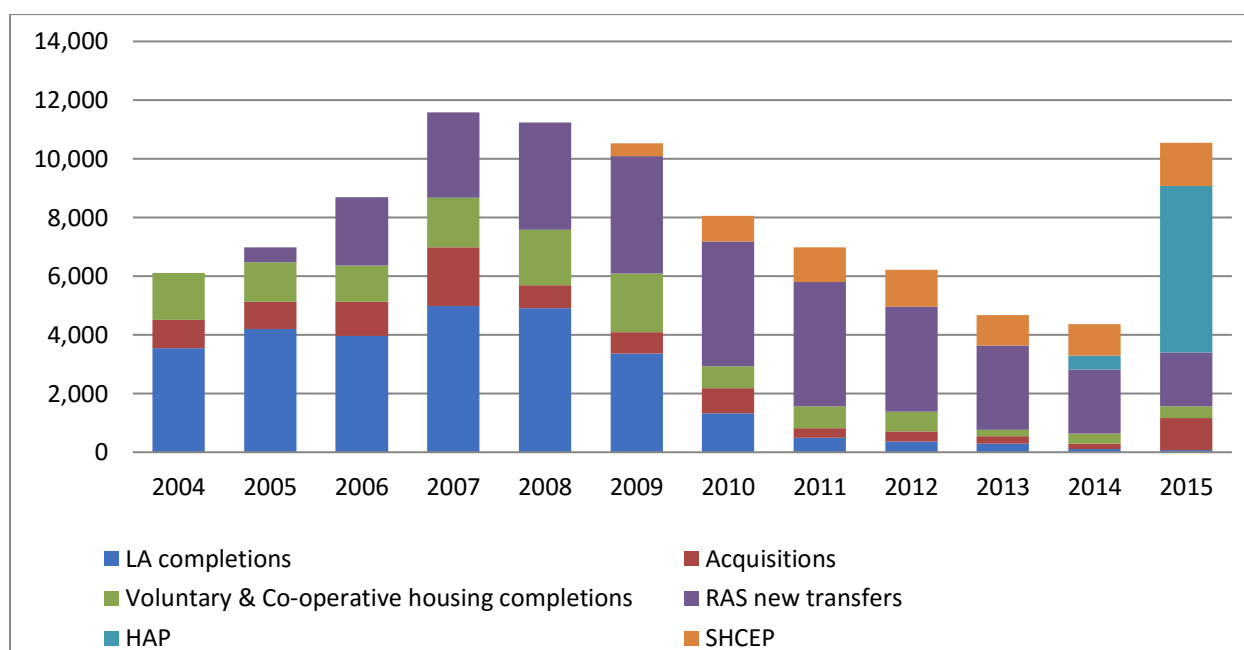
One of the benefits of this transition in the mechanisms for social housing delivery has been to deliver a better mix between private and social housing, rather than the reliance on large mono-tenure public housing projects which characterised housing investment in the 1960s and 1970s, many of which have since had to be regenerated in more recent years.

Graph 1: Social Housing Completions and Acquisitions, 2004-2015



Source: DHPCLG (2016) statistics. *Report of the Committee on Housing and Homelessness*, June 2016.

Graph 2: Spectrum of Social Housing Provision, 2004-2015¹



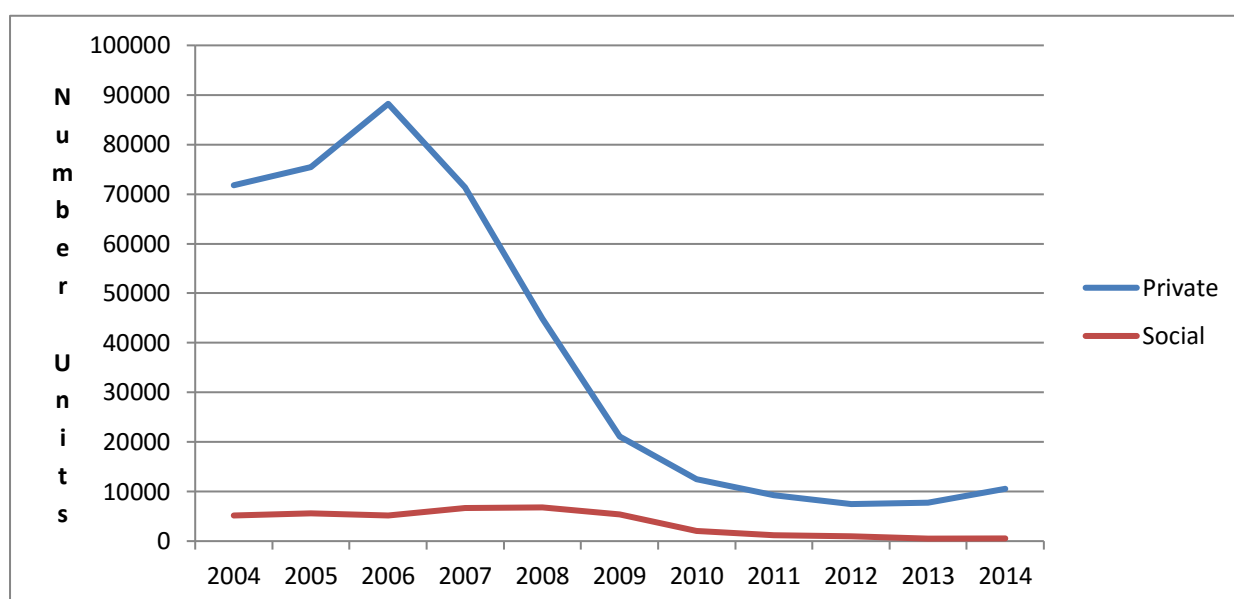
Source: DHPCLG (2016) statistics. *Report of the Committee on Housing and Homelessness*, June 2016.

Decline in House Completions

The mix of public housing completions and social housing rental models produced a high level of mixed community type housing up until about 2008 when around 11,000 units were delivered. The economic contraction which began in 2008 brought about a severe decline in the number of house completions within the private and social sectors as presented in Graph 3.

¹The social housing provision figure for 2015 indicated in this graph does not include the 'voids' figure of 2,696 which was included in the report on Social Housing Output in 2015.

Graph 3: House Completions by Sector, 2004-2014



Source: Report of the *Committee on Housing and Homelessness*, June 2016

The challenges presently faced in the housing sector are complex, heightened by legacy effects of the post-2008 economic contraction, the impacts of which were extreme by any international measure.

The collapse of the credit-driven property market decimated the development industry and seriously impaired the banking sector. The adjustment to a new multi-stranded financing model for house financing remains a “work-in-progress”, contributing to a continued low level of investment in the provision of housing generally.

Persistent Under-supply

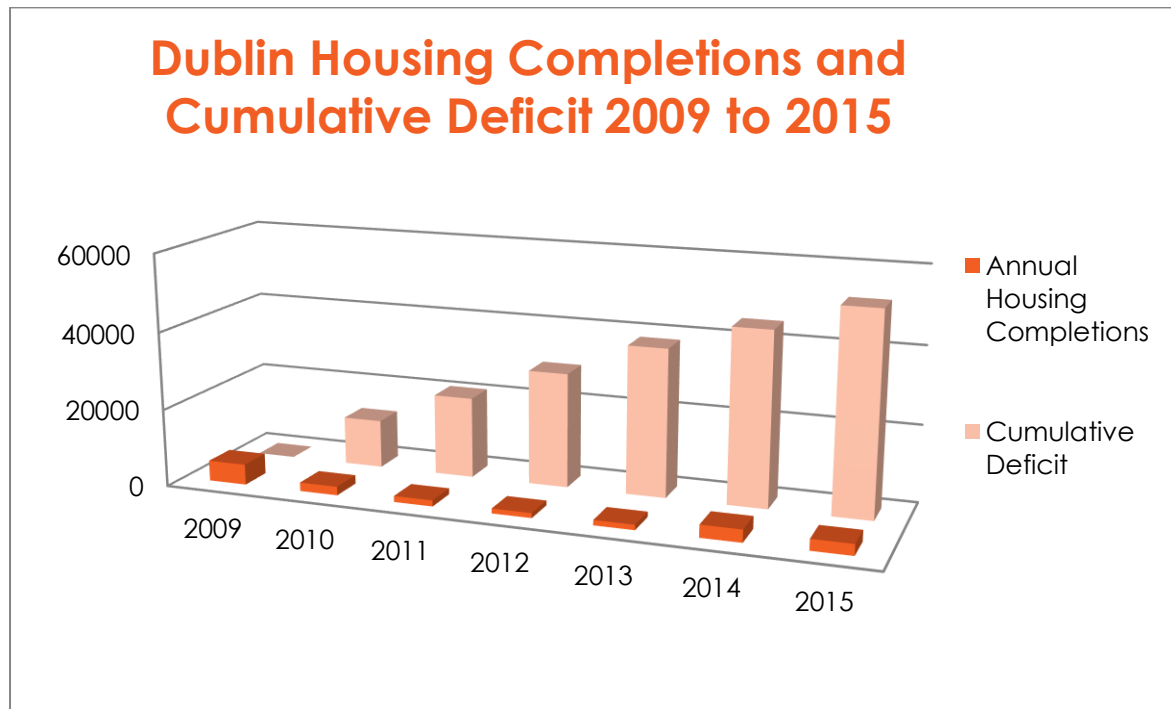
Under-supply has been most marked in urban areas, especially in Dublin but also in Cork and other regional cities and larger towns. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) research, published in 2014, estimated an annual new home requirement of 25,000 units, driven by demographic change, household formation and a level of obsolescence of existing stock. The ESRI research also outlined other potential scenarios with regard to economic growth, household formation and migration patterns, which would give rise to an annual requirement in excess of 25,000 units. Given the strength of the economic recovery which has occurred in some areas in recent years, it may be the case that such scenarios are more appropriate to current circumstances.

The Dublin Housing Supply Task Force, established under the Government’s *Construction 2020* Strategy, provides data on housing developments with planning permission and those with active construction underway in the four Dublin local authority areas. Data for Q1 2016 indicate the following:

- There are 115 active housing sites in the Dublin Region, where 10 or more homes are under construction,
- Planning permission is in place for 26,886 homes, whereas only 4,809 or 18% of these potential units are currently under active construction,
- 22,077 or 82% of potential homes with planning permission in Dublin are not commenced at all.

Since 2009, persistent under-supply, especially in Dublin, means that the housing supply deficit is likely to currently exceed 50,000 homes (see Graph 4 below), suggesting that to address both accumulated under-supply and meet future needs, the objective may well need to be to reach supply levels in excess of 25,000 units per annum. The first step, however, is to move from current levels (12,666 in 2015) towards 25,000 per annum as quickly as possible – and it is this transition, coupled with a significant increase and acceleration in social housing delivery, that is the primary focus of this Plan, the achievement of which will require transformational actions across social, private and rental housing.

Graph 4: Completions and Cumulative Deficit in the Four Dublin Local Authorities, 2009-2015



Source: DHPCLG

In addition, Ireland's economy is growing at a high rate and this recovery is taking place to a considerable degree in Dublin and other large urban areas, with associated increases in household formation, incomes and demand for new homes. The result has been price inflation, particularly in urban rental markets over the past two years. Current economic projections for sustained growth and increasing employment levels will contribute to further demand increases in urban areas, meaning that the recent decade of severe under-supply in Dublin will have on-going and enduring economic and social consequences if left unchecked. Yet, the capacity of the housing sector to meet increased demand is currently limited.

However, the housing challenge is not simply about providing more homes - it is also about moving away from cycles of volatility in supply and affordability. Ireland needs to move towards a more stable, cost effective, affordable housing provision model that also delivers the right level of housing, in the right places and at the right time.

DHPCLG will work closely with the ESRI and the Housing Agency to improve understanding of conditions in housing markets around the country and thereby better inform the implementation and design of current and future policy measures. This work will involve preparing national and sub-national geographic breakdowns of actual and anticipated supply and demand, across tenure types, based on demographic and macroeconomic developments. There will also be scope for research focusing on specific housing-related themes.

Composition

The structure of the housing sector in terms of tenure is also changing and this has been taken into account in preparing this Action Plan. Key trends include:

- Declining levels of home ownership to just under 70% in 2014.
- A corresponding increase in the numbers of renting households. As of Q1 2016, the Residential Tenancies Board registered 323,758 tenancies.
- Concentration of the rental sector in urban areas and a high proportion of renting households dependent on social housing supports.
- Falling household sizes means the average size had reduced to 2.7 people in 2015.
- Persistent, albeit improving, levels of households in mortgage arrears; as of Q1 2016, 85,989 accounts, or 11% of the total, were in arrears.
- An ageing population, which will represent a very significant demographic and societal challenge and which has implications for the design, modification and location of housing.

Location and Land Supply

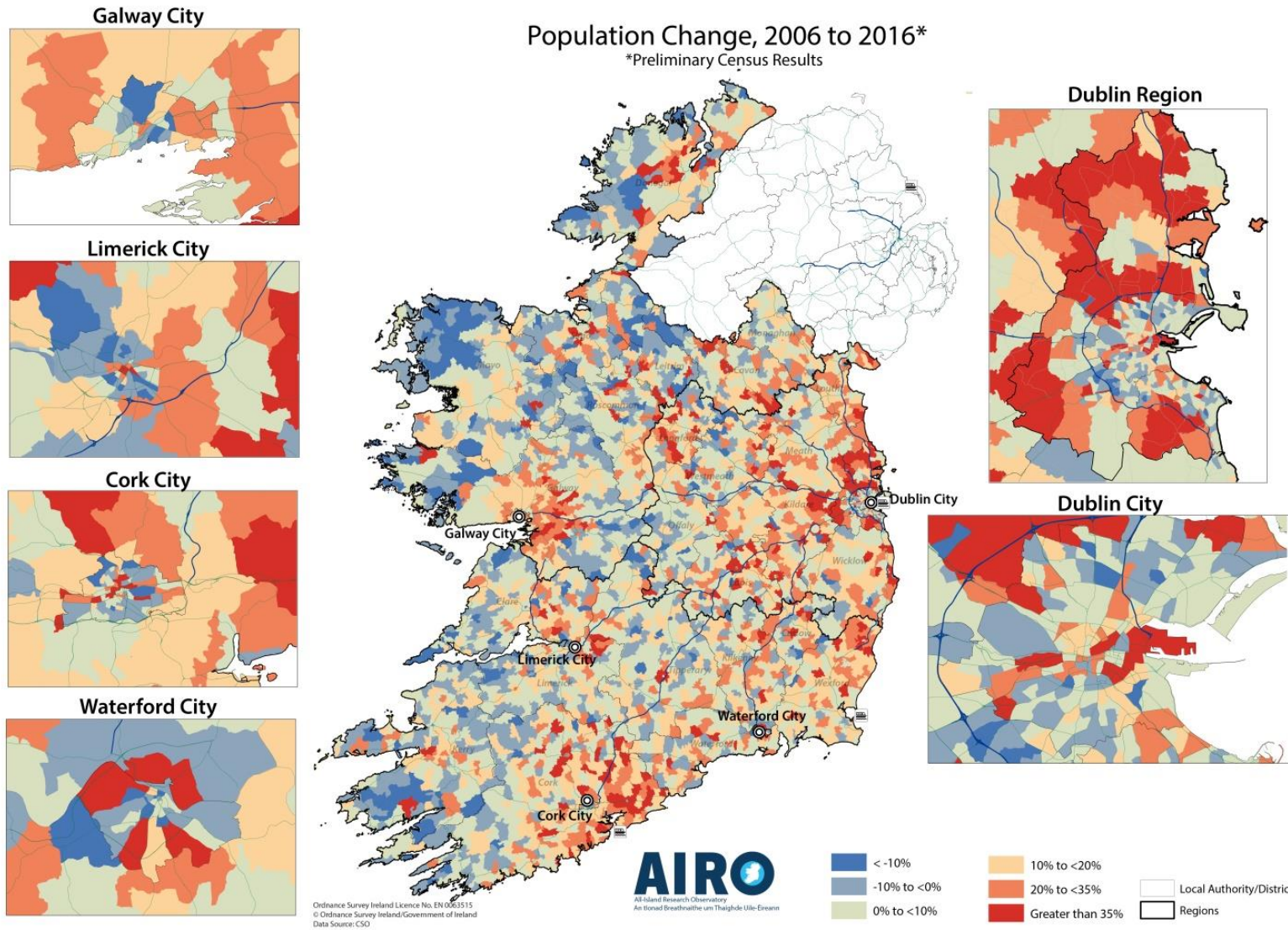
In addition to the scale of housing provision, the delivery of housing in the right place is also central to enabling a good standard of living and improving quality of life. Locating housing in the right place provides the opportunity for wider family and social networks to thrive, maximises access to employment opportunities and to services such as education, public transport, health and amenities, while also delivering on sustainability objectives related to efficiency in service delivery and investment provision.

The trends in population change in Ireland between 2006-2016 are reflected in Map 1. This map indicates that over the course of the last decade, Ireland's population has declined most significantly in the most peripheral areas of the country and has grown strongest in areas outside of the main city areas. In addition, the map reflects that population decline is very prevalent in core parts of our cities, where strong population growth is most desirable. Breathing new life into declining and central parts of cities and towns is a major issue which this Action Plan also aims to address.

One of the patterns from the past that needs to be avoided in the future is the long-standing tendency for the development sector, if left unmanaged, to prefer housing provision in peripheral or greenfield sites on the edges of urban areas over brownfield or re-development opportunities to a disproportionate and undesirable level. This creates demands for additional transport and other infrastructure and can lead to isolation from communities and services.

The costs of such development patterns are met by individual households and also by society as a whole. An excessive reliance on greenfield development and underdevelopment of existing but under-utilised urban or brownfield land is not sustainable. It inhibits competitiveness and the economic sustainability of cities and towns and acts to sap the vitality and prosperity of existing neighbourhoods and communities. Peripheral development is also less likely to counter urban rental and purchase price inflation than development within existing neighbourhoods.

Map 1: Population Change in Ireland, 2006-2016



Source: All Island Research Observatory (AIRO), NUI Maynooth.

While robust planning policies can play an important part in changing these patterns and achieving better housing outcomes, it is also important that public policy works to ensure that all publicly owned land portfolios are more coherently managed to influence where and how housing is delivered. All State lands, particularly local authority land but also land in the ownership of other State bodies, needs to be managed in order to ensure adequate and affordable supply of suitable land at the right time and in the right location to deliver the necessary housing output.

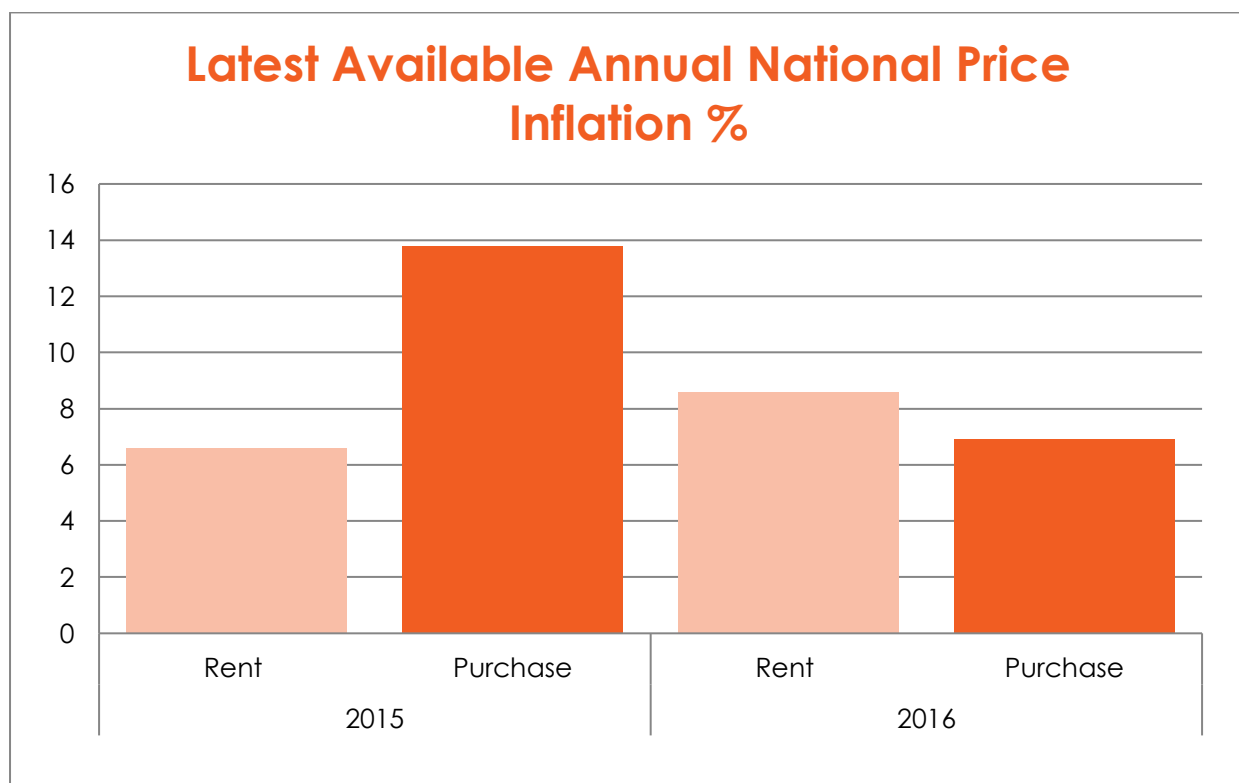
The effective use of residentially zoned but undeveloped publicly owned land and the forward management and replenishment of that land bank is an essential part of active land management. In this way, we can ensure the availability of ready-to-go sites that have realistic land prices that in turn aids the supply of homes for social housing, for purchase or for the rental market at affordable prices.

Affordability

Another key housing challenge is affordability. The incomes of many households are such that aspiration to home ownership in the communities in which they came from and work is unlikely to be realisable: this is despite the fact that in the recent past households in similar relative economic positions may well have bought houses in those communities. Rates of home ownership continue to decline and this will have important implications for housing and related policies that are described in further detail later in this Plan.

Affordability is also an issue for many renting households, having regard to price inflation set out in Graph 5. In many areas, rental price inflation is far in excess of income growth. While the issue of climbing rents may be most pressing for households with limited means, it is not simply a challenge for low-income households. As rent prices rise, a growing number of households are paying a greater proportion of their incomes on accommodation, which has obvious impacts on their quality of life and their ability to save.

Graph 5: Price Inflation in Purchase and Rental Markets, 2015-2016



Sustained increases in rental prices impact most heavily on lower-income households, driving them into either substandard accommodation or homelessness; this is a particularly acute and urgent aspect of the current housing challenge, not least because the impact is concentrated among those households which are the most economically vulnerable.

A further issue, highlighted in the *June 2016 Report of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness* and elsewhere, is a threat of homelessness associated with homeowners who are in mortgage arrears and where current restructuring measures are not sufficiently addressing the long-term unsustainability of these mortgages. Vulnerable homeowners struggling with mortgage arrears, combined with low social housing output and reduced housing supply generally, presents an added dimension to the overall housing challenge. This has also been taken into account in preparing this Action Plan.

The Rental Sector

Falling home ownership levels and increasing demand for rental accommodation on a long-term basis raises another key housing challenge - that of changing attitudes such that the advantages of rental as a form of tenure are more widely recognised. A strong rental sector should support a mobile labour market that is better able to adapt to new job opportunities and changing household circumstances. The rental sector must also cater for a diverse range of households, including students, low-income households and mobile professionals. The appeal of the rental sector as a tenure type of choice must be developed, which means increasing standards, security of tenure and altering some of the norms and expectations which characterise the sector.

Competitiveness

Rising prices for residential accommodation impact adversely on competitiveness. The attractiveness of Ireland as a potential investment location and, of course, the cost base for existing businesses will be impaired should price inflation continue, as rising prices place upward pressure on wages, deter inward migration and impede the labour market.

Of note is the 2016 Mercer ranking which placed Dublin at number 47 in an international cost of living index, number 1 being the most expensive. Only three other European Union cities, London, Copenhagen and Paris, were found to be more expensive. Accommodation-related costs are a considerable component of the costs of living and have been rising in Irish cities.

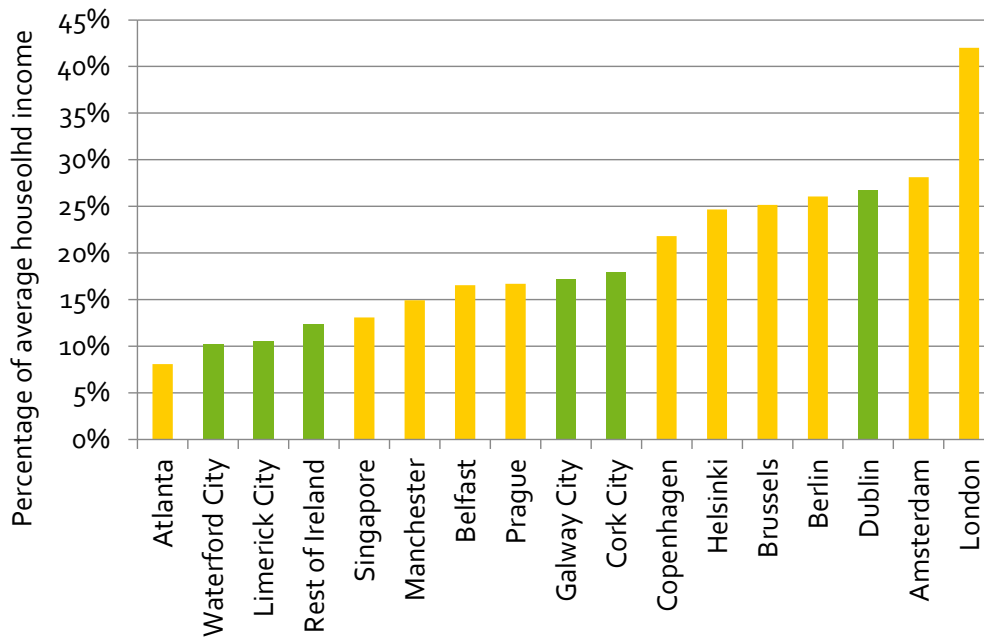
More recently, the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) commissioned a study² of the relative affordability of residential property in Ireland, over time, in an international context and against appropriate comparator regions. The study's findings and conclusions also signal a growing competitiveness challenge using the following definition of affordability.

Housing affordability is measured by examining the proportion of household income that is spent to meet own housing need whether purchasing a home or renting. Two overall indices are calculated, namely the NCC Mortgage Affordability Index (MAI), and the NCC Rent Affordability Index (RAI).

The Mortgage Affordability Index (MAI), set out in Graph 6, captures the cost of a newly purchased dwelling to a household earning the average household income for that region. The index as calculated is based on a standardised housing unit and takes account of differences in Mortgage Cost.

² <http://www.competitiveness.ie/Publications/2016>

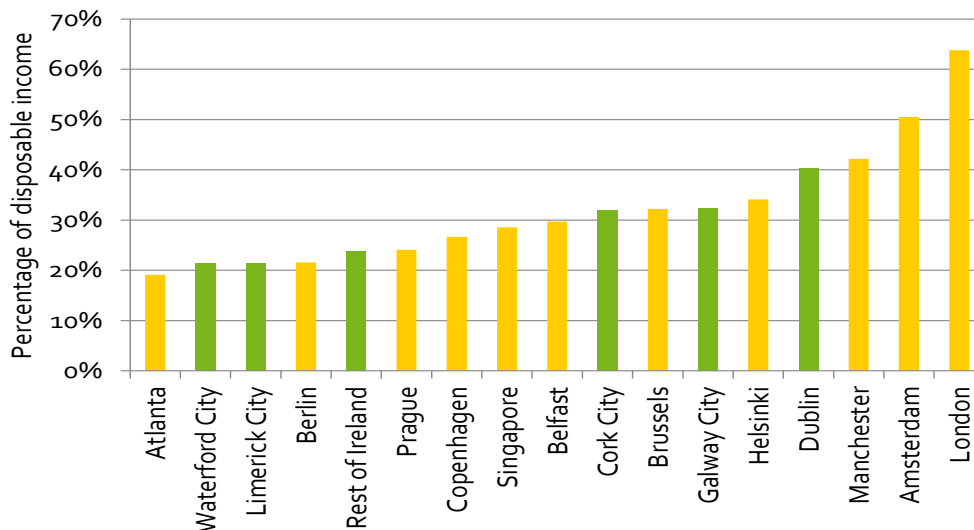
Graph 6: Mortgage Affordability Index (MAI) for Comparator Regions (60% Loan-to-Value), 2015



Source: Indecon Economic Consultants for NCC

The Rent Affordability Index (RAI), set out in Graph 7, captures the cost of rent to a household with the average household income for that region. It is calculated assuming a standard rental unit of 70 square metres, regardless of the type of housing (e.g. apartment or a house), and assumes a two-person household, each on 80% of average disposable income.

Graph 7: Rent Affordability Index (RAI) for Comparator Regions, 2015



Source: Indecon Economic Consultants for NCC

It is proposed that the analysis undertaken by the NCC will be taken forward by the Housing Agency, as part of their ongoing assessment of housing affordability.

Housing Supply Requirements

In view of the annual 25,000 homes target, and comparing this to the current and anticipated levels of completions on a “no policy change” basis, the following factors need to be taken into account:

- Current completion levels of around 12,600 additional homes must double in four years.
- There is a significant requirement to expand the “build to rent” sector, which is not being catered for in current construction levels.
- An increased level of ambition is required under the *Social Housing Strategy* to address the “social rented sector” by bringing on stream additional local authority and Approved Housing Body activity for social rented purposes.

Approximately 30% of the country’s population lives in Dublin and, as a result, the most significant accommodation pressures are being experienced in this area. Balancing demand and supply in and near Dublin and other areas of high demand such as Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, is a major objective of this Action Plan.

Notwithstanding the low level of output, the Dublin area, as well as similar locations in Cork and other regional cities, are well provided with a range of strategically placed large residential development areas with planned capacity for 1,000 - 3,000+ homes each under statutory Strategic Development Zones and Local Area Plans. These provide for the structured growth of substantial new residential communities, supported by the required physical, social, educational and other local infrastructure.

A key objective of this Plan will therefore be to ramp up the production of additional new housing stock in these locations from the currently low levels of activity and with a balanced approach between providing housing that is built for owner-occupation as well as housing for both the private and social housing sectors that is “**built to rent**”.

Without the interventions set out under this Action Plan and on the basis of the current rate of increase in delivery, looking at Dublin alone, it could take up to nine years for supply to reach the 10,000 additional new homes required in this area annually, according to the Housing Agency.

The re-use of vacant dwellings has some potential to reduce the numbers of additional new homes required. However, this issue requires analysis, particularly in relation to the real potential to achieve occupancy of dwellings in the immediate term and the match between location and demand, given that a large proportion of the national total of vacant units is located in rural areas, where demand may not be high.

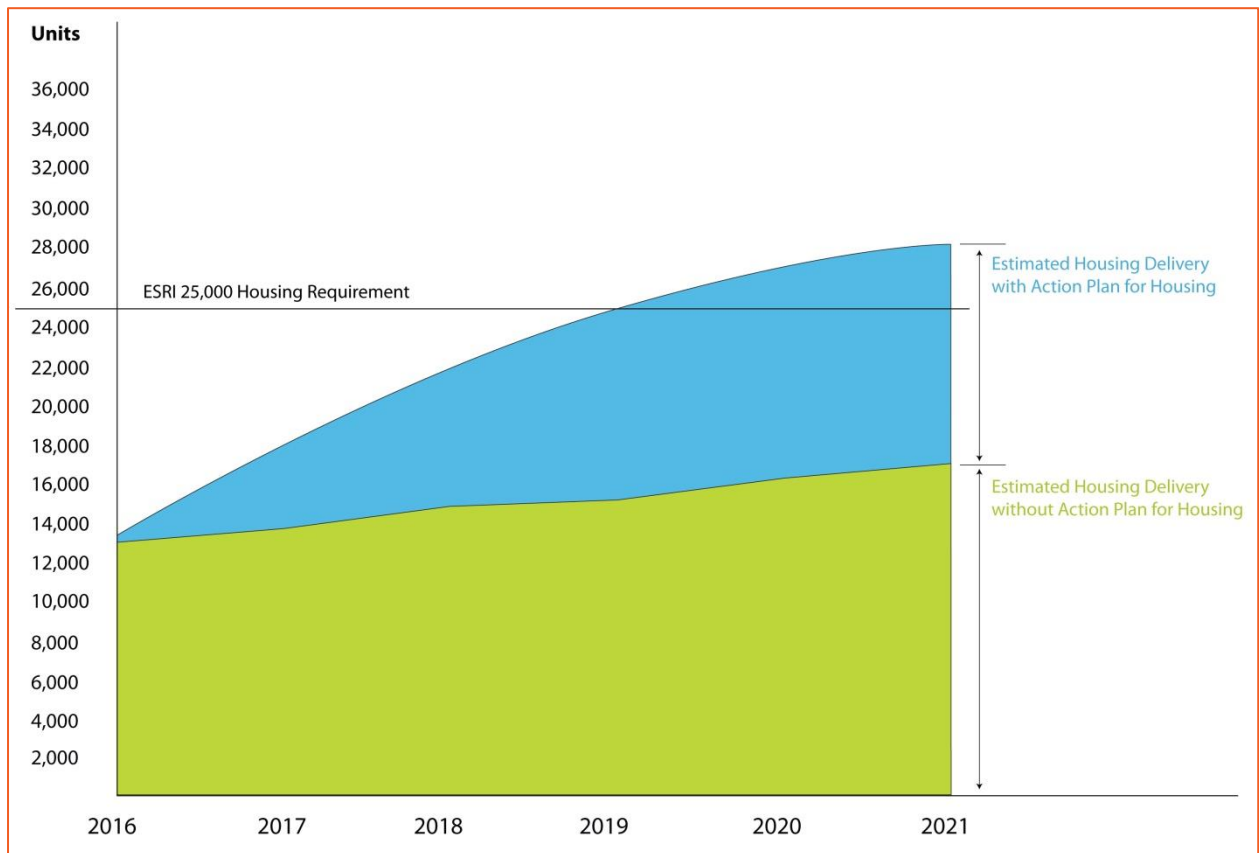
Anticipated Profile of Delivery

In line with the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, which aims to ensure that some 25,000 new homes are built every year by 2020, with higher targets thereafter to address unmet needs, this Action Plan contains a set of measures and initiatives designed to achieve that target. Housing providers, the State, funding institutions and all other relevant stakeholders must work together to achieve a recovery in the rate of delivery outlined in Graph 8, bringing together:

- Existing delivery,
- Increased and accelerated social housing delivery,
- Additional delivery, for example on key strategic housing areas, and
- Re-activation of vacant stock.

Graph 8 illustrates the objective to increase levels of activity to meet the 25,000 unit target by 2020 or earlier, taking account of the backlog in supply experienced to date.

Graph 8: Action Plan Output Objective



The actions set out in the following Pillars of this Action Plan are designed to drive, in an integrated fashion, the delivery of the overall increase and acceleration in housing supply that is urgently required.

The Five Pillars



Pillar 1: Address Homelessness

Addressing homelessness and keeping people in their own homes

Key objective: Provide early solutions to address the unacceptable level of families in emergency accommodation; deliver inter-agency supports for people who are currently homeless, with a particular emphasis on minimising the incidence of rough sleeping; and enhance State supports to keep people in their own homes.

Key actions:

- Ensure that by mid-2017 hotels are only used in limited circumstances for emergency accommodation for families, by meeting housing needs through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and general housing allocations, and by providing new supply to be delivered through -
 - An expanded Rapid Build Housing programme [1,500 units]
 - A Housing Agency initiative to acquire vacant houses [1,600 units]
- Triple the targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin and extend the housing-led approach to other urban areas
- Enhance supports for homeless families with children
- Enhance supports for homeless people with mental health and addiction issues
- Ensure an adequate supply of emergency accommodation nationally
- Extend tenancy sustainment measures nationwide
- Increased in Rent Supplement and HAP limits
- New initiative to provide access to independent expert financial and legal advice for people facing serious mortgage arrears
- Potential for further legislative measures in relation to mortgage arrears to be examined
- Facilitate more households with Mortgage to Rent

Addressing homelessness

Homelessness is a complex phenomenon which is often the result of a number of inter-related personal, social and economic issues. However, it is generally accepted that the supply shortage across the housing sector, which in turn is a result of the economic collapse and the associated contraction in the construction sector, has been a driving force behind the increased number of households presenting as homeless in recent times. The housing supply issue has had a knock-on impact on the operation of the private rented market, adding to the increased incidence of homelessness. Accordingly, the long-term solution to the current homelessness issue is to increase the supply of homes. The increased level of homeless presentation in recent times has placed extreme pressure on existing homeless services and emergency accommodation facilities, with the consequence that an ever-increasing volume of B&B/hotel bed-space has been utilised for emergency accommodation purposes for inappropriate and unsustainably long periods of time.

Homeless households

Traditionally, it has been single adults, mostly men, that have made up the majority of the homeless population. However, the economic impacts of the recent recession and the consequential housing supply shortage have resulted in a new homelessness dynamic, whereby households which traditionally would have been able to access accommodation in the private rented sector are presenting to homeless services. Many are households with access to State supports, such as Rent Supplement, and would have secured tenancies for themselves in the past.

Most such households, the majority of whom include dependents and have had no previous experience of homelessness, have been accommodated in B&Bs and hotels on an emergency basis. Prior to 2014, in the region of 20 families presented as homeless each month in the Dublin Region, an average of 32 new families presented as homeless each month during 2014, and this monthly average increased to 62 new families during 2015.

Families with children presenting as homeless require a response that is separate and distinct from presentations by adult individuals and couples. In recognition of the fact that tenancy retention is key to stemming increases in homelessness, agencies that have regular contact with families (including Family Resource Centres) should provide links to the main providers of housing and debt advice before a tenancy is terminated. This action is applicable to all bodies in regular contact with families. A fact sheet of services/programmes to be made available to families and children at risk of homelessness will be produced and distributed to key services working with families; for example, Homeless Action Teams, Community Welfare Officers, and the Educational Welfare Service.

In order to fully consider the most appropriate deployment of resources, a mapping of all emergency accommodation – overlaid by required and available supports for families - will be produced by Tusla with the cooperation of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE).

In line with the need to provide a family-appropriate setting to address a range of needs for families presenting as homeless, one-stop shop facilities for appropriate assessment of families' needs will be established in Dublin city, with outreach in the other three Dublin local authority areas. This will involve local authorities, Tusla, Family Mediation Services, Tenancy Protection Services, the Department of Social Protection and expert NGOs working together, making best use of modern technology, to provide the range of responses needed to keep families in their existing homes, where possible and to make appropriate referrals to homeless and other support services.

Moving families out of hotels

It is recognised that accommodating family units in hotel arrangements is inappropriate for anything other than a short period of time. The prevalence of homeless families and the utilisation of hotels for emergency accommodation is a much more significant issue in the Dublin Region than it is in the rest of the country. Based on May 2016 data, there were 1,054 homeless families nationally, of which 913 were in the Dublin Region, and on a single night in May, 622 families in Dublin were accommodated in hotels.

Our intention is to move the existing group of families out of these hotel arrangements as quickly as possible, and to limit the extent to which such accommodation has to be used for new presentations. Our aim is that by mid-2017, hotels will only be used for emergency accommodation in very limited circumstances. The increases in Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment levels from 1 July 2016, in terms of supporting families to remain in rented accommodation, will play an important role in the achievement of this overall objective. Where, however, families do find themselves in homelessness situations, their needs will be met through the enhanced Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme (see Pillar 2) and through general social housing allocations, as well as by tapping into wider housing supply to be delivered through:

- An expanded Rapid-Build Housing programme [1,500 units – see below];
- A Housing Agency initiative to acquire vacant houses [1,600 units- see Pillar 2].

Given the imperative to move households out of inappropriate hotel arrangements, and the considerable costs associated with such accommodation, we will also examine the reasons for, and appropriate responses to, households refusing offers of reasonable accommodation outside of hotels.

Rapid-Build housing

A Rapid-Build Housing Programme is being implemented to mitigate the issues associated with inappropriate hotel arrangements and to expedite social housing supply. This type of accommodation offers a greater level of stability for homeless families, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning for these families, with access to all required services, including welfare, health and housing services. The units are being built to the highest construction standards, with 50- to 60-year lifespans. Any units delivered which may ultimately not be required to assist in moving families out of hotels will be used by local authorities for general social housing allocations. A total of 1,500 rapid-delivery units will be delivered by 2018: 200 by end 2016, 800 in 2017 and the remainder in 2018. We will actively consider the use of short-term rapid build units to provide accommodation in emergency situations.

Housing Assistance Payment for homeless households

The Homeless Pilot of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme has been operational since February 2015 across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region, and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive. The pilot is designed to transition qualified households from emergency accommodation into private rented tenancies. While eligible households may source accommodation for themselves, a dedicated placement team, the Dublin Place-Finder Service, has been established to engage directly with property owners, support qualified households to find suitable tenancies and ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. A publicity campaign is in place on an ongoing basis in order to raise the profile of the scheme and to attract landlords to the initiative. The maximum levels of support available under the pilot scheme for homeless households were increased to 50% above the rent supplement levels in 2016.

We will increase the transition of homeless households and individuals from emergency accommodation through the Dublin Region Homeless HAP pilot, by creating 550 tenancies by the end of this year and a further 1,200 tenancies in 2017.

Supports for families with children

It is widely acknowledged that any medium to long-term period living in a hotel seriously impacts on normal family life and is particularly detrimental to children. While the concerted efforts and actions mentioned above will result in families moving on from hotels more quickly, we must ensure that families and children are supported as much as possible, while in hotel and other emergency accommodation.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA) and Tusla – the Child and Family Agency have key roles, together with housing authorities and DHPCLG, in ensuring that effective services are in place to support these families. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive and Tusla will continue to operate the Dublin Region protocol in relation to appropriate responses to child protection and welfare concerns among families in emergency accommodation. The operation of this protocol will be reviewed in December 2016 and refined as appropriate. These protocol arrangements will be extended nationally.

The following additional measures will be put in place:

- Dedicated Child Support workers will be appointed in an initiative by the DCYA. The workers will develop support plans for children and families with a particular focus on those with specific needs – a quarter of children presenting as homeless need this additional support.
- Home School Community Liaison and School Completion staff will assist children and families experiencing homelessness to maintain regular school attendance. Children in homeless accommodation will be prioritised within the School Completion Programme for services such as breakfast and homework clubs.
- Access to free public transport will be provided for school journeys and outings away from the emergency accommodation. Transport costs have been identified as a significant barrier to normal family life and a burden on parents and children alike.
- Access to crèches and preschool services will be provided to homeless families. Due to uncertainty about living arrangements, homeless families cannot pre-book a place for their child. The DCYA is asking the City and County Childcare Committees to liaise with these families and assist them in accessing pre-school. A new specific scheme will also be designed from existing resources.
- A pilot project will be introduced to support the family functioning of homeless families currently in emergency accommodation by providing off-site or near-site family time including play, homework, cooking and washing facilities, family support and parent support.
- The nutritional needs of families and children will be addressed. Some homeless families do not have access to cooking facilities or regular nutritional food, depending on the location of the emergency accommodation. The DYCA, in partnership with others, will identify problem areas and propose solutions.
- Additional resources will be put in place to strengthen inter-agency arrangements with Tusla including Family Support, Social Work and Education Welfare. Tusla will appoint specific staff to assist in accessing requisite family support and child welfare services and managing any difficulties that arise for children in relation to school participation.
- A joined-up approach will be promoted between education, health (including public health nursing) and Tusla to meet the needs of homeless families, by using the existing Children and Young People's Service Committees.
- A safety guidance/voluntary code for child safety in emergency accommodation will be produced and reviewed with relevant stakeholders.
- A new facility with accommodation for pregnant women who are homeless will be provided by DRHE, with DCYA and Tusla supporting the service, which will be managed by a NGO.

Homeless individuals and Housing First

While the recent increases in family homelessness are primarily related to the housing supply shortage, homelessness among vulnerable individuals has been an enduring societal problem in this country and internationally. Homelessness is a complex phenomenon which is usually the result of a number of inter-related issues, including mental health issues, addictions, relationship breakdown, family issues, domestic violence, financial loss, economic insecurity, rent arrears, tenancy issues, anti-social behaviour, crime, prisoner release and the vulnerability of migrants, among other factors. Consequently, a successful whole-of-Government response is required in relation to such issues, if the current homelessness issue is to be tackled effectively.

This homeless grouping typically includes rough sleepers, those that are in emergency accommodation for long periods of time on a consecutive basis, and those that use emergency accommodation on a short-term or long-term basis and for sporadic, non-consecutive periods. Long-term homeless are considered to be those in emergency accommodation for a period of longer than 6 months on a consecutive basis.

While considerable resources have been devoted to addressing adult homelessness over the years, the problem still persists. The Homelessness Policy Statement, published in 2013, recognises that stable housing is the sustainable solution to homelessness and emphasises a housing-led approach as the primary response to homelessness. Housing-led approaches to homelessness incorporate the provision of adequate support for people in their homes, according to their needs. Housing-led approaches are evidence-based and have the potential to produce more and better outcomes for vulnerable individuals; such approaches also reduce the long-term need for other services and allow for available public funds to be invested in other areas of service provision.

Taking into account the expected increase in housing supply as a result of this Action Plan, we will now strengthen our efforts and resources towards providing homeless people with a home following the housing-led, housing-first approach. In particular, we will triple the targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin, from 100 tenancies currently, to 300 tenancies in 2017. This will require additional resources to be provided by the HSE, subject to the finalisation of the HSE Service Plan for 2017. We will also expand the housing-led approach to homeless services in other urban areas.

Emergency shelters

We are committed to ensuring that there are sufficient emergency beds available in our urban centres for homeless individuals. In order to minimise the need for people to sleep rough, we will urgently review the current availability of temporary emergency accommodation and supported temporary accommodation in our main urban areas to determine appropriate availability consistent with need.

By strengthening the Housing First teams in the Dublin region and expanding the housing-led approach to other urban areas, we will aim to provide permanent, stable and supported housing to long-term homeless individuals and thus reduce the reliance on emergency accommodation over time. In the interim, we will ensure that no emergency shelter is closed, unless alternative accommodation has been put in place for those accessing it.

Providing support for homeless people with mental health and addiction issues

Accommodation alone will not address the underlying problems of the vulnerable grouping of homeless people who have addiction and/or mental health problems. They have particularly complex needs which must be addressed in tandem with the provision of stable housing. The individuals concerned must be given holistic medical and practical supports as required.

There is a need for collaborative and cross-agency working in this regard, with the DoH, the HSE, the Department of Social Protection (DSP), local authorities and NGOs with expertise in the area all playing a vital part. For example, the HSE Service Plan for 2016 commits to ensuring that arrangements are in place and working effectively to ensure homeless persons have access to primary care services where required, and that in-reach services are provided to emergency accommodation settings and long-term supported accommodation for people with high-support needs. Additional funding of €2m is being provided to the HSE this year for the provision of case management and support for homeless people with chronic and enduring health needs, in collaboration with mental health services. This will be increased to €6m next year and the HSE will identify appropriate Pathfinder projects to help guide the delivery of these services into the future. In addition, there will also be a particular emphasis on significant projects providing drug and alcohol detoxification programmes and enduring services supporting long-term recovery.

The current HSE in-reach primary care services for homeless people in emergency accommodation will be further supported and developed in 2017.

A new National Drugs Strategy is currently being prepared by the DoH for implementation from January 2017 onwards and it will include specific strategies and actions to address the rehabilitation needs of homeless people with addiction issues.

DHPCLG will continue to drive and facilitate this cross-Departmental and cross-agency work through the High-Level Implementation Team on Homelessness.

Homelessness prevention - keeping people in their own homes

As well as providing homes for people and families who are homeless, we must ensure that those most at risk of losing their homes receive support services, so that we can minimise the risk of them becoming homeless in the first place.

Young people leaving State care

Young people who have grown up in State care have a higher than average risk of becoming homeless as adults. The Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care has provided direction to local authorities on their requirement to engage with young people leaving care in relation to their housing need.

We will work to ensure that young people leaving State care and at risk of homelessness are identified and catered for through appropriate housing and other supports required to meet their needs. DHPCLG will allocate specific funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme for AHBs to respond to these accommodation needs, and the health and independent living supports will be provided by Tusla, the HSE and expert NGOs.

Preventing homelessness for other vulnerable groups

Tusla have primary responsibility for services in relation to addressing the needs of victims of domestic violence, including dedicated refuges. Women and families who seek emergency shelter because of acute safety threats resulting from domestic violence fall within the remit of Tusla-funded domestic violence refuges and short term emergency safe home accommodation. Tusla will provide additional emergency refuge spaces so that victims forced to flee the family home often late at night or in the early hours of the morning do not find themselves homeless. DHPCLG will provide policy and procedural guidance to housing authorities with regard to the role they can play to assist victims of domestic violence to secure new, independent tenancies as required.

Planning for release of prisoners, including sex offenders, must include measures to prevent their falling into homelessness on their release. We will enhance and implement effectively national procedures and inter-agency arrangements to ensure that the necessary accommodation supports are in place, prior to prisoner release.

Tenancy sustainment

The DSP's National Tenancy Sustainment Framework for Rent Supplement clients and the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operated by Threshold for any tenants worried about losing their home have been hugely successful, with favourable interventions in approximately 9,000 cases over the last two years.

The Threshold Tenancy Protection Service, which originally operated in Dublin City and Cork City, has recently been extended to Galway City and Counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. Building on this, the service will be extended nationwide by the end of the year. Much of the success of these support services, and others, was down to successful awareness campaigns, which we will repeat and intensify in order to ensure the highest possible levels of awareness of the range of supports in place to help prevent homelessness.

Rent Supplement/Housing Assistance Payment

The Government has increased rent limits under the Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) schemes from 1 July 2016. The new limits mean that people who cannot afford the full cost of private rented accommodation due to rent increases over recent years will receive greater assistance from the State. These increased rent limits, coupled with the ongoing flexibility and discretionary powers available to the Department of Social Protection's Community Welfare Service and local authorities, will provide more stability and security for tenants and reduce the danger of families becoming homeless when their rent is increased. In addition, it provides an opportunity for tenants who have entered an informal top-up arrangement with their landlord to contact their Community Welfare Service or local authority for assistance and to regularise these top-ups in most cases. The increased rent limits also mean that the level of support available to assist homeless households through the HAP pilot in the Dublin Region has increased significantly.

The Government's long-term approach for assisting households living in the rental sector requiring support is through the HAP scheme and so all rent supplement recipients with a long-term housing need will transition to HAP. HAP allows recipients to increase their household income without the risk that they may lose their housing support. In that way, HAP provides a more secure form of assistance to households who need help with their housing needs in the longer term. In order to ensure that all households who could benefit from the payment have access to it, the Government is committing to the accelerated roll-out of the scheme on a national basis (see also Pillar 2).

Mortgage arrears

Addressing mortgage arrears is necessary to support households to remain in their home and avoid additional pressures on the rental or social housing sectors. While the number of households in mortgage arrears has reduced over the last two years it remains a significant issue. The number in long term arrears remains high and it must be assumed that the majority of those in arrears of more than two years are at significant risk of losing their homes without borrower engagement to seek a restructure or an insolvency arrangement. The number of restructured mortgages continues to increase and 87% of these accounts are deemed to be meeting the terms of their current restructure arrangement. The Government is concerned that the majority of borrowers facing repossession are not engaging with their lender, the courts or available State supports – even though many of those who are before the courts could be helped by a Personal Insolvency Arrangement or other sustainable mortgage restructure. There is no clear information on the reasons why people are not coming forward to engage. Anecdotally from those working on the ground, among the main reasons identified are that people are fearful that engagement will lead to repossession; that people are unaware of the solutions available; and fear of engaging when the borrower cannot afford financial or legal advice.

The Government is committed to building on recent reforms and creating a framework that removes fear and brings predictability to a difficult process. Through a range of actions, Government Departments and agencies will work together to find ways to encourage those who have not been able to engage, to reach a suitable long term debt resolution, and avoid repossession if possible.

Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service

A new national Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, which will standardise supports available to borrowers in mortgage arrears, with powers and resources needed to advise, assess, negotiate and recommend solutions, will encompass:

- the Mortgage Arrears Aid and Advice Scheme, with total funding of €5m – €10m over 3 years, depending on the level of take-up,

- the relevant activities of Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS), including a Dedicated Mortgage Arrears (DMA) MABS Service, and
- the relevant activities of the Insolvency Service Ireland (ISI).

The overall objective of the Mortgage Arrears Aid and Advice Scheme is to ensure that a person who is at risk of losing their home can access independent expert financial and legal advice which will help them to identify their best options for returning to solvency – with priority attaching to remaining in the home, where that is a sustainable option.

MABS will act as the gateway for a person to access advice under the Scheme. MABS will triage eligible borrowers and direct them towards the appropriate components of the Aid and Advice Scheme, which are free of charge to the borrower. The borrower will be able to access independent expert advice and help, under a voucher system, from a personal insolvency practitioner or an accountant, including analysing his/her financial situation, and explaining the best options for a solution.

After financial advice, the borrower can also access a consultation with a solicitor from a panel set up by the Legal Aid Board (LAB), on a voucher basis via MABS, on any legal issue affecting finding a solution. A new 'duty solicitor' service, available via MABS, will assist unrepresented borrowers eligible for the Scheme at repossession hearings. The Scheme will also provide legal aid (via MABS and LAB) for an eligible borrower seeking the new Court review (where a proposal for a Personal Insolvency Arrangement is refused by his or her creditors).

The new Service will be governed by an enhanced role for the Citizens Information Board in relation to the relevant MABS activities, and a new Steering Board which will be chaired jointly by the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE), and DSP. Funding of €1.5m will be provided in 2017 for awareness raising around the new Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service and the full range of services available from it to borrowers in arrears.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality has also now requested the President of the Circuit Court to exercise his statutory powers under the Courts of Justice Act 1947 to order that, from this September, all Circuit Court repossession actions will be listed on specified days at dedicated court venues with specific judges.

National information campaign

The new Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service will be responsible for driving a communications and promotion campaign, aimed primarily at securing engagement and solutions for those in the longest arrears and who are not engaging with their lender. The campaign will seek to overcome the fear and anxiety associated with such circumstances and to ensure that borrowers are made aware of the supports that are available to them from the new Service.

Preparation of draft legislation

The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality will examine the necessity for legislation to provide for further possible measures arising from the *Programme for a Partnership Government* commitments on mortgage arrears, subject to legal advice on certain issues arising. Possible measures include simplifying personal insolvency legislation to increase thresholds for accessing a personal insolvency arrangement and to streamline requirements for court oversight at different stages; providing (if constitutionally permissible) for imposition by the Courts of debt solutions recommended by the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service and any corresponding statutory powers needed for the Service; and measures regarding Courts hearing repossession cases, including (if constitutionally permissible) the hearing of repossession cases in private where requested by the borrower.

Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears is a statutory code issued under section 117 of the Central Bank Act 1989. The Code applies to all regulated mortgage lenders operating in the State when dealing with borrowers facing or in mortgage arrears on their primary residence, including any mortgage lending activities outsourced by these lenders. The Code provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent way by their lender and that long-term resolution is sought by lenders with each of their borrowers. Lenders are required to comply with all aspects of the Code and non-compliance with the Code is enforceable against regulated entities by the Central Bank.

The Government will work with the Central Bank to ensure that the Code continues to be relevant, fair and balanced in respect of the legitimate interests of debtors and creditors, all the while promoting the availability of sustainable solutions to address genuine mortgage difficulty. This will include the Central Bank conducting an assessment of existing sustainable restructuring solutions across all lenders and non-bank entities operating in Ireland.

Mortgage to Rent

Inevitably, there will be a group of households in arrears whose mortgage position is unsustainable over the long term. Some of these households are at risk of losing their homes and, ultimately, of becoming homeless. Supports must be in place to assist these households and to alleviate the trauma arising in the transition from homeownership to other tenure types.

The Mortgage to Rent scheme is targeted at those households with unsustainable long-term arrears who require the greatest amount of support to meet their long-term housing needs. The scheme has been refined since its introduction in 2013 to widen the criteria to allow for broader eligibility and more streamlined administration. Despite this, the rate of uptake and progress on the scheme remains low. The reasons for this are varied and can depend on the lender, the property, the household and the ability of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector to increase their involvement in the scheme. Whatever the reasons for the low uptake, Mortgage to Rent should be a solution for greater numbers of households. The basic model is a good one – people in unsustainable mortgage situations get certainty around their long-term housing, and can stay in the home and community of their choice.

To support greater numbers of households entering Mortgage to Rent, DHPCLG will work together with the other key agents involved with the scheme and look at what further improvements or variations can be made to facilitate more households accessing the scheme.

This examination will include alternative financing and contractual arrangements to encourage greater support from AHBs, greater flexibility from lending institutions in supporting Mortgage to Rent as an attractive option for distressed borrowers, and the feasibility of an alternative model from the purchase of these units, including the potential for a long-term lease arrangement between local authorities and financial institutions.



Pillar 2: Accelerate Social Housing

Key objective: Increase the level and speed of delivery of social housing and other State-supported housing

Key actions:

- 47,000 social housing units delivered by 2021, supported by investment of €5.35 billion
- Accelerated Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) delivery
- NTMA/Private Sector Housing Fund to deliver increased housing supply
- Mixed-Tenure Development on State Lands and other lands
- Establishment of a Housing Delivery Office and Housing Procurement Unit
- Extensive supports for Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies
- Streamlined approval processes
- Housing for specific groups: meeting the needs of the vulnerable

The provision of housing to those who need it is one of the State's primary responsibilities. With an increased level of demand for social housing, which has been exacerbated by the impact of the economic collapse on wider housing supply over recent years, we need to significantly increase the level and scale of supports available to those whose circumstances mean they need State help in meeting their housing needs.

In response to these needs, the Government has identified a range of direct actions to facilitate, stimulate, encourage and incentivise the increased output of social, private and rental housing required, in the short and medium term, to bridge the gap between current levels of output and the annual target of 25,000 housing units by 2020. A central tenet of this Action Plan is a concerted and collaborative approach, through integrated actions by central Government, local authorities, AHBs, NAMA, NTMA, Housing Finance Agency and the Housing Agency, to secure expanded and accelerated delivery of social housing, through:

- a significant increase in the number of homes provided under the *Social Housing Strategy* programme to 47,000 by end-2021, with a particular focus on an accelerated and expanded social housing construction programme;
- the creation of an NTMA/Private Sector fund to support additional social housing supply and wider housing provision;
- the active targeting, with local authorities, other State land owners, NAMA and private owners, of residentially zoned but undeveloped lands to deliver social and more affordable housing; and
- new dedicated structures in DHPCLG to drive delivery and to identify and resolve potential impediments.

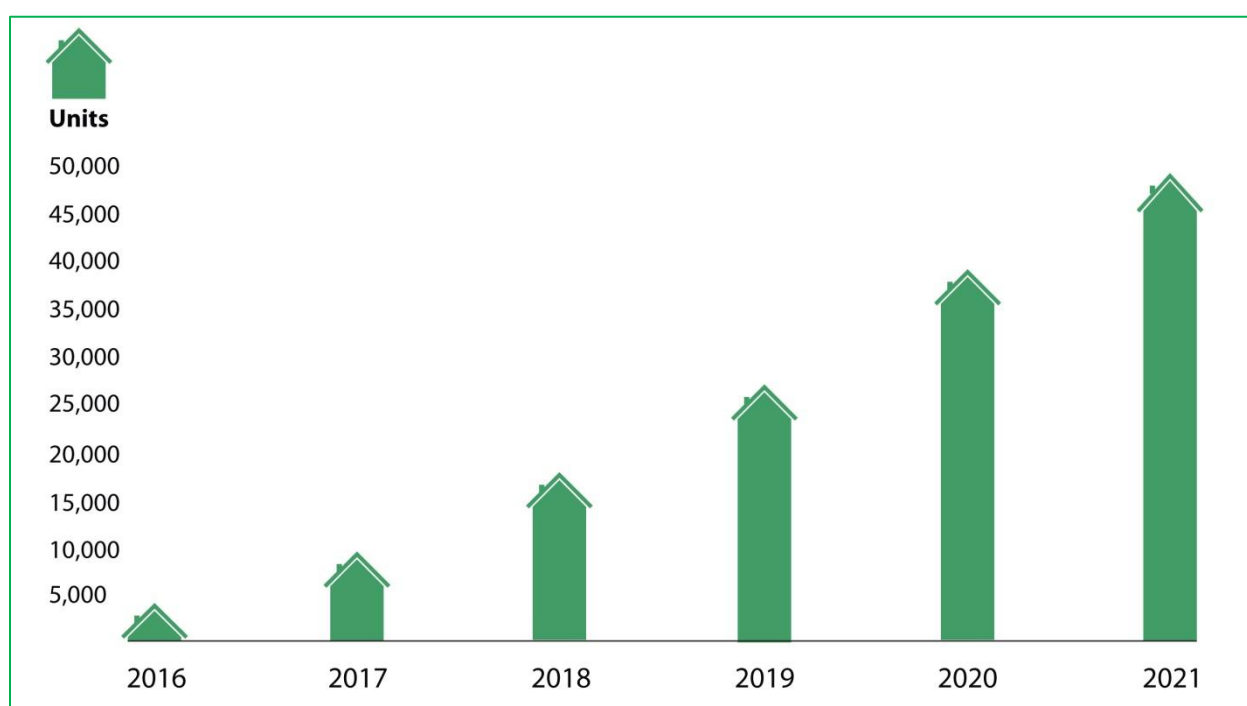
This delivery will be supported by actions under Pillar 3 to support the viability of private sector building, including planning reforms, and actions under Pillar 4 to improve the functioning of the private rented sector.

Increasing and Accelerating Social Housing Delivery

The *Social Housing Strategy 2020*, published in November 2014, committed to providing 35,600 new social housing units between 2015 and 2020, at an estimated cost to the Exchequer of around €3.8bn. Local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies are delivering these units through a variety of new-build and acquisition mechanisms as well as through leasing arrangements and tackling vacant stock. Given the scale of the current pressures in terms of delivery, more direct intervention is required to expand and accelerate overall social housing supply, particularly in the short term.

Under this Action Plan, targeted social housing supply is being increased to 47,000 units over the period 2016 to 2021 (at which stage some 10,000 units will be delivered on an annual basis). This will be achieved with Exchequer support of €5.35 billion, with the following delivery profile as set out in Graph 9:

Graph 9: Social Housing Cumulative Delivery, 2016-2021

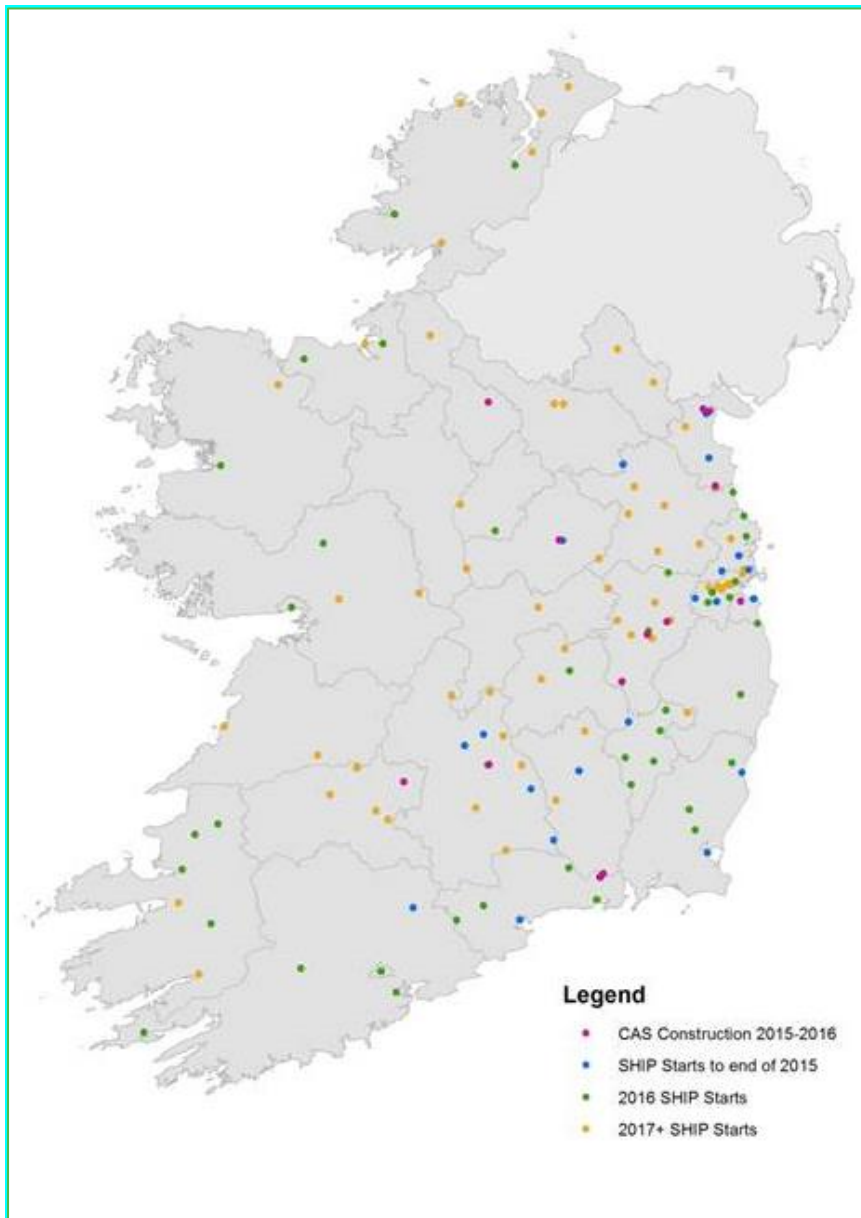


Securing this ambitious level of output is dependent on a number of critical factors:

- A functioning private residential construction sector, with levels of supply to meet demand (delivering 10% social housing units under Part V and providing a supply for targeted acquisitions);
- Local authority and AHB capacity in terms of skills, access to developable land, borrowing, processes etc., to directly deliver programmes across capital and current expenditure, and particularly direct build/refurbishment.

Looking at the Social Housing Investment Programme specifically, Map 2 illustrates the broad geographical locations of new build projects confirmed at this time in relation to anticipated housing starts up until the end of 2016 and for 2017 and 2018. Additional starts will be added as the programme evolves and regular updates will be issued so that its growing momentum will be evident.

Map 2: Broad Locations of Local Authority (SHIP) and Approved Housing Body (CAS) New Build Projects to 2018



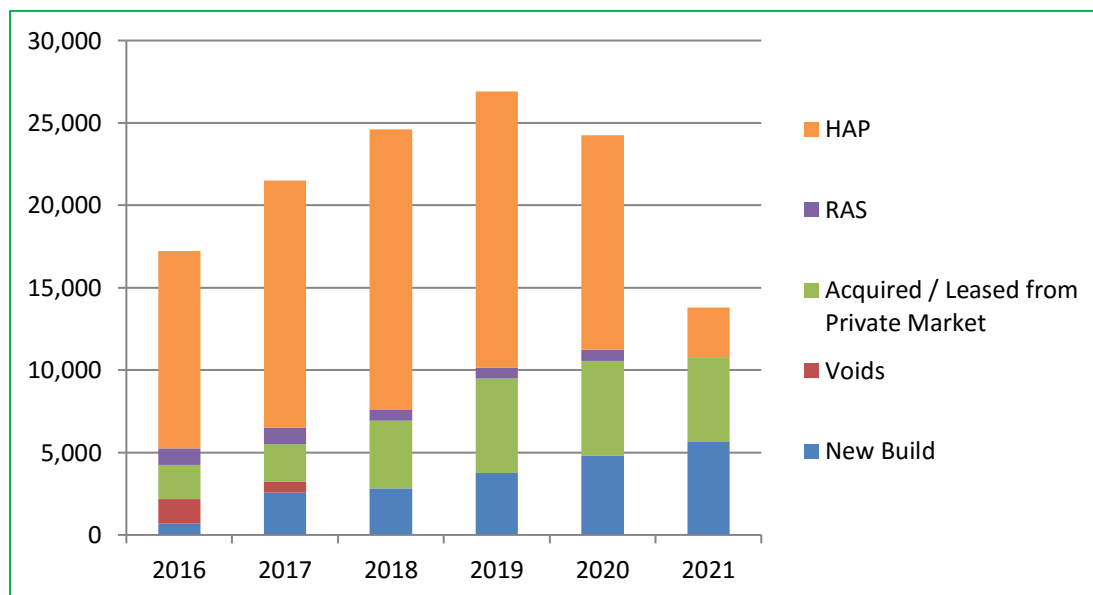
Actions under this Plan to improve the viability of residential construction and the functioning of the rental sector are therefore important in ensuring that the expectations in relation to output from the private sector, which will be drawn upon for a proportion of delivery by the social housing sector, come to fruition. However, more direct intervention is required from the public sector to expand overall supply and social housing delivery.

Significantly increased funding as well as loan finance from the HFA is being made available for local authorities and AHBs to ramp up delivery, increasing significantly the output envisaged in the *Social Housing Strategy*. With cooperation and mobilisation by local authorities and AHBs, this Action Plan envisages a significant progressive increase in social housing build activity to over 5,000 homes a year by 2021, with the potential for further increases thereafter, as necessary.

Irrespective of the method of their housing provision, our citizens deserve to live in sustainable communities with an appropriate tenure mix. The size of the individual construction projects in the new social housing building programme reflects that clearer thinking on achieving good tenure mix. Building a mix of smaller scale and infill developments is essential, if we are to deliver on our commitment to create long-term sustainable communities and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

The upward trajectory planned for the social housing build programme will be challenging, but the local authorities are now re-engaging in substantial social housing construction activity for the first time in many years. Working with AHBs, local authorities are now once again in a position to directly provide homes for those on their waiting lists in a way that enhances the quality of life of our citizens and communities. The overall forecast provision to 2021 from all programmes is set out in Graph 10.

Graph 10: Spectrum of social housing provision forecast, 2016-2021



*This new social housing stock includes units and tenancies delivered through the HAP and RAS schemes on an annual basis. It should be noted that HAP is a demand-led scheme and it is envisaged that the transfer of those on rent supplement to HAP will be complete by 2020.

Our Programmes

DHPCLG oversees and funds a range of programmes to support the delivery of social housing across communities. These programmes improve the lives of citizens and communities through the construction, acquisition and leasing of new social housing, remediation of existing houses and the regeneration of areas of disadvantage. We will review the operation of our programmes, set out below, on an ongoing basis to ensure that they remain relevant and are meeting the needs of citizens.

Table 4: Our Programmes

Programme	Objective
Local Authority Construction & Acquisition (also known as the Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP))	To provide funding to local authorities for the provision of social housing by means of construction and acquisition. It also covers expenditure under the RAPID Delivery programme, Part V acquisitions, Land Aggregation Scheme and the Public Safety Initiative in unfinished housing developments.
Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS)	To provide essential funding to AHBs for the provision of accommodation for persons with specific categories of housing need such as Homeless and Older Persons, People with Disabilities, Returning Emigrants and Victims of Domestic Violence.
Returning Vacant Properties to Productive Use (Voids)	To provide funding to allow local authorities bring back into use long-term vacant social housing units.
Regeneration Programme	To target the country's most disadvantaged communities, including those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour, through the provision of a holistic programme of physical, social and economic regeneration.
Disabled Persons Grants Scheme (DPGs) & Extensions and Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing (IWILs).	To provide for the needs of older people or people with a disability living in social housing, who may require chairlifts or the installation of a downstairs bedroom or bathroom and, where necessary, extensions that are needed to address over-crowding (families who outgrow their current dwelling).
Estate-wide Remedial Works Scheme	To provide support for local authorities to significantly improve run-down estates by improving the layout, addressing issues of anti-social behaviour, improving the housing fabric, and where possible, addressing issues of social exclusion.
Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability for private houses	To provide targeted support to private houses, via the Housing Adaptation Grant, Housing Aid for Older People and Mobility Aids Grant, to enable older people and people with disabilities to remain living independently in their own homes for longer and also to facilitate early return from hospital stays.
Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme for local authority homes	To improve the energy efficiency and comfort levels of older local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty, while also making a contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy reduction targets for 2020.
Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP)	Under this Programme, local authorities are recouped for the cost of long-term lease agreements or rental agreements that they make with private property owners or AHBs. The arrangements are usually for periods of 10-30 years.

Programme	Objective
Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF)	Up-front repayable loan of up to 30% of the relevant capital cost of construction or acquisition projects where units will be made available to the SHCEP. The programme facilitates AHBs raising private finance, including from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA).
Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)	Targeted scheme for households in receipt of rent supplement for more than 18 months, and who are assessed by housing authorities as having a long-term housing need.
Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	New scheme that will replace rent supplement and RAS as the support available to households with a long-term housing need who are housed in rented accommodation.

Accelerated Roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme

The Government's long-term vision is for rent supplement to be replaced with the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) for households with a long-term housing need, although rent supplement will continue to be available for people who need short-term support in meeting their housing costs.

The roll-out of HAP brings together all the social housing services provided by the State under the single umbrella of the local government system and removes a barrier to employment by allowing households to continue to receive HAP support even if their income increases or they gain full-time employment. The scheme has been rolled out on an incremental basis and is currently operational in 19 local authority areas, with more than 10,000 households being supported by the scheme. In excess of 7,000 landlords are receiving a rental payment on a monthly basis on behalf of households supported by HAP and the scheme is growing in credibility among landlords and tenants.

While the level of supply in the rental market is challenging, HAP continues to offer many families stable and supported social housing. The recent increases to maximum rent limits underpinning the HAP scheme, together with the additional flexibility provided to local authorities in operating the scheme locally, mean that HAP can and will continue to offer families ongoing support and access to good quality housing in communities of their choice. While many families wish to continue to live in high quality rented accommodation with the security of knowing that their HAP support will continue even if their household income increases, other households may wish in the longer term to transfer to other forms of social housing.

Building on the progress that has been made to date, we will now accelerate the roll-out of HAP to the remaining local authority areas, as follows:

- By end 2016, we will roll out HAP to the following local authority areas - Cavan, Kerry, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow; and
- From Quarter 1 2017, we will roll out HAP in the remainder of the Dublin Region.

With the intensification of the roll-out to the remaining Dublin local authorities, to be completed early in 2017, HAP will have replaced rent supplement as the long-term housing support for those living in rented accommodation; rent supplement will no longer be available thereafter to new households with an identified social housing need. The transfer of existing rent supplement recipients to HAP will continue as quickly as possible.

Table 5: Accelerated HAP Targets, 2016-2021

	Social Housing Strategy Target	Accelerated Roll-out
2016	10,000	12,000
2017	10,000	15,000
2018	15,000	17,000
2019	15,000	16,760
2020	11,040	13,000*
2021	n/a	10,000

* The aim is to complete the transfers from Rent Supplement to HAP by 2020

New Delivery Mechanisms

Existing programmes will be delivered through a range of new delivery vehicles and methodologies, including:

- NTMA/Private Sector Housing Fund;
- Housing Agency vacant housing purchase initiative;
- Part V delivery;
- Mixed-tenure development on State lands and other lands; and
- Vacant housing repair and leasing initiative.

NTMA/Private Sector Housing Fund

The Government has been actively exploring potential mechanisms that would facilitate investment into the residential market, including in particular the provision of social and affordable rental housing, in a manner that does not impact on the General Government Balance. These 'off-balance sheet' mechanisms seek to bring additional investment into the sector, in addition to the funding being provided by the State, to facilitate increased delivery.

In its June 2016 Report, the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness recommended the establishment of off-balance sheet mechanisms to provide additional investment in social and affordable housing. Building on the work already undertaken by DHPCLG in identifying off-balance sheet mechanisms to deliver additional social housing into the sector, the NTMA is examining the feasibility of establishing a funding vehicle, in conjunction with the private sector, that could be capable of facilitating investment in social housing in a way that does not impact on the General Government Balance. If significant challenges in respect of both the commerciality and the on-/off-balance sheet treatment of such a vehicle can be addressed satisfactorily, the objective is to establish a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) by early 2017 to acquire properties for onward leasing to local authorities and AHBs under long-term leasing arrangements that are already well established in the market.

It is envisaged that such a vehicle would source properties for social housing through a number of potential mechanisms, including the acquisition of Part V units on new residential developments, and other acquisition arrangements. This vehicle would be able to meet the up-front capital costs of acquiring housing units, the finance for which could be serviced through private rental income or State rental income streams where units are made available for social or affordable housing purposes. Units provided by the SPV for social housing purposes would be funded under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme on the basis of the existing contractual arrangements.

It is envisaged that the SPV, if commerciality and off-balance sheet treatment are established, has the potential to provide in the order of 5,000 units over a five-year period for social housing purposes. This SPV could also play an important role in activating residential construction for the broader build-to-rent sector, as a substantial portion of the overall supply of the units through the SPV may need to be for private housing purposes to meet the commerciality test of an off-balance sheet model.

Housing Agency acquisitions

The new initiative, outlined in Pillar 5, provides the Housing Agency with €70m in capital funding from the Exchequer, with the specific focus of engaging with banks and investment companies, primarily private equity funds, to acquire properties for social housing nationally, thereby increasing social housing delivery.

The units acquired in this way by the Agency will be offered for sale to Approved Housing Bodies who can access the funding support available under the CALF and the SHCEP to match loan finance from the HFA and other private lenders, and to local authorities for purchase with full capital support. It will, of course, be critical that the Housing Agency delivers value for money for the State, just as any other purchaser of such portfolios of distressed properties. It is estimated that this will deliver some 1,600 units over the period to 2020.

Part V delivery

Consistent with our policy of delivering sustainable communities and the promotion of tenure diversification, and capitalising on the measures in this Action Plan for improved delivery of private housing development, it is our intention to ensure adequate resources are made available to both local authorities and AHBs, to allow them purchase or lease newly built private dwellings to the fullest extent envisaged by Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

In addition, we will, where appropriate, support the leasing of additional privately developed dwellings beyond the extent envisaged by Part V. As part of this programme and to support the development of private housing, the up-front purchase of the Part V social housing requirement will be facilitated, subject to the introduction of strict controls.

Mixed-tenure development on State lands and other lands

The active pursuit of housing development on State lands, including local authority lands, will form a major part of the new approach to housing provision. In actively targeting State sites in prime residential locations and investing in infrastructure and State-supported housing, this should encourage and incentivise housing on adjacent lands owned privately. A number of local authorities have outlined proposals for mixed tenure developments on their own lands. The local authority will be pivotal in managing the overall planning and development of such large-scale housing developments and the implementation of these proposals will be influenced by lessons learned from:

- The initiative by Dublin City Council to seek expressions of interest from the market in respect of a number of sites it owns, for a mix of housing developments (social and private/public), and,
- The development of Social Housing Public Private Partnership bundles, particularly issues such as clear title; site access; infrastructure; planning and zoning; and sustainable communities proofing.

There is potential for the wider use of this approach and by taking a more active role in land management for housing, the State will support a more stable and sustainable housing

sector in the future. Some 700 sites reflecting local authority and Land Aggregation Scheme^[1] lands, which were purchased for housing purposes, have been identified by local authorities, notified to the Housing Agency and are GIS mapped showing their location, size, boundaries and other information.

For each site in the Land Aggregation Scheme, which is linked to land management approaches in Pillar 3, a Strategic Management Plan will be required to signal clear objectives that in essence will relate to moving the asset to the development stage at the earliest opportunity, in full support of developing sustainable communities, or transferring the land in support of the common good. Consideration will also be given to the use of this land to promote partnerships and explore synergies with other public or private bodies to deliver housing.

We will also work in partnership with religious congregations to identify underused land and property that may have potential to be brought forward for social housing and mixed-tenure developments.

Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative

The new initiative, outlined in Pillar 5, enables local authorities, having identified appropriate vacant privately owned properties in their functional areas, to provide upfront financial assistance to meet reasonable renovation works and to enter into long term lease arrangements with property owners. Renovation costs will be recouped from rent over an agreed period.

Innovations to improve, support and accelerate delivery

Housing Delivery Office

We will establish a high-level Housing Delivery Office within DHPCLG to support local authorities, AHBs and all stakeholders involved in the delivery of housing projects and to drive delivery of key elements of the ambitious private and social housing targets in this Action Plan.

This Office, which will be staffed by project management, procurement and technical experts through a mix of externally sourced seconded expertise and internal resources, and which will report directly to the Secretary General, will work across the range of stakeholders to accelerate housing delivery, both private and social, on key sites, identify further mechanisms to accelerate delivery, including process/procedural reforms, and support the rollout of complex construction projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery.

Housing Procurement Unit

A Housing Procurement Unit will be established within the Housing Agency to provide a procurement centre of excellence and advice in support of local authorities and AHBs in the accelerated delivery of their social housing programmes.

This new Unit will work with local authorities and AHBs to build their capacity and expertise to meet the scale and complexity associated with the ambitious programme of delivery in this Action Plan. It will also be available to co-ordinate project development and project briefs in local authority areas, and will be in a position to manage the design and tendering processes for local authorities and AHBs, as required, including the procurement of consultants and contractors.

^[1] Under the Land Aggregation Scheme the local authority land loans are redeemed by the Exchequer and the ownership of the sites transfers to the Housing Agency.

Accelerating Social Housing Approval Processes

The advancement of construction projects by its nature takes time and the key priority in planning and designing new social housing developments is to deliver high quality housing as part of sustainable communities.

The average of 18 months to advance social housing projects through planning and design and onto construction, is consistent with an average pre-construction period for delivery of private housing (pre-design, preliminary design, planning approval, potential planning appeals, detailed design and statutory Building Control), although private housing developments are not subject to time factors associated with the public procurement requirements that apply to social housing.

All publicly-funded construction projects, including social housing, are implemented under the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's *Capital Works Management Framework* and DHPCLG has streamlined the Framework's nine-stage pre-commencement approval process down to four approval stages. This involves a check on the business case for the project at initial capital appraisal stage, a pre-planning check on design and value for money, and two final assessments on pre-tender and post-tender costs. This approval process, which runs in tandem with the normal project advancement through design and planning, serves a particular purpose in delivering on public accountability, cost certainty and value for money.

While good planning and design are crucial for new social housing developments and while the timelines are aligned with much of what happens with private sector developments, nonetheless there is a clear need to progress social housing projects as quickly as possible given the scale of social housing need. DHPCLG is committed to working together with local authorities and all stakeholders to fast-track and advance projects as efficiently and effectively as possible. In the first three months of this Action Plan, working with the new Housing Delivery Office and with the local government sector, we will review again our procedures in order to identify the scope for further streamlining and acceleration.

Further technical resources are being deployed, both within DHPCLG and at local authority level, to accelerate construction projects. Early and active engagement on the planning of social housing construction projects is now being implemented to ensure their swift turnaround; the capacity building across the system that is already underway will be continued to ensure efficient and high quality delivery to meet the needs of our citizens.

Streamlining Part 8 planning processes for LA and AHB housing projects

While most Part 8 proposals relating to local authority own-development projects (such as social housing, roads, community facilities, libraries etc.) are generally supported and approved by local authorities and their elected members within reasonable timeframes, there is scope to further streamline the process in a way that protects the public's right to be informed about and participate in the planning process, while at the same time speeding up the process of finalising decisions once the public has had its opportunity to comment.

Accordingly, we will initiate a focused review of legislation in relation to Part 8 in consultation with local authorities, with a view to streamlining the processes, following which any necessary amendment of the legislative and regulatory framework will be finalised.

The Part 8 process can also be used for development carried out in partnership with a local authority pursuant to a contract. Building on the streamlining measures above, we will also encourage local authorities to use the joint venture provisions above with AHBs in relation to mixed tenure housing development projects.

Supporting Approved Housing Bodies to deliver

The *Housing Policy Statement 2011* and the *Social Housing Strategy 2020* recognise the key contribution that AHBs have to make to the delivery of housing supports in Ireland, building on their track record in terms of both housing provision and management. The AHB sector has evolved in a short timeframe from the traditional grant-funded model to greater use of a loan finance approach, reflecting the prevailing arrangements in other jurisdictions. Working with the Housing Finance Agency, 15 AHBs with certified borrower status are currently progressing projects across the country. This is a significant contribution and the Government remains committed to enabling the sector to play a central role in the effort to meet social housing needs.

Clearly, delivering on this increased output requires a streamlining of procedures, and concerted and integrated action focused on programme delivery. Additional funding under CAS will be made available for AHBs to increase their build output and supporting increased delivery by the sector will be a particular focus of attention for the new Housing Delivery Office, outlined earlier.

In addition, increased supply in the private market will provide opportunities for AHBs to explore a greater number of acquisitions and harness, to a larger scale, the availability of low-cost financing from lenders, including the Housing Finance Agency. The continued use of Payment and Availability Agreements to be funded by way of the SHCEP will be integral to the delivery of these units.

The construction of new homes directly by AHBs using private finance will also be intensified. AHB access to local authority lands will be an important contributor in this context, as will the continuing availability of CALF, as an early injection of cash-flow to support early project costs and providing the necessary leverage to allow AHBs to access private financing for the balance of costs.

The Government is also committed to a range of other structural, funding and policy supports to increase delivery by AHBs. Among these measures will be the establishment of an Innovation Fund to support the development by AHBs of innovative financial models, such as SPVs or mutual bodies, to further enhance the contribution of the sector to the delivery of additional social housing and maximise the opportunity to leverage off-balance sheet funding opportunities.

Support will be provided from this Fund to an Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)/sector-led new special purpose vehicle, involving investors, including the Credit Union movement. This new vehicle, which could itself ultimately seek AHB status and charitable recognition, has the potential to deliver significant additional investment funding for the delivery of permanent social housing by AHBs through both acquisition and new build. To assist in this process, it is anticipated that early acquisitions can be made from units purchased by the Housing Agency from financial institutions and other Funds using a funding vehicle outlined above.

A mechanism is also being introduced that will allow for the agreement of a two-year multi-annual CALF funding programme for AHBs. The objective is to provide more certainty to AHBs with regard to their funding requirements. The initiative will operate on a pilot basis with five AHBs with the intention of broadening the initiative thereafter.

It is also proposed to establish a unit within the Housing Agency to provide a 'one-stop shop' support to AHBs which will allow for better co-ordinated delivery under the various mechanisms across all local authority areas. Options to support additional delivery of new units through greater leverage of existing assets within the sector will also be explored. Specifically, we will develop a policy on release of CAS/CLSS charges by the end of 2016. This will help ensure that existing and already paid for units can be used as security for the provision of new permanent social housing units by the sector.

These actions complement activities that are already underway within the AHB sector to support long-term strategic thinking and facilitate collaboration, alliances and mergers within the sector. The establishment of a Regulator for the sector, on a full statutory basis, will be a key step in supporting its continued evolution and rationalisation.

Housing for specific groups

Older people

The ageing of our population represents one of the most significant demographic and societal developments that Ireland faces in the years ahead, with the number of people over the age of 65 expected to reach 1.4 million by 2041. Across this same period, the number over the age of 80 is set to quadruple, from 128,000 in 2011 to some 480,000. The implications for public policy in areas such as housing, health and urban and rural planning are considerable.

Government policy is to support older people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. In terms of cost effectiveness, home care costs in Ireland are estimated to be consistently lower than hospitalisation. For many, living in adapted or specialist housing reduces reliance on health and social care services and can result in measurably improved health status and lower rates of hospital admissions, while also contributing to a greater sense of wellbeing.

There is, therefore, a requirement for a range of housing choices and options for older people. In developing that aspect of this Action Plan, account has been taken of a number of strands of Age Friendly Ireland's work including;

- A consultation process with older people across 31 local authorities,
- Findings from the *Housing for Older People: Future Perspectives* research study (2016),
- Initial results emerging from the Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative survey which has involved c.10,500 household-based interviews,
- The training programme for local authority staff in housing, public realm and planning, and
- Learning from Age Friendly City and County multi-agency projects.

Older persons have specific housing requirements such as being in proximity to their family and social networks and the need for access to public and other essential services, recreation and amenities.

A new cross-Departmental/inter-agency approach will therefore be taken to progressing housing initiatives for older people, including a Dublin City Council pilot project for a sixty-home development which will be commenced in 2016, with opportunities for similar proposals in other local authority areas to be pursued in parallel.

Given the importance of housing adaptation and other grants that help older people live comfortably in their own homes for longer through local authority and HSE programmes, we will explore how the process of accessing these grants can be streamlined and simplified.

People with a disability

The *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability* (NHSPWD) 2011-2016, published jointly by the DHPCLG and the DoH in 2011, sets out the Government's broad framework for the delivery of housing for people with disabilities through mainstream housing options. The Strategy and Implementation Framework were developed as part of a coherent framework, in conjunction with the Government's mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, the *Report of the Working Group on Congregated Settings and Transforming Lives* – the programme to implement the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Disability Services in Ireland, to support people with disabilities to access community-based living with maximum independence and choice.

Implementation of identified actions in the NHSPWD 2011-2016 is being driven primarily by the Housing Agency by means of a dedicated sub-group, comprising representatives from DHPCLG, the HSE, DoH, local authorities, the ICSH and various disability representative organisations. Much work has been done to deliver on various initiatives to support both new supply of dedicated housing for people with disabilities and provide for the adaptation of existing stock. An Implementation Monitoring Group (IMG) was established to monitor and report on progress. The current Strategy will be extended beyond its original timeframe of 2016 to continue to deliver on its aims. The IMG will scope and frame the work-plan for its extension by the end of this year. As part of the overall implementation of the Strategy, local Strategic Plans for local areas to help identify and address the housing needs of people with a disability over the next 5 years are currently being collated by the Housing Agency into a draft National Strategic Plan before end Q3, 2016. These plans will inform the specific supply response for people with disabilities at a local level, including, for example, accessibility requirements in new social housing stock.

The NHSPWD 2011-2016 also supports the Government's de-institutionalisation policy, which is led by the DoH and the HSE. The HSE are dedicating considerable resources to this programme, to help accelerate progress, and DHPCLG will provide ring-fenced funding of €10m in 2016 under the CAS, specifically for the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities transitioning from congregated settings.

In addition, we will review the take-up of the funding by end 2016 and provide further capital funding - over and above the €10m for 2016 - in 2017 and 2018 for this programme, if required.

Traveller specific accommodation

Housing authorities deliver Traveller-specific accommodation based on multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities and also form the basis for the allocation of funding from DHPCLG for Traveller-specific accommodation (i.e. group housing and halting sites). Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programme running from 2014-2018.

To underpin the independence and quality of the programme, the Housing Agency will commission an expert, independent review of capital and current funding for Traveller-specific accommodation for the period 2000 to date, having regard to the targets contained in the local authority TAPs and actual units delivered, the current status of the accommodation funded and the funding provided for accommodation maintenance and other supports. Where targets have not been met, the review will include an analysis of the underlying reasons, in order to identify the particular challenges that need to be addressed to underpin future progress. This review will be commenced in Autumn 2016, and will be completed by end 2016.

Concurrent with the review, the composition and terms of reference of a working group to audit the implementation and delivery of the TAPs with a focus on appropriate supply of accommodation, will be scoped by the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC). The independent review commissioned by the Housing Agency will provide factual information and a key platform for the working group to progress its work effectively. The aim will be for the NTACC to complete its work by the first quarter of 2017 and the working group will be established immediately thereafter.

Irish Refugee Protection Programme

In addition to those who seek international protection in Ireland, the Government has committed to accept up to 4,000 people into Ireland as part of the EU response to the migration crisis in Europe. In September 2015 the Government established the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). A Cross Departmental Taskforce chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality, to deal with the operational and logistical aspects of the support programme, has been established. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and local authority chief executives are also represented on the Taskforce.

An operational sub-group under the auspices of the IRPP Taskforce is to be established, composed of all relevant Departments of State and other bodies such as representatives of local authorities and the Irish Red Cross, to support the process of housing the refugees. This sub-group will be co-chaired by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and the Department of Justice and Equality. Arrangements will be put in place at local authority level to support the housing of these refugees, including the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and a range of other supports will be made available at local level to ensure the integration of individuals into their new communities.



Pillar 3: Build More Homes

Key Objective: Increase the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices

Key actions:

- **Doubling of output to deliver over 25,000 units per annum on average over the period of the Plan [2017-2021], aided by**
 - Opening up land supply and low-cost State lands
 - Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund
 - NTMA financing of large-scale “on-site” infrastructure
 - Planning Reforms
 - Putting in place a National Planning Framework and land management actions
 - Efficient design and delivery methods to lower housing delivery costs
 - Measures to support construction innovation and skills

The economic collapse of 2008 in Ireland was principally driven by a debt-fuelled property price spiral. Learning from that experience, the Central Bank has put in place strict macro-prudential mortgage lending rules and financial institutions have rigorously reviewed and revised their commercial property lending practices.

A firm link has been re-established between the ability of citizens to afford to either rent or buy and the cost of housing provision. A two-person household, earning the average industrial wage, can afford either a mortgage or rental equivalent to the provision of a new home costing not much more than €250,000. Property sector sources indicate that above a price/rental threshold of a €300,000 home in Dublin and €250,000 or less in Cork and other regional cities, demand and the pace of sales/rental of newly available properties tapers off markedly. On the other hand, ongoing research on housing input costs by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland and others points towards significant challenges in delivering housing at prices much below €300,000.

There are two key consequences of the above:

- Boosting supply is fundamentally linked to all housing sector stakeholders re-shaping the entire delivery process, from land to infrastructure provision and through to construction methods, to match market affordability trends; and
- The State sector must support an inherently affordable supply of housing through the measures under its control and particularly:
 - Supply of land;
 - Certainty in the planning process;
 - Investment in enabling infrastructure; and
 - Review, and adjustment as necessary and practicable, in relation to cost inputs.

The Housing Supply Coordination Task Force for Dublin was established in 2014 as an action under *Construction 2020*³, with a focus on addressing supply-related issues affecting the delivery of housing across the four Dublin local authorities. The latest data from the Task

³ The Task Force comprises representatives from DHPCLG, the four Dublin local authorities (Dublin City, Fingal, South Dublin and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown), NAMA and other agencies, and is chaired by the Chief Executive of South Dublin County Council.

Force indicates that planning permission currently exists for approximately 27,000 new homes in Dublin, with zoned and developable land capable of delivering at least a further additional 50,000 homes. In terms of delivery, while the Task Force data show an increase in the number of active sites across Dublin (up from 91 a year ago to 115 now), the rate of increase is slow and, in overall terms, there are only 4,800 new homes currently under construction across the Dublin region.

The Task Force has prepared a number of reports on housing supply and it has concluded that the contrast between the scale of existing permissions and development lands on one hand, as opposed to the relatively low level of activity on those lands on the other, points towards factors such as the viability of new construction, investor confidence in terms of a sufficient pool of potential customers that can finance purchases, and development and finance capability as key issues that need to be tackled in bringing extra supply on stream.

If viability is recovering but not yet complete in Dublin, it is likely to be even more challenging in other parts of the country. For example, there is an acute shortage of apartment developments in the centre of Cork, despite a growing demand from new FDI-type employers establishing adjacent to the city centre, because of the gap between delivery costs and prices of second-hand homes in the wider Cork city area. Therefore, closing the supply gap, particularly in the right locations, is critically dependent on ensuring viability of housing provision, taking account of the prices that are affordable to potential buyers and renters.

Consequently, this Action Plan sets out a series of integrated actions to underpin viability under the following headings:

- Land supply management,
- Supporting infrastructure investment,
- Planning reforms,
- National Planning Framework,
- Tackling construction costs, and
- Construction sector capacity and skills.

Land Supply Management

As this Plan has been developed, a consistent message that has come through from many local authorities, housing providers and funders is that one of the best ways to ensure availability of reasonably priced housing is ensuring that there is a good supply of “ready-to-go” development land that is available at a cost that reflects the realistic value of what can be developed on those lands, taking account of all the usual input costs.

Despite a large reserve of zoned land across all our planning authorities, not all of that land would appear to be readily available to the broad range of housing providers. It is often reported that landowners may not sell their lands to housing providers until prices match their expectations, regardless of what may be a realistic land price in terms of the overall price of housing that it is economically viable to provide on those lands.

A significant number of the strategic residential sites around Dublin and other key urban areas of demand have been the subject of NAMA, receiver and liquidator activity, with the result that the levels of development land coming to the market are likely to increase over the short and medium term. In particular, NAMA is developing a programme to bring on stream up to 20,000 new starter homes over the next three to five years and has indicated to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness that it has a very significant land-bank and housing development programme.

To address the issue of land supply, this Action Plan proposes the preparation, as part of the new 20-year National Planning Framework, of a national land supply management strategy to ensure an active and healthy market for development land. As part of this strategy, it is clear that publicly owned lands will have a key part to play in ensuring that housing providers who are keen and ready to provide what the market needs, can access “ready-to-go” sites at reasonable prices.

For example, a range of large publicly owned residentially zoned and serviced sites will be master-planned by the relevant local authorities and put out to the market for expressions of interest from housing providers for a mix of tenure perspectives, such as private house builders and approved housing bodies, who may work together in developing these sites. It is envisaged that up to 3,000 homes could be released in the initial phase of this programme.

Allied to this objective, data in relation to land collated under the OPW-led State Lands Register, and the Housing Agency Land Aggregation Scheme will be co-ordinated to promote competition in the market place for development land that presents low risk for development (e.g. zoned, serviced) and to counter price-setting driven by land hoarding, which will be tackled in parallel through the Vacant Site Levy, introduced under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015.

Moreover, local authorities will be supported in making strategic acquisitions to replenish the supply of lands in key developable locations that can then be master-planned, with a view to removing planning constraints, before being re-offered to the broader housing sector for mixed public and private housing developments. This will be advanced through a range of measures including sale, joint ventures and licensing arrangements to ease land supply for smaller- and medium-sized housing providers who struggle to finance up-front land costs.

The Government also intends to promote better land supply through its support for infrastructure investment under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), by linking investment with the making of land on strategic sites available for a spectrum of housing providers.

To drive and underpin land supply management, two key actions under this Action Plan includes:

- Selection of LIHAF-supported pathfinder sites; and
- Establishment of a dedicated Housing Delivery Office within DHPCLG to drive supply.

Pathfinder sites that have a demonstrated capability to deliver significant up-scaling of the supply of new homes will be identified and prioritised in conjunction with local authorities. An initial estimation of potential sites indicates that they are capable of delivering in the range of 15,000-20,000 new homes at least. In addition, these development sites will act as exemplars for the co-ordination and delivery of plan-led housing development and active land management.

To provide leadership and a focused capacity to drive development on identified key pathfinder sites and other priority initiatives, a new dedicated Housing Delivery Office (see Pillar 2) is being established within DHPCLG.

Supporting Infrastructure Investment

Infrastructural blockages have been identified as one of the main impediments to development of certain key sites for housing development.

Across the four Dublin local authorities (based on data gathered by the Dublin Housing Supply Co-ordination Task Force), there are over a dozen planned new housing areas of significant scale (e.g. with potential for 1,500+ homes) that could be brought on stream to

address pent-up demand in Dublin. These sites include Government designated Strategic Development Zones, which are areas such as Dublin Docklands and Adamstown in West Dublin that are subject to detailed masterplans, and other areas where the relevant local authorities have prepared detailed Local Area Plans such as in Pelletstown in north-west Dublin and Dublin City's North Fringe.

However, to release major additional supply from these sites, considerable investment in access and supporting infrastructure is required. Traditionally in the past, the costs of not only the internal infrastructure needed on these sites but also wider surrounding infrastructure, were ultimately borne by the purchasers or renters of the new homes developed on these sites. However, in today's market, adding such costs to the overall price of new homes would likely result in development that is not affordable and therefore not viable under current market conditions.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF)

To address this issue, the Government has earmarked €150m in Exchequer funding, to be matched by €50m in local authority funding, which will collectively be used to establish a €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), spread over the period 2017-2019. Local authorities will be given access to increased borrowing from the Housing Finance Agency at low interest rates in order to facilitate their contribution. The Fund is designed to relieve critical infrastructural blockages and enable the delivery of large-scale housing on key development sites, with the potential to open up lands and deliver housing of the order of 15,000 to 20,000 units by 2019.

LIHAF Bids will contain:

- Clear identification of the infrastructural impediments which, if cleared, will result in significant capacity for substantial and affordable housing yield;
- Confirmation that the cost of providing that infrastructure by traditional means would make the provision of housing uneconomic/unaffordable/restricted in number;
- Commitment to a collaborative approach to increase housing output on the site(s). This collaboration will incorporate provision of housing at a lower price point through
 - cost reductions;
 - agreement with a private housing provider to purchase sites for multi-platform development;
 - agreement with AHB or LA to purchase/ develop social housing on site as part of the social housing programme and local authority Part V provision as well.

To get the LIHAF up and running as early as possible and provide certainty around releasing key sites, DHPCLG will shortly issue a call for proposals for local authorities and housing providers to work together to access this funding. In return, clear commitments will be required around the accelerated pace and scale of delivery of homes in the right locations and with affordability built in, reflecting the scale of the State's investment on behalf of its citizens.

In parallel, DHPCLG has been working with local authorities and Irish Water to develop a prioritisation methodology for investing in network extensions of water services for key strategic sites. Subject to necessary consents and regulatory approval from the Commission for Energy Regulation, Irish Water plans to put in place a programme of works, appropriately coordinated with LIHAF proposals.

NTMA funding of large infrastructure - Supporting Housing Infrastructure Investment

In addition to the large-scale off-site infrastructure to be funded under the LIHAF, the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), is developing proposals to offer competitive financing on a commercial basis, and in line with ISIF's statutory mandate, to meet other infrastructure requirements on large development sites. The NTMA proposals are aimed primarily at where the responsibility for delivering this infrastructure, which will unlock housing potential, falls to individual developers or to consortia of developers. The ultimate objective is to provide access to a new infrastructure financing stream for housing developments in areas of proven demand and early delivery potential. ISIF has, in this respect, already had specific engagement with private sector developers regarding infrastructure financing requirements relating to areas capable of supporting substantial new residential development in urban areas of greatest demand, and is continuing to engage with interested parties on development objectives generally.

The proposed investment by ISIF would assume risks that conventional market financiers are unwilling or reluctant to finance, generally because of development risks, longer loan timescales or uncertainty around timing of repayments. Such ISIF investment has the potential to complement any central and local Government contribution to infrastructure funding, including through the LIHAF. ISIF financing would target opportunities mainly where there is a financing gap between the identified infrastructure cost and the resourcing available through such central sources.

This commercial funding through ISIF will be in addition to investments that ISIF has already made in accordance with its statutory mandate in the wider real estate sector, including investments aimed at financing the supply of new commercial and residential development and investments aimed at supporting the increased supply of student accommodation. ISIF has, for example, already committed to housing investment platforms that have advanced finance to build in excess of 2,000 new homes and which have the potential to fund many more.

In addition, in the area of student accommodation (see pillar 4), ISIF has already made a substantial investment through its €54 million investment in Dublin City University's overall €230 million Campus Redevelopment Programme. Given the commercial returns that are available from the rental income on student accommodation, ISIF (in tandem with third party investors) is open to further investment opportunities in the sector. The primary housing-related benefit of ISIF's investment in this sector is in the consequential freeing up of significant rental accommodation in the vicinity of third-level institutions that is currently occupied by students.

Planning Reforms

The planning process has a major role to play in providing a clear path to meeting the housing needs of citizens and giving certainty for the providers of that housing. The Government is determined to see the planning process building on recent enhancements and becoming more responsive to the requirements and complexities around housing delivery. Reforms made to the planning process are already beginning to have an impact including:

- the introduction into the Planning and Development Acts of the concept of core strategies within city and county development plans, aimed at aligning local zoning requirements with housing demand and regional targets;
- legislative changes in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, streamlining Part V obligations on developers to guarantee more housing provision;

- reductions in development contribution charges applied by local authorities, facilitated by changes under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, as well as the introduction of a development contribution rebate scheme to support and make more economically viable the delivery of affordable starter homes in Dublin and Cork;
- providing for the application by local planning authorities of a vacant site levy to incentivise the development of vacant and under-utilised sites in urban areas for housing and regeneration purposes – while not applying until January 2019, the levy will have an influencing impact considerably in advance of that, as owners of affected sites bring forward proposals for development in order to avoid the levy;
- requiring planning authorities to comply with specific national planning policy requirements as may be prescribed by the Minister in statutory planning guidelines, for example, which underpinned revised apartment standard guidelines published in early 2016 and which have reduced the delivery costs of new apartments by at least €20,000 per unit on average; and
- streamlining the arrangements in relation to the making of modifications to Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) planning schemes.

Additional measures now proposed to further enhance the responsiveness and flexibility of the planning system include:

- measures to enable larger housing applications to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála, following the completion of necessary pre-planning consultations at local level;
- ensuring that An Bord Pleanála prioritises the determination of all planning appeals related to large-scale housing applications within the 18-week statutory objective period;
- more effective, streamlined and expansive use of the Part 8 process, whereby a planning authority can assess and approve more swiftly developments either planned to be delivered by itself or in partnership arrangements, such as with AHBs (see also Pillar 2);
- increased use of SDZ designations to master-plan and fast-track the co-ordinated development of key sites, in tandem with the provision of enabling infrastructure and supporting services;
- introduction of new on-line planning services across planning authorities; and
- provision for the further extension of duration of planning permissions within a specified period.

Streamlining planning processes for larger private housing developments

With almost all planning approvals of larger housing developments for 100 new homes or more being appealed to An Bord Pleanála, this has meant that there is in effect a two-stage planning application process which can take 18 to 24 months to secure ultimate approval to go on site and start to build. This can impact adversely on viability of the development, given the up-front cost of land acquisition accumulating over that, or a longer, period and the consequent time delays in securing a return on investment.

Having regard to the current housing supply shortages and the priority to accelerate larger-scale housing proposals in locations where pent-up demand is greatest, temporary provision will be made to enable larger housing development applications (comprising 100+ units) to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála for a four-year period to 2020. Such arrangements would draw on procedures already in place in respect of strategic infrastructure development projects under the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 and should speed up the planning decision-making process in respect of such developments, while also providing greater certainty for developers in terms of timeframes within which such developments can be determined in the planning system.

Furthermore, setting a clear time-limit within which these arrangements will operate should incentivise the front-loading and increased supply of housing as early as possible to help address the current pent-up demand.

Investment in re-using or converting urban commercial developments

One of the barriers cited by stakeholders interested in re-using vacant or under-utilised commercial properties in cities, towns and villages, such as accommodation or space over shops, is the range of regulatory approvals and processes, such as obtaining planning permission for a change of use, building control approval and disabled access certificates, and the difficulties that this array of regulation presents in raising development finance or funding acquisitions pending such approvals.

As outlined in Pillar 5, proposals will be brought forward by the end of 2016 to amend the exempted development regulations to include an exemption from the normal requirement to obtain planning permission to convert upper floors of commercial properties into residential accommodation, on condition that reasonable quality standards of accommodation and amenities can be provided in line with building control requirements.

Wider planning reforms

Beyond these immediate and short-term actions, and to ensure that the planning system remains accessible and responsive to the likely increased activity, in relation to residential, commercial and mixed development proposals, a root and branch review of the planning system will be undertaken and completed by Q1 2017. This review will focus particularly around the forecasting, planning and delivery of residential development and take account of the work underway in relation to the development of the new National Planning Framework. A key driver to delivering a more responsive planning system will be the integration of technological efficiencies such as e-planning, the roll-out of which will be supported across the local government sector and An Bord Pleanála (the board).

In addition, the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator, as proposed in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, will support both the land use planning functions and practices of planning authorities and monitor the systems and procedures of these authorities, and the board, to ensure that the planning system is flexible, fair and transparent. The 2016 Bill also proposes other reforms to further streamline the planning process, with a priority focus on facilitating speedier delivery of housing.

Recognising its key role within the planning system, it is crucial that the board is appropriately positioned and fit for purpose to maintain its high level of public and institutional confidence in providing independent, impartial and objective planning decisions both in respect of strategic infrastructure applications and in determining planning appeals. An external organisational review of the Board, which was completed earlier this year, assessed the capacity and resources of the organisation to fulfil its legislative mandate, acknowledging the likely increase in construction activity as part of the economic recovery and the increasingly complex policy and legislative context within which the Board operates.

Arising from the Review, DHPCLG, in consultation with the board, will develop an Implementation Plan, addressing the key findings and recommendations in the Review Report, by end Q3 2016.

Further consideration will be given to amending the Planning and Development Acts to extend the duration of extant permissions that have already benefitted from one extension of duration but where that extension of duration would not cover the period of this Action Plan and the measures proposed to boost supply. However, in order to ensure timely completion of approved developments, this legislative provision will be limited to extant planning permissions for larger developments of housing units and the provision will expire in 2021.

National Planning Framework

The *Report of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness* recommended that, in relation to private housing, a national policy on land use and housing provision across tenures and types should be prepared. Taking account of this important recommendation, the Government is preparing a National Planning Framework (NPF) for publication in draft by end 2016 to provide the strategic national planning and development policy direction for the next decade and beyond. *Inter alia*, the NPF is aimed at ensuring that housing development takes place in the right locations with the necessary supporting social, economic and physical infrastructure to meet all housing needs.

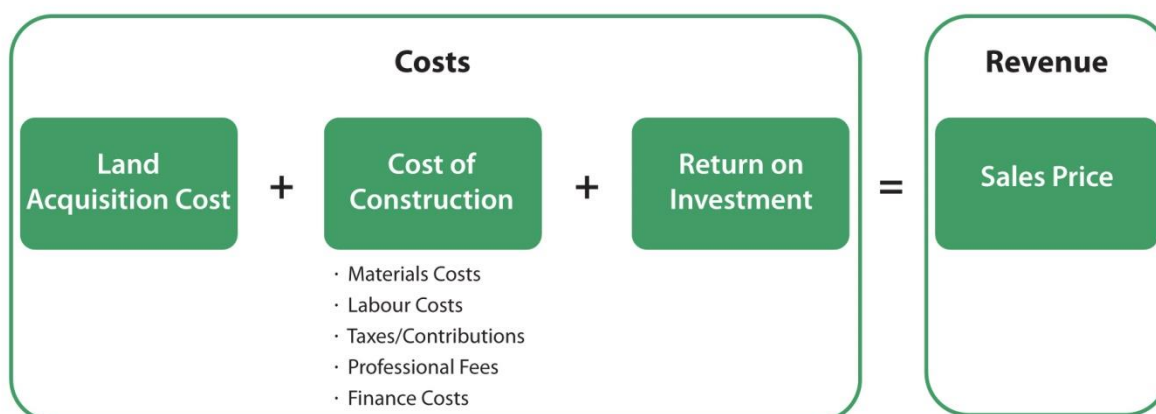
As a replacement for the 2002 National Spatial Strategy, the NPF will include a strategic assessment of national housing need and will support more effective delivery and viability of strategic housing development by ensuring greater certainty around infrastructure provision, strategic land supply management and investment co-ordination generally. Further details on the NPF are set out in Appendix 4.

Costs of Delivering New Homes

The construction of new homes by the private market requires selling prices to exceed development costs. The Central Bank mortgage rules protect households from taking on excessive debt and reduce property price inflation but they also effectively cap prices relative to income. Therefore, if prices cannot or more importantly should not increase, there is a need to address the other side of the equation and tackle development and construction costs relative to income and prices.

The relationship between input costs and sales prices in a well-functioning housing market is illustrated in Figure 3:

Figure 3: Broad Cost Components of Housing Delivery



However, in market circumstances where competition is weak, for example, where housing supply is insufficient due to a lack of suitable building sites, the relationship between costs and prices may weaken and higher than normal returns may result. Ensuring robust competition is therefore of particular importance, especially in relation to land and delivery costs discussed further below.

Like any other part of the economy, housing development, as an economic activity, must play its part, through the taxation system, in funding the broader provision of public goods and services. It is important to recall that the construction sector already benefits from a reduced VAT rate of 13.5% compared to 23% in other sectors of the economy and there have been a number of initiatives undertaken, under the *Construction 2020* strategy, to reduce the impacts of other charges, including reductions in development contributions, the introduction of a development contribution rebate scheme for larger schemes in Cork and Dublin, and changes to the requirements of Part V of the Planning and Development Acts.

Recent research from bodies such as the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland indicates that private housing construction provides only a marginal return in many housing market areas. At the same time, there is limited agreement on the elements of the Irish cost base that are out of line by comparison to other jurisdictions, but the key areas are land costs and construction costs. This Action Plan proposes a number of measures under both of these headings.

Land costs

To provide housing that most people can afford, site costs for a typical semi-detached house need to be kept as low as possible, with information showing that, once site costs rise much above €30,000 - €50,000, new homes are no longer affordable for most people.

Ireland has a lot of land zoned for housing, with the last annual Housing Land Availability Survey conducted in 2015, showing that there is enough zoned land to provide for a population of over 6 million people. Raw land is therefore not the issue but, in line with the message from stakeholder consultation events conducted to inform the preparation of this Plan, converting that raw land into low-risk, ready-to-go and attractive development sites that housing providers can buy at reasonable cost and turn into homes, is the largest area where a reduction in cost could be delivered. That is why this Action Plan proposes:

- Reform of the Housing Strategy process that local authorities are required to prepare as part of their statutory development plan, so that these Strategies are refocused around land and development site supply at affordable prices to meet the housing needs of each local authority area, across tenures and types as well as the social housing requirement;
- Funding for infrastructure under the LHAF process, to tackle blockages either holding up the release of zoned land or that make the development of such land uneconomic;
- Establishment of a new State Lands Management Group, with a clear objective to identify and release to the market a tranche of lands, capable of yielding up to 3,000 new homes in the first phase, with sites being made available at costs that can deliver homes that ordinary people can buy or rent; and
- Fast-tracking the planning process by introducing, for a limited four-year period, a process whereby larger housing applications, which typically tend to be appealed to An Bord Pleanála after local authority consideration, can be made directly to the Board. This measure could have a dramatic effect on enhancing certainty and cutting the time between acquiring a site and building on it, thereby reducing financing costs and ultimately sale prices.

These proposed land supply measures are aimed at encouraging a more stable and affordable source of potential development lands that the State can use to moderate excessive development land price inflation. Moreover, the planning reforms proposed have been designed to reduce the time required for, and therefore reduce the holding or financial costs associated with, site acquisition and getting planning permission.

Construction costs

This Action Plan proposes a range of actions to tackle some of the public costs associated with housing, but housing providers and the development sector must innovate too.

Detailed analysis will be carried out as a follow-up to recent NCC research in this area, in conjunction with the construction sector, to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland. The intention is to publish these findings with a view to identifying economies. In the meantime, the measures undertaken under this Action Plan will enable bigger sites to be activated at larger scale, opening up the possibilities for innovation and economies of scale in the provision of badly needed new homes, utilising modern methods of construction in particular.

One of the pathfinder projects under this Action Plan will be designed to demonstrate high quality, affordable, efficient design and construction. This will involve the establishment of a competition to champion best practice, efficient and cost effective design to enable the delivery of high quality homes in sustainable communities at an affordable level. In summary:

- Designers and providers of housing will be challenged to work together in coming up with new design and construction systems that are capable of delivering new homes for less than €200,000 (net of land cost).
- These new homes must be fully compliant with building standards and regulations and the approach should be capable of being replicated across a wide range of sites.
- The prize for the delivery of such new design and construction systems will be the provision, at low cost, by the State Lands Management Group, of a suitable site for the delivery of the homes.

In addition to continuing these initiatives, this Action Plan proposes the development of new approaches to local authority housing strategies, re-focusing on the selection, within the strategy process, of privately owned sites for delivery of starter homes. A pathfinder demonstration project for this purpose will be developed in conjunction with local authorities.

Construction Sector Capacity and Skills

In parallel with exploring and testing innovative design and construction methods, we also need to ensure that the recovering construction sector has sufficient access to qualified tradespeople to meet the challenges of significantly ramping up output in response to current and pent-up demand, and that these workers have the necessary skills and capacity to deliver housing to required building standards.

With direct employment in the sector forecast to grow from 140,000 in 2016 to 170,000 over the next few years, the skills needs of the construction sector will need to be met from both mainstream education provision, particularly through apprenticeships and higher education programmes, as well as from targeted initiatives, in line with the principles and objectives of the *National Skills Strategy*.

There is a broad range of courses available in the area of construction and the built environment in the mainstream higher education sector. There are 44 courses at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications and 37 courses at Levels 6 and 7. The courses are run across 16 institutions, with the majority of courses in the Institute of Technology sector. Course titles include: Civil Engineering; Construction Management; Structural Engineering; Architecture; Quantity Surveying; Interior Architecture; and Architectural Technology. 10% of all graduates in 2014 were in the engineering/manufacturing/construction area.

In addition to these formal qualifications, a number of targeted initiatives are in place to meet skills demands in expanding areas of the economy and also to support activation of the long-term unemployed, primarily:

- Springboard provides free part-time higher education courses to enable unemployed people who have lost jobs in sectors where employment levels will not return, to up-skill or re-skill in areas where there are identified skills shortages or employment opportunities. Construction-related courses have featured in Springboard, with some 940 construction-related places approved in 2015, and a further 246 places approved in the construction sector so far this year. However, primarily due to the improving employment situation, only 35% (325) of the 2015 places were filled. Graduation data from the courses is showing initial positive signs, although further data will be required in this area.
- A Construction SME Skillnet was launched in January 2016, in response to demand from the industry for more focused enterprise-led training. This training will initially be tailored to address skill shortages in the areas of Health and Safety, Building Regulations, and Lean Construction techniques.

However, a key issue to support the ongoing development of the construction sector is the role of apprenticeships. Apprenticeship registrations in the construction sector are forecast to more than double from some 1,700 in 2015 to over 3,600 by 2018, but it is likely that these forecasts underestimate the actual numbers in future years, in view of the anticipated and significant expansion in new residential development. To support this identified need, SOLAS will update skills forecasts and work with stakeholders to ensure mainstream and targeted education and training initiatives to support the supply of skills required to deliver the Action Plan.



Pillar 4: Improve the Rental Sector

Key objective: Addressing the obstacles to greater private rented sector delivery, to improve the supply of units at affordable rents.

Key actions:

- Develop a strategy for a viable and sustainable rental sector
- Introduce legislation on balanced arrangements for tenancy terminations
- Review the standards for rental accommodation
- Enhance the role of the Residential Tenancies Board
- Introduce an Affordable Rental Scheme
- Encourage “build to rent”
- Support greater provision of student accommodation

The rental sector has always catered for a diverse range of households, but increasingly rental housing is becoming a more permanent home for a growing number of both individuals and families. The key actions set out in this Plan will build on the structures already in place to support the rental sector in Ireland.

Ireland is relatively unique internationally in having a dedicated regulatory body for the rental sector – the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) – providing tenancy registration, advice, and dispute resolution services. It will be important to ensure that the regulatory framework and supporting policy for the rental sector is fit for purpose in terms of the role envisaged for the sector in the future – one that is attractive for tenants and landlords, offering appropriate supports and protections for both.

To do this, DHPCLG will publish a strategy for the rental sector by Q4 2016. This strategy will contain a range of actions focused on:

- Security – bringing greater certainty to tenants and landlords;
- Supply – maintaining existing levels of rental stock and encouraging investment in additional supply;
- Standards – improving the quality and management of rental accommodation; and
- Services – broadening and strengthening the role and powers of the RTB to more effectively provide their services and empower tenants and landlords.

Rental housing, because of its flexibility, is particularly important in enabling the housing market to adapt to the changing needs of the population. In Ireland, the rental sector has traditionally been regarded as a residual sector in which households, who would prefer either to own their own home privately or access permanent social housing, must serve time on their way to their true tenure of choice. This has to change if Ireland is going to develop a truly affordable, stable and sustainable housing sector.

Rental housing provides a flexible housing option to meet rising demand and can promote better alignment with the more mobile labour market of 21st Century Ireland. It also aligns with changes in people's behaviour in terms of house purchase, making it easier for individuals and families to pursue job opportunities or adapt their accommodation to changing family circumstances quickly. A well-developed rental sector can reduce the macro-economic risks of an over-reliance on home ownership. Countries with relatively large private rented sectors, such as Germany and Switzerland, have been better insulated against housing booms than those with small rented sectors, like Ireland and Spain.

The rental sector in Ireland has doubled in size over the course of the last two decades. Almost one fifth of the population now lives in the rental sector. Growth in the sector has been driven by a range of factors including a reducing reliance on home ownership as a tenure of choice, demographic factors including inward EU migration, decreasing household size, and increasing rates of new household formation. The contribution made by the rented sector in delivering social housing supports for low-income households through long-term leasing initiatives and, more recently, the Housing Assistance Payment, have also been key factors.

In parallel with the growth in the rented sector, Ireland's traditional reliance on home ownership, driven and supported by easy access to mortgage finance and a range of incentives that have been offered to households going back to the foundation of the State, has been reducing over time. While Ireland still has one of the highest rates of owner occupation in the OECD, there is an increasing acceptance that a viable and sustainable rental sector is a key building block for a modern economy.

However, the rental sector in Ireland is not yet a truly viable or sustainable sector. Severe supply pressures, rising rents, concerns regarding security of tenure, regulatory treatment of encumbered buy-to-let properties, examples of poor accommodation standards and a shortage of professional institutional landlords or other landlords with long-term investment plans all act as impediments to delivering a strong and modern rental sector that offers real choice for individuals and households, while contributing to economic growth.

Rental Strategy

The Government is committed to developing a real and meaningful strategy for the rental sector to enable it to develop to its full potential. This strategy, to be completed by Q4 2016, will chart a path forward, offering a vision for what role we want and expect the sector to play over the short, medium and long term. Incorporating measures already under development, including the new Deposit Protection Scheme, it will contain a range of ambitious measures which the Government will pursue in partnership with the RTB, other stakeholders and agencies in the housing arena. It will be a strategy developed with the needs of both tenants and landlords in mind.

The strategy will be structured around the following four key areas: security, standards, supply and services. The following are some of the specific measures that will be considered under these headings:

Security

- The potential role of new mechanisms for both setting and reviewing rent, similar to some continental European models, that reflect local market rents and are informed by comprehensive and up-to-date market data;
- Legislative measures to protect tenants affected by landlords' arrears (encumbered buy-to-lets); and
- The scope for a move to indefinite leases, replacing the Part IV four-year tenancy, perhaps with incentives for landlords to waive their right to terminate a tenancy in the event of the sale of the property.

Supply

- Provision of mixed tenure development – including market rental – by local authorities and AHBs using HFA or other funding;
- A build-to-rent model that can deliver additional supply towards the overall target supply of 25,000 units per annum; and
- An affordable rental programme (see below).

Standards

- Implementation of new standards following on from the 2016 review process underway; and
- A move towards enforcement of quality standards in rental accommodation on a regional basis.

Services

- Reform of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), as a regulator, to improve services for tenants and landlords, with a specific focus on:
 - accelerated dispute resolution timeframes;
 - streamlined eviction process for very problematic tenancies (for example, extreme arrears cases);
 - greater focus on non-adversarial dispute resolution and prevention through education, awareness and support;
 - greater awareness by tenants and landlords of their rights and responsibilities; and
 - restructuring of the RTB fee structure to reflect trends in the rental sector and allow the RTB to plan properly for the delivery of a broader range of services.

Early Legislative Actions

New legislative provisions governing tenancy terminations will be brought forward in the Autumn for early enactment. These will include actions to prevent a future recurrence of situations which have arisen, where large numbers of residents in a single development are served with termination notices simultaneously. While it is not intended to dilute the right of landlords to sell their property (subject to the requirements currently set out in the Act), it is proposed that where a landlord proposes to sell 20 or more units within a single development, the sale would be subject to the existing tenants remaining *in situ*, other than in exceptional circumstances. Other early actions will be taken to enhance the RTB's enforcement and dispute resolution powers. Specifically, it is proposed to amend the Residential Tenancies Acts to accelerate dispute resolution timeframes (by reducing the time period for appeals), restructure the administration process and provide for the possibility of one-person tribunals for certain categories of cases. We will also examine the model for resourcing enforcement within the RTB to allow for more enforcement cases to be taken in the future.

Standards in Rental Accommodation

The current minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. These regulations specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as, structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, ventilation, natural light, as well as safety of gas and electrical supply. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these Regulations.

Responsibility for enforcement of the Regulations currently rests with the relevant local authority, supported by DHPCLG via a dedicated stream of funding (provided from part of the proceeds of tenancy registration fees collected by the RTB).

To ensure that the standards reflect the requirements of a modern rental market, a review of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended, has been initiated and a stakeholder consultation process is underway. This review will be concluded in Autumn 2016.

Role of the Residential Tenancies Board

Increased understanding of tenant and landlord rights

The RTB has approximately 324,000 tenancies currently registered. Research carried out on behalf of the Board in 2014 found that many tenants had a lack of awareness of the RTB and of their rights as tenants. Since then, there have been significant changes to the Residential Tenancies Acts, which is the legislation underpinning tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities. New requirements have been introduced which mean that rents can only be reviewed once every 24 months, that a landlord must give 90 days' notice of the review and must also show comparable advertised rents in an area. Likewise, there are new requirements on landlords who are seeking to end a tenancy, with greater proof required of the reasons for the tenancy termination, and longer notice periods of tenancy terminations.

It is important, therefore, that the RTB focuses not just on registering tenancies and providing dispute resolution services, but on providing information on the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords. A drive to improve awareness of these should not only empower tenants, but can also help keep current landlords in the market as well as support future investment. To deliver this, we will establish a one-stop-shop within the RTB for accessible information and advice on the rental sector.

Understanding the rental market

The RTB is also in a unique position to provide data and evidence about what is happening in the rental sector. Given the increasing size of the sector in Ireland in recent years, the volatility in the housing market, rising rents and the changing regulatory environment, it is vital that a reliable evidence base informs public debate about the rental sector. Questions arise as to whether the profile of tenants and landlords is changing, whether the rental market is contracting or continuing to expand, and what is the relationship between rents and affordability. Therefore, it is intended to extend the role of the RTB in monitoring and providing data on the rental sector. This will include specifically linking the Quarterly Rent Index with an Affordability Index, so that affordability in the sector can be monitored, along with the introduction of annual surveys of tenants and landlords to understand better the profile of the sector, changes to supply and the impact of new policy.

Encouragement of build-to-rent sector

As already stated, one in five households in Ireland now rent their home. It is a growing sector, particularly in urban areas. Our current stock of housing, however, was not built with the needs of long-term renters in mind. A growing trend in other countries is homes built specifically for the rental market. Build-to-rent is larger scale, with on-site amenities, and targeted at institutional owners rather than individual buy-to-let landlords.

Build-to-rent developments are designed with the occupants in mind – this might be equal-sized bedrooms clustered around a central shared space, or the inclusion of amenities such as gyms and crèches and shared entertainment facilities. The Affordable Rental pilot scheme, currently under development (see below), will incentivise the development of units specifically for rental. The proposed housing vehicle to be developed by the NTMA (see Pillar 2) will, in addition to providing a new source of housing for social rental, expand the supply of wider build-to-rent properties. The Housing Agency, in conjunction with the RTB and other stakeholders, will monitor the implementation of these new approaches to encouraging build-to-rent, to identify any supporting measures required to deliver build-to-rent on a large scale. As part of this, the RTB will be asked to commission research on the ways in which institutional investment might be further encouraged for the rental sector in Ireland.

The build-to-rent model is also supported by the revised and updated statutory planning guidelines on apartment standards, published on foot of the November 2015 Government measures on housing, “*Stabilising Rents – Boosting Supply*”. Certain elements of these guidelines must be applied by local authorities under the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2015.

In addition, the updated guidelines address matters not covered previously, including the proportion of dual aspect apartments and the number of apartments per floor per lift core, which have been estimated to reduce delivery costs by at least €20,000 per unit, on average, while setting consistent national floor area, storage and amenity provision standards, to support high quality apartment living.

It is envisaged that Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) and other institutional investors which have been successful at raising development finance and investing in the commercial office sector, have the potential to begin significant investment in build-to-rent projects, taking account of the steps taken to date in relation to policies on apartments and the cumulative and wider impacts of all the actions under this Action Plan and associated Government initiatives.

Affordable Rental

Rising rents have made accommodation more and more expensive for many families and individuals. This is particularly so for those who are on low to moderate incomes and do not qualify for social housing but who need some level of support to meet their housing costs. In many cases, people in this group are employed in key parts of the economy (e.g. young professionals) and are crucial to Ireland’s continued growth and recovery.

To bring some much needed relief to this group and also to address the acute shortage of supply of rental units at affordable rates, particularly in urban areas, we will introduce an affordable rental programme. The goals of the programme are to:

- Provide long-term affordable residential accommodation for low to moderate income key-worker households in urban areas of high demand, in a mixed tenure context, promoting stability, while also reducing pressures on social housing lists;
- Provide an economic incentive to facilitate an increased supply in the housing rental market by large-scale and long-term professional landlords; and
- Ensure that housing supports are adequately refined to respond proportionately to the broad spectrum of accommodation support needs that exist.

An Affordable Rental Scheme will be finalised in order to enhance the capacity of the private rental sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. The Scheme is at an advanced stage of development and will be finalised by end Q3 2016, for roll-out by offer to potential housing providers thereafter. Subject to the finalisation of the Scheme by Government and market uptake thereafter, the commitment by the Government of €10 million in annual funding will deliver at least 2,000 rental properties over a range of projects by 2018.

Student Accommodation

Ireland’s third-level student population is projected to grow by around 20,000 students (or 15%) to 193,000 students by 2024. The 2015 ‘*Report on Student Accommodation: Demand & Supply*’ by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) estimates an existing level of unmet demand of about 25,000 student bed spaces nationally.

Taken together, both of the statistics above highlight the importance of providing well designed and located student accommodation in order to avoid additional pressures in the private rental sector. New student accommodation projects are on the way, including some 300 new on-campus places in Maynooth University and 350 units in UCD. Six other Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are going through planning phases with a view to delivering an additional 3,000 bed spaces by 2020.

However, an even greater level of provision of student accommodation is required and accordingly this Action Plan commits to the development of a national student accommodation strategy in 2017 by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in conjunction with DHPCLG and other stakeholders including DPER and the Department of Finance. This will set out a broad framework for delivery of an enhanced level of accommodation and which will inform local authority housing strategies and the land management process in general in order to provide suitably located and affordable sites.

Moreover, this Action Plan also sets out a number of actions designed to reduce the costs of funding such projects and to enhance the manner in which they are prioritised and assessed within the planning process.

In the meantime, measures will be advanced in conjunction with the student union sector, aimed at enhancing the process of identifying and sourcing a short-term increase of supply of student rental accommodation in the areas of greatest pressure.

Access to funding

The HEA Report 2015 identified the availability of affordable finance as a key requirement to enhance student housing provision. The Housing Finance Agency can access low-cost finance for the provision of housing by AHBs and local authorities. Working with the DES and the HEI sector, we will ensure that HEIs can access HFA funding by working with them to harness the potential for dedicated delivery structures such as AHBs. Over time, consideration will be given to amending the Housing Finance Agency Acts to explicitly enable it to lend to HEIs and other third-level institutions for student accommodation.

The ISIF has committed substantial investment through its €54 million investment in student accommodation in Dublin City University and there is further potential in this area.

In addition, a borrowing framework for the Institute of Technology sector will also be developed so that they can engage in additional student accommodation projects. Innovative funding mechanisms will be pursued, such as the funding model currently being prepared for student housing at Grangegorman by the DIT, intended to ensure the project is off-balance sheet.

Streamlining planning for student accommodation

Student accommodation complexes of 100 or more units will benefit from the new fast-track application process directly to An Bord Pleanála (see pillar 3). This will have major potential to cut processing time and enhance certainty. Moreover, use of the local authority "Part 8" planning process could facilitate the development on local authority lands of student accommodation, either as stand-alone development or forming part of mixed-tenure housing projects.

In addition, the wider initiatives in this Action Plan in relation to land supply and management (see Pillar 3) have major potential to access potential development sites in a more economic manner. New planning policy guidance will be issued to local authorities and An Bord Pleanála on the use of student accommodation complexes outside of the academic year, as their use during these periods provides a potential additional income-stream, thereby aiding the overall viability of these projects.



Pillar 5: Utilise Existing Housing

Key objective: Ensure that existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible - focusing on measures to use vacant stock to renew urban and rural areas

Key actions:

- Better management of social housing through rapid re-letting of vacant units (Voids) and introduction of Choice-Based Letting
- A review of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme
- Housing Agency purchases of vacant houses held by banks and financial institutions
- Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative
- Removing regulatory barriers to re-using vacant properties
- Urban regeneration, including Living City Initiative
- Village and Rural Renewal initiatives
- Continuation of work to resolve unfinished estates

An effective way to meet housing needs is to achieve optimum occupancy of the existing housing stock, whether social or private housing.

In relation to social housing stock, this Action Plan sets out proposals in relation to cutting the time between tenancies which will build on the progress achieved under the existing *Social Housing Strategy*, where €60 million has been invested in getting over 5,000 former social houses that were vacant, back into use.

In relation to the broader issue of vacant houses generally, preliminary 2016 Census results indicate that just under 200,000 dwellings nationwide, excluding holiday homes and derelict houses, were recorded as vacant, a decline of 13.8% on the figure of just over 230,000 of such dwellings in the 2011 Census. The 2016 results also show marked variations in vacancy levels, from 4% in South Dublin County Council to 30% in Leitrim, with Dublin and Cork City Councils recording vacancy rates of 9% and 8%, respectively.

Notwithstanding the welcome reductions in the levels of vacant housing since 2011, vacant properties remain a very important source of potential accommodation supply. They are typically served by existing infrastructure and getting empty homes and apartments back into use breathes new life into the streets, residential and rural areas of which they form an intrinsic part. For example, bringing 20,000 empty homes back into use would be equal to almost one year's supply of new homes.

An overarching action under this Pillar is therefore the development of an overall national vacant housing re-use strategy, using the detailed 2016 Census results. Up-to-date data will be crucial in pin-pointing:

- Where vacant houses are located;
- Who owns them – in private hands, banks, investors or others;
- How their location matches current and future needs; and
- What actions would have greatest effect in getting these vacant homes back into use.

In parallel with taking other immediate actions under this Plan to begin getting many vacant houses back into beneficial use, work will get underway in developing the national vacant housing re-use strategy. This will be finalised by mid-2017, to support a continual national drive to maximise use of existing stock.

Social Housing Stock

Better management of social housing stock

The national social housing stock of 153,000 units owned by local authorities and AHBs is a key component of Ireland's overall housing infrastructure. It is vital that the on-going management and maintenance of this substantial stock receives the targeted investment it needs.

Rental income forms an important revenue source for maintaining social housing stock. In line with the commitment in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, we will review the disparate systems of differential rents for social housing across local authorities to ensure that housing supports, including the HAP, are fair and sustainable, prioritises those on lowest incomes and avoids creating social welfare traps that may prevent people from either returning to work or the private housing market.

In managing the stock, a level of vacancy would always be expected in the overall social housing stock, as a portion of units will be vacant for maintenance or repair work between tenancies. The length of vacancies can depend on the age and condition of the houses when vacated, the efficiency with which repairs are carried out and the speed with which new tenants are secured. A certain level of vacancy is also required to ensure availability of homes to respond quickly to urgent need.

The issue of re-letting times for houses is particularly crucial. There are significant differences between local authorities in the time taken to re-let social housing in good condition; this is in turn influenced by differences in refusal rates of offers of housing by prospective social housing tenants. The fact that the published statistics in this area highlight 're-letting' times rather than 'refurbishment' times, present a skewed picture of the 'down time' of vacant social housing units.

A vacated social house, once refurbished, should not remain vacant for an extended period. Better management of the offers process and a move towards greater use of "choice-based letting", as pioneered by South Dublin County Council and Cork City Council, can make a big difference in terms of optimising occupancy rates.

In addition to availing of Exchequer support for tackling vacant units, many local authorities use their own resources to return other vacant units to use. This can result in vacancy levels being now as low as 1% to 2% for many authorities. Nonetheless, any delays, or indeed perception of delays, in refurbishing and re-letting social houses at a time of considerable need is unacceptable.

Very considerable progress has been made in tackling the back-log of vacant or boarded-up social housing that had built up. Between 2014 and 2015, some €60 million in Exchequer funding was made available to local authorities, which supported them in returning some 5,000 units to productive use. That support is continuing in 2016.

Accordingly, it is a key action under this Plan that, in line with best asset management practices, the refurbishment and, where possible, the re-letting of vacant social housing units is achieved with minimal delay, through:

- Adopting a national re-letting performance standard across all local authorities;
- A preventative maintenance approach to housing stock management;
- Greater focus on tenants' role and responsibilities; and
- Funding mechanisms, structured to incentivise swift turnaround, consistent standards and pro-active approaches.

Another factor that can delay immediate re-letting is that vacant possession gives a local authority an opportunity to refurbish a social house to a high standard. For example, it is normal practice to retrofit a vacant social house with insulation to improve its energy efficiency.

A major programme of insulation retrofitting to existing social housing commenced in 2013. To date, €85 million in funding has seen over 46,000 local authority homes retrofitted, drawing on EU co-funding. Phase 1 of the scheme has been initially targeted at the less intrusive cavity wall insulation, as well as attic insulation, while Phase 2 is focusing on the fabric upgrade works to those remaining dwellings with solid/hollow block wall construction.

Given the demonstrated beneficial impact of the programme on quality of life, in tackling fuel poverty and the significant contribution it makes to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets, this valuable programme will be advanced and expanded over the course of the implementation of this Action Plan.

Choice-based letting

Choice-based letting (CBL) is a method, facilitated through the Social Housing (Allocation) Regulations 2011, that can be used for allocating social housing in a manner that offers more choice and involvement for applicant households in selecting a new home, and thereby reduces the likelihood of a refusal. The CBL approach also assists in creating sustainable tenancies and promotes the building of settled and stable communities. The majority of local authorities have already made provision for CBL in their allocation schemes, but few have implemented CBL so far. The local authorities that have implemented CBL have refusal rates as low as 5% (as evidenced in South Dublin County Council), when compared to 40% or more in other local authorities.

Choice-based letting commenced in Cork City Council in November 2015, as an on-line service through which social housing support applicants can place an expression of interest on advertised properties of the Council on a weekly basis. The process of introducing CBL involved the Council in two rounds of correspondence with people on the housing list which, on the basis of responses received, resulted in an overall drop of 25% in numbers on the list.

Given the positive experiences in South Dublin and Cork, we will move to introduce and implement, as early as possible, across all local authorities, a choice-based or equivalent allocation system tailored to their specific circumstances.

Review of Tenant (Incremental) Purchase

Tenant purchase schemes for social housing are an important way to help people who would otherwise struggle to buy a home, to realise their home ownership ambitions, while at the same time supporting long-term commitment to a location by residents. The current scheme, through a claw-back mechanism, discourages the early re-sale of properties at a profit, thereby encouraging people to only buy houses they intend to live in.

The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 *per annum*. Local authorities have powers under the current regulations to exempt certain houses from the Scheme for proper stock/estate management purposes.

While the Scheme is in the early stages of implementation, DHPCLG is monitoring its operation in consultation with local authorities. In line with the commitment in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, to make the Scheme more attractive for social housing tenants and to raise new funds for housing development, a review of the Scheme will be undertaken following the first 12 months of operation (i.e. in Q1 2017). Any changes to the terms and conditions of the Scheme which are considered necessary, based on the evidence gathered as part of the review, will be brought forward through regulations.

Private Sector Housing Stock

Housing Agency Vacant Housing Purchase Initiative

The Housing Agency is currently purchasing properties in trust for local authorities from banks and investors. These properties are generally repossessed buy-to-let, vacant properties which are being disposed of by the banks/investors to liquidate mortgage assets.

The full potential of harnessing such vacant properties for social housing purposes has not to date been fully realized; firstly, because many financial institutions and investors are increasingly looking to sell portfolios of such properties at a scale which would not be suitable to an individual local authority or Approved Housing Body and, secondly, because such property portfolios can span a number of local authority jurisdictions.

Under this Action Plan, the Housing Agency will be funded to acquire suitable portfolios of properties for social housing directly from financial institutions and investors. In all cases, only vacant properties will be targeted. This would be a short- to medium-term initiative in direct response to the current shortage that would be designed to complement, not displace, ongoing targeted acquisition activity by local authorities and AHBs.

By providing the Agency with direct access to capital funding, the aim is to:

- simplify the current acquisition processes for portfolio purchases;
- speed up the acquisition process; and
- encourage investors to make additional supply available.

The planned investment of €70 million is likely to yield acquisitions of the order of 1,600 vacant properties, through a recycling of initial seed-funding, with local authorities and AHBs being funded in the normal way for acquisitions/leases through the social housing programme.

The potential to use this mechanism to acquire additional properties from other sources, e.g. new-build turnkey acquisitions, will also be explored, once the Fund has been established and is working efficiently.

Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative

The introduction of a Repair and Leasing Initiative (RLI) as an integral delivery mechanism within the actions under Pillar 2 will enable local authorities, having identified appropriate vacant privately owned properties in their functional area, to enter into long-term lease arrangements with property owners. The RLI will be a new mechanism for local authorities to provide up-front grant aid to prospective landlords to meet reasonable renovation works to upgrade the properties to current rental standards. In return, such landlords will enter into cost efficient contractual arrangements under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).

The potential benefits of this initiative include:

- Faster delivery than new-build as no planning process is involved;
- Reduced development risks;
- Compliance with housing goals of affordability, sustainability and inclusion;
- Attractiveness to owners, as the property is renovated and subject to a long-term lease, giving a guaranteed income; and
- Stimulus for smaller builders and associated professional services.

To test the concept, a pilot project will be trialed with Waterford City and County Council and Carlow County Council, with the intention of rolling out the RLI programme nationally by early 2017. This programme will be built up progressively, depending on take-up from private property owners.

In addition, other pilot initiatives for step-down specialist housing for older people will be advanced, building on examples such as Dublin City Council's *Financial Contribution Scheme for Older Persons*. This Scheme facilitated older people to down-size from their privately owned homes that had become too large for them, thus potentially freeing up these larger dwellings for use as family homes.

The combination of grant aid and the removal of regulatory barriers to the re-use of vacant commercial property for residential use establishes a very attractive new package for the owners of vacant properties to look afresh at the potential to bring them back into beneficial use for housing purposes.

Removing regulatory barriers to re-use

Owners of vacant properties, such as former offices over ground-floor shops and vacant retail units in secondary streets, face a number of regulatory requirements to advance projects for their re-use for residential purposes. These requirements can include planning permission, building control approval, including disabled access and fire safety certificates, and in some cases, provisions in relation to protected structures.

All of these processes can present significant regulatory hurdles to negotiate in bringing forward proposals for property re-use. When the cost of financing acquisitions is factored in, the uncertainty and layers of process can combine to create a high degree of risk and therefore a poor incentive for investors to take old buildings and find new uses for them.

Therefore, this Action Plan includes a commitment to review the planning legislative framework around conversion and re-use for residential purposes, with a view to allowing change of use of vacant commercial units in urban areas, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground floor premises, without having to go through the planning process. This should enable such vacant units to be brought into productive use earlier than might otherwise be the case.

Urban regeneration

As outlined in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, the Government is committed to regeneration of cities, towns and villages, many of which have been adversely impacted by our recent economic difficulties.

A large area of investment in existing social housing is the regeneration programme, which targets the country's most disadvantaged communities; those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. DHPCLG currently supports a programme of large-scale regeneration projects, focussed across social housing estates in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, and smaller projects in Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk. €50 million is being invested in regeneration projects in 2016 alone.

The Regeneration Programme is a priority from a social policy perspective, encompassing the provision of social housing, improvements to existing housing, as well as social/community and economic renewal. In the context of the priority on urban regeneration set out in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, we will provide increased funding over the course of this Action Plan for a range of measures that address deep-rooted disadvantage, while developing an approach to urban regeneration that empowers people to work together to improve their communities and to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

In addition, taking a more holistic view in relation to the potential synergies around the revitalisation and improvement of city, town and village centres and addressing the increasing problem of dereliction in many of our urban centres, we need to develop measures that can catalyse renewal, regeneration and private investment in these areas. For example, partnerships with private developers have the potential to rejuvenate derelict or under-utilised sites and provide a further source of accommodation across the range of tenures.

A high-level Senior Officials Group has been established, under the chairmanship of Minister of State, Damien English T.D., who has specific responsibility for Urban Renewal, involving representatives from local authorities and other relevant State actors. This Group has been tasked with bringing forward, by the end of 2016, proposals for new urban regeneration measures which will complement the existing regeneration programme and projects under the Social Housing Capital Programme. The Group will also explore other regeneration initiatives, such as an expanded and enhanced Living City Initiative and the establishment of a national register of derelict sites, as a complement to the new vacant site levy, to bring vacant and under-utilised sites into beneficial use for housing and urban regeneration purposes.

There is also scope to align and strengthen the links with the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development) Programme through the local authorities.

Living City Initiative

The Living City Initiative, launched in May 2015, is a targeted pilot tax incentive scheme which aims to regenerate central business districts and encourage people back to the centre of our cities to live in older buildings. The scheme applies in certain special regeneration areas, initially Limerick and Waterford and then extended to include Dublin, Cork, Galway and Kilkenny, particularly those zones identified as most in need of regeneration. The initiative includes two types of relief –

- An owner/occupier residential relief, and
- A retail/commercial relief.

While the Initiative has only been in operation for just over a year, with take-up lower than anticipated, considering up to 100% of relevant expenditure may be tax relieved, the Department of Finance is currently reviewing the Initiative with a view to introducing changes to enhance the attractiveness and effectiveness of the scheme. This review will be completed by the end of 2016.

Village and rural renewal

While much of the focus of this Action Plan centres on addressing housing need and supply shortages in urban areas, there is equally a requirement to facilitate a sufficient supply of homes for purchase, rent and social housing throughout Ireland's towns and villages.

Announced in September 2015, with an investment package of €30 million, the Town and Village Enhancement Scheme is targeted at supporting the development of rural towns and villages, not only as a component of a broader approach to rural development but also to improve the environment of rural dwellers in a way that will increase their quality of life and support potential economic activity in their area. Allocating €5 million each year from 2016 to 2021, funded projects will be developed by local authorities, in partnership with local communities, embodying a clear community-led approach to renewal.

Actions are aimed at structural aspects of these communities and, together with complementary measures supported under initiatives such as LEADER, will deliver real improvements for rural communities. Possible projects may include supporting greenways, cycleways, blueways and other environmental improvement initiatives that support economic activity in the area, environmental upgrading of public parks, civic areas, river walks, access facilities to amenities, public utilities such as street lighting, renovation of relevant derelict buildings, regeneration/re-use of vacant/disused sites, and other small-scale actions.

To further support the revitalisation of our towns and villages, and increase their attractiveness and sustainability as places to live and work, consideration will be given to broadening the scope and capacity of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. Complementing the Scheme, we will develop a further initiative by end-2016, initially on a pilot basis, in conjunction with local authorities, to establish serviced in-fill sites within small towns and villages for self-build projects to meet local housing needs.

Unfinished estates

Considerable progress has been made in tackling the legacy issue of unfinished housing developments, working closely with local authorities, residents, housing providers, financial institutions and NAMA. Through collaborative action, over three-quarters of the developments have been resolved between 2010 and 2015 (the number of unfinished developments has been reduced from 3,000 to 668), with evidence of further sites being re-activated and built-out throughout the country this year.

A number of measures have contributed to the progress made. A €5 million Public Safety Initiative Fund was established in 2011, initially in order to manage public safety issues within developments. A €10 million Special Resolution Fund was then established to bring about more substantive resolution of unfinished developments, particularly those developments not likely to be resolved in the normal way through solely developer/owner/funder action or because of the presence of specific financial barriers.

The continuation of the NAMA-established National Asset Residential Property Services (NARPS) Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) will enable remaining vacant and/or unfinished units within unfinished housing developments to be acquired, finished out and then leased back to local authorities and AHBs for social housing.

To ensure that residents can be confident that the housing developments they live in will be properly finished out and maintained into the future, the Unfinished Housing Developments Programme will continue by targeting the residual developments and particularly those that have remained vacant and unresolved in towns and villages.

Local authorities will be encouraged and supported to take the necessary enforcement actions under planning, derelict sites, environmental and public safety legislation, to ensure that the owners of such sites (particularly those that have recently purchased the loans against which these assets provide security), focus on early resolution strategies rather than retaining them for asset appreciation purposes. In particular, the expanded social housing programme under Pillar 2, including the Repair and Leasing Initiative, provides a potential source of funding for strategic acquisitions by local authorities of unfinished developments that have so far not been successfully resolved.

Finally, a National Taking-In-Charge Initiative will use a combination of €10 million funding from DHPCLG in 2016, coupled with bond and local authority funding, to accelerate the taking-in-charge (TIC) process of relevant estates, supported by wider legislative reform of the TIC process to be addressed through the forthcoming Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016.

Glossary of Terms

AHB	Approved Housing Body
CAS	Capital Assistance Scheme
CALF	Capital Advance Leasing Facility
CBL	Choice-based letting
CCMA	County and City Management Association
CLSS	Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme
DAHRRGA	Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DoF	Department of Finance
DHPCLG	Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
DoH	Department of Health
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DRHE	Dublin Region Homeless Executive
DSP	Department of Social Protection
HA	Housing Agency
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HFA	Housing Finance Agency
HSE	Health Service Executive
IRPP	Irish Refugee Protection Programme
ISIF	Ireland Strategic Investment Fund
LAs	Local Authorities
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
LIHAF	Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund
MABS	Money Advice and Budgeting Service
NAMA	National Asset Management Agency
NCC	National Competitiveness Council

NPF	National Planning Framework
NTMA	National Treasury Management Agency
OPW	Office of Public Works
Part V	Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2015
Part 8	Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 - 2015
RIAI	Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland
SHCEP	Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme
SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
TIC	Taking in Charge

Appendix 1: Table of Actions

Pillar 1 – Address Homelessness

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
1.1	<p>We will accelerate and expand the Rapid-Build Housing Programme to provide, in the first instance and as a priority, more suitable accommodation for families that are currently residing in commercial hotels, while more permanent tenancies are secured. Units delivered over and above the number needed for families in hotels will be used as standard social housing.</p> <p>In addition, the Housing Agency will acquire 1,600 vacant housing units. (See also Pillar 5)</p>	<p>To provide 1,500 new units under this programme to move the existing group of families out of emergency accommodation in hotels as quickly as possible, and to limit the extent to which such accommodation has to be used for new presentations.</p> <p>1,600 vacant units to be acquired.</p>	<p>Q4 2016 - 200 units</p> <p>Q4 2017 - 800 units</p> <p>Q4 2018 - 500 units</p> <p>2017-2020</p>	<p>Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and DHPCLG</p> <p>HA</p>
1.2	We will transition homeless households and individuals from emergency accommodation through the Dublin Region HAP Homeless Pilot.	To provide permanent, stable and supported housing to our long-term homeless individuals, and thus reduce the reliance on emergency accommodation over time.	<p>Q4 2016 – 550 tenancies to be created</p> <p>Q4 2017 - 1,200 tenancies to be created</p>	DRHE
1.3	We will put in place 'one-stop-shop' assessment centres with multi-agency participation, making the best use of modern technology, for families presenting as homeless. This will include local authorities, Tenancy Protection Services, Tusla, Family Mediation Services, DSP and expert NGOs.	To assess and support families with children presenting as homeless to ensure every effort is made to keep them in their current homes or to ensure appropriate homeless and other support services are provided.	Q4 2016	DRHE, Dublin LAs, Tusla, Family Mediation Services, DSP, NGOs

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
1.4	We will continue to operate the Dublin Region protocol in relation to appropriate responses to child protection and welfare concerns among families in emergency accommodation and review its operation in December 2016, refining it as appropriate. The protocol arrangements will be extended nationally in 2017.	To support homeless families with child dependents and ensure that a robust referral procedure is in place.	Q4 2016	DRHE, Tusla
1.5	We will further strengthen supports and initiatives for families in emergency accommodation to mitigate the challenges that such parents and children face, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced liaison on family support, child welfare and child protection, including Family Resource Centres; • Access to early-years services; • School Completion Programmes; • Enhanced locally available practical supports for daily family life; • Access to free public transport for family travel and for school journeys; and • Practical supports and advice for good nutrition for those without access to cooking facilities. 	To support homeless families with child dependents.	2016-2017	Tusla, , DCYA, HSE, DRHE, DHPCLG
1.6	We will put in place a safety guidance/voluntary code for child safety in emergency accommodation.	To address child safety & protection in emergency accommodation.	Q4 2016	DCYA, Tusla, DRHE, NGOs

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
1.7	We will work to ensure that young people leaving State care and at risk of homelessness are identified and catered for through appropriate housing and other supports for their needs.	To minimise homelessness among young people leaving State care.	2016 - 2017	DHPCLG, ,DCYA, Tusla, HSE
1.8	We will provide additional emergency refuge accommodation spaces for victims of domestic violence and we will provide policy and procedural guidance to housing authorities with regard to the role they can play to assist victims of domestic violence in securing new independent tenancies.	To reduce the number of victims becoming homeless and the length of time spent in emergency accommodation arrangements.	2016-2017	Tusla, ,DCYA , Cosc, DHPCLG
1.9	We will provide a new facility in the Dublin Region to accommodate pregnant women who are homeless.	To provide emergency accommodation and support services specific to the needs of pregnant women who are homeless.	2017	DRHE, DCYA , Tusla
1.10	We will enhance inter-agency arrangements to ensure that accommodation, welfare and health supports for prisoners are in place prior to their release.	To reduce the likelihood of released prisoners presenting as homeless.	Q3 2016	Irish Prison Service Probation Service, LGMA, DHPCLG, DSP, HSE.
1.11	We will implement national procedures to enhance inter-agency arrangements regarding the release and accommodation of sex offenders.	To reduce the occurrence of released offenders being accommodated in emergency arrangements.	Q2 2017	Probation Service, Irish Prison Service, DJE, LAs, LGMA, DHPCLG
1.12	We will triple the targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First teams in Dublin.	To provide 300 tenancies in 2017.	During 2017	DRHE

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
1.13	We will strengthen the existing housing-led approach in Dublin and extend it to other urban areas, focusing on persistent rough sleepers and long-term homeless households.	To secure accommodation and supports based on the needs of the individual.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , LAs, HSE
1.14	We will examine and analyse the reasons why offers of accommodation are not taken up by households in emergency accommodation in hotels.	To limit the period of time spent by households in inappropriate accommodation arrangements.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , LAs
1.15	We will improve mental health and primary care services for homeless persons using the existing allocation of €2m, and we will increase the allocation to €6m in Budget 2017.	To provide the most appropriate primary care and mental health services to those in homeless services and improve their ability to sustain a normal tenancy.	Q4 2016	DoH , HSE
1.16	We will address the rehabilitation needs of homeless people with addiction issues, through the new National Drugs Strategy which is to be effective from January 2017.	To ensure that the drug rehabilitation pathway is linked to sustainable supported tenancy arrangements.	2017	DoH , HSE
1.17	A national awareness campaign will be rolled out, targeted at families and individuals worried about, or at risk of losing their homes. The Threshold Tenancy Protection Service will be extended nationwide.	To maximise awareness of the services and supports available.	Q1 2017 Q4 2016	DHPCLG , DSP, RTB, Las DSP, Las and Threshold

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
1.18	We will provide access to independent expert legal and financial advice for people who are insolvent, and are in serious mortgage arrears on their home.	To ensure that an insolvent person who is at risk of losing their home can access independent advice which will help them to identify their best options, for returning to solvency – with priority given to remaining in their home, where that is a sustainable option.	Q3 2016,	DJE, jointly with DSP, Citizens' Information Board, MABS, Insolvency Service Ireland, Legal Aid Board
1.19	The Government will work with the Central Bank to ensure that the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears provides a strong consumer protection framework for borrowers struggling with their mortgage repayments.	In collaboration with the Central Bank, and based on an assessment of the restructuring options available to borrowers, work to ensure that distressed borrowers are facilitated to meet the terms of a sustainable restructuring arrangement and consequently to remain in their primary residence where possible.	Q1 2017	DoF, Central Bank
1.20	We will request the Central Bank to conduct an assessment of existing sustainable restructuring solutions across all lenders and non-bank entities operating in Ireland.	To ensure that there are sustainable restructuring solutions available to distressed borrowers.	Q4 2016	DoF, Central Bank
1.21	We will examine how the Mortgage to Rent scheme can be improved to facilitate more households, and explore alternative models for the purchase of units, including long-term leasing arrangements.	To support households in long-term mortgage arrears to remain in their homes.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , DoF

Pillar 2 – Accelerate Social Housing

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
2.1	We will substantially increase the delivery of social housing to 47,000 homes by 2021, with funding of €5.35 billion, particularly focusing on new direct-build projects by local authorities and AHBs.	To meet the social housing needs more quickly across the range of programmes and supports.	Ongoing to 2021	DHPCLG, LAs, AHBs
2.2	We will review existing current and capital programmes on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are relevant and are meeting the needs of citizens.	To accelerate the delivery of housing and ensure that projects are advanced efficiently and effectively.	Ongoing to 2021	DHPCLG
2.3	We will accelerate the roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payments Scheme on a national basis to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counties Cavan, Kerry, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow by end-2016, and The Dublin Region, commencing from Q1 2017. 	To ensure that HAP, and the support it provides towards employment, will be available to all households who can benefit from it.	Q4 2016 and Q1 2017	DHPCLG, DSP, LAs
2.4	NTMA will work with the private sector to establish a funding vehicle capable of facilitating off-balance sheet investment in delivering social and private housing, through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> acquiring properties for onward long-term leasing to LAs and AHBs, and activating new residential construction for the broader build-to-rent sector. 	To deliver 5,000 social houses over a five year period.	Q1 2017	NTMA, DoF, LAs, AHBs

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
2.5	We will put in place a Housing Agency Fund of €70 million, with specific focus of engaging with banks and investment companies, primarily private equity funds, to acquire properties.	To deliver some 1,600 units by 2020.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG ,Housing Agency
2.6	We will ensure that resources are made available to local authorities and AHBs to facilitate the purchase of newly built private dwellings to the fullest extent envisaged, by Part V of the Planning and Development Acts.	To increase social housing stock.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG , LAs; AHBs
2.7	For each site in the Land Aggregation Scheme and linked to land management approaches, a Strategic Management Plan will be prepared to advance the asset to the development stage at the earliest opportunity.	To enhance land management and utilise land to the greatest extent possible.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG; LAs
2.8	We will support the leasing of additional privately developed dwellings beyond the extent envisaged by Part V, including the up-front purchase of the Part V social housing requirement.	To stimulate development and increase social housing stock.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG; LAs; AHBs
2.9	A dedicated Housing Delivery Office is being established within DHPCLG to support local authorities, AHBs and all stakeholders involved in the delivery of key elements of the ambitious private and social housing targets in this Action Plan.	To accelerate and monitor housing delivery, both private and social, on key sites, identify further mechanisms to accelerate delivery, and support the roll-out of complex construction projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
2.10	The Housing Agency will establish a Housing Procurement Unit.	To provide a procurement centre of excellence and advice in support of local authorities and AHBs in the accelerated delivery of their social housing programmes.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG , Housing Agency
2.11	We will review our processes and procedures for approving and advancing housing construction projects.	To streamline and accelerate the delivery of housing.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG; LAs
2.12	We will legislate to streamline Part 8 processes with a particular focus on proposals for social housing projects and infrastructure servicing housing development both public and private.	To expedite the commencement and delivery of such housing development schemes.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG
2.13	We will introduce an AHB Innovation Fund.	To support development of innovative financial models, including SPVs or mutual bodies, to enhance the potential combined contribution of the AHB sector.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG, AHBs.
2.14	We will establish a dedicated one-stop-shop within the Housing Agency to support AHBs, which will allow for better coordinated delivery under various mechanisms across all local authority areas.	To provide for better coordinated and strategic delivery by AHBs under various funding streams across all LA areas, and enhanced cooperation between AHBs and local authorities to maximise potential yield from LA lands.	Q3 2016	HA, AHBs, DHPCLG and LAs
2.15	We will establish a Regulator for the AHB sector to oversee the effective governance and financial management of voluntary and co-operative housing bodies.	To safeguard public and private investment, rationalise and enable increased supply from the voluntary and co-operative housing sector.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG , HA (as Interim Regulator)

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
2.16	We will bring forward pilot projects, beginning with Dublin City Council, based on best practice and cost effectiveness taking a cross Departmental / inter-agency approach to housing initiatives for older people.	To examine the potential for mainstreaming best practice projects, which bring together the HSE and local authorities with designers and academic groups. Such models would cater for those who, while not requiring full nursing home care, have been assessed as having healthcare needs that can be met in the community.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG, DoH, LAs, HSE
2.17	We will increase the target of the Housing Adaptation Grant drawdown to 10,000 homes in 2017 (up from 8,000 in 2016) and will streamline the application process.	To support the continued independent occupancy of their own homes by older people and people with disabilities.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG
2.18	DHPCLG, in conjunction with DoH, is developing policy options for supported housing/housing with care so that older people have a wider range of residential care choices available to them.	To incentivise new supported living /assisted living arrangements which will meet the housing needs of certain older people.	From Q3 2016 to 2018	DHPCLG , DoH
2.19	We will create pilot competitions, focusing on three distinct areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smart technologies in housing for older people; • adaptation of existing houses to meet the needs of older people; and • life-time communities. 	To stimulate and encourage the design and construction industries to be innovative in designing and delivering housing solutions for older people.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, RIAI, CIF

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
2.20	We will work with the HSE and local authorities on all issues, including funding supports, for housing people who are transitioning from HSE accommodation and for clients of the mental health services living in community-based accommodation.	To support community-based living for people with disabilities.	Ongoing	DHPCLG, HSE, LAs
2.21	We will continue to support the DoH and HSE in the programme of transitioning people from congregated settings to community-based living through ring-fenced housing capital funding.	To provide €10m in 2016 to support community-based living for people with disabilities in congregated settings, with further funding for 2017 and 2018.	Continued out to 2020	DoH, HSE, DHPCLG,
2.22	We will extend the National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities (2011-2016) beyond its timeframe of 2016 to continue delivery on its aims.	To support community-based living for people with disabilities.	Continued out to 2020	DHPCLG
2.23	The Housing Agency will commission an expert, independent review of capital/current funding for traveller-specific accommodation to date, having regard to targets contained in the LA Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) and actual units delivered, the current status of accommodation funded and funding provided for accommodation maintenance and other supports.	To provide factual information, analysis and identification of particular challenges, as a key platform to undertake an audit in 2017 of implementation and delivery of the TAPs, with a focus on appropriate supply of accommodation.	Q3 2016 - Review to commence Q2 2017 – completion of review	HA, DHPCLG
2.24	We will establish an operational sub-group under the auspices of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme Taskforce, composed of representatives from relevant Govt. Departments, local authorities and other bodies, to support and coordinate the process of housing refugees.	To provide a range of supports at local level, including the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and a range of other supports made available at local level to ensure the integration of individuals into their new communities.	Q4 2016	DJE, DHPCLG, LAs , DSP

Pillar 3 – Build More Homes

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
3.1	We will establish a €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund, seeking bids from local authorities in conjunction with housing providers in respect of enabling infrastructure for social, affordable rental and private housing delivery on large-scale strategic sites, with the potential to open up lands and deliver housing of the order of 15,000 to 20,000 units by 2019.	To relieve critical infrastructural blockages to enable the delivery of housing on key development sites. To improve the economic viability and purchaser affordability of new housing projects.	Q3 2016 - Call for proposals Q4 2016 - evaluation and finalisation of approved projects Q1 2017 onward - initiation of projects	DHPCLG, LAs
3.2	We will provide capacity through increased borrowing and access to HFA financing for participating local authorities to provide matching funding for the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund.	As above.	From Q4 2016.	DPER , DoF HFA, LAs, DHPCLG
3.3	The National Treasury Management Agency, through ISIF, will develop proposals to offer competitive financing on a commercial basis, to developers or consortia of developers, to meet on-site and other infrastructure requirements on large development sites.	To facilitate the delivery of on-site infrastructure releasing the delivery of housing on key development sites, thereby improving the economic viability of such developments.	Q3/4 2016	NTMA
3.4	We will identify and prioritise the 15-20 key pathfinder sites with a proven capability to quickly deliver a significant scaling-up of new homes, in conjunction with local authorities and other stakeholders. Many of these sites will be opened up through LIHAF funds, and other funding and coordination mechanisms.	To deliver significant scale of new homes on key sites in the main urban areas, through coordinated efforts of the DHPCLG's new Housing Delivery Office.	Q3 2016 - key sites identified. Q4 2016 - initiation of programme for driving delivery of housing.	DHPCLG LAs, AHBs

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
3.5	<p>Within the context of the new National Planning Framework, we will prepare a national Land Supply Management Strategy, through which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites in LA and public ownership will be identified and mapped by a State Lands Management Group, with appropriate lands to be master-planned to deliver increased mixed-tenure housing, including social and more affordable housing, • Local authorities will be supported in acquiring housing lands in key developable areas, and • Strategic opportunities for urban renewal and regeneration will be identified for coordinated action across relevant public sector bodies. 	<p>To give a national framework to support the appropriate location of housing across the country.</p> <p>To ensure an active and healthy supply and market for development land, to identify scope to use State lands for housing and to support co-ordinated mixed-tenure development on publicly owned lands.</p>	<p>Q4 2016 - Draft of NPF</p> <p>Q2 2017 - Finalised NPF</p>	DHPCLG LAs, OPW, various Departments and Agencies
3.6	We will legislate to enable larger housing development applications (100+ units) to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála and to extend certain planning permissions that have already benefited from one extension for a further period	To fast-track large-scale residential development planning applications.	Q3/Q4 2016	DHPCLG ,ABP
3.7	An Bord Pleanála will prioritise the determination of all planning appeals in relation to large-scale housing developments within the 18-week statutory objective period.	To minimise delays to the consideration and determination of large housing developments.	Q3 2016	ABP
3.8	We will develop and publish an Implementation Plan to prioritise implementation of key recommendations within the An Bord Pleanála review.	To enable An Bord Pleanála to more effectively carry out its mandate.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG , ABP

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
3.9	We will support the development of on-line planning services for the local authority sector and An Bord Pleanála.	To give legislative underpinning as part of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 and to actively support the roll-out of e-planning in the local authority sector and An Bord Pleanála.	Q4 2016 – enact Planning and Development Amdt Bill 2016. Q4 2017 – accelerated roll-out of e-planning across local government sector and ABP.	DHPCLG LAs, ABP
3.10	We will implement a “root and branch” review of the planning system, particularly around forecasting, planning and delivering residential development and taking account of the work underway in relation to the development of the National Planning Framework (NPF).	To ensure a more effective, responsive and accessible planning system.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG
3.11	We will establish a competition to champion best practice, efficient and cost effective design and new approaches to both affordable and quality residential delivery.	To develop innovative systems for the delivery of affordable high quality residential development.	Q3/4 2016 – issue call for proposals and evaluate applications.	DHPCLG
3.12	SOLAS will update skills forecasts and work with stakeholders to ensure that mainstream and targeted education and training initiatives support the supply of skills required to deliver the Action Plan.	To ensure that a supply of construction workers is available as the residential construction sector expands.	From Q4 2016	DES

Pillar 4 – Improve the Rental Sector

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
4.1	We will develop a comprehensive strategy for the rental sector.	To increase supply and support the development of a stable, strong and viable rental sector offering true choice for households, investment opportunities for providers and reflect rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , RTB
4.2	We will legislate (through amendments to the Residential Tenancies Acts) to deal with circumstances where there are sales of property with tenants in situ and to address the RTB's enforcement and dispute resolution powers.	To provide a balanced approach and arrangements in relation to tenancy termination, enhancing and clarifying legal protections and dispute resolution mechanisms for both tenants and landlords.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , RTB
4.3	We will complete the review of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended, and make any new regulations required.	To ensure that the current minimum standards for rental accommodation reflect the requirements of a modern rental market.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , RTB
4.4	We will extend the role of the RTB to include a one stop shop for accessible information and advice and to monitor and provide data on the rental sector, including linking of the Quarterly Rent Index with an Affordability Index, and undertaking annual surveys of tenants and landlords.	To increase understanding of the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords and broader understanding of the rental market, so as to inform policy, monitor the impact of changing policy and monitor trends in the market.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG , RTB

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
4.5	We will examine standards, costs and feasibility of Build-to-Rent on a large scale and commission research on ways in which further investment might be encouraged.	To improve affordability of good quality sustainable rental accommodation.	Q2 2017	Housing Agency , RTB
4.6	We will introduce a new affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent.	To provide long-term affordable residential accommodation for low to moderate income key-worker households in urban areas of high demand and provide an economic incentive to increase supply of rental accommodation.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG , DoF, D/PER, AHBs
4.7	We will prepare and publish a national student accommodation strategy, which will set out a broad framework for delivery of an enhanced level of accommodation and which will inform local authority housing strategies and the land management process in general, in order to provide suitably located and affordable sites.	To develop a national policy on specific needs and mechanisms for the development of appropriate on-campus and off-campus student accommodation.	Q2 2017	DES , DoF, D/PER, DHPCLG, HEIs
4.8	We will work with stakeholders to prioritise and progress viable projects to provide additional student accommodation in key urban areas.	To bring on stream proposals capable of delivering an additional 7,000 student accommodation places by end 2019, on or off campus, in addition to projects already committed to.	Q4 2016 - initial assessment 2017-2019	DES, HEIs
4.9	We will establish dedicated delivery structures, such as AHBs in the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) sector to access Housing Finance Agency funding, and complete any required policy, regulatory or legislative changes necessary.	To provide additional funding mechanisms for the HEI sector, in conjunction with the HFA.	Q1 2017	HEIs , DES, HA and HFA

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
4.10	We will help to fund a Student Housing Officer to work with the Union of Students in Ireland, local authorities, AHBs and housing providers, to identify and expand short-term capacity enhancing measures in the student accommodation sector.	To assist students in finding appropriate accommodation.	Q3 2016	DES , DHPCLG
4.11	We will establish funding mechanisms for Institutes of Technology to support the development of their student accommodation capacity.	To facilitate the Institute of Technology sector in developing their potential for on-campus student accommodation through addressing current borrowing capacity and funding constraints.	Q4 2016	DES , D/PER
4.12	We will carry out an assessment of scope for provision of additional student accommodation on local authority or other publicly-owned lands.	To maximise the potential for student accommodation provision on suitable sites as part of mixed developments.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG , DES, LAs
4.13	We will enable student accommodation projects for 100 units or more to go straight to An Bord Pleanála, as well as maximise the opportunities for joint venture projects on local authority sites to proceed through the Part 8 process and prepare guidance on planning policies around student accommodation developments.	To enhance certainty and reduce delivery timescales and costs associated with bringing student accommodation proposals forward.	Q3/Q4 2016	DHPCLG

Pillar 5 – Utilise Existing Housing

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
5.1	<p>We will develop a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy, informed by Census 2016 data, to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compile a register of vacant units across the country, • identify the number, location and reasons for longer-term vacancies (i.e. over 6 months) in high demand areas, and • set out a range of actions to bring vacant units back into use. 	To ascertain the extent of vacant units with a view to informing policy measures to incentivise the bringing into productive use for housing purposes.	Q1 2017	HA , LAs, DHPCLG
5.2	We will review the disparate systems of differential rents for social housing across local authorities.	To ensure that housing supports, including the HAP, are fair and sustainable, prioritise those on lowest incomes and avoid creating social welfare traps that may prevent people from either returning to work or to the private housing market.	Q2 2017	DHPCLG , LAs
5.3	<p>We will work with LAs to speed up the refurbishment and, where possible, the re-letting of vacant social housing units, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adopting a common national re-letting performance standard across all local authorities; • a preventative maintenance approach to housing stock management; • a greater focus on tenants' role and responsibilities; and • funding mechanisms to incentivise swift turn-around, consistent standards and pro-active approaches. 	To minimise any delays, or indeed perception of delays, in refurbishing and re-letting social houses at a time of considerable need.	Q4 2016	LAs , DHPCLG

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
5.4	We will introduce and implement as early as possible across all local authorities a choice-based or equivalent allocation system, tailored to their specific circumstances.	To allocate social housing in a more efficient manner that offers more choice and involvement for applicant households in selecting a new home, thereby reducing the likelihood of refusals.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG , LAs
5.5	We will review the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme following its first year of operation.	To ensure that local authorities have sufficient discretion to limit the disposal of certain types of social housing in short supply, that the scheme is attractive for social housing tenants, and that it has sufficient potential to raise new funds for housing development.	Q3 2017	DHPCLG, CCMA, Housing Agency
5.6	The Housing Agency will be directly funded with €70 million in capital Exchequer funding to find and acquire suitable portfolios of vacant properties for social housing directly from financial institutions and investors.	To complement, but not displace, ongoing purchasing activity by local authorities and AHBs.	By 2020 – delivery of 1,600 units.	HA, LAs, AHBs
5.7	We will establish a Repair and Leasing Initiative (RLI) for local authorities to identify appropriate vacant privately-owned properties and provide grant support to prospective landlords to bring properties up to standard in return for entering into long-term lease arrangements.	To immediately increase the supply of social housing options through long-term rental leases.	Q4 2016 - launch of pilot project.	DHPCLG LAs
5.8	We will explore ways to promote the availability of step-down, specialist housing, for older people and incentivise down-sizing, where appropriate.	To provide older people with appropriate accommodation suited to their needs, while potentially freeing up larger dwellings for use as family homes.	Q2 2017	DHPCLG, HA, LAs
5.9	We will review planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial units in urban areas, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground floor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process.	To facilitate the speedy delivery of homes in urban and rural settings.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG

Action No.	Description of action	Objective	Timeline	Owner
5.10	The Living City Initiative will be reviewed with a view to further enhancing the attractiveness and effectiveness of the Scheme.	To better incentivise private landlords and property owners to bring forward currently vacant residential (including part-commercial) properties for sale and/or private rental.	Q4 2016	DoF
5.11	A Ministerial-led Urban Renewal Working Group will bring forward proposals for new urban regeneration measures which will complement the existing regeneration programme and projects under the Social Housing Capital Programme, and strengthen alignment with Social Inclusion and RAPID programmes across local authorities.	To support existing initiatives and explore potential synergies around the revitalisation and improvement of city, town and village centres, including addressing the problem of dereliction in many urban centres.	Q4 2016	DHPCLG, LAs
5.12	DHPCLG and DAHRRGA will work together to provide funding for a range of demonstration projects across the country as part of the €30 million Town and Village Renewal Initiative to support local authorities.	To further support the revitalisation of towns and villages, and increase their attractiveness and sustainability as places to live and work.	Q4 2016	DAHRRGA, DHPCLG
5.13	We will align the social housing investment programme and ongoing work in resolving unfinished housing developments in order to target opportunities for strategic acquisition and redevelopment of brownfield development sites, drawing on a further 2016 National Housing Development Survey.	To complete the process of resolving the legacy of unfinished housing estates nationally, in conjunction with the Housing Agency and local authorities.	Q1 2017	DHPCLG, HA, LAs
5.14	We will progress a National Taking- In-Charge Initiative with €10 million funding from DHPCLG in 2016 coupled to bond and local authority funding.	To accelerate the taking-in-charge process of over 1,500 estates, supported by wider legislative reform of the TIC process.	Q3 2016	DHPCLG, HA, LAs

Appendix 2: Response to key recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness

	Recommendation	Response
Social Housing Output	Increase the social housing stock (owned by local authorities and approved housing bodies) by at least 50,000 (an annual average of 10,000 per annum) through a programme of acquisition, refurbishment and new build.	Additional funding and innovative delivery mechanisms are being introduced through the Action Plan in order to deliver some 47,000 units of social housing over the period to 2021. This will be supplemented by the expansion of the Housing Assistance Payment and new affordable rental solutions being provided for many households who find themselves squeezed out of the current private rental market and consequently seeking social housing support. See Pillar 2, Pillar 4
Homelessness	Re-instate the policy of ring-fencing 50% of local authority allocation to the priority list in Dublin and other areas where homelessness is acute. The policy should be reviewed every six months and should ensure that the needs of long-term homeless people are met.	Expanded provision of social housing and new housing solutions to address unacceptable levels of people currently in emergency accommodation as part of the overall strategy to end long-term homelessness. Triple the targets for tenancies to be provided by Housing First in Dublin and expand to other urban areas. See Pillar 1
	Housing First should be significantly expanded and prioritise the long-term homeless.	See Pillar 1
	Ensure that no homeless shelters are closed until alternative accommodation is available elsewhere.	Commitment to ensure supply of sufficient emergency accommodation available to meet the needs of homeless individuals and families, with alternatives identified, where current accommodation is no longer suitable or available. See Pillar 1

	Recommendation	Response
	There should be increased resourcing for and improved co-ordination between HSE mental health service and homeless providers to ensure that the needs of people with mental health issues are met within the homeless system.	The Action Plan emphasises the importance of cross-agency collaboration and co-ordination to meet the needs of homeless people with mental health and addiction issues. A high level cross-departmental team will continue to drive this work. Within this context, the HSE is providing €2 million in 2016 for provision of supports for homeless people with chronic and enduring health needs, in collaboration with mental health services. This will be increased to €6 million in 2017. See Pillar 1
Housing Delivery	Reduce the Part 8 planning process from 8 to 6 weeks. Where there are unreasonable delays beyond 6 weeks, emergency powers (such as the statutory provisions of section 179 of the Planning and Development Act) should be involved. Also encourage greater use of Part 8 for AHBs where appropriate as it is for local authorities for a period of 18 months.	Regulations will be made to provide for a more effective, streamlined and expansive use of the Part 8 process, whereby planning authorities will more swiftly assess and approve developments planned for delivery by itself or in partnership with AHBs. See Pillar 3
	The Minister should consider the establishment of a Housing Procurement Agency with staff from the Housing Agency, NTMA, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Department of Finance to assist local authorities and AHBs to deliver their social housing programme through supports, including funding and procurement.	A dedicated Housing Delivery Office is being established in DHPCLG with staff seconded from various public bodies with procurement, project management and technical expertise, to drive delivery on key elements of the action plan. In addition, a Housing Procurement Unit is being established in the Housing Agency to build capacity in LAs and AHBs and to support programme delivery. See Pillar 2
	The Government should urgently seek flexibility from the European Commission on the application of the fiscal rules to the financing of social housing.	The Government is working actively with the relevant European institutions to ensure fully transparent and certain application of the rules on the treatment of funding models and vehicles, including whether they are designated on or off balance sheet, to support increased output of social housing. See Pillar 2

	Recommendation	Response
	The Government should provide the maximum possible direct Exchequer investment in the provision of social housing in the Capital Programme.	Additional resources will be provided over the period of the Action Plan to provide for 47,000 units of social housing. See Pillar 2
	The Government should establish an off-balance sheet funding mechanism to provide additional investment in social and affordable housing.	The NTMA intends establishing a funding vehicle in conjunction with the private sector that could be capable of facilitating investment in social housing in a way that does not impact on the General Government Balance. It is envisaged that such a vehicle would source properties for social housing through a number of potential mechanisms, including the acquisition of "Part V" units on new residential developments, which would remove the requirement on the State to bear the upfront capital cost of acquiring such units, and through acquisitions in the market place, including new build. The vehicle, developed by NTMA, will avail of relevant sources of funding to increase the supply of affordable and social housing. See Pillar 2
	The Government should seek to mobilise as quickly as possible, all possible sources of funding, including funding from the Housing Finance Agency, Irish Strategic Investment Fund, the Irish League of Credit Unions, and Irish Pension Funds to increase the supply of social and affordable housing.	
	Amend the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009 (s.2 and s.10) to allow NAMA to be an agent for the provision of social housing.	NAMA is providing social housing through its NARPS vehicle within its current legislative framework. The NTMA is working on a separate vehicle to facilitate additional delivery of social housing in an off-balance sheet manner. See Pillar 2
	NAMA should use its cash reserves to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis.	
Private Rented Sector	Introduce a system of rent certainty by linking rent reviews to an index such as the consumer price index and review annually.	The Action Plan commits to the development of a new rental strategy which will consider a range of issues associated with security, supply,

	Recommendation	Response
	<p>Increase security of tenure and protection for tenants by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introducing a scheme, whereby a housing association or local authority can purchase a rental property from an exiting investor (Rent Switch programme). ○ Increasing security of tenure from the current 4-year period. ○ Establishing legal safeguards to allow tenants to remain in situ during and after sale of property. ○ Amend the Residential Tenancies Act to outlaw the sale of property as grounds for evicting a tenant, except in exceptional circumstances where severe financial hardship can be proven by the landlord. 	<p>standards and services in the rental sector.</p> <p>New legislative provisions governing tenancy terminations will be brought forward in the Autumn for early enactment.</p> <p>See Pillar 4</p>
Keeping people in their own homes	<p>The Government should, at a minimum, before the Summer recess, and as a matter of urgency fully and quickly implement the programme for Government's strategy to deal with mortgage arrears.</p>	<p>A major new initiative is being introduced to provide access to independent expert financial and legal advice for people who are insolvent, and are in serious mortgage arrears on their home.</p>
	<p>Subject to the advice of the Attorney General, the Government should introduce legislation for a moratorium on home repossessions until such time as the Government's proposals are in place.</p>	<p>The Department of Justice and Equality will begin examining the necessity for legislation to provide for further possible measures arising from the Programme for Government commitments on mortgage arrears, subject to legal advice on certain legal issues arising.</p> <p>See Pillar 1</p>
	<p>Increase the use of long-term solutions to mortgage distress, including mortgage to rent (MTR), split mortgages, debt write-down and downsizing.</p>	<p>DHPCLG will work together with the other key agents involved with the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and examine the potential for further changes to be made to the scheme to facilitate more households.</p> <p>See Pillar 1</p>

	Recommendation	Response
	<p>Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payments should be increased to reflect current market rates and appropriate legislative safeguards should be put in place to ensure rent certainty.</p>	<p>The Government has increased rent limits under the Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) schemes from 1 July 2016, with the effect that the level of support available to assist homeless households through the HAP pilot in the Dublin Region has increased significantly.</p> <p>See Pillar 1</p>

Appendix 3 – Summary of Proposed Legislative Changes

Fast-track planning approval procedure for large-scale residential developments through direct applications to An Bord Pleanála

Subject to consideration and approval of the necessary legislative reforms by the Government, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government intends to introduce legislation along the following lines to accelerate planning decisions for larger housing developments (100+ homes) on the following basis.

- Housing providers will seek permission directly from the Board for relevant housing projects under a new process that will operate for a specified four-year period to 2020.
- The new process will be drawn from existing development consent processes operated by the Board in relation to strategic infrastructure and other utility type developments.
- Relevant applications will only be capable of being made to the Board, though there will be a key role for the relevant local authority in assisting in pre-application consultations.
- The Board will establish a Housing Proposals Assessment Unit to determine applications within the statutory objective period (additional resources will be provided to facilitate this).
- The new fast-track process will incentivise housing providers to activate projects of scale and bring on earlier provision of increased housing supply.
- Housing providers will be required to undertake pre-planning consultations that will harness the knowledge and capacity of local authorities to support housing projects and will be managed by the Board in relation to wider engagement and timescales.
- Members of the public and other interested parties will be able to make submissions to the Board as in the normal manner.
- To maximise the efficiency of the process and quality of preparations for applications made by housing providers, requests for further information or the holding of oral hearings will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Streamlining Local Authority own development (Part 8) processes

The Part 8 process under the Planning and Development Regulations will be reviewed to provide revised and streamlined timelines for decision making on local authority development proposals. (Including social housing, roads, community facilities, libraries etc.).

- There will be a 6-week public consultation period in respect of a proposed development by the local authority;
- Following the end of the public consultation, the local authority Chief Executive will have 8 weeks to issue a report to the elected council members;
- The elected members will have 6 weeks to vary, modify or refuse the proposed development. A council resolution to reject a proposed development will require the support of a minimum proportion of total council membership;
- If a council resolution is not passed within the 6-week period in relation to the proposed development, the Chief Executive's proposal will be deemed to be approved.

Legislation on balanced arrangements for tenancy termination

Subject to consideration and approval by the Government, legislation to amend the Residential Tenancies Acts will be brought forward to provide for measures to prevent a future recurrence of situations where large numbers of residents in a single development are served with termination notices simultaneously, together with other early actions to enhance the enforcement and dispute resolution powers of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

- Where a landlord proposes to sell 20 or more units within a single development, the sale will be subject to the existing tenants remaining *in situ*, other than in exceptional circumstances;
- Dispute resolution timeframes will be accelerated by reducing the time period for appeals;
- The administration process will be restructured to provide for more efficient processing of RTB determination orders;
- Provision will be made for one-person tribunals, rather than three-person tribunals, to hear certain categories of cases, for example, deposit retention, or other non-possession cases.

Potential legislation on mortgage arrears

The Department of Justice and Equality will examine the necessity for legislation to provide for further possible measures arising from the *Programme for a Partnership Government* commitments on mortgage arrears, subject to legal advice on certain issues arising. Possible measures include

- simplifying personal insolvency legislation to increase thresholds for accessing a personal insolvency arrangement and to streamline requirements for court oversight at different stages;
- providing (if constitutionally permissible) for imposition by the Courts of debt solutions recommended by the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service and any corresponding statutory powers needed for the Service; and
- measures regarding Courts hearing repossession cases, including (if constitutionally permissible) the hearing of repossession cases in private where requested by the borrower.

Appendix 4: The National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) will succeed the 2002-2020 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and will establish a long-term, 20-year framework for Irish strategic development out to 2036 that, taking account of projected growth and development and likely population increases over the period from around 4.7 million people today to over 5.5 million people, will set Government policy in relation to channeling and managing that growth in a way that will support quality of life, sustainable economic growth and an environment of quality.

The NPF will also be developed in tandem with the preparation of new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) by the three new Regional Assemblies, established to co-ordinate relevant local authorities under the Local Government Act 2014. The NPF and RSEs will together provide national and regional planning and economic development strategies for the country as a whole, including relevant Government Departments and Agencies as well as local authorities.

The NPF will identify nationally strategic development requirements for development of, and investment in, cities, towns and rural areas by providing guidance on:

- Population, housing and employment trends;
- Enabling key national infrastructure to address the trends above sustainably;
- Co-ordination of planning and delivery actions as regards regional spatial and economic strategies and city and county development plans;
- Co-operation and coordination across international borders; and
- Policies to reduce and mitigate environmental impacts, greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change.

The NPF preparation process commenced in December 2015 with publication of the NPF Road Map. It is intended that a draft of the NPF will be developed later in 2016 and finalised in 2017 for subsequent adoption by Dáil Éireann, subject to the passage of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 to give statutory underpinning and support to the NPF.

In addition, the NPF will take full account of relevant EU and national legislation requirements in relation to matters such as Strategic Environmental Assessment and other related EU Directives. Public participation and stakeholder engagement will form key elements of, and inputs to, the preparation process. Effective consultation will ensure that the NPF is built from the ground up, while at the same time taking account of strategic national level considerations in relation to the public finances, the latest relevant information and datasets, as well as environmental factors.

