Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation

Minutes of Meeting of 20th June 2018

Attendees:
Chair: Philp Crosby, Department of Education and Skills (In place of William Beausang, Assistant Secretary)

Colm Lynch - NDFA
Damien McClean –Union of Students in Ireland
Gearoid Hodgins - Technological Higher Education Association
Ian Matthews - Trinity College Dublin
Mairead Hughes - NDFA
Mariaam Bhatti - Union of Students in Ireland
Marie Mulvihill - Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Michael Casey - Irish Universities Association
Síona Cahill - Union of Students in Ireland
Stewart Logan - Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government
Stewart Roche - Higher Education Authority

Apologies:
Brendan Ellison - Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Emma Leonard, -Department of Education and Skills
Gary O'Doherty - Department of Education and Skills
Hazel Ryan - Department of Finance
Sighle deBarra - Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Vincent Landers - Department of Education and Skills

Secretariat: Trudy Duffy, Donna Maguire, Department of Education and Skills

1. **Minutes of Meeting of 20 March 2018**
   The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed

2. **Current Status and Outline of Pipeline Projects**

Status	***Year End 2017***	***End Feb 2018***	***End May 2018***	***Location***
Bedspaces completed since *Rebuilding Ireland*	2,606	2,687	2,990	Dublin, Galway, Kildare
Bedspaces on-site	4,553	5,530	7,017	Dublin (Majority), Cork, Galway

Planning Permission Granted	6,927	7,464	7,366	Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth
Planning Permission Applied	1,816	1,770	831	Cork, Dublin, Galway, Sligo, Carlow
Totals	**15,902**	**17,451**	**18,204**	

- The pipeline is healthy however with regard to future projections there will remain a shortfall in 2024.
- Work is ongoing in relation to identifying a funding model which will allow IoTs to finance their own Student Accommodation.
- The university sector highlighted conflicting priorities for capital investment where student accommodation is competing against learning infrastructure.

3. Update on action items

A full update on Action Items is included at Appendix I.

A. Outline of research to date (DES)

Donna Maguire, DES presented a summary of the research to date on the status of the PBSA sector, views and impact on living conditions of students. It has been prepared from a review of the following reports:-

- *USI Student Housing Report National Student Housing Survey (Sept 2017)*
  - 3,489 valid responses
  - Focus on living conditions, preferences and experience of student accommodation
- *Eurostudent Survey VI Report on the Living Conditions of Higher Education Students in Ireland 2016*
  - 20,000 responses from students in Irish HEIs
  - Focus on socio-economic background and living conditions of students
- *Linesight Report on the PBSA sector in Ireland (Jan 2018)*
  - Private consultancy firm in global construction sector
  - Based on interviews with 9 HEIs and 7 construction industry representatives
  - Focus on location, sizing and space, and issues surrounding the provision of funding and regulations

Summary:

- 33% of students surveyed by USI live in PBSA, 41% indicate that this is their preferred option for accommodation.
- 31% live in private rented accommodation, 27% indicate that this is the preferred option.
- 24% live with parents or relatives, eurostudent responses give a similar figure at 30%.
- 7% of students surveyed live in digs, 43% indicate that this is their least preferred option for accommodation.
- The top reasons for choice of accommodation were – proximity to college campus (25%), suitability for student's needs (23%) and reasonable price (11%).
- 52% of respondents have indicated that they have signed some form of lease agreement, with 52% of those students living in PBSA having signed some form of

agreement. 66% of students living in private accommodation did not know if their property had been registered with the RTB.

- 75% of students indicated that they personally pay for their own accommodation, with over half of the respondents indicating that their monthly income does not exceed €500 per month.
- The majority of students living in PBSA or private rented accommodation indicate that they are 'rather satisfied' with their accommodation, while a small number have indicated low levels of satisfaction. Such experiences are generally tied to poor conditions, the high cost of rent not being reflected in the quality of the accommodation or poor assistance from the accommodation provider.
- 75% of students report that they are living in 'good conditions' however, 24% report finding mould in their accommodation; 21% report inadequate heating or dampness; and 19% report high levels of noise. Only 11% of respondents reported that they have not experiences any of the above instances.
- Location is a key factor for students, HEIs and developers, ideally all parties want a distance of no more than a 15 minute walk to the college campus or close proximity to public transport which facilitates a short commute.
- Some HEIs have expressed that despite changes to the legislation allowing the HFA to lend directly to HEIs, they still find it easier to procure funding from the EIB.
- Perceived public sector challenges around the procurement process may lead to delays in the ability of HEIs to place bids and secure sites for development.

B. #HomesforStudy 2018 campaign update (USI)

Newly appointed Housing Officer Mariaam Bhatti gave an update on the outcomes of the 2017 #HomesforStudy and an outline of plans for the 2018 campaign.

Summary:

- 2,000 students have been accommodated through the campaign, with over 4,000 homes listed on the dedicated website.
- They have identified a difficulty in reaching incoming first year students to provide information. This year they aim to raise awareness of the campaign earlier and will release information on the 25th of June targeted towards students finishing the leaving certificate.
- USI will distribute 100,000 leaflets aimed towards homeowners, advertisements via social media advertising and the planned release of large visible banners.
- Intense training for incoming welfare officers has been planned for the second week of July, which will be provided in tandem with the RTB.
- USI will coordinate with the IUA and THEA in order to ensure effective communication of this year's campaign.

C. Next Steps for Research

- Additional work is needed in order to gain clarity surrounding the actual requirements of students in relation to accommodation.
- USI student accommodation survey is due by the end of the year. USI to draft questions and circulate to the group before the next meeting for observations and input.

4. Rent Increases

A letter has been sent to the Department of Education and Skills on behalf of the IUA in relation to the recent instances of rent increase. This letter has been shared with the members of the Interdepartmental Working Group by the IUA.

The recent instances of rent increases from certain private providers was discussed. While there exists a recognition of the need to ensure some form of predictability for students, it has been acknowledged that caution must be exercised to ensure that no unintended consequences are fostered.

5. **A.O.B**

6. **Next Meeting**
   3rd October 2018

Number	Action Point	Update 20 June 2018
1	In order to have a comprehensive picture of the progress of development in the sector the DES in conjunction with the HEA will track the progression of all developments of PBSA from pre-planning stage right through to completion and provide a quarterly update on progress.	Q1 report published April 2018 https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/progress-report-on-the-national-student-accommodation-strategy.pdf
2	Monitor the effects of the implementation of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act, 2016 on the speed of granting of planning permission for PBSA and continue to work with HEIs and the DHPCLG to speed up the process of applications for planning permission if that is deemed necessary in the future.	There is currently one private development in excess of 200 bed spaces with plans submitted. A further 13 projects are in pre-planning (7 from HEIs)
3	Monitor Planning Permissions Granted to ensure that there are no undue restrictions placed on the development of PBSA.	Ongoing
4	The inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation will monitor the development of PBSA to ensure that there is not a proliferation of change of use permissions sought in respect of planning permissions granted for PBSA	Ongoing
5	Maintain the established inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation as a co-ordinating mechanism to ensure that all stakeholders, including HEIs, have access to detailed information regarding student accommodation including information relating to potential financing and delivery models.	Ongoing. Meeting dates set for remainder of 2018.

6	At its next meeting the inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation will consider: (i) Whether the membership of the Group should be expanded to include representatives of private developers and managers of PBSA (ii) Whether the membership of the Group should be expanded to include representatives of financing providers (Housing Finance Agency (HFA), European Investment Bank (EIB), Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF)); (iii) Whether a once-off or annual forum or conference on student accommodation should be created.	As there are still outstanding issues with funding models for the IoT sector, the Forum on Student Accommodation remains on hold until Q4 2018. This is contingent on the identification of a viable approach to funding within the IoT sector.
7	The inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation will examine the data that is derived from the USI survey once it has been published. USI will also outline its future plans for conducting periodic national surveys on student accommodation The inter-departmental steering group will contribute to the development of future national surveys on student accommodation.	USI housing officer to give update on campaign outcomes and provide an outline of plans for 2018
8	DES and DHPCLG to work with HEIs and the HFA with a view to accelerating the provision of financing for PBSA projects. The HFA have already commenced work on the preparatory legal work necessary to deal with applications for financing from HEIs for the purpose of building PBSA. The HFA will also implement a dedicated streamlined application process for HEIs.	Ongoing
9	Develop and run workshops on financing models and mechanisms for HEIs on how they can access and structure the financing of PBSA, especially in terms of off-balance sheet solutions, with identified key stakeholders including the EIB, ISIF, NTMA, the HFA and the HEIs. This will build on the National Information Session on Student Accommodation which was previously hosted by the DES.	Planned Q4 2018 workshop.
10	Officials from DES will continue to liaise with officials from DHPCLG in relation to the development of the Housing Land Map and database detailing publicly controlled lands available for new housing development including PBSA. DES will continue to arrange and facilitate meetings between relevant stakeholders where potential for PBSA is identified.	The Housing Land Map was published in April 2017; Significant pipeline of activity to date.
11	The DES will support DIT in developing their proposed off-balance sheet service concession model with a view to ensuring that it delivers on campus PBSA for DIT in Grangegorman.	Ongoing

12	Following finalisation of the model for DIT in Grangegorman, the DES will explore, with THEA, the representative body for the sector, the HEA and other IoTs, the potential for this model to be used by other IoTs for the development of PBSA where there is unmet demand for PBSA in the area and projects are financially viable.	See item 11
13	Financing mechanisms will be examined with a view to seeking to identify other potential off-balance sheet solutions which could enable IOTs to develop further PBSA projects where there is unmet demand for PBSA and projects are financially viable.	See item 11
14	HEIs will consult with all relevant stakeholders, including USI, local students' unions, student parents, lone parents and students with disabilities, on the adaptation of existing stock of PBSA and on the design for new PBSA.	DES and USI to conduct a review of accessibility of student accommodation for vulnerable groups as part of a review of the operation of the NSAS
15	HEIs will ensure that their Accommodation offices/officers are aware of the specific needs of student parents, including lone parents, and are able to provide appropriate information to such students on sourcing accommodation.	See item 14
16	HEIs are encouraged to allocate additional bed spaces for student parents, lone parents and students with disabilities as additional on campus bed spaces are delivered.	See item 14
17	HEIs to engage with private developers of PBSA to determine whether formal or informal nomination agreements can be put in place to facilitate the provision of PBSA to students attending HEIs.	
18	USI to continue to run their #HomesforStudy campaigns.	Outcomes of 2017 #Homesforstudy campaign presented at June meeting. 2018 campaign launched in August.
19	DES to monitor the outcomes of the Working Group which has been established to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers).	Report of the working group on the tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers published September 2017 and presentation held 20 Mar 2018

20	Enhance co-operation between the HEI Accommodation offices/officers and the local Students' Unions and the USI Accommodation Officer with a view to alleviating the difficulty for students in accessing accommodation. HEIs will ensure that their accommodation offices/officers are in a position to provide specific information on sourcing accommodation, including providing referrals to relevant third-party accommodation providers/service.	DES and USI currently identifying means of providing information on accessing accommodation, particularly in the case of incoming first year students. Outcomes of the 2017 #Homesforstudy presented at June meeting, and outline of plans for year to come..
21	DES to work with DHPCLG and local authorities to emphasise the demand for additional PBSA, and the additional benefits that will arise from its development, as well as to further support and work with both HEIs and private developers to support the further development of PBSA.	Ongoing
22	The USI, local Students' Unions and HEIs will work together to highlight the potential for regeneration, community involvement, civic activities and engagement that arises from having an accommodation mix in an area that includes a significant proportion of student accommodation including PBSA through local and national campaigns.	Outcomes of the 2017 #Homesforstudy presented at June meeting, and outline of plans for year to come.
23	HEIs in conjunction with USI and/or local students' unions will promote awareness of the importance of 'being a good neighbour' to students through the USI and the RTB annual Finance and Accommodation Guide or local Student Handbooks and through the work of students' union representatives. HEIs will give consideration to the development of a Finance and Accommodation Guide to be distributed to all students when enrolling and registering. This would emphasise the importance of promoting respect for the local community and potentially include information in relation to the local neighbourhood	Outcomes of the 2017 #Homesforstudy presented at June meeting, and outline of plans for year to come.
24	HEIs will further support the development of volunteering opportunities for students and staff members in local community engagement and community projects. This could include the identification with local community groups and organisations of particularly suitable projects for the involvement of students.	Outcomes of the 2017 #Homesforstudy presented at June meeting, and outline of plans for year to come.
25	HEIs will continue to promote and develop the community utilisation of campus facilities.	Ongoing
26	Developers and managers of PBSA will be encouraged to develop and work on community engagement projects with a view to strengthening their role and acceptance in the community.	Minister has written to developers to encourage community engagement.

27	All developers and managers of PBSA should put in place an appropriate Management Plan for PBSA in order to minimise potential negative impacts of the development and its occupants on surrounding properties and neighbourhoods and to create a positive and safe living environment for students and develop and enhance the neighbourhoods in which they are situated for the betterment of the whole community.	Minister has written to developers to encourage community engagement.