An Coimisiún Tithíochta
The Housing Commission

The Recommendations of the Report of the Housing Commission

Introduction and Terms of Reference

Background

In December 2021, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage established the Housing Commission, as committed to in the 2020 Programme for Government *Our Shared Future.*[1] The Commission was tasked with examining issues such as tenure, standards, sustainability and quality-of-life matters, considering long-term housing policy while building on the policy changes outlined in *Housing for All*[2] and related government policies.

Over the course of its work, the Housing Commission analysed issues central to the Irish housing system, sought to build consensus on issues of importance by engaging key stakeholders, and formulated recommendations aimed at delivering a well-functioning housing system.

The members of the Commission, as set out below, were appointed by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage Darragh O'Brien TD. Fourteen members in all were appointed by the Minister.

Members of the Housing Commission	
John O'Connor (Chair)	Former CEO of the Housing & Sustainable Communities Agency
Patricia King (Deputy Chair)	Former General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Rosalind Carroll (from April 2023)	Chief Executive of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board & former Director of the Residential Tenancies Board
Pat Doyle (until Oct 2023)	Former President of the Irish Council for Social Housing
Sorcha Edwards	Secretary General of Housing Europe
Paddy Gray	Professor Emeritus in Housing at Ulster University
Ronan Lyons	Associate Professor in Economics at Trinity College Dublin and Director of Trinity Research in Social Sciences
Kathryn Meghen	CEO of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland
Michelle Norris	Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Geary Institute for Public Policy at University College Dublin
David O'Connor	Architect and former Fingal County Manager
Michael O'Flynn	Chairman and CEO of the O'Flynn Group
Brian O'Gorman (until Jan 2023)	CEO of Clúid Housing
Dermot O'Leary (from Feb 2023)	Chief Economist at Goodbody Stockbrokers
Ailbhe O'Neill	Senior Counsel (specialising in constitutional and regulatory law)

1 Government of Ireland, Programme for Government: Our Shared Future, Gov.ie, p. 58, 2020.
2 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 'Housing for All – a New Housing Plan for Ireland', 2021.

Terms of Reference

The scope of the work of the Housing Commission was set out in December 2021 in its Terms of Reference.

Terms of Reference	
Scope of the Commission on Housing As set out in the Programme for Government, the Commission on Housing is being established to examine issues such as tenure, standards, sustainability, and quality-of-life issues in the provision of housing. This should include the efficient functioning of the markets for housing construction and provision. As further set out in *Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland*, the Commission will also bring forward proposals on the Referendum on Housing referred to in the Programme for Government.	
Policy Areas for Review The Commission will consider long-term housing policy post-2030 and examine how to build on the policy changes outlined in *Housing for All* and related government policies. Having regard to the commitments in the Programme for Government and in *Housing for All*, the Commission will:	
1	Examine and report on maintaining a sustainable housing supply and providing balance and choice of tenures, having regard to social, environmental and economic objectives
2	Examine and report on the cost and quality of housing, the drivers of cost (including, inter alia, embodied carbon compliance), and how costs may be addressed, and compliance achieved in the longer term, having regard to international comparators and benchmarks
3	Examine and report on the capacity of the construction sector to meet housing supply requirements, drawing on international experience and alternative approaches to meeting capacity requirements, including Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and Modular/Off-Site Construction
4	Examine and report on the affordability of private rental accommodation
5	Examine and report on the affordability of house purchase for those entering the market for the first time, using comparisons with similar countries; in particular, examine measures which would complement or enhance the recently introduced suite of affordable housing measures, and examine the potential for introducing new models identified as successful in other jurisdictions in terms of enhancing affordability for people who want to purchase a home with a view to increasing and expanding homeownership to more people as part of an appropriate tenure mix
6	Examine specifically the issue of rural housing and how this can be facilitated in a way that is both environmentally and socially sustainable and allows for the development of appropriate one-off housing
7	Examine and report on the need for regulation of social housing
8	Examine and report on the optimum role of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in housing provision, including their role regarding the housing needs of vulnerable groups
9	Examine and report on the referendum on housing. The Commission will establish a sub-committee with appropriate expertise to examine the complex constitutional questions arising and examine the various proposals that have been made around potential wording for an amendment to the Constitution. It will advise the Government in an independent and objective manner regarding the critical factors for consideration and will make recommendations as to the appropriate wording to be put to the people.

Terms of Reference continued

The Commission will seek to build consensus on issues of importance to stakeholders. The Commission and/or its subcommittees may consult with such external experts and stakeholders as may be appropriate.

The work of the Commission should be complementary to work already ongoing to implement *Housing for All*. In particular, pursuant to Housing Policy Objective 13.3 of *Housing for All*, a significant piece of work to review and consolidate planning legislation is being undertaken by the Attorney General's Office and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. In addition, Section 3.2 of *Housing for All* deals with the wider aspects of Planning and Urban Development, and the Commission will therefore not consider planning reform under its Terms of Reference.

Context

The Government plays a central role through the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), in formulating and implementing housing policy. Across the country, 31 local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), the Land Development Agency (LDA) and The Housing Agency play a crucial role in planning and providing social, affordable purchase and cost-rental housing. Homebuilders, developers, and contractors are also vital in delivering housing, both for owner occupied and rental housing.

Financial institutions including banks, mortgage lenders and international institutional capital play a pivotal role in financing the sector. The delivery of services by transport, utility and infrastructure organisations is paramount to the development, habitability, and functionality of residential communities. Effective collaboration among these entities, and many more, is essential to ensuring sustainable housing delivery into the future.

The Housing Commission is cognisant of several pressing issues currently affecting housing in Ireland, such as high inflation in the construction industry, delays in the planning system and acute pressures on the availability of accommodation. However, as the focus of the Commission is long-term, the recommendations outlined in this report are aimed at shaping housing policy into the future.

Experts engaged as working group members

In addition to the Commission members, the work of the Housing Commission was greatly bolstered by experts engaged on a voluntary basis as Working Group members (listed below). They provided a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

- Dr Sarah Cotterill
- Francis Doherty
- Dr Joe Frey
- Margaret Geraghty
- Yvonne Harris
- Dr Aideen Hayden
- Màiri Henderson
- Mike Hoey
- David Howard
- Annette Hughes
- Helen Hughes
- Dr Karen Keaveney
- Dr Robert Kelly
- Tomás Kelly
- Rachel Kenny
- Dearbhla Lawson
- Michael Lynch
- John-Mark McCafferty
- Fergus Merriman
- Paul Mitchell
- Ruth Montgomery
- Paul Mooney
- Mick Mulhern
- Mary Mullholland
- Orla Murphy
- Patricia O'Brien
- Ruth O 'Herlihy
- Phelim O'Neill
- Gemma O'Reilly
- Michael O'Reilly
- Dr Conor O'Toole
- Tom Phillips
- Tomas Sexton
- Paul Sheridan
- Dr Rachel Slaymaker
- Aidan Sweeney

Recommendations

The Commission used three primary criteria for the development and assessment of its recommendations. These are:

1. **Impact**
2. **Durability / Future Proof**
3. **Consistency and Coherence**

A number of secondary assessment criteria were also used, these are:

Achievability, Cost, Value, Timelines, Risk and Policy Alignment.

Set out below are the Commission's recommendations.

Section 2 - Meeting Ireland's Housing Requirements

#1. Recognise and prioritise dealing with Ireland's housing deficit and address it through emergency action.

#2. Base housing policy on an assessment of the housing required for a well-functioning society. This should not be conflated with market demand or construction sector capacity.

#3. Align housing provision and economic development in the *National Planning Framework* to ensure sufficient housing supply to meet the needs of the population in all parts of the country, including the Dublin region.

#4. Account must be taken in housing policy of the full economic and social costs associated with not meeting Ireland's housing requirements.

#5. Ensure that housing policy makes adequate provision for a range of housing and accommodation types to meet the specific needs of identifiable groups.

#6. Develop and maintain the use of high-quality data resources covering all areas of the housing system.

Section 3 - Delivering a Sustainable Housing Supply

#7. Establish a Housing Delivery Oversight Executive in legislation as a decision-making body responsible for coordinating the delivery of housing. This body should be time-limited. It should identify and address blockages to housing delivery and oversee and drive investment in public utilities on land zoned for housing.

#8. Establish high-yielding Housing Delivery Zones at agreed strategic locations, where housing can be delivered in the short to medium term and at scale.

#9. Enhance the powers and resources of local authorities so that they can support and enable the delivery of a sustainable level of private, affordable, social and cost-rental housing.

#10. Assess all policy measures and interventions against their impact on housing supply. Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) should be performed on all such interventions.

#11. Establish a Land Price Register to increase the transparency around land transactions and improve the functioning of the market.

#12. Promote earlier and more effective participation by the public in the plan-making process, that is, in the formulation and inception stages of planning policy, including land-use zoning, and drafting of guidance and policy documents.

#13. Support the delivery of enabling infrastructure in advance of housing construction. In addition, the Government should ensure that the Commission for Regulation of Utilities recognises the need to reconfigure operational practices to support the delivery of advanced infrastructure for housing.

#14. Take urgent action to ensure delivery of the Greater Dublin Drainage Project by 2030 to meet the needs of current and future housing supply.

#15. Take urgent action to ensure delivery of the critical Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midlands Region by 2031 to meet the needs of current and future housing supply, increase the resilience of the water supply system and avoid the risk of major water shortages.

#16. Make economic sustainability a core tenet of policy objectives for delivering public and private sector housing, including:

   a. economic policy development to support viability of environmentally and socially sustainable housing development, with appropriately measured Land Value Capture tools;

   b. consideration of viability at a local level during the planning process, in particular during the land zoning process.

#17. Develop a set of principles on which a fair and efficient system of Land Value Sharing can be established.

#18. Ensure that diverse sources of finance, including stable public financing and a predominant international element, are available to increase housing output in the medium term. Long-term financing requirements and sources should be regularly assessed and updated.

#19. Ensure that the State plays both a direct and an indirect role in funding housing for the purposes of scale, certainty, equity and agility, as well as a direct role in its funding of social housing, particularly in higher-density housing where financing is more difficult.

#20. The State should explore the option of setting up a specific private savings fund that can be used to assist in the funding of housing.

#21. Ensure that appropriately calibrated macroprudential tools remain in place to underpin stability in the housing market.

Section 4 - Cost and Quality of Housing

#22. The State must support the collaborative development of standard house and apartment types to drive efficiency, reduce costs and support viability.

#23. Establish standardised measurement of housing costs as the basis for all cost comparisons and analysis.

#24. Carry out a comprehensive National Housing Condition Survey every five years for all types of housing, focusing primarily on housing conditions and standards.

Section 5 - Capacity, Collaboration and Innovation in the Construction Sector

#25. Establish a Central Construction Supply Unit to coordinate, monitor and track all major public sector construction projects in the country.

#26. Increase the scale and capacity of the homebuilding sector.

#27. Introduce a National Housing Procurement Strategy that promotes collaboration between contracting parties and the supply chain to support the delivery of housing, and reform the Public Works Contracts with a new focus on collaboration and dispute resolution.

#28. Enhance contracting authority and supplier procurement teams with appropriate resources and competencies to accelerate the delivery of housing programmes.

#29. Develop a pipeline of appropriately skilled labour for the construction industry, and other measures to address capacity issues in the sector.

#30. Facilitate the use of innovation, new technology and digitisation to improve productivity in the construction sector.

Section 6 - The Rental Sector

#31. Balance the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords through a programme of legislative and regulatory reforms to make the private rental sector more attractive to both parties.

#32. Deliver cost-rental housing at scale and transition to cost-rental as the main form of supply for both affordable and social rented accommodation to:

a. address the challenges in maintaining the supply of rental housing;

b. assist in addressing affordability challenges in the private rented sector;

c. enable social housing providers to accommodate households with a wider mix of incomes in their housing developments.

#33. Regulate market rents fairly and effectively by reforming the current system of rent regulation and establishing a system of 'Reference Rents'. This reform should be informed by evidence-based reviews on the impact of regulated market rents on rented housing supply, accessibility and affordability. Such reviews should be conducted on a regular basis and rent regulations amended where appropriate.*

#34. Reform and consolidate standards for rented dwellings through a single, nationwide dwelling standards risk-based inspection process. This should include all forms of rented housing, including private, social and cost-rental.

#35. Amend the standards for rental accommodation in private and cost-rental homes to enable the letting of accommodation without white goods appliances.

#36. Regulate the landlord functions of local authority-owned dwellings and formalise the local authority/tenant relationship.

#37. Amalgamate regulatory agencies involved in regulating rental accommodation under the remit of a single regulatory authority, and strengthen the enforcement powers.

#38. Implement reforms to ensure a more effective enforcement model for the rental sector that works for both tenants and landlords.

#39. Reform the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme, resetting them as short- to medium-term support measures for households eligible for social housing. Such households must remain on the social housing list, except where their income levels increase above the eligibility criteria for social housing.

#40. Initiate a review of the current legislation and regulations relating to Multi-Unit Developments.

Section 7 - Affordability of Home Purchase for First-time Buyers

#41. Review and recalibrate regularly measures to assist with access to home ownership for first-time buyers, taking account of detailed evidence on income distribution, affordability, supply dynamics and regional differences.

#42. Use appropriately targeted equity loan schemes to support first-time buyers to purchase a home, as provided for in the Affordable Housing Act 2021, and establish central revolving funds to manage capital derived from repayment of equity loans that are provided by the State or local authorities.

#43. Maintain a central online information resource for first-time buyers covering multiple schemes that support home purchasers, along with an information resource for cost-rental.

Section 8 - The Social Housing Sector

#44. Legally underpin the reforms set out in this section with a new Social Housing Act that would specify and protect the social purpose of the social housing sector over the long term and ensure that the sector is not privatised.

#45. Increase the size of the social and cost-rental housing sectors to 20% of the national housing stock so that these sectors will provide a substantial source of rented housing for lower and middle-income households in future.

#46. Provide a sustainable financing model for social housing by setting social housing rents at cost recovery rates. This will:

a. ensure there is sufficient income to manage and maintain dwellings;

b. assist in funding new social housing provision;

c. break the link between market rents and social housing rents.

To ensure that rents remain affordable, housing allowances should be provided to subsidise tenants who cannot afford to pay full cost rents.

#47. Reform capital funding of social and cost-rental housing to provide more stable and counter-cyclical funding for these sectors to:

a. ensure long-term financial sustainability;

b. reduce the volatility of funding for new housing;

c. provide long-term reliable capital to fund these sectors.

To achieve this:

a. the sources of finance for social and cost-rental housing must be diversified;

b. reliance on government grants and loans must be reduced and new sources of private and non-profit finance introduced.

#48. Retain and recycle all housing finance, rental income and public subsidies in the social housing system for future housing delivery, management, maintenance and upgrading.

#49. End the system of selling local authority dwellings to tenants at substantial discounts relative to current market value.

#50. Increase significantly the output of social and cost-rental housing in cities and the Dublin region to address the particularly high numbers of households in need of housing and those who are homeless. For those with complex needs, provide long-term social support services.

#51. Reform the current management structure in local government to strengthen housing delivery, management and maintenance capacity. This should be done by establishing separate arrangements for governing and delivering housing services. This could be achieved by establishing Local Authority Housing Organisations (LAHOs) on a local authority or regional basis.

#52. Review and streamline the arrangements for approving central capital grants and other public subsidies for social and affordable housing provision by the DHLGH to speed up the approval and payment processes.

#53. Reform arrangements for acquiring land for social and cost-rental housing to ensure sufficient supply of appropriately sized social and cost-rental housing, delivered in suitable locations.

#54. Centralise arrangements for applying for and allocating social and cost-rental housing and make more extensive use of choice-based lettings.

#55. Formulate a strategy on the role, capacity and sustainability of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector. The DHLGH should formulate this strategy and set out its vision for the AHB sector, including:

a. the role of AHBs in providing social and cost-rental housing and the housing system more broadly;

b. building capacity to grow larger AHBs and encourage large new entrants into the sector;

c. the necessary provision of regulation and other supports.

The strategy should outline a comprehensive plan on how to achieve this vision.

#56. Legislate to ensure that AHB social housing is provided, retained and let in perpetuity, except in exceptional circumstances.

#57. Put measures in place to increase the capacity of the AHB sector and encourage growth of more large AHBs to address concentration risks and enable more delivery.

#58. Develop a specific plan for smaller and unregistered AHBs.

#59. Enable off-balance-sheet financing of AHB housing.

Section 9 - Rural Housing

#60. Fully realise the commitment to develop sustainable rural communities by strengthening the design of towns and villages, facilitating housing in nodes and clusters, and revising planning and regulatory mechanisms for sustainable one-off housing in appropriate locations.

#61. Incentivise the reuse and retrofitting of vacant and deteriorating dwellings in rural Ireland by:

a. prioritising and extending grants and soft supports for the reuse and retrofitting of vacant buildings for owner-occupiers and tenants;

b. providing additional grants to ensure that property owners receive support and advice;

c. enforcing vacant building and vacant site taxation, and further incentivising the reuse of existing buildings (e.g. above-the-shop spaces).

#62. Monitor accurately the prevalence and use of second homes and holiday homes in rural Ireland.

#63. Develop and implement a holistic approach to delivering infrastructure in rural Ireland to address the historic and endemic challenges around water and sewage management.

#64. Provide dedicated supports to island and Gaeltacht communities to ensure their long-term viability through implementing the Our Living Islands policy.

Section 10 - Sustainable and Socially Inclusive Communities

#65. Develop social infrastructure and amenities in tandem with housing.

#66. Ensure that housing policy encourages integrated and inclusive communities.

#67. Reform the local authority social-work service to better identify and meet the needs of vulnerable tenants and applicants for housing.

#68. Integrate housing and homelessness plans, funding and strategies to ensure a consistent whole-of-government approach.

#69. Implement specific measures to end child homelessness.

#70. Implement the Lisbon Declaration in relation to addressing homelessness.

#71. Increase the supply of social housing that better matches the size of homeless households and households in need of social housing.

#72. Establish a new International Protection Support Service and end Direct Provision, as agreed by government.

#73. Ensure that appropriate Traveller-specific accommodation is delivered.

#74. Implement the *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People.*

#75. Increase the supply of supported social housing and expand provision of care and support services for tenants living in general-needs social housing to meet the needs of disabled people and an ageing population of renters.

#76. Address the housing needs of people as they age, recognising that we have an ageing population.

Section 11 - Environmental Sustainability in the Construction Sector

#77. Meet emission reduction targets for the new residential construction sector.

#78. Publish housing guidelines that address and cross-reference the *Climate Action Plan* with reference to the *National Planning Framework* and the Town Centre First policy, and link to their identified targets and actions.

#79. Address the energy efficiency deficit in the housing stock through sufficient funding and supports.

#80. Promote and enable through legislation the wider adoption of district heating as a lower-carbon source that can reduce the cost of residential heating and help meet climate goals in applicable areas when applied at scale.

#81. Support and deploy more widespread use of timber in housing construction and reform the building control system accordingly.

#82. Ensure that state policy supports compact housing growth, which is essential to achieving the transition to a low-carbon society.

#83. Support biodiversity measures in the development of residential areas.

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