

Delivering on Social Housing: What Councillors Can Do

The key to tackling the housing and homelessness crisis is to increase access to – and delivery of – social housing along with affordable and secure rental accommodation.

Current policies are not delivering the much needed increase across these areas. The supply of social housing remains the cornerstone of Government homeless strategy, as set out in Rebuilding Ireland but when we dig behind the numbers we see that only a fraction of what is being delivered is actually to be built by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

As an example in 2018 Rebuilding Ireland set a national target of 25,469 housing solutions to be delivered but only 4,969 (20%) were to be built.

This is not an ideological point. People don't care whether their new home was built by local authorities or the private sector, as long as it is well built and local community infrastructure is well resourced. This issue is that unless the Local Authorities and AHBs are causing new homes to be built, we only have one limited stream of new housing – developer led housing – and everyone, people who want to buy their own home, investors who want to purchase a house as a rental property and the rest of the market, has to compete for this. The fact is that LAs are not yet pulling their full weight and a number of councils are failing to meet even the relatively modest targets set by Government.

In the final Department of Housing breakdown the social housing construction report¹ shows that 3,745 units were built, of those 2,100 were 'turnkey' which largely consists of new build units bought from developers. Only 1,053 of the units reported as delivered were what would be traditionally understood as 'Local Authority build' with a further 392 units built by Approved Housing Bodies. In total, this amounts to 1,445 units or 6% of the rebuilding Ireland target.

So while it is true that most of the overall targets in Rebuilding Ireland are being met, the housing and homeless crisis continues to deepen. One critical component in turning the tide on this crisis is Local Authorities being more active in building.

Rebuilding Ireland relies far too heavily on much of the social housing being built by the private sector and then acquired by the State as social housing through Part V, leasing or other schemes. This is not working as not enough housing is being built to meet the demand. Local authorities need the support of elected officials to be facilitated to provide more housing.

¹ <https://data.gov.ie/dataset/social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2018>

Councillors can take a lead

While many of the solutions lie at national level, even in the absence of change at this level, Councillors can still take a local lead in ensuring that appropriate standards are in place in their own local areas.

- What is the target for building new housing in your local authority? Is your local authority on track to meet this target and if not, why? What is the need for housing and how can the gap be filled?
- Is your Council fearful of building large scale social housing developments because of the myth that all such developments fail? What can be done to explore the many lessons which show us how to plan and build social housing developments at an adequate scale?
- How does your Council deal with the concerns of existing residents to new social housing, and how could the communication (and support) of new social housing be improved?
- In engaging in 'turn key' development does your Council adopt a 'partnership turn-key' approach (in which the Council add to housing supply by working with developers from the beginning, facilitating them to build the units by knowing that there is final buyer and price) or 'near-market turn-key' (where the Council does not add to total supply but fights for ownership of units that have already been built, in competition with owner-occupiers and other potential buyers)?
- Many AHBs says they could build more if they have access to land, but LAs are reluctant to make land available to them. What are the policies of your local authority in regards to this, and what are the view of the AHBs in the area about what could change?