

# Evaluation of the Focus Ireland Meascán Housing Model

Kathy Walsh  
with Sarah Sheridan

Challenging  
homelessness.  
Changing lives.

**FOCUS**  
Ireland









**An Ghníomhaireacht  
Tithíochta**  
The Housing Agency

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The Housing Agency's purpose is to provide expertise and solutions to help deliver sustainable communities throughout Ireland. A strategic objective is to support stakeholders and policy makers by providing innovative thinking through evidence-based housing insights and data. In this vein, the Research Support Programme funds research projects which respond to key topical issues in housing and have the potential to impact on housing policy and practice. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of The Housing Agency.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, Focus Ireland would like to acknowledge and thank the Housing Agency for their support of this evaluation.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Kathy Walsh and Sarah Sheridan for their dedication and expertise in preparing this report.

A special thanks to every person that gave their time to contribute to the evaluation, including Focus Ireland staff, key stakeholders, and Meascán tenants.

Finally, Focus Ireland would like to thank all the members of the expert advisory group for their guidance and feedback. These included (in alphabetical order):

- › Clare Austick, Clúid Housing
- › Rob Lowth, National Housing First Office
- › Dennis Manning, Cork County Council
- › David Niblock, Focus Ireland
- › Aideen O'Dwyer, Cork City Council
- › Adrian Quinn, Focus Ireland



# Foreword



For most people who experience homelessness in Ireland, the only real problem is housing: they need to find a place to rent and a landlord that will accept them at a rent they can afford, or they need to survive whatever time they have left on the housing list before they are offered social housing.

But a significant minority of people who are homeless face additional challenges such as mental ill-health, addiction or behavioural issues which make it hard for them to maintain a tenancy even if they get one. In most such cases, these challenges emerge as issues that their landlord must deal with – delays in rent, hoarding, sometimes damage to property. All landlords – whether they be a private individual, a rental company, Approved Housing Body or Local Authority – encounter such tenants, and most have mechanisms to reduce the risk they present – very often by not accepting them as tenants in the first place. A small minority of these ‘challenging tenants’ have problems which impact not just on their landlord and themselves, but also on their neighbours and, sometimes, their wider neighbourhood.

At the heart of this report is the consideration of how we can provide stable homes, and a life within a vibrant community, for this minority of people who are homeless and have additional complex needs which must be addressed if they are to sustain a home and get on with their new community.

Historically, our society’s response to people with these problems has been to accommodate them in homeless shelters along with other people experiencing similar problems. Societies have persisted with this ‘congregate institutionalisation’ of homeless people with complex support needs, despite the overwhelming evidence that this form of institutionalised accommodation does long-term damage to their capacity to lead independent and fulfilled lives.

We need to guard against giving the impression, or perpetuating the impression, that the particular challenges that this small number of people present are typical of the vast majority of people who experience homelessness. They are not, and most people who have experienced homelessness are no more likely to present difficulties for their landlord or their neighbours than anyone else. But nor should we, in trying to overcome the stigma that all people who are homeless face, ignore that these challenges exist and must be resolved if we are to move towards ending homelessness.

The form of disruption that people with these issue can cause is generally covered by the term ‘anti-social behaviour’. Landlords – even social landlords such a local councils and general needs Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) – are reluctant to take such tenants and often evict them quickly when behaviours emerge. Other people would prefer not to live beside them because of the disruption they can cause.

The term ‘anti-social behaviour’ is not very helpful in understanding the challenges presented in providing homes for people with these problems. The term ‘ASB’ is used to cover everything from involvement in organised criminal activity, through inconsiderately playing music too loud, suffering periodic mental health crises or being so vulnerable that your home is taken over by drug dealers (cuckooing). Cruelly, an accusation of anti-social



behaviour can be directed at both the perpetrator of domestic abuse and the victim. Families with autistic children have been penalised for anti-social behaviour.

In the last two decades, a number of models have emerged in which people who are homeless and have complex support needs are accommodated in ordinary homes that are ‘pepper-potted’ among the homes of other members of the community, where they are provided with various forms and intensities of support to help them sustain their tenancy and integrate into the community. Focus Ireland has been pursuing this approach through its Focus Housing arm for over twenty years and now owns over 1,000 such ‘scatter-site’ or ‘pepper-pot’ homes – where floating support is provided, funded either by local authorities or from public fundraising. The Housing First model, which Ireland adopted over ten years ago, and now provides homes and support for over 1,000 formerly homeless people, is a particularly high intensity version of this approach.

Any solution to homelessness must address not only the broader questions of supply of affordable housing but also the needs of this group of people with high support need. Any strategy to tackle homelessness would need to achieve a significant expansion of this form of housing. Two major problems stand in the way of such progress.

The first problem is caused by the way in which Government policy either neglects this issue or actively creates barriers to progress. The neglect comes in the absence of any discernible policy to encourage the construction of the homes that most people actually need. Whether you look at the general population, the social housing list or the people who are homeless, the largest need is for homes for single persons. Yet until very recently, Government, despite its labyrinthine processes of social housing approval, did not even collect information on what types of homes were being built, yet alone encourage the construction of homes for single people. The creation of barriers comes in the form of severe financial restrictions on the number of single units which can be purchased from the market. Housing for All restricted the total number of single units that could be purchased to 200 per year until 2026. This very low ceiling must accommodate not only a programme to tackle homelessness, but also all the other categories of need (disability, ageing) which also seek to employ a scatter site model. A Government circular in March 2025 (Circular 11/2025) so restricts funding for these acquisitions that most local authorities will not be able to purchase any scatter-site accommodation until 2026. These Government policies are not clearly inconsistent with stated approaches to tackling homelessness and the claim that homelessness is a top priority.

The second problem arises from the social impact of this form of social mix. Only in a small fraction of cases do formerly homeless tenants with complex needs cause serious problems in their neighbourhood, but when it does occur the disruption can be considerable. The RTB tenant protection legislation does not envisage circumstances of extreme, even life-threatening, behaviour so it may take several months before tenants causing severe disruption can be moved to more suitable accommodation. Management companies in apartment complexes frequently respond to such prolonged periods of disruption by becoming actively resistant to further homeless tenants. The ‘mainstream’ neighbours themselves may well have had mental health difficulties or traumas which can be re-triggered as their formerly homeless neighbour struggles with their challenges. The supports available under Housing First can mitigate the problems in these cases, but it is a recognised feature of Housing First that some tenancies fail. One of the strengths of the

Housing First model is that the tenant is given a new chance with a new tenancy, but the model has little to say about the impact on the neighbourhood left behind.

To address these two challenges, Focus Housing and Focus Ireland have developed a new model of housing which we have called Meascán. The model is designed to create communities of intentional social mix, with tenants who have complex support needs and those who just need a home. This model will allow Focus Ireland to combine a policy of ‘scatter-site’ integration of people moving out of homelessness with our commitment to construct new social housing projects.

It might be more accurate to say that we are in the process of developing the model, learning from our tenants and our staff, and our interactions with local authorities and the wider community. For Focus Ireland the process of innovation also involves evaluation and sharing. This report documents the first phase of our development of the Meascán model, the mis-steps we have taken and the ways we have learnt from this.

We want to thank Mary Higgins, who undertook the first phase of the report and take this opportunity to recognise the enormous contribution she made to our evaluation work and her wider contribution to tackling homelessness in her long career. We also want to thank Kathy Walsh who took up the work on the report on Mary’s retirement and Dr Sarah Sheridan who helped her with the work. We also want to thank our tenants and staff who contributed their experiences and time to the work and to our partners in local authorities and government for their insights.

We share this evaluation as part of our own learning process, but also in the knowledge that other Approved Housing Bodies face the same challenges. We have a lot to learn from each other if we are to deliver on our twin challenges of building thriving communities and ensuring that the most vulnerable are not excluded.

**Mike Allen**  
Director of Advocacy  
Focus Ireland



## Executive summary

Meascán is a model of housing developed by Focus Ireland whereby Focus Housing Association, the approved housing body arm of the organisation, build or acquire blocks of apartments and is the landlord for a ‘intentional social mix of tenants’ including General Needs tenants and tenants with lived experience of homelessness who require additional support. The objectives of Meascán are to: create positive social-behavioural effects (reducing anti-social behaviour among tenants); promote community stability, interaction and integration; and reduce social exclusion and stigma.

The key question this evaluation was tasked with addressing is: *‘does the Meascán ‘intentional social mix’ Housing Model promote sustainable housing that contributes to meeting the housing needs and the social inclusion of various social groups, including marginalised people with lived experience of homelessness?’*

Seven Meascán housing developments were included in the evaluation: Three in Cork, two in Tipperary, one in Limerick and one in Dublin. The total number of tenancies in these developments is 110.

The key objectives of the evaluation were as follows:

- › Examine and evaluate the model process and implementation of the principles.
- › Assess the impact of the project and achievement of objectives for all stakeholders.
- › Capture key learnings that can be applied to future projects.
- › Identify and address any structural barriers to the expansion of the model and its future configuration.
- › Tap into the expertise of the advisory group to deepen learning and strengthen outputs and outcomes for the project and wider stakeholders.
- › Develop agreed non-property outcomes indicators for the project
- › Develop a cost benefit analysis framework

The evaluation was informed by a comprehensive literature review and used a mixed methods approach including consultations with Meascán tenants (14 survey respondents and 24 interviewees), a wide range of Focus Ireland staff, and six key external stakeholders in Local Authorities and government departments.

The evaluation was supported by an expert advisory group that met on several occasions and sought to support the evaluation process and provide feedback on the learnings emerging.

## Main findings

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The Meascán model, as it is currently being rolled out, **facilitates the mixing of various types of social housing tenants, including General Needs tenants, as well as tenants who have moved out of homelessness with a variety of support needs**. While it is envisaged in the model, no current site includes mixing of social housing tenants and other tenures (such as cost rental, private rental, or owner occupier) as is the practice in other jurisdictions.

The Meascán model is meeting the needs of General Needs tenants who make up around 80 per cent of tenants within each development. It is also **meeting the needs of the individuals/households with additional support needs, including marginalised people with lived experience of homelessness** who are tenants of the remaining units.

To date there has been **limited collective engagement with tenants by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association and tenants report limited but cordial contact with their neighbours**. This is particularly the case in apartment developments where there is limited internal shared spaces, and the external shared spaces that do exist are often neglected and largely abandoned.

One of the key challenges for Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association is that they currently have **limited input into the allocations and nominations process**, which is controlled by the relevant Local Authority and governed by primary legislation.

The model has been developed with a target mix of tenants of 80 per cent general needs and 20 per cent additional needs. However, the reality is that it often ends up as 60 per cent general needs and 40 per cent additional needs. **Tenants the Local Authority has classified as General Needs tenants can also have additional support needs** that become evident as part of the Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association assessment process or indeed, after the tenant moves into the development and this presents a challenge.

In overall terms, **most tenants who had moved into Meascán developments were generally very happy with their accommodation. They were also happy with the support they got from Focus Ireland**. Most General Needs tenants appeared to settle quickly into their new homes and had few complaints. The complaints they had, largely related to maintenance issues. Few of these tenants appeared to be aware that some of their neighbours had additional support needs, but generally seem unperturbed when the issue was raised.

**In general, most tenants with additional support needs were happy with the accommodation and the support they were receiving from their key worker**. Most, like the general needs' tenants, reported 'just wanting to get on with their lives.'

**Focus Housing Association staff reported being very involved with all tenants at the move in stage**, supporting tenants to make their Exceptional Needs Payment applications and getting payment systems set up for bills and rent. This was not something that they had anticipated General Needs tenants would need and it took up a considerable amount of their time.



On a positive note, the staff believed that it was useful to do this because it enabled them to get to know tenants and tenants to get to know them in a way that would not otherwise have happened.

**Some Local Authority staff working in homeless services were concerned that Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association was moving away from its core expertise:** providing support for those who are homeless and more generally, towards providing social housing. However, other Local Authority staff were pleased that Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland had decided to scale up their provision and were now working to provide accommodation for General Needs tenants.

**The DHLGH and Housing Agency stakeholders were interested in learning more about the impact of the project and its potential to sustainably accommodate a mix of tenure types in the longer term** (such as cost rental, private rental, or owner occupier), as is the practice in other jurisdictions.

There are two significant structural barriers to the rollout of the model. Firstly, **there is a shortage of sites and turnkey developments in locations where there is a demand for social housing**. This is a barrier for all AHB's seeking to develop and provide social housing.

Secondly, the **absence of a clear agreed system for assessing the support needs of tenants and the thresholds of support** (except for Housing First tenants) means that the negotiation process in terms of who needs support and what support is needed can be very subjective. Definitions and thresholds need to be developed for tenants with a range of support needs.

## Recommendations

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### Collaboration

- › Focus Ireland services staff and Focus Housing Association staff should work in a more connected way particularly in their relationships with Local Authorities.
- › There is a requirement for Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association to have senior-level leadership on all Meascán projects across both arms of the organisation.
- › Communication with Local Authorities needs to involve Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association jointly engaged with a range of sections within the Local Authority, not just Acquisitions and Homeless Services.
- › To facilitate collaboration, Focus Ireland or Focus Housing Association should nominate one key point of contact, with appropriate seniority, for each Local Authority.

### Communications

- › Meascán is a complex and innovative approach to social housing, that requires a much stronger internal and external communication strategy, which is essential to bring it to its full potential. To achieve this, Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association should:
  - › Develop a short internal guide for staff about Meascán, what it is and which developments are Meascán.

- › Provide staff with training about Meascán and how it is implemented in practice.
- › Provide clear ongoing communication from senior Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association management to all staff that the Meascán model is Focus Ireland's and Focus Housing Association's choice of preferred social housing model.
- › Develop a short guide for external audiences on the value and purpose of Meascán and its role in facilitating intentional social mixing in practice.

### **Management and leadership**

- › Focus Housing Association property management staff and Focus Ireland services staff should work in a more connected way in relation to the management of individual Meascán developments.
- › Provide greater clarity for tenants in relation to who their key workers report to, and the confidentiality of their conversations.
- › All Meascán developments would benefit from regular check-ins with all tenants (not just supported tenants).
- › Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland need to be able to provide General Needs tenants on occasion with support for a timebound period.
- › Appoint/nominate a Meascán Manager/Coordinator, whose responsibilities include:
  - › Serving as the link between the joint CEO of Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association, the Property Development and Management team, and the Services team.
  - › Responsibility for central coordination pertaining to: allocations, housing pipeline, community impact, evaluations, outcome indicators and impact measurement.
  - › Build relations with Local Authorities.
  - › Ensure contracts (between Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association and the relevant Local Authorities) for the delivery of accommodation and housing supports have the necessary resources to support the process of integration of tenants (supporting the deployment of community and tenant relation officers).
  - › Building relations with partners for wraparound supports (e.g. Mental Health Supports, Meals on Wheels, etc.).
  - › Ensuring the provision of regular training for internal stakeholders.

### **Tenant engagement**

- › Consider provision of safe communal spaces (including communal green spaces) in the design process, inclusive of furnishings and fixtures, before tenants move in.
- › Allocate increased staff resources to the provision of supports for the majority of tenants in relation to the installation of prepay meters and budgeting advice as well as the completion of the Exceptional Needs Application forms.
- › Invest in an ongoing process of regular engagement with tenants on an individual and group basis.
- › Provide tenants with access to an independent mediator where issues arise with Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association.
- › Work with tenants to develop neighbourhood charters for all Focus Housing Association and Focus Housing developments.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to Focus Ireland

The original Focus Point, which opened its doors in 1985, was established to provide advice, information, advocacy and help with finding a home – as well as providing a place to meet and have a low-cost meal. The need for a range of housing options for people moving out of homelessness had been identified very early on – Focus Housing Association Limited was established in 1988 and registered as an approved housing body (AHB). The legal and functional relationship between the two entities varied over the intervening nearly forty years but with the development of increased regulation for AHBs, Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association now exist as two separate legal entities, with a limited overlap at Board level, a joint CEO and integrated housing and support services.

**Focus Ireland** provides on-going tenancy and case management support for individuals/families with experience of or are at risk of homelessness, it also undertakes research and advocates for the rights of those groups. In the context of this report, the term Focus Ireland services refer to the case management services provided by Focus Ireland.

**Focus Housing Association** in contrast, is an approved housing body (AHB) whose role it is to acquire, build and manage affordable rental accommodation.

The two legal entities work closely together to provide sustainable homes for people with experience of or at risk of homelessness who are likely to require on-going tenancy and case management support.



## 1.2 Meascán

### 1.2.1 Background

While the first wave of housing developed by Focus Housing Association used congregate settings such as renovated convent buildings, since around 2000, informed by international research and the Housing First approach adopted as Government policy in 2014, the organisation has applied a ‘scattered site’ approach with support to provide homes for vulnerable individuals/families with underlying health, addiction or behavioural issues.<sup>1</sup> Using this approach Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland has, since 2014, been able to provide 1,600 homes, accompanied by relevant supports across the country.

This approach while it has been successful, presents a number of challenges as follows:

- › *There is only a limited supply of such housing units, in particular one-bedroom units, available on the market. This problem is even more acute outside of Dublin.*
- › *By relying on the acquisition of existing dwellings, Focus Housing Association is not contributing to increasing the overall supply of housing, and so is not addressing one of the underlying causes of the current housing and homelessness crisis.*
- › *Placing tenants with complex needs into mainstream communities can create problems, both for the tenants and the existing community. Sometimes the problems reflect prejudice, but where tenants with complex support needs have behaviours which are problematic this can place an unreasonable burden on neighbours. While problems arise only in a small minority of cases, they represent a significant reputational risk not just to Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association but to the broader project of creating socially mixed communities.*
- › *A crudely applied idea ‘social mix’ can have the effect of reducing the housing options of low income (including formerly homeless) households’ (Busch-Geertsema, 2007<sup>2</sup>)*

*Source: Focus Ireland (2020) The Meascán Housing Model – Introduction and Discussion Paper, p 7*

These challenges led Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association to consider a different approach, which saw Focus Housing Association build/acquire blocks of apartments where Focus Housing Association is the landlord for all tenants. While these have been delivered to a very high quality, the challenge was to create a balanced community within such developments. The community of tenants being a complex balance arising from the housing allocations policy of each individual Local Authority and Focus Ireland’s objective of moving households out of homelessness. In some cases, due to the number of households with support needs, both Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association struggled at times to provide a good quality of life for all tenants, thereby presenting a significant reputational risk to Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association, as well as

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1 For more details on the development of Focus Housing Association see “A Place to Call Home: Twenty-five Years of Focus Ireland”, A&A Farmar (2011).

2 Busch-Geertsema, V., (2007) Measures to achieve social mix and their impact on access to housing for people who are homeless. European Journal of Homelessness, 1(7), pp.213–224

to the relevant Local Authority involved. The key learning arising from this experience was that while the tenant moving out of homelessness is supported to understand their obligations and rights as a member of their new community, the ‘mainstream’ tenants who provide the other essential part of the ‘social mix’ also need preparation and support for any challenges that might arise from this mixing.

The application of this learning led Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association to develop a new approach to building communities that support a social mix of tenants with lived experience of homelessness and have on-going support needs – an approach which Focus Housing Association ultimately named the Meascán Housing Model (Meascán means mixture or blended in Irish) to reflect the ‘mixed’ nature of the new approach.

The model is built on experiences of housing developments in Utrecht in the Netherlands. Interestingly the Utrecht housing developments included owners, as well as up to 50 per cent of tenants from ‘special target groups’, while the Meascán model as it was developed adopted the Housing First Programme recommendation that no more than 20 per cent of households in a community should be Housing First tenants. While the Utrecht housing developments included owner occupiers as part of the social mix, the funding models available in an Irish context make mixed tenure development more of a challenge to fund.

The Meascán model developed by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association moved away from placing people who are moving out of homelessness into units purchased within an existing community to the idea that ‘mainstream’ households are made aware in advance of moving into their home that up to 20 per cent of their neighbours have experienced homelessness and may, from time to time, continue to experience periods of difficulty. With all households in the development made aware of the supports that are available, and the standards and processes that will be applied. The added value of this shift in approach is that it enables Focus Housing Association to become more active in building/acquiring/leasing larger scale housing developments while also maintaining the good practice of providing ‘scatter site’ accommodation and social integration for people moving out of homelessness.

### **1.2.2 Objectives and rollout**

The objectives of Meascán are to:

- › Create a ‘social mix’ of tenants.
- › Create positive social-behavioural effects (reducing anti-social behaviour among tenants).
- › Promote community stability, interaction and integration.
- › Reduce social exclusion and stigma.

This Meascán approach was first applied in Tipperary and rolled out in various other locations. At the time of writing, there are currently seven Meascán developments operational across Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association, with more planned. There are several stages in the rollout of Meascán. See Figure 1.1 for details.

**Figure 1.1 Stages in the roll-out of Meascán**





## 1.3 Evaluation question and objectives

### 1.3.1 Evaluation question

The key question this evaluation was tasked with addressing is as follows:

**‘Does the Meascán ‘intentional social mix’ housing model promote sustainable housing that contributes to meeting the housing needs and the social inclusion of various social groups, including marginalised people with lived experience of homelessness?’**

### 1.3.2 Objectives

- 1 Examine and evaluate the model process and implementation of the principles.
- 2 Assess the impact of the project and achievement of objectives for all stakeholders.
- 3 Capture key learnings that can be applied to future projects.
- 4 Identify and address any structural barriers to the expansion of the model and its future configuration.
- 5 Tap into the expertise of the advisory group to deepen learning and strengthen outputs and outcomes for the project and wider stakeholders.
- 6 Develop agreed non-property outcomes indicators for the project.<sup>3</sup>
- 7 Develop a cost benefit analysis framework.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.4 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was undertaken using a mixed methods approach using a number of methodologies as follows:

- 1 Literature and policy review.
- 2 Consultations with Focus Housing Association Meascán tenants, specifically:
  - An online survey of tenants (n=17).<sup>5</sup>
  - Semi-structured qualitative interviews by phone with Meascán tenants (n=24). Fourteen of the tenants interviewed were General Needs tenants, the remainder were supported tenants.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 4

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1 for a profile of the survey participants

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 2 for an overview of these tenant consultations

**3 Consultations with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff, specifically:**

- › Interviews with local and national Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff (n=8).
- › A dedicated full day Meascán workshop (held in Portlaoise, 7th November 2023) with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association local and national staff in attendance for the purposes of discussing the findings emerging from the Meascán evaluation and the future of the Meascán housing model within Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association.

**4 Interviews with key external stakeholders (n=6). This included:**

- › Four interviews with Local Authority officials, three of whom were working in homeless services.
- › Two interviews with senior civil servants, including staff member from Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).

The evaluation was supported by an expert advisory group that met on various occasions and sought to support the evaluation process and provide feedback on the learning emerging from the process.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.5 Methodological challenges

Several challenges arose in relation to the implementation of the evaluation methodology. They are discussed in detail below.

### Undertaking the evaluation in parallel to rolling out the model

Key among these was that because of the scale of the housing and homeless crisis Focus Ireland was not able to develop the Meascán approach through a “pilot-evaluate-learn-scale-up” model but instead found itself trying to scale-up housing provision, while at the same time undertaking an evaluation to learn lessons and improve. This meant that the evaluation took place while staff and other stakeholders were under significant pressure to build Meascán housing and that events were often half a step ahead of plans. This challenge was known at the outset of the evaluation and while it was clearly recognised, Focus Ireland decided that it was better to accept this challenge, rather than the alternatives which would have been to either slow down the rollout of the model or not evaluate the learning arising from the rollout. Many of the other methodological challenges can be seen to relate back to this decision to proceed with the evaluation in parallel to working to roll out the model.

### Identification of the definitive list of Meascán projects

At the commencement of this evaluation in Q4 2022, the terms of reference for the evaluation identified a total of three Meascán developments comprising a total of thirty-six tenancies. As the interviews with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff progressed it became clear that additional Meascán developments had come on stream and more were due. A decision was made for the purposes of the evaluation process that

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 5 for membership of this group.

to be included, developments needed to comprise of at least ten tenancies, which in turn resulted in the removal of the development in Carrigaline, County Cork from the projects to be considered in this evaluation.<sup>8</sup> See table 1.1 below for the final list of Meascán developments considered in the evaluation.

**Table 1.1 List of Meascán developments**

Name	Location	Number of tenancies
Abbey Court	Nenagh	15
Connaught Street <sup>9</sup>	Dublin	20
Drummin Village	Nenagh	13
Gerald Griffin Street	Cork City	13
Grand Parade	Cork City	16
Lower John Street	Cork City	17
Old Dublin Road	Limerick	16

**Getting a staff overview of Meascán developments**

At the time of the evaluation, responsibility for different aspects of Meascán was spread across Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland and no one individual had responsibility for its overall management, implementation and oversight.

As a result, it was challenging to get an overview of overall progress in relation to Meascán. This in turn meant that interviews needed to be conducted with local and national staff in both parts of the organisation to explore the issues related to Meascán property development and management, as well as the provision of services to supported tenants in Meascán.

The decision by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association to organise a dedicated staff workshop (as mentioned in the Methodology chapter) to discuss the findings emerging from the evaluation was therefore very welcome in terms of getting a broad staff overview of the concept and its implementation in practice.

**Tenant participation**

The original plan to consult with tenants (General Needs and Supported) had involved firstly, an online survey and secondly, onsite in-person interview meetings with tenants. The online survey was developed and piloted with Meascán tenants. It was subsequently promoted with posters put up in all the developments. Details of the survey were also sent directly to all tenants on several occasions. The total survey response rate was 20 per cent (17 responses from a total of 89 tenants). Dates were set for the evaluators to be in various developments and tenants were contacted directly by post and invited to meet with the

8 Focus Ireland is currently applying the Meascán Approach to any new development with more than six units (April, 2024).  
9 Connaught Street was tenanted in the Summer of 2023 and was therefore not included in the tenant survey.



evaluators. Off-site venues were booked to facilitate these interviews (because there was no suitable space in the various developments), however these visits were cancelled due to a lack of engagement by tenants. A decision was then made to move to a telephone interview format and that was more successful in terms of recruiting participants. All tenants were notified of the possibility of undertaking a telephone interview and a €30 Dunnes voucher was provided to all those who completed an interview. A total of twenty-four telephone interviews were completed.

**Table 1.2 Overview of interviews and surveys undertaken with Meascán tenants**

Development	Total number of interviews completed	Total number of interviewees who were supported tenants	Total survey Responses (n=17)	Total number of survey respondents who got support	Total number of tenancies
Abbey Court	6	2	8	2	15
Grand Parade	4	3	5	2	16
Old Dublin Road	1		4	1	16
Gerard Griffen Street	4	1			13
Lower John Street	4	2			17
Drummin Village	3				13
Connaught Street	2	2			20
	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b> (19 per cent response rate – did not include Connaught Street)	<b>5</b>	<b>110</b>

### Engagement with the key stakeholders

While all the external stakeholders approached to be interviewed as part of this study readily agreed to participate, the Local Authority officials struggled to find time to undertake the interviews. Several interviews had to be re-scheduled when these officials were called away to deal with other issues. All were eventually scheduled and completed but it took significantly longer than was anticipated.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

There is a vast international body of evidence on the development and sustainment of ‘social mix’ or ‘mixed communities’ in housing (e.g. Arthurson, 2008; Bailey *et al.*, 2007; Tunstall and Lupton, 2010; Monk *et al.*, 2011). Social mix in housing generally refers to residential areas which consist of households of diverse demographic profiles – relating to categories such as incomes, tenure type, ethnicity, immigration status – most commonly with respect to income. Terms such as ‘mixed income’, ‘mixed tenure’ and ‘social mixing’ are used interchangeably across the research.

Socially-mixed neighbourhoods are typically achieved through tenure mixing, for example mixing social housing tenants with owner occupiers or market renters. It is usually carried out either as a means of regeneration of disadvantaged areas or integrated into planning policies for new housing developments (Monk *et al.*, 2011).

Policies to enhance social mixing in housing are rooted in the idea that mixed communities are more likely to be more ‘successful’ and sustainable compared to large-scale, mono-tenure social housing residential developments (Bailey *et al.*, 2007). However, social mixing strategies require different approaches according to local contexts, for example the area size, physical layout, housing types and tenures, local amenities, housing need, ranges of household incomes and demographic mix (Hudson *et al.*, 2007).

The pursuit of social mixing in housing is now an established orthodoxy in housing policy across developed economies such as the USA, Australia, the United Kingdom and Western Europe, as well as Ireland (Hayden and Jordan, 2018; Norris *et al.*, 2022). For example, multiple policy and legislative mechanisms in Ireland have resulted in a significant increase in mixed tenure communities. For example, 78.2 per cent of all housing owned by AHBs are owned, rented or managed in mixed tenure estates. This is a marked increase from 20 per cent of AHBs in socially mixed estates in the early 2000s (Norris, 2005).

There are fewer examples of, and evidence pertaining to, single site ‘mixed housing’ projects. One exception to this is six housing projects in the Utrecht, that informed the Meascán model. These projects range in size from 15 to nearly 500 units. (Davelaar *et al.*, 2018; Davelaar *et al.*, 2019). They provide accommodation for ‘regular’ tenants or

owner occupiers, as well as those who were formerly homeless, former users of mental health or youth care services, those with mild intellectual disabilities and refugees. These developments provide people of different backgrounds with an opportunity to “intentionally live next to each other, connect and engage in joint activities” (Davelaar *et al.*, 2019: 169). Crucial to this model is a vision of self-organisation and community-building, based on principles of reciprocity (Davelaar *et al.*, 2019). Individualised professional support is also provided, as required, for those with support needs or additional vulnerabilities. The Meascán Housing Model as developed by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association seeks to “build on the experiences” of these housing innovations seen in the Netherlands (Focus Ireland, 2020: 5).

While most of the research literature focuses on tenure mixing in larger housing estates as opposed to single-site developments (i.e. apartment blocks) as per the Meascán Housing model, the wider research literature on social mixing in housing offers relevant insights into the overall effects of social mix in housing, the various strategies and approaches used, and the impact that such practices have on households and communities.

## 2.2 Irish policy context of social mixing

Social mixing first emerged in Irish housing policy in the 1990s, amid concerns that mono-tenure social housing developments had led to concentrated deprivation thus exacerbating social problems – such as high unemployment, poor services, place-based stigma, extra pressure on schools and weaker social capital networks (Hayden and Jordan, 2018). Thus, over the last three decades, there has been a consistent commitment within Irish housing policy to move away from the development of large-scale mono-tenure social housing to socially mixed developments, particularly in urban areas.

This shift towards social mixing in housing first appeared in the 1991 policy statement – *A Plan for Social Housing* – which stated that new social housing should be provided in smaller volumes and in ‘in-fill’ developments interspersed with existing developments (Department of the Environment, 1991). This policy direction was implemented in the regeneration of the Dublin Docklands during the 1990s, when special rules were applied to achieve a minimum of 20 per cent of the residential development allocated to social housing (Norris *et al.*, 2022).

In 2000, the *Planning and Development Act* – regarded as “a landmark legislation” (Norris *et al.*, 2022: 40) – consolidated existing planning legislation and regulation to impose tenure mixing on all new residential developments. Specifically, Part V of this legislation enabled Local Authorities to acquire a specific proportion of new housing developments to use for both social housing and affordable housing. Part V delivered a sizeable volume of social housing stock at the height of the economic boom in Ireland (mid-2000s) due to the high output of housing more broadly. However, with the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 and the collapse of the construction sector and property market, the effectiveness of Part V in social housing delivery was significantly impeded. This delivery was also impacted by changes to Part V that were introduced over the years, for example with developers given opportunities to make payments to Local Authorities or AHBs in lieu of built units (Norris and Hayden, 2022: p41).



More recently, in the context of a worsening housing crisis, the government introduced reforms to Part V, the *Affordable Housing Act 2021* which provides for Local Authorities to acquire 20 per cent of land at existing use value and to utilise this land to deliver homes to those who qualify for social and affordable housing support. This 20 per cent included social and affordable housing in private developments and represented an increase from the 10 per cent allocation introduced in 2015.

The *Social Housing Strategy – 2020* (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014) and the *National Planning Framework* in 2018 (Government of Ireland, 2018) represent major policies in recent years that situate mixed tenure in housing as a core government commitment in housing planning and delivery. This commitment can also be reflected across the multiple guidance documents aimed for Local Authorities to achieve tenure mixing in their respective local areas (see Norris *et al.*, 2022: 44-51).

Other ways in which policy measures have – perhaps inadvertently as opposed to intentionally – positively impacted on the nature and scale of social mixing in housing in Ireland include the multiple Local Authority tenant purchase schemes over the years. These have incentivised Local Authority tenants to purchase their homes at discounted rates, leading to increased home ownership in previously mono-tenure social housing neighbourhoods. Though, it has also been found that certain schemes to incentivise Local Authority tenants to move to other private housing estates, has led to worsening conditions in the communities that were left behind. For example, Hayden and Jordan (2018) found that the IR£5,000 Surrender Grant Scheme that was introduced in the mid-1980s, had an adverse impact on certain Local Authority estates after tenants who could afford to purchase their home moved to private housing estates, leading in turn to an increase in deprivation rates in the areas where poorer social housing tenants remained (Hayden and Jordan, 2018).

Interestingly, the growing policy reliance on supplementing the private rented sector to accommodate those eligible for social housing, such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), Rent Supplement (RS) and Rental Accommodation Schemes (RAS) has also resulted in increased mixed income households. For example, there are more than 60,000 households in receipt of HAP scattered across the country, particularly in urban areas. However, Norris *et al.* (2022) also notes that there are concentrations of rental subsidy recipient households in areas with high levels of social housing which has also led in some cases to an increase in mono-tenure areas (Norris *et al.*, 2022).

## 2.3 Overview of social mixing in housing

### 2.3.1 Spatial configurations of social mixing

There is a variety of ways in which spatial configuration of tenure mixing or social mixing is achieved. The terms used for these distinct configurations can differ across the literature and different contexts. They broadly describe social housing dwellings as being either concentrated or spread out across mixed tenure neighbourhoods.

For example, Bond *et al.* (2013) identify three primary approaches to mixing tenures to housing: ‘segregated’ (groups are concentrated together); ‘segmented’ (groups occupying a block or small area); and ‘integrated’ or ‘pepper-potted’ (groups are mixed on a street level basis) (in Norris *et al.*, 2022).

Similarly, in the Irish context, mixed tenure configurations were referred to in one study as either “dispersed” (spread out across a given area) or “clustered” (social housing dwellings concentrated together) tenure mixing strategies (Norris *et al.*, 2022).

Across these distinct spatial configurations, additional ways in which the nature and scale of socially mixed housing can be realised by developers, planners, Local Authorities and housing associations (Galster, 2013) include:

- ▶ *Composition*: On what basis(es) are people mixed: ethnicity, race, religion, immigrant status, income, housing tenure...all, or some of the above?
- ▶ *Concentration*: What is the amount of mixing in question? Which amounts of which groups comprise the ideal mix, or are minimally required to produce the desired outcomes?
- ▶ *Scale*: Over what level(s) of geography should the relevant mix be measured? Does mixing at different spatial scales involve different causal processes and yield different outcomes?

There are opportunities as well as drawbacks for these distinct forms of spatial configurations. For example, ‘segregated’ or ‘segmented’ tenure mixing can result in continued place-based stigma with the clustering of social housing in mixed tenure neighbourhoods, potentially enhancing social conflict and exacerbating the social exclusion of social housing tenants within the development (Dong-Wook Sohn and Ahn, 2020). Clustered social housing may also reduce opportunities for social interactions across income groups (Arthurson, 2010), facilitating a continued concentration of low income or poorer households. Interestingly in this context clustered configurations of social housing are often more economical for AHBs or Local Authorities in terms of the long-term maintenance and management of dwellings (Norris *et al.*, 2022).

In an Irish context, Norris *et al.* (2022) note that, with respect to Ireland’s AHB sector, around 70 per cent of mixed tenure estates are *clustered* in configuration. Yet despite this, Norris *et al.*’s research finds that there was more support among AHBs and other stakeholders for *dispersed* forms of social mixing. According to Norris *et al.* (2022), the higher prevalence of clustered forms of social mixing was primarily related to the nature of funding mechanisms for social housing. For instance, longstanding funding models such as Capital Loan Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) and Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) – which mainly just cover the capital costs of the dwellings without the revenue costs of managing

and maintaining them – are more likely to result in *clustered* forms of social housing. However, Norris *et al.* (2022) signalled recent changes to the financing of AHBs which is altering the spatial configurations of new developments. For example, newer forms of housing finance, namely the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF), is more likely to result in *dispersed* social housing, with funding also allocated to also meet revenue costs, and subsidise management and maintenance costs.

### 2.3.2 Mixed tenure proportions

Mixed tenure proportions vary hugely across international examples, with no clear ‘best practice’ model. For example, Holmes (2006) draws together key findings from seven research studies, encompassing more than twenty case studies across the United Kingdom, found no conclusive evidence as to the ideal ‘level’ of tenure mix to make a community work. Tenure mixes can range from ‘negligible’ proportions of affordable housing to communities where affordable housing exceeded 50 per cent. Income ranges have also been found to vary across the research in mixed tenure communities. However, it has been found that neighbourhoods with particularly wide income disparities may face additional challenges as the disparities can lead to resentment or misunderstandings between neighbours. In addition, Bailey (2008) found that young single people do not always mix well with pensioners or less affluent families with children, though local context and approaches to managing communities are also relevant in this regard. For example, in an intentional mixed community project in Utrecht, young residents actively engaged in their community, participating in voluntary activities to support their elderly neighbours, with seemingly positive results for all (Davelaar, 2018).

Tenure types can also change over time in communities which in turn can have a potential impact on the overall functionality of a neighbourhood. For example, dwellings can change from Local Authority stock to owner occupier (via tenant purchase schemes for example), and equally, owner occupier properties can become rental properties. There may also be changes to the composition of households over time, which also requires additional foresight and responsiveness (Bretherton and Pleace, 2011). These are additional considerations when planning and operating within mixed tenure communities.

## 2.4 Benefits of mixed tenure

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Mixed tenure is widely regarded by policymakers, both in Ireland and elsewhere, as preferable to large mono-tenure developments of social housing. The research literature also provides evidence that practitioners, relevant social housing stakeholders, community services, and residents also prefer mixed tenure communities, Norris *et al.* (2022) in their consultation with 13 AHBs in Ireland found overwhelming support for mixed tenure housing development. Further, in their analysis of five case studies of mixed tenure estates, socially mixed housing was also supported by residents of all tenures.

Available evidence in Ireland and internationally indicates that mixed tenure housing yields clear benefits across multiple domains at both community and household levels. In a study of three housing estates in the United Kingdom conducted twenty years after the estates were first established, Allen *et al.* (2005) found that while mixed income neighbourhoods were not devoid of issues, they were areas in high demand by residents of all tenures and resident satisfaction was generally positive (adding that this satisfaction was also associated with high quality physical environment and local service provision). Furthermore, they found that mixed tenure developments supported extended daily networks and experienced lower levels of anti-social behaviour than other locations. Atkinson and Kintrea (2000) found overall improvements to a mixed tenure neighbourhood in terms of reduced stigma and enhanced hopes for the future among residents. Similarly, Holmes' (2006) review of seven studies of mixed tenure housing developments found them to be positive places to live, learn and work. Noting that these neighbourhoods had good reputations and that the principles of inclusivity have benefited the overall social fabric of these areas.

## 2.5 Limitations of mixed tenure

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The research literature on mixed tenure housing emphasises that achieving diversity in communities should not be considered a panacea in combating economic inequality and social exclusion. Indeed, there is also evidence that socially mixed housing projects do not always lead to transformative change for low-income households. Across many studies of socially mixed housing, poverty levels remained unchanged, with a lack of social integration between groups. This body of research points to the greater significance of local services and amenities and levels of overall investment in neighbourhoods as making a more tangible difference to lower income cohorts. Further, many argue that the hypotheses that underpin the perceived benefits of socially mixed housing are paternalistic and undermine the many capabilities of low-income households.

### Tenure mixing as 'socially engineered' communities?

The suggestion that working class communities can benefit from the 'role models' of middle-income households is regarded by many as misplaced and can lead to resentment among lower income cohorts (Atkinson and Kindtrea, 2000; Allen *et al.*, 2005; Arthurson, 2008; Arthurson, 2010). Indeed, some regard tenure mixing policies to be a product of neoliberal ideology rather than rooted in progressive and equality-oriented principles



(Arthurson, 2008), while efforts to change the make-up of existing deprived communities can, in some cases, result in processes of gentrification *“that, if left unchecked, might force out many poorer households as housing costs rise”* (Bretherton and Pleace, 2011: p34).

In a historical analysis of social mix housing policies in Australia, Arthurson (2008) critiqued the prevailing assumption that mixed communities would ‘encourage’ social housing tenants *“to become good citizens through the instrument of middle-class leadership”*. (2008: 22). Arthurson argued that this evokes Victorian discourses underlying a *“fear of the poor and the need to manage their behaviour through dispersing concentrations of residents”* (Arthurson, 2008: 23). Related to this, poorer households may report surveillance within “socially engineered communities” which are “supposedly supportive” and intended to improve their situation but in fact result in constrictions to their daily life (Bretherton and Pleace, 2011: 3443). Though it is worth noting that additional support for certain households is often necessary and, if managed correctly, highly beneficial. For example, research on the housing and employment outcomes for offenders on probation, found that information-sharing between social landlords, health and social care providers can – when shaped around the needs and well-being of the service user – can be beneficial and supportive in delivering a coordinated package of services and minimising risk (Pleace and Minton, 2009).

### **Income inequality persists**

Many researchers point to the lack of tangible evidence proving that mixed communities lead directly to increased employment or income rates among lower income groups (Tunstall and Fenton, 2006; Bailey and Manzi, 2008). They argue that to address income inequality directly, specific policies and anti-poverty strategies and actions are required and that these are more effective in closing the inequality gap in neighbourhoods (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2000; Berube, 2005; Kintrea, 2007).

Propper *et al.* (2007) analysed the first ten waves of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) covering 1991–2000 to examine potential neighbourhood effects on social renters over time. The study drew from a representative and longitudinal dataset with a sample size of over 5,500 households covering more than 10,000 people. They then analysed the closest 500-800 persons around each individual, which meant the analytical scope was confined to the immediate neighbourhood, as opposed to data from wards or census tracts. While the researchers found social renters in concentrated areas of disadvantage fared worse over time in terms of income level and mental health, they did not find that this was due to a neighbourhood causal effect. Rather, they deemed it to be more likely to allocation policies; that social renters being “sorted into better or worse areas based on their individual circumstances” (Propper *et al.*, 2007: 408).

### **Limited social interaction in mixed housing estates**

There is limited research evidence that social mixing directly enhances social interactions and social networks in neighbourhoods, and it is considered even less likely for social interactions leading to tangible social benefits. For example, higher income households are more likely to have employment, friends or family elsewhere and tend to travel outside of the immediate surroundings for accessing services and shops (Tunstall and Lupton, 2010). In a study of three housing estates in Scotland, in which owner occupiers had been introduced in the 1990s in areas of subsidised renting properties, Atkinson and

Kintrea (2000) found little evidence of enhanced social integration, reporting that owner occupiers generally engaged in different social worlds outside of the local area and played only a small part in the social interaction in the estates. Further, they were more likely to have cars and work in areas beyond the locality.

Bretherton and Pleace (2011) analysed two mixed housing initiatives in the UK and found that while the middle-income owners reported positively on the design and affordability of the housing, they nonetheless held pre-existing negative attitudes and unease towards social renters, believing that social renters would engage in anti-social behaviour and would negatively impact their homes and local environment. They also feared they would be subject to crime in the urban surroundings and viewed their schemes as “under siege” by the residents in the neighbouring deprived areas. The authors also noted that in tenure-blind settings, when homeowners were not aware of social renters living near them, the homeowners remarked that there were no problems “so far” (Bretherton and Pleace, 2011: 3439).

Similarly, Norris *et al.* (2022) argue that provision of social housing in mixed tenure estates in Ireland is not a panacea for socio-spatial segregation and inequality and that poor quality-built environments, lack of public transport, and lack of public and commercial services in neighbourhoods can further undermine the social integration impact of tenure mixing. This, and other studies, point to the need for quality facilities and services, and green spaces to facilitate social interaction. There is some evidence, however, that social interaction was more likely when social housing was dispersed rather than clustered, as this provides more opportunities for contact (Arthurson, 2010; Tunstall and Lupton, 2010). Further, social interaction among children and families, as well as interactions at local schools, can serve as important sites of interaction across different groups.

### **Social mixing can restrict access to housing for homeless people**

In the context of a chronic shortfall in the availability of social and affordable housing, social mixing policies and practices may also slow down housing allocations, potentially resulting in a lower rate of exits from homeless settings. In a published ‘think piece’, Busch-Geertsema (2007: 213) convincingly argue that “*the measures driven and legitimised by the concept of social mix often reduce poor and disadvantaged people’s access to regular housing*”. They note that access may be particularly curtailed for those with high support needs, lengthy homeless histories, or substance misuse issues (Busch-Gertseema, 2007). Selection procedures and protocols in AHBs may also directly disadvantage these groups. Bretherton and Pleace (2011: 3441) found in their study that AHB staff regarded homeless people with high support needs – such as substance misuse, mental health problems, offending and anti-social behaviour histories – as bringing “unacceptable risks to neighbourhood cohesion”.

**“Social landlords often took the view that it was only by excluding this group that social diversity and coercion could be maintained in a neighbourhood as other households would be driven out by even small numbers of this high-cost, high-risk population.” (Bretherton and Pleace, 2011: 3441).**

International examples of Housing First allocation practices utilise both housing in scatter-site and single-site units (though the former is more prominent). According to Tsemberis (2010), 95 per cent of Housing First clients prefer housing *within* the community. Likewise, in Ireland there has been a policy commitment to achieving scatter-site allocation of Housing First tenants (Housing First in Ireland commits to not utilising more than 20 per cent of the units in any housing development) (Tsemberis, 2020).

Interestingly, researchers caution against allocating Housing First tenants in areas of concentrated disadvantage, as this is seen to inhibit the rate and success of recovery among those with mental illness and / or substance misuse (Padgett *et al.*, 2008). However, Busch-Geertsema's (2007) argument that an overemphasis on achieving strict social mixing may further impede the successful delivery of the Housing First programme is particularly pertinent in the context of the overall lack of one-bedroom units in Ireland, compared to the steady increase of single-person households on social housing waiting lists (Housing Agency, 2022). While in urban areas, a dispersed approach has appeared to work well in Housing First (as it has avoided the concentration of high needs individuals in a single location), there are also challenges for support staff working across large geographical regions, particularly in rural locations (Greenwood *et al.*, 2022).

## 2.6 Characteristics of sustainable mixed-tenure communities

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Drawing from the broader literature, there are various characteristics, strategies and procedures which are shown to enhance the success of mixed tenure neighbourhoods, whilst also mitigating the inherent risks and challenges. These include effective and well-designed shared spaces, effective management, community engagement and 'tenure blind' design.

### Place-making in designing sustainable communities.

The quality, design and master-planning of new developments has proven to be a major influence on social interaction (Bailey and Manzi, 2008). Similarly, facilities such as playground and community centres are each known to facilitate and enhance community integration and this is seen as more important than whether the nature of the mix is clustered versus dispersal of different tenures (Norris *et al.*, 2022). Investment in local facilities, as well as development of green spaces, local footpaths and cycleways, is also vital to ensure high satisfaction rates among residents (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2002; Allen *et al.*, 2006; Bailey and Manzi, 2008). As already referenced, schools are also found to be a key site of interaction between different neighbourhood groups and their children (Allen *et al.*, 2005; Silverman *et al.*, 2005).

## **‘Tenure blind’ housing**

‘Tenure blind’ means there are no explicit or visible external indicators of tenure type in the design and layout of a mixed tenure development. There are many perceived advantages to this approach, particularly with regards to reduced stigmatisation of social housing dwellings and households. Norris *et al.* (2022) found that most residents and social housing providers expressed preference for tenure-blind design. Further, explicit separation of tenures within housing estates is regarded as a barrier to social interaction between income groups (Arthurson 2010). For example, in an analysis of three housing estates in the UK twenty years after the estates were first established, tenure-blind design and a comprehensively planned local environment was found to mitigate tenure prejudice (Allen *et al.*, 2006).

Notwithstanding the existing arguments in favour of tenure-blind design, it is worth considering the value of transparency in communicating the benefits of mixed communities. For example, Bretherton and Pleace (2011) question the ethics and the effectiveness of having to ‘fool’ residents into thinking they are living in more socially heterogeneous environments than is the case (Bretherton and Pleace, 2011). Instead, the authors found that communicating greater transparency in social mixing – and emphasising the benefits of affordability, location and good quality housing – can potentially produce better results.

Bretherton and Pleace’s (2011) argument chimes with the intentional social mixing initiatives seen in Utrecht (as already outlined previously), which incorporate community and volunteering initiatives in its mixed housing projects. Based on research findings disseminated at conferences, the single-site mixed housing projects seen in the Netherlands have evidently yielded positive outcomes (Davelaar *et al.*, 2018; Davelaar *et al.*, 2019). The projects have been found to increase the well-being of most inhabitants, reduce loneliness and enhance a sense of social inclusion. Tenants with histories of homelessness and mental illness or addictions were, according to the findings presented, more likely to reach out for support if required, “with the community functioning as a social ‘early warning system’” (Davelaar *et al.*, 2019: 170). The housing projects also assisted ‘regular’ tenants to access an increasingly unaffordable housing market, with young people contributing significantly to these projects.

## **Effective management and community engagement**

In a comprehensive good practice guidance on achieving mixed communities that are successful and attractive neighbourhoods for all, Bailey *et al.* (2007: 29) identify several general principles which emphasises transparent and clear structure and organisation of the management function and powers to manage internal and external spaces. These decisions need to be made between the Local Authority, the private developer and one or more housing associations. These structures must also include the meaningful involvement of local residents. Bailey *et al.* (2007) specifically recommends:

- Clear terms of reference detailing the management structure, roles and responsibilities between Local Authority, private developer and one or more housing associations (with a lead organisation to avoid conflicts).
- Management organisation should have a local presence in the form of a neighbourhood office that is easily accessible to residents and be sensitive to provision of local services or schools in area.



- Involvement of local people from all sectors in the management process.
- Flexible and transparent decision-making structures which can respond to local (and changing) contexts.
- Lead organisations to carry out regular reviews of possible tenure change in estates.
- Management organisation should have responsibility for both housing, as well as private and public amenity space, to ensure consistent standards.
- Transparency for residents with respect to covenants and tenancy agreements, and the extent of tenure mixing.
- Lettings and nomination policies should be reviewed regularly to ensure residents are allocated dwellings of appropriate size.
- Affordable service charges.
- Clear anti-social behaviour strategies.

The report authors also suggest that a full assessment of local circumstances is required in the early stages and equally that key stakeholders should have as much autonomy as possible to devise local responses to specific contexts, challenges and opportunities (Bailey et al., 2007). Norris *et al.* (2022) found that mixed tenure estates are not generally more difficult to manage than single tenure social housing estates, with two exceptions:

- Vetting of applicants for social housing in mixed tenure estates can be problematic and not always feasible.
- Management and financial challenges can arise between AHBs and owners' management companies (OMCs) – who manage communal areas. For example, underfunding of 'sinking funds' to fund refurbishment of buildings over the long-term, or repair and replacement of shared components such as roofs and lifts.

Beyond formal involvement of lower-income households, for example through management structures or community associations, there is also scope for informal participation in community initiatives, which is also seen to have a positive impact. In a study of two ethnically diverse areas in Manchester and North London, Hudson *et al.*, (2007) described the residents' associations were not fully reflective of the neighbourhood diversity, with older members of more established ethnic communities more likely to be participating in these formal structures. This called for "more creative thinking" in engaging women, younger people and newer communities into these structures. By including these groups, there were successes in other, more informal, grass-roots community initiatives, including community radio schemes, cultural celebrations, voluntary community programmes, childcare initiatives, community clubs, and the development of training and work placement for particularly excluded groups. These schemes were found to help promote community relations and neighbourhood stability and reduce inter-ethnic tensions.

## 2.7 Conclusions

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In recent decades, there has been an explicit policy move away from mono-tenure, large-scale social housing developments towards mixed-tenure developments and neighbourhoods. This is based on substantial evidence that high concentrations of low-income households in a geographical area can have an adverse impact on the economy of an area and lead to social exclusion, anti-social behaviour, place-based stigma and overall reduced life chances of its inhabitants. Similarly, in the Irish context, there is now an accepted orthodoxy that large-scale direct build of social housing is no longer desired and mixed tenure is the preferred option for new social housing developments, despite the chronic shortfall in social housing more broadly. Related to this, mixed tenure neighbourhoods are seen to have higher rates of resident satisfaction, particularly when combined with quality facilities, schools and community spaces in the local vicinity.

The research literature also points to the need for caution in developing socially mixed housing initiatives. The degree to which poorer households' 'benefit' in tangible terms from socially mixed neighbourhoods is based on unsubstantiated assumptions that their contact with middle class households will increase their positive social capital and supposedly enhance their lives. This is misplaced and should be challenged, as it leads to continued stigmatisation, and potentially unnecessary regulation and surveillance of lower income households. In this regard, social mixing on its own can be a limited policy response in treating the symptom of poverty. Greater investment in local neighbourhoods and economies – and for some a supportive package of supports – is also required.

On balance however, the perceived benefits of mixed tenure housing are regarded as outweighing the disadvantages, particularly when social mix neighbourhood design and management is sensitive to local circumstances and receive sustained investment in local services and community spaces. Care and consideration are required in the design and layout of neighbourhoods as well as the available facilities, communal services, playgrounds, accessibility, transport and integration of residents into the wider locality. Tenure-blind design is regarded as best practice as this can enhance social integration and reduce stigmatising of social housing tenants. Importantly, there should be clear and supportive management structures in place, which meaningfully include local residents, particularly low-income households.

There are noted gaps in the research literature relating to how different parts of the community respond to their neighbours, and which design, management and other specific features might encourage or discourage interaction (Bailey and Manxi, 2008). Similarly, there is scope for new and innovative ways to create vibrant, reciprocal and mutually beneficial mixed income tenure communities at a project level, such as that seen in Utrecht. Such innovations should be explored further particularly in the context of affordable housing crises seen in countries such as Ireland.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland staff consultations

One-to-one interviews were conducted with specific members of staff from Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association including Senior Managers, Project Leaders and Project Workers. Staff were also consulted as part of a dedicated one-day workshop on Meascán. Focus Housing Association staff and Focus Ireland staff from around the country attended this event. Key findings arising from the consultations were as follows:

#### Understanding Meascán

Staff reported a lack of clarity in relation to:

- 1 What a Meascán development is.
- 2 How many developments within Focus Housing Association follow the Meascán model.
- 3 A clear definition of Meascán.
- 4 What the ideal breakdown of tenant types is (e.g. 80 per cent General Needs, 20 per cent Support Needs) to make a development 'Meascán'.
- 5 Clarity in relation to the ideal mix of tenant types.

The feedback from the staff workshop identified the Meascán model as a new system, which had resulted in confusion among staff and challenges related to understanding what it is, and how Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association communicate the model to tenants, other agencies, and Local Authorities.

Senior staff highlighted that a discussion paper on Meascán (Focus Ireland, 2020) is the only publicly available documentation on the model. They suggested that the paper needed to be updated, with more accessible materials prepared on the model for internal and external consumption. Staff attending the workshop suggested that a common language is needed across the organisations that would support better communication and promotion of Meascán. Staff also reported that there is a need to develop and integrate targets and key performance indicators for Meascán into the overall Focus Housing Strategy.

## Allocation, mix and locations

Staff attending the workshop noted that achieving a mix of tenancies can be difficult and that the location of developments needs to be given a lot more consideration. The Meascán development at Grand Parade in Cork City was seen to be working well and be well connected to amenities and facilities, especially for younger tenants. In contrast, there was a view that the Old Dublin Road development in Limerick, given the limited amenities (e.g. public transport), might work best for General Needs<sup>10</sup> tenants and less well for tenants with complex support needs (e.g. Housing First or other supported tenants).

## Working with Local Authorities

Focus staff reported that getting Meascán to work required a number of internal and external factors, including:

- 1 Ensuring that Local Authorities have a clear understanding that this is a new type of development that involved accommodating both General Needs tenants from the housing waiting list and Housing First Tenants. This is not business as usual. This understanding needs to exist both at a senior policy level in the Local Authority and also at the level of the official who is directly involved in agreeing appropriate allocations.
- 2 In many Local Authorities, the historic role of Focus Ireland has been to provide homes and support exclusively for people with additional support needs, using a scattered-site model. Some local Focus Ireland staff believe that the Focus Ireland reputation for successfully accommodating individuals with additional support needs means that, even where a particular Meascán allocation requires a General Needs tenant, Local Authorities tend to allocate persons who while officially classified as 'General Needs' have some additional support needs. Typically, it is presumed that General Needs tenants do not have additional support needs, but this is not always the case in practice.
- 3 Having an agreed system to assess the support needs of all potential tenants, both General Needs and Special Needs, would enable Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff to also assess risks and to flag to the Local Authority where they identify that a General Needs tenant nominated for a General Needs tenancy has additional support needs to be met in order to assist them maintain their tenancy.
- 4 Investing in and developing good working relationships with a broader range of Housing staff within the Local Authority. Prior to the Meascán approach, Focus Ireland's staff relationships were primarily with members of the Homeless Action Teams, but now they must liaise with staff responsible for all housing allocations, including under General Needs. Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff are also challenged by the turnover of staff in Local Authority housing sections,

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<sup>10</sup> Local Authorities categorise social housing applicants into General Needs and Special Needs applicants. A General Needs Tenant refers to someone who rents a property from a Local Authority or an approved housing body for their own use. They qualify for social housing solely because of their low incomes. These tenants typically do not have specific housing requirements beyond the basic need for accommodation. Special Needs tenants are people who, in addition, have a disability, are older or are formerly homeless. The Special Needs categorisation does not relate to a general assessment of the level of support need.

which means that relationships cultivated over time can be lost when individuals are transferred out of housing into other sections within the Local Authority. Staff turnover in Focus Ireland can also present similar challenges.

- 5 Some of the key challenges identified by staff workshop participants related to the varying systems of protocols and practices within Local Authorities. It was noted that most Local Authority housing staff did not have an understanding of the Meascán model while some did not have a good understanding of homelessness in general. It was noted that some of these challenges were mitigated by the long-established good working relationships that Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association enjoys with most Local Authorities, including in Dublin City, Cork City and Limerick City.

### **Inter-organisational working**

Consultation with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff found that the Meascán model necessitates staff from the two organisations (i.e. Focus Housing Association Property staff and Focus Ireland Services staff) working together in a way they have not done in the past. This collaboration is important in relation to promotion of Meascán in a consistent way and the operation of Meascán in practice. Focus Housing Association Property and Focus Ireland Services staff need to work closely together in creating the appropriate social mix through the needs assessment of potential General Needs tenants.

Staff across the two organisations also noted that there is no single person in either organisation who has lead responsibility for the rollout of the model. While a framework of themed ‘Strategy Workstreams’ is in place with the aim of creating this integration at a senior management level, the staff delivering Meascán projects did not refer to these structures and did not mention them as providing the leadership at senior level that they felt was needed.

Staff attending the workshop suggested that a post of a Meascán Manager should be created, with appropriate team support. This manager would act as the main point of contact for Meascán across both organisations, ensuring that the learning from the rollout of the model is successfully captured. They could also be a focal point for responding to any complaints and difficulties that emerge.

### **The practice of Local Authorities nominating general needs tenants with additional needs for Meascán**

There was a strong perception among frontline Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff that General Needs tenants being allocated housing by Local Authorities tended to have a higher level of support needs than those allocated to other AHBs, who do not employ support staff.

Staff again linked this to the positive reputation of Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association among Local Authorities as reliable providers of supports for tenants with additional needs. While this reputation is welcome, it is having the problematic effect of undermining the mixed-community approach required by Meascán. Staff attending the workshop suggested a more intensive assessment checklist needs to be agreed between the Local Authority and Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association, and jointly undertaken to better determine the needs of prospective tenants.



Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff attending the staff workshop spoke about the challenges of working with Local Authorities in relation to allocations. They noted that when a Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association assessment found that a prospective General Needs tenant has a need for supports, often the Local Authority did not accept this assessment, noting instead that if there was a problem Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association could end the tenancy within the six-month probation period.<sup>11</sup> While it is claimed that some AHBs may adopt this approach, it is not an approach that Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association believe should ever be taken with tenancies and would not adopt in relation to their own work, as it risks making that tenant more insecure and possibly less likely to take up an AHB tenancy in the future. It can also result in the tenant losing their place on the social housing waiting list and having to wait for years for a move out of homelessness.

### Delayed move-ins

Consultation with staff found that most of both the General Needs and Supported tenants required a large amount of support at the point of moving in to their new accommodation in a Meascán development. They noted that tenant move-ins to their allocated accommodation were often delayed by a lack of resources to manage the set-up of bills, purchase of white goods, and so on. There was also an issue about tenants having the necessary financial resources to adequately fit out the property. See Table 3.1 for a sample spend on a Meascán apartment in an urban location.

**Table 3.1 Sample fit-out costs in a Meascán apartment in an urban location.**

Item	Cost	CWO grant
Flooring	€1,466.51	€2,970.00
White goods	€1,915.00	
Furniture	€2,003.67	
Blinds (1 very large window)	€270.00	
<b>Total Spend</b>	<b>€5,655.18</b>	
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>€2,685.18</b>	

Staff reported that all tenants accommodated within Meascán developments had needed help to apply for an Exceptional Needs Payment from the Department of Social Protection.

Exceptional Needs payments are provided generally on a one off basis to individuals to cover the cost of flooring, furniture, and white goods for those who meet the means test basis. It does not however cover all the costs related to move in. It also absorbs a lot of AHB time supporting tenants to complete the forms.

<sup>11</sup> Under the Residential Tenancy Legislation, which applies to AHBs and private landlords, a tenancy may be terminated within the first six months for no reason. After this period, tenancies can only be terminated for a limited number of reasons and tenants have recourse to procedures and protections under the Residential Tenancy Board.

Staff also reported that many General Needs and Supported tenants lived day-to-day financially and required advice about budgeting and the setting up of pre-pay/pay-as-you-go electricity and gas supplies.

### Staff contact with tenants

Focus Housing Association staff contact all tenants in relation to rent and any ongoing maintenance issues, as they are responsible for the management of the buildings. They also have planned maintenance and monthly estate inspections in place in all Focus Housing developments, including Meascán Developments. Focus Housing Association staff also provide a lot of informal support to General Needs tenants to assist them move in. Focus Ireland support staff in contrast, only have contact with the tenants they provide direct supports to in a Meascán development.

Some staff raised the question of whether there was a role for Focus Ireland support staff in relation to checking in with and supporting wider General Needs tenants within the Meascán developments. A Tenant Engagement Officer post was created by Focus Ireland over the lifetime of the evaluation to support this process and the Officer was involved in a tenant engagement day held as part of the rollout of the Connaught Street Meascán development in the summer of 2023.

### Limited community engagement

Consultations with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff as part of the evaluation process found that at the time of the evaluation community engagement work was confined to a minority of more recent Meascán developments.

One staff member attending the workshop noted that *'In Connaught St, there has and is real efforts to implement the community engagement piece, but this is difficult due to the lack of spaces (there is nowhere on site to meet people). (The Tenant Engagement Officer) and a Property Management staff member had gone around to tenants knocking on doors to check in – which was well received.'* Staff who were familiar with the Connaught Street development went on to suggest that that this sort of engagement could be made routine by linking with other forms of site visits.

Staff attending the workshop suggested that there was a number of reasons for the limited scope of community development interaction: a lack of resources to engage in this work, as it is not funded either as part of the state support either for development or for tenancy sustainment; the workloads of existing staff; and that not all tenants want to engage with neighbours in a community within the housing development: *'they just want to keep their head down and get on with things'*; and the absence of communal meeting spaces within developments.

Staff went on to suggest that there was a need for further community development workers to ensure that that this type of work could be progressed at a local level across all Meascán sites.

In most Meascán developments there was some *individual* pre-tenancy community engagement but (because of Covid 19) little if any *group* pre-tenancy or tenancy work had been undertaken.

Staff attending the workshop however highlighted that in the most recently tenanted site in Connaught Street Pre-Tenancy courses/days had been carried out collectively

with Property and Dublin Offsite Housing Service team. However, “*some tenants did not always hear all of the information, [given they were so focused on getting a house] and were distracted from the tenancy agreement and responsibilities attached to it.*” Staff went on to suggest that some tenants may need some further pre and post tenancy input to ensure that they are clear about the nature of the development they are moving into.

A small number of the staff consulted also noted that the absence of an agreed protocol for how and who might conduct any post tenancy exit interviews to learn about what is working and not working is a missed opportunity.

### **Limited and in some cases neglected shared/communal spaces**

According to Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff there are limited shared community spaces (indoors and outdoors) in the current Meascán developments and some of the shared spaces are neglected. The absence of dedicated parking spaces is also a source of conflict in at least one Meascán development. Workshop attendees at the staff workshop noted that community/communal spaces are required for community engagement. The challenge remains however that it can be difficult in the current housing market to design developments on a bespoke basis. In many cases due to constraints in the planning process, buildings must be purchased with little opportunity for modifications.

### **Focus Ireland supported tenants transferring to a Meascán development**

Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff were keen that existing Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association tenants whose accommodation was no longer suitable for their needs (for whatever reason, too small/too large/ not sufficiently accessible) would be able to apply for a transfer to a suitable Meascán development, should the opportunity arise. There is a clear internal transfer process in place for tenants, but any transfer, even between Focus Housing units, must be approved by the relevant Local Authority.

## **3.2 Tenant consultations**

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### **3.2.1 Online survey**

17 tenants completed the online survey. This included a mix of supported and non-supported tenants from three Meascán developments. Five respondents commented that they liked their accommodation and enjoyed living there, just one respondent said that their accommodation was ‘*ok for now*’. When asked what they liked about living in their accommodation, 13 respondents replied saying that affordability was one of the key aspects they like about their accommodation. Other key factors that were important to 12 respondents were having local amenities, while 11 respondents reported that the size of their accommodation was important. Respondents also reported that insulation, bright and well-ventilated accommodation, and access to local transport were high priorities.

Unfavourable qualities that respondents reported were the lack of private outdoor space (n=5), anti-social behaviour (n=3) and the size of accommodation (n=3). Two

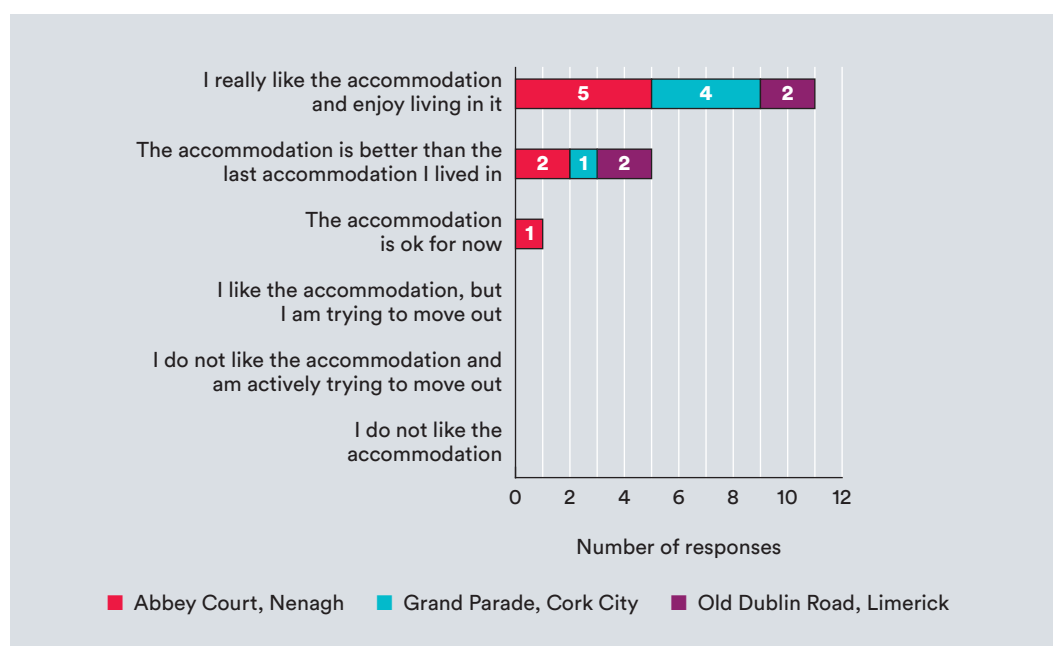
respondents reported that not being able to have visitors over,<sup>12</sup> had an impact on their enjoyment of the accommodation. Other concerns mentioned by respondents included poor ventilation, dark and cold, and not feeling safe.

Eight respondents were happy with their neighbours and seven respondents agreed that they had a lot in common with their neighbours. Asked whether they feel they could ask their neighbour for help, eight respondents said they could. Asked whether they are nervous of some of their neighbours, two respondents strongly agreed and six respondents agreed.

### Attitudes to Meascán accommodation

One of the first questions tenants surveyed were asked was whether they liked their current Meascán accommodation and related to that, what they liked and did not like about it. Most survey responses were positive, in terms of either liking it (n=11) and/or reporting that it was better than their last accommodation that they lived in (n=5). See Figure 3.1 for details.

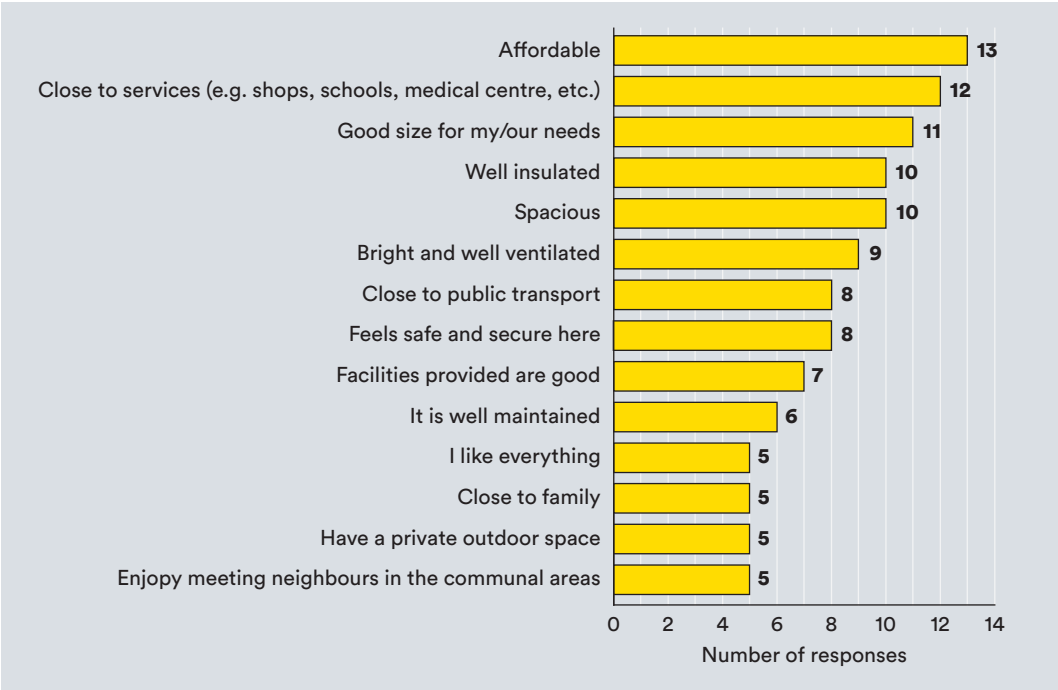
**Figure 3.1 Views on accommodation (n =17)**



The attributes tenants reported liking about their accommodation included its affordability (n=13), proximity to services (n=12), a good size for needs (n=11), well insulated and spacious (n=10). See Figure 3.2 for details of other features survey respondents liked about their accommodation.

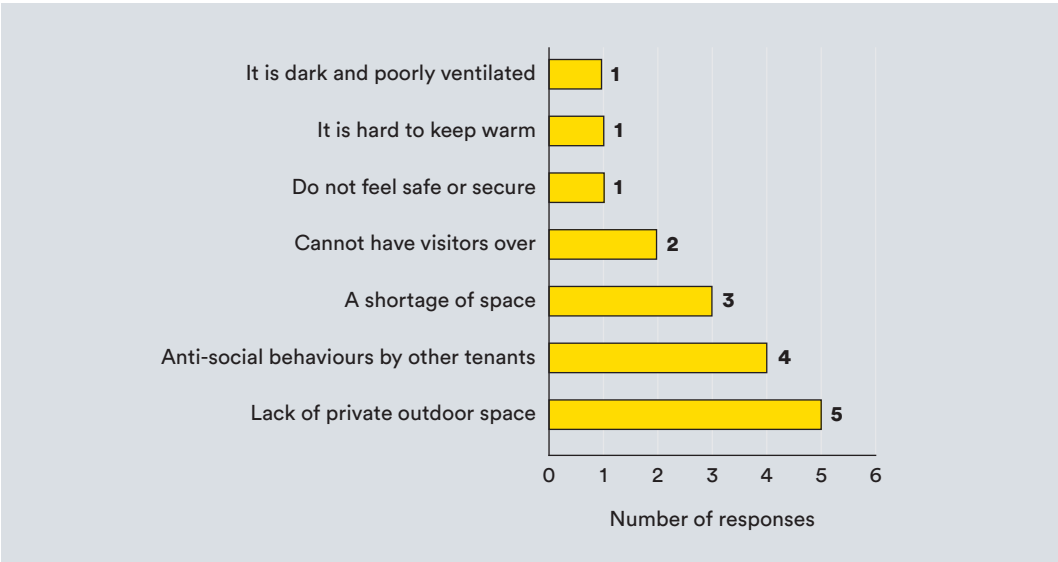
<sup>12</sup> Focus Housing Association does not have a policy of restricting tenants from having visitors over, except on rare occasions where the behaviour of tenants or visitors has resulted in anti-social behaviour which affected neighbours. Tenants have full Part 4 rights under the Residential Tenancy legislation and may take a case to the Residential Tenancy Board if they feel any restrictions are unfair.

**Figure 3.2. Positive aspects of accommodation (n=17)**



The most common aspects of the accommodation that the tenants surveyed did not like related to the lack of private outdoor space (n=5), anti-social behaviour by other tenants (n=4) and a shortage of living space (n=3). See Figure 3.3 for details.

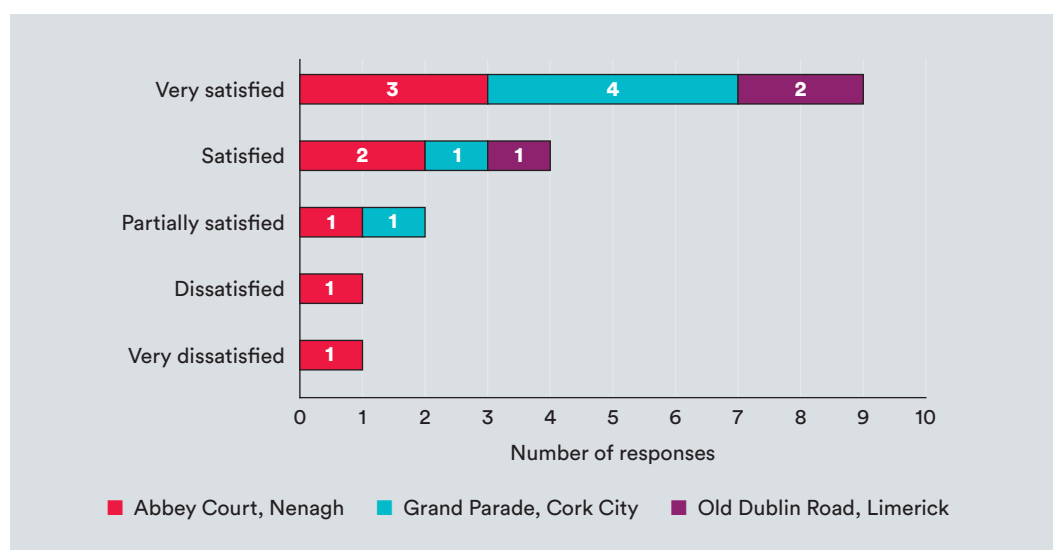
**Figure 3.3. Negative aspects of accommodation (n=17)**



In general terms however, more than half of the survey respondents (n=9) were very satisfied with their accommodation, while 4 respondents were satisfied. Two respondents reported being dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with their accommodation. See Figure 3.4 for details.



**Figure 3.4. Accommodation satisfaction levels (n=17)**



Key features that appeared to contribute to this level of overall satisfaction related to:

- 1 The location of the development.
- 2 A location that is close to other family members.
- 3 The development being a good place to raise children.

Most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that they would  
 1) 'Recommend this complex development to friends looking for a place to live' and  
 2) 'Viewed their current accommodation as their forever home'.

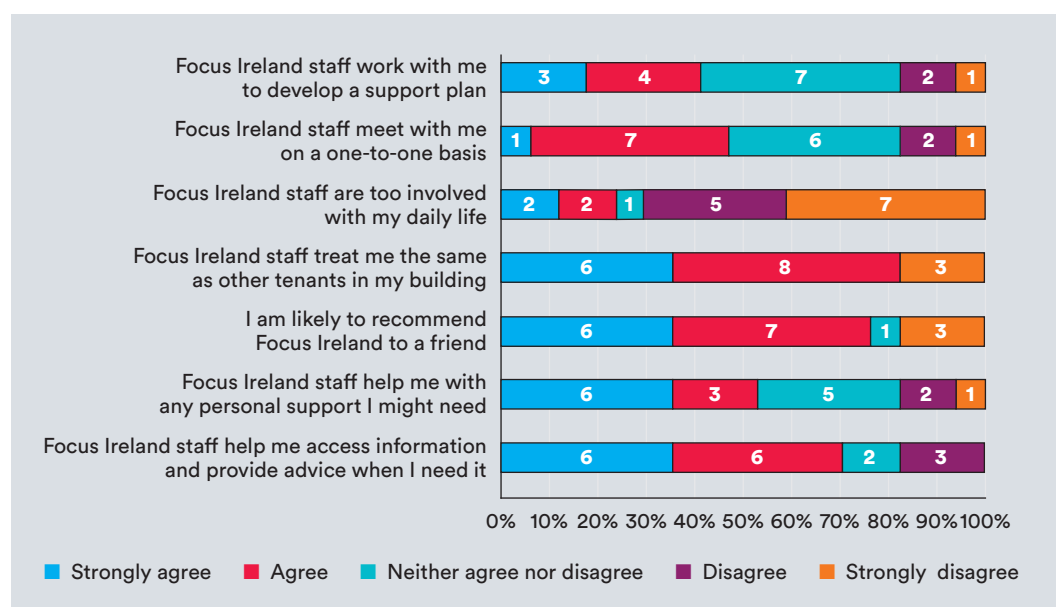
### Engagement with and views on Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff

Ten of the tenants surveyed reported having contact with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff in relation to maintenance issues in their apartment/house. Six of the tenants surveyed had contact with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff in relation to accessing information and signposting, while four had contacts related to accessing support and the payment of rent respectively.

The five supported tenants had more contact with Focus Ireland staff than Focus Housing Association staff, while the General Needs tenants were generally more likely to have contact with the Focus Housing Association staff in relation to maintenance issues. Survey respondents' attitudes to Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff were generally positive.

Survey respondents were specifically asked about their engagement with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association Ireland staff. See Figure 3.5 for details.

**Figure 3.5. Tenant engagement with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff (n=17)**



### **Satisfaction with Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association support since living in your current accommodation**

Fourteen survey respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with Focus Ireland’s support since living in their current accommodation, while just two survey respondents were dissatisfied. Respondents who reported being “very satisfied”, described Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association as responsive and supportive to their needs.

**‘They ensure this is a safe and friendly place to live and sort out neighbours’ altercations before they get out of hand.’ (Survey respondent 5)**

**‘Quick to respond to queries, fix issues. helpful, friendly, proactive. Gave lots of support with move.’ (Survey respondent 10)**

Survey respondents who stated they were “satisfied” mentioned how support has dropped off since moving in, others reported delays relating to dealing with maintenance issues.

**‘Maintenance seems to always be left on the long finger. The homes are fitted with solar panels, but we get no savings as the energy companies say they are not registered so the bills are very expensive up to €1000 per billing cycle during the winter months just gone and were reported on many occasions. Along with a lot of other jobs. That will eventually become bigger jobs the longer are left on the long finger.’ (Survey respondent 3)**

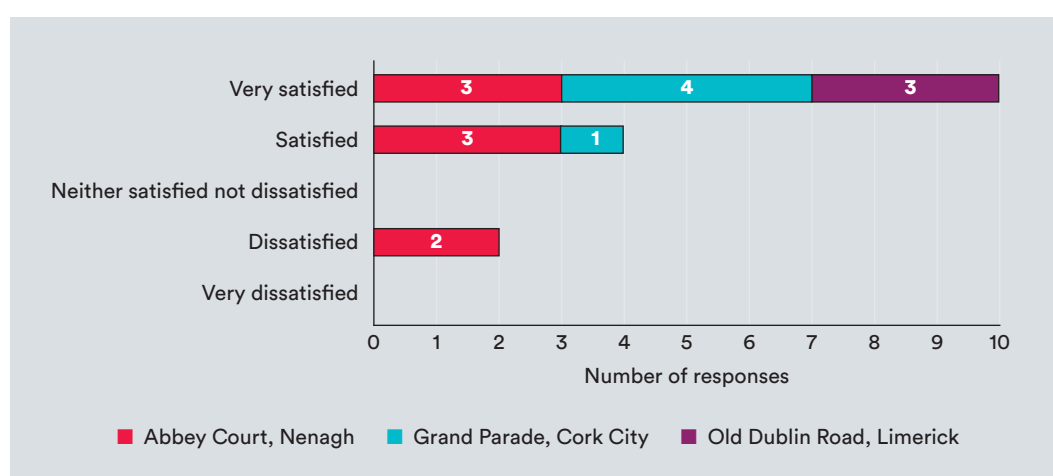
**‘I am very grateful to Focus Ireland for the roof over my head, but support has dropped off since moving in.’ (Survey respondent 13)**

Respondents stating that they were “dissatisfied” mentioned delays addressing issues and one respondent was of the view that they had too much contact from their key worker.

**‘Although my point of contact is nice to deal with, I feel that issues I raise are of extreme concern and importance, and yet I can be left waiting and waiting for a reply.’ (Survey respondent 15)**

**‘Key workers are constantly on my back when I should be left alone at my age.’ (Survey respondent 8)**

**Figure 3.6. Satisfaction levels since move in (n=17)**



### 3.2.2 Telephone interviews

One to one phone interviews were conducted with 24 Meascán tenants. Fourteen of the tenants interviewed were General Needs tenants, the remainder were Supported tenants (including five people engaged in a youth housing programme). Tenants were interviewed from all seven Meascán developments. Six of the interviewees had children under the age of 18 living with them on a full-time basis, while two had adult children living with them.

#### Interviewee profiles

The tenants interviewed had complex housing histories. Six of the tenants interviewed had been living in the private rental sector, often for quite a length of time, anywhere from four years to thirteen years. These tenants had to move from this accommodation for a variety of reasons including the accommodation being sold, the landlord requiring the accommodation for a family member and the accommodation being of poor quality/unsuitable for aging tenants or tenants with health issues.

Five interviewees had been living in HAP accommodation prior to moving into the Focus Ireland Meascán accommodation. Again, many of these tenants had to move when issued with a Notice of Termination when their landlords wanted to sell or because the accommodation was of very poor quality and unsuitable for their needs.

One interviewee had been living with her parents and her two children in a very overcrowded situation, while another had been sofa surfing for more than eight months.

The remaining 11 interviews had been living in homeless accommodation, having previously lived in a variety of accommodation types. Some had been living in homeless hostels for long periods of time, up to seven years in one case. Others had lived in B&B's, as well as house shares provided by a number of homeless service providers, including Cork Simon and Focus Ireland.

### General feedback

The majority of interviewees reported being generally happy with their current accommodation, often describing it as *'much better than their previous accommodation'*.

**'It was lovely moving in here, everything was clean and new.'**

**(Meascán Tenant Interviewee 3)**

**'The apartment is so bright and light and if anything goes wrong, I can phone someone to get it fixed.'** (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 7)

**'I feel better living here, that is the biggest thing, and do you know what, I go to the GP less because I am happy, this is a good place to live. I feel very lucky.'** (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 13)

**'The best bit about where I live now is that I can shut my door and it is quiet, you rarely hear any noise, and if you do meet people in the corridors or the lift, they generally just say hello.'** (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 23)

For many, what they liked best about their Focus Housing Association accommodation was that it was in an area they were familiar with and they would be able to live there for the rest of their lives, assuming they were able to meet their obligations as a tenant.

**'I am happy here, I don't want to move and I never have to... I never, ever want to be homeless again.'** (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 18)

**'My children can grow up here and make good memories here, not like me I moved around so much when I was young. It's not good for you to be moving about. I am happy for them.'** (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 10)

## Awareness of Meascán

Most of the General Needs tenants interviewed appeared largely unaware that they were living in a Meascán or an intentional social mixing housing development.

**‘I think the Focus person mentioned something about this when we were moving in but to be honest, I was just so focused in getting out of where we were living, I don’t remember what it was all about.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 16)**

Supported tenants in contrast all knew that there was a mixture of tenants in the development.

**‘What I don’t like is that when anything goes wrong, I am the one that gets the letter from Focus, but the thing is that I want a quiet life, I want to keep my head down, I don’t want any drama anymore.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 5)**

**‘Where I lived before, I had disasters for neighbours, shouting and screaming and making a nuisance of themselves 24/7 and I was worried about that moving in here, but it did not turn out like that, here there are no issues, it is great.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 9)**

The notion of “keeping your head down” and staying out of trouble was a common theme across all interviews with the Supported tenants, none of whom wanted to go back to living in homeless accommodation. All the tenants interviewed knew at least their immediate neighbours to say hello to and pass the time of day with.

**‘I always say hello to the people I meet in the stairs and the lobby, but I don’t know that many of them by name, I do know the names of the people who live on the same floor as me.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 5)**

The tenants with children less than 18 years of age also knew many of the other families with children of a similar age in the development. Where open space was available these children played together.

**‘We are lucky here to have space for the children to play, and the parents can chat together while keeping an eye on the kids.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 17)**



## Moving in challenges

General Needs and Supported tenants reported struggling with the costs and in some cases the organisation of moving in to the accommodation. All were very appreciative of the Focus Ireland Housing Association staff support to assist them prepare their Exceptional Needs Payment application to enable them to buy the basics to move in.

**‘Focus staff really helped me with my Exceptional Needs Payment application. I did not have the money to buy the beds or the fridge or the cooker. Without Focus’s help it would have taken me a lot longer to move in.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 1)**

**‘When I moved in the Focus person helped me to set up the payments for my electricity. Now I know what I have to spend, and I also know that my bills are paid.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 22)**

Some General Needs tenants reported getting support from other organisations at the time they moved in (including mental health providers, occupational therapy, social workers, physiotherapy etc.) but not all of them had let Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association know about this support, fearing it might negatively impact on their allocation of the accommodation.

**‘I didn’t want to give them (Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland) any reason to turn down my housing application, so I didn’t tell them about the fact that I get some support from the mental health services. I still haven’t told them, it’s not really their business, is it?’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 15, allocated accommodation as a General Needs tenant)**

Another interviewee who reported being illegally evicted from their private rented accommodation after more than 10 years and had moved into one of the Meascán developments (after six months living in a B&B) had a breakdown after they moved in. The interviewee noted that once Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland became aware of the situation they quickly moved to appoint the tenant a key worker, who worked intensively with the tenant to support and assist them.

**‘When I moved in, I was not being assisted by Focus Ireland, but when I rang them from the hospital, they acted instantly and provided me with a key worker who I could not say enough about. Not only did she help me to get out of the hole I was in, but she has also helped me to return to work. She is so good, she still rings every few weeks to check in. This was lifesaving support. I could not be more thankful.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 20)**

The payments for successful Exceptional Needs applications are made directly to the tenant unless they request otherwise. This generally worked well with tenants having the opportunity to decide what to furnish their property with, often for the first time. A small number of tenants ran into problems with this.

**‘Focus staff told me it was not a good idea to buy a second hand cooker and fridge, they were right. Cause when I did buy them, they worked for a few weeks and then they didn’t.... but I didn’t want to tell them, so now I just buy the food I need every day.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 19)**

**‘When I got the payment, I was delighted. I started looking at furniture and fridges and cookers and then my sister got into trouble, she owed a lot of money. She said it was just a loan when I gave her the money, but now she has no way to pay me back. So, I am sleeping on the floor. It’s not great but what can I do.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 8)**

### **Ongoing challenges**

With the tenant interviews conducted in Autumn/Winter of 2023, all of the tenants were concerned about the cost of heating.

**‘I worry about the bills; I live on a fixed income and the bills keep going up.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 14)**

Several interviewees also noted that while the specific development they lived in had solar panels, which should help to reduce costs, the solar panels were not working.

**‘I was delighted to see the solar panels when I moved in, but they have never worked and because of the draughts and our health and the need to keep the house warm our bills are very high.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 4)**

Some tenants also identified issues in relation to ongoing maintenance and property management.

**‘The back gutter is leaking for a year, I cannot do it myself and I have told Focus several times, but nothing has been done about it, when you go out the back door you get drowned.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 2)**

**‘The front door bangs, I know it is only a little thing, but it would not take too much to fix, and it is annoying if you live beside or above it.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 6)**

**‘There are issues with parking, because people want to park outside their front door.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 9)**

**‘The house is very cold, despite the high bills, the solar panels are not working, and the front door is warped, letting in a big draught. Also, the boiler is not working properly it takes four hours to heat the water for the shower and there is no hot water in the sinks.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 15)**

In contrast, one interviewee reported that emergency maintenance issues were generally dealt with promptly.

**‘I had a leak in the apartment and Focus responded quickly, sending someone out to fix it.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 22)**

### **Supported-needs tenants**

Most Supported Needs tenants had moved out of difficult and often chaotic housing situations and were delighted with their move to their own door accommodation. Most now wanted privacy and get on with their lives. All the supported tenants interviewed (including the supported Housing For Youth tenants) recognised the important support provided by their key worker particularly when they moved in.

The supported Housing For Youth tenants initially welcomed their key workers support to get them established in their new accommodation (particularly as it was the first time most of them had lived independently). However, after a while some of the interviewees were concerned that the key worker was remaining too involved.

**‘I know where they are if I need them.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 20)**

**‘I need to get on with my life.... This is a new chapter.’  
(Meascán Tenant Interviewee 24)**

**‘My key worker is constantly on my back when I should be left alone at my age (early twenties).’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 7)**

Some of these younger tenants also had concerns about whether and what their key worker reported back to Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association.

**‘I am not sure who my key worker reports to, and whether what I say to them is kept confidential or shared with others. So, I am careful about what I say to them.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 17)**

**‘It is always assumed that I’ve done something wrong, I get the letters from Focus not the other tenants.’ (Meascán Tenant Interviewee 13)**

A small number of the supported tenants were concerned about the six-month probation period<sup>13</sup> and unclear about their rights as tenants and feared eviction. As a result of which these tenants did not always want to report to Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff when there were difficulties in case it might put their tenancy at risk.

### Contact with Focus

The tenants interviewed generally regarded the Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association staff they had contact with as responsive and generally helpful. The General Needs tenants contact was generally only with Focus Housing Association staff in relation to rent and maintenance issues, while the Supported tenants also had ongoing contact with a key worker from Focus Ireland. The Supported tenants’ views of their key workers varied, some had very good relationships and believed that they could talk to their key worker about anything, while others were more wary about what they would tell their key worker.

### Suggestions for change

The tenants interviewed made several practical suggestions in relation to positive changes that could be made. They are as follows:

- › Tenants to receive a detailed information pack on the Meascán development in advance/at the time of move.
- › Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland organise a meet and greet with all the neighbours annually.
- › Non-emergency maintenance issues to be logged centrally, and tenants provided with an estimated date of repair, and regular updates in terms of when the issue will be addressed.
- › Ensure all tenants have access to some open space within a development.
- › Clarify the mechanism by which supported Housing For Youth tenants can apply to disengage from a keyworker.

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<sup>13</sup> The six-month probation period refers to the Residential Tenancy Board statement that a tenant can be evicted for no reason in the first six months. This is included in Tenancy Agreements as it is required in the legislation.

### 3.3 External stakeholder consultations

Interviews were conducted with six external stakeholders (n=6). This included:

- One to one interviews with Local Authority officials in three Local Authorities all of whom had Meascán developments in these Local Authority areas. Two were working in homeless services, the other was working at a Senior Management level with housing oversight.
- One to one interviews with two senior civil servants working within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and with the Housing Agency respectively.

#### Understanding and perceived value of intentional social mix

All the external stakeholders consulted were clear about the value and purpose of intentional social mixing and in some cases noted that it was government policy.

**‘Having a mix of tenant types (provided you get the mix right) can make a development easier to manage. There are national guidelines in relation to sustainable and mixed communities, it is definitely something that needs to be supported.’ (External Stakeholder 1 – national level)**

**‘The environment out there is supportive of the purchase of larger developments with a better balance of tenants.’ (External Stakeholder 2 – national level)**

**‘The purpose of intentional social mix is to create a sustainable community that’s easier to manage.’ (External Stakeholder 5 – Local Authority)**

They also all expressed the view that social mixing was something that all Local Authorities were striving to achieve.

**‘For years Local Authorities have been taking tenants from the housing waiting list who are working and not working, as well as those with additional needs and accommodating them in one location.’ (External Stakeholder 4 – Local Authority)**

**‘Intentional social mixing is what Local Authorities have been trying to do for years, but it is tricky to get the right balance of tenants. We now have community tenancy sustainment teams to support this process.’ (External Stakeholder 3 – Local Authority)**

**‘Within this Local Authority increasingly, the different sections are talking with the acquisitions section, and are working to promote intentional social mixing. In my opinion there is a mix happening and the idea is that we progress this within the framework of the county development plan.’**  
(External Stakeholder 5 – Local Authority)

### **Familiarity and engagement with the Meascán model**

The external stakeholders interviewed were familiar with the Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association Meascán model to varying degrees. Three Local Authority officials had direct experience of making allocations for various Meascán developments. One Local Authority official had ongoing contact with Focus Housing Association in relation to a range of developments in the Local Authority area. The DHLGH and the Housing Agency as national stakeholders were familiar with the model but not its detailed operation.

According to one Local Authority consultee, the *‘key benefit for our Local Authority of Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association doing intentional social mix housing is that the Local Authority does not have to manage the development.’*

### **Views on Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association undertaking intentional social housing**

Local Authority officials consulted and working in the allocations section considered Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association as two of a small number of key providers of supports for tenants with higher support needs. The decision of Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association to broaden their services to provide accommodation for a range of different tenant types was not something they were particularly supportive of.

**‘In my role in allocations I ‘don’t need Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association to do general needs housing I need them to do the specialist housing.’** (External Stakeholder 3 – Local Authority)

**‘I see Focus Housing Association as a niche type of AHB. It is not what we would consider when we think about Housing First. They have a different way of working; they generally work office hours and offer an out of hours call service which has limitations. Our view is that they offer support for tenants with higher support needs.’** (External Stakeholder 5 – Local Authority working in homeless services section)

**‘My difficulty is that there are only four or five specialist AHB’s and by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association dabbling in other types of housing they are diluting the existence of their specialist services.’**  
(External Stakeholder 4 – Local Authority)



The senior Local Authority official working across homeless services and the two national level stakeholders in contrast had no issues with Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland moving into the provision of social housing more generally.

**‘Focus Housing Association are very professional and they have good relationships with developers. We are happy to see them getting involved in the provision of general needs and supported housing provision.’**  
(External Stakeholder 6 Local Authority)

**‘Building sustainable communities through mixed tenure is national policy, the intentional social mixing being done by Focus is a step in the right direction.’**  
(External Stakeholder 2 – national)

**‘We need organisations like Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland to build more housing if we are going to complete 33,000 units per year until 2030, which is the target in the Housing for All policy.’** (External Stakeholder 1)

### **Location of housing developments**

Two Local Authority officials consulted were very keen to point out how important it was that this type of accommodation be provided in areas of need, rather than in areas where sites/developments were available. They also noted intentional social mix developments needed to be located in areas that were well served by public transport and other services.

**‘Focus Housing Association are increasingly coming forward with properties, without really realising whether it is meeting the needs of the council.’**  
(External Stakeholder 4 – Local Authority)<sup>14</sup>

**‘Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association needs to think more about their customers and their customer demands. And if you think about it, it is the Local Authorities who are their customers.’** (External Stakeholder 3 – Local Authority)

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<sup>14</sup> A Member of the Focus Senior Management Team stated in response to this that *‘The first thing Focus do when we are looking to build or acquire a new development, or even a one-off property, is look for support from the Local Authority. If it doesn’t meet their needs or if they consider that there is adequate social housing in the area, Focus Ireland don’t get approval.’*

The Local Authority officials were very aware that many individuals who are homeless would prefer to live in urban locations but noted that they had a responsibility to ensure that no-one area becomes dominated by social housing.

**‘Where AHBs come to us offering to provide accommodation one of the first things we do is a social-housing mix check. What we have to do is avoid putting more social housing in an area that is already oversaturated.’**  
(External Stakeholder 5 – Local Authority)

## Allocations

The Local Authority officials drew attention to the situation that while each Local Authority holds and manages the Housing Waiting List for its own administrative area, the determination of the order of priority that applies to the waiting list is made through the ‘schemes of letting priorities’ decided upon every few years by the locally-elected representatives.

The officials noted that most Local Authorities operated a “time on list” system, whereby priority is given to those with longest time spent on the waiting list, with some limited discretion available in terms of the provision of accommodation for others in need of social housing. Some Local Authorities operate local priority categories, while many have separated and specific waiting lists for all or some of the categories below:

- › Older persons accommodation (typically over 55 years)
- › Homeless persons (Housing First/Notices to Quit)
- › Care leavers
- › Traveller specific accommodation
- › Medical need
- › Disability

Several Local Authorities have also adopted a system called Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) where those approved for social housing can express an interest in properties advertised on its CBL website. The idea of CBL is that it allows a person who is on the Housing Waiting List to have some control over where they live and the type of social housing tenure (Local Authority, approved housing body or leased homes). As houses and apartments become available under CBL, prospective tenants can indicate their interest in particular units which are then allocated to the interested household which is highest on the waiting list, taking account of all the relevant circumstances. Not all vacancies are advertised through the CBL system, and the Local Authority officials consulted reported that where a decision is made to advertise a property through the CBL system they often have less discretion in relation to who might be allocated accommodation. In some Local Authorities Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association can make a transfer application recommendation, subject to the person having an open housing application.

While processes for Housing First may be different, in general making an offer of accommodation to an individual/household currently requires the Local Authority to review its assessment of the household’s eligibility and need for social housing. The Local Authorities also always undertake a Garda check. The Local Authority may also confirm that:

- The application is still valid as regards connection with the area and selection of ‘area of choice’.
- The person’s circumstances have not changed resulting in them being deemed ineligible for social housing support.

Once the person has passed the Local Authority checks, they are either provided with Local Authority accommodation or their details are passed over to the AHB (in this case Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association Housing) to follow up.

One Local Authority official interviewed acknowledged that in some cases the follow up assessment work done by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association has seen them come back to the Local Authority to argue the case that some potential tenants (e.g. General Needs tenants) have unmet support needs. What follows, according to the Local Authority officials, is a ‘*process of negotiation*’ in terms of what support is needed and what support is provided. While there is an agreed national housing needs framework, there are no specific common standard general housing needs assessment criteria. Where it is agreed that an individual/household needs support, the supports are generally provided by Focus Ireland and funded by the Local Authority under Section 10 of the 1988 Housing Act.

Limerick City and County Council have a formal policy to promote social and tenure mix as follows:

**Table 3.2 Social and tenure mixing policy in Limerick City and County Council**

Policy Objective 12
Ensure the new social and affordable turnkey housing delivery promote social and tenure mix. New large scale turnkey housing of more than 40 units built for the Council or AHBs shall target a tenure mix of 30 per cent social rented including general social homes and specialist provision, 20 per cent private for ownership or rental and 50 per cent affordable including homes for affordable purchase cost rental and new build incremental scheme

Source; Limerick City and County Housing Strategy and HNDA 2022–2028 P113

### **Making Meascán work better?**

The national-level stakeholders interviewed were keen that the intentional social mix agenda would be progressed but were not familiar enough with Meascán at an operational level to be able to comment on making Meascán work better.

One of the national stakeholders believed that ‘*intentional social mixing would work better if there was more flexibility at Local Authority level in relation to nomination rights.*’ While the other national stakeholder suggested that there was a need for a more extensive ‘*conversation about who is paying for the services and if this is happening under Section 10 or could it be paid for in another way or indeed be self-financing.*’ They noted that currently the majority of this Section 10 money goes into emergency accommodation rather prevention or tenancy sustainment.

The second national external stakeholder highlighted the ‘*importance of thoughtful design in developing a good human space for people to live together in.*’

Both national level interviewees agreed that there was a requirement for more guidance in terms of a clear assessment of the needs of General Needs tenants compared with Supported tenants.

The Local Authority officials made various suggestions in relation to how Meascán could be made to work better from their perspective. Some of these comments related to the need for a joint approach by Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland to various sections of the Council, not just one section.

**‘Focus Housing and Focus Ireland need to work together to jointly approach the allocations and the homeless sections.’ (Local Authority Interviewee 1)**

**If Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association are serious about Meascán, they need to discuss the model with different sections of the Council.’ (Local Authority Interviewee 3)**

The Local Authority officials consulted commented that from their perspective the decision by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association to reconfigure its regional management structure and put in place Heads of Development service was not helpful. They noted that Local Authority’s preference is to have *‘one single point of contact’*. The Local Authority official working at a senior level in contrast did not agree with this view arguing that they had a single point of contact that they worked closely with in Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association.

The Local Authority officials involved in homeless services consulted repeatedly queried what they saw as Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association appearing to be trying to *‘do everything’*, which included *‘Meascán, Long terms housing, youth housing, transitional housing and Housing First housing’*. In contrast Local Authority officials involved in social housing provision more generally welcomed the fact that Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland has become involved in the provision of larger scale social housing developments.

**‘The issue is one of scale, we need AHB’s to step up and work with us to meet our housing targets.’ (Local Authority Interviewee 2)**

## 4 Conclusions

### 4.1 Does Meascán contribute to meeting the housing needs and the social inclusion of various social groups?

#### Facilitating intentional social mixing

The Meascán model, as it is currently being rolled out, facilitates the mixing of various types of social housing tenants, including General Needs tenants, as well as tenants who have moved out of homelessness with a variety of support needs. While it is envisaged in the model, no current site includes mixing of social housing tenants and other tenures (such as cost rental, private rental, or owner occupier) as is the practice in other jurisdictions. The design of current developments is tenure blind ensuring that it is not possible to determine who lives in which units and this is positive.

#### Meeting housing needs

The Meascán model, as currently rolled out, is meeting the needs of General Needs tenants who make up around 80 per cent of tenants within each development. It is also meeting the needs of the individuals/households with additional support needs, including marginalised people with lived experience of homelessness who are tenants of the remaining units. The accommodation provided is generally of good quality, and planned maintenance is in place. Unforeseen maintenance issues have arisen in some locations but given that these developments are new, they should still be within the building liability period for the defect.

#### Contribution to social inclusion

Focus Housing Association staff have contact with all tenants at the assessment and move-in stage, and work hard to support tenants move in and get established in their new homes. Once the General Needs tenants are established the only contact they have with Focus Housing Association is in relation to rent and repairs. The supported tenants in contrast each have a Focus Ireland caseworker with whom they have regular contact.

To date there has been limited collective engagement with tenants by Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association and tenants report limited but cordial contact with their neighbours. Some of this limited contact can be linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. This is particularly the case in apartment developments where there is limited internal shared spaces, and the external shared spaces that do exist are often neglected and largely abandoned. There appears to be more scope for contact and mixing of tenants in housing developments, where tenants meet when supervising children at play, but in one or two instances speeding and communal parking are sources of ongoing conflict in these locations.

### **Overall observations**

The current execution of the Meascán policy is pragmatic with different regional applications of the model and varying levels of engagement with staff in the Local Authorities. One of the key challenges for Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association is that they currently have limited input into the allocations and nominations process, which is controlled by the relevant Local Authority and governed by primary legislation.

Mixing tenants can be difficult because of different lifestyles. The model has been developed with a target mix of tenants of 80 per cent general needs and 20 per cent additional needs, but there is no evidence base for establishing the maximum proportion of tenants with support needs that would be viable.

The reality is that it often ends up as 60 per cent general needs and 40 per cent support needs. It is also the case that some tenants the Local Authority has classified as General Needs tenants can also have additional support needs that become evident as part of the Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association assessment process or indeed, after the tenant moves into the development and this presents a challenge.

Where a Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association assessment of a 'General Needs' tenant highlights support needs that had not been anticipated, Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association currently revert to the Local Authority to make them aware of the issue and seek additional support for the tenant. There is no agreed criteria for this negotiation and this process meets with varying degrees of success.



## 4.2 What is the impact of the project for stakeholders?

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### All tenants

In overall terms, most tenants who had moved into Meascán developments were generally very happy with their accommodation. They were also happy with the support they got from Focus Ireland to assist them make successful applications to furnish their home using the Exceptional Needs Payment. For some individuals, it was the first time they had the opportunity to make decisions in relation to the flooring and white goods they required. Many regarded their house or apartment as their forever home.

### General needs tenants

Most General Needs Tenants appeared to settle quickly into their new homes and had few complaints. What complaints they had, largely related to maintenance issues. Few of these tenants appeared to be aware that some of their neighbours had additional support needs, but generally seem unperturbed when the issue was raised by the evaluator. In general, they wanted to get on with their lives in peace..

### Tenants with additional support needs

Most tenants with additional support needs were happy with the accommodation and the support they were receiving from their key worker. Most, like the general needs' tenants, reported '*just wanting to get on with their lives*' and '*live a quiet life with no hassle*'. Some reported really appreciating that for the first time they had real control over who they allowed into their home and their life.

However, some of the younger tenants, in contrast, reported being frustrated by requirement that they continue to engage with a key worker. They resented not being able to make their own decisions and questioned when they would be considered an adult capable of making their own decisions.

### Focus Ireland staff

Focus Housing Association staff reported being very involved with all tenants at the move in stage, supporting tenants to make their Exceptional Needs Payment applications and getting payment systems set up for bills and rent. This was not something that they had anticipated General Needs tenants would need and it took up a considerable amount of their time.

On a positive note, the staff believed that it was had been useful to do this because it enabled them to get to know tenants and tenants to get to know them in a way that would not otherwise have happened. The result of which was that they believed tenants were more comfortable and ready to contact them when they came across a problem with their accommodation.

Focus Ireland staff in contrast only had contact with the tenants that they provided case work services and support to, and as such this work was not different to what they do in other locations.

## Local Authorities and other stakeholders

Some Local Authority staff working in homeless services were concerned that Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association was moving away from its core expertise: providing support for those who are homeless and more generally, towards providing social housing. Other Local Authority staff were pleased that Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland had decided to scale up their provision and were now working to provide accommodation for General Needs tenants.

The DHLGH and Housing Agency stakeholders were interested in learning more about the impact of the project and its potential to sustainably accommodate a mix of tenure types in the longer term (such as cost rental, private rental, or owner occupier), as is the practice in other jurisdictions.

## 4.3 Structural barriers to the expansion of the model

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There are two significant structural barriers to the rollout of the model. Firstly, there is a shortage of sites and turnkey developments in locations where there is a demand for social housing. This is a barrier for all AHB's seeking to develop and provide social housing.

Secondly, the absence of a clear agreed system for assessing the support needs of tenants and the thresholds of support (except for Housing First tenants) means that the negotiation process in terms of who needs support and what support is needed can be very subjective. Definitions and thresholds need to be developed for tenants with a range of support needs. Then, once in place, training should be provided for Local Authorities and AHBs to understand and apply these definitions and thresholds. This would reduce the level of negotiation required around social housing allocations. Currently, Local Authorities conduct a social housing assessment and AHBs undertake a separate assessment to determine the support needs of the tenant/s. Consideration should be given to the development of a system of joint Housing and Needs Assessment by LAs and AHBs.

## 5 Recommendations

### Collaboration

- › Focus Ireland services staff and Focus Housing Association staff should work in a more connected way particularly in their relationships with Local Authorities.
- › There is a requirement for Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association to have senior-level leadership on all Meascán projects across both arms of the organisation.
- › Communication with Local Authorities needs to involve Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association jointly engaged with a range of sections within the Local Authority, not just Acquisitions and Homeless Services.
- › To facilitate collaboration, Focus Ireland or Focus Housing Association should nominate one key point of contact, with appropriate seniority, for each Local Authority.

### Communications

- › Meascán is a complex and innovative approach to social housing, that requires a much stronger internal and external communication strategy, which is essential to bring it to its full potential. To achieve this, Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association should:
  - › Develop a short internal guide for staff about Meascán, what it is and which developments are Meascán.
  - › Provide staff with training about Meascán and how it is implemented in practice.
  - › Provide clear ongoing communication from senior Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association management to all staff that the Meascán model is Focus Ireland's and Focus Housing Association's choice of preferred social housing model.
  - › Develop a short guide for external audiences on the value and purpose of Meascán and its role in facilitating intentional social mixing in practice.

## Management and leadership

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- › Focus Housing Association property management staff and Focus Ireland services staff should work in a more connected way in relation to the management of individual Meascán developments.
- › Provide greater clarity for tenants in relation to who their Key Workers report to, and the confidentiality of their conversations.
- › All Meascán developments would benefit from regular check-ins with all tenants (not just supported tenants).
- › Focus Housing Association and Focus Ireland need to be able to provide General Needs tenants on occasion with support for a timebound period.
- › Appoint/nominate a Meascán Manager/Coordinator, whose responsibilities include:
  - › Serving as the link between the joint CEO of Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association, the Property Development and Management team, and the Services team.
  - › Responsibility for central coordination pertaining to: allocations, housing pipeline, community impact, evaluations, outcome indicators and impact measurement.
  - › Build relations with Local Authorities.
  - › Ensure contracts (between Focus Ireland and Focus Housing Association and the relevant Local Authorities) for the delivery of accommodation and housing supports have the necessary resources to support the process of integration of tenants (supporting the deployment of community and tenant relation officers).
  - › Building relations with partners for wraparound supports (e.g. Mental Health Supports, Meals on Wheels, etc.).
  - › Ensuring the provision of regular training for internal stakeholders.

## Tenant engagement

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- › Consider provision of safe communal spaces (including communal green spaces) in the design process, inclusive of furnishings and fixtures, before tenants move in.
- › Allocate increased staff resources to the provision of supports for the majority of tenants in relation to the installation of prepay meters and budgeting advice as well as the completion of the Exceptional Needs application forms.
- › Invest in an ongoing process of regular engagement with tenants on an individual and group basis.
- › Provide tenants with access to an independent mediator where issues arise with Focus Ireland/Focus Housing Association.
- › Work with tenants to develop neighbourhood charters for all Focus Housing Association and Focus Housing developments.

# Appendix 1

## Profile of tenants who completed the online survey

Table A.1 Profile of the tenants who completed the online survey

Gender	› Female	10
	› Male	4
	› Information not provided	3
Age	› 18–45 years	13
	› 45–65 years	4
Ethnicity	› White Irish	14
	› Other (including mixed background)	1
	› Other White background	2
Primary employment status	› In employment or full-time education (full time or part time)	7
	› Not employed due to disability, sickness, or long term unemployed	8
	› Caring responsibilities	2
Which Meascán development do you live in?	› Abbey Court	8
	› Grand Parade	5
	› Old Dublin Road	4
How long have you lived in your current accommodation?	› The average length of time lived in current accommodation	9.7 months
	› Abbey Court average	12.5 months
	› Grand Parade average	3–4 months
	› Old Dublin Road average	1–2 months
How many adults are living in your accommodation?	› One adult household	10
	› Two adult households	3
	› Three adult households	4
How many households have children under 18 years?	› One parent family with children under the age of 18	3
	› Other households with children under the age of 18 years	4
Living situation before moving to current Meascán development	› Private rented accommodation	6
	› Staying with family	4
	› Living rough/Living in emergency accommodation or couch surfing	4
	› Owner-occupied property	1
	› Unknown	2
Supported tenants	› Received support from a key worker	5
	› General needs tenants	12
Support needs	› Mental health	1
	› Physical health	1

## Appendix 2

# Profile of tenants Interviewed

**Table A.2 Profile of tenants interviewed**

Development	Interviews with general needs tenants	Interviewees with supported tenants
<b>1</b> Abbey Court	4	2
<b>2</b> Grand Parade	1	3
<b>3</b> Old Dublin Road	1	
<b>4</b> Gerard Griffen Street	3	1
<b>5</b> Lower John Street	2	2
<b>6</b> Drummin Village	3	
<b>7</b> Connaught Street		2
	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>



# Appendix 3

## Cost benefit analysis framework

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### The model

The Meascán model of housing facilitates people moving out of homelessness to 'intentional social mix' apartment blocks shared with 'general needs tenants' from the social housing list. The 'general needs tenants' are aware that some of their neighbours have experienced homelessness and might require additional supports from Focus Ireland staff.

The objectives of Meascán are to create a 'social mix' of tenants; create positive social-behavioural effects (reducing anti-social behaviour among tenants); promote community stability, interaction and integration; reduce social exclusion and stigma.

Meascán housing is built by Focus Housing Association, leased from the Local Authority or purchased from the market. Where the housing is built it adds to the overall supply of housing.

### Base case (or alternative scenario)

The alternative to Meascán is people moving out of homelessness into existing communities that are unaware of their neighbour's homeless history or additional support needs.

Placing tenants with potential challenging behaviour into mainstream communities can create problems, both for the tenants and the existing community. Sometimes the problems reflect prejudice, but where tenants with complex support needs have behaviours which are problematic this can place an unreasonable burden on neighbours.

While problems arise only in a small minority of cases, they represent a significant reputational risk of creating socially mixed communities, which is a goal of government policy.

### Costs benefit analysis factors

A framework for analysing the costs and benefits of an 'intentional social mix' housing model such as Meascán compared to the status quo includes four main categories: Capital, Operational, Services and Social. Each category besides Social can be analysed quantitatively with figures available internally within an organisation and publicly available information such as health and criminal justice associated costs. Social cost benefit factors will require a qualitative approach.

**Table A.3. Costs benefit analysis factors**

<b>Capital</b>	
› Land	Cost of land for building/acquiring new housing
› Construction	Cost of building construction
› Materials/equipment	Cost of any additional materials or equipment in the provision of new housing
<b>Operational</b>	
› Staff salaries	Cost of salaries for staff working in property and support services functions
› Property maintenance	Cost of maintaining property including repairs and refurbishments
› Evictions/transfer/rehousing	Cost associated with evictions or transfers to other properties
<b>Services</b>	
› Health services use	Cost associated with tenants use of health services
› Criminal justice service use	Cost associated with interactions with the criminal justice system
› Re-entry to homelessness/homeless services use	Cost of re-entry into homelessness and use of homeless services including homeless accommodation
<b>Social</b>	
› Community integration and engagement	Benefits associated with community integration and engagement
› Quality of life	Benefits associated across a spectrum of quality of life indicators
› Employment outcomes	Benefits associated with employment

## Appendix 4

# Potential non-property outcome indicators for the project

Non-property outcome indicators for intentional social-mix housing can be varied and complex, depending on the specific objectives of the housing. The objectives of Meascán have been identified as follows:

- › To create a 'social mix' of tenants.
- › To create positive social-behavioural effects (reducing anti-social behaviour among tenants).
- › To promote community stability, interaction and integration.
- › To reduce social exclusion and stigma.

See table below for details of indicators that could be used to measure the achievement of these four objectives.

**Table A.4 Non-property outcome indicators**

Objective	Indicator
<b>A 'social mix' of tenants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Intentionality of the social mix (to what extent was what was planned in terms of social mix 1) achieved and 2) sustained.</li> <li>› To what extent does the development include tenants with a mix of income levels, educational backgrounds and educational backgrounds.</li> </ul>
<b>Positive social-behavioural effects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› No of incidences of anti-social behaviour under section 17(c) of the Residential Tenancies Act annually.</li> <li>› Improvements in tenants' well-being. There are many personal well-being assessment tools that have been developed to understand changes in personal and family well-being.</li> <li>› Improvements in tenants' physical and mental health.</li> <li>› Changes in tenants' standard of living, Standard of living refers to a household's level of wealth, comfort, material goods and available necessities. By providing affordable housing, household income that would have been spent on housing is now directed to other uses. Measures of standard of living can include both direct income data and asking families directly about whether they can afford certain necessities.</li> </ul>

Objective	Indicator
<b>Community stability, interaction and integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Average length of tenancies by different tenant types.</li> <li>› Tenancy turnover rates.</li> <li>› Tenant satisfaction surveys to measure sense of belonging/ community, perceptions of safety and general satisfaction with wider local services and amenities.</li> <li>› Tenant groups (where they exist) involve a range of different tenancy types.</li> </ul>
<b>Reduction in social exclusion and stigma</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Frequency and quality of interactions between different tenant types.</li> <li>› Improvements in tenants' access to quality education, employment opportunities, healthcare, public transport and other essential services.</li> </ul>

The outcome indicators used will vary depending on the context and the specific objectives of the Meascán model at any time. It is also important to note that monitoring and measuring these outcomes will require a robust methodology. Broader community impact indicators could also be used, including:

- › Enhanced vitality of the neighbourhood.
- › Local economy benefits (jobs, local spending etc.)

## Appendix 5

# Membership of the Expert Advisory Group

<b>Daniel Hoey (Chair)</b>	Focus Ireland Research Manager
<b>Clare Austick</b>	Clúid Housing
<b>Rob Lowth</b>	National Director Housing First National Office
<b>Dennis Manning</b>	Cork County Council
<b>David Niblock</b>	Focus Ireland Head of Housing Supports – South East, South West, North West
<b>Aideen O'Dwyer</b>	Cork City Council
<b>Adrian Quinn</b>	Focus Ireland Head of Housing Supports – Eastern Housing Services

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focusireland.ie

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

Head Office  
9-12 High Street  
Christchurch, Dublin 8  
D08 E1W0

T 01 881 5900  
LoCall 1850 204 205  
F 01 881 5950  
E [info@focusireland.ie](mailto:info@focusireland.ie)

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