THE HOUSING CHALLENGE
Covid threatens housing delivery

INVEST IN LEARNING
Ramping up education spend

SOCIAL HOUSING SPECIAL
Gearing up to deliver 50,000 social homes

ROLLING OUT THE VACCINE
HSE looks to social engagement

PEACE PLUS 2021 TO 2027
EU cross-border funding post-Brexit in Ireland

SOCIAL HOUSING TARGETS
The growing role of AHBs

HELP IS AT HAND
Unprecedented demand for frontline services

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Future is an attitude.
Some see new motor. We see a new era.
The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), established in 1982, is the national representative federation for the non-profit housing association (AHB) sector in Ireland. Housing associations have a long tradition in providing secure social rented homes at affordable rents and delivering and managing homes as far back as the 1890s.

The ICSH represents up to 270 affiliated member organisations throughout the country, including larger developing housing associations as well regional and local community housing associations providing specialist housing.

Collectively, the sector by the end of 2019, will have provided and manage almost 40,000 homes for families, older persons, homeless households, people with disabilities and single people. A number of housing associations are increasingly developing, with local authorities, new types of rental housing options for intermediate income households as part of meeting wider housing options.

Housing associations have worked in partnership with local authorities in joint ventures in the regeneration of estates to enhance the quality of life of local residents. Housing associations also provide housing related services that seek to prevent households becoming homeless including those encountering mortgage difficulties.

AHBs and the housing association sector now provide over one third of all new social housing delivery in line with targets in Rebuilding Ireland. AHBs are increasingly using new innovative forms of finance for enhancing delivery as well as working within a newly-established regulatory framework.

The ICSH provides a wide range of information, advice, guidance, education and training, research as well as group schemes to our members supporting them to develop and further thrive.

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IN THE NEWS
The latest news from Ireland’s public sector

HOUSE PRICE SURGE

House price inflation has surged to more than 6%, the fastest pace in nearly three years, according to the latest house price report from property website MyHome.ie.

House prices increases of 4.8% in Dublin and hikes of 7.2% elsewhere in the country was due to a number of factors, including Government supports protecting incomes and removing the risk of forced selling as well as a continuing deterioration in housing supply, the report said.

The findings dispelled earlier warnings that the Covid-19 pandemic could see ‘double-digit’ price reductions in the housing market. The authors said the data confounded earlier warnings that the housing market could see “double-digit” price slump in 2020 and October 2020 saw mortgage lending reach a new high.

The average asking price for new shomes nationally is €284,000, while the price in Dublin is €392,000 and elsewhere around the country it is €238,000.

The author of the report, Conall MacCoille, chief economist at stockbroker Davy, said that further house price increases were now likely in 2021.

“As we head into 2021, homebuyers have saved additional funds to purchase homes, with sentiment helped by the likely recovery in the economy as vaccines are dispersed. “Given that homebuilding will remain impaired, with banks seeking lending opportunities, too much cash is chasing too few homes – which can only push prices higher.”

MORE SOCIAL HOUSING NEEDED

The state should increase the supply of social and affordable housing to offset the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the long-term supply of new homes, according to a recent study by the Economic and Social Research Institute.

The authors say the crisis is likely to exacerbate supply issues already present in the property market and lead to a sharp increase in price when demand recovers.

Dr. Conor O’Toole, senior research officer at the ESRI and co-author of the study, said demand for housing is currently low due to the impact Covid-19 has had on household incomes and restrictions placed on viewing properties. The ESRI has called on government to intervene and increase the supply of social housing, which they say will offset reduced investment in housing in the short-term.

SKY HIGH MORTGAGE RATES

Mortgage rates in Ireland remain the second highest in the eurozone, according to recent statistics from the Central Bank.

The average interest rate on new mortgages was 2.79% in October. This is down 0.14% compared to the same month last year. But it is over twice the average across the euro area and second only to Greece.
BOI APPROVES €320M FOR HOMES

Despite numerous questions about the impact of Covid on the housing market, Bank of Ireland has approved more than €320m in funding for residential property development since the start of the pandemic.

This will deliver around 2,300 new homes over the coming years. The total funding approved has declined from the €365m in funding approved over the same period last year. Michael Murray, senior director, Bank of Ireland said the funding includes provision for around 675 social housing units.

Together with Dublin, other locations to benefit include Limerick, Mayo, Kilkenny and Donegal.

HOMELESS HEALTH SUPPORT

The Peter McVerry Trust has welcomed the additional €5.1m in funding for health supports for homeless services. The funding was announced by Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly during a visit to the Dublin Homeless Covid-19 response service, which is being operated by the Peter McVerry Trust.

The additional funding will help support people experiencing homelessness to access essential health services during the ongoing pandemic, according to Pat Doyle, CEO of Peter McVerry Trust.

“Any interest in funding for health services that enable people impacted by homelessness to get the support they need will result in better outcomes and help to reduce homelessness,” he said.

HOME OWNERSHIP RATES PLUNGE

Home ownership rates have not recovered since before the financial crisis while the number of households renting has soared by 56%, according to figures from the Central Statistics Office.

Between 2006 and 2016, the percentage of Irish households that owned their homes outright or with a mortgage fell from 74.7% to 67.6% while households classified as renting rose to 469,671 in 2016 from 301,306 in 2006.

HOME SWEET HOME

AIB has launched a €300m fund which will help build more than 2,000 social housing units. The funds will be given to Approved Housing Bodies and developers.

“Having fully allocated our initial €100m social housing funds, it is vital that AIB continues to support the sector in delivering new stock,” AIB chief Colin Hunt said.
CALL TO PROBE HOUSING TENDERS

An investigation into the rising cost of social housing tenders in Dublin needs to be carried out, according to Sinn Féin housing spokesman, Eoin O’Broin.

Following the significant hike in tender prices for social housing and in Part V acquisition costs in the capital, he said: “There has been growing concern with the dramatic increase in tender prices for social housing and the acquisition costs of Part V units in Dublin city.

“I intend to raise the issues of rising costs with the Minister. He should task the Housing Agency with investigating the issue and to produce a report with recommendations.”

ROOM TO DOWNSIZE

Almost seven in 10 people in Ireland are living in homes that are too large for their household needs according to new Eurostat figures.

The figures show that Ireland (69.6%) had the third-highest share of people living in under-occupied dwellings in the European Union in 2019. Only Malta (72.6%) and Cyprus (70.5%) had higher rates. Ireland also had the second lowest share (3.2%) of people living in overcrowded households.

In Spain (55.4%), Luxembourg (54.0%), Belgium (53.9%) and the Netherlands (53.4%) more than half of the population were living in dwellings deemed too large. In contrast, less than 15% of the population were living in dwellings deemed to be too large in Romania (7.7%), Latvia (9.6%), Greece (10.7%), Bulgaria (11.5%), Croatia (12.0%), Slovakia (14.0%) and Italy (14.2%).

Almost every third person (32.7%) in the EU lives in under-occupied dwellings.

The Republic’s high rate is believed to be linked to the large number of adults living in “empty nest” households, as well as the relatively larger size of traditional Irish families and associated need for more bedrooms compared with most other European countries.

The figures show that more than 92 per cent of older people in Ireland are living in homes considered too big for their needs. Meanwhile, 3.2 per cent of the Irish population were classified as living in overcrowded households in 2019, which increased from 2.7 per cent the previous year.

BETTER TO BUILD THAN BUY

Figures provided by the Department of Housing to Sinn Féin’s Eoin O’Broin in response to a recent parliamentary question reveals that building homes is cheaper for the Government than purchasing them.

The figures released to the Sinn Féin housing spokesman shows how much local authorities paid for houses purchased from developers in 2018 and 2019.

“The figures I received from the Department of Housing show that on average, if you look at local authority build, local authority turnkey acquisition and Part V purchases for every local authority, it is more cost effective for councils to build social housing rather than acquire units from private developers.”
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The number of planning permissions for houses and apartments in the third quarter of 2020 jumped 22% to 12,942 from the same quarter in 2019, according to the new CSO figures.

A large increase in the number of planning permissions granted in the latter half of 2020 would appear to indicate that house building is beginning to recover from the disruption caused by Covid-19.

However, some experts have warned that planning permissions may not be a reliable guide to the prospects of the troubled house building market and both the ESRI and the Central Bank have both warned of the long-term damage which the Covid-19 crisis is likely to inflict on housing supply.

In addition, the figures show that one-off housing accounted for a significant share of the planning permits granted in the September quarter.

The figures show that the permissions in the quarter involved more apartments than houses — 7,214 were apartments and 5,728 were houses — received planning approval.

That means, the CSO said, that there was a 27.5% increase in the number of apartment permissions from the 2019 quarter, and a rise of just over 16% in the number of houses getting planning permission.

The Housing Minister Darragh O’Brien wants to scrap building height restrictions in certain designated areas. The Fianna Fail TD agrees with his predecessor Eoghan Murphy who also opposed “arbitrary limits”.

The maximum height for buildings in Dublin city is 60m but exceptions are allowed in special areas. However, Minister O’Brien also wants to build to greater heights outside the capital.

“Even in the older cities in Limerick and Cork and Dublin, no one is living above the shops,” Minister O’Brien said.

“It’s looking at the existing buildings that we have, and why aren’t people living right in the corridor of the city.”
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The Irish construction industry experienced its worst quarterly decline on record between April and June with output declining by a massive 45%, according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

This was nearly four times the euro area average of 12% and worse than the height of the 2008 property crash. The three-month period coincided with the first lockdown which forced the closure of nearly all outdoor building sites.

The CSO said the largest quarterly decline prior to this was a decrease of 13.9% in the fourth quarter of 2008.

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris TD, has confirmed four retrofitting centres of excellence are to open within the next three months. The centres of excellence will open in Limerick and Clare ETB, Mayo Sligo and Leitrim ETB, Cork ETB, and Laois and Offaly ETB.

“Retrofitting involves making homes more energy efficient and helping you to save money on your electricity bills,” Minister Harris said.

“The government has set ambitious targets to retrofit 300,000 homes by 2030 but we need to ensure we have the workers to deliver it. “We will establish four centres of excellence – four centres to train 2,000 people in retrofit skills, including Near Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) skills.

“So, if you are a worker in the construction area and you want to upskill in the area of green skills, then this could be for you.”

Retrofitting centres of excellence provide the very highest standards of training and qualifications to people attending them. This is a very important area of the economy and there are huge employment opportunities within it.

“In Laois & Offaly ETB, we will have a particular focus for Bord Na Mona employees, including a six-day Skills To Advance programme that offers the trainee an opportunity to gain a Level 5 certificate in Thermal Insulation Installation and this will be expanded to include Ventilation and Air Tightness.

“We have a significant body of work to do to ensure Ireland is climate ready and we need workers to have the right skills to deliver on these huge challenges, Minister Harris added.

“For people seeking work, or people in employment, learning these climate skills will ensure you are ready for the future and are in the best place to find work into the future.”

SOFTWORKS WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

Founded in Ireland in 1990 with a small team and big ideas, Softworks aim was to create the most sophisticated, innovative and easy to use workforce management software solutions in the world! Always a little ambitious they began by developing time & attendance solutions and naturally expanded into other areas including rostering & shift management, flexible & remote working, HR, employee self-service and absence management.

In the last 30 years they have pushed through two recessions and a global pandemic. According to Softworks CEO, Andrew Ferguson, this has only made the company more resilient and determined to come up with new ideas and solutions, to assist the growing number of organisations that they work with.

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In 2020 they extended their market leading eRostering tool to include automated rostering/scheduling, self-rostering and a whole host of additional benefits. For more see softworks.com
Peter McVerry Trust is a national homeless and housing charity. The charity works in partnership with the Department of Housing, Planning and Heritage, Local Authorities and State Agencies to bring about effective responses to the needs of people impacted by homelessness. Core to our work and ethos is the delivery of the Housing First model which is supported and complemented by our strong pipeline of social housing delivery.

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**CHALLENGE 1 – TACKLING THE SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Housing Supply & Demand: Following a decade of undersupply and stagnation within the housing construction market, 2016 saw increased recognition of the emerging housing crisis amongst the media and body politic within Ireland. While recent figures do show a significant increase in the volume of housing stock being delivered to the market, the volume of supply still falls significantly below demand nationwide, at around 52%. To offset this shortfall in 2019 would require supply to increase 2.8x.

Also of concern is the nature or make-up of the 18,000 new housing units supplied which disproportionately fall outside of the mortgage affordability range for a significant portion of the Irish population. New Housing delivery in the greater Dublin area (GDA) is largely focused on servicing higher income families and/or property investors.

**HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

Ireland’s current average gross household income stands at €37,200. With the Government “help-to-Buy” Scheme and assuming a 90% LTV Mortgage, our analysis indicates that such households would have only been able to access less than 5% of the new housing stock delivered to the open market last year within the Greater Dublin Area (Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare, Meath).

Within the Greater Dublin Area, the increased cost of construction and land acquisition costs are proving a challenge for those who aim to deliver housing for lower income families. With mortgage borrowing capped by the Central Bank at 3.5x income for households nationwide, lower income households in GDA are being locked out of the market too soon in the cycle. This is cooling the supply of housing aimed at the lower-end of the market, forcing lower-income families into a rental trap, paying unsustainable rents, without security of tenure.

**CHALLENGE 2 – ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The Global Financial Crisis had also resulted in sizeable investment losses for investors and increased correlation in performance across the traditional asset classes. This prompted investors to seek out new asset classes with the potential to deliver good returns with lower correlations and wider portfolio diversification benefits. There was a meeting of needs of both the borrowers and a new type of investor - loan investors. The solution further evolved with the arrival of Fintech Peer to Peer digital platforms providing the structure for facilitating the relationship between the two and consequently helping to fill the market gap left by traditional banks. These developments were broadly welcomed by Governments and Regulators as they continued to support the economic and financial systems at a time when banks were at their weakest and scrambling to recover their financial sustainability.

**ADVANTAGES OF THE NEW MODEL**

The evolution of the new finance platform model proved to be extremely efficient at matching (NBL) non-bank lenders (i.e. loan investors) and borrowers for their mutual benefit. The advantages for borrowers typically include loan finance availability; flexibility; speed; competitive rates and quite often a more personal relationship with their provider. Loan investors can access an asset class previously only open to institutional investors; with attractive risk-adjusted rates of return; low volatility; and low correlation to other asset classes. Where a loan is also secured by a first legal charge over property and the borrower provides a meaningful level of their own equity – this brings an additional level of comfort in both the security, collateral and the buffer offered by the borrower’s own equity contribution.

Initiative Ireland has established itself as a trusted funding partner to experienced developers across Ireland focused on delivering the much-needed energy efficient social and affordable homes. Equally so Initiative Ireland is actively engaging with Irish (AHBs) Approved Housing Bodies with the objective of offering suitable funding solution.

Should you wish to get in contact with Initiative Ireland to discuss either an investment loan opportunity or as a potential borrower please feel free to contact Declan O’Brien, at declan@initiativeireland.ie or on 01-685 9259
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Covid Disrupts Housing Plans

Home planning permits surge but industry experts warn that planning permissions may not be a realistic indicator of prospects for a challenging home building market.

The number of planning permissions granted for new houses and apartments in the third quarter of 2020 increased by 12,942, a 22% increase on the same quarter in 2019, according to figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO figures).

The figures show that the permissions in the quarter involved more apartments than houses — 7,214 were apartments and 5,728 were houses. That means, the CSO said, that there was a 27.5% increase in the number of apartment permissions from the 2019 quarter, and a rise of just over 16% in the number of houses getting planning permission.

While a surge in the volume of planning permissions granted may indicate an impending recovery in new home construction, industry analysts continue to sound the alarm about the likely long-term damage which the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to inflict on new housing delivery.

Economists from both the ESRI and the Central Bank, among others, have warned that the Covid-19 lockdowns will set back house building here for many years to come. The majority of analysts agree that only around 20,000 new homes will be completed this year, significantly below the 35,000 units most agree are required to be built each year for to meet housing demand.

While the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Irish economy and the construction industry will take time to emerge, Stephen Ashe, Director at Linesight says it is already clear that it has been substantial and wide-reaching. Construction activity declined by a record 45% between April and June 2020.

Ashe points out that the Government is now operating the national finances with a deficit of €18.5 billion and our economy is expected to shrink by 8.5%. This is a direct result of the ongoing cost of the pandemic and the government stimulus packages.

“Additional public investment has been provided in direct response to COVID-19, as well as through the July Stimulus Plan, and public expenditure is planned to increase by 12% in 2021. It is also encouraging to see the Government sticking broadly to the Project 2040 ambitions,” he says.

“As outlined in the Build 2020 report prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, total investment in building and construction grew by an estimated 11% in 2019 to €27 billion. However, it could decrease by up to 35% in 2020 due to a fall in public and private sector investment, to reach in the region of €17.9 billion.”

“This is a substantial impact on the construction industry, and while we are seeing cautious optimism in terms of existing projects proceeding and new pipeline, a recovery is largely dependent on the duration of the pandemic. As is to be expected, the path to recovery will not be straightforward, and is likely to be interrupted by recurrences and additional waves of the virus.

“With construction turnover at €18 billion, it represents 5.4% of total projected GDP for 2020 of €331 billion. This is well below the EU average of 9%, reported by the European Commission. “

A number of other Government stimulus plans are also welcome, according to Ashe, including the enhanced levels of support for the Help to Buy incentive, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (which will now run to the end of March 2021) and the temporary reduction in the standard rate of VAT from 23% to 21%.

The impact of COVID-19 on the commercial sector remains to be seen, but at a minimum, Ashe says that clients are reassessing their space requirements and are reviewing options around futureproofing designs. This will allow the occupiers of office space to respond quickly to changes in business practice, such as headcount growth and contraction, new ways of working, social distancing and flexible working.

Meanwhile The Goodbody Analytics BER Housebuilding Tracker indicates a 33% year-on-year reduction in house completions in Q2 2020, representing the largest annual decline in house building in eight years. It is noted, however, that figures are beginning to rebound, and the expectation is that the year-on-year reduction will stand at approximately 20% by year end (equating to circa. 16,500 units).

The figures are still less than half of what is required to tackle the housing crisis, with the Central Bank estimating that 34,000 new homes must be built every year for the next decade to meet demand.
We would encourage local people to use www.vacanthomes.ie. Bringing vacant homes back into use increases the housing supply and provides homes to people with a housing need. Apart from the supply of housing, utilising existing vacant homes helps rejuvenate areas that are in decline and contributes to the creation of more sustainable communities.
Minister for Housing Darragh O’Brien said that the Covid-19 pandemic has been a “serious impediment” to the building of new social housing in the State as figures showed that just 725 were built in the first six months of the year.

The Social Housing Construction Status Report revealed there were 1,467 built, acquired, or leased homes delivered up to the end of June 2020. Of the 1,467, 725 were new builds while Local authorities provided a further 355 and Voluntary housing organisations delivered 387 further homes.

The dramatic slump in social housing output is raising concern over the state’s ability to meet long-term targets, particularly if Covid-19 continues to significantly dispute the industry. The government set a target of building 7,736 social homes in 2020 and just 10% of that figure has been achieved in the first half of the year. It is now the third year in a row in which the Government has missed its own target for building new social homes.

Last year, over 10,000 social homes were delivered.

While acknowledging the scale of the current crisis, Housing Minister, Darragh O’Brien, has insisted that his department remains committed to delivering 50,000 public during the government’s term in office.

“These figures show that delivery of social housing has been very much impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19 in late Q1, and the significant restrictions during Q2,” he said.

“Looking ahead, it is extremely important that we mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on overall delivery to the greatest extent possible. Our goal is to provide housing support to some 27,500 households this year and I am committed to delivering on that.”

Insisting that the overall under-delivery on new build was unavoidable as a result the pandemic, he said the priority now is to get back on schedule. “The focus now rightly turns to getting new builds back on track and new activity continuing to move at pace,” he said.

In relation to the wider housing market, recent research commissioned by the minister from the ESRI indicates that we need to be delivering 33,000 homes per year. Other experts suggest that this does not go far enough and a new study by industry body, Irish Institutional Property suggests that 47,000 houses need to be built each year for the next five year to meet market demand.

IIP claim that 30,000 new homes per annum is merely the minimum requirement in order to meet population changes alone, with net migration and changes in household size also likely to be key factors driving demand. The figure of 47,000 suggested in the report is almost twice that laid down in the government’s Project Ireland 2040 plan, which set a target of 25,000 per year.
Since 1973 Co-operative Housing Ireland and its members have built 6,000 homes through partnership with county and city councils, government departments, builders, and developers.

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Building homes is a partnership

“This is my forever home, it’s the best thing that could ever happen. It’s your own space, it’s your own freedom, and I think everybody should have that freedom.”

Sandra, Co-op Member

“The delivery and construction of a house is only a snapshot in time. There is a whole life after the houses are completed, and it’s so important to know the houses will be well-managed and people will enjoy living in them.”

Housing developer

Visit: www.cooperativehousing.ie
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“It highlights the scale of the challenges,” Minister O’Brien said. “We need to build up capacity and we need to be realistic about how much we can build in a given year.”

“We’ll move on to a new housing plan in relation to the delivery of public homes in 2021. 50,000 new homes is our target, with the vast majority of those being built. I have changed the focus from ‘acquisition’ to ‘build’ in relation to public housing.”

The €3.1 billion housing budget was broadly welcomed by industry representatives and Minister O’Brien’s says it is a sign of the Government’s intent to address the housing challenges.

The government’s affordable housing plan will see the State take up to 30% equity in a home and Minister O’Brien has reaffirmed that no arbitrary salary cap will be applied to the long-awaited scheme. Under the scheme the state takes an equity loan share of up to 30% in your home while the owner takes out a mortgage with a bank on the remainder as usual.

Speaking shortly after the launch of the scheme, Minister O’Brien said: “We are looking at a shared equity type arrangement. There will be no arbitrary salary caps, that’s really important,” he said. If you are a couple working in two decent jobs, they’re going to be earning over €75,000. They are left renting, paying an exorbitant rent, and they can’t save enough to buy.”

“In some instances, people won’t want the full 30 per cent State equity, maybe the affordability gap is smaller so they might go for 10 per cent or 15 per cent equity.”

The scheme will be open to all new build homes subject to price caps and is targeted at first time buyers with some exemptions for separated individuals. The government believes the new support will save potential owners up to €11,000 per year in rent and in the long term save the state rental support payments.

The minister also referenced a similar scheme in Britain which he said increased supply by 50 per cent without resulting in any house price inflation. “This one will not either,” he said.

While the final details of the scheme are being negotiated with stakeholders and will be subject to state aid approval from the EU Commission, the plan is set to be approved by Cabinet and will come before the Dáil in early 2021. The launch of the scheme is due to take place in summer 2021.

Minister O’Brien says the scheme will boost housing supply as it helps to guarantee sales by bridging the gap between the Central Bank rules and the actual cost of a home for ordinary income families.

€75 million will be assigned to the affordable housing scheme which is being introduced in conjunction with a new €35 million Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) scheme. which will deliver 400 homes and see tenants paying 25% to 30% below market rents.

The Programme for Government, Housing for All, commits the Government to the development of a new cost rental housing sector in Ireland, in which the rents charged will be set to cover the costs of delivering, managing, and maintaining the homes.

The CREL scheme will accelerate the implementation of this new cost rental sector by AHBs, prior to the delivery of further homes by the Land Development Agency and directly by Local Authorities.

The scheme will see long-term loans on favourable terms made available to AHBs to cover up to 30% of the development or acquisition cost of new cost rental homes. This state assistance in securing financing will mean that AHB landlords can set lower cost-covering rents for cost rental tenants.

It is expected that the remaining development or acquisition costs for the homes will be met by long-term commercial loans from the Housing Finance Agency, which has confirmed it will make a corresponding €100 million available next year.

“Approved Housing Bodies have consistently demonstrated their capacity and expertise in developing and managing homes for the social housing sector,” Minister O’Brien said. “This new scheme provides for an expanded role for the AHB sector, enabling it to support moderate-income households in need of quality, affordable homes.”

As the country possibly faces into further restrictions in the week and months ahead, Minister O’Brien said he is determined to keep construction sites open and avoid any further heavy disruption to housing output. “Construction will remain an essential service. I do not envisage a shut down in the construction sector,” he said.
TACKLING THE “AFFORDABILITY CRISIS”

Entrepreneurship is about approaching things differently and creating a success story. In co-founding Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance CLG in September 2014, entrepreneur Hugh Brennan promised himself that he’d make a difference in terms of addressing the dire shortage of affordable housing available in Ireland.

Brennan has kept his promise to make a difference, with thousands of people across Ireland benefiting from the initiative he took six years ago to deliver affordable and fully integrated housing. Not one noted for sitting back and waiting for things to happen, Brennan continues to drive his brainchild forward.

Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance CLG is a housing co-operative with Approved Housing Body (AHB) status. A not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, it is governed by a voluntary board of directors.

The agency’s principal aims are to develop and support fully-integrated communities, to deliver well-designed, top-quality, energy efficient homes at an affordable price and to ensure its co-operative model for affordable housing can be replicated and scaled across the country.

Ó Cualann has grown and developed at an impressive rate. Having hit the ground running, it continues to use its unique modus operandi to forge a better future for more and more people on the nation’s housing list. “When we set up the organisation in 2014, we took a different approach having concluded that the housing crisis was actually an affordability crisis,” Brennan, Ó Cualann’s Chief Executive Officer, explains.

“Our research showed us that around 40% of the population were earning income above the threshold to qualify for social housing and yet they were not in a position to afford to purchase accommodation on the private market,” he adds.

“Effectively we discovered that some 80,000 to 90,000 people were earning too much to qualify for social housing and not enough to be able to purchase a home on the market. They were left out in the cold. They weren’t being looked after at all.”

Involved in construction all his life – including stints constructing houses in charitable projects in years past in Haiti and South Africa - the Bolton Street, Dublin engineering graduate remains the public face of Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance plus the now renowned Ó Cualann ‘model’. It’s a ‘model’ that is favoured greatly in Sweden and has been lauded by a slew of vested interests, including successive Irish government housing ministers.

Through their model, Ó Cualann delivers well-designed, top-quality, energy efficient homes at an affordable price for first time buyers hoping to get on the property ladder. The people at Ó Cualann believe their model can be replicated and scaled across the country and are committed to working with local authorities and like-minded groups to change the way housing is delivered in Ireland.
Working together with local authorities and availing of the land and other supports that have been made available to it, Ó Cualann has experience and a proven track record in providing affordable homes to people. “Our organisation is one of the few who are engaged in the provision of affordable housing, allowing for fully integrated communities to blossom and prosper and where tenant and owner members live side by side, sharing common amenities.” Brennan tells us.

“The vast majority of housing bodies are engaged in managing social housing on behalf of local authorities whereas we first build and then sell affordable housing to people who meet certain eligibility criteria which are agreed with local authorities from whom we source the land.”

The American writer Mark Twain – author of Huckleberry Finn – famously once told his audience to “Buy land; they aren’t making it anymore”. And for Hugh Brennan, that’s a truism that is at the heart of the principal challenge his organisation faces in attempting to make an even more significant indentation on the list of those waiting to access quality, energy efficient, affordable homes via the Ó Cualann model.

“Our model worked from day one and continues to work but the big problem is access to the land,” Brennan says. “We could build forever if we had access to more land but getting local authorities to release land is pretty difficult.

“In fairness to Dublin City Council, they have supported us, and they provided land in Poppintree in Ballymun for us in December 2015 for our inaugural project where 49 houses were completed and handed over to residents.

“As I say, while Dublin City Council have supported other local authorities around the country are now beginning to come on board too which is very positive.”

But what of the aforementioned “certain eligibility criteria”? “There has to be an eligibility criterion,” Brennan declares. “Seventy per cent of the people have to be from the local area. That’s part of the agreement with the local authority and there are income limits which dictates that a single applicant or applicants could not earn more than €59,000 in the previous tax year as an individual or €79,000 as a couple to apply for one of our affordable houses.

“As long as people meet the eligibility criteria, and they apply to us for a house, then it’s a first come first served basis.

“If someone meets the eligibility criteria then the process of financing the purchase kicks in, a process which ends with the applicant buying the house with the help of a mortgage received either from a bank or from Rebuilding Ireland.

“As regards, construction and finance, we organise that through the banks or through our interactions with private investors and private companies. For instance, a charitable trust might come to us to loan us the money to build the houses because their risk is so low because we have such a demand and the units are pre sold, so they get their money back.

“It’s important to say too that homeowners who sell within 10 years will have to pay a “clawback” fee to us which is related to the discount on the purchase price.”

Interestingly, the local authorities take a hands-off role with regard to the allocation of Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance inspired houses. Instead, Brennan and co. engage an independent assessor who assesses whether the applicant(s) meet the eligibility criteria or not.

The independent assessor runs the rule over the applicant(s) income limits and investigates whether the applicant(s) will qualify for a mortgage.

Although great strides have been made in eating into the numbers seeking to avail of affordable housing, Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance CLG currently has 2000 people on its waiting list in Dublin alone. No wonder that its CEO was moved to declare recently that the lack of affordable homes in the capital was at “epidemic level.”

Certainly, while Brennan penchant for thinking outside the box has delivered a winning formula, the fact remains that the housing crisis continues to represent one of the most challenging and intractable problems facing Irish policy makers and remains a conspicuous carbuncle on the country’s landscape. Pointedly, Brennan acknowledges that while Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance CLG has been a success story in striving to help alleviate the housing crisis in Ireland, the organisation doesn’t possess a silver bullet.

“Housing bodies like ourselves can play an important role in helping to alleviate the housing crisis, but we can’t do it on our own,” Brennan points out. However,
he has been greatly heartened by a commitment by Permanent TSB to financially support Ó Cualann’s plans to develop 1,800 houses across the country over the next three years.

“TSB are supporting us, and we are very grateful to them. We have a community partnership; they’re supporting us to build our internal capacity so that we can scale the operation. They’re going to provide a grant of 50,000 euros per quarter for the next seven quarters which is terrific.”

With such support, Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance continues to go from strength to strength. Indeed, in 2021, there is the distinct possibility that Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance will be engaged in five different developments: two in Dublin, one in Cork, Waterford and Kilkenny.

“We put a big emphasis on community. We are building communities and not just houses, and we will have no difficulty in achieving greater scale because we have a model that works. We are optimistic about the coming year and the projects we have planned, and we have a good relationship with the new land development agency. They love what we are doing, and we look forward to working with them as well as the various local authorities, religious orders and other housing groups in 2021 and beyond.”

Doubtless a lot of people newly housed by Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance can feel the love!
Fair Play To You is a great opportunity to win big cash prizes while at the same time helping 3 of Ireland’s most trusted and respected charities. CRC, Rehab and the Mater University Hospital benefit every time you play. Players can win cash prizes up to €25,000 and playing is really easy.

For just €9 each month, you get 9 chances to win or play for just €1 per Line per draw. Enter Fair Play To You and you will be allocated a unique set of 3 lucky numbers, should those numbers be drawn as the Bonus numbers in the Lotto, Lotto Plus 1 and Lotto Plus 2 draws on RTE television you win! There are also Wild Card prizes to be won every month.

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In 2019, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation launched the Government’s Future Jobs Ireland Strategy based on embracing innovation and technological change, improving productivity, enhancing skills and transitioning to a low carbon economy. Building Innovation is strongly aligned with that strategy.

The Construction Sector Group Building Innovation report follows the earlier publication of an economic analysis of productivity in the Irish construction sector and identifies a number of high impact actions to be undertaken to increase innovation and output in the sector in order to deliver the economic and social infrastructure this country needs.

The report highlights three potential solutions to address the volatility which has prevailed in the construction sector over the past 20 years as the construction sector and aims to help improve profits, wages and output for the industry, and thereby provide value for money in the delivery of Project Ireland 2040.

The solutions identified include the need for the industry, particularly SMEs and small firms, to increase investment in innovation and technology to spur the next wave of growth based on a foundation of digital adoption, by both clients and contractors.

In addition, it pointed to the importance of progressing regulatory reform of public procurement, environmental, labour and other areas to streamline and assist in achieving competitiveness and sustainability.

The need to increase certainty and visibility of the pipeline of projects to provide the industry with the confidence to invest and individuals with the opportunity to choose a career in the built environment was also highlighted.

“In spite of Covid-19, the extensive requirements for housing and infrastructure identified in Project Ireland 2040 remain substantially unchanged,” Minister Donohoe said. “The Government remains committed to investing public capital expenditure into the development of new social, economic and climate infrastructure.

“More than ever, Ireland needs a competitive, dynamic, and sustainable construction sector that can deliver high-quality physical infrastructure for all our citizens.

“The shutdown of sites due to the necessarily imposed public health restrictions posed a great challenge to all sectors of our economy. I am confident that the implementation of the actions outlined in this report, alongside the continued, open dialogue between Government and industry stakeholders through the Construction Sector Group (CSG) will positively affect the sector’s ability to deliver and overcome challenges around capacity following the recent restart.”

The actions identified in this report will inform the ongoing work programme for the CSG, which was established in 2018 following the launch of Project Ireland 2040 and acts as a forum for dialogue between Government and stakeholders in the industry. The CSG meets every quarter, providing an opportunity to monitor the implementation of these actions and the response to Covid-19 over the coming period.

Tom Parlon, Director General of the Construction Industry Federation and a member of the Construction Sector Group also welcomed the report. “The Building Innovation framework charts a way for the construction industry and the State to collaborate efficiently in building a truly innovative and dynamic industry over the next decade,” he said.

“The benefits of doing so will be felt by every citizen in Ireland and the coming generations. For example, the recently published Programme for Government is heavily dependent on having a dynamic construction industry operating at optimum levels. In addition, the construction industry will be front and centre in driving economic recovery in the near term, the housing required to solve the ongoing crisis, and the infrastructure required to reshape Ireland up to 2040.

“This requires coordination, coherence and commitment across the industry and the multiple Government agencies involved in the delivery of construction output in Ireland.

“We look forward to working with our partners to modernise our industry and in doing so, rebuild our economy and reshape our society to the maximum positive impact on every citizen’s wellbeing.”
‘Give and you shall receive’. The long familiar exhortation to show generosity towards the less fortunate dates back to biblical times and reminds us of the personal reward and sense of wellbeing that derives from supporting people in need.

But for supporters and contributors to The Care Trust, an Irish registered charity located in Blackrock, County Dublin, the call takes on an altogether more literal meaning. As well as enjoying the inevitable feel-good factor which comes with supporting a highly deserving cause, contributors to The Care Trust are also entered into three monthly draws - each of which feature highly desirable prizes including a brand new Renault Clio.

“We’re a dedicated fundraising entity and our model is quite unique in the sense that we specialise in repeat gifting,” explains CEO Senan Mullins. “Since our inception, we have operated our fundraising on the back of lottery activity, and we’ve been running lotteries for longer than the National Lottery itself has been in existence. The model is simple. We ask people for their support and in return they are entered into our lottery draws which are an incentive to continue to support us and also a good way for us to thank our supporters.

“Our key focus is on maintaining a sustainable fundraising model. We target the general public and don’t get involved in hosting large annual events. Essentially, it is a door-to-door service, our fundraisers call to people’s homes, explain who we are and what we do and ask people to support us. In terms of the amount it is €18 a month which works out at 60 cents a day which we collect by direct debit. There’s no cash handling and it is completely secure. The top prize in each of our three draws every month is a Renault Clio car and we also have some consolation cash prizes.”

Formally incorporated in 1974, The Care Trust is a not-for-profit organisation with registered charitable status. It has been raising critical funds in support of its chief beneficiaries; the CRC, Rehab and the Mater University Hospital, for over 50 years. The funding provides vital support for the three recipients, each of which provide vital services and support for children and adults with disabilities as well as people who are disadvantaged and require medical care.

While each of the beneficiaries receive state funding and fundraise directly themselves, Mullins points out that the funds raised by The Care Trust are a critical source of extra funding and are allocated to different projects on a ‘needs’ basis.

“The funds provided by The Care Trust are hugely important and the contributions we receive support thousands of people and their families across Ireland who avail of services in health and social care, rehabilitation and employment in addition to children and adults with disabilities. Our work ensures that many thousands of people in need receive the help they need and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and enjoy the same quality of life as everyone else.”

CRC provides wide ranging services and supports completely free of charge to around 5,000 children and adults.
with disabilities each year while some 20,000 people avail of the services of Rehab, according to Mullins. The three critical pillars of support provided by Rehab centre around healthcare services, vocational training, and employment support for people with disabilities.

“The Mater Hospital - and I should clarify that I’m talking about the Mater University Hospital rather than the Mater Private - is an extensive organisation with about 150 centres located around the country,” he explains. “It was founded in 1861 and it carries out a great deal of research and has a strong reputation as a teaching hospital. Some people regard the Mater as being a Dublin hospital but it is much more than that: It is a national centre for heart surgery, it’s a national centre for heart and lung transplantation, it has a national spinal injuries unit and a national unit for pulmonary hypertension, and scoliosis.

It is also the national isolation centre, so it has a broad national reach. I think most of us know somebody who has benefitted from attending the Mater Hospital. ”

The Care Trust’s longevity speaks to its commitment and resilience, but the nature of its door-to-door fundraising model has made it particularly vulnerable to the impact of Covid-19. Traditionally, the organisation has attracted a disproportionate volume of support from an older demographic but the disruption wrought by the pandemic has resulted in a re-evaluation of its fundraising methods and a concerted effort to attract a broader cohort of support.

“Our ability to fundraise door-to-door has been dramatically affected because of lockdowns but unfortunately the needs of CRC, Rehab and the Mater Hospital, remain the same. So we wanted to see if we could reach out to the younger demographic, the 25 to 40-year olds who are effectively online natives. We developed a prime new product which we’ve called ‘Fair Play To You’ and it’s a way of engaging a new support base who interact to a huge extent online.”

The new Care Trust lottery product Fair Play To You was launched by actress Déirdre O’Kane last July and has been widely promoted on Ian Dempsey’s morning radio program. Each Contributor who logs onto fairplaytoyou.ie is issued with a unique random selection of 3 numbers, each from the range 01-47. In the National Lottery Lotto draws on each draw date (Wednesdays and Saturdays) one Bonus number is selected in each of 3 draws: Lotto, Lotto Plus 1 and Lotto Plus 2. Any Contributor who has entered a Line containing 3 winning Bonus numbers in the correct order will be entered into a draw for a Wild Card prize or of €100 in the Fair Play To You Series. A Fair Play To You Series consists of all the draws during a given calendar month.

“Covid has really knocked us over in terms of our fundraising capability and we had to explore other avenues. We developed this new fundraising initiative called Fair Play To You which allows people to have a bit of fun while also supporting The Care Trust,” says Mullins. “We are continuing to raise awareness of the initiative and seeking to attract a greater degree of support from younger people.

“The Mater Hospital – 150 years caring for the nation commonly referred to as the Mater Hospital, holds a unique place in the delivery of healthcare not only to the community of North Dublin but also to the rest of the country with its tertiary services. The hospital has two national specialities, Cardio-Thoracic surgery (including transplantation) and Spinal Injuries. Other areas of expertise include breast cancer screening and oncology.

In all my time with The Care Trust I never cease to be amazed at the generosity of people and particularly the many people who contribute even though they can’t afford much. Of course, we wouldn’t want anybody overspending or contributing beyond their financial means and we do have limits on excess spending.”

Many charities claim to account for every cent received but in the case of The Care Trust it is demonstrably verifiable given that a ticket is issued for each contribution made. The Care Trust is governed by an independent board of directors who work on an entirely voluntary basis. External audits are carried out every two years and internal audits are also routine. The Care Trust has won numerous Governance awards for its published accounts on multiple occasions and has been shortlisted again in the 2020 good governance awards.

“We have a very supportive board, and they are very conscious of their fiduciary duties and our operations,” says Mullins. “They don’t get a cent of remuneration or expenses, not one cent, all of their work is done completely voluntarily. We have published all of our annual reports dating way back on our website as well as very detailed financial statements and we believe strongly in openness and transparency and fulfilling our duty to the public.”

So, now you have the story of The Care Trust - time to log onto: www.fairplaytoyou.ie

THE CARE TRUST

For over fifty years The Care Trust has been providing vital additional funds to three main beneficiaries:

The Central Remedial Clinic – is a national organisation for the care, treatment and development of children and adults with physical and multiple disabilities. Most clients attending the CRC have a congenital physical disability such as Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Spina Bifida or Erb’s Palsy.

The Mater University Hospital – 150 years caring for the nation commonly referred to as the Mater Hospital, holds a unique place in the delivery of healthcare not only to the community of North Dublin but also to the rest of the country with its tertiary services. The hospital has two national specialities, Cardio-Thoracic surgery (including transplantation) and Spinal Injuries. Other areas of expertise include breast cancer screening and oncology.
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THE RISE OF HAP

The number of households using the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) has increased year-on-year since it was launched in 2014 and the latest CSO figures show that 57,630 households availed of the payment in 2019.

HAP is a social housing support provided by all local authorities who make a monthly payment to a landlord on behalf of the HAP tenant, subject to rent limits and in return the tenant pays a contribution towards the rent to the local authority. The change to tenants is calculated according to household income.

Research by the Central Statistics Office show the number of new HAP tenancies peaked at 16,930 in 2017 and slowed to 14,540 in 2019. In 2018, 53.9% of HAP households had some PAYE employment, a percentage which increased to 62% in the four Dublin local authorities.

The median household annual income nationally was €13,816 while 20% of households earned less than €5,000 a year. The highest median income was in Meath (€18,606) and the lowest was in Mayo (€7,842).

In 2019, just over one in five (20.5%) of HAP tenants worked in the wholesale and retail sector compared to an average 13.4% across the national workforce. A further 16.6% worked in accommodation and food compared to a national average of 7.9% and the percentage working in Human Health and Social Work rose from 11.4% to 15.2%.

The earned incomes of HAP tenants rises by an average 18% in the two years after securing a tenancy. While 44% of those on HAP spent a year or less on a Local Authority waiting list, a significant number (21.4%) spent five years or more waiting to be allocated a home.

The biggest family groups entering HAP in 2019 were single parents with one child and single people, with both groups each representing just under 23% of the total. Referrals from homeless services rose from 3.1% of applicants in 2014 to 21.1% in 2019.

The county with the highest percentage of registered rental properties under HAP tenancies was Louth at 41.8% while 85% of HAP landlords nationally had just one property, according to the CSO report.

Meanwhile, the Simon Community has published an updated version of its “Locked Out of the Market” report which has found that the supply of affordable housing has plunged to critically low levels across the country.

The study found that just 738 out of 2,543 properties available to rent in 16 areas over a three-day period were affordable for those who on HAP payments and that an overwhelming 94% of properties in the HAP category were located in Dublin.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and related restrictions initially brought about substantially increased supply in the private rental market across the country. However, the Locked Out of the Market study which took place over the third quarter of 2020 indicates that supply has started to decrease once more, as the initial influx of short-term lets onto the private rental market have moved through the market.

The study shows that supply has contracted since the June 2020 Locked Out study, with supply of properties within Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) limits at chronically low levels across the country. This is particularly the case outside of Dublin and for households consisting of singles and couples within Dublin. In fact, of the 16 study areas, eight did not have a single property within either standard or discretionary HAP limits.

In all, there was an average of 2,543 properties available to rent at any price across the 16 study areas over the three-day period (21st to 23rd September). This represents a 14% decrease from the 2,988 properties available during the June study.

81.7% (2,078) of all properties available to rent at any price were found in Dublin City (Dublin City Centre, Dublin City North and Dublin City South), with a particularly high concentration in Dublin City South (1,041).

There were 738 properties available under a standard or discretionary HAP limit in at least one of the four household categories, representing 29% of the total properties available. This is a decrease of 12% on the 837 properties available in the June study.

An overwhelming 694 (94%) of those 738 properties that fit into a HAP household category were located in Dublin, indicating the chronic lack of supply within affordable limits outside of Dublin.

There were just 56 instances of those properties being available to rent within the standard HAP rates in one of the four categories during the three-day period. The same property may fit into two categories, and that is counted as two instances of availability. In the June study, there had been 78 instances of a property fitting into a standard HAP category.

There were 1,082 instances of those properties being available to rent within the discretionary HAP limits in at least one of the four household categories during the study period. In Dublin, this discretionary rate is up to an additional 30% of the standard HAP rate. The rate is 20% in other counties.

In eight of the 16 areas, there were no properties available to rent in any category within standard or discretionary HAP limits. Those areas were Athlone, Cork City Centre, Galway City Centre, Limerick City Suburbs, Limerick City Centre, Sligo Town, Portlaoise and Waterford City Centre. This is an increase from three areas with no properties within HAP rates in the June study.

Just one or two properties were available across the four household categories in two areas; Cork City Suburbs and Co. Leitrim. There was just one property available to rent for a single person household within standard Rent Supplement / Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) limits across all 16 study areas.

Wayne Stanley from the Simon Communities says the figures are a cause for concern and highlight how difficult it is for people in rural areas to get a home. “[People on the payment] are going to struggle in the private rental market and that is what constantly comes out in these reports. We have seen a huge growth in the number of properties available overall, but the vast majority if that has been in the Dublin region,” he said.
As a North/South Implementation Body set up under the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has statutory responsibility for managing the EU cross-border funding Programmes, PEACE and INTERREG.

For over two decades these Programmes have provided over €3.3bn to support tens of thousands of projects; all designed to enhance cross-border co-operation and reinforce peace and stability within the region. Reporting to the North/South Ministerial Council, the SEUPB is sponsored by two different government departments, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland.

The PEACE and INTERREG Programmes reflect the desire of the European Commission to support the on-going peace process and cross-border development of the region. Both Programmes are also supported financially by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. There are many excellent project examples involving government departments, NGOs, charities, universities and colleges who are currently benefiting from EU funding, under the PEACE IV or INTERREG VA Programmes.

The Irish and UK Governments, along with the European Commission, have confirmed that a new post-2020 funding programme, called PEACE PLUS will be supported. A hybrid of the current PEACE and INTERREG Programmes, supporting similar, but also entirely new areas of funding from 2021-2027.

Extensive engagement commenced in 2019, with government departments, statutory agencies and local authorities, to garner their views and priorities for cross-border activity to be supported under the new Programme. There was also a public consultation process, across the region, which saw over 1,000 citizens attend 16 events, to give their views, as to the future of EU cross-border funding post-Brexit, in Ireland.
The SeaMonitor project is using innovative marine species tracking technology to better understand and protect vulnerable marine life in our oceans.

content of PEACE PLUS; with a further 320 detailed survey responses submitted. This information along with many other reports, including a socio-economic profile of the region, has been used to help shape the draft content of the new Programme.

Discussing the importance of PEACE PLUS, Gina McIntyre, Chief Executive of the SEUPB, said: “PEACE PLUS represents an exciting new opportunity for the region. It will fund activity which not only maintains peace, and builds reconciliation on this Island, but will also support economic prosperity and cross-border areas of mutual interest, that are best served when we work together. The Programme region is Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland. However, PEACE PLUS offers tremendous opportunity for Irish based organisations, outside of the border counties, to become involved and create new and exciting partnerships and synergies with their Northern-based counterparts.

“These partnerships will help to address many areas of shared need in a wide-variety of fields. For example, the new post-2020 PEACE PLUS programme will support cross-border initiatives involved in the delivery of e-health and social care, as well as environmental protection and climate change adaptation projects that could form part of the ‘green recovery’ process.

“The Programme has the potential for far-reaching impact across these two Islands, as it will support the development of industry-leading Research & Innovation, as well as practical support to enable SMEs to become more competitive. It will also invest in the tourism and hospitality sectors, which have been so badly affected by the pandemic. Indeed, the PEACE PLUS Programme will play a significant role in helping to re-build our damaged economies and social support structures, on both sides of the border.

“Other areas of funding that have been identified under the new PEACE PLUS Programme include support for the personal development of young people, the regeneration of rural areas (particularly within border communities) and smart cities, towns and villages. The Programme will champion an underlying principle of community innovation and regeneration, encouraging the social economy and entrepreneurship.

“The European Commission is also proposing a mandatory element for all cross-border programmes to seek to address the legal and administrative challenges presented by a border. There is therefore significant opportunity for government departments, and statutory agencies, on a cross-border basis, to work together to find solutions to some of these challenges. We would therefore strongly encourage government departments
to consider how they can best avail of this opportunity,” she continued.

A statutory public consultation will be launched to gather feedback on the proposed thematic areas of the new PEACE PLUS Programme, before submitting the final version to the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the European Commission for approval in early 2021.

There are many excellent projects which are currently receiving funding from the PEACE IV or INTERREG VA Programmes; just a few of which are highlighted below.

Dublin City University, University College Dublin and the Dundalk Institute of Technology are all key partners in the delivery of the Eastern Corridor Medical Engineering (ECME) project. This €8.1m INTERREG VA-funded initiative has set-up a cross-border centre of excellence within the field of cardiovascular medicine with other research organisations based in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is transforming heart disease care by undertaking ‘big data’ research into people suffering from cardiovascular conditions, as well as the development of smart wearable monitoring technology and improved diagnostic equipment.

Ultimately, this work will help move patient care out of the hospital setting and into the home, thereby alleviating pressure on an already taxed public health care system. The project is also making grant awards currently available to some highly innovative mini-projects, involved in the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Dundalk Institute of Technology is one of three partners involved in the Border Regions Airways Training Hub (BREATH) project. This €8.5m INTERREG VA-funded initiative has created a unique, world-class, cross-border team of researchers focused on the causes, treatment and prevention of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). An incurable and slowly progressive condition causing irreversible lung damage, COPD is recognised as the third leading cause of death worldwide. The BREATH project is currently training a cohort of approximately 20 of the best young scientists to help combat the disease and raise awareness of its effects across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Ireland.

University College Cork and the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology are both involved in the delivery of the €4.7m cross-border SeaMonitor project. This environmental protection initiative has created a network of monitoring buoys (across the regional seas of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland) equipped with the latest oceanographic sensors and advanced fish tracking technology. The network is supporting the conservation of basking sharks, whales, dolphins, wild salmon, seals and skate fish. It will also provide essential infrastructure for the baseline oceanographic and ambient noise monitoring of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

A number of charities, based in Ireland, have also been able to create new working partnerships with other organisations through involvement in the PEACE IV Programme. This includes the Changing Lives Initiative, led by Dublin based charity Archways. The community-focused project is working with various partners in Northern Ireland and Scotland on a specialist intervention programme for families with children experiencing ADHD.

Another example under PEACE IV, is the Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries project, led by the Migrant Rights Centre, Ireland in partnership with a large number of local authorities and NGOs in Northern Ireland. The project is involved in the production of in-depth research into the working conditions of members of Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) communities. This research is looking at issues connected with labour market integration and cross-border dynamics, within the context of Brexit. It has a specific focus on the agricultural and food processing business sectors based in the Donegal/Derry-Londonderry, Cavan/Armagh as well as Monaghan/Newry & Down Council areas.

These projects represent just a small selection of the type of work which is being supported by the European Union through the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes. There will be even more opportunities for cross-border partnerships to be created under PEACE PLUS.

To learn more about PEACE PLUS and take part in the upcoming statutory consultation go to: www.seupb.eu/PEACEPLUS
Building Communities, Not Just Houses.
BRINGING THE X-FACTOR TO MARKET

Over the last three years, XpertDPO’s innovative and market-leading ideas have proven critical in affording companies a major leg-up in their efforts to transform regulatory constraints of the GDPR into opportunities. Stuart Anderson, XpertDPO’s founder and Managing Director.

To coin a phrase, XpertDPO does what it says on the tin. Founded in 2018, XpertDPO is a Data Protection and Compliance consultancy firm par excellence which uses its expertise and experience to give companies complete assurance on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) concerns. In so doing, XpertDPO also allows its customers to focus on their core activities and, thus, stay one step ahead of the pose.

For a growing list of discerning companies, a route whose finishing point is marked “full compliance” - but which is pockmarked by potential pitfalls - is made easy by XpertDPO. Fact is, being on a data protection odyssey with XpertDPO empowers companies and ultimately embosses a positive impact on the companies’ existing economic and organisational models.

XpertDPO is renowned for quickly and accurately assessing an organisation’s state of data protection awareness and maturity before planning a route to where the customer wants and needs to go to demonstrate GDPR compliance. Furthermore, the journey down the compliance route is ably facilitated by XpertDPO’s delivery of a cost-effective solution; essentially a service package which provides on-site consultancy plus tailored documentation that is essential for demonstrating compliance.

The GDPR has been with us for a period approaching three years now and is the toughest privacy and security law in the world. Drafted and passed by the European Union (EU), it imposes obligations onto organisations anywhere, so long as they target or collect data related to people in the EU.
In the eyes of the uninitiated, it seems anathema that anyone could fall in love with the complex beast that is GDPR but Stuart Anderson, XpertDPO’s founder, did just that; albeit after quite an extensive courtship! “Some time back, I was working with a software start-up on a product connected to the GDPR,” Anderson explains. “We knew that the GDPR was coming, I was tasked with going away and finding out about it and the more I read the more I got into it and along the way I fell in love with data protection - although that’s probably a strong way of putting it.

“I knew that the GDPR was going to be a massive thing and that there would also be a massive demand for strong expertise on the issue. So, I educated myself, and got the chance to set the business up. It became a reality just a few days after GDPR day.” Having come into being the same day as Anderson’s wife gave birth to the couple’s second child, XpertDPO has wasted no time in finding its feet. In a short time, it has become one of the leading providers of Outsourced Data Protection Officer services in Ireland and the UK. A specialist also in offering Nominated European Representative Services to non-EU based organisations, the Anderson-led firm has gotten a lot of things right for a lot of companies - but how so? “We pride ourselves on being able to offer industry leading advice and various advisory services concerning the GDPR,” Anderson adds. “We’ve been very lucky in that we have garnered some very good clients from the word go who we have been able to work with and who have been able to prove the concept that GDPR allows, for the first time, the roll-out of an outsourced data protection officer. “The fact is, if a company needs a data protection officer, it might not want to employ somebody full-time. Alternatively, the company might not have anybody suitable internally because they don’t have the training and they don’t have the experience. Similarly, many organisations who require a Data Protection Officer will not be able to attract or justify paying for an individual that meets the capability and seniority requirements so that’s also where can come in.”

Anderson’s research and consideration into the various principles which underpin the GDPR has clearly stood to him. His grip on his chosen subject has made him a trusted service provider, a confidant and business partner of a raft of blue-chip companies. And while the birth of the GDPR was a laboured process - taking over six years before it saw the light of day - its emergence over the last 30 months or so is viewed by XpertDPO’s founder as not only welcome but vital and also inevitable.

“Punch cards were used in Germany to record the census results of the population and when the Nazi Party came to power in the early 1930s, they used those punch cards and all the data the cards collected to determine who wouldn’t be fit, in their view, to be a member of the society they were intent on creating. “Sad, that data was used by the Nazis to do a lot of what they did. So after the war, it became apparent that we couldn’t let that happen again and that there had to be certain protections put in place by organisations, states and by countries with regards to processing personal data and the purposes for processing personal information”.

“Personally, my belief is that the GDPR is a risk-based regulation. Because any personal data that an organisation has in its possession, and which it processes, presents a risk. There’s a risk that it might be used for something that it shouldn’t be and there’s a risk that somebody might take that data and use it inappropriately. It could be a person, internally within the organisation or somebody, externally.”

Increasingly, it seems that Benjamin Franklin’s mantra ‘fail to prepare, prepare to fail’ is embedded in the DNA of all GDPR-wise companies. Significantly, Anderson and co play a key role in crossing all the you-know-whats. In this respect, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) delivered by XpertDPO can be used by companies to identify and mitigate against any data protection related risks arising from a new project which may affect them.

Similar to the comfort blanket afforded XpertDPO by their DPIAs, Cyber Essentials (CE) is a cyber security certification scheme that Anderson and his team offer as a sound foundation of basic IT security controls; controls which all types of organisations can implement and potentially build upon.

While allowing for his obvious business bias, it’s clear that company founder Anderson is a paid-up member of the GDPR fan club. For instance, he...
“Personally, my belief is that the GDPR is a risk-based regulation. Because any data that an organisation has in its possession and which it processes presents a risk. There’s a risk that it might be used for something that it shouldn’t be and there’s a risk that somebody might take that data and use it inappropriately. It could be a person, internally within the organisation or somebody, externally.”

credits the regulation for “giving more rights, more protection to the ordinary citizen” and “giving them more control over what happens with their data.” Interestingly, he doesn’t have any sympathy for companies who have gigabytes of data - electronic or paper data - lying around and who are found to be non-compliant and who go on to suffer “eye-watering fines.” “The thing is, it won’t be the fine that is going to put a company out of business,” Anderson says emphatically. “Unfortunately, I think some organisations still have their heads in the sand but I would expect that when the fines start to be handed down with more regularity, I think that might be the catalyst for a wake up call. Ultimately though, if a company is found to be not protecting data and not caring enough about their clients to anonymise data or to encrypt a server hard drive, the reputational damage that will follow on will affect those businesses much more than a monetary fine.”

In the absolute minefield that is GDPR compliance, the team at XpertDPO have proven experts in the business of keeping their customers from imploding under the weight of what has been a mass of new regulations in recent times. Toolkits, templates and tailor-made solutions are just some of the items XpertDPO has in its arsenal to help companies dodge the bullets that GDPR can throw at unsuspecting companies.

Meanwhile, XpertDPO’s business continues to grow organically. Pointedly, some 90% plus of its present-day business – whether that be from its core markets of health, pharmaceutical and medical research - comes from referrals. “We spend very, very little money on advertising because we haven’t felt the need to,” Anderson explains.

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An Gníomhaireacht Tithíochta
The Housing Agency
The latest figures for homelessness and a rising death toll, particularly among single adults, is causing alarm.

Figures released by the Department of Housing reveal that a total of 8,737 people were in emergency accommodation nationally at the end of October 2020. This compares with 8,656 at the end of the previous month and the figures also include 2,642 children.

Homelessness among single adults remains stubbornly high and the data shows 4,495 single adults without any child dependents were classified as homeless nationally during the same period - over 3,000 of which were in Dublin. This compares to 4,452 single adults registered as homeless in the previous month - 3,051 of which were in Dublin.

The current incidence of adult homelessness represents a 13% increase on the October 2019 figure of 2,694 and a 38% increase on the number of homeless single adults in October 2018. The figures do not include people sleeping on the street.

There is also growing alarm over the number of recorded homeless deaths in Dublin for 2020 which has reached 55 so far this year. There has been an “unprecedented spike” in the number of homeless people who have died in Dublin this year.

The shocking statistic was revealed as part of a new report from Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) - one of Ireland’s best-known homelessness and addiction charities.

According to the report, 42 per cent of people in homelessness are female and the average age of death for homeless women just 38. This is six years less than the average age of death for homeless men which was recorded at 44 years of age.

The report also discussed the relationship between drug abuse and violence experienced by the female homeless population. They found that women who are the victims of extensive violence and abuse are eight times more likely to be drug dependent.

Homelessness charity, Focus Ireland, said it is “deeply concerned and upset” by the number of homeless people who have died in Ireland this year. CEO Pat Dennigan said: “We must [focus] on prevention to reduce people from entering into homelessness. The circumstances of any death are often complex, and respect must be shown to the deceased as well as to the families who are grieving.”
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Anthony Flynn, chief executive of Dublin based charity, Inner City Homelessness (ICHH) has criticised the government’s response to the homeless crisis and said Housing Minister Darragh O’Brien needs to take responsibility for the number of rough sleepers who are dying on his watch.

“We’re spending a hell of a lot of money and we’re not getting the results that we need in terms of outcomes and exits within homeless services, and we can pat each other on the back as much as we want to about how much has been done but there’s still an awful lot to be done.

“The buck stops with the minister and the minister has to take responsibility that there have been deaths on his watch.”

According to Flynn as many as 60% of rough sleepers in Dublin don’t have access to bed provision at present due to Covid-19 restrictions because they are not from the area.

“We need to take responsibility in terms of these deaths, and I think we can be doing a hell of a lot more,” he said. “We need to be more responsible in how we roll out our services and that’s right across the board.”

A statement from the Department of Housing acknowledged that the homeless figures were “simply too high”.

“In particular, we recognise the growing number of single adults in emergency accommodation and wants to see a greater emphasis on the delivery of one-bedroom social homes... The Programme for Government commits to expanding the Housing First approach with a focus on the construction and acquisition of one- bed homes and the provision of relevant supporting service.”

Sinn Fein Housing spokesman, Eoin Ó Broin described the latest homelessness figures as “deeply disturbing” and said they highlight the extent of the crisis for single people unable to access housing.

42 per cent of people in homelessness are female and the average age of death for homeless women just 38. This is six years less than the average age of death for homeless men which was recorded at 44 years of age.

“Behind these numbers are real people who are being let down by the housing system.”

“We need to see far greater urgency and ambition in the delivery of Housing First scheme - which moves people directly from homelessness into secure housing with associated supports. The ambition is for 2,000 a year. We need multiples of that across the country.

“Behind these numbers are real people who are being let down by the housing system.

Government must, given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, reinstate the ban on the issuing of notices to quit, rent increases and evictions until at least March 2021.”

This issue has also been highlighted by homeless charity Threshold which says that it has advised on almost 300 invalid notices of termination despite the protections given to tenants during the pandemic. The charity also says that this figure is just a fraction of the overall number of people being threatened with eviction.

“This year the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives and society. Private renters feel this keenly as they make up a large number of workers in sectors which experienced the greatest job losses,” said Threshold chairperson, Aideen Hayden, highlighting the challenges posed by Covid-19.

“The moratorium on rental evictions introduced in March and again in October did offer some respite for tenants. In spite of this, however, Threshold had to intervene in over 100 illegal or threatened evictions and advised on almost 300 invalid notices of termination between March and August.

“During the most recent five-week moratorium, introduced alongside Level 5 restrictions in October, we had to intervene in 17 illegal or threatened evictions and advised on 69 invalid notices.”

In some instances, Ms Hayden said that tenants had arrived home to find the locks changed with their belongings still inside their home.
Supporting the Social Housing sector in Ireland

Between social housing supply and demand Last year, the number of families and individuals waiting for social housing across Ireland fell just short of 70,000*. Over half of these have been waiting more than three years for a home, and 18,000 have waited in excess of seven years.

Managing this demand for accommodation is a serious challenge and as a country, we are struggling to meet the mark on a number of fronts, including new property developments. Indeed, 5,771 new social houses were built in 2019, missing the target (6,545 units) set by the Rebuilding Ireland 2019 plan.

The need to improve our approach to social and affordable housing solutions is now more crucial than ever, particularly in light of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic.

Though it’s not yet possible to gauge the long-term impact this crisis will have at a macro and micro level, the supply-demand gap in social and affordable housing is likely to widen further - unless additional efforts are made immediately to address the supply shortfall.

As we navigate our way through these uncertain times, supporting customers and communities across Ireland is front and centre for Bank of Ireland, and we are especially conscious of those who are most vulnerable.

We understand that the provision of essential social housing and a more sustainable property sector in Ireland necessitates a unified effort from a range of stakeholders. We recognise all political parties have emphasised social housing as a key priority. To this effect, we support the national recommendations outlined by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in their recent Housing for All framework, with key ambitions including: ensuring the people of Ireland have access to a home, reducing numbers in emergency accommodation and preventing homelessness through low-cost rental, affordable purchase schemes and increased availability of social housing.

Bank of Ireland is committed to playing our part and helping achieve these ambitions. We want to support the housing market directly by funding the development of new homes and also help buyers acquire new homes. Our ambition is to play a leading and central role in supporting the development of Ireland’s housing market and help to alleviate the housing crisis.

We partnered with Bank of Ireland on the acquisition of 144 turnkey residential units at Hazelwood, Rathnew, Co Wicklow. These loans are strategically important for Co-Operative Housing Ireland and we’re delighted to be in partnership with the Bank of Ireland for the project. I wish to express my gratitude to the team in Bank of Ireland, for their enthusiasm for the project, their understanding of the sector and their belief in Co-operative Housing Ireland.

We look forward to building on our partnership in the coming years.

Kieran Brennan, CEO of Co-Operative Housing Ireland
Specifically, a key priority for us going forward is to help mobilise more social and affordable housing projects. Building on our efforts to date, we will provide flexible and tailored loan structures to private builders and institutional investors, and continue to develop strong partnerships with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

Bank of Ireland has been active in this space for many years and we are currently providing financial support across a range of environmentally sustainable NZEB, A Rated, social housing developments. Of the 7,200 residential units we are funding in the Republic of Ireland, over 700 will be acquired by local authorities or AHBs for those on the social housing waitlist (this excludes Part V obligations which is another c.700-units). We are also supporting the delivery of over 500 new social housing homes across five schemes in Dublin as part of a Public Private Partnership, Social Housing Bundle 1 (Sisk & Oaklee).

We have formed strong relationships with many AHBs over the years. The support we offer consists not only of competitive terms for development and acquisition finance, but also dynamic partnerships in which we provide proactive/ongoing, strategic guidance.

Our recent work with Co-operative Housing Ireland illustrates the positive impact of our dual-focused approach to funding with the provision of facilities to fund the acquisition of 144 new homes in Rathnew Co. Wicklow, along with a development finance loan to fund the development of 30 new apartments on North King Street, Dublin 2.

Closing the gap between social housing supply and demand won’t be easy and will take time. However, Bank of Ireland believes that if we combine our efforts with other key organisations, local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, together we can build a better future for individuals and families in need across Ireland.

As one of the Bank’s oldest customers, the Iveagh Trust has always worked closely with Bank of Ireland, whether in delivering innovative financial models for social housing, or the everyday banking needs of a busy housing charity. The Trust has always regarded the Bank as a key partner in delivering our services.

Aidan Culhane, Chief Executive, The Iveagh Trust

At Oaklee Housing we recently closed an important funding package with Bank of Ireland. This builds on a long established and successful relationship that the wider Choice Housing Group has enjoyed with the bank spanning over many decades. Bank of Ireland understand our requirements and are proven to have a strong knowledge of the AHB sector and the funding required to deliver new homes in this space.

We look forward to continuing to grow our relationship with Bank of Ireland in the future.

Aaron Ceillier FCA, Head of Finance at Oaklee Housing

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Bank of Ireland is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.
Noeleen McHugh, Assistant Chief Executive with the LGMA explains how the Agency is planning to lead and influence a culture of innovation across the local government sector.

The local authority sector in Ireland has experienced a sea change in how services are delivered to the public due to COVID-19. From developing ways to continue services within restrictions to assisting local businesses to reopen and spearheading a community response that supported the most vulnerable in our society, local authorities across the country have responded in innovative ways to the pandemic.

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) has been to the fore in co-ordinating with the sector in its COVID response and is one of the organisations leading the way on an ambitious national programme to develop, promote and embed a culture of innovation across the wider public service.

As part of the OPS 2020 programme to develop a national innovation strategy, the LGMA along with Monaghan County Council, The Courts Service and the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, is taking part in a pilot project to develop their own strategy using tools and methodologies developed by EY consultants. The output of these pilots will be a defined process supported by tools and techniques that will be used to develop and promote innovation within public service organisations.

The overall national ambition is to unlock the power of innovation and deliver world-class public services in Ireland today.
and for generations to come. “This is a really exciting ambition and the LGMA is up for the challenge”, says Noeleen McHugh, LGMA Assistant Chief Executive in charge of Innovation.

One of the guiding principles for developing this strategy is making innovation real. “We want to leverage the good work that has been happening and scale it up – empowering employees and truly embedding innovation in the DNA of the public service. Now, more than ever, we need to be focussed and ambitious enough to tackle the big challenges and opportunities facing the country.”

LGMA has been working with EY consultants to develop the new innovation strategy. The first step in this process involved an innovation ‘maturity assessment’ to gauge the current state of play within the organisation. Following this, a series of workshops took place with employees from across the organisation to identify priorities, goals and actions specific to the organisation while also remaining aligned to the overall public service strategy.

Innovation is about the creation of a new, viable offering that adds value and it has to come from within so it is crucial that all employees recognise the role they have and know that they will be supported to grasp opportunities to innovate, according to McHugh, “We will be including innovation in the personal development plans of all our employees, so that everyone will have innovation in mind when they are setting their personal goals. We want to make sure employees feel empowered to come up with innovative solutions to challenges and know how to progress those solutions,” she says.

The next step will be finalising the LGMA Innovation Strategy and developing an associated detailed implementation plan, with assigned action owners and a clear governance plan. “We want this pilot project to lead to concrete actions and real change in the way we approach challenges and innovate in future,” says McHugh.

The role of pilot innovator is very appropriate to the LGMA, an agency that provides a range of shared services, supports and advice to the country’s 31 local authorities and acts as a centre of best practice for the sector.

“We recently underwent an organisational review that highlighted innovation as a core focus for the Agency, so we were delighted to be chosen as one of the pilot organisations for the national innovation strategy. We aspire to being innovation partners and influencers, promoting and supporting innovation across the local government sector. We have excellent relationships with local authorities across the country and with a range of other government departments so we will be well placed to share our learnings with the councils we support day-to-day as well as with the wider public service,” says McHugh.

“In recent months we have seen the vital role local authorities play at the frontline of community services. The hope is that we can help build on the excellent examples of innovative solutions local authorities came up with in response to COVID-19 and support local authorities to foster a permanent culture of innovation in the sector, empowering local authority employees and creating a much improved experience for the public.”

- Noeleen McHugh, Assistant Chief Executive with the LGMA
The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) is the national social housing federation representing over 270 housing associations across Ireland. We talk to CEO Donal McManus about the success of his organisation and how he feels that Government can continue to support the social housing sector.

The ICSH was established in 1982 by a small number of interested housing and homeless organisations who felt Ireland was missing out, i.e., that there was not a greater and more active non-profit housing sector to meet the needs of the Irish housing sector. Although non-profit housing associations and trusts were active in the 1890’s, the next significant supports by Government for the sector occurred in the 1980’s to complement the role of local housing authorities. The ICSH acts as the national representative body for non-profit housing associations (AHBs) to support and promote the role of housing associations in Ireland in meeting housing needs and homelessness. The ICSH now have over 270 members compared to 50 members in the 1990’s with members comprising both larger developing associations as well special needs housing associations located through both urban and rural areas.

The ICSH provide a range of services and supports to ICSH members to further enhance their capacity on delivery and management of social and affordable housing. These supports include group schemes in insurance and Garda vetting, project advice and guidance on housing development, housing management, governance and regulation, as well as professional housing education and training programmes. The ICSH co-ordinate the development of policy, research and practice initiatives on behalf of members for various Government departments and other public and private bodies.

They represent and advocate on behalf of members with various national bodies to promote the role of the sector and how it collectively can play a key role in meeting housing needs and other related health, social and economic areas.

When asked to provide a summation of where Ireland now stands with respect to social housing, CEO Donal McManus says that on the last count by local authorities in 2019 of households in need for social housing, there were 68,693 households assessed in housing need, a majority of which were 1-2 person households who had presented from the private rented sector. The four Dublin housing authorities accounted for over 43% of the total households in need of social housing.

Looking at the timeframe, supply levels may begin to balance the volume of demand, MrMcManus comments: “There generally will always be frictional levels of social housing demand. The goal is to have a suitable sufficient scale of social housing made available (through local authority and AHB homes) to reduce waiting times for those seeking social housing.

“Over the next 5-10 years, with continuous high level of social housing delivery and investment, the frictional demand for social housing could reduce significantly from its current level if social housing comprised of up 1/3 of total new housing output annually.”

Over the last 20 years, the ICSH through mobilising members has been able to expand capacity and delivery
for the sector, such as with increased financing which has been successful in convincing successive Governments of a progressively increased role for AHBs. This has resulted in the recent target of around 15,000 homes to be delivered through Rebuilding Ireland, which the sector is in line to meet or exceed this target by 2021. In addition, through successful work by ICSH members leading on innovative new mixed funding initiatives, new programmes have been introduced since 2010. The increased partnership by the ICSH with the range of Government and public bodies over the years has resulted in these programmes enabling ICSH members to deliver more homes and a range of associated supports including for the homeless, older people and those with disabilities to help them live independently or with support. ICSH members range from Tuath, Clúid, Respond, Oaklee, Circle to Peter McVerry Trust, Fold Ireland, Iveagh Trust, North & East, Simon Communities, Focus Ireland, HAIL to regional and local housing associations.

When questioned about policy instruments and programmes introduced in recent years that have proved most effective in alleviating the demand for social housing Mr McManus points to the CALF & P & A programme. “This new mixed funding mechanism allowed housing associations develop new social housing projects by using less state capital funding of up to 30%, with the remaining cost funded by loan finance through the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) or private financial institutions such as banks or institutional investors,” he explains. “This programme has contributed significantly to housing associations meeting local authority housing needs since 2016.” In addition he says, the processing of these capital funding applications through the Housing Agency has resulted in efficient turnaround times. Housing associations in recent years have been delivering around 40% of total social housing homes which reached a peak at over 4,100 homes being delivered in 2019.

When questioned, McManus while acknowledges benefits of the HAP scheme such as choice and reducing employment traps, it is not without its limitations. “The HAP was a form of DIY housing benefit which facilitated significant numbers of people seeking housing support to move from the previous SWA rent supplement scheme to HAP in different local authority areas, as well as facilitating new households in need of housing to obtain a home in the private landlord sector. HAP has also played a role in meeting the needs of homeless households where there was a shortage of traditional social rented housing supply options. However, HAP delivery in the private sector still relies on motives of private landlords offering properties in key areas of demand, and has limitations in its ability to bring forward newly built rental housing stock as well as the ongoing revenue costs of the programme. The logic was that when new social housing delivery expanded on a significant scale with affordable rents this would reduce the impact on the HAP programme.”

In terms of developing a sustainable social housing model, McManus feels that there is a need to reduce the level of dependence on the private sector for lower income households: “There was a prolonged period of relying on the private sector, through private landlords, particularly from 2010 to 2015 for providing options for people assessed in need of social housing on local authority waiting lists. Relying on the private sector and individual landlords meant it was difficult to predict future supply, as many landlords have their own motive for being landlords, whether in the short and long term.

“This was also coupled with security of tenure and rent issues that had arisen in the sector. Where the private sector has a clearer role is the traditional role of constructing social and affordable housing for local authorities and housing associations. In recent years, joint ventures between housing associations and the private construction sector, such as through new turnkey developments, has seen strong partnerships emerge that has yielded a significant number of new high-quality homes in mixed communities.”

There is no doubt that we still have a housing crisis even with Covid and McManus feels that in the coming year, the challenge will be for the sector to continue to increase delivery at continued scale to contribute to meet Government social housing targets for general needs housing. This is in addition to meeting the special needs gaps, which are still present in the housing sector such as for homelessness, disability and older people. In that respect he says, the capital assistance scheme must be continually utilised to its maximum. “One new challenge in 2021 is for AHBs in the sector to be able to deliver the new cost rental housing programme for moderate-income groups which has potential to be a game changer in some high demand areas,” he adds. “A continued access in the coming year to residential land from public or private sources will still be essential for continuing the pipeline for new homes as well as initiating a programme for retrofitting, which is key for housing associations with older less energy efficient housing stock.”

Underlying all these objectives and programmes will also be the roll out from 2021 of new statutory regulation for AHBs providing even more assurance and should enable delivery with high standards.

These are challenging times for the sector but McManus says the ICSH and the sector is well up for the challenge although ICSH members will respond in different ways. Closing he says: “Over the last five years, the size of the sector has increased by 20% to over 40,000 homes and in turn, the sector is now four times the size it was in 2000. There has been increasing professionalism in the sector during that period which has seen new expertise introduced in the sector in areas of housing development, finance and housing management. The continued strengthening partnership with public and private sector bodies as well as with elected members should be central to achieving successful outcomes for the sector and tenants."
To adapt to the pandemic, our Government and public services have taken swift measures that only a few months ago would have been unthinkable by many. For example, welfare supports have dramatically increased. The public sector has also taken over private hospitals, creating a ‘Sláintecare’ style health system that was expected to take years to implement.

While measures like these are temporary, many will ask whether some of them should remain in place after the pandemic. It’s a valid question and one that has to take account of a new economic reality, as many countries go into recession. This new economic landscape will remind many of us of the last downturn, triggered by the 2008 financial crisis. Then, Ireland went through a series of austerity measures to pay back its debts. Through spending cuts and tax hikes, every person in the country was impacted.

From a housing perspective, the last recession had a paralysing effect. Construction virtually ceased, while demand for social housing support increased. With the building of homes only beginning to re-emerge in recent years, there are fears that the pandemic could undo the positive steps that have been taken to help increase the provision of social and affordable housing.

In recent years, Ireland’s return to economic stability had provided the Government with an opportunity to look to the future. Through the effective implementation of long-term initiatives like Sláintecare, Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework and the Climate Action Plan, we can meet the challenges that the country faces.

Rebuilding Ireland, a plan set to expire at the end of 2021, is being implemented, but may be impacted by the current crisis. As we face a dramatically different economic landscape, we must take the necessary actions to ensure that much needed housing continues to be delivered.

LONG-TERM PLANNING

The Housing Agency believes that a new long-term housing policy is critical to effectively deliver housing and a sustainable affordable housing system. A long-term housing plan must be one that has broad political support to ensure its implementation. Furthermore, it is recommended that this plan...
Over the next 20-years Ireland will face many challenges. One is clear – a likely recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the world faces a climate crisis that, much like this pandemic, requires us all to adapt to survive. Ireland’s Climate Action Plan states that our carbon emissions need to fall by 24 per cent by 2030 from 1990 levels. This plan, along with international initiatives like the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the European Green Deal, give us some indication of the actions needed to address the climate crisis.

Any new long-term housing policy must take into account future challenges. The way we build housing can have a huge bearing on community, environmental and economic sustainability. With these challenges in mind, The Housing Agency believes that future housing policy in Ireland must:

**Learn from the last recession** - We must continue and increase the delivery of housing. The urgent need for homes remains – Ireland must do all it can to meet this need through the building of public housing on a large scale.

**Promote the cost rental model** - The provision of affordable high-quality rental accommodation by the State, where the rent covers the cost of construction and ongoing maintenance should be a key part of housing sector activity.

**Act fast to help people in mortgage arrears** - The psychological toll felt by many who went through mortgage arrears in the last recession is still with us and we need to prevent more households being affected in that way. With many currently finding it difficult to pay their mortgage, prompt and concerted action must be taken to provide immediate assistance, rather than a delayed response that only leads to increasing anxiety and fear over the loss of a home.

**Prioritise energy-efficient and climate-friendly housing** - We must double-down in our approach to addressing the climate crisis from a housing perspective. Cost-effective measures can and must be found to make homes climate-friendly. There are three elements to this; where we build housing, appropriate housing density and the right types of homes. Sustainable quality standards, such as the Irish Green Building Council’s Home Performance Index, must be implemented for all State-funded residential projects.

**Adapt to new technologies** - Future plans must also be ready to adapt to new technologies that may emerge in the coming years. New technology may speed up housing construction and allow us to meet climate targets with greater ease and efficiency. Keeping an open mind on future developments will be crucial in developing quality homes in sustainable communities.

**Be mindful of biodiversity needs** - Future housing must take into account the need to preserve and promote biodiversity. Open green areas that are allowed to grow wild, and landscapes that enable the growth of diverse plant and wildlife species are some of the ways in which construction projects can incorporate biodiversity into their projects.

These are just some of the factors which need to be included in any future housing policy for us to plan for a fair and sustainable future.

The Housing Agency has contributed to both the Rebuilding Ireland Plan for Housing and Homelessness and the preceding Social Housing Strategy 2020. Based on this experience, the Agency would identify four key elements of a new long-term national housing policy:

1. **Delivery of housing by the public sector including social housing, cost rental and affordable purchase.**
2. **Development of a cost rental sector (to provide affordable rental housing).**
3. **Utilisation of state lands for housing.**
4. **Delivery of housing by the development sector including rental housing and home ownership.**

By actively using State land to deliver public housing, the public sector must start building homes on a large scale, using a mix of social housing, cost rental and where appropriate, affordable purchase housing.

To do this, master planning will be crucial. This would involve developing roads and infrastructure to allow parcels of land to be released and developed in turn, similarly to the master planning for Adamstown and the Dublin Docklands. Delivering infrastructure ahead of development facilitates more sustainable growth, better communities and greater certainty for all stakeholders.

Ireland faces many challenges in the years ahead and how we respond to the economic difficulties imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic now will have long-term effects. Decisions made now can show promise for a sustainable future. Through an ambitious long-term housing policy, we can provide many years of sustainability for our housing sector, while meeting the housing needs of our citizens in a way that is both affordable and sustainable for future generations.
Bonham Street

This Dublin City Council scheme located on Bonham Street in the city centre is an infill site located in close proximity to the digital hub. Construction started on the 57 high quality homes in October 2019. The scheme is based on three six to eight storey perimeter blocks surrounding an enclosed courtyard area for residents’ use.

The Bonham Street development is adjacent to a new public park at Bridgefoot Street that is also currently under construction by Dublin City Council. In the 2016-2022, Dublin City Development Plan, the site is zoned Z5 to consolidate and facilitate the development of the central area, and to identify, reinforce, strengthen and protect its civic design character and dignity. The strategy is to provide a dynamic mix of uses which interact with each other, help create a sense of community, and which sustain the vitality of the inner city.

A new nine and ten storey student housing project is located to the south of the site between Bonham Street and the Digital Hub. To the north, the site is faced by five and six storey apartment buildings. Island Street then steps down to the one and two storey buildings of the Mendicity Institute, a culturally significant building in the area. The Oliver Bond Street Flats designed by Herbert Simms in the 1920’s are visible across the new park to the East of the site.

Part of the external wall of the Marshalsea prison is visible to the south of the site of Bridgefoot Street Park and St Patrick’s tower in the digital hub is a 150ft high smock windmill built to service Roe Whiskey Distillery. It was built in 1805 and was in use until about 1860. It is a protected structure.

In summary this high-quality residential development will consist of:

- 26 one bed apartments
- 23 two bed apartments
- 3 accessible two bed apartments that are universal design plus standard
- 5 three bed apartments
- 1 commercial space
- 1 Live/ work unit
- Landscaped courtyard

The architecture which is modern and contemporary respects and integrates positively with the surrounding context, adding to the rich legacy and quality of the area. This development provides homes for individuals and families in a small community setting and the human scale, sense of ownership and personal space is therefore extremely important and will be most evident in the courtyard and private side of the development.
CORK AND CHAMBER STREET

This Dublin City Council development is located within the historical Liberties area, directly opposite a new city park – Weaver Park. The project started on site in February 2020 and will provide 55 homes arranged in two blocks of apartments with associated communal courtyards, and a small commercial space. These new homes will be of the highest quality, all with private amenity space, and will provide much needed additional housing in the Liberties area.

The development will create an attractive edge to Weaver Park which is currently surrounded by vacant sites. The buildings will range from three to seven storeys in height with the tallest element facing onto Cork Street, reinforcing the importance of this busy road as a main artery into the city.

Dublin City Council in collaboration with our consultants Levitt Bernstein and ABK Architects have attempted to reinterpret historical facades typical for the Liberties into a modern elevation as a means of retaining a historical continuity with the area’s past. The park elevations will reflect the narrow plot widths of the historic development pattern. In contrast, the elevations along Cork Street will have larger openings, and a more robust and simpler character to address the urban scale of the area. Due to its proximity to a busy city park, the rear courtyards of the apartment blocks are intended as sanctuaries where the residents can experience quiet in an enclosed external area.

The development will consist of:

- 32 one bed apartments
- 8 two bed apartments
- 2 accessible two bed apartments that are universal design plus standard
- 13 three bed apartments
- 1 commercial space
- 2 landscaped courtyards

SPRINGVALE

This Dublin City Council development at Springvale started on site in January 2020 and is located on the northern side of Chapelizod Road, on the eastern outskirts of Chapelizod village. The development comprises 71 apartments arranged in six blocks with associated parking and amenity spaces, as well as a new scout/community hall. The buildings range from three to five storeys in height and include landscaped communal spaces at ground level.

The concept for the scheme is to maintain and enhance the connection with the Phoenix Park, drawing the park in through the site and creating views back to the Park from the Chapelizod Road.

The buildings along Chapelizod Road will create a defined street edge, related to the scale and urban character of the village of Chapelizod, so it appears as an extension of the village.

An intimate, internal street will be created running through the length of the site. Projecting balconies, apartment entrances, front doors and pedestrian and vehicle movement will help to create activity along this street.

The scout / community hall will be a “marker” building, sitting comfortably within the existing tree-filled eastern end of the site. The design and materials are purposely different from the residential buildings, in order to reflect its unique use and community focus. The building will include a double height multi-purpose hall, storage and associated ancillary accommodation.

The landscaping and central open spaces provide a balance of amenity and play space, referencing both the village and the park in material and planting. It also provides a visual link from the park to the church creating a generous planted buffer to private front gardens.

In summary the development will consist of:

- 21 one bed apartments
- 27 two bed apartments
- 3 accessible two bedroom apartments that are universal design plus standard
- 20 three bed apartments
- 1 scout / community hall
- Communal amenity spaces and private courtyards
- Play trail
BUNRATTY ROAD

This Dublin City Council scheme of 64 apartments and 14 houses started on-site in October 2019 and comprises of 4 four-storey apartment blocks and 14 two-storey houses. The scheme is being developed on a long narrow site between the quiet residential Bunratty Road and the busier Oscar Traynor Road, just east of the North Side Shopping Centre.

The site consists of a strip of grass lands, which has historically offered little in terms of amenity value due to its narrow layout. The previous flat blocks that were on the site were demolished in 2013 in a move that greatly increased the sites development potential, making way for this new high quality modern scheme.

The site strategy is to extend the existing residential blocks further south with new two-storey houses and to cap the ends with four-storey apartment blocks fronting onto Oscar Traynor Road with the aim to create greater urban definition and a more defined street edge. The existing spur roads will terminate in carefully landscaped cul-de-sacs with new parking bays, bin and bicycle stores, while also providing pedestrian through access onto Oscar Traynor Road, greatly enhancing permeability in the area.

There is an extensive landscape and planting plan for the new development to include a planted buffer zone between the footpath and apartment blocks, while the well-established street trees to Oscar Traynor Road are to be retained and enhanced with additional tree planting.

The site is well located, with the city centre only 30 minutes by public transport, bicycle or car. The twenty-acre Stardust Memorial Park is just a short walk to the north and there are established children’s play areas at either ends of the site, with an all-weather MUGA play area at the west end.

In summary this high-quality residential development consists of:

- 32 one-bed apartments
- 28 two-bed apartments
- 4 accessible two-bed apartments designed to universal design plus standard
- 14 three bedroom houses
- 4 landscaped residential pocket parks / landscaped cul-de-sacs with car parking bays.

NORTH KING STREET - NZEB PILOT PROJECT

Dublin City Council have commissioned an NZEB (nearly zero energy building) pilot project on a former brownfield site on North King Street, Dublin 7. The scheme comprises of 30 apartments within a 6 storey residential block designed around three central common areas.

The apartment mix consists of 7 one-bedroom apartments, 18 two-bedroom apartments, 3 two-bedroom duplex apartments and 2 three-bedroom apartments. Accessible units are also provided within the scheme. Each apartment has dual aspect and is designed with a private balcony. Four apartments have triple aspect. A shared private courtyard is located along the Southern boundary of the site.

The NZEB low energy benchmark for the North King Street housing scheme involved using a fabric-first approach to the design using quality building materials. Renewable fuels are provided with the use of roof-mounted photovoltaic panels and heat pumps for each apartment. These heat pumps provide ventilation, heat recovery for hot water and heating for each apartment. High performing triple glazed windows and low air permeability form part of the design strategy in order to mitigate infiltration of external wall fabric and provide an optimum acoustic within each apartment. A green roof is provided to mitigate the Urban Heat Island effect, to promote biodiversity and to reduce surface water run-off entering the existing drainage network.
Improving the Quality of Our Housing Stock: Dublin City Councils Bedsit Amalgamation Programme

The City Wide 2 into 1 Bedsit Amalgamation Programme consists of the refurbishment and amalgamation of existing bedsit units to bring them up to appropriate size standards, improve overall energy efficiency and extend the life of existing housing blocks. Many of these bedsits were built in the 60’s and 70’s and were designed to house one person. Dublin City Council has successfully completed over 280 bedsits to provide 140 completed high quality one-bed apartments.

1. ST BRICINS

The work at St. Bricin’s Park is the culmination of the city-wide Bedsit Amalgamation Programme. This apartment block for senior citizens was done to Passive House Standard which is a standard of energy-efficient construction that ensures homes are exceptionally comfortable, healthy, and affordable to occupy. The refurbishment also included refurbishing a community kitchen that prepares meals on wheels for the wider community. The refurbishment also included refurbishing a community kitchen that prepares meals on wheels for the wider community.

The project achieves the Passive House EnerPHit standard of a minimum 80% reduction in energy use and minimum 80% reduction of CO2 emissions. As well as providing energy efficient buildings, this approach also avoids further embodied carbon by prolonging the life of existing housing stock. Retro-fitting the properties allows residents to stay in their communities in really comfortable homes and the response has been really positive.

St Bricin’s high profile awards include:

- Irish Building &amp; Design Awards 2019: Winner ‘Renovation Project of the Year’ (Low Energy Design Lead Architect)
- Isover Awards 2019: Winner ‘Excellence in Residential Renovation’ (Low Energy Design Lead Architect)

2. BALLYBOUGH HOUSE

Ballybough House, built in 1939 formed part of an ambitious housing programme to address the chronic housing problems in the city at the time, it was estimated in 1934 that some 18,000 families lived in single-room tenements.

Herbert Simms, who was the chief housing architect at the time, was responsible for the design and construction of an astonishing 17,000 new dwellings, ranging from flat blocks in the city centre to extensive housing schemes of two-storey cottages. Ballybough House is one such scheme that has housed people for over 80 years now.

Dublin City Council is embarking on a pilot project that seeks to address the issues of size, energy efficiency and dampness by amalgamating two flats into one. The historic fabric will be insulated with breathable materials to prevent the growth of mould and a new heat pump will replace the gas boiler. If successful, this could act as a template for the rest of the complex and other complexes and might offer future generations the enjoyment of habitable heritage.
Today, there are more than 3,000 families, throughout Ireland, living in homes managed by Co-operative Housing Ireland and a further 3,000 that were built by the movement in the ’70s and ’80s. Older members retain fond memories of NABCO (National Association of Building Co-operatives), an organisation founded in 1973 which utilised the co-operative model to support people engaged in affordable self-build projects around the country. The core mission remained unchanged until the late eighties when a shift in direction meant the organisation began to focus on social housing for rent. In more recent years NABCO became Co-operative Housing Ireland (CHI) and CHI has grown significantly in that time.

“NABCO was set up very specifically as an umbrella body for people self-building their own home,” explains the CEO of CHI, Kieron Brennan. “The name says it all. It was not social housing as we know it but rather it was affordable self-build which NABCO did very successfully over a long period. Its members built over three thousand homes before the organisation decided to review and restructure its operating model.”

“The change meant we would build the housing but retain the schemes in co-operative ownership and rent them out socially under the relevant government schemes. This means that the homes are owned co-operatively in perpetuity and the people who live in those homes become members and retain a share in their local co-op.”

Members are expected to participate in the governance of their co-op and they exert influence on the management, upkeep and maintenance of co-operative housing schemes. Local co-ops largely pursue their own initiatives in response to the particular circumstances which prevail in their own area and they also elect representatives onto CHI’s national board.

“The CHI Board consists of 12 people and the majority (seven) of our board members are elected by our co-ops,” says Brennan. “Members are encouraged to get involved in the co-
op’s local activities and to participate and get elected onto the local board. Following that, there is an opportunity to get elected onto the national board.

“The National board also provides training both for board members and member co-ops which caters to a variety of areas, including governance, finance, administration and social housing management strategy.”

Up until 2014, CHI largely confined its activities to Dublin and Cork where the social housing deficit remains most acute. However, following the financial crisis and the resulting surge in demand for social housing nationwide, CHI decided to expand its offering to cater for the whole country. Today, the organisation has a presence in 21 counties and continues to expand its geographical footprint.

“The aim is to become a vibrant national organisation with a footprint across the country and to offer the co-operative housing option to anyone who wishes to have it,” Brennan says.

A resident of County Clare and a veteran in social housing and community development Pearse O’Shiel, represents the Ralahine Housing Co-op and was elected Chairperson of CHI two years ago. He professes to a longstanding interest in the co-operative sector and is particularly enthusiastic about the inherent values and principles which co-ops encapsulate. Housing is a sector particularly suited to the co-operative approach, he believes.

“The co-operatives side of things was something I have always been interested in,” he says. “I’m aware from my own background of the value of co-operative efforts and the extent to which it helps to get things done. There is a kind of self-reliance value which comes from a group of people joining together to co-operate on a project or endeavour and it can be extremely powerful and effective.

“As an Approved Housing Body (AHB), it’s very clear to me that CHI has been very effective, not only in providing housing and responding to the housing crisis, but also in terms of developing and fostering the co-operative ideal within communities. What appeals to me is the kind of flat organisation and the voluntary nature of the activity as well as the democratic element which lies at the heart of the co-op model and the fact that members elect their own representatives to oversee and manage each co-op.

“The co-operative principles which prevail in terms of CHI’s housing management, the adherence to and appreciation for the collective effort and the value placed on education and training, these are all core principles which underpin each of our local co-operators. The particular interest I have is the question of community development being led and determined by people in the community. This is something which the co-operative principles help to foster; the sense that you belong on an equal footing with other members and that you collaborate with each other in order to improve the collective circumstances.”

Social housing was a cornerstone issue in the last election and a significant factor in the slump in support for the Fine Gael led government. However, Brennan believes the scale of the social housing deficit is to a considerable extent a legacy of the financial crisis. In particular, he laments the decision to abandon the policy of developing large-scale public and local authority housing schemes.

“The previous Government took a lot of heat on the housing issue, but I think you need to go back to the collapse of the Celtic tiger and beyond. Once they stopped producing new homes it meant there was an automatic reliance on the private sector to provide those homes and it also meant the state no longer had the capacity to respond to the next crisis, whenever that might come about. It also meant there was no counter cyclical policy capability within the states armoury to deal with the situation as it transpired.

“Obviously, you’ve got to keep building public, social and local authority homes. You have to maintain delivery of those homes at a certain rate because it’s not something you can just ramp up at a moment’s notice.

“All of the corporate know-how and all of that knowledge and capacity is lost within organisations when production collapses suddenly and to the extent which occurred before and particularly after the financial crisis.”

The funding mechanisms also needs to be reassessed, according to Brennan who supports current efforts to open up the mainstream financial markets to the AHB sector, a significant departure from more recent norms which have relied almost exclusively on state-grants to progress social housing developments.

“With the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, the state moved away from that model to one where AHIBs now borrow the bulk of the cost of what they build - up to 70% in the majority of cases. The state needs to continue to support the AHIBs access to financial markets and it needs to protect borrowings in order to enable that. We borrow from the state via the Housing Finance Agency and we also borrow from private banks. Given the demand for resources that the state is currently facing it seems to me that accessing other funding streams outside of state resources is
something that ought to be welcomed.

“That includes assisting AHBs to come off the state’s balance sheet. I’m not going to bore your readers but they will be aware that AHBs were placed on the state’s balance sheet a couple of years previously and the government is now committed to reversing that measure.”

According to O’Shiel the requirement to borrow from the Housing Finance Agency and mainstream lenders in order to fund the delivery of new social housing schemes has significantly upped the ante for AHBs in terms of the need to ensure the appropriate project appraisal, risk management systems and governance structures are firmly in place.

“That’s the key factor in enabling these professionalised organisations to effectively manage very significant sums of money, whether that is state funds or any other funding source,” he says. “In recent years, the AHB sector and in particular the larger AHBs within the Housing Alliance which comprises ourselves and the other five largest AHBs in the country have greatly enhanced their governance and administrative structures and upped their capacity. There is little doubt that the sector is now in a position to play a much more significant and influential role in addressing the housing crisis into the future.

“Over the last five years we have made progress in addressing the issue at a macro level but by their nature these things take time because organisations need to build up their capacity. In the meantime, we have had to pursue temporary solutions to deal with the surge in demand and roll out programmes such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme.”

The current Programme for Government appears to recognise the error of abandoning the construction of public housing and has promised to deliver 50,000 new social housing units over the term of the government. CHI has broadly welcomed it, particularly the enhanced recognition which has been given to AHBs.

“There are many positive elements and on balance we welcome the Programme. From our point of view, the most significant element is that it clearly gives greater recognition to AHBs,” says Brennan. “There is a commitment to help AHBs to reform, to expand and to further develop their overall capacities. In tandem with that there is the commitment to support AHBs in accessing alternative funding streams and to moving off the state balance sheet.

“There are a number of other key issues including the standardisation of differential rents across the country which is also very important. At the moment the differential rent, which is the rent that individual tenants in social houses pay, is determined by the local authority in your own region. So, you can be in the same type of house but paying different rents depending on the local authority region in which you reside. There is broad consensus on the need to provide a fairer and more equitable system and better standardisation of rental charges which would be a major and very welcome change.

While recognising the need for a temporary fix such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, the CHI Chairperson also supports the government’s intention to reduce reliance on HAP and shift the focus towards building more social and public housing schemes. “I don’t think anybody sees HAP as an effective long term solution,” O’Shiel says. “The landlord is the one ultimately in control and we have individual cases in Clare and elsewhere where HAP tenancies are brought to an end and the individual is faced with the same problem they had originally.

“We’re putting a huge amount of resources into what is a temporary solution. Why not put the same resources into the AHBs and local authorities and they will produce houses to be used in perpetuity to provide social housing to those who need them?”

Brennan adds, “The state was faced with an immediate issue, namely a huge demand for social housing and homelessness numbers which were going through the roof – the state simply could not meet that demand” he says. “HAP was always envisaged as a temporary solution and only ever intended to be one part of the solution which would be wound down over time.

“The problem is we haven’t sufficiently ramped up the production of public and social houses in the meantime to allow us reduce our reliance on HAP. The programme has grown and grown as a result and become a significant portion of state expenditure on housing. This is not the fault of the landlords. We need to gradually reduce our reliance on HAP and we can only do that if we have
public housing on a sufficient scale to allow the state to slowly withdraw itself from the private sector.”

CHI is also strongly supportive of the commitment from the Land Development Agency to deploy land banks under its control towards local authority and AHB housing, a departure which Brennan describes as extremely significant. He also welcomes the commitment to retrofitting social housing as part of the Climate Change Package.

“It will help retrofit social housing for people that couldn’t afford to do so,” he says. “It will create huge employment opportunities and it will reduce our emissions and give us a plus in the climate change column of the balance sheet.”

One of the critical goals of the forthcoming social housing building programme earmarked in the programme for Government will be to avoid the urban blight associated with some previous large scale public housing projects, most notably those built in the 1960s and 70s. The ideal, according to O’Shiel is larger scale developments with mixed tenure – social rented tenants like CHI members, private home owners, and private renters.

“We should look at countries such as Holland where it is the norm to have public housing, different tenures, different social classes all mixed in together,” he says. “Middle class people living next door to people who are unemployed. It’s a less segregated housing system. Ours is still based on the charity model unfortunately.

“If you can’t afford private housing you go in social housing and they will be segregated off. We need to move on from that approach. If we agree that we need to solve this crisis by providing volume, then those issues need to be factored into the mix.”

O’Shiel also advocates the need for an affordable housing scheme to address the needs of people whose earnings are higher than the required minimum threshold for social housing but who don’t have sufficient capacity to borrow to purchase their own home. “They are mid-crux and there are many people in this position. Some sort of dedicated scheme would be very helpful to them,” he says.

Brennan is in full agreement. “Spot on,” he remarks.

“There is not meaningful programme or policy currently being implemented around affordable housing, as far as I’m aware and it is urgently required. However, there is a commitment to it in the Programme for Government and again we welcome that.”

Both Chairperson and CEO accept that the Covid pandemic will likely result in some delays in the delivery of housing schemes and will also add to the organisations costs going forward. “Looking to the future,” Brennan says, “our biggest challenge will be configuring ourselves to deliver more housing. At the moment we have just over 3,000 units and we plan to significantly increase that.”

“The commitments outlined in the Programme for Government around AHBs, social housing, the land development agency and retrofitting are very encouraging. We’re hopefully beginning the job of creating a new framework for public housing and that is exactly what is needed. Let’s hope that it gets up and running and gets fully implemented,” he says.
FOREVER HOME WITH CLANN

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) report on population projections forecasts that by 2051, Ireland’s older population will increase by around one million. By 2030, one in five people living in Ireland will be 65 years of age or older.

Clann – a dedicated housing service for people over 55 sets out to meet the growing demand for age-friendly housing across Ireland. Launching earlier this year, Clann believes that now is the time to ensure we have the right housing supports in place so that people can continue to live independently in their own home for as long as possible.

Speaking at the launch of Clann, broadcaster and age-friendly housing advocate Brendan Courtney commented: “There is no doubt about it, Ireland’s population is getting older. We need to have a frank and honest conversation about how we are going to manage the future housing needs of people over the age of 55.”

QUALITY HOUSING AND SERVICES

Clann’s core purpose is to provide quality housing and services that enable people to create homes and thriving communities. Aoife Flynn Kennedy, Head of Clann, added: “Clann is committed to empowering our residents to live for as long as possible in sustainable, high-quality, affordable homes in their own community. The key to achieving this is to provide a safe and secure environment with access to all relevant services and community supports.”

Clann’s ambition is to expand and improve housing options for the over 55s. That means supporting people to remain living independently for as long as possible and providing more age-friendly homes for people who are inappropriately housed.

“The name Clann was chosen by our residents. It’s the Irish word for family, or a group of people with a common interest. We are committed to supporting our residents to age-in-place, as well as leading the sector by addressing the future growth in demand for age-appropriate housing.” says Flynn Kennedy.

AGE-FRIENDLY HOUSING

In Ireland, the National Positive Ageing Strategy’s operating principles are underpinned by the United Nations (UN) five principles for older persons covering independence, participation,
care, self-fulfilment and dignity. Clann is committed to delivering housing in line with this national strategy.

LARGEST AGE-FRIENDLY PROVIDER

With over 700 properties in management, Clann is already the largest provider of age-friendly housing in Ireland. Despite this strong footing, Clann enters the market issuing a warning that Ireland is facing a potential crisis in older persons’ housing.

“We believe the time to start planning ahead is now and we are actively seeking partnerships to deliver more age-friendly housing. We have to begin planning now to meet future needs – otherwise, we risk a serious housing crisis for this age group” explains Flynn Kennedy.

Experts agree that Ireland needs an improved mix of housing options for people over the age of 55. Clann’s provision of age-friendly housing alongside community services will go some way to meet this growing demand.

Clann’s vision is a society where everyone has a great place to live. Developing age-friendly housing close to town centres creates homes that work for our older people in cities, towns and villages across Ireland, while also building stronger, more diverse communities.

Commenting on people’s requirements when downsizing, John McCartney of Savills explained: “Downsizers don’t want to relocate, they want to stay close to everything they know, they just don’t want to have the commitments and costs of a bigger property”.

LOCATION IS KEY

Clann schemes are located close to local amenities like shops, post offices and community services. Each scheme takes a holistic approach to resident’s wellbeing by including internal and external communal areas that encourage regular social interaction and combat loneliness.

Amongst Clann’s 20+ schemes across the country is Broome Lodge in Cabra. The scheme was designed following the principles of Universal Design and has received plaudits for its design, comfort and place in the heart of the Dublin 7 community.

Broome Lodge resident Carmel Giles said: “I absolutely love living in Broome Lodge. It’s very peaceful and very quiet. It’s a lovely place. I love my home – it’s very comfortable and I have good neighbours and we have a nice community of people here who all look out for each other. I’m delighted to be able to call this place my home.”

Resident John Keegan added: “Broome Lodge is in a great location, close to the city on a good bus route. My partner Phyllis and I are delighted to be living here. We had lived nearby beforehand, so it was great that we could stay in our own community. We have everything on our doorstep, and nice neighbours as well. Thanks to Clann for this opportunity to have this lovely home – the two of us are delighted with it.”

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Clann already has the largest age-friendly social housing development programme in Ireland and plans to increase that to meet the housing demands of Ireland’s ageing population. The organisation’s ambitious pipeline of 800+ new homes will be delivered through a mixture of acquisition and construction programmes.

Looking to the future, Flynn Kennedy concluded: “This level of growth can only be achieved by developing new national partnerships and continuing to work with existing partners like the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, all local authorities, developers, the Housing Finance Agency and other age-friendly service providers. We are actively seeking new partnerships and I would encourage people to reach out to us to discuss how we can work together to deliver much needed age-friendly housing across Ireland.”
In 1998 the late John Hume was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He used his prize money to set up the Hume Charitable Trust which became the vehicle for the equal division and distribution of £250,000 of the prize money into the coffers of the Salvation Army and Saint Vincent de Paul.

In response to Mr. Hume’s largesse, Mr. Colm McNicholl of Saint Vincent de Paul described Mr. Hume back then as “one of the greatest human beings of the century”.

The sad passing of Mr. Hume on August 3rd last has been mourned by thousands of people nationally and internationally. His death evoked deep sorrow in particular among all those committed to waging war on want and poverty.

Reaching out to the marginalised and vulnerable is the primary mission of Saint Vincent de Paul and perhaps that is one reason why the dynamic Derry-born politician held such deep affection for the organisation. Daily, those in the vanguard of the SVP mirror the kind, unselfish act Mr. Hume made in 1998 and also the compassion and love for those less fortunate in society that he demonstrated all his life.

In her role as SVP’s National Manager for Social Housing Paula Kenny works with Society volunteers nationally who have taken up the baton held for so long by John Hume.

“We recognize that the wish to be housed is a fundamental need,” Ms. Kenny explains. “Our mission in terms of housing links directly to the core mission and ethos of the Society as inspired by our principal founder Frederic Ozanam - to offer support and friendship, promote self sufficiency and work for social justice. A root cause of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland is the lack of housing and the work of our volunteers in our community nationally goes some way towards addressing this.

“We have a very strong social justice department and the ultimate goal is to bring people out of poverty and provide long term solutions.”

The provision of housing to all citizens in the North of Ireland was something that energised John Hume and his colleagues to set up the Social Democratic Labour Party in 1970. For decades, the northern government provided a cold house for nationalists seeking housing but Hume and co. successfully challenged such social injustice. Kenny and volunteers nationally operate in a different environment, thankfully, and in a different time, but they too have their challenges:

“Things have changed quite significantly over the last five years in terms of regulations,” says Kenny who has been with Saint Vincent De Paul for the last four years.

“We welcome the regulations as a positive but they’ve been challenging as we have individual groups or Conferences
as we refer to them - who have operated autonomously for many years around the country doing amazing work in their local communities and when regulations were introduced, we had to bring a consistent approach to operations ensuring requirements across governance, performance and viability were being met and reported on.

“Much of what we are required to do, we were doing anyway. For us, the focus has always been on ensuring that we’re delivering high quality housing and providing a good service to our tenants”.

“There has been a huge amount of work imposed on our Conferences, and they are rising to the challenge albeit it’s a big ask and through support from fellow volunteers locally and through volunteers and resources at regional and national level we are going in the right direction. However, the operating environment now requires a more skilled volunteer base locally in areas such as IT, financial, legal, technical/engineering etc.” As an example Kenny highlights the commitment and determination of one National member to bring IT into local operations and implement a Housing management IT system across housing schemes/volunteers nationally, “just one of the journeys we are on and not without its challenges”, Kenny admits.

Ireland is noted for its high rate of volunteerism in the areas of sport and community support and Saint Vincent de Paul which has been in existence since 1844 continues to rely heavily on Ireland’s volunteering to keep the wheels in motion.

“Our volunteers are absolutely crucial to us,” Kenny confirms. “At national level volunteers have been critical to me at a national Committee/board level with the Society having worked hard in the last number of years to ensure the right skillsets are on board through our volunteers to guide our housing direction and provide professional input. As a nationwide organisation, we very much recognise the need to continuously encourage the involvement of more new volunteers on the ground in order to maintain our operational model nationally. The work that is done on the ground on a daily basis by volunteers is so commendable. Without volunteers operating locally, the service that we offer would be very different as we pride ourselves in the added value that is brought through the volunteer input”.

“We’re proud of the fact that there’s such a strong and close relationship between the volunteer and the tenant. Our volunteers on the ground are able to respond to the needs of tenants locally and that is super important. Tenants know the volunteers and they can contact them when they need assistance. It’s not unknown for certain members in our Conferences to take calls from tenants in the middle of the night. Even during the height of the Covid
-19 restrictions, an enormous amount of work was being carried out on the ground by our volunteers to ensure our tenants were supported. In that way, our organisation really is very unique and truly highlights the Vincentian ethos amongst our volunteers.”

“But I’d have to say that getting new volunteers is arguably our greatest challenge. We know we have volunteers that won’t be around forever to assist us. Kenny would encourage anybody that has time to give to consider getting involved in the housing operations. She adds “of our recently recruited volunteers some are new to retirement from having had very active professional lives and being able to utilise their skills and give something back is hugely motivating and rewarding for them.”

As the operating environment has changed over the last 5 years the Society housing model has correspondingly incurred significant changes with the need to recruit resources to assist volunteers in meeting operational/regulatory requirements. This is working successfully where the scale of operations justifies it whilst continuing the overall volunteer led model. The Society has a number of Regional and Scheme Officers in place who provide a very valuable back up to Conference volunteers particularly evident during the ongoing COVID restrictions. They have been able to go out and support tenants directly and communicate with them as appropriate.

The Society works with all categories of people. However, it has a particularly close bond with older people and once housed a key priority is sustaining the tenancy and keeping people in their homes within the community for as long as possible. In fact, 85% of SVP’s stock of housing is allocated to older people.

Delivering on the housing needs of people under the management of SVP requires a substantial funding stream and having accessed Capital funding from the Department of Housing via local authorities nationally in the delivery of the vast majority of stock initially some 25-30 years ago the Society now finds that such stock requires new investment to bring it up to current day standards in particular in the areas of energy efficiency and in adapting the home to the older persons physical and mobility needs. “Going forward ensuring that our stock is of a high standard is a priority and the Society are working with Conference members locally to ensure properties are maintained and necessary refurbishment works undertaken.” The Society have been successful in accessing grant funding through SEAI for energy upgrades on a number of schemes nationally and are very eager to complete additional projects. Kenny outlines that given the significant costs involved with energy upgrades they are actively exploring further grant funding and are very much open to working with companies who may wish to assist through their corporate social responsibility work. “We know the impact that a quality standard of accommodation has on a tenant, in particular for older people having accommodation that meets their needs and provides a level of comfort is hugely important”, Kenny says.

The Society tenants come through a number of avenues, mainly nominations from local authorities but also include

85% of SVP’s stock of housing is allocated to older people.
transfers from homeless services, disability/mental health organisations and the Safe Home Programme. Safe Home Ireland assist older Irish born emigrants wishing to return home to secure suitable housing in their native communities who would not otherwise have means to do so. It’s a programme which is particularly active in the West of Ireland and has proven transformative for participants. The returning emigrants benefit from the assistance of dedicated SVP volunteers who are invariably active members of their communities and have a real connection with the area chosen as a place to live by the returning emigrant.

“Overall, it is rewarding to see the positive impact that can be achieved from our social housing projects. That is what makes my job so worthwhile”, Kenny reveals.

Nobody should underestimate how much a home means for so many, having a safe, permanent and secure home means everything. Just as the returning emigrant has been on a journey, Kenny - SVP’s National Manager for the past four years – has also been on a journey since joining her current employers from the Irish Council for Social Housing.

“The journey SVP Housing has been on in terms of meeting the regulatory requirements and all the structural changes required has been an eventful one and one that started as I joined,” Kenny explains.

“It’s been a challenging journey but I’m fortunate that I have fantastic SVP members working with me and supporting me on a daily basis. I am also fortunate that my previous job gave me a great education and exposure into the whole social housing sector. That experience has given me the tools to work with in my current role with SVP and equipped me with insights into housing development and management in terms of operating as a Tier 3 AHB.” Kenny continues her involvement with the Irish Council for Social Housing being currently a board director.

As 2020 gathers pace, Kenny and her colleagues are determined to continue a number of refurbishment projects and complete some additional new units to a number of schemes having been interrupted by Covid 19. Looking to the future Kenny would like to see the Society play its part in meeting additional housing needs for older people, in line with coalition plans laid down in Rebuilding Ireland, where there is capacity amongst Society volunteers locally to deliver and manage and where state funds can be accessed.

“From our perspective, our older people should be supported where they can, to remain in their own homes within their communities for as long as possible”, Kenny says. “Covid 19 has highlighted the vulnerabilities of nursing home care and the need to look at other models and create options for where an older person who just needs a certain level of support to stay in their own home but doesn’t need that full nursing home care.”

“I’ve been working with people who are supported to a certain level are able to maintain their tenancy without going into nursing home care. That needs to be looked at because we’ve seen the drawbacks of having large concentrations of older people in nursing homes.”

Never a truer word spoken.
The County Council progressed its construction programme during 2019 when 67 units were delivered through the council’s own build programme; 189 units were delivered through the turnkey model and 52 units through the Part V process. New social housing was provided throughout the county with developments completed in Carrigaline, Cloyne, Bandon, Mallow, Kanturk, Midleton and Fermoy as well as a range of other towns and villages. A number of own build, turnkey, Public Private Partnership and single-stage construction projects are currently on-site and will deliver 570 units. A further 177 dwellings are at various stages of the approvals process.

Cork County Council is the lead authority for Bundle 2 of the Public Private Partnership Programme with 152 of the 465 new social homes being delivered on three sites across the county in Clonakilty, Macroom and Skibbereen. Sites in Clare, Galway, Kildare, Roscommon and Waterford make up the remainder of Bundle 2.

**Energy Efficiency**

Under the DHPLG’s energy efficiency scheme and in tandem with the SEAI’s energy strand scheme, the Council’s Housing Department carried out energy efficiency improvement works to 38 local authority houses at a cost of €1.2million. These works involved deep energy retrofitting of older council houses to bring them to a B Energy rating and reduce the impacts of fuel poverty in areas including Midleton, Fermoy and Mallow. The measures included upgraded windows and doors, installation of externally wrapped thermal insulation and loft insulation, upgraded heating systems through the provision of air to water heat pumps and space heating stoves, heating control systems and ventilation.

**Vacant Houses**

A total of 146 vacant properties were refurbished in 2019 and of these, 106 council properties were repaired through the continuation of a funding stream made available by the DHPLG to facilitate the return of vacant properties to productive use. The introduction of a new vacant house procedure, that included a condition classification system and targeted turnaround times has improved reletting times.

**Choice Based Letting**

Cork County Council’s choice-based letting system (CBL) introduced in 2016 continues to be a very successful method of advertising and allocating vacant Cork County Council and Approved Housing Body properties that are available to let. 982 properties have been offered through the choice based letting system to date, of which 973 were accepted. The CBL system has been very successful in getting the refusal of tenancy offers down from mid 30% to less than 10%.

**Capital Assistance Scheme**

13 new units were delivered in 2019; nine in Rosscarbery in partnership with Rosscarbery Housing Association AHB and four in Charleville in partnership with Charleville Care Project AHB.
In 2019 also, Bandon Geriatric and Community Council won the Irish Council for Social Housing National Award for housing for older people at the ICSH national conference.

The Community Council attached to St Michael’s, in partnership with Cork County Council’s Housing Directorate completed nine new houses in 2018 within the heart of Bandon town through the Capital Assistance Scheme. The accommodation provides independent living for older people with on-site visiting support services in place.

APPROVED HOUSING BODIES

Cork County Council has a strong collaboration with the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector and in 2020 alone over 100 units will be delivered by them through DHPLG approved schemes in Fermoy, Midleton and Kinsale. In addition, the council has a history of working with small rural AHB’s in delivering smaller schemes for older people in rural towns and villages such as in Bandon, Charleville, Rosscarbery and Bedl Átha an Ghaorthaidh.

HAP

With over 5,200 sign-ups, Cork County Council has supported more households under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme than any other local authority.

GRANT AID

Over 700 private households in Cork county receive grant funding annually to carry out works in their homes under the Housing Adaptation, Mobility and Older Persons Grants.

A total of 146 vacant properties were refurbished in 2019 and of these, 106 council properties were repaired through the continuation of a funding stream made available by the DHPLG to facilitate the return of vacant properties to productive use.

A total of 143 new units were delivered through leasing schemes in 2019 increasing the total number of leased properties to 473. Overall delivery for the county in 2019 both directly and in partnership with AHBs:

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<th>DELIVERY 2019</th>
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<tr>
<td>SHCIP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turnkeys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buy and renew Acquisitions</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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South Dublin County Council’s administrative area covers 223 km², extending from the River Liffey to the Dublin Mountains and bordering the administrative areas of Dublin City, Fingal, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Wicklow and Kildare. The county has a population of over 278,000 people (average age 35.5 years) living in more than 92,000 homes. The accommodation needs of the county’s population as well as various demographic factors are key considerations for housing delivery and this is reflected in the significant plans being brought forward by the Council.

**Recent Housing Delivery**

In recent years, South Dublin County Council’s Housing Department has developed a range of high-quality social housing projects to meet various housing needs including those of lower income households, homeless people, people with disabilities and older persons with recent developments of note at locations such as Ballyboden, Killininny, Brookfield, Lealand and Neilstown. Housing supply in the county is achieved in partnership with a range of stakeholders including Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage (DHLGH) and private developers to accelerate housing delivery and increase capacity.

Building on this, the Council is currently progressing a range of new housing developments to suit mixed incomes on zoned housing land in the county as well as specific age friendly housing projects to support independent living within communities.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, annual local targets are set with local authorities responsible for monitoring and delivering on these targets. Across 2018 and 2019, South Dublin City Council provided 3,334 households with various social housing solutions including 924 new builds (112% of target), leasing, Part V delivery, the acquisition of second hand properties and support through Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

This shows that the Council is addressing the challenges...
Newly built or acquired local authority housing is an investment in state owned assets for current and future housing needs – it is critical that newly delivered homes are delivered are well-planned, built to last, of high-quality, and situated within communities and with nearby services.

faced on housing, meeting targets and making crucial progress for the individuals and families it supports. While the stock of social housing is built up, supports like HAP and RAS, provide a flexible way to provide accommodation for those in need. Newly built or acquired local authority housing is an investment in state owned assets for current and future housing needs and the Council’s priority is to ensure that newly delivered homes are delivered, are well-planned, built to last, of high-quality, and situated within communities and with nearby services.

FUTURE PLANS

Progress is continuing on the next tranches of social housing delivery in South Dublin and significant plans are also being prepared for future housing delivery. 109 social homes are due to be completed at Corkagh Grange, Clondalkin in December 2020 under the Public Private Partnership model while sites at Mayfield (41 homes), Firhouse (16 homes) and Knockmore (12 homes) are now moving to construction stage following tender processes. Work continues to progress other proposed new developments that have been approved by the Council including sites at Balgaddy (69 homes), New Nangor Road (93 homes) and St. Marks (41 homes) while further sites are also progressing towards approval stage.

LARGE SITES

In addition to the social housing construction programme and the various range of housing support options outlined, the Council has also embarked on a €1 billion investment plan to deliver 4,500 new homes in mixed tenure developments across large Council-owned sites at Kilcarbery, Clonburris, Killinarden, Belgard Square North and Rathcoole in the coming years. The sites at Killinarden, Clonburris and Rathcoole have received provisional approval totalling €18.3 million from DHLGH under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) which will provide subsidies of up to €50k for each affordable home provided.

The innovative joint venture between the Council and Adwood Ltd, a consortium of established Dublin builders, Adroit and Maplewood at Kilcarbery in Clondalkin will see 1,034 homes (including 30% social homes and 5% discounted/affordable homes) delivered along with an 847m² community building and creche facilities. The development was the inaugural project of the Major Urban Housing Delivery Sites (MUHDS) initiative under Rebuilding Ireland with state funding of €2 million used to provide infrastructure to facilitate large scale housing delivery. Planning approval was granted by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) in late 2019 and construction of the new homes is due to commence on site imminently.

KILLINARDEN

In July 2020, the Council went out to tender seeking an economic operator to work with the Council to deliver a medium density residential development on a 15.7-hectare site at Killinarden. The development site is just over 1.5km south west of Tallaght Town Centre with an estimated capacity for 500
homes (comprising 300 affordable purchase homes supported by SSF, 100 social homes and 100 private residential homes) along with a creche facility, a community building incorporating a sports pavilion and a park, designed to facilitate active and passive recreation for a variety of ages to the east of the development site. Once the competitive dialogue procurement is completed, the successful tenderer will progress the final design to planning approval and construction.

**CLONBURRIS**

In May 2019, ABP approved a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) for lands comprising approximately 280 hectares in Clonburris, located between the established communities of Lucan, Clondalkin and Liffey Valley. These lands are also designated as a MUHDS site with the potential to provide homes for over 21,000 people. The approved planning scheme includes provision for up to six schools and is well serviced by two train stations and excellent transport links. The masterplan for the SDZ shows capacity for more than 2,600 homes on Council owned lands within the SDZ. Phase 1 of the development of the Council’s lands in Kishogue South West has the potential for 274 homes comprising a mix of affordable (rental and purchase with SSF support) and social homes. A design team has been appointed to bring the outline design for Phase 1 through the Part 8 process with commencement scheduled for 2021 followed by further phases within the SDZ.

**BELGARD SQUARE NORTH**

Council owned lands at Belgard Square North/Cookstown are the subject of an overarching masterplan that includes affordable rental apartment accommodation together with a new town park/civic plaza, innovation centre and a potential site for a new post primary school. The site is centrally located in Tallaght town centre, adjacent to Tallaght University Hospital and will be accessed from a new link road to the east of the site, which is currently being constructed.

Councillors approved the new Tallaght Local Area Plan in July 2020 and subsequently approved the development proposal for 133 affordable rental apartments with a community facility in three blocks ranging from three to eight storeys, as well as the proposal for the civic plaza, at the Council meeting in October 2020. The apartments will be delivered under a design and build contract in collaboration with an AHB consortium with construction work scheduled to commence in mid-2021.

**RATHCOOLE**

A site immediately south of Rathcoole village which is 22 kilometres west of Dublin City Centre, situated between Saggart and Newcastle villages, close to commercial, leisure and employment hubs of Citywest and Tallaght Town Centre has also received provisional approval under SSF. The site has the capacity to deliver more than 200 homes with proposals to be finalised following the completion of ecological and other surveys.

**AGE FRIENDLY HOUSING**

Although the population of South Dublin County has a relatively young average age, there is an increasing number of older people living here, with a 34% increase in people aged 65 and over in the last ten years. These numbers are projected to continue to increase significantly in the coming years and planning for the related housing needs is a primary objective for the Council under our recently adopted Age Friendly County
To meet the changing needs of people as they age, the Council is progressing new and innovative housing options for older people. It has appraised comparative best practise and various options to develop an exemplar model of ‘housing with care’ for older people to combine supports and services while retaining the concept of independent living.

Strategy for South Dublin is to ensure that older people can live independently in their communities for as long as possible.

To meet the changing needs of people as they age, the Council is progressing new and innovative housing options for older people. It has appraised comparative best practise and various options to develop an exemplar model of ‘housing with care’ for older people to combine supports and services while retaining the concept of independent living. There are over 170 new age friendly homes at various stages of design, planning and construction with a range of additional sites across the County being examined for feasibility for more age friendly housing proposals.

Forty new homes in Springfield, Tallaght adjacent to Tallaght University Hospital are currently under construction while a further 81 homes located at Whitestown Way will shortly commence construction. These sites are being progressed in partnership with Clúid Housing and will be part of a new “wellness village” concept supported by both Tallaght University Hospital and Trinity College Dublin to provide a range of health supports and interventions on site to support and enhance the capacity for independent living. Further age friendly housing developments are being delivered by AHBs in the County including at Ballyboden and Citywest while Councillors have also approved developments at Old Bawn, Templeogue and Palmerstown.

Most recent sites approved and being considered in particular are informed by analysis of housing need with more than 700 housing list applicants aged 55+ as well as an under-occupancy study undertaken by the Council of current social housing tenancies. This study showed approximately 1,200 homes solely occupied by people aged 55 and over, living in three and four-bedroom social homes. Examining and mapping the data together with local transport links, community supports, healthcare provision and other key services, has informed further targeted infill development of age friendly homes within existing communities by our age friendly housing technical specialist team.

Accompanying rightsizing research in conjunction with Age Friendly Ireland and the development of a local rightsizing policy including the range of supports and assistance required to allow older social tenants to stay within existing neighbourhoods area and maintain their social and support networks in high-quality and suitable accommodation for living independently for longer.

Ambitious Plans

The Council’s ambitious and strategic plans outlined above show our focus on the continued delivery of the much-needed housing supply across the County for a range of households and needs. These plans will serve to meet housing demand in the coming years with the proposed new mixed tenure and age friendly developments providing opportunities for high-quality sustainable and integrated new communities supported by efficient use of housing stock across South Dublin.
To achieve, in a sustainable manner and in co-operation with other key stakeholders, an enduring and better quality of life and a robust local economy in Cork by balancing the relationship between communities, economic development and environmental quality
Homes Unveiled in Cork

The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. John Sheehan officially opened 81 new homes across the city while also unveiling plaques to mark the laying of foundation stones for a further 220 homes which are being constructed at three sites over the coming months.

Seventy-one new homes were opened at Cork City Council’s Northwest Quarter Regeneration at Knocknaheeny and at another Cork City Council project at Blarney Street. A further 10 homes, which were developed by the Respond Housing Association, were officially opened by the Lord Mayor on Dublin Street in Blackpool.

In addition, the Lord Mayor unveiled plaques marking the foundation stones for two more Respond Housing Association developments at Redforge Road and Thomas Davis Street in Blackpool. A third plaque was unveiled on a Thomas Davis Street scheme to mark the foundation stone for a 112-unit scheme to be developed by Clúid in partnership with Cork City Council.

“It gives me great pleasure and pride as Lord Mayor of Cork City to be able to open so many new homes and mark the commencement of so many more right across the City, especially at this defining time in our history and for the first year of our expanded City,” Mayor Sheehan said.

I wish to thank everybody involved for their support in getting these critical projects off the ground and may all the families involved enjoy their new homes and communities. This is a great day”.

Cork City Council Assistant Chief Executive, Brian Geaney said that housing has always a core priority for the City Council’s objectives, particularly as the city is experiencing unprecedented growth in the City and rapidly becoming the go-to destination in the country.

“So, despite the recent difficulties of the pandemic and necessary restrictions our housing delivery programme under Rebuilding Ireland is still very much on track. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of all stakeholders involved and look forward to more busy times ahead,” Geaney said.

The 47 new homes at Harbour View Road in Knocknaheeny are part of the Northwest Quarter Regeneration Phase 2a. Built by Murnane and O’Shea for Cork City Council, they provide 32 houses and 15 apartments for the regeneration programme.

The 24 new homes at Blarney Street were acquired by Cork City Council under its award-winning Competitive Dialogue procurement process for social housing. They were built by Unique Fitout and KPH Construction in partnership with Cork City Council.

10 apartments for older people were also officially opened at 27-29 Dublin Street. Developed by Respond Housing Association, the scheme consists of 5 two-bedroom apartments and 5 one-bedroom apartments in a four storey building. This project was developed in partnership with Cork City Council and Department of Housing and funded through the Capital Assistance Scheme. The building was completed in March 2019.

The Lord Mayor unveiled a plaque to mark the foundation stone for an 80-unit Respond Housing Association Scheme at Redforge Rd in Blackpool. This development, which includes 2 communal facilities is located to the north of the recently built up district centre at Blackpool Shopping Centre and Blackpool Retail Park. The scheme comprises of 6 one-bed, 38 two-bed, and 36 three-bed houses to accommodate different needs and requirements.

The Mayor also unveiled a second foundation stone plaque to mark a 112-apartment scheme by Clúid at Thomas Davis Street which will remove a large derelict site and further contribute to the regeneration of Blackpool village. The apartments will be built in five blocks, one of which is dedicated to sheltered accommodation for older people.

A third foundation stone plaque was unveiled at Thomas Davis Street for a 28 apartment Respond scheme for older people and is located within a close proximity to a range of amenities including Blackpool Shopping Centre and Blackpool Retail Park. The scheme comprises of 5 one-bedroom apartments and 23 two-bedroom apartments to accommodate different needs and requirements.

Respond is working in partnership with Cork City Council and Department of Housing and funded through the Capital Assistance Scheme. Works commenced on site in December 2019.
While all things pertaining to Covid 19 continue to colour the front and back pages of our national newspapers, the housing crisis hasn’t gone away, you know.

The twin ravages of homelessness and dearth of social housing remain a blight on our economic landscape and there is little indication that either is going to dissipate any time soon. For his part, housing charity chief Denis Buckley fervently believes that government needs to put Ireland’s housing crisis on the same footing as the Covid 19 crisis:

“As a country, we need to apply the same approach and commit the same resources to our housing crisis as we have done for tackling the current pandemic,” says Fold Housing’s Chief Executive.

“The housing crisis has been around for 40 years. Covid 19 has been around for a matter of months! One is being confronted with an impressive sense of urgency and the full allocation of all the necessary resources while the other has been addressed by a patchwork of different measures over the decades depending on the political environment and on whether the money has been in place to make something positive happen.

“We have seen how we have spent the money necessary on COVID 19 and we have seen the results but I honestly find it ironic that, unlike funding for social housing, there’s been no question about a lack of money in relation to tackling the coronavirus.

“The practice by successive governments of not spending enough money on social housing has been reflected in the voting preferences of the electorate. A large segment of the voting population in Ireland has voted with their feet in terms of what has been happening in relation to our housing policy and accompanying reductions in public expenditure.”

Buckley has been CEO of the tier three approved housing body since 2019 and, along with Tina Donaghy who is Fold Housing’s Director of Development and Housing, is responsible...
For the day-to-day management of the organisation.

Needless to say, in overseeing Fold Housing’s provision of a unique combination of accommodation and associated service options including housing-with-care and day care for frail older people and people with dementia; sheltered housing; and general needs accommodation for families, Buckley, Donaghy and co. have been busy, busy, busy in 2020.

“We have three big projects which are being finalised at the moment and which would be already finished, completed and allocated by now, except for the Covid pandemic which hindered progress,” explains Buckley who has twenty years’ experience at CEO level in the corporate sector, both nationally and internationally.

“We have St Agnes’ in Crumlin, which will consist of 103 units for people over the age of 55, and New Dolphin Park in Rialto, which will house 43 older persons. We also took ownership of 31 units in Abelard Square, Phoenix Park.

“IT’s only recently that work was resumed on these schemes. We are seen as providing an essential service and all three projects are now near completion.

“The Dolphin’s Park project - in the Dolphin’s Barn area of Dublin - is a substantial regeneration project that is now essentially complete and has been done in association with Dublin City Council. It entailed the regeneration of an old part of Dublin where many generations of people have lived and the community there have all been involved. It ticks all the boxes and will outlast all of us. I would like to think it will win an award!”

It is likely that it will feature in the winner’s enclosure again, sooner rather than later, because it has form in that respect. Certainly, it will be no major surprise if the aforementioned Dolphin Park project is suitably garlanded just as the organisation’s Ballygall project was in 2017 when it claimed the Irish Council for Social Housing’s Regeneration Award plus its overall Winner Award.

Fold Housing is headquartered at Ashtown Business Centre on Dublin’s Navan Road. It is dedicated providing ‘the best housing, care and support to those in need of such services.’

Its innovative approach to design, sustainability and housing management is not only award-winning but, more importantly, wholly practicable in enabling its residents to live independently and with dignity while maximising their quality of life.

SadIy, Ireland has given witness to a system of care, state and private, in recent months which has been less than palatable. The nation’s nursing homes, in particular, have come in for some scathing reviews. Worse still, a lot of them have been found guilty of operating way shy of the standards set down by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Health Service Executive; standards fully met by Fold Housing.

“The Taoiseach mentioned recently that we need to examine the model we have adopted in relation to caring for our elderly and that is very true because the prevailing scenario of nursing home care for looking after the over 55s is no longer valid.

“My belief is that it should be all about providing a holistic approach towards the care of the elderly in the modern world and by that I certainly don’t mean nursing homes.
"We need a system of care that is adaptable and flexible for the current environment. We have to move on from being simplistic in our viewpoints and we have to look at the world today in a more complex environment. We have to look at one sector, whether it’s the elderly or the disabled, and see what the requirements are within that sector.

“There is an urgent need for a step down programme and on a broader level we need to re-examine all the reasons for having a social program relating to housing. It has to be looked at more comprehensively and we have to strive to achieve a balance in the community, whether its old people, young people, whether it’s the travelling or the refugee community. I repeat, there needs to be a holistic approach.”

A graduate of Commerce from Cork University, Buckley is a qualified Chartered Management Accountant. He also holds an MSc in Strategic Management Practice at Trinity College. The practice of investing in sandbags just as the river is bursting its banks is not something the Fold Housing CEO is taken with. Rather, he would prefer to see adequate support being afforded to not-for-profit charities like Fold Housing at all times and not just at times of emergencies.

“The issue of proper supports being made available has to be a strategic effort on behalf of the State,” Buckley opines.

“Our housing crisis was the main issue during the election, weeks before the outbreak of the coronavirus. We need to have our housing crisis front and centre as regards government priorities now but my fear is that with a coalition (government) you can end up with a hybrid social policy in relation to housing and that may be difficult to implement.

“I feel if we had the number of people dying of homelessness, of the nature that we’ve had with Covid 19, we would have had houses built a long time ago. I think lethargy and the slow tide of change and politics tend to follow whatever is required. The politicians don’t tend to lead except in a crisis.

“In my view, an adequately funded and sustainable housing policy has to be agreed by the politicians at national level. Then we have to work with the Irish Council for Social Housing and other alliances to ensure that we provide proper housing at the levels required, particularly for the elderly.”

Buckley accepts that to the untrained eye, the difference between a nursing home and a housing-care model which Fold Housing operate may not be entirely vivid.

“The real difference between the two is that with our housing-with-care, each of our tenants or residents have their own individual apartment. Our customers have a full complement of staff to look after them with food, medications – everything that you would normally find at a nursing home.

“As I say, as an organisation we are focused on adopting a holistic approach in terms of our residents’ accommodation and their overall well-being. Seeing their lives being extended by taking a healthy and more rounded path is very satisfying for all our staff and volunteers.”

“My belief is that it should be all about providing a holistic approach towards the care of the elderly in the modern world and by that I certainly don’t mean nursing homes.”
Delivering homes
Creating communities
Changing lives

To find out more
search Oaklee Housing
or email us at
development@oakleehousing.ie
By the end of 2020, it is expected that more than 50% of social housing units in Ireland will be provided by Approved Housing Bodies. North & East Housing Association is one of these key players who have stepped into the breach.

“Funding to Approved Housing Bodies like ourselves was cut in the wake of the economic downturn. From a position whereby we were getting 100% government funding, from 2011 we were being asked to go out to the open market to borrow money,” explains Vincent Keenan, CEO of North & East Housing Association. “To access that necessary funding and to be attractive to funders like the commercial banks, we had to demonstrate that our organisation is run well, governed the proper way and well managed. Fortunately, we have a great voluntary Board of Directors and an experienced and professional management team.”

Keenan has been CEO of North and East Housing Association for the past six years but his experience in working with people out of homes, supported housing and general housing stretches back nearly thirty years. Prior to taking up the role of CEO in 2014 Keenan was an Executive Director in Co-operative Housing Ireland (formerly NABCO) and also spent over ten years with Focus Ireland.

Providing Homes

Providing high quality, affordable housing and supporting communities has been the mission of North & East Housing Association since it was established in 1993. The Association has delivered on its previous strategic objective of delivering 700 homes by the end of 2020.

A new strategic plan has been launched and by 2024 North & East plan to provide a total of 1,100 homes. That will be an additional 400 homes in the next four years.

To achieve this, the association works in partnership with local authorities and other Approved Housing Bodies in the northern and eastern regions of the country to provide as much social housing as possible for both the general public and special needs groups; such as the elderly and those with physical and intellectual disabilities. “We are dedicated housing providers who can provide not just social housing, but other forms of good quality rental accommodation in the market” explains Keenan.

Keenan also noted that North & East welcomes the announcement by Government regarding the introduction of an affordable cost rental scheme and as indicated in the Strategic Plan...
the association is keen to pay its part in
developing this model of housing provision.

THE LAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Being on the frontline of social housing
provision can be a frustrating business,
of course, and Keenan admits that the
absence of a proper long-time land
management plan has hindered the job
of building houses on a sustained basis.
However, he has high hopes for the work
of the land development agency.

“It is important that the Land
Development Agency is given the proper
authority and mandate because just setting
it up is not enough. It needs to play a
co-ordinating role in putting land together, if necessary using
Compulsory Purchase (CPO) powers. If a strategic 10- or 20-year
plan was to be put in place, it would be the first time that we
would have a National Land Management Plan. To date, we have
been working on a cyclical four- or five-year plan, dependent
on what money we had. The biggest difficulty in providing
sustained output of social housing has been the land issue.”

NORTH AND EAST

North and East Housing Association has an interesting history.
Given the size and scope of its current operations, it is difficult
to believe that the organisation was run, for many years, on a
voluntary basis. The first full-time staff were employed only in
2004. Up to then, the association’s tasks of supporting tenants,
collecting rent, overseeing the carrying out of repairs etc. were
all carried out by volunteers.

“From 2010 onwards, our housing association has operated
in a very challenging environment. Changes to our operations
were necessary to allow the association to develop further
and to be in a position to borrow money. Our regulatory
environment also changed significantly and in recent years
and we have invested significant resources in ensuring that we
achieve compliance with all regulatory frameworks.”

Keenan admits he has never worked in such abnormal social
and economic times. “Thankfully, North & East has managed to
continue to deliver what we need to deliver. We have had staff
going out, viewing and allocating new homes and obviously
that had to be done in a safe way. We did a lot of work with the
return to the workplace plan. An awful lot of work was done
early on by us to ensure that we had safe operating procedures
in place for staff and for tenants.”

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

“We have seen first-hand the challenges that coronavirus has
brought about for older people and it has highlighted the nature
of the care we provide for them within the community and
the need to look at alternatives to the nursing home sector. I
think the pandemic has also highlighted the huge importance of
providing good quality accommodation for older people in
good locations.

“To my mind, it does not come down
to a choice between where our older
people are currently living and a nursing
home. Instead, we need to concentrate on
providing more appropriate accommodation
for people as they grow older. The need to
provide better accommodation, which is
appropriate to the needs of older people,
in terms of size, accessibility and providing
for restricted mobility, is an aspect of our
current strategic plan.”

“The completion of a number
of construction projects at the beginning of
2020, just before Covid-19 emerged in
Ireland means that the pandemic hasn’t
had a huge impact on our delivery or
plans this year”, Keenan says.

“We had a business continuation plan in place that allowed
us to continue to provide all the services to our tenants during the
worst of the crisis back in March and April and we’re continuing
to manage things quite well, due in no small measure to our
understanding and supportive tenants.

“We have continued to allocate homes and I’m conscious
that this has to be our priority and that of the Government
too. But while we have been busy allocating new homes, we
continue to look after our older stock of houses too. In that latter
regard, we have used the SEAI grant to improve the BER ratings
homes in terms of helping to mitigate fuel poverty. We have an
asset management strategy which allows for the spending of a
significant amount of money each year.”

TENANT ENGAGEMENT

Tenant engagement represents a significant element of North
and East Housing Association’s current strategic plan. Giving
rents a voice is a major goal of the association, especially in
light of the ongoing change in demographics and policies.

“We are ambitious in our approach to tenant engagement,”
says Keenan. “It’s all about consulting with our tenants to allow
them the opportunity to affect the decisions that we make in
terms of their homes. That can take the form of engaging with
them when we are doing planned maintenance programmes
or giving them an opportunity to give us feedback on how we
are doing and how our contractors are doing. We carried out
a survey at the end of last year and we were quite happy with
the results. It indicated that our tenants are very happy with the
quality of the homes that we’ve provided to them. While we are
satisfied with the positive outcome of the survey, we know we
can do even better in providing an improved, easier to access
and more consistent service.”

INTO THE FUTURE

There is no doubt that the provision of social housing remains
one of the most important challenges we face as a society.
It seems clear that Approved Housing Bodies will have a
significant role to play in that process and that North & East
plans to be at the forefront of meeting that challenge.
Back in the day, many householders, whether owners or tenants, took in lodgers to bring in a little extra income. More recently, Airbnb, the accommodation rental site followed a similar principle, generating income from sharing a home or a room on a short-term basis. Taking this idea one step further is the concept of THE Homeshare which brings about social benefits and not necessarily commercial gain to those who take part.

Put simply, The HomeShare is the exchange of housing for help in the home. A householder, typically an older person with a spare room, offers free or low-cost accommodation to another person in exchange for an agreed level of support. It is a clever scheme that upholds the principle of sharing homes in a mutually beneficial way for the householder and sharer. For founder and CEO Lucie Cunningham, it is rewarding work that is a win-win situation for the owner and the occupier.

“We have to build on the trust we have already achieved,” Lucie stresses. “Every single person is interviewed face-to-face and there is a continuing review system in place, with monthly checks, following a two-week trial period.”

Lucie’s team ensures that people are getting on, are happy with each other and there are no safeguarding issues on either side, whether mental, financial or physical. In fact, most sharers become like family to each other; it is very rewarding work.

Lucie says that with the challenges of the current housing market, professionals and students struggle to pay high rents or deal with long commutes, and this can make it impossible to save for a deposit or pay off expensive student loans. Key workers such as health and care workers, teachers and state security workers may not take home high wages and often battle with housing costs in the very places they need to live, Dublin being a prime example. She cites two recent Garda graduates from Templemore College who had to leave their chosen career as they could not afford accommodation in the city. “These are just some of the circumstances people find themselves in, where Homeshare could provide a solution.”

Alongside this, most older people want to remain in their Home Sweet Home

Sharing accommodation across generations is a win-win situation as Lucie Cunningham, CEO of THE HomeShare explains to Devlin Media’s Jacqueline Bragg.
The HomeShare is the exchange of housing for help in the home. A householder, typically an older person with a spare room, offers free or low-cost accommodation to another person in exchange for an agreed level of support.

homes, living as independently as possible, yet many need some practical support and company. They do not want to burden their families and can suffer from loneliness and social isolation. This is where Homeshare comes in, bringing people together in a mutually beneficial way.

Each participant of a HomeShare arrangement agrees to some basic rules and boundaries, i.e., what is expected of them. They are also given tools such as how to deal with emergencies and so forth. Some people living alone may just want a little company, others require carers coming at various times throughout the day and night, which many can ill-afford. “We try to ensure that householders and sharers each understand how they can help each other in particular and individual circumstances,” adds Lucie.

As the Covid-19 pandemic progressed this year, Lucie described the organisation as “experiencing an exponential growth in the numbers of people wanting to join the scheme”. Lockdown meant many vulnerable people were unable to have visitors, including their own families, and there was fear of strangers coming in and out of elderly people’s homes. In addition, students were set adrift, jobs were lost with all the fallout that accompanies the loss of work, and the usual structures of care were difficult to implement. Suddenly THE HomeShare came into its own.

Running the organisation with one other person keeps Lucie busy and the company is set for expansion as they hope to add to their numbers in the coming year. “It isn’t like a job really,” she said, “It’s like looking after your own family and improving their lives. The beauty of the HomeShare model is that it is immediate. It doesn’t involve long waits, organising loans, searching for a suitable nursing home or sourcing expensive rental property,” said Lucie. “We are here on the spot and adults of all ages are turning to us for an affordable and accessible solution to their housing needs, which can also have positive impacts on the social and economic needs of others who are happy to share their homes.”
The Right Response

Respond an Approved Housing Body (AHB) and service provider has been working around Ireland for over 38 years. Niamh Randall, Head of Advocacy and Communications at the voluntary housing agency charts the progress achieved by the organisation in terms of social housing delivering and building communities and sets out Respond's future goals and objectives.

Niamh Randall is Head of Advocacy and Communications and a spokesperson for Respond. She is part of a team of talented people from a myriad of housing, social and professional backgrounds who are working diligently to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland by providing social housing and a range of services.

Established in Waterford city, the not-for-profit organisation is an approved housing body which has, over the years, evolved into a core service provider with 6 Family Homeless Services, 3 Day-Care Services for Older People; 17 Early Childhood Care and Education services, 4 Family Support services and 4 Refugee Resettlement services.

Employing approximately 300 people, Respond has a presence in all 26 counties.

A member of Respond’s Executive Management team which dedicates itself to ensuring that the strategic direction set by the Board of Directors is implemented effectively and that the charitable ethos of the organisation is maintained, Randall says a bottom-up policy is an emerging part of the organisation’s modus operandi.

“One of our core commitments is in relation to ensuring that we are addressing the needs of people in their own communities, at grass roots level,” she says. We are very focused on creating vibrant communities, diverse communities and places where people want to live and to be a real part of that community.
"Respond has got a very clear mission that every family and individual in Ireland should have high quality housing as part of vibrant and caring communities."

Since its inception, Respond has built more than 6,370 properties including social and affordable homes, community buildings and group homes etc. nationwide. The organisation is responsible for providing homes for families, older people, people who are homeless and people with disabilities.

Just last year, the organisation published a five-year, strategic, plan which incorporates seven key goals.

"We are committed to building 2,500 homes by the end of the five years," adds Randall who brings 20 years of experience of working within the field of housing, homelessness and drug use to the table. "Currently we manage a just over 4,250 Respond homes across 26 counties with around 10,378 tenants. We also have community buildings – 84 of them around Ireland.

"Our strategic plan has two guiding principles; one is the human right to housing. It’s very much focused on the fact that everybody is entitled to a safe and secure place to call home. The second one is focusing on social justice. We clearly see that our role is about creating a more just and equal society and addressing poverty and inequality."

The organization traditionally has had a positive and collaborative relationship with the State. In that regard, it is likely that Respond’s penchant for working in partnership with statutory organisations may well be ramped up if the commitment by the current coalition government to build 50,000 new housing units becomes a reality.

"We are very focused on creating vibrant communities, diverse communities and places where people want to live and to be really part of that community."

"We’re pleased to see that a new government is in place," Randall avers," and we are looking forward to continued engagement with the new Minister for Housing, Darragh O’ Brien TD, in relation to delivering on the
ambitious commitments that have been announced.”

And the most exciting aspects of the Programme for Government from Respond’s perspective?

“There are some very positive aspects; especially the commitments around delivering high quality social housing and the commitment to deliver an affordable cost rental model,” she remarks. “The affordable cost rental model is really important. It also contains a commitment in relation to addressing reclassification and working towards moving Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) off the government balance sheet. That’s really important because the last thing we want is the tier three Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) competing for state funding for infrastructural projects such as roads, hospitals etc.

“Unfortunately once the tier three Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) were classified on balance sheets, that means that they’re counted as part of the state spend according to European rules. “We are looking look forward to a mechanism or process to facilitate this move off balance sheet as per the Programme for Government commitment.

“Other positive things in the Programme for Government, in our eyes, would be the exploration of increasing Part V from 10%’.

“We desperately need to deliver more social and affordable homes. That’s critically important. As a national organization we welcome the commitment to a balanced regional development. We work in all 26 counties ensuring that we’re injecting life into our smaller towns and rural areas as well.”

Randall and the rest of the Respond team are looking forward to engaging productively with the current coalition government. Drilling on the detail of the new government’s housing policy is top of the agenda.

Employed by Respond Housing Association since January 2019, Randall has brought a wealth of experience to the organisation, have previously worked with the Simon Communities and Merchant’s Quay. While admitting that the advent of COVID 19 has presented a challenge she could not have foreseen and which has not been easy to address, she is fulsome in her praise at the “amazing adaptability” of Respond’s staff.

“We’ve been really lucky in terms of the adaptability of our staff. They’ve been brilliant. Everybody has been working together collaboratively to try and address this (COVID 19), it has had a significant impact, for example in terms of our Early Childhood Care and Education services had to close due to Government restrictions . They have now reopened implementing all relevant public health protocols.”

In these difficult economic times, views differ as to the best way to proceed as a nation. Dig in and batten down the hatches or come out fighting? Tighten belts or expand your horizons?

“I think when there’s pressure on the economy, that’s a particularly pertinent time to invest in delivering and building social housing adopting a counter-cyclical approach” Randall comments. “, you continue to stimulate the economy and you continue to deliver homes for families and individuals who need them.”

“As an organisation, Respond has been advocating for this counter cyclical approach to ensure that we continue to invest in social housing – primarily because people need homes urgently and secondly, to ensure that we keep the economy ticking over and keep people in work in a range of other sectors as well.”

2020 has been an extraordinary year but Respond has lived up to its name and reputation.

The pursuit of social justice is part of Respond’s DNA. As is their recognition of the right of every person to be housed. Respond is crystal clear in its determination to address poverty and inequality, even in times of a pandemic.

Respond has achieved a lot through working with all their partners to provide people with high quality houses in vibrant and caring communities. “At the end of the day, the houses are only the beginning of the journey” says Randall. “It’s the communities we build around those houses that will support people throughout their lives.”
BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE

Strategic Objectives 2020-2024

NEHA will continue to place tenants at the heart of its activities and invest in management capacity and quality services to meet the needs of tenants and their communities.

We will strive to increase our portfolio of homes in management from 700 to 1,100 by the end of 2024.
public sector magazine

an ambitious agenda

as oaklee housing launches its 2020 annual report, head of development, kevin alfred talks us through the role the development team will play in delivering on the ambitious goals as set out in the next generation, 3-year oaklee housing corporate strategy.

the development strategy sets out its focus on new business opportunities across five key areas:

oaklee-led construction

building on the successful completion of recent construction projects at poplar row in dublin 1 and walkinslough court, co. kilkenny, which between them delivered 65 new homes, oaklee now intends to leverage the expertise of its in-house development team to deliver more than 100 new homes over the lifetime of the corporate plan. this will involve the acquisition of land, either public or private, and the mobilising of design and construction teams.

one of the benefits of this type of project, according to head of development, kevin alfred, is the control it affords in the specification of the end product. “one of the greatest challenges we face as an approved housing body (ahb) is the lack of consistency in the design and quality of our homes across our entire estate,” he explains. “being in control of both of these elements instantly gives us an advantage and allows us to raise the bar when it comes to the type of homes we can offer our tenants.”

alfred acknowledges that these projects entail a certain level of risk and he credits oaklee’s “expert and talented team
of professionals” which are primed to deliver schemes from design through to breaking ground within an 18-month timeframe. He also praises the efforts of local authorities which have been instrumental in facilitating the significant increase in social housing output which is being delivered by approved housing bodies.

“The opportunity here is to deliver homes that are fit-for-purpose from the get-go,” Alfred remarks. “We’ll look to foster the excellent working relationship we have with a number of Local Authorities across the county to develop publicly owned land as well as look to procure sites on the open market that may or may not have planning already attached.

“Having a good working relationship with local authorities is crucial to the success of these projects. Housing in Ireland is an urgent political and social issue, all eyes are on it, so it’s critical that Local Authorities can rely on us to deliver.”

TURNKEY PROJECTS

Another area of opportunity for Oaklee Housing is the acquisition of homes delivered as ‘turnkey units’ from developers. These schemes are delivered by the contractor and acquired by Oaklee Housing as complete blocks or estates ready to occupy.

“Even though the opportunity to influence the design of the scheme is often no longer there, these projects have their advantages, the greatest being that the risks are borne by the Developer and we have a finished product ready to go,” notes Alfred.

Oaklee have proven the success of this as a fast and effective mechanism to deliver homes through the acquisition of schemes in across the country.

LONG TERM LEASING

A relatively new area in the context of delivering social housing is long-term leasing. This concept is driven by funds looking to build ‘low-risk’ investment portfolios supported by state-backed rents with organisations such as Oaklee Housing looking after the maintenance and management of the scheme.

Also engaging in this kind of investment are developers keen to retain their built stock and at the same time earning a guaranteed return on their investment.

“These schemes may appear more attractive to the fund or developer than they are to AHB’s like Oaklee Housing. They do, however, provide a low risk mechanism for the bulk delivery of new homes,” Alfred points out.

ACQUISITION OF EXISTING PROPERTIES.

Distinct from turnkey projects in that these opportunities involve the acquisition of second-hand properties, already in the marketplace, these homes may or may not have already been used for social housing and can be acquired in single or multiple units.

These properties generally require a degree of refurbishment and Oaklee is rigorous and uncompromising with regard to fire safety and other compliance issues. However, they can be considered a fast and effective way to deliver urgently needed social homes, according to Alfred.

“The emphasis is to acquire these properties as whole blocks or developments in order to nurture the formation of communities within the schemes we operate,” he says.

AFFORDABLE / COST RENTAL

The final area of focus for Oaklee Housing is their involvement in the development of a cost rental or affordable housing scheme which was introduced in the Programme for Government. With a budget allocation of €35mil this is a new opportunity for housing bodies like Oaklee.

The concept is based on the fact that homes are either built or acquired and rented to qualifying tenants on a not-for-profit basis. The purpose of the scheme is to provide security of tenure at an affordable level to those middle-income individuals and families.

“While still in its infancy this concept is likely to mature and become a significant contributor to the supply of socially affordable housing which, it is hoped, will assist in reducing the numbers on the housing waiting list,” advises Alfred.

This strategy represents the progressive manner in which the Oaklee development team are approaching their task of continued growth in line with the principles outlined in their corporate strategy. “These next three years promise to be busy but exciting with some forward-thinking propositions on the horizon, so watch this space!” Alfred concludes.

For further information contact Siobhain Bunni, Head of PR & Communications, on 086 1942397 or by email on siobhain.bunni@oakleehousing.ie
Sophia Housing is something of an enigma in housing circles. They might not be a household name, yet for over 20 years Sophia Housing has been quietly creating a housing model with backup support that provides a long term sustainable solution to homelessness in Ireland.

Founder of the organisation Sister Jean Quinn DW is also something of an enigma. Jean is now the Director of the New York based organisation UNANIMA International, advocating for the rights of women and girls at the United Nations. Much like the organisation she founded, Jean has been quietly working towards global solutions to ending homelessness only this time at the UN.

Soon after founding Sophia in 1997, Jean was joined by Eamonn Martin, and working with both religious and lay people they began to establish a model of support that placed providing a home with associated supports at the centre of their approach. In this regard, they were ahead of their time. Today this support model is the mainstream public policy (Housing First) and is central to the Irish government’s response to the homeless crisis.

Over the past two decades, Sophia has been tailoring the support model to respond to the many different needs of homelessness in Ireland, after all, one size does not fit all, and a person-centred approach needs a person-centred response.

This people-centered approach has set Sophia Housing apart because of the support model it created, but also in the way the organisation works with a wide range of partners such as Religious Congregations who, together with Sophia, are utilising lands and buildings they own across Ireland and bringing them back to life as housing for people who need more than just a home; those who also have complex support needs.
Housing With Support

Sophia Housing works with the most vulnerable people in Irish society to find not just a bed for the night but a home for life. Their focus is to help people recover from the trauma and stigma of homelessness, reducing not only social exclusion and poverty but also the health and social issues associated with living through the traumatic experiences of being without a home.

Sophia Housing believes that any response to homelessness in Ireland must have the provision of a home at the very core of that response. The Sophia model recognises this primary need while also recognising the trauma that people may have suffered which in some cases can include layers of trauma, one over another, which can have a profound effect on people. Recognising this, and how such trauma can be triggered in many different ways informs and shapes how Sophia’s teams support people across the country.

Looking at one such undertaking, the innovative project in Sean McDermott Street in Dublin is hugely impressive. Here in collaboration with Dublin City Council, Sophia Housing work with couples who have complex mental health and addiction issues, supporting their needs and helping them recover from personal issues as well as long term homelessness. This project provides much needed 24 hour on-site support and it has been highlighted in a European best practices manual on how to support people who have been homeless and have mental health needs.

Ambitious Building Plans for the Midlands

In October 2016, Sophia Housing entered into a collaboration agreement with Midlands Simon Community. Both organisations are aligned in terms of values and model of service delivery. The collaboration allows both organisations to share resources, avoid duplication, and collaborate in developing services. Sophia believes this partnership is a best practice model in terms of getting optimal use and return for the public funds that they receive.

A diverse range of partners has backed Sophia. Local Authorities and the Department of Housing have invested in Sophia developments across the State, over €30 Million of...
capital funding has been approved by the State, which across the country will support hundreds of people to progress out of homelessness. Their Portlaoise project brings together the Department of Housing, Laois County Council and the local Parish and Presentation Sisters to renew and reinvigorate the town centre utilising the former Sacred Heart Secondary School and surrounding lands, which had been lying empty for a number of years. The scheme, designed by OBFA Architects, will see 48 apartments and 4 houses built on the site. The former convent, vacant since 2000, is a protected structure and will be converted into three one-bedroom apartments and six two-bedroom apartments, while the two-storey school building will be converted into four one-bedroom apartments. Keeping these buildings and their architectural heritage in the town centre has been an important part of the project.

The impact on the community of such a development will go beyond providing much-needed housing. The project will create a new public park and garden in the heart of the site and also access to the proposed new ‘blue-way’ that will follow the course of the Triogue River which will link Portlaoise Town centre with a large town park on the New Road. The original school building will be converted into a community space which will be used by residents and the wider community.

**INNOVATION AND SCALING UP**

Sophia’s values and its reputation as an ethical partner has seen further innovations to its model. Smaller Approved Housing Bodies have approached Sophia to take over the management of their properties and the support of the people living in them. Giving other AHBs the security that their work over the years will continue to serve the people they set out to help is an important part of Sophia’s work. These partnerships reduce duplication but most importantly, they create a best practice model of how to ensure niche supported housing is provided at a scale that otherwise would not be possible.

Sophia have also renewed its Board of Directors, recruiting new Board Members to compliment the skills of the existing Board Members so as to ensure robust oversight of the organisation including full adherence to the codes of compliance as outlined by the Regulation Office for Approved Housing Bodies.

Responding to the Homeless and Housing Crisis in Ireland has seen Sophia Housing increase the number of people it supports by 100% over the past 4 years. In the next 3 years, it will grow by a further 60%, building over 200 new homes and providing support for at least 546 people including 86 families of which 172 will be children.

T.K Whitaker one of the most influential Public Servants in the history of the Irish State, said: “There are values moral and intellectual, which are higher than just mere economics. But it makes for a happier and more contented society if everybody has some basic share of wealth and well-being.”

The values at the centre of the Sophia model share this vision for a more contented, equal society by providing the security of a home with support that increases the wellbeing of those who live in them.
We offer

• Apartments and houses for older people and families.

• Supported 24 hour care for frail and older people in our two Housing with Care schemes.

• Fold Housing enhances the quality of life by providing unique accommodation and associated service options.

• 24 hour Telecare through a team of highly trained Radius Connect 24 call advisors.

• Home security solutions

Call us on 01 8228804
Email: enquiries@foldireland.ie
Horizon Offsite Ltd is one of Europe’s leaders in Offsite Construction and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)

Horizon Offsite provides a fully accredited structural light gauge steel system for the housing, commercial, healthcare and educational sectors.

Contact the Horizon Offsite team at

+353 52 744 1424  info@horizonos.ie
Horizon Offsite was established in 2017 by some of the most experienced names in engineering, led by Managing Director Ger Fahey. The construction manufacturer provides structural light gauge steel products for use in the construction of walls, floors, ceilings and roofs. The fully-accredited Horizon Offsite structural building system encompasses an in-house design team expert in offsite construction technologies, manufacturing through the Horizon Offsite facility in Cahir, County Tipperary and installation of the system on site by the team of Horizon-certified installers. This innovative approach to offsite building sees the Horizon team working one to one with clients to meet their every design and building specification.

Horizon Offsite has seen demand in both Ireland and the UK markets grow significantly over the past four years, with output doubling year-on-year for 2019 and 2020. The pace of this growth is on track to continue throughout 2021 as the Horizon Offsite team takes on more rapid delivery hospitals and healthcare facilities, education facilities and social housing projects nationwide. On foot of this rapid growth, the company has recently expanded its Tipperary facility in excess of 30,000 sq.ft., with an additional 7,000 sq.ft. of office space. The facility has the current capacity to process in excess of one million linear metres of steel per annum, which translates into approximately 1,000 residential units annually.

The fully-accredited Horizon Offsite building system is perfectly suited to the fast-track delivery of housing, apartment blocks, hospital accommodation and other healthcare facilities, commercial and industrial developments. Throughout the initial lockdown, the Horizon Team ramped up capacity, operating in two shifts, to deliver on essential healthcare and social housing projects right across the country. The company has evolved from working on mid-sized projects to much larger scale projects that are, according to the management team, more complex in terms of buildability and with much shorter build programmes.

Under this rapid delivery model, Horizon Offsite will routinely be approached by the hospital procurement teams and then appointed by the hospital authority directly, from that point, use of the fully-certified Horizon Offsite light gauge steel framing system is nominated or novated to the main contractor. And this is not just happening for public sector work, increasingly, the Horizon Offsite building system is being specified by design teams as the optimum way to deliver on build programme.

Industry demand for offsite construction, across Ireland and the UK, is growing and this growth is not all driven by Covid-19. While the pandemic certainly accelerated MMC (modern methods of construction) adoption, this is building upon the increased awareness of the inherent benefits of offsite construction. It is a comprehensive or holistic solution, ensuring frictionless execution of design, and overall compliance with building regulations for issues including fire and acoustic performance. This is the primary benefit of a fully-certified building system, as it allows for the speed and certainty of budget that project owners and managers demand.

ABOUT HORIZON OFFSITE
Horizon Offsite Ltd is one of Europe’s leading players in Offsite Construction and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), providing a fully accredited structural light gauge steel system to the residential, industrial, commercial, healthcare and educational sectors. Contact the Horizon Offsite team at https://horizonoffsite.ie
BUILDINGS FOR OUR FUTURE

The future of building is off-site manufacture, says Richard Thorpe, CEO of Metal Frame Construction Ltd.

It’s a no brainer – improved housing quality, rapid construction times, reduced building costs, improved sustainability and off-site manufacture using light gauge steel which is 75% recycled lessening environmental impacts – what more could you want? This is the package offered by Metal Frame Construction Ltd in Co Meath.

A carpenter and builder before taking on the gauntlet of manufacturing light gauged steel following the recession in Ireland, CEO Richie Thorpe was looking for an opportunity to manufacture a high quality and desirable product for the construction industry.

Speaking to Public Sector Magazine, Richie said: "It was the quality of the steel frame system that struck me. From testing the water by building a couple of houses with steel frames produced in the UK, we knew we had our product and went from there. The benefits of light gauge steel is its speed and accuracy and this gives us the edge in quality. We now have two factories, one producing our light gauge steel and the other where we turn our light gauge steel panels into 3D modules for our pods. An inspirational, practical and economic type of build for the 21st century."

"Here’s an example", says Richie: “Say we’re working on a housing estate, our frames will go out 60 per cent finished. The frames will already have the air tight membrane; they will be insulated and have the brick channel and tie system fitted therefore enabling windows and doors to be fitted as soon as the frame is erected. So when this is transported to site, you will have a watertight house in 2-3 days which allows other trades to proceed to work inside. These time-savings on on-site construction ultimately translate into cost savings.

“But equally as important is that Metal Frame Construction Ltd light gauge steel system is Irish Agrément Board Certified and CE marked. We are building huge confidence in our products,
evidenced in our year-on-year growth.

Lockdowns due to Covid 19 impacted less on the building industry than in other sectors, said Richie: "We didn’t work in the first lockdown, but kept the offices working remotely, which was tough at times. But as the restrictions eased, we had a huge spike in new work.

“Even with the restrictions in 2020, we are extremely proud of the completion of our first ever NZEB compliant temporary classroom block installed in Ireland for the Drogheda Institute of Further Education located in Co, Louth. We built the school in seven weeks in our factory. It was delivered and completed in three weeks on-site. The school is NZEB, (nearly zero energy building) and BCAR compliant with a BER rating of A2. The students were walking in for their first day on December 2nd 2020.

“Local authorities are now taking notice of the completion of this type of building and construction can bring to them. Whereas 10 years ago, they were not interested when we approached them, as the ideas were new, there has been a turnaround. The interest is there. The benefits in terms of our systems helping to solve the Housing Crisis in Ireland and beyond is obvious. We are now tendering for a number of projects for social housing which will begin in 2021.

“As with any customer, local authorities need assurances for themselves and the public, testing and procedures, accreditations and certifications of building compliance – we have all of that in place, including a minimum lifespan of 60 years for the building system.

Richie says the sector is moving at break neck speed towards improving sustainability for buildings as the environmental targets of 2050 loom.

Using metal frames as the building block, modular pod housing as a blueprint, and expert architects and engineers, the ex-carpenter believes a carbon neutral Ireland can be achieved.

“The first consideration is sustainability, this is implemented by the performance of the house, how well they are built and the life expectancy. Combined with the speed and quality of production and rapid build, it is the future of construction.”

Since the first lockdown our sister company The Pod Factory which manufactures off-site 3D modular pods has seen a huge spike in the requirement for home offices, home gyms and one, two and three bedroom living pods.

Richie adds: “There is also a hidden bonus - if you want to move house, just take the pod with you.”
INNOVATIVE ENGINEERING

A culture of innovation and a commitment to providing the best-in-class service has been key to the growth of Mayo-based civil engineering contractors, ShareRidge Limited.

ShareRidge Limited has long been recognised as one of Ireland’s most highly regarded civil engineering contractors. While much of the company’s work in recent years has been concentrated on water and wastewater contracts, ShareRidge has also established itself as a market leader in roadworks, streetworks and public realm projects. Furthermore, the company has recently become more and more involved in the housing sector and is currently carrying out thermal upgrade, refurbishment and retrofit works for a number of local authorities across the country.

Established in 2006, ShareRidge is headquartered in Castlebar in Co Mayo, with regional offices in Galway, Limerick and Arklow, as well as site offices all across Ireland. The company focuses on developing innovative solutions, offering a wealth of technical expertise, competency and professionalism to its clients and partners, both private and public.

ShareRidge specialises in pipe replacement technology, utilities, water, wastewater engineering, telecommunications, roadworks, streetworks enhancement, and housing, offering a comprehensive, professional client-orientated service across all its projects. ShareRidge strives towards excellence in all aspects of its work and service delivery. The company pushes the boundaries by introducing pioneering techniques, making work more efficient, improving outputs, driving down costs and offering shorter delivery timescales.

Project Ireland 2040 – the government’s long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all of us – has resulted in significant investment in enhanced amenities and recreational infrastructure in towns and cities all over Ireland. This investment, coupled with local authority funding, has seen an increase in public realm and street enhancement projects across almost every county. ShareRidge is currently involved in a
The company pushes the boundaries by introducing pioneering techniques, making work more efficient, improving outputs, driving down costs and offering shorter delivery timescales across the country. In addition, ShareRidge has branched further into the housing sector of late and is engaged in several projects and schemes for local authorities nationwide, predominantly in the thermal upgrade, refurbishment and retrofit disciplines. As with all projects undertaken by ShareRidge, the company endeavours, where possible, to utilise local resources on these projects, ranging from local tradespeople, suppliers and garages, to local manufacturers.

Operating an extensive portfolio of work across several disciplines, ShareRidge has more than doubled its workforce over the last three years. The company currently generates direct employment for more than 130 people from a range of backgrounds, skillsets and education levels, as well as creating considerably more indirect employment through the regular use of preferred sub-contractors.

ShareRidge’s exponential growth in recent years has resulted in significant investment in resources nationwide and the company’s core values ensure the team continuously focus on developing innovative solutions. Across all contracts, ShareRidge is committed to providing best-in-class services, with communication and collaboration being key to the company’s success.
Onwards and upwards with LMC

The global economic crash of 2008 created more than a ripple effect of change to the Irish construction sector – across the industry it caused an all-out tsunami wave, from which many failed to survive.

Not so for the founding partners of Dublin based LMC group, Martin Lydon and Stephen McConnell, who looked the storm in the eye and refused to go under, instead challenging the recession and grabbing the opportunity to make their own mark.

Working together for over 10 years as employees for an engineering company, the pair set up a regional office from scratch providing M & E services to the construction industry where they were kept busy and enjoyed the boom years. Then came the biggest crash they had ever experienced and they were both made redundant in a moment. Lydon recalled the shock: “It was September 2008. We were out of work! We had a fantastic team there, yet the company shut down our office overnight and all of us were made redundant.”

As firm friends as well as colleagues, Lydon and McConnell had an idea for a new business that had already been brewing for some time. They now saw their opportunity to go for it. They walked where others feared to tread at a time when investment was difficult and set up LMC when times were beyond hard.

“We grabbed our chance, but it was a baptism of fire,” joked Lydon. “The reality was harsh, but we saw our opening. We knew we could do better than what already existed. We never looked back, even when we took the knocks, financial and circumstantial, we continued to strive to survive.

“We were a tiny M & E engineering firm at that stage, but we now boast over 300 employees in our engineering, modular build and facilities management companies. We lived off our sound reputations at the start and not much else, but here we are now.”

In 2012 LMC FM was added to the LMC Group providing technical based hard facilities management services. This was a natural progression for the company and utilised the technical experience of the staff base. LMC FM is now a market leading facilities company in Ireland managing some of the largest and most prestigious FM contracts in the country.
In 2017 LMC Modular was added to the LMC Group. As a result, the company could offer their clients a complete end to end service from integrated design, provision of M & E services, manufacture and installation of all the modular elements as well as ongoing building management and lifecycle care. McConnel explained: “The added value we bring to the table for modular building is that we don’t just install. We are a complete life cycle building company. Our background is based on technical knowledge and engineering. We are the whole package. Our range of services and versatility also allows us to flatten the curve as circumstance fluctuate, this happened lately with the Covid-19 pandemic; we adjusted our work practices and delivered rapid build modules to our frontline workers in the health services. That would have been impossible in on-site construction situation.”

Ireland’s new construction standards (Nzeb) incorporate environmental targets and full life-cycle measurements necessary for zero carbon aims, now a legal obligation within the EU. At LMC Group, they pride themselves on being at the cutting edge of new methods and solutions required to fulfil these targets. The company is surging forward in an R & D phase of a new prototype of modular residential housing.

LMC’s ‘modular space’ journey began with pods of bathrooms, kitchens and utility rooms, which would slide into the structure of buildings, such as student accommodation and hotels. The continuation of this journey is to extend to the creation of entire buildings, including the external components of the build, again off-site.

Lydon explained that the future was looking good as they break into their own specialised systems combining all the gathered skills over the years: “Our prototype of modular housing is the next big development. 2021 will take us into the final phase of testing. By the end of 2021, we will be ready to produce off-site, factory built, top-of-the-range modular residential homes that will save on energy, time and carbon emissions, without compromising on safety or quality.

Lydon and McConnell’s view of the future? “We would like to see a massive focus in off-site construction, which will make a critical contribution to social housing strategies and includes local authorities in the mix. This is a manufacturing solution that can facilitate a new era in both public and private affordable housing and help with the environmental crisis.
With increased focus on turnaround and sustainability for mid to large scale construction projects, many are now looking towards modular and hybrid modular methods as effective solutions. Cpac Modular, with over 30 years heritage in modular construction development, have recently re-branded and re-focused their efforts to several new and innovative products and longer lasting modular construction techniques. Cpac Modular boast that they can assemble 90 units into a three-storey building in just three days.

"Modular is more cost effective and can be up to 50% faster to complete than traditional builds," says Alan Boyce, Marketing and Bid Manager with Cpac Modular. "From a concept sketch or an architect’s proposal Cpac Modular can develop a full end to end, design and construction programme. We have one of the most expert teams in the UK or Ireland and they can guide you through the process that can bring even the most ambitious ideas to life."

Cpac Modular have been involved in a wide range of innovative and challenging projects in recent years and particularly during 2020 - when apart from major projects to tackle C19 with a number of Test Centres, increased hospital projects and a major facility at St. Vincent’s University Hospital, as well as their own Safegate Hygiene Pod - they also completed Ireland’s largest welfare and catering facilities for one of the country’s biggest tech employers.

This multi-storey building not only facilitates employees in terms of welfare and shower rooms, but also houses Ireland’s largest restaurant which feeds up to 4,000 employees daily. In addition, the company boasts that it has built enough educational space for over 4,000 school children and enough healthcare projects to accommodate over 1,150 bed spaces in the last 2 years alone.

Cpac Modular acts as an agent for planning and building regulation approvals where required, and in general will manage a project from building design through site investigations, services design, planning permissions, building regulations and also recommend any additional sustainable features to the design.

Their construction division manage the entire build programme and a dedicated contracts manager oversees the construction phases from the foundations and services to the factory build and installation of the building. To complete the site Cpac Modular can also take care of parking facilities, landscaping and internal fitout.

While the site and foundations are being prepared, the Cpac building is already being manufactured in their large facility in Dunshaughlin, County Meath where they employ over 70 specialist workers as well as a full design team focused on BIM. Factory manufacture means a more dependable build programme that is not subject to weather or site conditions.

Manufactured under controlled factory conditions by skilled workers, to strict tolerances and to a stringent ISO quality control programme means the highest quality of build is...
achieved. As much of the build program is done in a controlled factory environment, waste is minimized and nearly all materials used are recyclable. So next to nothing goes to landfill.

“With up to 80% less activity on site, modular constructed buildings cause less disruption and damage to the local environment and to wildlife whilst improving safety and security. In addition, with a faster production time you can occupy your building earlier and start getting a return on your investment sooner,” adds Tadhg Twomey, MD of Cpac Modular.

Maintained correctly, Cpac Modular buildings have the potential to last for over 60 years. Cpac Modular buildings can also be relocated making them an even better long-term investment than traditional buildings.

“Short term space provision, especially in the in the education and healthcare sectors, has traditionally seen the provision of “Grey Box” style pre-manufactured units. This type of product, although purposely designed to suit a limited lifespan can often lack relevance and optimal performance if used past the limited lifespan which can result in possible costly maintenance and much higher operational costs, particularly in regard to heating and cooling,” says Boyce.

“We have recently introduced an enhanced product, ‘Cpac Hybrid Modular’ which achieves the look, feel and performance of an architecturally designed, traditionally built, structure but is delivered utilising Modern Methods of Construction. It is manufactured off site to the highest quality and building standards delivered in less than 50% of the time taken to build from the ground up.”

The actual time on site can be up to 80% less than traditional build. While the benefits of considerably longer use in optimal performance together with prolonged cost savings on maintenance, heating, and cooling.

Architecturally finished exteriors can be tailored to conform to the local vernacular, a higher specification internal fit out with identifiable architectural features and steel frame structure, as opposed to grey box timber frame. This gives a longer lifespan and their modern heating and cooling systems also achieve NZEB (Near Zero Energy Building) standards.

One recent example of Cpac’s Hybrid Modular work is their project for Griffeen Community School. It entailed the delivery of a new 2 storey building which was required to sit beside an existing, traditionally built modern three storey school. Cpac’s Hybrid Modular building was constructed off-site and architecturally designed to the highest specification with the look and feel of a ground up build;

“This project stands as a best in class example of what modern school space provision can be,” says Martin Murray, Sales Manager, Cpac Modular. “Our method of construction stems from our drive to deliver eco-friendly projects.”

The Griffeen Community School project meets all new requirements brought under the Building Directive (recast) 2020, achieving an NZEB standard. Renewable energy is utilised within this build by the use of air-source heat pumps, thus minimising the carbon footprint of the build over its lifecycle.

The building envelope was designed to complement the existing facilities and the local vernacular. A range of façade materials including an architectural micro-rib steel panel system with associated trims and an architectural fibre cement panel system. The windows include a glass spandrel panel which colour matches that of the existing facilities to ensure continuity of design throughout the entire facility.

Maintaining a comfortable indoor temperature was achieved at design stage through detailed analysis of the building fabric, building orientation, natural ventilation considerations and mechanical heating requirements.

BIM (Building Information Modelling) enables this transparent, collaborative approach. An intelligent 3D computer model is designed and shared with the client and all relevant stakeholders throughout the entire process. BIM allows for even the most non-technical stakeholder to fully engage and interrogate all aspects of the building.

“The 3D modular volumetric construction of this building enables a transparent and collaborative approach to design considerations. We engage with clients at an early stage to ensure all their requirements are achieved during the build,” Murray explains.

For details of Cpac’s Hybrid Modular solution or Safegate Hygiene Pod see cpacmodular.com or contact Alan Boyce (087 778 9193) or Martin Murray (087 390 0274)
Residual legacy issues resulting from the 2008 financial crisis continue to cast a shadow over aspects of the Irish economy, most notably in the building sector where efforts to reboot the industry in order to redress the significant shortfall in private and social housing supply are proving problematic.

In January last year Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI), a state sponsored lender for builders and developers was established with a fund of €750m from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund and with the capacity to borrow a further €750m underpinned by legislation. HBFI provides development finance for viable housing schemes and aims to support the construction of up to 7,500 homes over its first five years.

In keeping with State aid rules HBFI operate on a strictly commercial basis. Loan durations are for up to 5 years and industry standard terms and conditions apply. The interest rates charged reflect the credit risk of each particular project and the profile of the applicant. A maximum amount of €75m is provided towards any single development and loans are only made available to schemes with planning permission or where there is a lodged planning application in place.

HBFI works closely with applicants to fine-tune and modify their proposals so as to ensure that the best prospect of a successful realisation of their funding requirements. According to Dara Deering, formerly a senior banker with KBC, who was appointed by Minister for Finance, Paschal Donohoe to head up the new lender in May of last year, “the reason we engage proactively with the prospective borrower is due to the fact that we want the money we lend to start producing results very quickly,” she says.

“Our sole motivation is to turn the finance we extend into
homes. We operate exclusively in the new homes sector and we spend a lot of time with builders and developers in the early stages before loan approval is granted - trying our best to make the scheme work. In many instances, the initial proposal needs further refinement. Costs are frequently underestimated while revenues may be overstated. We work directly with the developer or their advisors to amend their plans and make them viable. We might encourage them to phase it in a way that enables them to test the appetite in the marketplace or we might suggest altering certain elements of the scheme.”

“Ultimately, if we put a more realistic lens over the scheme and find it isn’t viable, we can’t fund it because in that scenario, there’s a high risk that the scheme will not get finished.”

Chastened by the central role in the economic crash mainstream banks remain determined to limit their exposure to property related risk. Deering stresses that the key rationale for establishing the new state backed lender was to supplement the current funding gap left by Mainstream banks and promote the delivery of new homes throughout the country.

“Over the last number of years we were still undersupplying the market with new homes and one of the reasons was that builders and developers were maintaining that they couldn’t get access to finance,” she says. “Tier one lenders now have a lower appetite for risk and while the main banks offer very competitive rates - because the level of gearing is lower - developers now have to bring more equity to the table. Lenders are also more selective in terms of location because of legacy exposure to certain areas and they also require applicants to have a largely unblemished financial record.”

“So, there are a couple of reasons why developers come to us. Firstly, while the rates we offer must be on a commercial basis, we also may have a higher risk appetite and will lend up to 80% of the project cost as compared to the banks which offer from 60% to 65%, in most instances. Many people that come to us don’t have the level of equity required to finance their projects through the banks. At HBFI we have a national strategy, we look at every location and we look at every scheme. We have one single focus and that is to turn the money that we’ve been given into homes. This allows us to be more flexible in our approach.”

Towards the end of last year a strategic review was undertaken by HBFI which found that up to 12% of all new housing supply across the country, including Dublin, consist of schemes with fewer than 10 units.
won’t hold it against somebody if they were adversely affected during that period. If we fund one of their schemes and they can re-establish a positive track record, then the banks will hopefully be happy to fund them for future projects.”

It was originally envisaged that HBFI would work largely with small and medium sized businesses although it was anticipated that it would not fund schemes of less than 10 units. However, towards the end of last year a strategic review was undertaken by HBFI which found that up to 12% of all new housing supply across the country, including Dublin, consist of schemes with fewer than 10 units.

“The growing number of smaller housing schemes is due largely to the prevalence of smaller builders in an industry which remains in recovery mode and their preference for less risky urban infill developments,” states Deering.

“If you look across the board, many of the banks will have a minimum loan size, because if you’re looking at really small schemes, they’re obviously more expensive on a pro-rata basis,” she explains. “We feel these schemes are part of the market and if they can’t get financed our job is to step in and offer support.”

“The strategic review also revealed that while the volume of planning applications indicate that developers are keen to pursue new apartment schemes, this is not being translated into adequate numbers of new schemes coming on stream. Again, difficulties raising finance appear to be acting as a constraint on the delivery of new homes.”

“We had products ready to launch in March to respond to these gaps but then the sites closed, and we announced them in May in order to support the market as construction activity resumed.”

COVID-19 has given rise to concerns of a further paralysis in construction activity which could exacerbate the housing crisis and threaten the painstaking recovery which has been achieved in the wider construction sector. The COVID-19 response launched by HBFI was designed to facilitate a quick resumption of housebuilding throughout Ireland as Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

Launched in May 2020, the new €200m Momentum Fund, was designed specifically for large developments in prime locations and as a direct response to consequent funding challenges faced as a result of Covid19. Given the strength of demand for the funding, an additional €100m was committed in July. “We felt that, as an entity setup by the state to focus on the sector we needed to have an appropriate response to COVID-19 which went beyond our core offerings,” says Deering. “It is critical to ensure that the skills that are being rebuilt in the sector following the last crash are not allowed to dissipate once again because it takes years to rebuild the industry. One of our deliberations was to make sure that by stepping into projects and keeping construction going in the short term, we also helped to keep people in jobs.”

The extent of the support being provided was highlighted in the HBFI’s mid-year results which shows that it has trebled the value of loan approvals in the six months to end July 2020. HBFI approved €340m worth of loans in this period (since its launch in January 2019) and it supported the development of almost 1,500 units across 29 developments in 16 different counties.

“If I take the €340m, which represents our full approvals up to the end of July, €156 million of that relates to 852 homes in the category of small loan product, apartment product and medium sized schemes while €184m or 625 homes relates to the Momentum Fund which obviously, represent much larger loan sizes where we’re stepping in temporarily to try and support larger schemes which are struggling to get finance in the current environment.”

Deering further explained by saying that “when sites closed back in March, our initial focus was our existing customers. We didn’t know at that stage how long sites were going to be closed for or the impact it would have. By now all of the sites we support have reopened again and activity has resumed. We’re working very closely with those customers and the only impact there has been is one of timing and there will likely be delays to some of the schemes. While the market tried to understand the full impact of COVID-19 our volumes have accelerated, and we’ve seen a trebling of loan approvals in 6 months which is well beyond the plans we had.”

Deering showed an obvious enthusiasm to support these schemes but also showed the agility of HBFI in reacting to market needs, stating:

“However, our intention is that these measures are temporary in nature. We do expect some levelling out and a more normal financing landscape to be restored in the coming months however we are continually adding to our product offering. We have more recently launched the Social Housing scheme and also a product for smaller developers of between 5 and 10 units, supported by the European Investment Fund (EIF). In addition, in the near term we will carry out a review with stakeholders to see if we need to tweak our offering and assess where any other gaps might emerge in 2021 which we can help to address.”

HBFI continues to evolve and the sequence of packages which it has launched this year has changed the profile of its clients.

HBFI has concentrated its efforts on counties where the need for housing is greatest, particularly in Dublin and the surrounding counties as well as larger urban centres of Cork,
Limerick and Galway. Few counties have been unaffected by the shortage of housing and HBFI has been steadily growing its nationwide presence. In recent months it has expanded its activities into Donegal, Mayo and Offaly and the HBFI chief is keen to encourage and support further development in these locations.

“We want to see more happening in those areas,” Deering confirms. “There is ongoing debate as to whether remote working will bring a change in demographics, and whether people will choose to live and work in a new location. It’s probably too early to know the answer to that but if there is a move in this direction it will, going forward, help to get more house building activity taking place away from the big population centres.”

Deering also points out that a third of the schemes supported to date by HBFI will be allocated towards social housing and acknowledged the important role for HBFI in facilitating the development of social housing projects. Noting the ongoing collaborative engagement that HBFI has with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) Deering said that “The difference in this scenario is that we are lending directly to private developers building homes on land they have purchased privately. Instead of selling them on the private market they’re typically sold in one block to an approved housing body or a local authority who allocate these homes towards social housing. We have seen a lot more of this post COVID-19, and it is part of the solution for social housing. The launch of the Social Housing product is a direct response to the market demand. It isn’t the only solution but obviously it helps to increase supply.”

Deering is encouraged by the figures which demonstrate the appreciable impact being made by HBFI. She points out that HBFI is still in its infancy and prior to lockdown was heavily focused on building awareness and in endeavouring to raise its profile throughout the country. Those efforts have been largely curtailed since March and the lender has been busy hosting webinars and disseminating its message virtually to the best extent possible.

“The numbers show we’re having a positive impact. We are nearing two years in operation and it obviously takes time to make people aware of our existence. The team in place originally had done a lot of outreach but the reality is that awareness levels were still low, particularly outside of the main construction bodies. That’s why we need to get on the ground and get out to the various counties, which we were doing pre lockdown.”

“That will continue to be a focus because we need to ensure we are engaged and that we listen and evolve our offering. We’re here to try and have a real impact on housing and we recognise that there is still a long way to go. We want to see construction happening in every county and we want to get to a stage where the residential construction sector is funded primarily from the markets.”

“Our five-year plan is that we will support up to about 7500 homes and we’re well on track to achieving that. The next couple of months will tell a lot and help shape our offering for next year. We are committed to staying engaged, staying flexible and doing what we can do to keep construction going and deliver more housing in 2021.”

Speaking to Dara Deering it is clear that HBFI has a mandate to deliver and it is moving very quickly to make this happen.

For further details visit the HBFI website www.hbfi.ie
In recent years, the Approved Housing Bodies (“AHB’s”) and local authorities have become very prominent in the provision of social housing, in particular since the Rebuilding Ireland programme was launched back in 2016. Notwithstanding challenges over the years, the success of the programme is evident from the year-on-year output levels. As new, greater challenges face the economy, an understanding of the underlying drivers of these successes will allow some visibility into how the market will evolve, allowing us to drive further growth.
The diagram above shows a breakdown in the mix of how units have been delivered over the past 4 years against the targets, broken into three categories, New Builds, Renovated Stock and the third category being Leased (combination of New Builds and Renovated Stock).

It shows that the AHB’s and local authorities tend to buy, rather than lease, the majority of their housing stocks, with only 11.6% of social housing stock being leased based on 2019 numbers.

With 6,074 new build social housing units completed in 2019, this represented 28.6% of the total new builds market in 2019 (21,241). The 7,736 new social housing units originally forecast to be built in 2020 under Rebuilding Ireland would have further advanced the progress of the social housing sector, representing a 27.4% uplift on the previous year. In early November 2020 Goodbody’s revised the estimates the full year output of new build units to be 20,000, if this proves to be accurate it would result in a 5.8% drop on 2019 output, which under the circumstances wouldn’t be considered too bad. While some social housing sites were granted permission to remain open earlier this year, the social housing sector was not immune to Covid-19 disruptions so full year social housing new build are anticipated to fall short of targets.

**SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK 2020**

By end June 2020, 725 social housing units has been complete against 8,276 across the market, representing 8.8%. Assuming the full year estimates are accurate, it would mean that a further 4,995 social units would need to be delivered in the second half of 2020 to maintain the levels reached in 2019.

All indicators are pointing towards a significant increase in social housing supply in 2021, which may make up some of the 2020 shortfall. “It is important that the balanced mix of development between social, affordable, PRS, and private unit supply over the past number of years continues into the future. From our experience at Beacon arranging funding for developers, there has been a seismic shift to social housing funding in 2020,” says Michael Bolger, Managing Director, Beacon Capital.

“While this is a very welcome development it is vital that we don’t lose sight of the need to provide and housing for the private market as well. A solution that encourages private housing development at affordable prices is very much required as any shortage in the supply of private houses can adversely impact the dynamics of the housing market as a whole, with unintended consequences”.

**THE DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL LANDSCAPE**

In the current low interest rate environment, Ireland has enjoyed investment growth as capital seeks assets that can provide a stable return. Banks, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, and family offices all contribute to this capital pool and one of the areas this has been most evident in Ireland is in the emergence of a market for forward sales of residential units to institutional investors.

**PRIVATE RENTAL SCHEMES (PRS)**

The private rental sector (“PRS”) has enabled the construction of a number of schemes in recent years with the sector outpacing and outperforming all other sectors in 2019 with a record €2.36 billion of transactions completed. Over the last 6 years, it has firmly established as a key component in helping to address the shortage in supply of housing, in particular for Dublin and Cork.

While the prospects for a PRS market may look brighter than they did earlier this year there may be some bumps ahead as the “work from home” debate comes to a landing. As the role of the office takes shape, it is quite likely that we will not see a return to the same levels of density that existed Pre-Covid. That will undoubtedly have an impact on the private rental sector, in the short term at least, and anecdotally already appears to be the case.

In the PRS market the funds are generally valued based on a yield compression basis and if rents drop a multiplier effect comes into play which could lead to many problems with regard to the valuations. The current rent caps, designed to support a stable residential market and availability of housing, are causing landlords to prefer a vacant property than to drop the rent of that property for fear of not being able to recover to previous rental income levels should the market recover. The removal of rent caps could have a positive impact on the market.

These large PRS funds have been an important source of housing supply into the market over the past few years as the smaller developers are generally not well capitalised enough to build large apartment blocks, as the peak funding requirements and market risks are too great.

**LENDING FOR SME BUILDERS**

Pre-Covid there was a growing quantum of capital available with lenders growing in confidence to supply capital and new lenders entering the Irish market. This had the impact of speeding up the provision of capital to allow developers to build and assisting with competition in lending, therefore driving down the cost of capital, and as a consequence reducing the cost of housing stock delivery.

As much as lenders feel they can prepare themselves for Brexit, Covid-19 poses a far greater challenge. It has disrupted the debt capital markets in many ways due to the uncertainty of the outlook. With one eye on trying to protect the loans that they have provided over the past few years, lenders are trying to understand the knock-on effect of Brexit in a post Covid-19 era.

For the real estate market in general there has been a tightening of lending availability. Notable sectors such as hospitality and retail have been impacted most and were the first to feel the effects.

Within residential development the funding availability for developers has gone into two speeds.

Since Covid reared its head there has certainly been a flight to social housing backed developments. In Beacon Capital we have sensed a big shift from the smaller developer towards social housing builds with circa 8 out of every 10 funding enquiries from this cohort seeking funding in respect of social housing backed projects. The cost of capital and levels of gearing are a lot more attractive to developers than the private market development projects, not to mention having to deal with the transactional side of things with multiple private buyers, mortgage approvals etc.

There has been a sharp drop in availability of debt for those that have, or planned to, sell housing stock to the open market. In contrast, the availability of debt has improved where a sale or
Since Covid reared its head there has certainly been a flight to social housing backed developments. In Beacon Capital we have sensed a big shift from the smaller developer towards social housing builds with circa 8 out of every 10 funding enquiries from this cohort seeking funding in respect of social housing backed projects.

The Future of Housing in Ireland?

The world is a very uncertain place right now and uncertainty is likely to be a feature of the market for the foreseeable future. Since the end of October 2020, we have seen much positivity coming back into the market, an element of confidence has been restored with the combination of the US elections, the Covid Vaccines and potentially softer Brexit, this is definitely evident in the funding landscape and the confidence we see in the borrowers out there. As an asset class, social housing lends itself to be a very attractive proposition, and it should therefore attract the investment as long as the Irish state covenant remains solid.

One can see from the above diagram that planning permission approvals have dropped off in H1 2020, much of this may be as a result of reduced capacity in the planning offices, this is a very important barometer to be look at when considering impact on supply over the next 2 to 3 years.

The Central Bank of Ireland forecasts that 34,000 homes will need to be built each year for the next 10 years to meet demand. Rebuilding Ireland targets, even with the recent budgetary measures supporting an uplift in those targets, suggest that new builds for social housing should represent just shy of 30% of the total new homes brought to the market. It is therefore imperative that there is a healthy supply of private dwellings being brought to the market supplementing social housing, to meet the country’s demands. This mix of private, affordable housing, and social housing is needed, otherwise it will create an imbalance that will result in a need for more policy amendments causing further disruption and uncertainty in the future. December 2020.

lease to a local authority or AHB can be demonstrated.

“The long term, stable nature of the Social Housing asset class, and strong counterparty risk with no vacancy or voids risks associated with Social Housing investments, compared to PRS that is exposed to these risks, means that social housing very much suits investors with long-term income requirements, such as pension funds and sovereign wealth investors” states Feargal McKenna, Director, Beacon Capital.

How can Beacon Capital help?

Beacon Capital was established in 2015 to provide a one stop shop solution to developers that are seeking funding, raising capital from Banks, pension funds, family offices, alternative funders and high net worth individuals, our knowledge of the market allows us to tailor the right funding package for each borrower depending on their needs.

Whether it is a social housing development, a commercial investment, bridging finance, or securing and financing settlements, having completed over 140 loans to date, the firm has managed to build up important trust and experience with both funders and borrowers.

As a result of the need for streamlining in the financing, Beacon Capital has earlier this year established its Real Estate advisory service, headed up by Alan Deering, with a particular focus on social housing which assists investors and developers across the full timeline of their transaction to remove bottlenecks.

We have brought together a panel of experts with specific experience of delivery in the social housing sector and the nuances associated with it across different disciplines such as solicitors, quantity surveyors and project managers to work alongside the developers own professionals.

This ensures a quality team can be formulated if desired and can help to streamline the whole development process which will hopefully speed up delivery across the board and result in a mutually beneficial outcome for all involved.

“Social housing development finance can be provided at higher gearing levels when compared to the private market, Beacon Capital can arrange funding up to 80% of the net sales value of the contract at competitive terms. We help clients to plan the most efficient delivery method, negotiate the best possible terms of the debt, manage the process from start to finish including liaising with local authorities, approved housing bodies and other professionals as required,” says Alan Deering, Associate Director.

If you are interested in contacting Beacon Capital to discuss a social housing related opportunity, please contact them via phone or email. Tel: (01) 685 6708 Email: socialhousing@beaconcapital.ie
NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST IN THE RECOVERY OF OUR ECONOMY AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT WILL DRIVE IT FORWARD.

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The role of the voluntary housing sector is a critically important component in the delivery of social housing in Ireland and last year Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) broke all previous records and built over 4,000 new homes. Given the growing influence of the voluntary housing sector and the substantial stock of social housing units which it has accrued over recent decades, the need to ensure that they are adequately protected and insured is a paramount consideration.

Little surprise then that the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), the leading representative body for Ireland’s AHB’s has been relying on BHP Community Ltd. to cater for its insurance needs. BHP is the only insurance broker in Ireland which focuses exclusively on providing insurance solutions for the Not For Profit (NFP) Sector, including charities, volunteer organisations, and the social housing sector.

Originally founded in 1998 as a general Insurance brokerage, BHP was broken up in 2018 and a brand new entity was formed called BHP Community Ltd trading as BHP Insurance. The breakaway company, BHP Community, which is Irish owned and 100% Independent from the old entity, retained the largest part of the business which was, at the time, over 5000 customers within the NFP sector.

"We offer products directly to the customer as a retail broker but also given our niche and experience in the sector, we act as a wholesale broker into the market,” explains Martina Westphal, who started in BHP in 2007 and has been the Managing Director of BHP Community since its inception in 2018. Prior to that she served as the Charity Director and oversaw the entire book of NFP clients.

As appointed broker to the ICSH, the company now has over 200 member AHB’s on its scheme, including the ten largest in the country. “Our scheme covers over 90% of all social housing stock in Ireland excluding the local authorities,” says Martina. “The ICSH scheme is one of the larger accounts that we manage and it is hugely important to the growth of our company.

Year-on-year, the voluntary sector continues to expand its housing output and in response to the rapid growth in the sector BHP has expanded its housing team to keep up with the needs and demands of customers. Today the company has 14 staff and a dedicated social housing team who understand the sector like no other insurance professional. The company’s housing brokers are also fully integrated into the housing sector.

“With constant engagement with the Housing agency, Local Authorities, the ICSH, lending institutions and legal teams, we don’t just provide an insurance policy, we provide risk management programmes tailored to each ABH, interactive workshops with key housing staff and reporting of trends and claims activity within the sector,” says Martina. “We also facilitate a task group with insurers and other stakeholders to ensure longevity and consistency of the scheme.

“A social housing policy isn’t just about bricks and mortar or about the property covers, it spans a wide range of services that AHBs provide. We provide a comprehensive package that includes risk management, public liability, property covers, loss adjuster services, claims management and more.”

Tried and Tested

BHP Community Ltd.- Ireland’s Not For Profit (NFP) Sector’s most trusted insurance provider provides tailored insurance solution to over 200 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) across the country.
“WE PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE PACKAGE WHICH INCLUDES, A FLEXIBLE POLICY WHICH IS CONSTANTLY ADAPTED TO MEET THE CHANGING NEEDS OF THE SECTOR. WHETHER IT BE CHANGES TO FUNDERs REQUIREMENTS, HOUSING REGULATION OR A NEW PANDEMIC SUCH AS COVID-19, WE MAKE SURE THE POLICY WILL CATER FOR THE CHANGING NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF OUR CUSTOMERS.”

which includes, a flexible policy which is constantly adapted to meet the changing needs of the sector. Whether it be changes to funders requirements, housing regulation or a new pandemic such as Covid-19, we make sure the policy will cater for the changing needs and requirements of our customers.

Some of the unique features of BHP’s scheme include full cover for void properties, bespoke endorsements for HFA and NAMA and directors and officers cover and most importantly a consistent pricing model. “Having a comprehensive policy is a huge benefit and but the service being provided is just as important,” Martina explains. “We understand that delivering social housing in this housing crisis is all about timing and deadlines and therefore we commit to SLAs ensuring immediate responses to queries and issuing of documents in real time. “

Since being appointed to manage the insurance scheme for the ICSH in 2004, the sector has undergone significant transformation. However, the most notable change from an insurance perspective, according to Martina, has been the claims culture. With the implementation of sinking funds and health and safety measures, the quality of the housing stock has improved greatly and resulted in less property damage claims. However, with the economic downturn since 2008, liability claims sky-rocketed for the sector and the cost of insurance increased for everyone as a result. “Liability claims are still at an all-time high in Ireland and it continues to have adverse effects on AHBs across the country,” she says.

The other major insurance issue which has caused great difficulty within the sector is the lack of flood cover for properties. “If you can’t get flood cover you will most definitely run into problems with lending institutions and funders and that has a knock-on effect to the business as a whole. In recent years we have been successful in obtaining flood cover for members of the ICSH where other insurers have failed, and this is one of the stand-out benefits of our ICSH scheme.”

BHP provides insurance solutions to every conceivable type of AHBs from those which provide homeless, mental health and youth services and to the small rural schemes with just a handful of houses. This has equipped the company with a keen understanding of all the complex needs of all AHBs. From the relationships that it establishes with customers - many of whom have been with BHP since 2004 - it accumulates a wealth of information on all the housing schemes and services being provided.

“Every month we use the information we have gathered and take part in a working group with insurers whereby claims trends and processes are reviewed and assessed,” says Martina. “We can then use that info to implement our tailored risk management programmes and provide valuable feedback to the sector.

BHP has affiliations to numerous umbrella groups and national organisations across the NFP sector and provide exclusive insurance schemes to members of the ICSH, The Wheel, The Public Participation networks (PPNs) and Department of Social Protection & Community Employment Schemes. More recently, following feedback and requests from existing customers it launched a brand-new sports club insurance scheme.

“The Sports and leisure sector has been hit hard recently with the rising cost of insurance and mass exodus of insurers from the market,” Martina says. “With the right insurance partner and our claims management programmes the scheme has been going from strength to strength. It’s an area that we wish to pursue more aggressively in 2020 and 2021 and it forms part of our long-term strategy for BHP.”

BHP has been providing services to the charity and community sector since 2003 and its relationship with the voluntary sector rests on extremely strong foundations. The company first entered the sector in 2003 with the national community and voluntary forums which have changed into the PPNs and it opened doors into many different areas of the community and charity sectors.

“We are highly committed to the sector and BHP’s CSR strategy involves supporting initiatives of many organisations in the sectors,” Martina notes. In 2019 we partnered with Business to Arts and Creative Ireland to develop an Artist in residence programme for Mid-West Simon Community and in 2019 early 2020 we teamed up with the Carmichael Centre to sponsor their mentorship programme, which provides support and guidance to CEOs and senior managers working in non-profits.

“We are always looking for new partnerships and the opportunity to develop new insurance schemes for the sector.”

Martina Westphal - Managing Director

THE PUBLIC SECTOR MAGAZINE

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SOCIAL HOUSING EDITION
It has been heartening to see the solidarity and sense of partnership between the private sector and the public sector over recent months to support the country as we seek to recover from the unknown. This partnership has taken various forms - logistics, the use of empty buildings, the provision of beds in hotels for the homeless, and crucially, supporting the local businesses that are the lifeblood of our communities.

PRIVATE SECTOR MUST LEAD THE WAY

While huge thanks was rightfully reserved for the HSE and frontline workers who have done so much to help the country out of the grip of this pandemic, we must remember that this sense of civic duty and community spirit is going to be vital in helping our towns and communities recover in the weeks and months ahead. It will be the animating spirit of the successful partnerships that will be needed to drive recovery. For while the government has stepped up to the plate with public intervention unprecedented in this country’s history to protect the economy, that action is necessarily finite.

In the medium to long term, recovery must be driven by the private sector. That does not mean doing it alone, but investment and enterprise in partnership with government, local authorities, other public sector organisations, as well as smaller developers and businesses. We all must play our part.

That is why we are asking that the new Government strongly
encourages Public Private Partnerships (PPP) between local authorities, state bodies and developers to facilitate much needed regeneration as part of the recovery effort in Ireland over the coming years. Support for a strong PPP model in Ireland can have a transformative effect on the ability to deliver housing and other critical infrastructure projects for communities.

It is no secret that PPPs in Ireland have had some really negative publicity recently, but it is crucial that we don’t let a number of bad deals hamstring the opportunities that a new PPP model, based on a true partnership between the public and private sector, can create.

When structured and managed correctly, a better PPP model can deliver for Ireland now and in the future, resulting in better towns and cities.

We must create leaner, less costly processes that harness a new kind of expertise. Most of all, we must move beyond an adversarial, contractual relationship towards true partnership between public and private partners where the needs of communities are placed first.

**OUR EXPERIENCE**

Partnerships have never been more important. From our work, we know that the best and most successful public/private partnerships are those where value is created for all involved.

Take our work at Preston Barracks in Brighton, for example. In partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council and University of Brighton, we are delivering a €220 million GDV regeneration scheme – one of the biggest in the city – that will establish a thriving new academic and economic corridor. As well as new homes and student accommodation, the scheme features Plus X Brighton, the first in a new network of purpose-built innovation hubs aimed at helping business and communities prosper through growth and innovation support, inspiring workspace and state-of-the-art prototyping workshops and studios. Notably, Plus X will generate as much 160 times more social and economic value than that of a traditional office building, helping to catalyse local regeneration and support the local economy.

In Manchester, we’ve put sustainability and wellbeing at the heart of our PPP ambitions. Mayfield is a €1.5bn regeneration scheme that will transform 24 acres of derelict city centre land into a new urban neighbourhood, formed around a new 6.5acre park – the first in the city for over 100 years. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of high quality, green space within our cities for physical and mental wellbeing, and Mayfield will be a tranquil oasis for residents and visitors alike. With 1,500 new homes, 1.6m sq ft of commercial space, restaurants, cafés, bars, shops, cultural spaces and a hotel, the scheme will also create over 10,000 new jobs and generate €7.7bn of socio-economic gain for the city. The first phase received planning
Support for a strong PPP model in Ireland can have a transformative effect on the ability to deliver housing and other critical infrastructure projects for communities.

consent and the UK Government granted funding for the park earlier this year; meaning we can now get started on making our vision a reality.

Overall, regeneration done well has an enormously widespread positive social impact that can be hard to capture by any single metric.

POSITIVE COLLABORATION HOLDS THE KEY

We must also look for opportunities to work with other partners across our sector - smaller developers or landowners that have an opportunity but lack the risk capital or capacity to bring a project forward. U+I was born out of a marriage between a large property company (Development Securities) and a smaller creative developer (Cathedral). Understanding how important these smaller stakeholders are and how they operate remains part of our DNA.

We believe the outcomes that can be achieved through working in positive partnerships are always greater than those that can be achieved alone. It may be generating employment, creating high quality and affordable homes, delivering exceptional public realm, reanimating a high street, or transforming underused or derelict land into productive uses. It may be delivering exceptional public art, like our work with Cork’s Sophie Gough, where she has created a truly remarkable and sustainable sculpture to be unveiled outside The Hive in Sandyford in the coming weeks, for the community to enjoy.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

These outcomes will be the result of successful partnerships, which are built on a shared understanding of the drivers of each partner and, in particular when it comes to PPPs, the parameters within which both public and private sectors work. This is where the civic mindedness that has emerged over the past months can help generating a sense of shared purpose and mutual understanding that can drive our recovery.

For the private sector, rather than approaching a project aiming to deliver the local authority’s brief as cheaply as possible, good developers should ask how they can make a great library, fire station or community centre and still make it stack up financially, sharing an ambition with local authorities to leave a legacy of great buildings and value for money, without saddling future taxpayers with debt.

For local authorities and other public bodies there’s a real opportunity to put aside natural suspicion of partnership with the private sector and think laterally about how open thought and dialogue with private developers could provide creative answers to seemingly intractable problems.

STEP UP

Private developers need to step up and help stimulate recovery in Ireland. For U+I, that means actively seeking investment opportunities where we can bring our skills, expertise and insight to bear.

So, while we may still all be working from home, our team is right now as busy as ever seeking out new opportunities and perspective partners with land or projects that have the potential for transformative regeneration that drives our business. Because let’s be in no doubt, it is only through that form of positive value creation that our country will recover.

It may be a long road ahead, but it starts now.
Delivering for the Public Sector for over 40 years

Est. 1977
The quality of our built environment affects the quality of our everyday lives and it is vital that we make informed choices on how we use our places and spaces, our built heritage, landscapes and natural resources. The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (‘the RIAI’) supports and regulates the architectural profession and promotes the value that architects bring to society for everyone’s benefit. Our purpose is to drive excellence in the built environment. The RIAI regularly engages with the Government, the professions, industry clients and the public to promote quality in architecture; to deliver quality and sustainability in the built environment; to enrich our distinctive culture and heritage; to contribute to the competitiveness of our economy; and to improve quality of life for the people of Ireland today, and for generations to come.

How we live, work and engage with others has changed over recent months and while we yearn for some sort of normal, we also know that there have been fundamental shifts in our everyday. Our homes have become offices while many of our offices lie empty, our streets have seen new cycle lanes, expanded footpaths, and tables and chairs set out to allow for outdoor dining. While our parks, beaches and other green spaces are more valuable than ever as we embrace nature for fresh air and recreation.

We need to both imagine and reimagine how we will live going forward, not just in the distant future, but in the here and now. Reimagining is at the heart of what an architect brings to the built environment. RIAI-registered Architects bring a solutions-based approach to developing quality buildings and public spaces. They are trained to understand how the space or building will be used for the long-term, to solve problems and to create designs with quality at the core.

The Government and public bodies are the largest procurers
Good design adds value to the quality of the project and to the public realm. The success of a building project is determined long before a sod is turned, or a brick laid. The key to the outcome lies with the brief - a quality brief that provides adequate detail and scope. Poor briefs, including limited information on design specifications, add to the overall time and cost to bring new public sector developments to completion. Architects can assist public bodies develop functional and clear design briefs; they can provide expert rigorous challenge and oversight throughout the design, permitting contingencies to deal with procurement and construction phases of each project to be dealt with as they arise.

Key to delivering sustainable quality homes and buildings, infrastructure and public realm will be the availability of the professional expertise within the public service. The RIAI believes that Architects are needed at senior levels across both central and local government to ensure quality is always a priority and sits alongside cost as a necessary criterion by which to evaluate projects.

RIAI-registered Architects can play a role in supporting government and policymakers to address the impacts of climate change, plan for changing demographics, deliver more and better housing, and balance regional development.

Over 70% of Ireland’s population live in dwellings that are either in low density suburbs or one-off rural housing. Continuation of this settlement pattern would be an enormous obstacle to the achievement of the country’s climate action goals due to the low density and spread out nature of such development, its incapacity to support efficient public transportation and the nature of the design of such dwellings which, by their nature, have far greater external surface through which to lose or gain heat.

Compact, high quality urban development, in priority to suburban and
Compact, dense urban development, in priority to suburban and one off rural housing, has the potential to enable the country to meet its climate change goals and provide sustainable, vibrant communities far quicker and far more effectively than current patterns.

While upfront delivery costs for sustainable urban developments, such as ‘living over the shop’ and infill apartment schemes, are higher than traditional development, all other public costs, such as environmental impact, public transport, services & infrastructure, are much lower, reducing the public investment required.

The RIAI want homes that put people at the centre, ensuring shorter commutes, better services, improved housing mix, and a real potential for strong, sustainable communities. These are homes that will both have a lower impact on the environment and that will benefit the public purse due to lower costs of servicing.

Towns and villages across Ireland have been integral to Irish economic and cultural life for centuries; they can also be great places to live and work for modern lifestyles. The Architect’s ability to unlock value and opportunity in our towns is essential for the process of reimagining and revitalisation. In December 2019, to support those involved in Irish towns and villages, the RIAI launched a free online resource - the RIAI Town and Village Toolkit.

Built around six themes, including Health, Wellbeing and Happiness and Connectivity, Accessibility and Movement, the toolkit is based on an extensive body of research and work developed by the RIAI, with funding from the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht under the Government Policy on Architecture. The Toolkit provides practical advice, references and successful case studies of places that have, with architectural and urban design expertise, positively overcome challenges. It is available for local authorities, associations, town councils or anyone involved in town and village life to access and use.

Practising Architects are at the frontline of tackling the problems of design, build, sustainability, and how communities are served by amenities and infrastructure. Quality design needs to be at the heart of our urban locations and rural landscapes and it is the role of the Architect to put it there.

The RIAI Town and Village Toolkit and many other free online resources are available from riai.ie.
Allowing the rituals and perception of everyday life inform our ideas, to create architecture of true meaning.
A long-established firm of architects, project managers and development consultants Van Dijk Architects Ltd. enjoys a stellar reputation. In recent years it has been bringing its design expertise to help address challenges in Ireland’s social housing sector.
“There are now minimum requirements for new communities which must be met by designers. The challenge for architects is to deliver a quality social housing scheme incorporating all residential social and community elements within set design parameters and on budget,” he says.

Van Dijk Architects are currently working on housing projects nationwide and have ongoing projects in counties Louth, Limerick, Sligo, Donegal, Meath Dublin, Wicklow, Waterford, Cork, Kerry and Kilkenny. It is involved in the process in a number of different ways and has been appointed to a number of significant projects aimed at enhancing Ireland’s social housing portfolio:

- As Selected Architects and Assigned Certifiers on OGP framework and NDFA framework for social housing projects throughout the country.
- As Lead Architect in reappropriating vacant premises in association with Louth county council and the Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative.
- As Local Authority’s Design Team Architect to design Rapid Build Social Housing projects under Design and Build Contracts.
- As Contractor’s Design Team Architect Part of OGP Framework with a number of construction companies in delivering Rapid Build Social Housing projects under Design and Build Contracts.

The practice places considerable emphasis on the collection of baseline data at project inception, according to Van Dijk. “Our strong site analysis includes a detailed study of the area and its architecture. We assess the environmental factors, the vernacular...
“For the average person ‘stay at home’ is the new normal. Society is seeing first-hand how well a home functions during long periods of enforced lockdown. The need for Community in these uncertain times has never been so important. What has become apparent is that a house is no longer something that you ‘come home to’.”

styles, and the typical typography. These are important factors which determine a true sense of place and this in turn influences the design direction and informs a solution which responds appropriately to the environment and surroundings,” he explains.

In line with steady growth in recent years, Van Dijk Architects have taken the time to produce Standard Operating Procedures documents which outline the precise methodology which applies to each project by sector. This has been invaluable in providing a quality consistent professional service as the practice expands and new projects multiply. It ensures that new team members coming on board or joining a project team have guidelines to follow.

“We believe that the Architect’s role lies in trying to find a balance between cost efficiency and the long-term durability of a project,” he says. “We strive to produce sustainable housing that will stand the test of time. At a time when the government are more than ever focused on delivering housing, their continuing main focus is to deliver it on a very tight budget. This is a key challenge. If the materials selected are not robust there will be increased maintenance costs. If the design is not durable, it will not stand the test of time. If the Residents don’t develop a sense of pride in their scheme, they won’t maintain it. What we must avoid at all costs is the scheme falling into disrepair over time which feeds the public preconceived opinions on local authority housing estates while generating negativity about the place and unfortunately, its residents.”

In addition to the well documented challenges in the delivery of social housing numbers, Van Dijk points to the likely future implications of the unfolding pandemic which he says
Social Housing Edition

“OUR STRONG SITE ANALYSIS INCLUDES A DETAILED STUDY OF THE AREA AND ITS ARCHITECTURE. WE ASSESS THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS, THE VERNACULAR STYLES, AND THE TYPICAL TYPOGRAPHY. THESE ARE IMPORTANT FACTORS WHICH DETERMINE A TRUE SENSE OF PLACE AND THIS IN TURN INFLUENCES THE DESIGN DIRECTION AND INFORMS A SOLUTION WHICH RESPONDS APPROPRIATELY TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND SURROUNDINGS.”

will add a new and unexpected layer of difficulty to the process. An already tight budget will be stretched to cover Covid operation costs for the Contractor.

“For the average person ‘Stay at home’ is the new normal. Society is seeing first-hand how well a home functions during long periods of enforced lockdown. The need for Community in these uncertain times has never been so important,” he says. “What has become apparent is that a house is no longer something that you ‘come home to’. For many people, the Covid-19 restrictions confined them to a difficult living situation. A well-designed scheme will serve the community it houses. Ideally sufficient exercise and amenity space should be included and accessible to all. This has never been so vital to the health and wellbeing of its occupants.”

These core principals are evident in the design of a new older persons housing scheme at Maplewood and Fernwood in Tallaght which Van Dijk Architects were commissioned to undertake by South Dublin County Council in association with Clúid Housing Association. Van Dijk applauds what he describes as “a forward-thinking local authority welcoming the possibility of constructing older persons accommodation on existing underutilised Public Open Space”. The scheme was developed so that larger 3- and 4-bedroom homes would be vacated by older people who would be allocated new, purpose-built smaller homes leaving the larger homes free for young families from within the established community. Two new developments of one- and two-bedroom single storey units are currently under construction. It is hoped that the diversity of home types will maintain balance in the social fabric of the existing community.

Established residential communities are also a key in the redevelopment of existing derelict or outdated Local Authority Housing stock. Van Dijk Architects work closely with Louth County Council in their enlightened endeavours to tackle the social housing issue which currently exists in Louth by refurbishing older derelict homes and bringing them up to standard. Their joint efforts have taken a sustainable approach in the conservation of the built environment while respecting the existing social fabric of older residential areas. Statistics show that they are at the forefront of tackling this issue in comparison to other Local Authorities around the country.

Through the study of the tradition and culture of social housing along with strong examination of the site’s potential Van Dijk Architects strive to reinforce a sense of place, foster a sense of community, complement existing street patterns and strengthen links to surrounding amenities.
Counting the Costs

McGahon Surveyors provide cost certainty in uncertain times

Founded in Ireland in 1977, McGahon Surveyors (MGS) are well aware that the only thing you can be truly certain of in this life is death and taxes!... Like us all, they have enjoyed the Celtic Tiger, endured the Crash and the damaging recession that followed, witnessed the parting of ways with Brexit to the coming together of the Grand Coalition of FG and FF (FULL PARTY NAMES??)... but when our people went to elect the 33rd Dáil Éireann in February 2020, they couldn’t have possibly dreamt of the impact, heartache and uncertainty that COVID-19 would bring to Ireland and across the world!

Despite COVID-19 and despite approximately 50% of McGahon Surveyors staff working from home since Friday 13th March 2020, they have continued to provide a full and uninterrupted QS service to their client base throughout Ireland. MGS have yet again raised to the challenge and proved their resilience and professionalism which has led to them being one of Ireland’s leading Professional Quantity Surveying Practice, entrusted to oversee and manage over €600M of the Governments Capital spend on many Public funded construction projects across Ireland.

“Never has the home been more important than in 2020!” Joe Beggs, Managing Director McGahon Surveyors remarks.

Asked about the impact of COVID-19 and what still continues to drive MGS after 43 years, Joe was quick to respond. “One of the key drivers is the absolute satisfaction in delivering social housing, as during the nightmare of COVID-19 and the multiple restrictions, never has the home become so important than it is in 2020!,” he says. “We are currently QS on the delivery of over 5,000 Homes for the Public and Private sectors across Ireland and despite Covid-19 we have completed many Social Houses Units this year and have received many thanks for our efforts, which is so rewarding.”

“One elated Senior Executive Architect from a County Council wrote to compliment the entire design team and all involved stating that: “We have never been in a position before to hand new houses to people, and when we finished on the technical side, the admin staff had the lovely job of phoning the new residents to tell them there was a brand new house waiting for them. Many of them were in tears on receipt of the phone call and the phrase; “This is the greatest day of my life and you have no idea what you have done for me” was said to us more than once!” If that kind of feedback and the true reality of your efforts doesn’t sink in and drive you on to deliver housing in the quickest time possible, then nothing will!” stated Joe.
It is very clear that all of MGS personnel have a vast experience of delivering Residential projects, including the following:

1) Delivering over 40nr residential projects under the traditional procurement route (using PW-CF1 or PW-CF5) for various Local Authorities and Housing Associations right throughout Ireland (From Dublin to Tuam, from Tralee to Buncranna and from Dundalk to Waterford).

2) Delivering multiple Residential projects following the Design & Build Procurement Route (PW-CF2) for Rapid Delivery.

3) Delivering multiple major residential projects (many over 100+ units per project) for Developers and Housing Associations and Local Authorities on a turn-key basis.

4) Delivering multiple major residential projects (many over 100+ units per project) for Housing Associations delivered via an e-tender process whereby developers were requested to provide proposals and the Housing Association funds the project on a stage payment basis.

MGS experience not only demonstrates their expertise in respect to construction contracts and public procurement, but the resulting projects also demonstrates the benefits of collaboration and the alternative means of delivering housing, which is also a testament to government and stakeholder commitment to rebuilding Ireland.

MGS not only aim to provide cost and time certainty on all their projects, but when delivering residential projects, economical design is crucial, thus ensuring the projects viability and profitability. However, Joe Beggs (MD) insists that this can only be achieved through early engagement with themselves or with other Specialist Residential Chartered Quantity Surveying Practices.

“We are currently QS on the delivery of over 5,000 Homes for the Public and Private sectors across Ireland and despite Covid-19 we have completed many Social Houses Units this year and have received many thanks for our efforts, which is so rewarding.”

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“After Planning (or the Part VIII process) has been obtained, the opportunity to provide the best possible value has been missed, as the earlier the stage, the greater impact design decisions have on achieving the most economical design,” says Joe.

Key factors include maximising the site density (i.e. maximising the number of units on the site); maximise the use of double loaded roadways (housing/
apartments either side, thus making the best use of the road and all main service runs, etc.); maximisation of built structures at the outside edge of the site (i.e. delivering the shortest road length per unit and smallest hard surface area per unit); selecting the correct levels, thus mitigating cut and fill, rock excavation, retaining walls, etc. (MGS have specialised QS software in respect to site levels, cut & fill etc., which they use on every project).

“We have been appointed on many projects after planning stage in order to prepare costing, which resulted in our only advice being that the client should go to planning again and seek more units, otherwise the particular site and abnormal costs would make the project unfeasible – whilst this is clearly not want a client wants to hear, particular if they have bought the site based on this planning, it has always proven to be the only way forward to deliver a successful residential project,” says Joe.

Despite COVID-19 and the obvious cost and strain it is having and will continue to have on the economy, MGS believe that the Government has learnt from before and that they will continue their commitment and investment in delivering much needed homes throughout Ireland. In this regard, MGS look forward to being part of the team in delivering many more residential developments as providing new homes and new communities is the most satisfying reward possible for a Quantity Surveying practice.

“NEVER HAS THE HOME BEEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN IN 2020!” .... JOE BEGGS, MANAGING DIRECTOR MCGAHON SURVEYORS
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The terminology “volumetric housing unit” and its alternative construction methods may fly straight over the average lay person’s head. But the importance of the growing impacts of such innovative building schemes on environmental and carbon emission targets, the crippling housing crisis and the ever-increasing financial costs involved in construction can be easily understood by all, with a little explanation.

The core idea is for modular homes and commercial buildings to be constructed off-site, primarily in the factory and then transported to the building site, with materials 95% ready to be erected. The industry is young and developing fast.

A leading modular homes provider in Ireland MHI (Modern Homes Ireland), established in 2016, has completed more than 600 units of steel-framed homes since its inception, including a combination of social housing and high-end residential developments, mainly in the Leinster area. BAM, the Netherlands based construction company working since 1864 has become a shareholder in recent years.

Director of MHI, Micheal Keohane, describes how the advantages of such construction processes are difficult to knock in an existing plodding industry where change can be excruciatingly slow:

“The construction industry is one of the slowest moving of any industry to adapt. Technology is moving fast - AI, robotics, digital construction and so on, yet within the industry, we are using old and out of date methods. This is the era of automation, and important considerations of what is most efficient environmentally too are needed immediately. We are trying hard to bring the industry into the 21st century here in Ireland.

“With the housing crisis as it is and a growing demand for
additional housing, for the state to be working with us to help solve the critical problems of affordable social housing, student accommodation and hotels, is a no brainer. Our doors are open, we can be the supportive arm to the government using innovative and money and time-saving principles of construction.

“We have been involved in some social housing work, but this needs to be upscaled dramatically. Approximately 50% of our homes have been social units and we have over 300 social units booked into the factory for 2021, which is great. This is clearly the future. Uniquely our systems give high quality builds combined with rapid programmes due to the nature of our modular construction. Time scales for building are considerably quicker – in the current market, this is crucial.

“Our homes can be built in 4 – 5 hours on-site to 90% complete and we can be off-site in 2-4 weeks. This speed is a significant benefit, but the most important part of our system is quality. We are manufacturing under a Factory Production Control system that requires each module to go through a 48-step quality checking process, far in excess of any verification and management possible in other forms of construction. Our programme is such that as we are building the homes off-site, the foundations are being poured on-site. We don’t get interrupted by weather or atmospheric conditions, which in Ireland is a big help!

“It is fantastic to be part of an organisation which gets to provide high-quality homes for those that need them most. We have significant capacity and are looking forward to filling that over the coming months.”

The enormous housing challenge in Ireland needs to be addressed and the state is facing huge criticism over leaving solutions to the free market. Mr Keohane goes on to explain how MHI could potentially help the housing supply and demand gain some sort of equilibrium.

“The big thing for us is capacity. MHI and other similar companies have capacity to deliver significant volumes of projects. We would see a standard internal layout being agreed amongst the industry and then allow those in need - the AHB’s, the councils or Re-Building Ireland, for example, to block book capacity in multiple factories. That could then guarantee a volume of supply, reduce the price of the units and secure a workforce in rural locations such as Ballyjamesduff in Cavan, as well as in Tipperary, Galway, Wexford and other locations where there are factories. Working together is key to this and cross-company and country collaboration is key.

“COVID-19 has had an impact on our business, but we have survived, others have suffered more. Recovery is now the priority and getting reasonably high-volume projects is essential to create an industry that can sustain itself.

Closing Keohane says: “We would like to see the government rowing in behind the industry and guaranteeing volume to off-site providers, potentially taking a share in the business or a Joint Venture (as Homes England have with Sekisui and Urban Splash, which have been an enormous success) or they could simply release more contracts of scale. This is a huge opportunity which is currently being missed.”
PMEP Consulting Ltd (Penston MEP) was founded in 2015 by managing director Nick Penston. Since then, the practice has gone from strength to strength, growing in size from four staff to the current contingent of fourteen highly skilled engineers and designers, and justifying their growing reputation in the industry of delivering efficient, innovative and robust mechanical and electrical designs for their clients and always in a timely manner.

Based in Citywest, Dublin, the company prides itself on its core values of providing the highest quality design packages that are on budget and on programme to their ever-expanding client base, PMEP are involved in projects within the Commercial office, Pharma, Logistical, Data Centre, Medical, Residential and retail sectors.

PMEP offers the complete range of M&E design expertise in building services installations from HT and LT installations, LV and ELV installations, lighting and emergency lighting, fire detection and alarms, BMS systems, ICT installations, all forms of HVAC systems, combined heat & power / cogeneration. In addition to this, PMEP offers specialist skills and services in advanced computer modelling including thermal analysis, environmental and sustainable engineering, REVIT services, BREEAM and LEED assessments, due diligence, M&E cost control, building energy audits and BER assessments.

According to Managing Director Nick Penston, the public sector is very important to PMEP as it is a source of prestigious projects and of repeat business. “We are in a position to pledge director lead teams and to provide an exemplary service to our clients,” he says.

This level of service is evident in the company’s recent re-accreditations. PMEP re-attained ISO 9001:2015 and OHSAS 18001:20070 status earlier this year, and has been involved in many prestigious projects since its inception, including Slack, DAC 3, Adobe Citywest, Oracle Blocks C and E, Eastpoint Business Park (Block E achieved design stage LEED Platinum), Clay Farm Development for Park Development Group, Parnell House for Alstead Securities, and the new Jaguar Land Rover vehicle testing facility in Shannon, to name but a few.

All of the PMEP team members from Managing Director Nick
Penston, Director of HR and Finance
Michelle Hickey-Penston, Associate Director Saverio Talotti and the other invaluable staff that keep it all going are extremely committed to client satisfaction by approaching each project as an opportunity to achieve a new higher level of professionalism, service and quality, to maintain a working environment that rewards distinction and that sets the standard for exemplary building services M&E design.

Nick Penston has travelled widely and previously worked with Kentz Corporation in the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, Holland and the UK. He gained invaluable experience on a wide range of projects in the industrial, power, oil and gas, commercial, retail and healthcare sectors. Nick returned to Ireland in 1995 and worked for Varming Consulting Engineers. From there, he moved to Mott MacDonald where he was a director for five years and then as a founding partner set up O’Connor Sutton Cronin (OCSC) M&E Consultant Engineers before founding his own practice.

An outstanding project manager who takes great pride in every project that he leads, Nick’s main focus is to manage and develop a culture of business development throughout the team, secure work through existing and new clients and to act as a key point of contact for clients.

For further details, contact PMEP Consulting Ltd: First Floor, Unit A, Citywest Shopping Centre, Citywest Rd, Citywest, Co. Dublin. Phone: (01) 253 0710 Email: info@pmep.ie Web: www.pmep.ie

A PROUD PORTFOLIO
The ISO 9001:2015 and OH SAS 18001:2007 accredited company boasts an impressive track record and has been involved in numerous high projects across the country, some of which include:
- Central Bank of Ireland, North Wall Quay;
- Canada House, St. Stephen’s Green;
- Ashford Castle refurbishment, Co. Mayo;
- Phoenix House, Smithfield;
- Ballbridge; Fota Hotel & Resort, Cork;
- Dublin Port MV upgrade;
- Tallaght Hospital A&E extension;
- Beaumont Hospital Science Lab (Roche Pharma);
- Hubspot Phase 1, 2 and 3 (Hubspot);
- Square fit out (Square);
- Jaguar Land Rover facility, Shannon (JLR)

Nick was also involved in a variety of prestigious projects including:
- Reem Island master planning, Abu Dhabi; Masdar Mist IA, 220kV substation, Benghazi & Misurata, Libya; Kuwait Naval Base, Mina Alhindi Refinery Hotel Artes, Barcelona; Harbour Exchange, London and East India Dock, London.
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Economy-wide CO₂ emissions are expected to decrease by 9.5 per cent this year arising from the coronavirus pandemic, according to analysis by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). However, it warns “this reduction is short-lived as the low current energy prices increase energy demand and emissions rise again in 2021”.

Based on current trajectories, Ireland will fail to meet key 2030 targets on reducing CO₂, it adds.

Globally, Covid-19 restrictions will cause greenhouse gas emissions to drop by roughly 2.4 billion tons this year, a 7% drop from 2019 and the largest decline on record. A decline in transportation activity is the principal reason for the plunge in global carbon emissions.

The US and the EU are expected to record the largest drop in carbon emissions at 12% and 11% respectively while India is likely to see a 9% drop. Meanwhile, China is likely to record a mere 1.7% fall in emissions due to the fact that the country’s lockdown measures happened earlier in the year and were shorter in duration.

The decline in transportation activity is the primary cause of the global drop in carbon emissions. Emissions from automobiles and air travel fell by about half during the peak of Covid restrictions in April.

Nonetheless, the historic drop in global emissions has had a negligible effect on carbon concentrations in the atmosphere, which are heating up the Earth and worsening climate disasters, ice melt and sea-level rise. Even though emissions fell in 2020, they were still around the same levels as in 2012, and the drop is insignificant in comparison with the total amount of CO₂ polluting the atmosphere.

In Ireland, the 9.5 per cent annual cut in emissions is the largest since the 2008 financial crash. However, according to the co-author of the ESRI study, Kelly de Bruin, the economic downturn is likely to continue to suppress CO₂ emissions in the short-term but lower energy prices will lead to an increase in energy demand, and hence an increase in emissions as restrictions are lifted.

“Although the economic impacts of the Covid crisis are severe... we do not expect large emissions reductions as seen during the financial crisis of 2008,” he said.

“Ireland would still need to put in considerable effort to reach its EU emission goals. The results underline the importance of having a well-designed Government response policy package, which considers the unique economic and environmental challenges presented by the Covid-19 crisis.”

The ESRI research, funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, examines the coronavirus-related production shutdown in specific sectors, changes in consumption habits due to restrictions, declining labour force participation, trade impacts and the Government’s initial response.

“Each of these changes impacts the economy, where it is found that the largest impact comes from the production side. This work assumes that the economic structure of the Irish economy will recover in 2021,” the report said.

Meanwhile, research carried out by global consultancy Sia Partners estimates that ongoing Level 5 lockdown restrictions in Ireland will cut emissions by just half of the proportion witnessed during the first stricter lockdown between March and May.

Sia estimates that the second level 5 period, end on December 1st, 2020 will cut Irish carbon emissions by 13 per cent, whereas the first lockdown reducing emissions by 27 per cent, which lends weight to the view that the current round of measures is proving far less impactful in terms of curbing overall activity to fight the virus.

Sia calculates that Irish shipping emissions are down by just 3 per cent, while manufacturing emissions are down by just 5 per cent, as Ireland’s export economy continues to operate with high levels of activity in stable sectors such as IT and pharmaceuticals. Car emissions were down 20 per cent.
The Irish government plans to build 26,500 homes each year till 2030. Local authorities are under pressure to deliver social and affordable homes in a short space of time. The Land Development Agency, Home Building Finance Ireland, Department of Housing, guided by the National Planning Framework are working with local authorities to build affordable and social housing. Ireland is not alone in the EU in the dual challenges of both building social and affordable housing and tighter regulation for sustainability and climate action.

Ireland is not alone in the EU in having a housing crisis. Everyone is walking the same tightrope, as EU Member states experience a severe lack of equilibrium between demand and supply, affordable property whether for rent or purchase, constraints from lenders such as banks and a lack of state desire to commit to a programme to alleviate these concerns. This has led to a lack of social housing which is causing untold problems from homelessness to thousands living in temporary accommodation, particularly in cities.

Against this backdrop, the imperative for EU member states to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 will impact on how homes are constructed. It will also impact on the need to look at the bigger picture; including how land is used, the location of housing to reduce transport emissions, construction methods and the need for local low carbon emission materials. This all requires a deep-rooted shift in the industry and a change in mindset if these environmental and social targets are to be met. In particular, public sector procurement professionals need to understand these new developments.

The non-profit organisation, the Irish Green Building Council (IGBC), now have nearly 200 corporate members from the full value chain of the construction industry, including local authorities, building owners, housing associations, developers, building professionals, contractors and manufacturers, and as CEO, Mr Barry and his members are trying to transition the industry to meet the climate change and resource challenges of the 21st century.

Previously as an architect, Pat has had years of experience in Ireland, Europe and South America. His central belief is that the housing crisis must be solved, but without making the climate crisis worse, and given the scale of the Irish housebuilding programme this is a real risk.

**Leadership & Procurement**

IGBC recently held a workshop for its members on procurement, and the clear outcome was that they wanted far greater leadership from the public sector. In a strategy driven by the EU, which requires that the public sector leads on climate
change through procurement, the Irish government has had a policy of Green public procurement since 2012. However, this has not so far been implemented for construction. In fact, local authorities (with the notable exception of Dublin City Council) and approved housing bodies (AHB’s) appear to still build and procure houses to minimum standards. They may ask for the Nearly Zero Energy Standard (NZEB), but this has already been the minimum building standard for over a year, so is not green procurement. The conversation needs to move on to carbon-neutral housing across the full life cycle and also consider all the other massive impacts of housing construction on transport emissions, biodiversity loss, resource consumption, water use, land use, and increasing flood risk.

In contrast, the private sector is now well ahead of the public sector with the big international pension funds realising the massive risk of owning stranded assets. They now require any homes or buildings they purchase to be certified to a green standard such as Home Performance Index that goes well beyond national building regulations. The IGBC developed the Home Performance Index (HPI) standard, Ireland’s first national certification system for quality and sustainable residential development to enable procurers to either specify a green standard or require the homes that they purchase from developers to meet it. This measures over 30 indicators for everything from water efficiency, density, biodiversity, indoor air quality and location.

Pat believes that this gives a third party verified seal for procurers, financial institutions, buyers and developers, which can help ensure that the public sector is actually getting the best homes. It is easy to use and Dublin City Council has implemented it on all their recent developments. Indeed 350 homes in Bundle 1 PPPs recently completed by Sisk Living have all been certified to the standard. It aligns with the new EU taxonomy regulations for Green investment for institutional investors such as the European Investment Bank, private banks and investors, the EU’s Level(s) framework of indicators for sustainable construction, which means it is an easy way to implement Green procurement.

**CARBON FOOTPRINT**

Pat feels that it goes well beyond energy efficiency to look at the full carbon footprint of homes including embodied carbon. It integrates a Zero Whole Life carbon standard that includes embodied carbon for the really ambitious. He says that we must remember that Ireland’s new home construction programme will result in huge ‘embodied carbon’ emissions each year, equivalent to bringing a new Moneypoint coal-burning power station online if we continue to build these houses in the way we currently do. These emissions result from the impacts of mining, quarrying, transporting, manufacturing building materials (particularly cement) and the process of constructing the homes, and largely happen before the home is even occupied. This is not being measured currently, and what is not measured cannot be reduced he says.

Pat concludes: “We must also get planning right so that all new homes are in compact walkable communities where almost all services can be reached within a 15-minute walk to avoid the need to own a car. We will reduce transport emissions far faster by getting people out of cars altogether rather than trying to electrify them. As the well known Canadian urbanist Brent Toderian said at a recent IGBC conference, Ireland would do better to take 1 million fossil fuel cars off Irish roads by 2030 and replace them with 250,000 electric cars rather than the 1 million electric car target in the climate action plan. However, this can only be achieved if all local authorities and AHBS stop building low-density car centric social housing and stop supporting private sprawl developers.

To implement these ideas he says, we are starting an advocacy campaign around Green procurement to get all the key indicators integrated including embodied carbon.

“‘We know it is hard as there is little knowledge around these technical indicators but we are putting in place intensive training for local authorities and professionals in 2021.’

Pat Barry is passionate about his work and about making positive change but he also realises that the industry is slow to shift. It can however see an increase in delivery if the public sector starts to lead again.

The ideas that Pat is putting across are not unreachable or aiming for an unattainable utopia. He believes that in the rush to build new homes we are not going to do the occupants any favours if we leave them stranded in sprawling car-dependent high carbon developments.

Closing he says: “There are no additional costs to doing things right if we get procurement right. The key is that procurers are trained on how to procure competent design teams, who know how to design low or zero carbon homes across their full life cycle. Only skilled contractors should be allowed near a public tender. Private developers should not be able to purchase or develop state land unless they are building zero carbon homes across the full life cycle, and this requirement must be tied to the land purchase. The state is doing no favours for itself, the construction industry or the homeless by procuring from the lowest bidder, or by selling land to the highest bidder. It must consider the full life cycle environmental, social and economic costs; it must drive ambition, innovation and skills by only procuring from or engaging with the most climate ambitious designers, developers and contractors.”

For more information on The Irish Green Building Council and its membership, please see www.igbc.ie IGBC will be offering low-cost training to procurers starting in 2021 in Green Procurement, including Life Cycle Assessment, Life Cycle Costing and Indoor Air quality assessment aligning with the EU Level(s) framework. This is funded by the EU Life Lifelevel(s) project grant agreement number LIFE 18 GIE/ES/000911 LifeforLLL(s)
Making Green public procurement of homes easy!

The Home Performance Index

Ireland's national certification for quality, sustainable homes.

FIND OUT MORE
www.homeperformanceindex.ie

Developed by Irish Green Building Council

With the support of EPA, Dublin City Council, EU Smarter finance

Get ready for Green procurement
Training for procurers in Whole life Carbon and LCA, LCC and Indoor Air Quality 2021

For more information visit:
www.igbc.ie/events

NOTE: This project has received funding from LIFE Programme under the Grant Agreement number LIFE 18 GIE/ES/000911 Life for LLI/s.

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Over 10,000 social housing units will need to be retrofitted to meet energy rating targets in the coming years, according to The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) which represents 270 organisations that manage 35,000 social housing units across the country.

The ICSH has welcomed the Government’s commitment of €45 million in Budget 2021 towards retro-fitting homes and says that the social housing sector can play the lead in future-proofing for low-energy standards.

The council has said that almost one-third of those units will need to be retro-fitted to meet energy-saving standards into the future.

“It’s a major issue going forward, both for tenants and for housing organisations - to try and reduce fuel bills for tenants but also to reduce maintenance for housing organisations,” CEO Donal McManus said.

“You want to have your stock in good condition but also want to have good energy efficiency for tenants,” he added.

The ICSH chief believes that a retro-fitting programme, managed properly and involving all relevant stakeholders including the Government, voluntary organisations, the construction industry and banks, could make significant progress in reducing energy consumption in our homes as well as alleviating “fuel poverty”.

“Only by bringing the parties together and agreeing a consensual way forward, is the only way that this will be resolved long-term,” Mr McManus said.

A huge retrofitting programme is part of the Government’s Climate Action Plan which aims to eliminate the use of fossil fuels for home heating. The plan will include new insulation, heating systems and renewable energy sources in order to upgrade the energy efficiency of older properties.

Local authorities have been pursuing an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting on the least energy efficient social housing homes since the government began providing funding for the initiative in 2013. Over €150 million of government funding was provided for this work up to the end of 2019 and has helped has improve the energy efficiency and comfort levels of some 80,000 local authority homes.

Speaking at a recent energy renovation conference hosted by the Irish Green Building Council, Environment Minister Eamon Ryan outlined the government’s commitment to making retrofit a cornerstone of our economic recovery. Minister Ryan also committed to ending the stop-start nature of grant funding that
Increasing energy bills, the need to reduce carbon emissions and the raft of challenging legislation are driving the demand for alternative forms of domestic heating to improve energy efficiency.

The Ecodan system provides **reliable affordable heating and hot water** to help reduce your energy bills and your carbon emissions. If you’re looking to replace your existing heating system our award winning Ecodan range is perfect for any property type.

Heat Pump technology has been used around the world for decades and Mitsubishi Electric have developed the Ecodan range – one of the most advanced heating systems available today.

See [mitsubishielectric.ie/heating](http://mitsubishielectric.ie/heating) for more or call 1890 326 326.
has applied to date.

“Retrofitting homes will play an important role in our economic recovery. It is a highly labour-intensive sector and can create high-quality, sustainable jobs in local communities throughout the country. €221.5m in capital funding has been provided for SEAI residential and community retrofit programmes,” Minister Ryan said.

“This represents an 82% increase on the 2020 allocation and is the largest amount ever allocated for the schemes. Of this allocation, €109m is provided to support lower-income households to retrofit their homes and participate in the transition. This means that almost half of the total SEAI residential and community retrofit budget will support people vulnerable to energy poverty.

“A further €65m has been allocated for social housing retrofit in the Department of Housing and Local Government.”

Initial estimates suggest that this investment will result in an extra 3,500 houses being retrofitted to a Building Energy Rating of B2, and up to 3,500 additional upgrades to homes of those living in energy poverty, as well as creating 3,200 direct and indirect jobs.

In addition, Minister Ryan points to the Programme for Government which has set ambitious targets in relation to the number and depth of residential retrofits to be completed by 2030. The targets are to retrofit 500,000 homes to a Building Energy Rating of B2 and to install 400,000 heat pumps in existing buildings over the next 10 years.

These targets are expected to achieve the Climate Action Plan target of reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from the residential sector from 6Mt CO2e in 2017 to 3-4Mt CO2e in 2030.

The modelling carried out as part of the development of the National Energy and Climate Plan shows that in order to attain the 2030 residential energy efficiency targets, retrofitting needs to be scaled up significantly and rapidly to an estimated level of 33,500 B2 retrofits per year by 2022 and 56,000 per year by 2024.

As part of last July’s stimulus package, Minister Ryan increased the SEAI budget by €100m for the year ahead. The funds will be allocated to community retrofit schemes and help support those in energy poverty as well as funding other initiatives to support the achievement of national retrofit targets.

“Retrofitting has the ability to contribute to a number of important goals including de-carbonisation, warmer and more comfortable homes as well as job creation and job retention,” Minister Ryan said.

Irish homes emit almost 60% more CO2 than the average EU home according to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and the residential sector accounts for a quarter of the energy used in Ireland as well as a quarter of the energy-related CO2 emissions.

Tackling fuel poverty is a further incentive to create more energy efficient homes. Ireland has the fourth highest electricity prices in the European Union and approximately 400,000 households suffer from fuel poverty in Ireland.

The cost of bringing a home to B2 or cost optimal standard is influenced by a number of factors, principally the size and type of home as well as the initial condition of the home. According to Minister Ryan, a cost-optimal analysis commissioned by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has estimated that the cost of achieving a B2 rating from a starting point of a D or E rating to be in the range of €21,000 to €39,000.

Some 90% of Irish homes are estimated to have a Building Energy Rating (BER) below a B2 and a Retrofit Taskforce is working to finalise an estimate of the total cost of the retrofit programme as well as a new average cost.

Achievement of the 2030 targets will be supported by the Programme for Government’s commitment to ring-fencing a significant proportion of future carbon tax receipts for a new €5 billion socially progressive retrofit fund. The fund will target all homes but will have a particular emphasis on social and low-income tenancies. This is a significant level of Exchequer investment, but it is generally accepted that more private investment will be necessary to meet the level of retrofit and heat pump installation required.

A significant level of investment in training and skills development will also be required to support progress towards achieving 2030 retrofit targets. To meet this need, the Department of Education and Skills is investing €500m in programme seed funding for the development of new reskilling and activation courses due to be rolled out in 2021. The department is also due to announce details of an Apprenticeship Action Plan shortly, which will set out a programme of actions aimed at securing a major expansion of apprentice recruitment by the public and private sector.

“The retrofitting industry is just finding its feet,” says Pat Barry, CEO of the Irish Green Building Council. “To scale up deep energy renovation, businesses need to train staff, build new business models and guarantee long term work for their reskilled employees. The move to a multiannual budget should assist this.”

“Now that we have the direction, we must focus on actions,” he added. “Better conditions for staged renovation are needed. This could be done through the introduction of retrofitting roadmaps, which would complement existing BERs. Addressing labour and skills shortages is also critical. We do not currently have the capacity to retrofit 50,000 homes annually. Re-training suitable workers from hard hit sectors should hence be supported”.

To ensure the wide take-up needed to achieve the 2030 retrofit targets, Professor John Fitzgerald of the Climate Change Advisory Council says that home-owners and tenants will need to be reassured that they will save money by retrofitting their homes.

“If you want people to spend lots of money on retrofitting their homes, you must be able to tell them they’ll save a load of money from doing so,” he said.

An incremental annual increased is one way of ensuring that people will recognise the significant savings to be made from home energy retrofits, he added.
The words ‘Air Source Heat Pump’ don’t exactly trip off the tongue and when said in company they would usually elicit a quizzical look in response and an additional metre of social distancing for the speaker. Or at least that was the case only a couple of years ago. Since the publication of the Government’s Climate Action Plan in 2019, Air Source Heat Pumps are one of the key solutions to decarbonising the Irish environment.

The Climate Action Plan details that 600,000 heat pumps will be installed in Irish homes by 2030 and 400,000 of those will be retrofitted to existing homes, replacing the fossil-fuel burning oil and gas-fired boilers.

Air source heat pumps are an established technology that have been installed in the Irish homes for over 20 years. A heat pump is a modern, low-carbon heating system that uses energy from the air to provide 100 percent of a home’s heating and hot water. Mitsubishi Electric’s Ecodan range is one of the most advanced, yet easy to use heat pumps, which are manufactured for the Irish climate. The technology inside an air source heat pump is very similar to that of a domestic fridge: transferring heat from one place to another -the back of a fridge is warm because it is removing heat from the food inside the fridge out into the room. The heat pump itself is a small box which sits outside the home, quietly collecting the energy from the air and converting it to heat.

“The Ecodan heat pump is classified as a renewable technology using up to 60 percent less carbon per unit of heat produced. As additional renewable sources of electricity generation are added to the grid this will rise to 90 percent,” says David McConnell, Mitsubishi Electric’s Heating Products Manager.

“While the focus is on their lower carbon emissions and lower running costs, heat pumps also provide higher levels of comfort. In Ireland we are used to peaks and troughs of temperature in the home. When it’s cold the heating gets switched on for an hour or two until it’s too warm and the heating is switched off again. This cycle of over- and under-heating is typical of fossil-fuel systems whereas a heat pump remains on constantly, resulting in an even and constant room temperature and a much more efficient heating system”.

All Hands to the Pump

Air Source Heat Pumps can play a key role in reducing greenhouse gases in the built environment which is responsible for generating almost 40% of annual global GHG emissions.
Remote control of the Ecodan system is also so easy with Mitsubishi Electric MELCloud which is a cloud-based control solution. The homeowner can control their heating system from their PC, phone or tablet from anywhere in the world.”

The Mitsubishi Electric Ecodan is Ireland’s leading heat pump brand in both the retrofit and new build markets. Due to its A++ energy rating the Ecodan heat pump helps achieve Part L compliance in building regulations. The Ecodan system is available as a packaged system or standalone component solution into suit all types of Irish homes. The Ecodan heat pump has also received the ‘Quite Mark’ of approval from the Noise Abatement Society.

The Ecodan heat pump is easily installed by heating engineers who have been trained by Mitsubishi Electric to ensure all aspects of design, installation and maintenance are optimised for maximum performance. “Remote control of the Ecodan system is also so easy with Mitsubishi Electric MELCloud which is a cloud-based control solution. The homeowner can control their heating system from their PC, phone or tablet from anywhere in the world. Some key features include remote control of hot water and heating functions, frost protection, holiday mode as well as reports on electrical energy consumed and heat energy produced,” adds David.

“We are very proud of our Ecodan range of heat pumps which are key to reducing the carbon footprint of the country whilst also providing homeowners with savings on the running costs compared to fossil-fuel systems. These are of course great benefits of the Ecodan system and combined with the increased level of comfort for homeowners it’s clear why heat pumps have rapidly gained in popularity, not just in Ireland but throughout Europe”, states David.

For more information on Mitsubishi Electric’s range of Ecodan Air Source Heat Pumps visit: www.mitsubishielectric.ie/heating
VENTILATION IS KEY

Good Air Quality in buildings needs to meet higher standards. To reduce CO2 levels, intensive ventilation is required. Nowadays, with modern technologies this is achieved without loss of energy, (energy neutral). Therefore, low running costs are achieved. Systems with good filtration can be more than 90% efficient, according to Mark Eire BV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 – Standard design CO2 concentrations above outdoor concentration assuming a standard CO2 emission of 20 L / (h per person)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
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<td>II</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
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<td>IV</td>
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</table>

Experience has shown that an increased CO2 concentration has a negative effect on the attention span. The values shown are used to determine the CO2 concentration in the room air and to take suitable measures. The measures taken to improve air quality within the air quality range 1000 and 2000 ppm according to Table 2 must be documented in the risk assessment. This also applies if the measures fall below 1000 ppm CO2 in the room air.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 – Recommendations according to ASR 3.6 Ventilation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CO2-concentration [ml/m³] respectively [ppm]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No further measures (provided that the use of the room does not increase the concentration above 1000ppm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Check and improve ventilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create a ventilation plan (for example, define responsibilities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ventilation measures (e.g. increase of outdoor air flow or air change)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Further measures required (e.g. increased ventilation, reduction in the number of people in the room)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The classification according to Table 3 must be performed separately for gaseous ODA (G) and ODA (P) pollutant particles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 – Recommendations according to ASR 3.6 Ventilation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The outdoor air classification is shown in Table 3. These categories are used to inform all parties involved about the external pollution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 – Recommended minimum filter classes per filter section (definition of filter classes according to EN ISO 16890-1)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor air quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to maintain a good sanitary level in the ventilation system, the minimum combined filtration efficiency of mechanical supply air must comply with filtration class ISO ePM1>50% in accordance with EN ISO 16890-1.

The considerable improvements in airtightness of Irish buildings over recent years has amplified the importance of good quality ventilation. We can no longer rely on poor quality insulation and draughts through windows and doors to ensure that our schools, offices, hospitals, etc. are adequately ventilated.

Ventilation is a key component in ensuring proper indoor air quality. It maintains air flow through the building and eliminates contaminants, moisture build-up, and odours. Poor quality ventilation can have serious consequences and result in a build-up of condensation and mould which damages the walls and fabric of our buildings. More importantly, it can adversely impact the health of the occupants.

Bad air quality can result in the following, discomfort, headaches, fatigue, loss of concentration, burning eyes, nasal irritation, allergy aggravation, transfer of infection, poor learning results.

For infection control, the World Health Organization has recommended that Ventilation System run times are extended, and that as much outside air is used as possible, the amount of air per person is key (See Table 5).

Demand controlled mechanical ventilation can achieve this. Demand signifies that you have ventilation when you need it. This is not possible by simply opening windows, the uncontrolled loss of energy by doing this is unacceptable, one has no filtration and constant unmanageable draughts.

The advantages of good ventilation in public buildings whether schools, hospitals, commercial and sporting facilities are numerous and include reduced absenteeism, better concentration, less allergies, better temperature control, less dust mites, less bacteria, fresh air, no draughts.

For example, in a school classroom Mark Eire BV recommend 1000 to 1500m cu/hr fresh air with a filtration system and optional electrical heater or low-pressure hot water if you wish. The system is easy to install under or over ceiling (site specific), with minimal construction changes and minimal disruption during installation.

Nowadays, nobody should be without a proper ventilation system. Why not try one room and see the benefits? No job is too big or too small for Mark Eire BV which can supply single room or complete building Ventilation Systems.

For further details contact Mark Eire BV, International leader in climate control and specialists in air heating, radiant heating, ventilation, and recirculation equipment:

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**ERV HEAT RECOVERY UNIT**

Ceiling heat recovery unit with an efficiency up to 86% (Delivery from stock!) The Mark ERV is the ideal solution for energy efficient ventilation and a comfortable indoor climate. The appliance is equipped with a high efficiency counter flow heat exchanger with a heat recovery efficiency of 75–86%. This means that 75–80% of the energy expelled is supplied to the fresh intake air. This high efficiency means that in many cases no after heating is required. Possible applications for the ERV include offices, showrooms, apartment complexes, waiting areas and schools.

**Characteristics**

- High efficiency for optimal air comfort
- No condensation drain required
- Exchange of heat and moisture
- Energy-saving BLDC motor with 10 speeds
- Innovative HR counter flow exchanger
- Low weight
- Indoor installation
- Automatic bypass, intelligently controlled by outside temperature
- Plug & play control, optional CO2 and humidity control function, remote control and Modbus/BMS* control available
- ErP 2018 ready! * for type 2000 only available at extra cost. Inquire about the possibilities.

**Optional:**

- Electric re-heaters
- Disinfection-unit to sterilize the outdoor polluted air The Mark ERV is intended as a decentralized heat recovery unit. For central heat recovery, please refer to the Mark AIRSTREAM.

**Table 5**

*Indoor Air Quality (IDA) can be classified as follows:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ventilation Amount/person (m³/hr)</th>
<th>IDA 1</th>
<th>IDA 2</th>
<th>IDA 3</th>
<th>IDA 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Air quality</td>
<td>&gt;54</td>
<td>36-54</td>
<td>22-36</td>
<td>&lt;22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Air quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Air quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Air quality</td>
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Fingal Rises to the Challenge

Housing delivery in Fingal continues at pace despite Covid-19 emergency

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented every sector of society and level of government with an unprecedented challenge. The way of life for everyone has changed fundamentally and we all have had to rethink how we operate in life and business.

Fingal County Council is no different. The local authority for North County Dublin has had to rethink how it provides in excess of 380 services to 300,000 residents in the county.

“As a Local Authority we have had to adapt a lot of services and business to suit this new way of doing things and ensure that we continued to support, fund and build housing. Before COVID-19 we were facing real challenges to meet the need for housing and this demand has not gone away,” explained Fingal County Council Chief Executive, AnnMarie Farrelly.

Housing provision is one of Fingal’s key services. The demand for housing in the county remains high and supporting those in homeless circumstances was a key priority prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the demand for housing of all types, public and private, in Fingal was very high and has not diminished.

Fingal County Council is already responsible for more than 6,500 social housing tenancies across the county, accommodating nearly 20,000 people, and works to provide housing support through a range of measures. The Housing Department also provides a variety of other services including mortgages, rents, lettings and leasing, Housing Assistance Payments (HAP), Homeless Services, Estate Management and Maintenance Services and Grants for people with a disability.

With the restrictions brought on at the beginning of the pandemic, it was critical for Fingal County Council, in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, to ensure that that housing construction projects continued to progress. One such social housing development at Holymount, Swords was completed in June. This development site, alongside all other sites in Fingal, had been shut down temporarily due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was one of six social housing schemes in the county that were allowed to continue construction following approval from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The Council then worked closely with the contractors to ensure safe working standards were adhered to so each project could be completed.

Fingal County Council’s Director of Housing and Community, Margaret Geraghty, said: “The key was to work collaboratively with our partners - the Housing Agency,
the Department of Housing and the Housing Delivery Coordination Office and a number of Approved Housing Bodies – to have the six sites, and a total of 91 homes that were nearing completion, deemed essential sites. These are now completed with families moving into their new homes”.

“The hard work and ability of all the staff in our Housing Delivery and Tenancy Support services has ensured that these key services continued to be provided during the health emergency,” said Mayor of Fingal, Cllr. David Healy. “The recent completion of the Holymount development by Fingal County Council is an example of the work that is being done by both our staff and the contractors. The Council continues to deliver much-needed social housing in Fingal and ensure that we tailor what we’re delivering to the needs of those on our social housing lists.”

At the start of the year councillors in Fingal County Council approved plans to construct 87 more social homes on three sites in Swords, Cappagh and Clonscaugh. These plans are now progressing towards the tendering stage, after which construction will begin on site.

Since 2015, when Margaret Geraghty was appointed as Director of Housing and Community, Fingal has delivered housing solutions through a range of delivery mechanisms including construction projects, Part V, acquisitions, leasing and using the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP). A number of new social housing developments have also been delivered in collaboration with the Council’s partners in the Approved Housing Body sector.

The Council has constructed 288 homes since 2016 with 2019 seeing the completion and occupation of homes at Avondale and Church Road in Dublin 15 as well as Rowlestown and Castellands in Balbriggan. Rowlestown was the estate featured in this year’s RTÉ ONE television programme SuperGarden.

“I am very fortunate to have an excellent team in the Housing and Community Department”, said Ms Geraghty. “We partner with other key departments across the Council such as Planning, Architects, Finance, Property Management and Operations to deliver housing solutions. Within the Housing and Community Department we are clearly focused on our objective of delivering housing and building communities. Critically, the demand to increase housing supply has not gone away despite COVID-19. Therefore, it is essential that we continue to drive and support the mobilisation of construction and housing delivery within Fingal,” she added.

At the beginning of 2020, Fingal County Council was 14% ahead of its target having delivered 6,139 social homes since 2015. The Council’s construction pipeline has been growing steadily over the past five years with 16 new developments completed and a further 13 in the pipeline.

“Over the course of the pandemic we had to ensure the continued building of social housing projects. We are fortunate to have a strong construction pipeline and so we had quite a lot of construction going on,” said Ms Geraghty, adding: “We will continue to work collaboratively with the Department of Housing and our other partners to ensure the development of social, affordable and private housing across the county.”

Providing affordable housing is also a key objective for Fingal County Council and the Council hopes to sign contracts for its first affordable housing project in the county in a number of years.

Fingal County Council has also completed developments in Rowlestown and Balbriggan.

County Architect Fionnuala May, Chief Executive AnnMarie Farrelly, Mayor of Fingal Cllr Eoghan O’Brien and Director of Housing and Community, Margaret Geraghty inspect Fingal County Council’s newly built housing development at Holymount, Swords.
at Lusk with another three projects moving steadily towards the construction phase in Skerries, Cappagh and Mulhuddart.

As Chief Executive AnnMarie Farrelly observed: “It is a very difficult time for councils with revenue streams being interrupted by the COVID-19 emergency, so we have to handle our resources carefully to continue to provide quality services for our communities. Through continuing our development of housing in Fingal we can help to support the construction industry and support the local economy.

“Supporting the construction sector to get building is very important in terms of economic recovery. Local authorities are well placed to support this, not just through our enterprise offers, but equally from a joint-working perspective. There are opportunities for local authorities to not only support mobilising construction again but to support the delivery of social and affordable housing.”

During the last few months, faced with having to mobilise staff to work remotely, the housing team continued to provide a full range of housing services. Support from the Council’s IT team was critical to ensuring that happened very quickly and smoothly.

“Our housing team showed enormous commitment and put significant effort into communications, using both on and offline channels,” said Ms Geraghty. “Our housing staff reached out to tenants to help navigate their different issues. It was also an opportunity to check in with our tenants to see how they were doing and if there were other services they needed.

“We have about 1,000 households in Fingal with social housing who are over 70 and a third that live alone. Making information accessible to all was a necessity. Where you have a very elderly population, mainly using their phone, you must be willing to provide opportunities for people to engage through whatever means they can.”

The Community side of Fingal’s Housing and Community Department was heavily involved in the Council’s COVID-19 response as they co-ordinated the activities of the county’s Community Call Response Forum which brought together over 20 organisations and agencies to work together.

“A positive legacy of the COVID-19 crisis has been the new working relationships that have developed between these groups and the excellent contribution made by volunteers across the county,” said Ms Geraghty. “Within the Council there was also a strong response from all our departments to ensure that all our essential services could continue to be delivered.”

During the COVID-19 crisis, some mortgage holders with Fingal County Council found themselves suffering loss of jobs, loss of wages, shorter working hours or reduced pay and Ms Geraghty said keeping communication going between the Council and its clients is important.

“This is also a very challenging time for people looking to buy their first home and we are committed to working with prospective mortgage applicants on a case by case basis as many have faced changed employment prospects and will need some additional support and time to obtain mortgage approval and complete the purchase of their own home.

“Looking back over the last few months, I think our ability to be flexible and the relationships we have built up with key stakeholders has been crucial to keeping our housing delivery programme and our relationship with our tenants and citizens going and this will continue to help us over the coming months and years.”

At the beginning of 2020, Fingal County Council was 14% ahead of its target having delivered 6,139 social homes since 2015. The Council’s construction pipeline has been growing steadily over the past five years with 16 new developments completed and a further 13 in the pipeline.
Rome wasn’t built in a day, our houses are.

Our precision engineered modular homes are certified by the NSAI to 30 metres. Our units offer maximum; quality, speed & resilience to COVID-19

1 DAY
TO BUILD TWO HOMES
90% COMPLETE

48 STEP
RIGOROUS QUALITY PROCESS

600+
HOMES SINCE 2016

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In November Mayo County Council was named Local Authority of the Year at the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards which celebrates the best of Local Government in Ireland. Congratulating Mayo County Council, Minister for Housing and Local Government, Darragh O’Brien praised the progress it has made in ensuring the sustainable development of the county and helping to raise its profile nationally. “Having local government structures working to such a high level has helped to maintain an important sense of community in these difficult times and an inclusive, caring society for all,” Minister O’Brien said.

In 2014, the Local Government Reform Act expanded the role of local government in Ireland and granted local authorities additional powers in relation to economic development. Since then, Mayo County Council has emerged as one of the most dynamic and resourceful local authorities in the country. It has supported critical infrastructure projects such as the new US$300m transatlantic cable and the current €241m N5 Westport to Turlough Road and resolutely championed County Mayo as a desirable location for inward investment.

Last May Peter Hynes stood down as CEO of Mayo County Council following a highly successful ten-year term which was notable for the quality of the management team he led and a laser like focus on key areas including investment, infrastructure, transport, energy and the environment and housing. Mayo has been resolute in confronting the housing challenge, consistently exceeding national delivery targets and launching innovative schemes such as VacantHomes.ie - a countrywide housing initiative developed to bring empty and derelict homes back into use, Tom Gilligan, musician, author and Director of Services at Mayo County Council since 2015 is credited with pioneering VacantHomes.ie. He believes that the new powers granted six years ago was a turning point for local government and helped to unleash the pent-up potential and capacity of local authorities.

“We are at the heart of the community and that whole idea of co-operation and collaboration is really at the core of what local authorities do,” he says. “We are the frontline in relation to supporting communities and we are innately familiar with the key problems affecting our community, so it makes sense that we provide the appropriate services and solutions”.

“We have a broad sweep of responsibilities ranging from roads and transportation to housing and climate change, which has become particularly prevalent in recent years. Local authorities have had to be more adaptable in our response and we welcome that challenge. Mayo County Council is a great place to work and it is very rewarding to be able to provide critical services and solutions to the citizens of the county”.

One of the more resourceful and pro-active local authorities, Mayo County Council is intent on ensuring that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on more vulnerable members of the community is curtailed. The immediate priority when it first emerged was to ensure that Mayo’s homeless service continued uninterrupted.

“First and foremost, we had to be insurance bolted which is critical, particularly during an unprecedented emergency situation. Our services still have to be provided and Covid doesn’t make that task any easier. On the whole, local authorities have responded very well and we have been able to provide accommodation...”

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for anyone who is in need of temporary housing”.

“Homelessness is a very traumatic experience for anyone to find themselves in and we have been working with other relevant stakeholders to support those people in need of housing as well as those currently availing of our housing services. We have support teams in place, and we operate a community call-out service to help people who may have issues getting to a pharmacy or a doctor and to provide support to older people, in particular.”

However, Gilligan acknowledges the “huge and significant impact” which the pandemic has wrought on every aspect of the local authorities operations. As with every county, the initial lockdown seriously impacted Mayo’s construction delivery programme and significant efforts were undertaken to establish watertight health and safety and social distancing protocols throughout the organisation. Working practices were altered substantially and immediate steps were taken to ensure that employees had all the facilities, technology and support required to carry out their work remotely.

“Face-to-face meetings have largely been replaced by zoom calls and the pandemic did slow things down for us, obviously,” he says. “We are confident that we can remain on course with our housing program although we remain highly concerned about the ongoing and future impact of the pandemic. It is clear that some local businesses which were closed will not reopen again. That’s going to have a severe social and economic impact in many of our rural areas. It’s a very worrying time but we have to remain positive and we have to focus more so on the solutions rather than the problems”.

Gilligan is also concerned about the significant pressures which Covid has exerted on local authority finances. The extensive and prolonged closure of businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, has resulted in a substantial decline in rates while other sources of income, including funding from leisure centres and tourism sites as well as parking income has been severely restricted. Meanwhile, Mayo County Council has had to shoulder considerable additional costs due to the wide-ranging measures required to protect against Covid.

“We also had to incur significant costs in relation to COVID and we estimate that in 2020 we will have spent an additional €1.7 million more on areas such as IT and PPE and in adopting the preparatory and preventative measures which have been put in place across the board. At the same time, we have experienced a severe drop in our income streams as have all other local authorities. There is no question we will require funding in order to move forward. All the services I mentioned such as housing, roads and climate change, water safety as well as library and street cleaning services and managing our parks and beaches are absolutely critical services and they all need money, and they all need resources”.

“Our revenue budget for 2020 in Mayo is just over €148 million and our rates income of €35 million accounts for a significant proportion of that.” The Government announced initially a 100% waiver of commercial rates applied for a 6-month period from 27 March 2020 to 27 September 2020 to all ratepayers except a small number of categories. The waiver was to be applied as a credit in lieu of rates for the 6-month period covered in 2020. Then an extension of the commercial rates waiver was agreed by Government and was announced in the budget statement on the 13th, October 2020.

Despite the myriad of challenges facing the county, Mayo County Council remains ahead of schedule in relation to the overall delivery target of 708 new social housing units over the period 2016 to 2021 set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action plan and Gilligan is confident that it will remain on course despite the protracted series of delays and general disruption caused by Covid.

“We’ve been very successful as a region and while everything comes with a ‘Covid caveat’, we are confident that we will continue to meet and exceed our targets. Part of our overall figure includes a development of 27 housing units in Swinford and another project providing eighteen new homes in Ballyhaunis. We also have another site in Ballinrobe generating a further sixteen homes. We have a number of other sites where construction has commenced and any shortfall in supply is being made-up by way of leasing and acquisitions.

“Addressing the housing issue and homelessness is a priority issue in Mayo and we’re happy with our performance to date. I think local authorities have to play a leadership role in the matter of social housing. We need to be building more homes and increasing output in order to boost supply to the extent needed to make homes more affordable. We are fortunate to have our own architect department in Mayo which allows us greater independence and flexibility. Our former CEO, Peter Hynes was also an architect and he was a key figure in leading the charge with respect to social housing provision as well as issues such as climate change and attracting inward investment.”

Traditionally, housing construction in Ireland tended to focus largely on the provision of standard three-bed semi-detached homes. However, according to Gilligan demand nowadays is weighted more heavily in favour of smaller one and two-bedroom dwellings, a trend which is increasingly prevalent across Europe.

“Demographics have changed and families in previous generations were larger than they tend to be today. There isn’t the same need for four- or five-bedroom houses although three-bedroom houses remain popular. We’re focusing primarily on providing 2 and 3 bed units, because we see those being very important in relation to social housing, and that’s likely to remain the case for a while yet.”

“It is a reflection on our society as well and it’s important that we are able to respond and meet whatever needs exist. Family needs have changed over the years and we have to adapt and calculate these trends into our planning going forward. In other EU countries apartments are more prevalent and they are much more focused on high-rise development. We need to pursue the
whole question of higher density housing, particularly in our larger towns and cities.”

There was further encouragement for social housing providers in Budget 2020 when the Government committed to delivering 50,000 additional social housing units during its term in office. A central issue in the election in Jan 2020, the decision to replenish the national social housing stock has been welcomed by Gilligan who says it is a recognition by Government of the importance of developing a sustainable housing market.

“I think the Government is demonstrating that it is serious about social housing and that is welcome,” he says.

“There is an overwhelming need which exists, and we have to respond. This is a step in the right direction and now we have to ensure that we get the right number of properties constructed and deliver them in those places where there is greatest need. It will be challenging and even more so with Covid but we have to do our utmost to ensure these targets are met. From a local authority point of view it’s a great opportunity to show what we’re capable of.”

With the constraints placed on housing delivery due to Covid restrictions likely to persist through 2021, Gilligan believes that the Vacanthomes.ie scheme first pioneered by Mayo County Council in August 2017 will be particularly important in helping to meet social housing targets. The vacant homes initiative was borne out of Mayo County Council’s commitment to the Rebuilding Ireland Action plan on Housing and Homelessness and, in particular, Pillar 5 of the plan, which outlines a range of actions to ensure that existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible.

“We’ve been very involved with the issue of revitalising vacant homes and I want to thank everyone involved and the whole team that helped us to progress this important initiative,” he says. “If you look back at census 2016, there were over 183,000 vacant housing listed which is around nine percent of our total housing stock! It was a figure that really needed to be addressed and that is what we have been doing.

“From my own viewpoint, the need to bring vacant properties back into use is now more urgent than ever because of Covid and the fact that construction targets are not now being met all across the country. There are a number of schemes now established to help users bring vacant properties back to use, including a ‘buy and renew’ scheme whereby a local authority purchases a vacant property and uses it for social housing as well as a ‘repair and lease’ scheme which delivers guaranteed rent.

“These schemes are important for property owners who wouldn’t ordinarily have access to finance and want to see the property brought back into use. If people have properties that are lying vacant, we would encourage them to avail of these schemes. By restoring these properties and putting them to good use, it not only benefits the property owners and the tenants but also the local community and local service providers.”

Housing Minister Darragh O’Brien provided a further €40m in Budget 2021 under the 2020 Voids Stimulus Programme and Mayo County Council was allocated €500k to assist in the refurbishment of 45 units that will provide a home to people with a social housing need. “The funding, apart from ensuring that extra social housing stock becomes available quickly also have a really positive economic benefit, by generating employment to local builders and tradespeople,” says Gilligan.

“It’s great to see these social housing units that have been vacant for a while being brought back to good use. It’s so important that we have the housing supply available and that we can meet the needs of everybody that requires assistance in securing a home”.

The other critical issue likely to occupy the minds of local authority chiefs in the coming years is the growing impact of climate change. According to Gilligan local authorities have adopted an active climate change remit and have been engaging with the Department of the Environment on a variety of climate change initiatives. With the longest coastline in the country, Mayo is vulnerable to coastal erosion, flooding and other extreme weather events.

“One of the things that has become very prevalent over the last year or so has been the whole area of climate change and the services that we provide to protect against these increasing climate related emergencies are absolutely critical,” says Gilligan. “These events can threaten lives and they also have a devastating impact on property and vital infrastructure. They will be increasingly common in the future and local authorities have to be adaptable in our response.

“In Mayo, we have a severe weather alert team and a good media communication set-up. They are able to respond quickly to these events. But we also have to be proactive in identifying areas that might be prone to flooding or severe weather events and ensure we put in place the necessary barriers and infrastructure and improve our overall defences.”

Despite the myriad of challenges facing the county, the citizens of County Mayo can rest a little easier knowing that the defences are being manned by the resolute and steadfast crew at Mayo County Council.
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When it comes to profiling Jennings O’Donovan’s target market, let’s just say we’re talking broad church. The wholly Irish-owned consulting engineering company has demonstrated itself, over seven decades, to be a firm of real substance, of proven worth, one which quickly garners trust, generates loyalty and exhibits supreme expertise in renewable energy, water supply, planning and structural engineering, environmental, waste water, civil engineering, health and safety, leisure and recreation, housing and commercial projects.

An internationally recognised specialist operator with an array of marquee civil, structural and environmental engineering projects under its belt, Jennings O’Donovan boasts a highly qualified team of design engineers, project managers and environmental scientists.

Delivering projects from inception through feasibility, planning, design, procurement and construction to handover and project close out is encoded in the DNA of Jennings O’Donovan of Finisklin Business Park, Sligo. Numbered among the company’s specialist, award-winning team of civil, structural and environmental engineers is company director Conor McCarthy.

McCarthy’s curriculum vitae showcases his 38 years experience in consulting engineering in Ireland and the US. Like his fellow long-time employees at Jennings O’Donovan, the recently appointed President of the Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI) diligently helped steer his company through the choppy waters that washed across the bows of Ireland’s economy during the years 2008 and 2013. In the current Coronavirus-inspired economic storm, it’s a case of all hands on deck on the Good Ship Ireland Inc.

And as the titular head (the first person from a company based in the north-west of Ireland to be afforded such an honour) of an organisation that represents the business interests of over 100 member firms and their 4,000 employees, McCarthy is all too well aware of the need for everyone to show leadership and bravery in their collective decision-making.

In that latter regard, McCarthy believes solid and sustained capital investment by the Irish government can help anchor the country in these turbulent times.

“In my role as President of the ACEI, I intend to lobby very strongly for significant capital investment in social and private housing, for example, as part of an overall national recovery programme by our government. The cost of borrowing money has never been as low in terms of affordability and that, in my mind, is the road to go to get out of this difficult economic situation we find ourselves in at present.

“Investing in major capital projects like housing which can employ significant numbers of people and get the economy...
moving is what should happen now. That is the key. Increase the social housing stock, in particular with an emphasis on new builds.”

The popular partner in Jennings O’Donovan says he is encouraged by the commitment given by the current coalition government to work towards the construction of 50,000 new builds over the next five years.

“Increasing the social housing stock by that degree is a positive step forward and I welcome that move as well as their decision to increase the level of funding to each local authority from two million to six million euro. That kind of outlay by the government gives more autonomy to the local authorities in terms of enabling them to drive projects forward rather than having to seek approvals year on year.

“Such monies will facilitate the business of getting projects through construction in a more expedient manner and I think that can only be a positive thing and very important in our efforts to stimulate the economy.”

And his theory on how best to stimulate the economy?

“By investing in it. We should borrow. The cost of borrowing money has never been as low in terms of affordability. I’m convinced the EU will support us in that regard.”

Like so many of his ilk engaged in the world of commerce, McCarthy is fervently of the view that investment in jobs as a means of generating taxes/revenue is key to Ireland getting a grip on what is a very slippery financial slope. He is adamant that it’s simply not sustainable for the government to continue making available wage subsidies, pandemic unemployment payments or job seekers’ allowance on the current scale.

“To help turn things around, we need to provide investments in larger projects, particularly in the construction area,” he notes. “That will get people back to work in meaningful numbers. In that way also, they will be paying taxes as opposed to being simply supported financially. I think things can be turned around with support from Europe. It’s a great opportunity to move projects forward and get construction projects in particular through the planning process in a more expedient manner.”

“A CASE OF LESS HASTE, MORE SPEED?”

“I think to be fair to An Bord Pleanála, they need to be resourced better to allow them to deal more efficiently with the projects that come their way. It’s not the fault of the people that work there; there are just not enough of them.

“The amount of time it takes to get projects through the planning process can be very frustrating,
especially the amount of time it takes for a project to be reviewed by An Bord Pleanála. They give guidelines in terms of timelines but then these timelines are extended and extended again.

It’s important for all of us that the planning guidelines and regulations are functional.

“We see from a Jennings O’Donovan perspective – as people working in a consulting engineering practice in the north-west - how long it takes for a planning project to go from the concept through to when it actually reaches a conclusion. It’s just too long.

“In terms of driving projects forward, there needs to be an overhaul in relation to how we can get appropriate projects that are environmentally sustainable and meet with the environment guidelines delivered more efficiently; same goes for water services. We see projects that could be 20 years in the making.”

As immediate past President of Sligo Chamber of Commerce, McCarthy is unashamedly a cheerleader for all things to do with the Yeats County and its environs. The north-west of the country, in its entirety, is obviously close to his heart.

Very much the evangelist with regards to promoting the north-west as a destination for people to work and live in, McCarthy believes that driving balanced regional growth is key to the prosperity of areas outside the Pale.

“Connectivity from the regions to Dublin remains very important. We still don’t have complete connectivity with our capital city. For instance, the rail stock is not sufficient at the moment. People are standing at the moment on the trains a lot of the distance from Sligo to Dublin - a three-hour journey. Also the quality of the of the rail network itself needs upgrading.

“Then as regards the roads, you have motorway or dual carriageway from Dublin as far as Mullingar but once you leave Mullingar and head further west, you’re back to single lane roads and that’s not acceptable.

“Regional balance across the country remains a serious challenge. It’s a fact that we’re more reliant on our capital city than any other country in the EU is on their capital city!”

And as a nod to the company’s mission statement of actively targeting engineering and scientific work that is environmentally responsible, McCarthy talks up the quality of the environment that the north west is renowned for:

“The air is clean and we have great expanses of green areas. There are many attractions in the north-west, from walking trails, seaside coastal areas, mountains and lakes.

“Along the Atlantic economic corridor, we have a lot going for ourselves, a tremendous, safe environment from Donegal Town to Sligo, Mayo and Galway to Clare and to Limerick and on to Kerry.

“There’s quite a focus on developing hubs along that region and connectivity between those hubs and an economic corridor along the west coast that would be self-sustainable and could act as an attraction in terms of places for people to live as opposed to being Dublin centric.”

McCarthy pin-points the rolling out of top notch broadband more expeditiously as a matter of immediate importance to the north-west. Also, urban centres like Sligo that have been designated a growth centre need to be furnished with the proper planning and supports via the likes of the Living Cities Initiative. Another key aspect of making the north-west attractive for people to live and work there is the expansion of its third level education facilities and upgrading of IT Sligo to a Technological University, he concludes.
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SLIGO LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

Regional development plan identifies Sligo as well as Galway, Athlone and Letterkenny as key growth centres by 2040

The Regional Development Plan is focused on expanding the population and workforces of four key cities in the west and north and promoting development in designated regions to cater for a sharp expected increase in population over the next 20 years.

The plan aims to redress the economic imbalances between the east and west coasts of Ireland and identifies Galway, Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny as key growth centres where the populations could rise by 40 per cent by 2040.

Under the plan forecast is for the population of the west and north west to increase by 180,000 people by 2040.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), published by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), has called for more focused delivery of housing, transport infrastructure, healthcare, education and childcare and developing “more employment clusters in high value sectors such as tech and medtech”.

A metropolitan area strategic plan for Galway and growth centre plans for Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny also form key parts of the plan. The assembly said the plan aimed to “break the chain of uncoordinated, incoherent and short-sighted ‘business as usual’ development that has served the region poorly in the past”.

David Minton, director of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly, said the strategy shows how high net remote working, more affordable housing, safer cycling and better work-life balance could be introduced in the region.

The NWRA represents regional government in Ireland with a remit to accelerate regional development.

Filling Sligo’s growth centre potential

Sligo is positioning itself to fill its growth centre potential in accordance with the Governments’ National Planning Framework (NPF) designation, according to Ciaran Hayes, Sligo County Council CEO, who is to step down from his role on January 1st, 2021, following 42 years of service in local government.

“Sligo is putting in place the necessary building blocks for the city and county to be promoted and marketed as a ‘Smart Region’ that is attractive to a variety of clean industries including a range of Information Communication Technology (ICT) companies capable of providing quality jobs in a sustainable and innovative environment,” he says.

Sligo is a key business node for the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC), connecting the western counties with Northern Ireland and the Sligo County Council chief is intent on making Sligo the economic, tourist and cultural capital of the Northwest.

“The unprecedented investment in the county’s roads infrastructure is just one of the many reasons to be positive about Sligo’s future and shows what can be achieved when key agencies work in dynamic partnership towards a common objective,” says Hayes.

Taken in conjunction with the progress being made right across all service areas, Sligo County Council is making a real impact on people’s lives, and communities all over the county are energised and enhanced by schemes such as the Town and Village Renewal Programme.

In addition to the capital roads programme, exciting proposals are progressing for O’Connell Street and the Stephen Street Cultural Plaza, the Yeats Trail, Armada Centre, Grange, Enniscrone Bath House, Pavilion and Promenade and Greenways. “I believe our designation as a centre for economic growth will be the catalyst and driver as we deliver on our status as economic, tourist and cultural capital of the Northwest,” says Hayes.

Hayes also highlights the proposed Sligo Cultural Plaza will transform an existing city centre car park into a permanent flagship attraction for visitors to Sligo, as well as for the local community. A traffic-free location on the banks of the Garavogue and within easy reach of public transport, public car and coach parking and Sligo Tourist Office, the plaza will serve primarily as a welcoming place for visitors, orienting them and providing information about Sligo and its many amenities and attractions.

Sligo County Council is also developing a Digital Strategy for County Sligo. The objective of the strategy is to place County Sligo at the forefront of digital transition, using its benefits to enable the successful implementation of the climate action agenda, develop economic activity in the Sligo region, and improve social inclusion.

The strategy will see the development of Sligo into a Smart City with the aim of realising energy-efficient neighbourhoods, smart transport and development of infrastructure with the capability to use data analytics from smart technology to provide information which enables the ongoing improvement of all aspects of the city and its environs.

Meanwhile the O’Connell Street Enhancement Project involves the refurbishment of Sligo’s busiest commercial zone and pedestrian thoroughfare. The main design ethos is to create an improved pedestrian zone by enhancing the quality and attractiveness of the urban environment while concurrently creating a permeable interconnected metropolitan space that will facilitate commercial and residential opportunities for the undeveloped and underutilised sites on and in proximity to O’Connell Street.

The proposed Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Approach Roads would provide a local link road on the eastern side of Sligo City. It is required to overcome the inadequacies of the existing road network in facilitating local travel between the eastern parts of Sligo City without need for travel through the city centre. The development will join communities north and south of the Garavogue River, will improve circulation and will reduce traffic congestion in the city centre.
Last November 15th, council buildings across Ireland were lit up to mark this year’s ‘World Remembrance Day for Road Traffic Victims’. Local Authority Road Safety Officers encouraged the public to get involved and ‘and shine a light in their window between 7pm and 8pm that evening to remember those in their community who have died on the roads.’

A total of 148 people died on Irish roads last year, a 4% rise on the 142 deaths recorded in 2018 which was the lowest year for road fatalities on record. Casualty figures for 2019 show that there was a 45% increase in the number of drivers killed compared to 2018 while the number of pedestrian deaths declined by 36% and passenger deaths were down 20%.

While the increase in road fatalities last year was disappointing, the overall trajectory in Ireland is positive with the number of road fatalities falling by one third over the last decade. In addition, Ireland was the second best-performing country in the EU last year in terms of road safety, according to the European Commission.

Overall, the State recorded 29 road fatalities per million inhabitants in 2019 and was surpassed only by Sweden where 22 per million people died on the roads. According to EU Commissioner for Transport Adina Valean, the goal is to have “no deaths and serious injuries on European roads by 2050”.

Perhaps surprisingly the figures for road deaths in 2020 so far show no reduction due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. More people died on Irish roads in the first nine months of 2020 than over the same period last year. 118 people were killed on Irish roads up to the end of September 2020 compared to 111 over the first nine months of 2019 despite public health restrictions which advised people to stay at home and only travel for essential journeys.

According to The Road Safety Authority this most likely due to more pedestrians and cyclists being on the roads and with rush hour traffic at lower levels than normal, it has urged drivers to be on the lookout for vulnerable road users, such as cyclists and pedestrians, whose numbers increase during lockdown.

The recent inquest in the death of four young men who died in a single-vehicle incident in Gortahork in January last year highlighted the heartache and trauma which results from road fatalities. The four close friends, Mícheál Roarty, 24, from Gaoth Dobhair; Shaun Harkin, 22, and John Harley, 24, both from Fál Carragh; and Daniel Scott, 23, from Gort an Choirce had been drinking and were travelling at an estimated speed of 120km/h on an 80km/h road when the crash occurred.

The inquest heard that Mr Scott and Mr Harkin were both wearing seatbelts, but that the two other men were not.

Speaking at the conclusion of inquest into the deaths of the four young men, the coroner for Co Donegal Dr Denis McCauley appealed to people to think long and hard about the devastation caused by fatal road crashes. They were four close friends who decided to go out to enjoy themselves and made a couple of decisions that had a dreadful outcome, said. The crash had devastating effects which rippled through the community and you could hear the devastation in the statements read out at...
the inquest in Letterkenny Courthouse.

Donegal has long been blighted by a stubbornly high rate of road deaths and Donegal County Council has been spearheading a determined effort to improve road safety culture in the county. From 2014 until Donegal County Council spent €521,648 on road safety and anti-drink-drive artwork, marketing and training - 27 times more than the €18,900 spent by Tipperary and significantly more than other counties with a similarly sized population and equivalent numbers of road deaths.

According to Brian O’Donnell, Road Safety Officer, Donegal County Council, more proactive measures had to be adopted in order to effectively address the high rate of fatalities in the country. One of the key initiatives was the establishment of the Donegal Road Safety Working Group and the local authority also introduced a series of road safety plans, the first of which can be traced back to 1997. Its efforts have not gone unrewarded and Donegal has seen a marked reduction in deaths, from 19 in 2010 to 8 last year.

The current Road Safety Plan (2016 to 2021) focuses on five key elements: education, engineering, enforcement, evaluation and empowerment. It acknowledges the innate existing car culture within the county, and addresses it, tasking all members of the community with responsibility for changing it.

“Our Road Safety Working Group which includes members of the Garda, the HSE Ambulance Service, TII and our own fire service has been doing a lot of good work,” O’Donnell said. “In addition, we have young people – members of Donegal Youth Service - involved in the Group plus our own staff.

“We have also members of our working group involved, an organisation called Pro Social Ireland who work with the courts service and the probation service”

“All told, we have an input from a lot of stakeholders who are very interested in making the roads in Donegal safer and reducing the number of accidents in the county.”

O’Donnell is wholly supportive of the EU’s declared objective of eliminating road deaths by 2050 and he believes that road traffic collisions should not be accepted as a normal part of life. “Road safety applies to every one of us – motorists, cyclists, motorcyclists and pedestrians alike. All are vulnerable and have duties of care to each other,” he says. “The importance of motorists allowing a safe passing distance when overtaking cyclists cannot be emphasised enough. We need to impress on motorists the vulnerability of cyclists and the need to respect them as road-using equals,” he says.

Among the other aggravating factors in Donegal are the high incidences of speeding and drink-driving as well as the fact that too many cars are simply not roadworthy. “It is virtually impossible to enforce the law on the local road network on a regular basis. We need to see more Garda enforcement. It has increased but we need to see more of it,” he says.

“I am in regular contact with the Garda Síochána in relation to different campaigns we run and I’m glad to say the support that we get from them is second to none. But our very close proximity to the border brings particular challenges to the law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border.

We work very closely with road safety groups across the border in Derry because a large volume of traffic comes over the border.”

The road safety chief also supports changes to the drink-driving laws aimed at driving home the road safety message to all road users. Educating violators of the rules in tandem with punishing them is proving effective and Pro Social Ireland are currently working with the court service and Probation service to improve both the awareness and the driving behaviour of drivers referred to their service.

“We have a situation now whereby drivers who fall foul of the road traffic legislation in terms of, for example,
drink-driving and speeding have to undergo a four-week programme,” he says.

“As part of the programme, a report has to be completed on behalf of the offenders and returned to the court service and the judge who has to be satisfied that they have engaged fully in the process of the programme. “There are modules to be completed such as social responsibility and emotional control.

“Such a programme, I feel, allows the offenders to see the errors of their ways. The offending rate for participants that have done the programme is zero! The Programme has received National recognition and to date has won a number of major awards for its contribution to road safety in Ireland.

Educating young people about road safety and being a responsible driver is key to improving the counties road safety record and there is a strong emphasis on youth behaviour attached to the various programmes initiated by Donegal County Council. “Without a shadow of a doubt, young people are being particularly targeted by our campaigns. “We’re talking here primarily about an age group from 16 to 24. Thereafter, the group with the next highest profile are those people aged between 24 and 50,” says O’Donnell.

The Local Authorities road awareness safety campaign is featured on local radio as part of a broader strategy which sees it working with the tabloids and social media. It also has youth groups who have recorded audios that also gain airtime on the various radio stations.

“I have to say that the participation levels we get from the young people are very positive, especially from our own road safe show – the next time it could be you - which runs every year in October, and which regularly has over 3000 students in attendance from all secondary schools in Donegal.

The measures are being fruit, according to O’Donnell who affirms that “road fatalities in county Donegal are on the decrease”. “The objective of the (2016 to 2021) plan is to reduce the number of road deaths and while we all agree that one death on our roads is one too many, you have to have a target that is realistic,” he says.

“We have to take some solace that the numbers (of fatalities) are reducing and that is to do with the campaigns and focus we have put on road safety. Our target, from the outset, was to continue to reduce road deaths year in and year out and I think we have achieved that.

“We have to thank the road users out there who are abiding by the law and adhering to the rules of the road; taking their own lives and other lives seriously and we need to keep reminding people that road safety is everybody’s responsibility”
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As part of a stimulus package to get the tourism industry back on its feet, the government’s ‘stay and spend’ tax rebate is an attractive option for those eager to travel when restrictions are lifted. It means that people can receive 20% back from their restaurant and hotel bills in the form of a tax credit at the end of the year, with the rebate in force from October 2020 through to April 2021.

Some of Ireland’s most striking scenery is just wanting to be discovered and can be experienced right on these very shores. Out at the very edge of Europe, the Wild Atlantic way stretches for 2,500 km (1,500 miles) along Ireland’s western seaboard. From Malin head in Donegal to Kinsale in County Cork, through regions like Connemara, Galway Bay and Kerry, it’s the longest defined coastal drive in the world - a sensational journey of soaring cliffs and buzzing towns and cities, of hidden beaches and epic bays. People flock from all over the world to visit our tiny island, so why shouldn’t we do the same?

There are endless opportunities for discovery along this route. Every few miles there are places to stretch your legs, quench your thirst or grab a bite to eat. Maybe you’ll hunker down and stay a night or two to get to know the places and the people. You might join in the craic at an impromptu session, go island-hopping, visit ancient sites, or sit by turf fires in traditional pubs, where your taste-buds might explode with fresh flavours.

Ireland’s reputation as a delicious destination is alive and kicking. Our culinary pedigree has us patting our backs and our bellies at the same time. Across the entire island you are guaranteed a gastronomic delight and with Galway having been named one of just two European Regions of Gastronomy, the City of Tribes is a foodie haven, a bohemian dream and Ireland’s festival capital. Take your pick of the Film Fleadh, the Oyster Festival, the medieval architecture and the riotous fun of a trad music session at Taaffes pub. Or head down in October...
Staycations

for the ‘Food on the Edge’ symposium where you can get a taste of some of the world’s best chefs including Angela Hartnett, Magnus Nilsson of Sweden’s Fäviken, Ashley Palmer-Watts of Dinner by Heston Blumenthal and Slovenian star Ana Roš, voted Best Female Chef in the World 2017.

TOP HOTELS

From castles and stately homes to heavenly B&B’s, has a feast of fine lodgings on offer. Killarney stormed into 8th place in Trivago’s Global Reputation Ranking of the world’s best hotels, with Galway also featuring in the Top 100. Meanwhile, Condé Nast Traveller named Ardmore’s Cliff House Hotel in their 10 Most Beautiful Clifftop Hotels list, and four of Ireland’s resorts feature in its Top 25 Resorts in Europe.

The spectacular Ashford Castle and Adare Manor have both undergone extensive refurbishment while Ballyfin Demesne in County Laois refuses to be knocked off its perch as Ireland and one of the world’s top hotels. If you can’t quite stretch to staying in one of these fine establishments, why not pop along for afternoon tea? Resident or guest you can be assured of great attention, after all, hospitality is in our nature.

TEE TIME

The island of Ireland is made for golf. From internationally renowned courses to welcoming local clubs in every corner of the country we have more than 400 courses including over 30% of the world’s links courses. From green parkland to rugged coastal links and everything in between, there is a course to suit every skill level and every budget.

It’s a great way to take a bit of gentle exercise or to get competitive. There are golf courses where you can walk past five thousand-year-old dolmens or the ruins of medieval castles as you walk up the fairway. There are courses where you’ll return to clubhouses that are living breathing stately homes and centuries-old fortifications. There are courses where the sublime coastal views will physically distract you from your shot - hidden gems everywhere wrapped in mythology and legend. And there are courses that challenge the best with built in blind shots that require a healthy portion of luck, sheer brilliance or the assistance of a good caddy to get your ball where it needs to be.

Golf Digest’s number 1 golf course on the planet is Royal County Down. The experts say: “On a clear spring day, with Dundrum Bay to the east, the Mountains of Mourne to the south and gorse-covered dunes in golden bloom, there is no lovelier place in golf. Champion golfer Rory McIlroy is a fan, too: “The more you play it, the more you recognise it for the class place it is.”

THE BIG HITTERS

Killarney National Park and the Cliffs of Moher are regularly featured in Condé Nast Traveler guides – and for very good reason. The Cliffs sweep in jagged majesty down the coast of County Clare, while Kerry’s National Park hides castles and a Tudor mansion beneath towering mountains. Two of Ireland’s big hitters – and must-sees for anyone journeying southwest.

North of the country Donegal continues to dominate. Not content with being voted the coolest place in the world to visit by National Geographic Traveller, Donegal has had the landing strip at its regional airport voted the second most scenic in the world. Anybody who has landed here will know why, and if you haven’t yet experienced the slow sweep over the spectacular bay yet, put it on the bucket list. Adam Twidell, CEO of PrivateFly and an experience pilot, said: “I have landed at Donegal many times and the rugged coastline of Ireland’s north west coast is even more awe-inspiring from the air, with the backdrop of Mount Errigal adding to the timeless appeal.”

“Breathtaking, stunning, wild, dramatic ... You will not see anything like it anywhere else on earth ... An Irish welcome awaits every visitor”, were some of the comments made by voters about the landing strip. Flights from Dublin to Donegal take just 55 minutes; a magnificent way to enter the county and

NOTHING BEATS LANDING ON SKELLIHG MICHAEL AND CLIMBING THE STONE STEPS TO REACH THE INTRIGUING CHAMBERS LEFT BY THE MONKS. IT’S A CHALLENGING CLIMB BUT THE REWARD IS A VIEW TO DIE FOR.
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And travel bible Lonely Planet just can’t get enough of Ireland, falling head over heels for the Skellig Ring, “Ireland’s most charismatically wild and emerald stretch of coastline.” Of the wild and isolate Skellig Islands, it claims, “Nothing beats landing on Skellig Michael and climbing the stone steps to reach the intriguing chambers left by the monks.” It’s a challenging climb but the reward is a view to die for.

IRELAND’S ANCIENT EAST

For those who love to peel back the layers of time, Ireland’s turbulent, mystical and inspiring 5,000-year history is waiting to be discovered by travellers through its Ancient East.

Featuring three unique areas— the Land of 5,000 Dawns, the Historic Heartlands and the Celtic Coast— the Ancient East is a smorgasbord of fascinating destinations that is enough to satisfy the biggest cultural appetite.

The northernmost stretch encompasses the iconic Neolithic passage tombs at the UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Boyne Valley and the legendary Hill of Uisneach, Ireland’s sacred centre. In May, the Uisneach Festival of Fire celebrates the beginning of summer, harking back to Ireland’s pre-Christian era and reviving this most ancient and primal of traditions.

The Historic Heartlands is the setting for more high drama. In County Tipperary, sitting on a towering rock said to have been discarded by the Devil himself, the Rock of Cashel looms large over Ireland’s history. Here medieval buildings rub shoulders with a Gothic cathedral and castle, and tales of saints and kings abound.

There are more than a few castles in the Historic Heartlands including the splendid Norman Kilkenny Castle and Birr Castle, home to the Great Telescope built in the 1840s, the largest telescope in the world at the time.

The Celtic Coast takes in counties Wicklow, Wexford, Waterford and Cork and reveals more of Ireland’s colourful past.
in some of the country’s most impressive architecture, as well as dazzling scenery. In Wicklow ramble through the ruins of the sixth-century monastic city of Glendalough with its famous round tower, or stroll around the magnificent Powerscourt House and its award-winning gardens.

Europe’s oldest lighthouse at Hook Head in Wexford offers a glimpse of the island’s maritime history, while Waterford City holds treasures and tales of its Viking past. Down in Cork there are many attractions including the famous Blarney Castle with its famous kissing stone, not to be missed by those aspiring to eloquence and the easy charm that comes so easily to the Irish.

Ireland’s Ancient East offers a captivating journey through time but the region is also alive with fun and frivolity—from leprechaun hunts to music festivals—ensuring you leave enriched, enlightened and entertained.

**A DREAM MUSEUM**

Widely acknowledged as one of Ireland’s leading museums, the County Museum, Dundalk has built its innovative reputation on the quality of its collection and the development of in-house exhibitions on a range of subjects ranging from historical events to inspirational figures. Fundamental to this has been a recurring dedication to ensure that the museum (and its collection) remain relevant to its core principles and by extension, its core audience.

Given the exigencies and pressures of the new normal in this Covid Age the museum’s mission statement emphasises the importance of collecting those items and artefacts that capture, illustrate and articulate the nature of life as we are experiencing it at present. In effect, this is the perfect example of the museum mission – collecting the present to inform future generations about their past. Indeed, one of the lessons to be learnt from the period of lockdown has been the enjoyment that members of the public have derived from the opportunity to savour the history of their own surroundings. Over the course of the lockdown, the museum developed a series of short video presentations on its Facebook page using items from the collection. In addition, the museum developed a number of articles highlighting the wide and diverse nature not only of the collection, but of the historic events that have influenced the direction in which the county has developed. These innovations were further bolstered by initiatives such as weekly quizzes, children’s activity sheets as well as online jigsaws inspired by a selection of artefacts currently on display. As one woman remarked, “if it wasn’t for this (the museum collection) and the music we’d have nothing.”

In essence, this is the success of the County Museum, Dundalk. It is, however, more than a museum, it marks the most important moments of the county’s history in a manner that is immediate, accessible and relevant. More information may be had by contacting the Museum at 042 9392999 or checking out their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/countymuseumdundalk
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CURING THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

A variety of recent reports and strategy documents have highlighted the intimidating range of challenges facing Ireland’s health system as it seeks to improve its performance.

The health status of Irish people has improved substantially in the last two decades with life expectancy registering huge gains and most people reporting being in good health. Despite this progress, there is a consensus that the health system is underperforming and that a fundamental transformation is needed to make it fit for purpose and to meet future demands associated with an ageing society. Key areas to be tackled include introducing a universal health system, building up the health system to improve access and adequately meet healthcare needs, more consistent workforce planning and better budget management at all levels.

COVID-19 has placed unprecedented pressure on the healthcare system. The emergency measures implemented to date are welcome and necessary, however, in the medium and long term the issues of bed capacity, lack of step down care facilities and the need to broaden access to community care must be addressed so the acute hospital system is better placed to deal with any future shock.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic ever reached these shores Irish hospitals were already working near full capacity. The occupancy rate for acute care beds is among the highest in OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), and while having a high utilisation rate of hospital beds can be a sign of hospital efficiency, it can also mean that too many patients are treated at the secondary care level.

Even though Ireland spends 25% more per capita on health than the OECD average, the number of beds per 1,000 population is considerably less than the OECD average and hospital bed occupancy rates in Ireland reaches almost 95% - the highest in the EU 28.

In its report on the Irish Healthcare system in 2019, the OECD found it to be hospital-centric, with significant capacity constraints in primary and secondary care. It concluded that the current health infrastructure is simply not adequate for current demand and unable to cope with the projected increases due to population ageing. And that was before a global pandemic.

One of the things that contribute to this situation is the inability to discharge people, often older patients, due to problems accessing support in the community. The problems associated with our high bed occupancy rates are associated with a persistent failure to invest properly in areas such as primary care, community care and step-down facilities.

A recent ESRI report highlights the unmet need for formal home support, finding that Ireland provides formal care to only
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24% of those needing it and that 38% of people over 65 have unmet needs for care, as do 34% of disabled adults. The HSE estimated in 2017 that increasing availability of rehabilitation beds would potentially free up 12% of delayed discharge beds. In 2019 the OECD came to a similar conclusion noting that the high rate of delayed discharges in Ireland contributes to high hospital bed occupancy rates. Hospital bed occupancy rates could be reduced if post-discharge planning and care arrangements for the elderly were improved and if access to primary care and community care was improved.

**The COVID Challenge**

The failure to properly invest in primary care was having detrimental impacts on the Irish healthcare system long before the arrival of COVID-19, but this lack of investment now leaves the system painfully exposed.

In a policy briefing on healthcare system responses to COVID-19, the OECD emphasises that the experience in China and Italy has highlighted the critical need to ensure adequate capacity of hospital beds in general and intensive care. The report finds that given the characteristics of the treatment required for the most severe COVID-19 patients, the most important bottlenecks in hospital capacity are taking place in intensive care beds. A preliminary analysis of the most recent publicly available data suggests that across ten OECD countries, the variation in capacity is six-fold, ranging from a high of 33.9 critical beds per 100,000 population to a low of 5.0 beds per 100,000. Ireland is at the low end with just 5.0 beds per 100,000 of population.

High occupancy rates of acute care beds are symptomatic of a health system under pressure that has limited capacity to handle an unexpected surge of patients requiring immediate hospitalisation. Ireland has almost no capacity when it comes to this issue with a bed occupancy rate of 95%. This problem has been highlighted for several years and is primarily a result of a lack of an integrated primary and community care structure. Ireland remains the only Western European country without universal coverage for primary care.

The correct policy response in the Irish context in the medium to long-term, once this crisis is over, is to focus on developing the primary care and community care infrastructure so that acute care beds can be made available quickly in times of extreme pressure such as we are experiencing at present. This requires investment and a rebalancing from the current system of reliance on hospital care with resources being diverted to primary care and Sláinte care.
Health Minister Stephen Donnelly:

“The combination of winter and what Covid has done to our healthcare system means that this winter will probably be the most challenging time in healthcare in living memory.”

Healthcare for All

In May 2017, an Irish cross-party parliamentary committee published the Houses of the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare Sláintecare report. The report highlighted the importance of fundamental changes in the Irish health system and the conviction that the system was not performing as well as it could.

Sláintecare set out an ambitious roadmap to deliver whole system reform and universal healthcare over a ten-year period. The vision is to establish a universal, single-tier health service where patients are treated solely based on health need and the reorientation of the health system ‘towards integrated primary and community care consistent with the highest quality of patient safety in as short a time-frame as possible.’

Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly says that the Sláintecare plan remains the main route to reforming the healthcare system and that the move towards universal healthcare had to be accelerated in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

“Covid has created a perfect storm. It means we need a very large amount of additional spending, money that could have been deployed on other parts of the healthcare system. The waiting lists have shot way up. The in-patient waiting list since March has gone up by almost a third. A number of measures are now needed to address the changes seen in recent months. We need to expand the capacity within the HSE - that means running the operating theatres and diagnostic suites longer, getting everything we can out of the primary care centres and ramping up on telemedicine.”

The Minister said there was a need to secure short-term capacity from outside the HSE - a strategic partnership with private providers. He pointed out that there are 11,000 beds in the public system and 20% of them now need to be kept vacant for infection control measures. “All ideas need to be on the table and everyone needs to come together to face the enormous challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Budget Implications

The health budget implication is one such challenge with the pandemic having bared an €8 billion hole in Ireland’s finances due to widespread business shutdowns and an extraordinary increase in government spending.

According to the Department of Finance, the increase in spending reflects the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from the Department of Health and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe said, “the extraordinary increase in public expenditure is a result of the government’s commitment to supporting our health service and the wider economy through this unprecedented period, as demonstrated with the announcement of the July stimulus plan to support businesses and get people back to work.”

Referring to the €7 billion stimulus plan Taoiseach Micheál Martin said the package was an “unprecedented set of measures required by unprecedented times”. He went on to say that the impact of the virus had unleashed a recession more “rapid and dramatic” than ever before recorded.

Winter Ready

In preparation for what lies ahead, the Taoiseach announced a €600 million winter plan for the health service which aims to increase capacity in hospitals and in the community to boost services against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. A key part of the plan is an expanded flu vaccination initiative which government sources suggested could cost €64 million. The HSE has placed orders for approximately 1.35 million doses of flu vaccine for adults and 600,000 doses for children aged between two and 12 years.

The winter flu is so-called because influenza thrives in colder temperatures and prefers the humidity levels in the winter months. The virus is also more likely to be transmitted when people keep windows and doors closed. And in the cold, wet months at the end of the year, staying socially distanced outdoors or in well-aerated rooms becomes much more difficult. At present, it is too early to determine whether COVID-19 is similarly affected by the changing seasons but there is evidence that people can be infected by both viruses at the same time.

“We don’t yet understand how that alters the severity of the disease,” Dr Kim Roberts, Assistant Professor of Virology at Trinity College Dublin said. He added, however, that both viruses have an impact on the respiratory system so recovery from one virus could make a case of the other more serious.

The winter plan also includes the introduction of 1,000 additional acute and sub-acute beds with a workforce of 3,000 people involved in testing for COVID-19, as well as contact tracing. The plan sees GPs having access to diagnostic services for their patients in the community in order to keep them out of hospitals as much as possible. There will also be new
The National Ambulance Service (NAS) is the statutory pre-hospital emergency and intermediate care provider for the state. In the Dublin area, ambulance services are provided by NAS and Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB). Aero Medical services are provided by the Irish Air Corps and the Irish Coast Guard by agreement with each organisation. At a local level, the NAS is also supported by over 274 (March 2020) Community First Responder schemes, responding to particular types of medical emergencies (i.e. cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, chest pain, choking and stroke) where it is essential for the patient to receive immediate life-saving care whilst an emergency response vehicle is en route to the patient.

In recent years, the NAS has embarked on a strategic investment programme to develop a modern, quality service that is safe, responsive and fit for purpose. The service is implementing a significant reform agenda which mirrors many of the strategic changes underway in ambulance services internationally as they strive for high performance and efficiency whilst coping with a continuously increasing demand on services.

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community assessment hubs which will aim to deal with patients, particularly those with chronic conditions, without them having to be admitted to hospitals.

The provision of several million additional home-support hours is included, to enable people in hospitals to return home or to stay in their homes. Sources suggested that up to three million additional home support hours could be provided for in the new plan.

Commenting on the plan Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly said: “the combination of winter and what Covid has done to our healthcare system means that this winter will probably be the most challenging time in healthcare in living memory.”

Resilience & Recovery

Trying to make sense of the difficulties we now face is to look through a kaleidoscope. Within its brief existence, the virus has turned healthcare systems worldwide on its head unleashing a storm of attempts to make sense of the present and protect for the future against the backdrop of previous epidemics and pandemics.

All across Europe, the virus is regaining its foothold and spreading at a rate not seen since March and April. Currently, Ireland is moving from a short-term emergency response approach to a medium-term approach to managing risk and repairing the damage that the coronavirus has inflicted on society.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin said: “we must continue to live with the reality that COVID-19 is potentially deadly, causes long-term illness, and we must limit the spread.

“When a vaccine is available we will move quickly to implement a widespread vaccination programme, however, I want people to understand that even before then, we can go much further in opening up economic, social and cultural life in our country. At all times the priority will be to keep schools open while keeping people safe and protecting the resilience of the economy and communities.

“Protecting public health remains an absolute clarity,” he said. “We are a resilient people. As a nation, throughout our history, we have come through every manner of trial and hardship. And this too will pass. The great responsibility that rests on each and every one of our shoulders is to do everything we can to make sure that when it does pass, we have brought as many of our families, friends and neighbours with us, alive and in good health, to enjoy the better and brighter days that lie ahead.”
At a virtual ceremony, the International Chambers of Commerce and Mind the Bridge awarded the HSE the Global public sector innovation award. The HSE Digital Transformation team have adopted a next generation approach to Open Innovation. The HSE has adopted the novel Open Innovation 2.0 methodology where the Irish Digital Health ecosystem is aligned around a common digital innovation strategy “Stay Left, Shift Left” and uses a network of living labs to co-develop solutions in complex real world health environments.

‘Stay Left’ advocates for solutions which keep well people well at home or if the person has a chronic condition, help the patient be managed best at home. ‘Shift Left’ advocates for digital health solutions which move patients from an acute setting to a community setting to a home setting as quickly and efficiently as possible. The HSE has collaborated with start-ups/SMEs such as patientMpower, RedZinc, S3 and PMD solutions to develop unique digital solutions to enable Stay Left, Shift Left.

In October, the HSE announced a network of digital living.
“WE ARE DELIGHTED THAT THE HSE HAS BEEN RECOGNISED INTERNATIONALLY FOR OUR WORK IN OPEN INNOVATION”
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labs with further announcements earlier this month. A living lab is a user-centric research methodology and platform for sensing, prototyping, validating and refining complex solutions in multiple and evolving real-life health contexts. For example, initial living lab focused on Covid-19 respiratory sensing has evolved into a virtual respiratory ward which helps manage patients with conditions such as Cystic Fibrosis, COPD and IPF in their own homes.

Speaking about the award Paul Reid, CEO of the HSE said “We are delighted that the HSE has been recognised internationally for our work in open innovation. Using the Open Innovation 2.0 methodology enables us to rapidly develop transformational digital health solutions. This is substantial early evidence that the HSE is making good progress on our transformation journey.

Martin Curley, Director, HSE Digital Transformation stated, “We have been very encouraged that the Irish digital health ecosystem have aligned around our ‘Stay Left, Shift Left’ Digital Health Innovation Strategy. By involving all elements of the quadruple helix, government, industry, academia and patients we can co-develop better and quicker digital solutions which proactively improve the health of all our citizens.

Ian Talbot, CEO of Chambers Ireland and ICC Ireland said “We are very pleased to see that the HSE has been awarded the global Public Sector Innovation award by the International Chambers of Commerce and Mind the Bridge. This recognition alongside global household brands is an exceptional achievement in this most difficult of years.”
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Honk for Heroes

Ireland paid a special tribute to its frontline heroes as part of the annual National Services Day celebrations.

In previous years National Services Day would have been marked with a major parade through the streets of Dublin with large swathes of the public out in force. However, the current pandemic put paid to those plans this time around.

Despite this, people from across every corner of Ireland were eager to mark the day and acknowledge the incredible efforts of these key workers over the last few months. Firefighters, gardaí, paramedics and lifeboat crews sounded horns and sirens across the country as a show of respect for colleagues working near and far. Three helicopters were dispatched from the Irish Air Corps to conduct a flyover of Dublin city centre that not only marked the occasion but served as a special tribute to the victims of COVID-19.

A special ceremony took place at Collins’ Barracks in Dublin with Justice Minister Helen McEntee joined by representatives of 24 agencies for the event.

The day which honours all frontline and emergency services saw a particular emphasis on the health services this year. The National Ambulance Service was represented by Director Martin Dunne who paid tribute to staff who have worked tirelessly for months. He also acknowledged the families of health service workers, saying: “Families have been a huge support to allow health service workers to do what they’re doing and that should also be applauded and recognised.”

Owen Medland, the RNLI’s lifesaving manager, described it as a day to remember those who had passed away from the virus. “They’re in the forefront of our mind,” he said. “We’ve got many, many people within our services who have been touched both in their own loss or just witnessing and I think it’s a time for reflection as well.”

Ms McEntee said it is her “deep privilege” to work closely with some of the frontline emergency services, such as An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service.

“I have seen at first hand their tremendous professionalism and dedication, in what can be very challenging circumstances,” she said. “I am delighted to have the opportunity to publicly thank them and all our emergency services for the quiet heroism of their chosen career.”

The Justice Minister also used the ceremony to reflect on Detective Garda Colm Horkan, who tragically lost his life in the service of the State earlier this year.

“On this day, I think particularly of Detective Garda Colm Horkan, who tragically lost his life in the service of the State this year. “In his selfless commitment to community and country, Detective Horkan represented the very best of An Garda Síochána and indeed of all our frontline services. We remember and honour him today.”
Rental law in Ireland: What you need to know

The Residential Tenancies Board is home to the best information and data on renting in Ireland, for both tenants and landlords alike.

The RTB’s website provides a wide range of information from rules around starting a tenancy to how to correctly end a tenancy and everything in between. Visit www.rtb.ie for the latest information.

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media.queries@rtb.ie

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In an end of year statement, the Coast Guard has highlighted, that despite the impact of COVID-19, 2020 has proven to be a relatively busy year.

Overall, the Coast Guard coordinated 2643 incidents in comparison with 2490 incidents in 2019. Activity over February, March and April was the lowest recorded for each of those months over recent years but noticeably picked up in May with August and September proving to be exceptionally busy. 464 incidents were recorded in August in comparison with 369 for August of 2019 and 307 incidents recorded in September with a corresponding figure of 239 in 2019.

Coast Guard Director Eugene Clonan said that the key challenge this year was to ensure the 24/7 delivery of Coast Guard SAR services, as coordinated by the three Rescue Coordination Centres in Malin Valenta and MRCC Dublin and responses delivered primarily by Coast Guard’s own volunteer sector, its contracted Helicopter service, RNLI and Community Inshore Rescue services.

The Coast Guard attaches particular attention to what it categorises as Lives Saved i.e. assistance provided that, prevented, loss of life, severe risk to life, or protracted hospitalisation. In 2020, the Coast Guard recorded that 391 individuals were categorised as Lives Saved.

SAFETY CONCERNS

During 2020 the Coast Guard noted an increase in two activities that gave rise to safety concerns; increases in the number of incidents involving persons using inflatable devices (Lilo’s / Dinghy’s) on beaches and inland waterways during summer months, and increased participation in open water swimming in autumn and winter. Coast Guard acknowledges that safety messages regarding open water swimming have been well heeded with most participants adhering with basic safety precautions.

Public safety messaging continues to be promoted via the revamped www.safetyonthewater.gov.ie website and other social media platforms in conjunction with stakeholders from the Marine Safety Communications Sub-Group (Coast Guard, Water Safety Ireland, RNLI, Bord Laisceigh Mhara, Commissioners of Irish Lights and Irish Sailing). Coast Guard recorded a total of 72 drownings in 2020 a reduction on 2019 figures and is working closely with Water Safety Ireland in monitoring drowning risks and trends.

The RNLI is categorised as a declared resource to the Coast Guard, which means that each individual station can be directly requested to respond to individual incidents. RNLI lifeboats were tasked to 783 missions while Community Inshore Rescue Boats responded to 84 mission. During the year the Coast Guard and RNLI agreed a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out its long-standing arrangements for SAR response and coordination.

STAY AFLOAT – STAY IN TOUCH

The capacity to Raise the Alarm and Stay Afloat, are central to the prevention of drownings at sea or on inland waterways. The Coast Guard’s core safety message Stay Afloat – Stay in Touch; highlights the importance of never engaging in any commercial or recreational boating activity without wearing a fully serviced Life Jacket or Personal Flotation Device (PFD), coupled with a capacity to raise the alarm via means such as a VHF radio, Personal Locator Beacon, EPIRB or mobile phone. This should be supported by informing shore-based colleagues of intended activity and anticipated return time. Mobile phones should not be considered as a suitable substitute or be relied upon as the only means of emergency communication at sea. Phone coverage at sea is limited and unreliable. Mobile phones are also highly susceptible to failure due to water ingress.

If you see somebody in trouble or if you think they are in trouble at sea, on the water or along the coast, dial 112 and ask for The COAST GUARD.
The need for immediacy in dealing with the physical impacts of the illness at its outbreak was arguably the most important concern but the unseen and unknown long term effects of the coronavirus, in part precipitated by social distancing and lockdown are equally worrying. The effects of loneliness or being cooped-up with others; stresses on relationships; grief, loss and bereavement; depression, job and financial insecurity and a myriad of emotions and change of behaviour patterns are all now of great concern.

Charitable support services in these areas are being stretched to their limits as they are experiencing a sharp increase in demand combined with a lack of cash input and a vastly decimated workforce. The huge difficulties faced by those that were vulnerable pre-COVID 19 are now exacerbated by the pandemic. This is leading to even further pressure on the existing agencies with responsibility for helping others.

The importance of mental health support services, either charitable or otherwise across the board has never been in doubt, but the help they aim to offer is being stretched to its limit as expertise and time required has shot up in these times of adversity. Studies show that the number of people describing symptoms of depression is climbing rapidly and that help is needed by many who have never before required support in this way. Frontline health workers, emergency workers and care home staff, in particular, have been under intense pressure in these unprecedented times. While perhaps coping on the surface and ‘doing their job’, many suffer heavily from the stresses and strains of their workload and responsibilities.
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Mental Health Crisis

The UN has warned that a global mental health crisis is looming: “After decades of neglect and underinvestment in mental health services, the COVID-19 pandemic is now hitting families and communities with additional mental stress,” said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. “Even when the pandemic is brought under control, grief, anxiety and depression will continue to affect people and communities.” The UN brief stressed the need for countries to include access to psychosocial support and emergency mental care in all aspects of their response to the pandemic.

A recent report in The Washington Post quoted Michele Obama, former First Lady of the United States and wife of former President Barack Obama as expressing that she too felt an underlying sense of low-level depression during these difficult times. She told columnist Michele Norris that she had experienced some very low points recently. Mrs Obama said: “There have been periods throughout this quarantine where I just have felt too low,” adding that her sleep was also affected.

The United Nations (UN) described the mental strains on people who fear that they or their loved ones will be infected or die from the coronavirus, which has now killed almost three-quarters of a million people worldwide to date. The international body also pointed to the psychological impact on vast numbers of people who have lost or are at risk of losing their livelihoods, have been separated from loved ones or have suffered under drastic lockdown orders.

Devorah Kestel, head of the World Health Organisation’s mental health and substance use department stated: “We know that the current situations, the fear and uncertainty, the economic turmoil - they all cause or could cause psychological distress.”

She called for a significant hike in investments in this area, pointing out that before the crisis, countries on average dedicated only two per cent of their public health budgets to mental health support.

Health care workers and first responders under stress are particularly vulnerable, Kestel pointed out, where media reports indicate a rise in suicides among medical workers. Other groups also face psychological challenges brought on by the crisis, she added.

People who are homeless form a large number of the especially vulnerable and this group includes many who struggle with substance use and addiction issues. Homeless charities in Ireland are voicing concerns that a new wave of homelessness is on the cards if protection policies put in place earlier in the year, such as the provision of emergency accommodation for the homeless and the banning of evictions are lifted too early.

Fear & Uncertainty

Emergency accommodation, hostels and family hubs, already struggling under the burden of a homelessness crisis in Ireland, are now taking drastic measures to protect homeless people from the coronavirus. Facing something of an unprecedented situation, charities and homeless services are trying to work together to coordinate a response. “We were in crisis before this came along,” Mike Allen from Focus Ireland says. “Now it’s more like “crisis squared”.

Harm reduction services, in combination with housing, health and homeless agencies in both the public and private sectors were expanded rapidly in Ireland to good effect in response to protecting the homeless from COVID-19, experts such as Dr John Collins (Drug Policy Unit at LSE) claim. But fear and uncertainty remain that should the Covid crisis recede, so too will the newly implemented support service facilities across the board.

Listening and responding to the fear, distress and anxiety precipitated by the virus and to any other personal crises since 1953 is the global frontline voluntary telephone and face-to-face support service - the Samaritans.

Four in ten crisis calls received by the Samaritans in Ireland at the moment are connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Niall Mulligan, the Executive Director. While coping with an average number of 1,000 calls in local branches, the support service is also having to cope with a fall in volunteer numbers.

Mr Mulligan said in a recent report in The Irish News: “Coronavirus isn’t necessarily the main feature of most calls but it’s in the background if not the foreground of quite a lot of calls at the moment.”

The charity has to ensure the remaining volunteers are protected, however, so face-to-face visits have been suspended.

“At this critical time of need for the public, we are doing everything humanly possible to keep open our 24/7 helpline,” added Mr Mulligan. “The COVID-19 pandemic is a massive challenge for all charities at the moment and the Samaritans organisation is no different.

“We have experienced a drop in volunteer numbers due to self-isolation, shielding and cocooning. This has impacted on branches, but we were able to deal with this by many volunteers doing additional shifts per week.

“While our service is confidential, we know that in general when people ring Samaritans for emotional support, they often mention several concerns including isolation and loneliness, anxiousness and mental health, as well as family and relationship issues and it is no different in the current crisis which has magnified some of these issues for callers.”

Mr Mulligan added: “Even with restrictions easing, we are quite aware that many people face an uncertain future, and some will be concerned about losing their jobs and their businesses.

“Others may be facing challenging financial circumstances, while some may still have to remain isolated.

“Samaritan Ireland’s key message is that if you’re struggling with the impact of COVID-19 if life is difficult and you’re feeling anxious, stressed or unable to cope, don’t struggle through it alone.

“Don’t bottle it up. We are here to listen to whatever you’re going through.”
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Lock Up Light Up

Lock Up Light Up is An Garda Síochána’s anti-burglary awareness campaign which encourages homeowners to protect their homes over the winter months, when burglaries traditionally tend to rise.

The campaign is part of Operation Thor, a national multi-strand anti-crime initiative which actively targets organised crime gangs and repeat offenders. It involves a wide-range of enforcement, crime prevention and public awareness measures.

Operation Thor has resulted in a substantial reduction in domestic burglaries across Ireland since it first launched in November 2015. Over the winter months, targeted activity across Garda divisions will include checkpoints, increased patrolling in burglary hot-spots, and the provision of impactful and useful crime prevention advice. The Gardaí will also be working with its partners on initiatives such as Text Alert, and denying criminals the use of the road network.

Data from the Garda Analysis Service shows that one-third of all burglaries are through the front doors - with most burglars using their own body to gain entry. Other key findings include:

- Burglars also commonly target back doors (26%), back windows (24%) and front windows (8%), with one in five cases involving a burglar getting access through an unsecured door or window.
- Jewellery and cash remain the most common objects stolen, with €600 being the average value of goods taken.
- Computers, mobile phones, TVs and games consoles are also among the top items stolen.
- Nearly half of burglaries (46%) occur between 5pm and 11pm.

If you love it, lock up and light up.
The practice of ‘fishing’, where car keys are fished through a letterbox by burglars, also remains a problem with the Dublin region most at risk.

Having your home burgled is a distressing and traumatic experience. An Garda Síochána is hoping that by raising awareness of some simple crime prevention measures, such as locking up and lighting up, less Irish families will have to endure the pain of being burgled this winter.

If going out, Irish homeowners should endeavour to make sure their home looks occupied - to Lock Up and Light Up. Use timer switches to turn on lights, lock all doors and windows, store keys away from windows and letterboxes, and use your alarm.

Taking these simple steps will lessen a home’s vulnerability, deter burglars and protect homes.
PRO-ACTIVE POLICING

Community policing in Ireland is a partnership based, pro-active, community-orientated style of policing. It is focused on crime prevention, problem-solving and law enforcement, with a view to building trust and enhancing the quality of life of the entire community.

Community Gardaí engage in community partnership building, to enhance delivery of the Garda service within communities. Such engagement is a joint process requiring An Garda Síochána and community groups, to work together, to improve the ‘quality of life’ of people in those areas and to reflect their needs and priorities. The establishment of partnerships at local level should be seen as a cooperative effort to facilitate problem-solving. The problems presented to and faced by An Garda Síochána cannot be solved by the Gardaí working alone. Crime and the prevention of crime is everybody’s business.

Community Gardaí are required to be proactive, in building positive partnerships, through initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch, Community Alert, Campus Watch, Hospital Watch, Garda Clinics, Supporting Safer Communities Campaigns, Garda Schools Programme, etc. Flexible engagement practices are required to cater for individuals, community groups and can ultimately lead to a community being empowered. The establishment of partnerships at local level should be seen as a co-operative effort to facilitate problem-solving.

OUR COMMUNITY POLICING OBJECTIVES

- To engage in partnership opportunities (e.g. JPC, Neighbourhood Watch, Community Alert, local policing fora, various retail fora, Business Watch)
- To provide an accessible and visible Garda service to communities.
- To establish effective engagement processes to meet the needs of local communities and provide feedback to communities.
- To use problem-solving initiatives, devised in partnership with communities and local agencies, to tackle crime, drugs, public disorder and anti-social behaviour, through targeted enforcement, crime prevention and reduction initiatives.
- To engage in a community-focused approach to provide solutions that reduces the fear of crime.
- To engage meaningfully with young people to develop and foster positive relationships and promote personal and community safety.
- To enhance communication strategies that articulate...
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To be accountable to the community we serve.

To work in partnership with other agencies ensure safety on our streets and roads.

**AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA’S MODERNISATION AND RENEWAL PROGRAMME FOR COMMUNITY POLICING**

To support Community Gardaí with community engagement, a National Community Policing Office, attached to the Garda Bureau of Community Engagement, captures best practice in community policing initiatives and will disseminate these practices through its communication network. This office serves as a resource, for all Garda personnel who are engaged in Community Policing, offering advice on community engagement techniques and initiatives.

Under An Garda Síochána’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme (2016-2021) one of the initiatives is to introduce multi-skilled Community Policing Teams or Sector Teams in every District to support Community Policing Gardaí. Community Policing Teams /Sector Teams will be made-up of Gardaí from a number of different units (including Community Policing Units) who will work with the local community to prevent and detect crime. Maintaining and building on our strong tradition of community policing will be at the core of this plan.

A new community policing framework is currently being developed and will enhance community engagement and public safety. New Community Policing Teams/Sector Teams will work with local communities to prevent and detect crime in their locality supported by Community Safety Fora made up of local Gardaí, members of the public and community groups.

National implementation of this new community policing framework is intended to take place between now and 2021. Currently the entire country is being mapped out using the Central Statistics office tool SAPMAP which approximately maps out the country down to community policing areas between 50 and 150 households. This first phase has commenced and will continue, followed by phase two which involves the identification of community policing geographic areas across all of Ireland in consultation with local Chief Superintendents. Phase three will involve the evaluation of required resources nationally followed by training and first stage deployments based on available resources with a view to full deployment by 2021.

Central to this development is also the establishment of Divisional Community Policing Offices in each of our 28 Garda Divisions. These offices will be critical to the efficient and effective implementation and on-going management of the Community Policing Teams/Sector Teams and the defined and dedicated ‘Community Areas Policing’ approach in each District and Division. These offices will transform the existing service provided to communities by all Gardaí in line with the Garda Síochána Code of Ethics. Each Divisional Officer will be responsible for providing services to local communities and establishing a Divisional Community Policing Office in order to standardise the delivery of Community Policing. The day-to-day supervision of the Divisional Community Policing Office will be the responsibility of the local Chief Superintendent.
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The vaccine communications programmes are based on insights and evidence from the people the HSE care for, their staff and healthcare professionals. As they have successfully done with existing vaccination programmes and with the Covid-19 vaccine programme, they will share factual, up-to-date information from trusted sources, and will ensure that they use the full range of channels and platforms to reach people. The HSE have agreements with Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that mean searches for vaccine information in Ireland will prompt users to visit the HSE website content in
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the first instance. They had similar partnerships in relation to Covid-19 information. HSE ask that people get their information from reputable sources and follow the public health advice available on hse.ie and gov.ie.

Paul Reid, CEO, HSE, said: “We are providing regularly updated information on the HSE website and are working with Facebook and Twitter to make sure the public get accurate, reliable health information in relation to vaccines. Public safety is our top priority and it’s absolutely crucial everyone is able to access reliable, accurate. I really welcome their support in signposting people to the content that we have on hse.ie. The Covid vaccine gives everybody a significant shine of light and gives everybody a boost to look forward to into 2021.”

Ronan Glynn, Deputy CMO, Department of Health said: “I welcome the work being done to counter misinformation and disinformation related to COVID-19. The potential for false claims, myth and rumour to negatively influence those in our society who have genuine and very understandable questions about the new vaccine remains a concern.

The Department of Health and the HSE will offer factual, up-to-date and accessible information to allow everyone to make an informed and confident decision about the COVID vaccine - for themselves and for their families.

I strongly advocate that people access information from trusted sources, including www.gov.ie/covid and www.hse.ie and, of course, their local health professionals including their GP or pharmacist.”

Sinéad McSweeney, MD of Twitter Dublin and VP of Public Policy, Twitter EMEA: “At Twitter, we recognise the role the service plays in disseminating credible public health information. We recently expanded our COVID-19 misinformation policy to now cover Tweets which advance harmful, false or misleading narratives about COVID-19 vaccinations. We are working with health authorities, including the HSE and Dept of Health in Ireland, on the COVID-19 #KnowTheFacts search prompt – a partnership that aims to ensure high visibility access to trusted and accurate public health information on our service, for the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Gareth Lambe, Head of Facebook Ireland: “We’re very pleased to continue working with the HSE on their communications campaigns for the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine in Ireland. Since March, we’ve been working with the HSE to keep people accurately informed during the COVID-19 public health crisis by providing free advertising for their public health campaigns, connecting people to accurate and authoritative information and preventing the spread of harmful misinformation.”
Covid-19 accelerated the use of online platforms for public consultation and community engagement from novelty to necessity within a matter of weeks. While the trend of virtual town halls was evident prior to the pandemic, 2020 saw their move into the mainstream of local authority public communications. The use of technology for placemaking is coming at a critical time; months of spending time largely inside our homes and within close proximity of our homes has transformed how we use and view space.

PLACEengage.com is just one example of the latest iteration of cloud-based, community engagement tools that embrace PaaS, or Platform as a Service, to act as a virtual town hall. It quickly identifies community stakeholders and then becomes a digital bridge between placemakers, their stakeholders and neighbours. It allows project owners to upload proposals, planning decisions and changes to planning for all stakeholders to access and comment on in real-time. This is a great way to bring citizens along in this process-driven system, using immersive technologies like virtual or augmented reality to bring proposals to life.

Of course, it can also be used to promote and then live-stream more traditional approaches like workshops or covid-compliant in-person discussion groups so that no one is left behind. The use of online platforms allow members of the community to stay informed on area or development proposals or changes, in real time, and to contribute their views from the comfort of their smartphone 24/7. Local authorities can then reap the benefit of a decade-worth of disjointed smart city initiatives and it takes them a step further towards the aspired ‘Digital Citizen’.

**COLLABORATIVE**

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**TRANSPARENT, TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED BUT DATA-DRIVEN**

Also, this type of AI-enabled, digital placemaking makes sense for property developers (public or private) as it offers a
complete, multi-stakeholder, communications tool to facilitate meaningful public consultation and further community engagement in a compliant and technologically smart way. As we embrace greater building heights and urban density, which are to be delivered at rapid pace, it has never been more important to engender community support and cooperation.

In its simplest form, digital placemaking leverages the power of emerging technologies and social media to increase community engagement by meeting citizens where they are, online, and sharing information and plans in a transparent way. More importantly, the community has a much deeper awareness of local needs and challenges, and these insights can be fed back to the local authority in a way that helps to prioritise resources. It is critical for citymakers to embrace data innovation in order to deliver evidence-based projects and investment decisions.

Share vision leads to owned spaces

Urban planning and design is about so much more than a green area of respite from traffic or efficient parking that does not curtail retail opportunities. It is also about more than seemingly-random outdoor seating or disjointed art installations copied from other successful areas modelled. Every place is unique and, as such, presents with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. The solutions and proposals form the basis of a placemaking strategy to which all stakeholders can contribute.

While it might sound overly simplistic, often the key to unlocking all these contemporary solutions can be found within the space itself. Placemaking is the process of mining all available natural resources like place, community spirit, local entrepreneurship and creative talent, and then refining it into something precious – a shared vision. Once the vision is shared, the place can really be owned by the community. And while it might sound counterintuitive, the most successful placemaking never reaches a conclusion. ‘Place’ is a constant work in progress and this is a good thing. As society changes and as people change, so too do their needs and the space around them must evolve to reflect that.

“Good placemaking requires multidisciplinary experts to provide answers, but great placemaking gives a voice to the community to pose the right questions.”

www.PLACEengage.com is a dynamic public consultation tool for fully-immersive, digital placemaking and meaningful stakeholder engagement. The PLACEengage.com team are founding members of the Public Consultation Institute of Ireland and are currently contributing to an international multidisciplinary body of work aimed at establishing best practice in integrated on and offline public consultation for both the private and public sectors in Europe.
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A new report by the Higher Education Authority reveals that Irish third-level students are twice as likely to be from affluent backgrounds than disadvantaged ones.

This is the second year running in which the HEA has used detailed geographical census figures to measure the socio-economic background of students attending all of the country’s publicly funded third level institutions. The study highlights the gap between Ireland’s rich and poor when it comes to participation in and progress through the higher education system.

It shows that some 20% of students are from the most affluent parts of the country compared to just 10% from the most disadvantaged. Those contrasts are particularly apparent in colleges in Dublin and Cork compared to regional institutions and ITs in other parts of the country.

Using a deprivation index score, the study reveals Trinity College Dublin (36%), University College Dublin (35%) and the Royal College of Surgeons cater to the highest proportions of students from affluent areas, compared to other third-level institutions. However, at just 5%, these three colleges have the joint lowest share of disadvantaged students, according to the HEA data.

The data confirms that the country’s institutes of technology are far more likely to cater to greater numbers of students from disadvantaged areas, with Dún Laoghaire’s Institute of Art, Design, and Technology (IADT) the one exception.

Of all third level colleges Letterkenny Institute of Technology has the highest proportion of students from disadvantaged areas at 25%, compared with 10% nationwide. However, the HEA says that the location of a college plays a key role in influencing the socio-economic make up of its student body because students tend to favour a facility that is closer to home. Donegal, for example, comprises some of the most deprived local electoral areas in the country, according to 2016 census data, while Dublin contains the most wealthy.

The overall average household income of a student at

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**UNIVERSITY CASH CRISIS**

The country’s seven universities will run an estimated combined deficit of €102 million between last year and this year, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education has heard.

The Provost of Trinity College, Dr Patrick Prendergast, told politicians that the Covid-19 crisis has had a severe impact on an already seriously underfunded sector. He said with an occupancy rate of only 69%, accommodation revenues had “gone through the floor” and ancillary and commercial revenues had been devastated.

Dr Prendergast said the sector was seeking additional funds to cover unavoidable revenue losses.

Raising the issue of student fees, Sinn Féin’s Rose Conway-Walsh said it was unethical for students to be charged the full amounts when they were not getting the full experience that they had been promised. Given that Irish students already pay the highest fees in the EU, she asked would refunds be given.

But Dr Prendergast said the cost of delivering education had not reduced by moving online. “If anything it has increased, in providing the new technologies needed,” he said.

Dr Prendergast also said that Trinity College had seen a doubling of the number of students seeking support with mental health difficulties.

Responding to questions from Senator Eileen Flynn about vulnerable students, Dr Prendergast said the colleges health services were dealing with a much greater need for psychological and counselling services among students due to the pandemic.
Letterkenny IT is €35,853. This compares to €56,822 for a student attending IADT.

The data confirms some stark divides too when it comes to course choice. Fields of study such as medicine, finance, banking and insurance have higher numbers of affluent students. Just 4% of medical enrolments are from disadvantaged areas, while 35% come from affluent backgrounds. 34% of those studying courses in Finance, banking or insurance come from affluence.

Fields of study such as childcare, social care, and sports courses have comparatively higher concentrations of disadvantaged students and fewer coming from wealthier backgrounds. 19% of those pursuing a childcare qualification are from a disadvantaged background.

In healthcare alone, while medicine attracts a disproportionate number of affluent students, those from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be found on nursing and midwifery courses.

Commenting on the release of the report, Dr Alan Wall, chief executive of the HEA, said that its findings show that more work has to be done to improve socioeconomic inclusiveness in Irish education. “The higher education student population does not yet reflect the diversity found in the rest of the population in Ireland,” he said.

“This detailed dataset provides policy-makers and institutions with a comprehensive knowledge of patterns of access and disadvantage that will assist them in developing and implementing targeted approaches to advancing equity of access.”

Based on admission figures from the 2018/19 academic year, the report uses Deprivation Index Scores (DIS) to profile the socioeconomic makeup of Ireland’s higher education student population. It’s a measure of affluence or disadvantage in a given ‘small area’ within the country using 2016 census data from each individual local electoral area.

Rather than just focusing on income levels, the DIS takes into account a range of factors including dependency levels, employment rates and other indicators. HEA researchers then use these scores to analyse the socio-economic profile of the student body by institution and course, which are then given individual DI scores. The lower the number, the higher the volume of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

When all Irish third-level institutions are taken together, the mean score is 2.2. Letterkenny IT (-5.1); Waterford IT (-2.3); IT Carlow (-2.3); and IT Tralee (-2) have the four lowest scores while Trinity (+5.7); RCSI (+5.7); and UCD (+5.6) scored the highest, indicating a higher proportion of students from affluent areas.

It’s the second annual report of its type and provides a more accurate view than last year’s installment. In 2019, Trinity College declined to participate in the study, citing privacy concerns. Researchers also believe it to be a more accurate information-gathering technique than the old Equal Access Survey (EAS), which relied on outdated information, for example, asking students to identify their father’s occupation.

Simon Harris, Minister for Higher Education, said that the study will be used to craft the government’s new National Access Plan for third-level education. “This is a really valuable and important piece of work,” he said.

“We must ensure that our policies strengthen the participation of students in higher education and to do that, we need accurate data and evidence.

“This is the second year of such data collection and I believe it will be an excellent resource to us as we prepare our new National Access Plan.”

15% OF TEACHERS CALL IN SICK

Figures from the Department of Education show 15% of teachers (9,233) have recorded a Covid-19 related absence from school since schools reopened in September. The vast majority of these absences have been for fewer than 14 working days.

The data does not include teachers working in Education and Training Board (ETB) schools as they are paid through a different mechanism. The absences have been for a variety of reasons and include teachers who are restricting their movements while a household member awaits a test or because they have been identified as a close contact; teachers who are self-isolating while awaiting a test; teachers who have been categorised as very high risk and cannot attend the workplace; as well as teachers who have themselves been diagnosed with Covid-19.

The Department of Education has said that, in line with the advice from the public health authorities, teachers have been asked to support the safety of the school community by staying at home for a number of Covid-19 related reasons.

It says that the number of days absent ranges from one or two days while a teacher is awaiting the result of a test, to where the teacher cannot attend the workplace at all because they are very high risk.

The department said that many teachers will have continued to work remotely during their period of absence. It said it has put in place very significant funding to ensure appropriate substitute cover where required, so that schools can continue to operate during the pandemic.

However, some schools have been obliged to send students home for periods of time because of the high level of teacher absence.

The vast majority, 97%, of absences recorded have been from one to 14 working days, while just over 2% relate to absences of more than 28 working days. The figures show 6,373 primary school teachers have recorded absences, with the remainder teachers working in non-ETB second-level schools.

According to the department, the total number of full school days missed as a result of the absences was 37,671. While this looks like a large figure it represents just 1.7% of the overall total number of days worked by teachers so far this year.
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These are exciting times for Cork City Council Libraries. In May of 2019, the city expanded, taking in 85,000 additional people, and three new libraries. 2020 sees the service publishing its five year strategic plan which places learning, creativity and inclusion at the heart of the communities. In preparing the strategic plan for the library service, the Council recognizes that there will be considerable continuity, but also some major departures.

One major challenge is securing a new city centre library for the city. A new City Library has been mooted for more than 20 years, and in a more concrete manner in 2006-2008, and the development of a new building must be addressed, sooner rather than later.

The new Cork city is very different to what it had been prior to May 2019. While there will be considerable continuity, much will change. The city centre will still look much the same, but will be impacted by the fact that it will now be the centre of a much larger city, with consequences for traffic management, retail, hospitality, and of course the need for a much larger and more modern city centre library.

The city which will evolve in the years ahead will be a very different one physically, and thus socially. The new city is five times the size of the former city, in area: 187 km² rather than 37.3 km². The population grew by 68% overnight on 31 May 2019 and is projected to reach 325,000 by 2040. The library network grew from seven locations to ten.

For at least the next couple of decades there will be a huge focus and emphasis on the urbanization of the new areas. The city faces a big question in general terms and in particular in the future development of the Library Service: How will the larger, more populous city change the library service? How will embracing the new areas change the way the service will be delivered? Equally importantly, how can the library service help build this new city?

When the library service was preparing a five-year strategic plan 15 years ago, questions of diversity and Interculturalism did not figure hugely. Cork has changed so much in the intervening years that for the next five years, and for the longer-term, these questions must be front and centre.

Irish society has changed significantly and continues to change. For example, in the lifetime of the last plan there were two major referenda, on marriage equality and on the repeal of the 8th amendment. Libraries must take these societal changes on board in a positive way, while continuing to be open to all shades of opinion and belief.
The city’s age profile changed on 31 May 2019 – we are now a much younger city on average – but like the rest of Ireland we will be an aging society in the years ahead. The percentage of people who have moved to Cork to live and work is already quite high and is likely to remain so. This includes people from other EU countries and elsewhere.

The library service made very tangible progress on making Cork an intercultural city, through the process and the publication of A Journey called Home, an anthology of work in twenty languages from 62 writers from many countries who now call Cork home.

Covid-19 and its impact in 2020 highlighted the fact that Cork City Libraries have a very competent and enthusiastic staff, ready to face all challenges with confidence. The lockdown in March meant that staff stood down but their commitment to community remained very strong with many staff volunteering for contact tracing, working with the HSE, Friendly Call, Community response and Park Rangers. Staff ensured that the Housebound Service was the first in the country to be extended to those cocooning and the delivery of books to people in their homes was invaluable to them. Many other staff were involved in creative initiatives to engage people online.

Cork City Libraries collaborated with many organisations during this time. The service responded to the Cork COPE Foundation’s #WholIMiss campaign by providing 5 tablet devices for an extended loan period to help residents stay connected with loved ones during the COVID-19 emergency. Partnership with Cork International Film Festival allowed those at home enjoy cultural cinema from across Europe by making short films by local and national filmmakers, available through our online service. Books were provided as part of food parcels delivered to homes by DEIS Schools. The service worked hand in hand with Cork City Councils’ Community Response Unit throughout the lockdown and especially in May with a weekly Bealtaine Newsletter distributed to all communities through the unit.

Cork City Libraries also hosted a very successful Culture Night this year, bringing literature onto the streets of the City with Words on Windows, seeing excerpts from poetry and prose installed on the windows of businesses and vacant buildings. A collaboration with The Glucksman Gallery, University College Cork, showcased artwork by teenagers in Direct Provision on the façade of The City Library. The libraries’ Creative Ireland projects continued with a very successful anthology of Cork writing Cork Words published. Local writer Tadhg Coakley engaged with the public online through the One City One Book programme and 2020 saw the Cork City Libraries’ first ever Writer-in-Residence appointed.

Everyone embraced new work practices on June 8, when libraries reopened with call and collect, with a lot of background work ensuring this would be successful. Gradually the doors reopened, and services were extended to include study spaces and access to public PCs, while strictly adhering to public health guidelines. Visitor numbers increased as the months progressed from 26,098 visits in July 2020 to 33,676 the following September. While this was approximately half the number of visits recorded in September 2019 it was a positive step towards engaging with our public again.

All public libraries were closed again on October 22, 2020, under Level 5 restrictions. While this was very disappointing the resilience of staff to yet another change in work practices, to developing new and creative ways of reaching the public and to the reopening of the Douglas Library was second to none. As our doors reopen once again, the commitment of the staff of Cork City Libraries to responding, engaging and being aware of the needs of the public is even stronger, and our service continues in a new way.
Electronic plan review is rapidly becoming a solution for government agencies involved in construction. While government projects may not be the first thing that comes to mind for the industry, with the volume of projects being processed through government agencies, the need for efficient processes within project review is paramount.

Enter, the North Carolina State Construction Office. By making the digital transformation to using Bluebeam Revu for design reviews and approvals, the state is facilitating growth at an astounding rate. Since going digital for electronic plan reviews, the state has seen a 39% increase in productivity. This means more projects, more jobs, and more expansion for the state, increasing opportunities and growth for the industry and not just for the office.

Bluebeam sat down with LeaAnne Hahnel, business systems analyst for the state of North Carolina, as well as Isaac Loydpierson, engineering intern to learn about the state’s digital transformation and how Bluebeam Revu plays a huge part in the electronic plan review process.

Bluebeam Blog: What was the initial problem you were looking to solve by trying to create a new plan review process?

Hahnel: We were swimming in paper. Time was also a factor, as the reviews took a long time to process because we were reviewing plans one discipline at a time. We’re a government agency, money and resources are always a top concern. Many of our staff are getting closer to retirement age so the thought of changing process is tough. I think these were our two biggest challenges and the reason why we created the new process.

Bluebeam Blog: How did the office choose Bluebeam Revu for the new process?

Hahnel: The town of Carey, North Carolina, uses design review for their in-house design and a lot of their project plans. They invited us over to see their whole system. They walked us through how they use Bluebeam, and that was just really cool to collaborate with them. On the client side, we actually had a key pool of designers that are out in the market that had projects with us, and they were willing to do some pilot projects with us to run through our system. We walked through the projects with that designer, and we kind of developed our end of the usage so that it was beneficial to them as well.

Bluebeam Blog: How long did it take you to come up with what you wanted to do and then how long did it take you to implement?

Hahnel: We started a committee in March of 2018, and took us maybe three or four months to establish the direction that we wanted to go in. Then we developed it and it took maybe three or four additional months to start onboarding. There are about 25-30 people, all of whom are from the state office. By January 2019, we were up and running, with the entire staff onboarded by June 2019.

“Being able to have all of our different disciplines collaborating on the same documents electronically was a vast improvement for our reviews.”

LeaAnne Hahnel
Business Systems Analyst for the State of North Carolina
Bluebeam Blog: How did the committee work together to decide the work flow?

Hahnel: We have different disciplines here. We’ve got architects, civil and structural engineers, electrical and mechanical and so forth. We pulled them in to make them a subject matter expert and they went back to their sections to talk about what Bluebeam could do. In a way, we were taking away that scariness of change and becoming acclimated with Revu without really putting all hands on it. That eased them into the process and that’s where Isaac came in and he developed some hands-on “Just In Time” trainings.

Bluebeam Blog: How did you roll out the “Just In Time” trainings?

Loydpierson: One of the more important things we did with the “Just In Time” trainings was to break them down to the smaller groups. We took a certain amount of people in each discipline, between three and six people. We had lunch and learns to introduce Revu and showed them the idea of markups. Then we reviewed the process and showed them how reviews get into their hands and then what happens after they’re done with it, to the point where [the reviews] get back to the designer.

Hahnel: What was really interesting to see, though, was how each one of those disciplines would come back. There would be one person in that discipline that would have branched out and figured out how to do some other things, and he or she would bring that back to the table and share it. They probably gleaned a lot more knowledge than they had anticipated getting in that one session.

Bluebeam Blog: How did the idea of standardized markups or comments help to get buy-in?

Hahnel: I think the beauty of that was we were paper, so everybody was creating all of this information on a notepad, and then they were transferring it to a Word document. And then this Word document got sent over to our admins, and they would put it into the entire comment section. So, for them to have the ability to put that information right on the plan where they wanted it, I think they were just thrilled to remove one of those cumbersome steps.

Loydpierson: I created some tool boxes and little tool chests for them with cloud callouts; a few of the basic standard tools that I felt could be used for all their markup needs, and I did it by discipline.

Bluebeam Blog: How did Bluebeam Studio get used within your process?

Hahnel: We had these long reviews... some of them were weeks—depending on what type of review was coming in. If you’ve got one set of plans, you would pass that one set of plans through the disciplines. But now all the disciplines can review that document simultaneously within that Studio session, so it’s not in a holding pattern until it gets through all the disciplines.

We have a naming convention so we can carry that document title over into the documents within the Studio session. We had the opportunity to link that in our project management system called Interscope. So, while you’re in Interscope, you can actually click on the Bluebeam Studio Session and it will take you over there if you have permission. That exchange of data has been fantastic.

Bluebeam Blog: How did you primarily exchange the PDFs?

Hahnel: Our ITS department put SharePoint in the background of our Interscope program, which is the state government project environment. We could pull [plans] over into the Bluebeam Studio Session. The Interscope system alerts us that they’ve uploaded the file and we can pull it over. That was our technology bridge of how to get things into the Bluebeam system and let the state of North Carolina still own those documents.

Bluebeam Blog: Has it enhanced collaboration?

Hahnel: Oh yeah, and on the other side of that, because we are a state government agency, we support all of the department agencies, all of the universities and all of the community colleges. A lot of those agencies and universities have on-site engineers and architects that do in-house projects, so they’re shifting over to the Bluebeam system so they can get into those sessions and transfer that data back and forth a lot easier than what we were doing in the past. I can see everybody moving towards electronic processing.

To discuss your digital transformation strategy with a Bluebeam UK account manager please reach out at sales.uk@bluebeam.com
Originally established as the Curriculum and Examinations Board in 1984 and becoming a statutory body in 2001, NCCA is now a larger and arguably more relevant and influential agency than ever before. The Council’s primary role is to provide advice to the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools as well as assessment procedures used in schools and examinations as part of the curriculum. Through this wide remit NCCA plays a central role in shaping policy decisions in education aimed at providing exciting and relevant learning experiences for children and young people from birth to eighteen years of age.

‘This wide brief makes the work challenging and hugely exciting with opportunities to build more and more connections between what and how children learn as they move from early childhood through primary and post-primary school.’

The curriculum and assessment advice is developed collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders. This work is overseen by a 25-person Council appointed by the Minister for Education and with the majority nominated by...
School management, teacher unions, parent, and industry representative organisations.

With main offices in Dublin and Portlaoise and twelve regional offices the length and breadth of the country, NCCA is a vibrant organisation leading innovation in curriculum and assessment. This work is due in no small part to the expertise and experience of its staff and the members of NCCA Council, boards and development groups. With a staff of over forty-five across executive and corporate functions and staying abreast of educational thinking, the organisation is more dynamic than ever.

‘We have great people at NCCA, expert early years, primary and post-primary specialists. Most of our team have spent years at the chalk-face in classrooms and in settings fud fad na hÉireann and bring with them a wealth of experience, research and connections to their briefs.’

‘As chair I am always so deeply appreciative of the dedication and experience of the team and of our Council, boards and development groups in working together to innovate for an exciting future for all learners in our schools and early childhood settings’.

**Relevance, Significance and Impact**

Curriculum is sometimes described as the story that one generation chooses to share with the next generation. And that story is, of necessity, an evolving one reflecting and responding, as needed, to social, cultural, economic, political and technological changes.

‘Recent times have shown us that change is a constant and that each of us needs a certain agility, creativity and resilience to respond to, and deal with uncertainties.’

Relevance therefore becomes a major consideration in NCCA’s thinking and work on curriculum and assessment—relevance for children and young people, and relevance for life and work. This is captured in the Council’s vision of Leading innovation in education for learning, living and working in a changing world. Key to achieving this vision is the way in which NCCA develops its advice. This has four pillars: cutting-edge research from across the globe is critically reviewed and debated as we observe and keep a watchful eye on international developments.
Close attention is paid to ‘what works’ as ideas about learning and teaching are developed, tried out, discussed and evaluated by and with children, young people, practitioners, teachers, parents and school leaders. Consultations encourage wide engagement with key ideas about curriculum and assessment change. Extensive discussion and deliberation by the education partners takes place.

“This robust approach to our work helps us, as a Council, to be bold as we develop innovative curriculum and assessment for engagement, progression, quality, inclusion and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions. Ultimately, this is about a high-quality, relevant and inspiring educational experience for each young person that allows them to live as fulfilling and active a life as possible.’

Examples of this innovative work include the new Junior Cycle which students have been experiencing in the first three years of post-primary school. This saw the introduction of wellbeing as a new area of learning within Junior Cycle. 2009 saw the publication of Aistear, Ireland’s first ever curriculum framework for early childhood education which also emphasises wellbeing. And currently, the Council is leading two major reviews—one on the primary curriculum and one on senior cycle education.

Changes to assessment which have come about as a result of the exceptional circumstances caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, will be of particular interest to NCCA’s work on the Review of Senior Cycle, which is nearing completion. The NCCA is completing an Advisory Report on the review setting out areas of work and plans to be pursued in the future development of senior cycle education.

**PRIMARY: A MAJOR REVIEW**

What and how children learn in primary school is changing. Earlier this year, NCCA published a set of proposals for consultation on the future of the primary curriculum. The current curriculum was launched in 1999 and since then, there have been calls for it to do more, including addressing societal problems. There have also been changes in education itself with the introduction of universal preschool provision for young children and a changing junior cycle experience. All of this creates an exciting and important opportunity to reflect on the purpose of a primary curriculum, particularly when we think about today’s world and the years ahead. The proposals are shaped by an extensive body of research, by working directly with schools and preschools, and through ongoing deliberations with education partners. You too can have your say on what the next primary curriculum should look like and do for children.

For more information on how to get involved go to: www.ncca.ie/primary
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We design accredited programmes which are both progressive and relevant. Our mission is to empower professionals and organisations to expand their management skills and knowledge in areas of general business, health services and supply chain management.

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Counting on Educate.ie

Founded in 2009, Educate.ie were the first publishers to bring down the price of exam papers and its resources have been critical to enabling many teachers to continue to teach remotely during the pandemic.

Headquartered in Castleisland, Co. Kerry, Educate.ie produce and publish its entire stable of titles in Ireland. A leading innovator in Irish education, it is a sister company of Walsh Colour Print which print all its books.

Twenty of the company’s thirty plus employees are based in Dublin while the remainder are located between Castleisland and a number of other bases around the country. A further eighty people are employed at Walsh Colour Print in Castleisland.

Educate.ie produces books for the entire school cycle, starting from Pre School through to Primary and Post Primary schools. The status enjoyed by the company is apparent from that books produced Educate.ie are sold in over 3,500 schools right across the country.

Quality and competitive pricing are the hallmarks of the company and its commitment to producing high-end schoolbooks at keen prices has ensured the appreciation of school goers and parents which has been reflected in a substantial increase in sales over recent years. Educate.ie now has 7 Junior Cycle market leaders.

Innovation is also a core value at Educate.ie which demonstrated its keen market insights when becoming one of the first educational publishers in the world to give a free e-book with every textbook.

This allowed students the choice to leave their books at school and do their homework using the e-book and thus cut the weight of their heavy school bags but has now become so important in schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Educate.ie have an impressive range of online resource material to support each of the titles it produces. The company has gained further prominence and received widespread praise from educators during the pandemic as its resources have been instrumental in enabling many teachers to continue to teach remotely.

For further information: email sales@educate.ie to request an inspection copy of any of the books on our list. Alternatively, log onto www.educate.ie or contact the main office: Tel: 01 8053944
Education is Key

Budget 2021 provided for a significant increase in investment in education and will enable the hiring of over 2,100 new teachers and special needs assistants as well as important new measures in special educational needs and social inclusion.

Building on the initiatives set out in the Programme for Government, the budget for the Department of Education is €8.9 billion in 2021, an increase of €410 million or some 5 per cent on 2020.

Funding will be provided for 900 additional special needs assistants (SNAs) while the budget also aims at reducing the pupil teacher ratio in primary schools to 25:1.

In addition, €80m is being provided towards school building programmes, ICT and the minor works scheme for the Department of Education while €270m will be provided for Higher Education building projects.

Budget 2021 will also aim to provide around 5,000 places for demographic changes arising from calculated grades. It will also see the SUSI grant for postgraduates from €1,500 to €3,500 and provide for a 50m fund to give all third-level full-time students €250 social welfare rates to be maintained in 2021.

According to Minister for Education Norma Foley the Government’s first budget provides a clear demonstration of its commitment supporting teachers, students and the wider education sector. “With this significant new investment, we will continue to improve the experience of our children in education, and provide improved practical supports, particularly in light of Covid-19,” she said.

“I,065 more teachers will be hired, benefiting our primary, post-primary and special schools and this includes assisting primary schools to retain existing teachers,” she said. “Significant funding has been provided to ensure we can meet all of the commitments in associated with hiring more teachers and to meet the costs of implementing agreed pay deals for teachers and other school staff.

“The Budget includes an additional allocation of €226 million which will be provided to schools to meet costs relating to Covid-19. This allocation represents the balance of the €437 million package approved by Government last July as part of the Roadmap for the Reopening Schools.

“I am pleased to have been able to secure significant additional funding for our schools across a range of areas. I am particularly pleased that we have been able to focus on a critically important area: the classroom,”

“We are increasing teacher numbers, we are retaining posts that might otherwise have been lost and we are continuing to invest in building new schools and improving the existing stock.

“We are making further significant improvement in the area of special education through additional teacher posts and additional special needs assistants and the expansion of a more inclusive model for pupils with special educational needs.

“Additional DEIS supports will also help our most disadvantaged students. We are continuing to support our schools, our teachers and of course our students as they cope with Covid-19.”
INVESTING IN EDUCATION

New Teachers: This Budget has further reduced the primary staffing schedule by one point, bringing this to a historically low level of 25:1. In addition, there has been a three-point reduction in the retention schedule, which will assist schools that would otherwise be at risk of losing teaching posts. Overall, 1,065 new teaching posts will be created.

Special Education: €2 billion will be invested in special education – over one-fifth of the education budget. 235 new teachers will be recruited to work in special classes in our schools while another 23 teachers will be hired for special schools. An additional 145 special education teachers will be recruited. These investments will ensure more than 1,200 new places in special classes.

Almost 1,000 additional special needs assistants will be recruited to work with children with special educational needs in schools while some 80 therapists (speech and language therapists and occupational therapists) and 30 educational psychologists will be recruited.

Social Inclusion: Further supports are being provided as part of the DEIS programme to those schools catering for the highest concentrations of educational disadvantage. This will be supported by additional funding of €2 million in 2021 and €5 million in a full year.

New and Improved School Buildings: Budget 2021 investment includes a capital allocation for new and more energy-efficient school buildings with a €740 million budget for 2021 under Project Ireland 2040. This funding will sustain the rollout of projects including some 145 projects under the large scale and additional accommodation schemes that are due to commence construction activity before July 2021.

It will also meet costs associated with some 200 school building projects currently on-site, many of which will be completed in 2021, which will deliver approximately 23,000 pupil places (additional and replacement) as well as new ASD units and space for special classes. Since 2016, in excess of €3 billion has been invested in the school building programme.

Creativity, Music and Arts in Education: Additional funding of €3.5 million is being provided by this Department to continue investment in the Creative Ireland and Music Generation programmes. This will bring the overall funding in this area to over €9 million in 2021.
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The Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) raises awareness of children’s rights and investigates complaints about services provided to children by public organisations. The service is free and independent.

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