An Roinn Tithíochta,
Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil
Department of Housing,
Planning and Local Government

**Oifig an Ard-Rúnaí**
Office of the Secretary General

Your ref: Ref: PAC32-I-1222

February 2019

Ms. Éilis Fallon
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Dear Ms. Fallon,

I refer to previous correspondence (reference as above) and set out below responses to a number of requests for information by the Committee.

**Item 1:** **Breakdown of the number of people on Housing Assistance Payment**
**Item 2:** **A note on the number of exclusions of all those identified under the criteria**
**Item 3:** **A breakdown of all those on the housing assistance payment who are on the transfer list.**

At the end of 2018, the number of households being supported under the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) was 43,443.

On an annual basis, a comprehensive national exercise is undertaken under which social housing needs assessments are carried out by each individual local authority under section 21 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. The results of these assessments are fed into an overall national analysis by the Housing Agency, on foot of which a report (*the Summary of Social Housing Assessments* or SSHA) is published, setting out the numbers of households qualified for and in need of social housing support. The SSHA is used as the objective basis on which targets for social housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland are set for each local authority.

The key figure reported in the SSHA is referred to as 'net need'. Net need is the total number of households qualified for social housing support, whose need for support is not being met. As a result, this total excludes the following households:

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- *Duplicate applications* – where a household has applied to more than one area for social housing, only their oldest application is included in the count.
- *Already in receipt of social housing support,* e.g. households currently living in local authority rented accommodation, voluntary/co-operative accommodation, accommodation provided under the HAP scheme, accommodation provided under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), or accommodation provided under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), in accordance with the relevant governing legislation.
- *On a transfer list* - any household that has applied for a transfer from an existing form of social housing support.

While data is not available on the numbers of households under each of the above headings, I have requested that the data concerned be collected as part of the 2019 assessment, which will be carried out later this year.

The SSHA provides an in-depth profile of social housing support applicants. The list is analysed under a number of different headings including location, household type, basis of need, time on the list and the need or otherwise for specific specialised accommodation. This information informs social housing policy and targets. It also enhances the capacity of local authorities to plan to provide the right types of housing support.

The detailed results of the 2018 SSHA were published in September 2018 and showed that 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support as of 11 June 2018. This represents a decrease of 13,941 households or -16.2% on the previous assessment in June 2017 and a reduction of 22% on the position in 2016.

Local authorities operate transfer lists to facilitate the movement of social housing tenants from one form of social housing to another, including transfers from HAP into a local authority or Approved Housing Body (AHB) owned or leased property, on a case by case basis. As transfer lists are managed locally by each individual local authority, details are not compiled on a national basis. Data is, however, available on HAP exits to other forms of social housing, as this data is provided to the HAP Shared Service Centre by the relevant local authority on cessation of a HAP tenancy. As end 2018, 2,189 households across the country had transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support.

**Item 4: Inspection of properties rented with assistance under the HAP scheme**

A key element of the HAP scheme is the legislative requirement in relation to the inspection of properties. This is an important mechanism to ensure that state funding of private rented accommodation for social housing is directed at properties that meet the minimum standards for rented accommodation. Accordingly, under section 41 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, local authorities are required to commence the inspection process

within 8 months of the commencement of HAP support being provided in relation to a particular dwelling, if the dwelling was not already inspected within the previous 12 months.
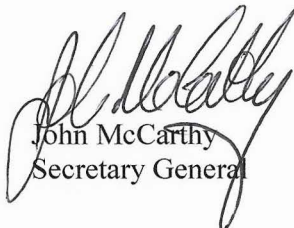
The Department has consistently communicated to local authorities the need for a particular focus on HAP inspections as part of their wider inspection programme and local authorities have been working to increase capacity within their inspection teams with the aim of ensuring that the legislative timeframes for HAP inspections are met. The Department has been working with the 31 local authorities to capture the relevant statistical information on inspections and the HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) (in Limerick City and County Council) has provided a module for collation of this data through the SSC system. However, local authorities are currently recording inspection activity across a range of data systems, and the SSC is working with local authorities to ensure that data in relation to HAP inspections is recorded on the new HAP module. This involves the migration of some historic data and the refinement of existing data management practices to ensure that, overall, the data is being collected and managed efficiently.

The Department has engaged with the City and County Management Association (CCMA) on this matter on several occasions and arrangements were made for the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) to lead an exercise to collate better the inspections data across local authorities. Appended to this letter is a report, prepared by the LGMA, on HAP inspections carried out by local authorities, and associated inspection data compiled from local authorities in the course of preparing the report. The data indicates that the average rate of inspections across local authorities is 83%.

The Department will be continuing to work closely with the local government sector to ensure the achievement of full compliance with the statutory requirement for inspections in relation to HAP properties and will report on performance in this regard annually.

If the Committee requires any further information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.


Yours sincerely,


John McCarthy
Secretary General

# Update on HAP inspections carried out by local authorities
## 18th February 2019

## Overview:

The Rental Strategy 2016 recognises that the quality of rental accommodation is critical to the success and sustainability of the residential rental sector and to its attractiveness as a long-term accommodation option for households. The strategy has set out the aim of having minimum inspection targets for each LA with the long-term goal of having 25% of registered tenancies inspected per annum by 2021.

To deliver on these objectives, the Department established a Rental Standards Working Group involving the RTB and Local Authorities to examine and recommend options in terms of streamlining the Inspectorate Function including ICT, legal services, training, capacity development and resource and performance management. Three specialist sub-groups have also been established, ICT, Training and HR.

In parallel with the objective of the rental strategy to inspect 25% of registered tenancies per annum by 2021, is the legislative requirement for inspections to be arranged for **all** HAP properties either within 12 months prior to coming onto the scheme, or otherwise within eight months of commencing.

This requirement for 100% inspection of this subset of private rented properties represents a substantial element of overall inspections carried out by, or on behalf of, local authorities.

## CCMA Key Priority

The area of rental inspections is a key priority for the CCMA Housing and Building Committee. Indeed, the Strategic Housing ICT Housing Programme Board looking at potential ways to roll out a consistent process and new technologies across the sector. Accurate reporting on rental inspections, whether they are being supported under one of the various state funded schemes or otherwise, is recognised as a key requirement, as is the move to a single rental inspection system. In terms of a single rental inspections system, this ideally would be a tool that would manage the full "end to end" process of all the inspections on private rented

properties, from recording the basic property information, inspection records, re-inspections, to generation of letters and management of any ensuing court process.

It should be noted that smaller scale, innovative, individualised and localised applications have been developed by certain local authorities and these are operating very effectively in assisting these teams to deliver an efficient and effective service locally.

In terms of HAP, at the time of full roll-out of the scheme it was recognised that there was a need to be able to capture statistical information on such private rented inspections as were covered under the HAP scheme, and accordingly the HAP Shared Service Centre (HAP SSC) developed an inspection module to record the inspections. This tool was not intended to become the overarching system, described above, which would manage the full requirements of all inspections in the private rented sector.

The CCMA also engaged the Irish Public Administration (IPA) to assist the local authorities and their members with training on the regulations and requirements for private rental inspections. The 'Standards for Rented Houses'[1] training programme is for all local authority staff, both professional / technical and administrative, who have responsibilities related to enforcement of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017. The programme seeks to bring about a common understanding among Inspectorate Staff, and thereby standardisation, in interpretation and implementation of the Regulations and Guidelines, both within individual local authorities and across the sector generally.

## Findings in relation to HAP inspections

The table at Appendix 1 sets out information in relation to HAP inspections, broken down by LA, as at February 1st and the main findings are:

1. The average rate of inspection (total number of properties inspected or arranged to be inspected/number of properties required to be inspected) is 83%.

2. In many LAs, more properties are being inspected than are due to be inspected (before the 8 months are up) as, in practice, inspectors may concentrate on a geographic

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[1] IPA training - https://www.ipa.ie/local-government/standards-for-rented-houses.4173.html

location, picking up a broad range of properties including those outside the statutory HAP requirement.

3. In many cases, while the administrative activity around uploading data to the HAP SSC is not up-to-date, LAs are clear that inspections are being carried out, in high volumes.

4. The lowest rate of inspection, at 30%, was accounted for by difficulties in recruiting technical resources where the private construction industry is offering very competitive rates, however this is being addressed as a matter of urgency by the LA.

5. Dublin City Council, despite having the highest volume of tenancies, also has one of the highest rates of inspection, and has invested considerably in the area of private rented inspections. The DRHE, also under the remit of DCC, has a rate of 77%.

## CCMA context around HAP Inspections:

- A significant proportion of tenancies now supported in HAP were previously receiving state support under the Rent Supplement Scheme. One of the significant benefits of these tenancies transferring to HAP is the statutory requirement for an inspection to be carried out. This means, in many cases that a tenancy/property which might never have previously been inspected would now be captured. Depending on the rate of transfers arising in a specific LA this can cause additional burden for LAs over and above new HAP tenancies arising.

- Local authorities carry out inspections on HAP properties through direct and indirect labour. There are two resource requirements to deliver on the inspections namely a technical and administrative resource. In 2018, there were an average of 345 new tenancies registered weekly in the HAP SSC. Local authorities have created dedicated sections and inspection teams to inspect these properties and to ensure that the regulations requirement is achieved. While every effort has been made by local authorities to ensure that the backlog of data has been uploaded into the HAP SSC system, there are a number of local authorities that have had resource difficulties in this area.

- A number of LAs identified that the time taken to engage with landlords to address their concerns prior to doing/post doing inspections also has an impact on the process. There are challenges around non-compliance for some landlords. This does not mean

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that the properties are unfit for purpose but levels of adherence to the regulations vary, each situation is different, and the circumstances and risks are considered prior to decisions on enforcement. The challenge for local authorities around the level of follow up and engagement cannot be understated.

- A number of local authorities have local ICT systems which they use to track rental inspections, however resources are still required to upload the HAP related subset of overall inspections into the HAP SSC's Sugar system. The alignment and integration of the Sugar system with the local system to ensure more accurate reporting is a priority.

- All inspections are documented - local authorities confirmed that all inspections are recorded either on tablets or on the paper form and that a record is created for all HAP inspections.

- There was broad agreement that all local authorities would welcome the mandatory introduction of EirCodes to make the local process easier and also provide a unique identifier for the property. This was particularly flagged for RTB data where slight variations in recording of address could lead to data issues.

## Note on Statistical Data:

It is not possible to base analysis of inspections carried out on the total tenancies set-up - this is because certain tenancies set up may have closed prior to the statutory requirements kicking in, or no longer be in the scheme.

In terms of active tenancies, the HAP SSC was asked to run a date-based calculation which would determine the number of active tenancies as at 01 February 2019 which should have had an inspection carried out (i.e. these have been in the system for longer than 8 months). This is a total and will include both inspected and uninspected units.

The % calculation is taken as the Inspection due total/inspection arranged/carried out total, and it is a calculation of "the rate of properties inspected against number due for inspection".

| Local Authority | Total Number of Tenancies | Total Active Number of Tenancies | No of Properties where an Inspection is not due as per legislative requirement (Inside of 8 months) | No of properties where an Inspection is due | Inspection Carried out/Arranged* | % of inspections arranged / carried out* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carlow County Council | 935 | 683 | 149 | 534 | 527 | 99% |
| Cavan County Council | 341 | 288 | 132 | 156 | 119 | 76% |
| Clare County Council | 1955 | 1324 | 276 | 1048 | 730 | 70% |
| Cork City Council | 2218 | 1726 | 413 | 1313 | 881 | 67% |
| Cork County Council | 4808 | 3738 | 1018 | 2720 | 1749 | 64% |
| Donegal County Council | 2554 | 1714 | 376 | 1338 | 1411 | 105% |
| Dublin City Council | 1562 | 1863 | 840 | 1023 | 1206 | 118% |
| Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council | 377 | 371 | 171 | 200 | 193 | 97% |
| Fingal County Council | 1675 | 1625 | 791 | 834 | 731 | 88% |
| Galway City Council | 1408 | 1236 | 378 | 858 | 395 | 46% |
| Galway County Council | 1347 | 1168 | 408 | 760 | 923 | 121% |
| Kerry County Council | 1070 | 940 | 405 | 535 | 598 | 112% |
| Kildare County Council | 2431 | 2036 | 581 | 1455 | 435 | 30% |
| Kilkenny County Council | 1395 | 861 | 196 | 665 | 775 | 117% |
| Laois County Council | 805 | 695 | 328 | 367 | 449 | 122% |
| Leitrim County Council | 275 | 221 | 103 | 118 | 133 | 113% |
| Limerick City & County Council | 3078 | 2204 | 465 | 1739 | 2009 | 116% |
| Longford County Council | 353 | 300 | 156 | 144 | 165 | 115% |
| Louth County Council | 3351 | 2674 | 859 | 1815 | 1306 | 72% |
| Mayo County Council | 1399 | 1131 | 368 | 763 | 497 | 65% |
| Meath County Council | 2305 | 1912 | 666 | 1246 | 719 | 58% |
| Monaghan County Council | 772 | 530 | 145 | 385 | 459 | 119% |
| Offaly County Council | 1094 | 841 | 204 | 637 | 244 | 38% |
| Roscommon County Council | 463 | 388 | 171 | 217 | 168 | 77% |
| Sligo County Council | 830 | 660 | 211 | 449 | 406 | 90% |
| South Dublin County Council | 3010 | 2724 | 586 | 2138 | 2001 | 94% |
| Tipperary County Council | 2493 | 1738 | 396 | 1342 | 1432 | 107% |
| Waterford City & County Council | 2587 | 1845 | 524 | 1321 | 1308 | 99% |
| Westmeath County Council | 732 | 646 | 245 | 401 | 438 | 109% |
| Wexford County Council | 1251 | 1058 | 502 | 556 | 395 | 71% |
| Wicklow County Council | 1087 | 998 | 425 | 573 | 261 | 46% |
| DRHE | 5687 | 4236 | 1753 | 2483 | 1921 | 77% |
| **Grand Total** | **55648** | **44374** | **14241** | **30133** | **24984** | **83%** |

*Note: Data in red font is based on actual records held by LA, rather than data input on SSC system, and was provided directly by the Local Authority to the LGMA.