

**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing Planning and Local Government
Housing for Older People**

**Opening Statement by Mary Hurley,
Assistant Secretary Department of Housing, Planning and Local
Government**

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting me to attend today's Committee meeting and for giving me the opportunity to brief members on this very important issue - housing for older people. My colleague Sarah Neary, Principal Housing Adviser, is accompanying me today.

While Ireland is a relatively young country comparatively, one of the key challenges facing the country in the years ahead is planning for and addressing the needs of our rapidly ageing population. In recognising and valuing the achievement and benefits of our population living longer, we need to ensure that their quality of life is maintained and nurtured.

Government policy in relation to housing for older people, as set out in the *Programme for Government and Rebuilding Ireland*, is to support older people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Research has consistently shown that older people wish to 'age in place' close to their families, friends and in the community where they may have lived for many years.

This policy approach is also seen as being both cost effective and contributing to a greater sense of wellbeing for older people. For many, living in adapted or specialist housing reduces reliance on health and social care services and can result in measurably improved health status. My colleagues in the Department

of Health are best placed to speak on these issues. However, it is important to acknowledge that housing policy for older people is broader and more complex than the mere provision of housing. Indeed, addressing the needs of older people requires a cross-Departmental approach and inter-agency co-operation. The provision of housing for older people, particularly as we look at the future needs of our ageing population, will require a good mix of housing and health policy.

Towards that end, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Health have been working closely together over the past number of months and we are currently finalising a joint policy statement on housing for older people, which it is envisaged will be published this summer. We want to ensure that older people will have a wider choice of appropriate housing options that are suited to their needs, including housing with care and supported housing, and to give them an opportunity to plan for their changing needs in good time.

Consulting with key stakeholders and interested parties is a crucial part of this work, so we may develop policy options that are responsive to the diverse needs of older people. The policy statement will be a first step in the broader process and it is proposed to hold a conference later in the year. This will be a consultative forum for all stakeholders and interested parties to identify and discuss the range of issues that are likely to emerge. The conference will be hosted jointly by Minister of State for Housing and Urban Renewal, Damien English and Minister for Older People, Jim Daly.

St. Michael's Estate site in Inchicore has been identified as a Housing with Support pilot model under *Rebuilding Ireland* and will deliver 52 care homes, due for completion in 2020. This is a collaborative project between the

Departments of Housing and Health, the HSE, Dublin City Council and the Irish Council for Social Housing. It is intended to set a new standard for the future of housing provision for older people and to act as an exemplar for others to follow. The project has been approved for funding of almost €15 million under the Department's Capital Assistance Scheme with a contribution of €450,000 from the Department of Health towards additional communal facilities for the residents.

In terms of the challenge we face on housing generally, I would like to reassure the Committee that *Rebuilding Ireland* contains specific commitments to meet the housing needs of the vulnerable in society, which includes our older people. In addition, local authorities have been advised that the delivery of social housing targets under *Rebuilding Ireland* should be consistent with the housing need identified in the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments, which means that the housing needs of older people will be addressed.

It should be noted that Part M of the Building Regulations also set out the minimum statutory requirements that a building must achieve in respect of access and aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment underpinning the principle of Universal Design. If the Committee wish, further detail can be provided on Part M requirements, the implementation of which are very important in terms of meeting the needs of a range of individuals, including our older population.

In line with a commitment under *Rebuilding Ireland* programme, the Department in collaboration with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design ran the 'Homes for Smart Ageing Universal Design Challenge', which aimed to stimulate and encourage the design and construction industries to be innovative in designing and delivering housing solutions for older people. The challenge

attracted over 60 high quality entries, which was testament to the high level of engagement by the industry in designing and delivering innovative housing solutions for older people. The competition winner, the “Abhaile” project, has now established itself as a new enterprise and is actively pursuing pilot projects/clients with their innovative housing solution.

Finally, as members are aware, the Department of Housing provides significant funding for social housing projects incorporating housing for older people and, in addition, we support adaptations to private housing through the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. The Department also provides funding and policy support to the local government sector in respect of the Age Friendly Ireland initiative, which is active across all local authority areas.

These supports are aimed at facilitating changes needed to make the homes of Older People and People with a Disability more suitable and enable them to remain living independently in their own homes for longer, as well as facilitating early return from hospital stays. Rebuilding Ireland has committed to increasing the funding available for these grants and, in fact, funding has increased year on year since 2014.

The total funding in 2018 is €66.25 million, which is an increase of 11% on 2017. Further consideration will be given to increasing this funding over the coming years in the context of Rebuilding Ireland. The grants are also being made more accessible to people with a new single application form being issued soon, along with an Easy Read Guide to filling those forms out.

I will be happy to take questions from the Committee and engage on these issues during the course of the debate. Thank you.