



Comhairle Contae Chiarraí
Kerry County Council



**Opening Statement by Ms Moira Murrell, Chief
Executive, Kerry County Council**

to the

**Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local
Government**

on

Thursday 6th December 2018.

***Funding and Delivery of Public Housing under
Rebuilding Ireland***

Chair and Members of the Joint Committee

I thank you for the invitation to meet with the Committee this morning and the opportunity to outline the current position in Kerry on the delivery of our Housing Programme under the Rebuilding Ireland Programme 2017-2021.

I am Moira Murrell, Chief Executive of Kerry County Council and I am accompanied by the Director of Housing, Martin O'Donoghue.

Before I deal with the broad Housing Programme I will give a brief outline of County Kerry and the context in which our Housing Programme is being delivered.

Context

Kerry is the fifth-largest County by area and the 15th largest by population. The Central Statistics Office data shows that of the 147,707 people living in Kerry in April 2016, 35 per cent lived in urban areas and 65 per cent lived in rural areas. The population increased by 1.5% from the previous census, which is well below the national average. Kerry has one of the oldest populations in the country averaging at 40.2 years, with higher age profiles more prevalent in certain areas of the county.

The National Planning Framework recognises the central triangle of Tralee, Killarney and Killorglin as the economic engine of County Kerry. This area has over 50% of the population and at the last census accounted for 85% of the population increase. The two main towns of Tralee and Killarney have experienced low levels of new housing delivery apart from public sector delivery programmes.

Kerry is a primary tourist destination. Kerry currently attracts approximately 2M visitors per year. It has the greatest concentration of tourist accommodation outside of Dublin – up to 50,000 beds in the approved and unapproved sectors. Kerry is also more dependent on tourism than any other county with over 20% of its workforce employed in tourism-related enterprises and has over 9,000 people directly employed in the accommodation and hospitality sectors. This activity sees significant pressure for accommodation in the primary tourist towns of Killarney, Dingle and Kenmare. This demand arises not only for visitors but also from those working locally in the tourist industry. This has a significant impact on the housing supply for the permanent residential population. It has led to increased rents and causes huge issues around availability particularly in the summer season where there are increasing demands for seasonal workers serving the industry.

Given such demands, short stay rentals are a particular feature of County Kerry with a significant number of properties in this category and indeed available through on-line service providers in this area.

In discussions with the Construction Industry Federation they have advised that availability of finance remains a significant issue. In addition, the purchase price of units in many parts of the County remains below construction costs.

Against this background we are operating in an environment where little new Housing supply is coming on the market. The demand for existing units is high particularly in the private rented market and this is having a significant impact on both rental level and on availability. This also impacts on the potential delivery of Part V units.

Our current housing needs assessment indicates that Kerry has a waiting list of 2917 households (SSHA 2018 June 2018) with a further 1164 on the transfer list. This list is dominated by the two largest settlements of Tralee and Killarney.

Rebuilding Ireland – County Kerry

Pillar 1 – Address Homelessness

Kerry County Council is part of the South West region for the management of funding and reporting purposes.

The Homeless Information Centre (HIC) in Denny Street, Tralee is open daily and is operated in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection. This is part funded by the DHPLG homelessness allocation to the Southwest Region and the HSE. Despite this area being identified as a more significant difficulty in the major cities and larger urban areas, experience to date shows that there is a continuous and significant increase in activity in this area in Kerry, with an increased number of people presenting daily, seeking emergency accommodation or seeking advice and assistance as they are in danger of becoming homeless. We do not currently have any levels of rough sleeping and have sufficient capacity to deal with current numbers.

Kerry County Council figures show that the number of families presenting to the HIC has increased very significantly from previous years. We have several facilities retained and available for use for emergency accommodation purposes. In addition, Novas operates a number of facilities in Tralee Town. Discussions have recently commenced with FOCUS Ireland with a view to exploring services they can provide in Kerry.

We work closely and in Partnership with other agencies to ensure that appropriate supports and wrap around services are in place to support our customers. The Council has dedicated staff working in this area and provides an outreach service to our clients. The increased activity has required the Council to allocate units within its own stock on a short-term basis as Emergency accommodation and allocate additional local resources to deal with this issue.

The most recent figures for Kerry show a total of 131 Adults and 63 Dependents in Emergency Accommodation.

We have received Department approval and support for the appointment of an additional HAP Place Finder and the provision of additional outreach services.

Our performance in this area remains strong notwithstanding the continuing increase in activity and the on-going significant challenges being faced in the delivery of these services.

Pillar 2 Accelerate Social Housing

Rebuilding Ireland has established a Target of 1770 Units, for Kerry, for the period 2017-2021 under the broad Build, Acquisition and Leasing headings from all these streams.

For the current planned programme out to 2021 the following is the current expected delivery;

840	Build
310	Turnkey
360	Acquisition
270	Lease

This is a current planned delivery of a total of 1780 units. Additional units continue to be pursued. In addition to this we continue to work in Partnership with the Approved Housing Bodies to explore further delivery options.

The Council has a dedicated Capital Delivery Unit consisting of multi-disciplinary staff working to deliver our Construction Programme. This unit was newly established since the re-commencement of the Capital Housing Construction activity. Prior to that we had no construction programme and no staff in this area and we have had to essentially re-establish what at one time was a key component of our organisation and work programmes.

I am confident that we will achieve the current targets for Kerry by the end of the current programme.

HAP and Analysis of HAP to date.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a key component of this Pillar and continues to show high activity levels in Kerry.

973 HAP tenancies have been set up in Kerry since launch date in December 2016 and of those 864 tenancies remain active. The demand in the client base has intensified since the later part of 2017 and has continued in 2018. 524 new tenancies have been set up in 2018 (to Nov 26th) compared with 448 in 2017.

In some cases, the local authority may increase the HAP payment to the landlord depending on the household circumstances and in particular the disposable income of the tenant. This is a discretionary payment made on a case by case basis and the top-up may be between 0% and 20%. Discretionary HAP top-up has been used in 38% of tenancies set up to date.

The current HAP limits are causing some difficulty in certain locations in County Kerry in particular in the main tourist towns but increasing in Tralee - our largest town as well. While this programme has proven quite successful and additionally forms a key part of the solution to homelessness, the continuing reduction in availability of properties in the private market is starting to increase pressure on delivery in this area.

We provide an extensive programme of grants and grant assistance for adaptation to units;

2017

We allocated a total of 502 grants with a total value of €2.62 M

Mobility Aid Grants	229
Housing Aid for Older People	162
Housing Adaptation Grant	111

2018 to date

We allocated a total of 512 grants with a total value of €2.72 M
Allocated

Mobility Aid Grants	233
Housing Aid for Older People	177
Housing Adaptation Grant	102

Pillar 3 Build More Homes

As outlined earlier the private market continues to be difficult in Kerry with little construction activity and few new units coming to the market.

Kerry County Council has attempted to stimulate the private market through the amendments and adoption of new Local Area Plans and the revision and amendment of Local Development Contribution Scheme.

Activity remains relatively low, but we have begun to see some initial signs of recovery.

Pillar 4 Improve the Rental Sector

The Council continues to pursue all avenues in this area. We have high activity level particularly working in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies.

Given the tourist industry in Kerry a significant number of properties and units are currently available or rented through short terms on-line rental facilities. We await the impact of recently announced Policy changes in this area. The ever-reducing availability of units in the private market is causing increasing difficulty in this delivery area however.

We have completed 66 leases in 2018 with a further potential of 21 to years end.

In 2018 we have secured 87 units under RAS.

Pillar 5 Utilise Existing Housing

A high level of vacant properties have been identified under CSO data for County Kerry. A significant portion of these units are holiday/ second homes which are not available for re-use for Housing purposes.

The Council is working on the analysis of current data sets in this area and the real vacancy rates based on preliminary data appear significantly lower than current national data sets would indicate.

Our purchase programme has seen 50 units acquired in 2017 with a further 51 to be delivered by the end of 2018. 35 of these units were vacant properties returned to use through our acquisition and our Buy and Renew Programme. In addition, the turnkey projects have seen unfinished and vacant units completed and added to stock.

Kerry County Council has a very active 'Voids' Programme with a total of 256 units returned to stock since 2017. A total of 148 units were delivered in 2017 with a further 108 delivered in 2018 to date.

The current Tenant Purchase Scheme has seen large interest with a total of 212 valid applications at various stages of processing and completion.

To date a total of 28 sales have been completed.

Summary

Kerry County Council has a very broad ranging and active Housing Programme and continues to be fully committed to delivering on our responsibilities and targets under the current Rebuilding Ireland Programme. We acknowledge the partnership, co-operation and support of other agencies, Approved Housing Bodies and particularly the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

I thank the Committee for their invitation and engagement on this important matter.