

ICSH Opening Address to the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government

'Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Land Development Agency Bill 2019'

Tuesday, 15 October 2019, 11.30am

Thank you Chair and members of the Committee for inviting the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) to engage with you today on a truly significant issue affecting the delivery of homes across Ireland. My name is Donal Mc Manus, CEO of the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) and I am joined by my colleague, Ms. Karen Murphy, ICSH Director of Policy.

The ICSH is the national federation of housing associations with over 260 AHB member organisations that collectively own and manage over 35,000 homes at affordable rents for families, older people, people with disabilities, homeless and single people.

Overall, the AHB sector has had a commitment to developing and managing social housing over the long-term and addressing the changing needs of the population.

When the Land development agency was initially announced it was very much welcomed by the sector and the ICSH. For some time the ICSH had advocated that there was an urgent need for the strategic management of state lands with an appropriate tenure mix. In our view when it comes to the development of valuable state assets, the public interest is best served by ensuring that a very a significant proportion of social and affordable housing is built on state lands. Housing associations need state lands to deliver social rented homes affordably. It's a simple equation – the lower the cost of land should feed into lower costs to deliver social and affordable homes for the taxpayer.

We welcome the proactive role being adopted here by the State in the management of land. In particular the ability to drive strategic land assembly is a strong power which will be deployed for the public good. Any interventions which drive down the cost of land for housing are to be welcomed and supported.

In our view the current 10% social housing mandated on LDA sites as a minimum is too low and indeed just matches the Part V requirements on private sites. The LDA is currently active in delivering over 3,000 homes on state lands. We would hope of the 3,000 homes currently being delivered that the social element is significantly higher than this and we acknowledge that the LDA has stated that they view the 10% as a minimum.

In regards to the proposed legislation we would sound a note of caution over the proposed commercial remit of the company being proposed. While there are significant differences between the current proposal and the NAMA legislation, in our view the commercial remit of NAMA meant that the social dividend came at a commercial price. We would hope that the LDA will enable the provision of social and affordable housing at a lower cost overall to the exchequer.

Head 8

In relation to the 'objects' we would like to see the delivery of social housing, affordable rental housing and affordable purchase as part of its remit. The LDA potentially has a significant role to play in the expansion of a cost rental sector in Ireland and explicit objectives to achieve this should be included.

We welcome the register and would recommend a review of the previous housing land map to ensure all state and semi-state mapped land is up-to-date and accounted for.

Head 9

We would like to see an explicit relationship between the LDA and AHBs and local authorities for the provision of housing and related amenities. The LDA should have powers to enter into agreements with LAs and AHBs.

Also, CPO powers would be a necessary addition to their functions.

In regard to the management of housing by the LDA in our view housing management is not their central objective and this should be carried out by local authorities and AHBs. If the

LDA becomes a large scale landlord then they will be distracted from their central functions and objectives. Also would they be under regulation by the RTB as rental housing landlords?

Head 10

In the drafting of the legislation it should explicitly provide for the use of the public appointments service in the recruitment of board members. Transparency on governance arrangements are crucial.

If we look at the nation's changing demographics, we know that a much greater percentage of new housing must come in the form of lifetime adaptable housing, to enable the growing number of older households to age in place. We would suggest that at a policy level the new LDA should be guided to deliver a percentage of homes for older people and accessible homes within their delivery plans. This will assist in meeting Government Policy objectives.

The LDA should have the powers to set standards to support and achieve government objectives in areas such as energy efficiency, zero carbon and lifetime housing, to name a few.

Future Outputs of AHBs

Last year the sector provided 3,219 social homes, 38% of the national total, and took more than 4,000 households off the social housing waiting list. As a sector there are challenges to the continued delivery at a high level and the availability of sites which are zoned and serviced will assist the AHB sector greatly in upscaling their delivery of homes.

Donal McManus

CEO

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