

## **Public Accounts Committee**

### **Opening Statement by Bob Jordan,**

### **Chief Executive Officer of the Housing Agency**

### **In relation to Housing Agency Financial Statements 2020/ Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund**

Chairperson, members, thank you for the opportunity to present to the Public Accounts Committee today, on the 2020 Financial Statements of the Housing Agency; the Housing Agency Revolving Acquisitions Fund; and the work of the Housing Agency. I am joined by my colleagues Jim Baneham, Director of Delivery and Innovation, and Claire Feeney, Director of Services and Inclusion.

The Housing Agency's purpose is to provide expertise and solutions to help deliver sustainable communities throughout Ireland. We do this by being a centre of expertise on housing; supporting housing policy development; and implementing effective housing programmes in collaboration with others.

We work with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in the delivery of housing and housing services. The Agency also implements the Pyrite Remediation Scheme on behalf of the Pyrite Resolution Board.

To meet the challenges facing our society in respect of housing, the Housing Agency's role and work has increased significantly in recent years. Our work is closely aligned with the Government's national housing strategy *Housing for All*.

New areas of work include the Cost Rental Equity Loan, the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme, the Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme, and the management of Land Acquisition Fund. We will also be playing a role in relation to resolving defects in apartments.

Our operational budget for 2023 is €16m, and we currently have 133 staff in the Agency.

The Housing Agency's Acquisitions Fund of €70 million was established at the beginning of 2017. The Agency's role was to engage with banks and investment funds in areas with high levels of social housing demand to acquire vacant residential units for social housing. Separate to the Fund, the Housing Agency's acquisitions team has acquired properties for local authorities and for the Department of Children to support the delivery of accommodation for International Protection applicants.

In 2014, the Housing Agency was given responsibility for regulating Approved Housing Bodies under the Voluntary Regulation Code. This role ceased at the end of 2021, following the establishment of an independent authority, the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (AHBRA), who are with us here today. To facilitate this transition, the Housing Agency provided AHBRA with administrative support which concluded at the end of 2022.

The Housing Agency has a number of priority areas of work:

- Our first priority is **supporting the delivery of more affordable housing**. We do this through providing Cost Rental Equity Rental Loans; central underwriting for Local Authority Home Loans; and facilitating the provision of affordable purchase homes by local authorities.
- Another priority is **increasing the supply of social and private homes**. This will be achieved through expanding our technical team to increase supports to local authorities and AHBs. We will be managing the rollout of the Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Scheme. We are supporting delivery of the Town Centre First policy to address vacancy and dereliction. We will purchase land for social housing through the Land Acquisition Fund.
- Our third priority is **addressing social inclusion issues** including co-ordinating the delivery of the national Housing First programme to end long-term homelessness; supporting the implementation of the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People; and supporting International Protection.
- **In relation to remediation of defective homes, we** oversee the delivery of the Pyrite Remediation Scheme; we will be supporting local authorities in the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme. We will also be involved in the resolution of defects in apartments.
- Finally, **we contribute to policy development and public discourse by undertaking research**. Our research covers three themes – affordability, sustainable communities, and social inclusion. For example, we undertake the Annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments.

The Housing Agency is central to the successful delivery of homes and sustainable communities across Ireland. We are committed to ensuring there is financial probity, good governance structures and efficient measures in place to meet the remit and objectives of the Housing Agency.

Finally, I would like to thank the Comptroller and Auditor General and his staff for their assistance and courtesy in conducting their work. I thank the Committee and Chairperson for your attention and will answer any questions you may have.

**Ends**