

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters
Tuesday 30th March 2021 12:30 pm
Opening Statement
Minister for State with responsibility for Local Government and Planning, Peter
Burke T.D.,
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Good afternoon everyone, I would like to thank the Committee for inviting myself and officials from my Department and the Housing Agency here today to discuss the very important subject of housing for people with disabilities. I am joined today by Paul Benson, Principal Officer, from my Department, John O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer and Claire Feeney, Senior Executive Officer from the Housing Agency.

I will make a brief opening statement and we then look forward to answering the questions from the Committee. We also welcome the insights of the Committee into these important matters. This is timely as we embark on a new overarching housing strategy – Housing for All – and a review of the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability.

Housing is a top priority for this Government and the approach – Housing for All - in the Programme for Government is clear. This Government is working towards a housing system that caters for all our people. In this regard, the Programme includes the commitment to ensure that an appropriate mix of housing design types is provided, for older people and people with disabilities.

Since taking Office the Ministerial team in the Department has set about this work with our officials, other Government Departments, local authorities, delivery partners and key stakeholders. My Department has also been re-organised with a new Division established since the start of the year focussing on housing inclusion, homelessness and affordability.

The record €3.3 billion housing budget for 2021 is a clear signal of the Government's intent to deliver on the Programme for Government, and it's only the start. This investment will provide further impetus to important schemes targeted at housing for persons with a disability such as the capital funding for social housing to local authorities, the funding to approved housing bodies including the Capital Assistance Scheme, and the Housing Adaptation and the Disabled Persons Grant Schemes.

There major strategies were published in 2011:

1. National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016
2. National Implementation Framework for the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016, and,
3. Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion.

My Department in conjunction with the Department of Health, the HSE and other stakeholders have been working hard to implement these strategies.

The vision of the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016 is:

“To facilitate access, for people with disabilities, to the appropriate range of housing and related support services, delivered in an integrated and sustainable manner, which promotes equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living.”

The strategy uses the term “disability” in reference to four categories of disability aligned with UNCRPD:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) sensory disability,(2) mental health disability,(3) physical disability and(4) intellectual disability. |
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The Strategy is a joint initiative with the Department of Health and its aims are aligned with the UNCRPD. A key output of the Strategy has been the establishment of a Housing and Disability Steering Group in each local authority and preparation of a Strategic Plan for the delivery of housing for people with a disability in each local authority area.

This is supported by a National Housing Sub-Group, made up of my Department, the Department of Health, the HSE, the National Disability Authority and representatives from other stakeholder organisations. This Group meets regularly to co-ordinate relevant actions on a national basis with executive support from The Housing Agency.

The overall national housing output requirement in the coming years is estimated at 33,000 new homes per annum, across social, affordable and private. All delivery channels and mechanisms will be needed to achieve these targets. We are planning for delivery of these homes in the new housing strategy – Housing for All – and the needs of people with a disability will be factored into this process at national and local level.

In terms of social housing, the Programme for Government commits to increase the social housing stock by 50,000 over the next 5 years, most of which will be new build. The level of allocations for social housing to people with disabilities has increased significantly over the last 10 years with over 10% of all allocations being made to people with disabilities.

The work on the strategy will also include an examination of adaptation, conversion and refurbishment programmes and grants for existing stock. For example, the Housing Adaptation Grants Schemes which have assisted 115,000 households to stay living in their homes since 2008. This is very much in keeping with the objectives of the UNCRPD.

In terms of building regulations Part M - **Access and Use** of the Building Regulations aim to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions, where practicable and appropriate.

As you can see, there is clear alignment between the objectives and approach of housing policy for people with a disability and the UNCRPD. This can be bolstered further as we develop the two housing strategies mentioned. I have outlined in the Appendix 5 key achievements in this area to date. We can provide the Committee with more detailed briefing on areas of interest following today's session.

We look forward to our discussion.

Thank-you.

Some Key Achievements

- 1. Organisations working together in a collaborative way.** Huge strides have been made in getting organisations to work together rather effectively. At national level that is being done through the **National Housing Subgroup** and at local authority level this is through the **Housing and Disability Steering Groups**.
- 2. Increased access to housing** both for people in the community and from institutions. Since 2016 there has been an increase in the allocation of housing to people with a disability. **Over the last 5 years at least 10% of all social housing allocations were to people with a disability.**
- 3. Increased awareness** among key groups of the ability of people with a disability which has seen a willingness to support these abilities so that people can live independently. This included the joint funding from Health and Housing for the 8 Mental Health Tenancy Support Officers to support individuals to obtain and hold tenancies.
- 4. More consistency of treatment** of people with a disability to access housing, this will be increased further by the introduction of the Medical/Disability Information Form in April. This will ensure consistency of information being provided to local authorities and a consistent approach to determining need based on disability and the determining of priority as appropriate.
- 5. More accessible information** that allows people with a disability to make informed decisions on their housing requirements, such as **the new Streamlined Housing Grants Application Form and easy to read guidance, the Housing Options Guides, Easy Read Guide to completing the Social Housing Application Form** and the Moving in Checklist.
- 6. Age Friendly Ireland Local Authority Shared Service** which is working on programmes to provide walkable streets and public realm improvements, improved

housing and transportation options and access to key services and opportunities for older people to participate in community activities. These actions compliment the work being done under the NHSPWD and by doing so, communities are better equipped to become great places in which to live and work.

The table below shows the increase year on year in grants being drawn down. The fall off in 2020 arises from the impact of Covid-19. The available budget had been increased

No of Grants paid from 2015 -2020				
Year	People with a Disability	Older People	Mobility Aids	Total
2015	2,600	3,127	1,869	7,596
2016	2,714	3,425	1,871	8,010
2017	3,449	3,558	2,073	9,080
2018	3,622	3,640	2,151	9,413
2019	3,891	4,009	2,111	10,011
2020	3,165	3,290	1,682	8,137