

CCMA Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Disability Matters – Planning for Inclusive Communities

January 2024

Introduction

Chair, members of the Committee, my name is AnnMarie Farrelly, I am a member of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) Committee on Housing, Building and Land Use (HBLU), and I am also Chief Executive of Fingal County Council. I am accompanied here today by my colleagues Mr Michael Rainey, Planning and Economic Development Director of Service Carlow County Council, Mr Barry Lynch, Housing Director of Service Meath County Council and Mr Liam Hanrahan, Economic Development and Planning Director of Service Galway County Council.

Firstly, on behalf of the CCMA, we welcome the opportunity to attend the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters to discuss Planning for inclusive communities.

The County and City Management Association (CCMA) is the representative body for Local Authority management. Our membership includes the Chief Executives of each of the Local Authorities, as well as the Assistant Chief Executives of Dublin City Council. The CCMA operates through seven committees, each of which is concerned with specific policy areas.

The responsibility and remit of the CCMA HBLU Committee includes Housing, Planning, Building Control and Management. Local authorities, as housing authorities, provide a range of homes and supports to those with a housing need, including people with disabilities. Local authorities work in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies, the charity sector and other stakeholders to assist individuals and families to ensure their accommodation needs are met via local authority or AHB housing or accommodation provided through subsidisation via the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

1) Housing supply

The overall delivery of disabled persons housing is a key area of focus for the local authority sector and as such figures obtained from the Housing Agency, indicate that there was a total of 2472 allocations nationally for the year 2022. These allocations are broken down by 4 categories - Physical, Sensory, Mental Health & Intellectual.

Disability	2019	2020	2021	2022
Physical	1231	1038	1121	1089
Sensory	239	222	338	389
Mental Health	632	521	597	695
Intellectual	296	312	338	299
Total	2398	2093	2394	2,472

The Capital Assistance Scheme provides a capital funding mechanism through the local authority to AHBs, for the delivery of accommodation, either by construction or acquisition, for priority groups such as: elderly people, homeless persons and people with disabilities. The Capital Assistance Scheme is a valuable scheme, and we encourage our Approved Housing Body partners to utilise this scheme to provide accommodation to meet housing needs.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have recently published figures for CAS to Q3 2023 detailing 52 units completed, 217 unit acquired with a total of 269 units delivered.

2) Steering Groups

Housing and Disability Steering Groups have been established in all local authority areas. Membership of these steering groups consist of representatives from the HSE, Disability Service Providers and Housing Service Providers. The aim is to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of persons with a disability. The Housing and Disability Steering Groups are tasked with preparing a Strategic Plan for their Local areas to develop specific local strategies to meet identified and emerging need. These Plans, along with the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments, allow local authorities to plan more strategically for the housing needs of persons with disabilities and support the delivery of accommodation using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms. Housing and Disability Steering Groups continue to have a key role as the forum for delivery of the strategy's outcomes at local level.

3) Case studies

The alignment of housing and support services is a high priority for local authorities. A detailed description of the following case studies of local authority initiatives supporting the needs of people are provided within the appendix attached to this submission:

- Galway County Council: Housing Disability Steering Group (HDSG) Mental Health Subgroup
- Meath County Council: Disability Action Team (DAT)
- Wexford County Council: Support for Tenancy And Recovery Targets (START) programme
- Meath County Council: Age Friendly work including the Healthy Homes Programme and the Healthy Homes Coordinators
- Age Friendly Technical Officers and the Age Friendly shared service
- Meath County Council: Sláintecare Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme

4) Universal Design

The adoption of the principle of Universal Design provides for greater sustainability of our housing stock, especially in the current circumstances of dramatically rising construction costs. It should be noted however, that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, remains as the sanctioning authority in respect of the adopted design standards, funding and project approvals.

A new design standard is being developed under the auspices of the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) with participation from among others the DHLGH, NDA and Age Friendly which will be a common standard for the use of UD and UD+. Meath Co. Council is carrying out a pilot project in Kells where 30% of the units are UD. This project is subject to planning approval and initial indications from the architect in 2021 was a cost differential of circa 6.4% for the UD units.

5) Housing Supports for People with Disabilities and Older People

With funding from the DHLGH, Local Authorities provided the following three separate grant schemes namely:

- a) Housing Adaptation Grant for Older people and People with a Disability
Through this scheme LAs assist those with a disability have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs.

Through figures obtained from the DHLGH, for the year 2022, Local Authorities approved up to 4,995 of this type of grant, costing approx. €38,085,000 nationally

b) Housing Aid for Older People

Through this scheme LAs assist older people to carry out necessary repairs such as structural repairs or improvements, re-wiring, repairs to or replacement of windows and doors, provision of water supply and sanitary facilities, provision of heating, cleaning and painting. Through figures obtained from the DHLGH, for the year 2022, Local Authorities approved up to 5,999 of this type of grant, costing approx. €24,258,000 nationally

c) Mobility Aids Grant Scheme

Through this scheme LAs assist those in need for works designed to address mobility problems in the home, such as the purchase and installation of grab-rails, a level access shower, access ramps or a stair-lift.

Through figures obtained from the DHLGH, for the year 2022, Local Authorities approved up to 1,804 of this type of grant, costing approx. €6,375,000 nationally

The CCMA welcome the current review of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability scheme by the Department. The ability of the sector to co-fund the schemes is limited and can be a barrier to delivery, the CCMA would welcome additional exchequer funding in this area. In addition, it is important to highlight that there are significant staffing requirements on the sector in this high demand area as applications continue to increase year on year. Like all areas of housing development, construction inflation has hit this area, with difficulties arising in the availability of contractors to carry out the necessary work to meet the required standards.

The 10-year period to 2023 indicates a significant retrofit cost of €644 million to private housing including local authority match funding. It should be noted that since the inception of the scheme in 2007 grants in excess of €1 billion have been paid out with 20% of this being funded by the local government sector. The CCMA believe this is a significant burden on the sector and supports the need for 100% exchequer grant funding.

The summary below indicates that cumulatively local authorities have drawn down the funding allocated albeit with variations in individual years.

Summary 2014 to 2023

	Allocated	Drawdown	
	€	€	
Dept 80%	517,075,345	515,689,614	80%
LA Match			
Funding	129,268,836	128,922,404	20%
Total			
Investment	646,344,181	644,612,018	100%

Percentage drawdown 99.73%

Figures obtained from the DHLGH regarding the Housing Adaptation Grant for Older People and people with a disability Scheme show that for the year 2022, €65,000,000 funding was allocated and €68,717,487 was drawn down by the sector. These figures are based on 80% Exchequer funding and

exclude the local authorities 20% contribution. The DHLGH are currently in the process of finalising the figures for 2023. These figures do not include the cost of resources for Local Authorities to run these schemes.

Conclusion

All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility, under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty or Public Sector Duty, to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users, and everyone affected by their policies and plans. In addition, relevant issues specifically linked to the UNCRPD are identified and included as individual departmental action plans. Commitments to implementing the UNCRPD, Disability Act 2005 and human rights and equality related legislation are threaded throughout Corporate Plans, County Development Plans, Equality and Human Rights Framework and all the Council plans and strategies.

In line with Housing for All, The CCMA are committed to delivering an appropriate range of housing and related support services, in an integrated and sustainable manner, which promote equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living for people with a disability. It is important to note that for those people with disability the co-ordination of housing provision with the delivery of key health and social care supports is paramount. The CCMA continue to work with the necessary stakeholders in that regard.

In conclusion, the CCMA welcomes the opportunity to engage in dialogue on these complex issues and are happy to answer any questions that you may wish to address to us.

*** End of Submission***

Appendix 1: Local Authority initiatives

- **Galway County Council: Housing Disability Steering Group (HDSG) Mental Health Subgroup**

The Galway County Council Housing Disability Steering Group (HDSG) was set up as part of the Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability 2021-2026. The largest cohort of housing applications under disability category are for mental health.

It is a partnership approach between Galway County Council - Housing and HSE Community Healthcare West Mental Health Services, to progress mutual clients. The group allows for discussions of cases, development of actions plans and bridging the gap between the local authority and the HSE. It offers a communication pathway and for decisions to be made. More importantly, it allows for vulnerable clients with additional needs to progress to having their own homes and tenancies utilising a rights and community based approach.

Approximately 52 people have been supported to date. Of those, 12 people were supported to transition from mental health hostels to independent tenancies with support. The age range is from 28 to 74.

The HSE Housing Co-ordinator is operating at the interface between Local Authorities/Housing Bodies, Mental Health Services and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who provide social care support in the community and is applying their expertise and knowledge in relation to policy, systems and structures to assist staff in all agencies to resolve day to day problems.

This strategic oversight allows the Housing Co-ordinator to identify barriers and enablers to successful transitioning to community living and come up with creative solutions to these issues.

The Housing Co-ordinator works in partnership with the Senior Social Worker and Senior Executive Officer within Housing as a 'conduit' for the mental health service and the local authority. Whilst the HSE Housing Coordinator is part of a wider HSE initiative, the example set up by Galway County Council is unique, as it has equal commitment by the local authority and the HSE = Partnership

Galway County Council has made a commitment to work on driving the agenda for housing for vulnerable applicants/clients underpinned by their own Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability 2021-2026. This is underpinned by the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 & Implementation Plan and Housing for All.

- **Meath County Council: Disability Action Team (DAT)**

In response to the National Housing Strategy Meath County Council established a disability action team. The purpose of the DAT is to formalise the pro-active interagency case management of social housing applicants with a disability, who require multi agency supports.

The operation of DAT is actioned under the auspices of the County Meath Strategy for Housing Persons with a Disability 2021-2026, as devised by the Meath Housing & Disability Steering Group.

The role of DAT is threefold, namely:

- 1) To review those applicants with a disability that are in line for an allocation of a social house by Meath County Council within the next 12 months (offer zone analysis), with a view to ensuring that both the appropriate unit and supports are in place to allow for independent living
- 2) To review specific cases that are brought forward by members of DAT, for priority consideration in respect of their accommodation needs
- 3) To review residents already housed in the community or community residencies, so as to ensure that their accommodation remains appropriate to any evolved needs

In addition to providing a forum for the effective interagency case management, the DAT will also have a key role in i) establishing and maintaining positive working relationships between the relevant agencies and ii) to collectively capture the blockages to effective service delivery, whether that be at local or national level, with the view to informing the case for the necessary resources or policy changes where appropriate.

- **Wexford County Council: Support for Tenancy And Recovery Targets (START) programme**

The START programme is a collaborative project with HSE, Local Authority and Focus Ireland to house and provide tenancy sustainment services to mental health housing applicants. This programme has been in operation in Wexford for almost 4 years and has resulted in successful supported tenancies.

Local Authorities play an essential leadership role in the democratic, social, economic, and cultural development of local areas. City and County Councils across Ireland provide amenities, services and infrastructure designed to improve local areas as inclusive places in which to live, visit and work.

- **Meath County Council: National Age Friendly Shared Service**

Meath County Council hosts the National Age Friendly Shared Service on behalf of the local government sector and provides a comprehensive suite of resources and information to encourage the provision of Age Friendly Housing principally through the website www.agefriendlyhomes.ie

The shared service follows the principle “If you design for the young you exclude the old, but if you design for the old you include everyone” (Glenn Millar, Canadian Planner, Canadian Urban Institute). This principle equally applies in meeting the needs of disabled people and there are many issues in common between Age Friendly Housing and Housing for Disabled People.

- **Age Friendly Technical Officers and the Age Friendly shared service**

As part of its work to encourage the provision of more age friendly housing and public realm a network of Age Friendly technical advisers has been established in each local authority area and a new national coordinator has now been appointed to oversee this. The Department of Housing Heritage and Local Government has also asked each local authority to appoint a Disability Technical Adviser. In some cases, this role will be performed by the same individual who holds the role of Age Friendly Technical Adviser. These roles provide an invaluable resource for any

companies or individuals who need relevant advice before embarking on a construction project. The Advisers can also give advice on matters such as improved public realm and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

- **Meath County Council: Sláintecare Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme**

A key programme which takes a holistic, person centred approach to dealing with Housing and health issues faced by older people (many of whom have disabilities) is the Sláintecare Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme. Healthy Age Friendly Homes has four key objectives:

- 1) Enable older people to continue living in their homes or in a home more suited to their needs (Rightsizing).
- 2) Live with a sense of independence and autonomy.
- 3) Be and feel part of their Community.
- 4) Support the avoidance of early or premature admission to long term residential care.

It is anticipated that 10,500 older people per annum will benefit from the support of this programme. The programme is hosted by Meath County Council and is funded through the Department of Health and the HSE. Following a successful pilot in nine local authority areas this programme has now been scaled up nationally with coordinators appointed across the country. The co-ordinator agrees a personal plan with each individual older participant and supports them to access a range of services which include housing adaptation grants, home energy improvements, health appointments, befriending or other community services, or technology supports.