

# Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing Local Government and Heritage

## Housing for Older People including Fair Deal

10 May 2022

### Opening Statement by Caroline Timmons

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Good afternoon Chair and members of the Committee.

#### **Introduction**

Thank you for inviting me to attend today's Committee meeting and for giving me the opportunity to brief members on housing for older people. I am accompanied today by my colleagues, Patrick O'Sullivan, Principal Officer in the Social Inclusion area, and Catherine Comer, Principal Officer in the Rental Market area. I note our colleagues from the Department of Health are also in attendance and we work closely with them in a number of areas across the social inclusion spectrum and, in particular, I note we have collaborated strongly in the area of older people over a number of years now.

#### **Housing Policy for Older People**

The number of people over the age of 65 is expected to reach 1.4 million by 2040, or about 23% of the total population. The implications for areas of public policy including housing, health, urban and rural planning, transport, policing, the workplace and the business environment are considerable.

Government policy in relation to housing for older people, as set out in *Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland*, is to support people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible - in short to allow them to 'age in place' close to their families, friends and in their community. It is also recognised though that some older people, no less than any other age group may want, or need, to move to alternative accommodation. It is therefore, incumbent on us as policy makers to ensure that there are options to allow older people to choose the housing solution that is best for them.

*Housing for All* confirms the commitment to the principles and actions of the 2019 Joint Policy Statement, *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population*. That Policy Statement was delivered jointly with the Department of Health, and the Implementation Group set up to progress the actions in that Statement was very successful. I look forward to updating you on progress in that regard during the meeting.

*Housing for All* reflects and aligns with the policy and actions in *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population* because it targets delivery of more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. It commits to delivering over 300,000 new homes by 2030, including 54,000 affordable homes for purchase or rent and over 90,000 social homes. It is the largest State led building programme in our history and is financed by the biggest State funding commitment ever. Pathway 2 of *Housing for All* commits to expanding the housing options available for Older Persons and sets out specific actions on housing for older people, including a commitment to implementing the 40 actions that were contained in the Policy Statement.

### **Collaboration**

A successful housing outcome for older people requires an effective blending of housing and health policy and, as a Department, we are already collaborating very productively with our colleagues in the Department of Health, the HSE and local authorities to plan for the delivery of services to meet the needs of older people.

We also work closely with, and jointly fund, Age Friendly Ireland, the local authority shared service delivering the World Health Organisation (WHO) Programme which promotes the development of age friendly policies across eight thematic policy areas, including housing and

health. The shared service is a unique resource within our local government system targeted to the needs of older people and supporting the Departments and agencies in the development of their programmes and it has a representative in each local authority across the country.

## **Delivery**

My Department delivers on housing options for older people by both stimulating supply in the private sector and directly funding social housing. Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies are key partners in this regard.

Housing for older people is funded from the mainstream capital programmes for social housing in local authorities, as well as the Capital Assistance Scheme, which provides funding to Approved Housing Bodies for specialist housing, including AHBs like Clann which specialises in housing for older people.

There are many excellent examples of the results of this funding such as the age-friendly development provided by Meath County Council as infill housing on a previously derelict site at Proudstown, County Meath and the Broome Lodge apartment development by Clann in Cabra, Dublin 7 which incorporates universal design principles. Both of these have changed the lives of the older people who live in them in the heart of their own communities in safety and security.

For older people who want to remain living in their existing dwelling, the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for People with a Disability and Older People, the Mobility Aids Grants Scheme and the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme allow older people in private housing to make adaptations and improvements to their homes to enable them to go on living there in comfort. Funding totalling €81.25m is available to local authorities for these grant schemes in 2022 and in line with Housing for All commitment the Department will be finalising a review of these grants this year.

## **Conclusion**

My Department is committed to improving housing for older people, working with our colleagues in the Department of Health and other stakeholders within the framework of *Housing for All*. We will continue to work with them to achieve the ambition of making Ireland a 'great country to grow old in' as a truly age-friendly country works for society as a whole.

My colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.