

**Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and
Heritage**

**General Scheme of the Remediation of Dwellings Damaged by
Defective Concrete Blocks Bill 2022**

**Opening Statement by Caroline Timmons, Acting Assistant
Secretary, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage**

Thursday 23rd June 2022

Good evening Chair and members. My name is Caroline Timmons and I am Acting Assistant Secretary in the Housing Affordability, Inclusion and Homelessness division in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. I am accompanied by my colleagues Paul Benson, Principal Officer and John Wickham, Senior Advisor. We are pleased to be here this evening in this session alongside the Housing Agency and thank you for inviting us to assist the Committee in its discussions and deliberations on the General Scheme of the *Remediation of Dwellings Damaged by Defective Concrete Blocks Bill, 2022*.

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Introduction

- The General Scheme of the *Remediation of Dwellings Damaged by Defective Concrete Blocks Bill, 2022* is the culmination of six months of work and stakeholder engagement since the Government decision of the 30 November, 2021 on this matter.
- I want to thank all of those who have helped bring us to this point;
 - the Attorney General and his Office, including the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, who have put considerable time into advising and guiding on the development of the scheme

- the members of the Expert Group on Technical Matters, under the Chairmanship of Paul Forde
- the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland for their report on construction costs related to remediation works under the scheme
- homeowners and their representatives who have continued to engage with the nominated liaison as the scheme has been developed
- the Housing Agency who are taking on a critical role on behalf of local authorities under the enhanced scheme and
- my own colleagues who have worked extremely hard on the defective concrete blocks issue over the last 6 months

The General Scheme

- The General Scheme encompasses the key decisions made by Government last November namely;
 1. a 100% grant to an overall maximum grant amount payable to an applicant under the scheme in the sum of €420,000
 2. within the overall maximum grant of €420,000 grant assistance is also available for
 - Alternative accommodation costs €15,000
 - Storage Costs €5,000
 - Immediate repair works €5,000
 3. Increased grant rates which take account of a report on construction costs provided by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland and I note the rates are set to ensure that homeowners will get a rate equal to or greater than the rates contained in the report of SCSi for remediation works under the scheme
 4. the removal of the financial barrier to scheme entry which is a feature of the current scheme thereby reducing the cost for homeowners from up to

€7,000 to an estimated €500/€700 which will be recoupable under the scheme by approved homeowners

5. a damage threshold for entry to the grant scheme will be set in order to ensure the worst affected homes are first into the enhanced scheme and prioritised for approval and remediation. The Expert Group have made a recommendation in relation to the appropriate damage threshold which should apply. This is being considered by the Minister and will when agreed be provided for under regulations
6. a second grant application opportunity is being made available to homeowners who are approved for remediation options other than full demolition and re-build. The second grant opportunity works as the form of guarantee which has been sought by homeowners and will remain available for 40 years
7. review by Government of the maximum grant amount and rates as appropriate
8. the extension of the scheme beyond owner occupied principal private residences to include rented dwellings to a maximum of one per homeowner and which were RTB registered on or before the 1 November, 2021
9. the establishment of an independent appeals panel and clarity on the four key decisions which can be appealed by homeowners
 - validation of an application
 - meeting the damage threshold
 - the remediation option and grant amount
 - a refusal by a local authority to pay a grant
10. and that Clare and Limerick will be included in the enhanced scheme upon commencement and further local authority areas can be added as the necessary evidence supports inclusion.

- I want to bring to your attention a number of other issues of note which are relevant to the scheme and the matters under consideration;

1. The first is that the review of a number of technical standards called for by Government have begun. These include the
 - review of the I.S. 465 standard for the assessment, testing and categorisation of impacted homes
 - consideration of the potential impact of other deleterious materials e.g. Pyrrhotite and the impact or otherwise of those deleterious materials on the foundations in homes impacted
 - the review of the Irish Standard for concrete blocks (including aggregates) and
 - the review of the potential impact, if any, of full cavity insulation on homes susceptible to damage or damaged by defective concrete blocks.
2. the Housing Agency are being resourced to fulfil the crucial role they will play in the independent determination of the appropriate remediation option and grant amount for each home
3. the intended introduction of an exchequer funded scheme of assistance for local authority and approved housing body owned social homes which are impacted and
4. the provision for a review of the operation of the Act after three years or sooner if that becomes necessary arising from a change in the I.S. 465 standard currently under review

Finally Chair, you will be aware that our Department made a presentation available for circulation to the committee members which provided a recap on the current scheme the challenges and issues which arose, how those challenges are being responded to, how the new scheme will work and the essential next steps to enable the scheme to commence, which I hope the members find helpful. . My colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions which Members may have, or to provide further details as required.

Thank you.

ENDS

