



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí  
Cork City Council

## **CORK CITY COUNCIL**

### **OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HERITAGE**

**TUESDAY, 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2022**

Chair, Deputies and Senators thank you for inviting us to report on housing delivery in Cork City. I am joined by my colleagues Brian Geaney, Assistant Chief Executive, Niall Ó Donnabháin, Director of Services for Housing and Fearghal Reidy, Director of Services for Strategic and Economic Development.

#### **Social Housing Delivery and Targets**

In the three-year period from 2019 to 2021, a total of 3,698 social housing supports were delivered in Cork City Council's administrative area. Of this, 847 homes were provided using the build delivery mechanism, 294 homes were acquired, 218 homes were leased and 2,339 tenancies were created and supported through HAP and RAS.

#### **Future Delivery of Social Housing**

Under the Cork City Housing Delivery Action Plan, there is a pipeline to provide 2,399 social homes by 2026. This is made up of 2,134 homes to be delivered by build - including Part V, and 265 homes by lease.

In 2022, a total of 691 homes will be delivered which will be achieved through a combination of new build (515 homes), acquisitions (54 homes) and leasing (122 homes).

Right now, there are 49 projects under construction which will deliver over 957 homes when completed.

The strong pipeline delivery is reached by activating City Council owned sites, the competitive dialogue procurement process, partnership with the AHB sector, turnkey scheme acquisitions and Part V, with further housing development underway with the Land Development Agency.

#### **Rightsizing Schemes**

In the last 3 years, Cork City Council built 41 rightsizing homes for older people. Construction of additional 89 homes will be completed by the end of 2022. These schemes are spread across five sites, all of which were either derelict or vacant.

#### **Affordable Housing Delivery and Targets**

Under the Housing Delivery Action Plan, Cork City's has a target to deliver 1,737 affordable homes of which 378 homes will be to be provided by Cork City Council and the balance of 1,359 homes to be developed by the AHB sector and the LDA. Cork City Council currently has 4 affordable housing

schemes under construction that will deliver 215 homes. Of this, 135 affordable homes will be completed in 2022 and the remaining 80 homes will be completed in 2023. The AHB Sector is delivering an additional 105 cost rental homes across two schemes in 2022. Other schemes are at planning and pre-planning stages.

### **Delivery Challenges**

Delivery of both social and affordable housing has been affected by well documented externalities, the COVID 19 pandemic, cost inflation, supply chain challenges and general market uncertainty. Part V housing is also reliant on the private sector delivery. That stated, Cork City Council remains strongly committed to continuing to the delivery of a strong programme to achieve our housing targets.

### **Vacancy & Dereliction**

Vacancy and dereliction are key issues that relate to the fabric of the city. There is significant public discourse, and indeed frustration in relation to vacancy and dereliction and I would like to highlight some key facts in so far as these issues relate to Cork City.

As the members of the committee are aware, not all vacant houses are derelict. This important, because the instruments to address dereliction are not the same as those available to address vacancy. The Vacant Homes and Derelict Sites team of Cork City Council are working on a portfolio of just over 460 properties (vacant homes and derelict sites).

### ***Dereliction***

Concentrating on dereliction, the definition of dereliction is set out in the Derelict Sites Act, a key consideration of Cork City Council, in the first instance, is whether or not the property is safe and habitable. Where possible, we also seek to determine the specific circumstances of the owners of each property. This is important as property owners may be facing difficult circumstances which led to the unsightly presentation or indeed dereliction of their property. Cork City Council engages with property owners who are actively seeking to remove dereliction through the planning process or by disposal of the site. If this engagement does not yield satisfactory results, we will then move to place the property on the derelict sites register. This is, as you would expect, a long process.

Today there are 110 sites on the Derelict Sites Register, the highest number since the register was established. Measure to support regeneration and remove dereliction include, Repair and Lease, Buy and Renew and Living City. In addition, Cork City Council provides grants to support the development of premises in Architectural Conservation Areas. In the last 5 years €1.23million derelict sites levy was collected. As of January, 2022 there was €4.1 million due from the derelict sites levy.

Cork City Council compulsorily acquired 22 sites under Derelict Sites legislation. Cork City Council acquires a derelict site in the knowledge that not all sites are suitable for social housing, and alternative solutions may be required to remove dereliction. That stated over the last 5 years, a total of 619 social and affordable housing homes were delivered or are under construction by Cork City Council in vacant, derelict and regeneration sites. A further 206 homes are in the pipeline at these sites. This equates to a total of 825 homes that are spread over 50 such sites. This points to the relative complexity of bringing regenerating these difficult sites. It also highlights the impact that the development of these sites will have across the city in terms of providing homes and regenerating neighbourhoods.

## **Vacancy**

Focussing on vacant properties, according to the Revenue Commissioners as at the end of June, 2022 2.6% of properties in Cork City are vacant, of which in the order of 50% are vacant for less than 12 months. This correlates with a survey of vacant homes conducted by Cork City Council in 2018. Reasons for vacancy vary. The new vacant house tax will add to the instruments available to address vacancy.

The work on Vacant Homes and Derelict Sites is led by a Vacant Homes Officer, who is supported by a dedicated office. There is a cross directorate working group made up of planning, property, law, housing and finance working on derelict sites in the city. This team considers the suitability of sites for acquisition, disposal or use of derelict sites for housing or regeneration purposes, along with other instruments that could address dereliction and vacancy.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, Chair and members of the committee, while we face a range of challenges, there is considerable work underway by Cork City Council and our partners to achieve the targets of our Housing Action Plan to deliver a total of 5,671 social and affordable homes in Cork City by 2026.