

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Implementing Housing for All

Opening Statement by Ms. Jackie Maguire Chief Executive, Meath County Council

22nd November 2022

Cathaoirleach, Members of the Committee, thank you for your invitation to attend this afternoon's meeting to discuss the implementation of Housing for All. I am joined here by my colleagues Mr. Barry Lynch Director of Services for Housing, Community and Cultural Development and Mr. Dara McGowan, Director of Corporate Affairs and Governance, Climate Action and Emergency Services, who has specific responsibility for derelict sites and the Council's Vacant Homes Unit.

Summaries of housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland and projected delivery under Housing for All are shown at tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1 Housing Delivery 2018-2021

Homes Delivered	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Acquisitions	88	78	21	25	212
Build *	285	270	260	184	999
LA Part V	49	88	54	39	230
Leasing	14	36	76	88	214
LIHAF Affordable			5	5	10
Overall Total	436	472	416	341	1,665

* Includes LA Build, CALF, CAS and Buy and Renew

Note: The Rebuilding Ireland target for the same period was 1,190 social units.

Table 2: Estimated Delivery per Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026

Estimate Delivery	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Build *	290	291	429	169	173	1,352
LA Part V	72	40	62	46	57	277
Leasing	31	73	-			104
LIHAF Affordable		10	25	25	25	85
Housing for All Affordable**	10	28	41	36	36	151
Overall Total	403	442	557	276	291	1,969

* Includes LA Construction including future purchases, CALF, CAS and Buy and Renew

** Includes Affordable Purchase and cost rental.

Note: The social target of 1,733 units was based on the Housing Needs Demands assessment and provides for an additional 208 units in excess of the DHLGH target.

Table 2 outlines what is planned to be delivered by the Meath Co. Council over the life of the Housing Delivery Action Plan which would entail the acquisition of circa 10 hectares of land for the construction of social housing schemes as outlined in the plan. A much greater scale of land acquisition would be required to fully eliminate existing net need and pent-up demand due to transfer applications. The support of the Dept. of Housing Local Government and Heritage in sanctioning an additional 13 no. staff for the Social Housing capital programme is acknowledged. Meath Co. Council is active across a number of delivery streams and the following gives an overview of same.

Housing for Older People

The National Age Friendly Shared Service is hosted by Meath Co. Council and is dedicated to promoting the provision of Age Friendly Housing nationally through a network of Age Friendly Technical Advisors and through online channels primarily the agefriendlyhomes.ie website. At a local level single applicants who are over 55 years of age account for 11.6% of the gross housing need in the county. The Council is working to address this need through a combination of its own direct construction schemes and in collaboration with the Approved Housing Bodies (such as the recently opened Colliers Place in Duleek). MCC is currently at planning stage for a pilot scheme in Carrick St. in Kells where 30% of the 47 units are to be built to universal design standards. This project involves the regeneration of a significant town centre brownfield site and MCC intends to replicate this regeneration approach elsewhere in the county, for example at Brews Hill in Navan.

Projections on Activation of Vacant Homes and Vacant Homes Officers

Preliminary Census Data for 2022 indicates a vacancy rate of Meath of 5.81% compared with a national rate of 7.85%. Geo Directory data for Q4 of 2021 indicates a much lower vacancy rate of 3% compared with a national average of 4.4%. While the vacancy rate in Meath is low, the Council is taking a number of measures to bring vacant stock back into use.

Town Centre First

Meath Council has established its Town Centre First Section in Corporate Affairs and Governance. To complement this Section, the Town Regeneration Officer will also be responsible for managing the Vacant Homes Officer and Derelict Sites Officer. It is the intention, that this new team working together will endeavour to increase the number of properties that are brought back into use. In the last number of years, the Council has brought back 87 properties through the following schemes:

Buy and Renew Scheme funds local authorities to purchase and renew housing units in need of remediation and make them available for social housing use. Between 2017 and 2022, the Council secured 55 properties under this scheme.

Repair and Lease Scheme funds works to suitable vacant properties, to bring them up to the standard for rented accommodation and the cost of the works is then deducted from lease payments over an agreed lease term. The Council has secured 1 property under this scheme since 2018.

Change of Use Exemptions provide for commercial properties that have been vacant for over 2 years, to avail of the exemptions from planning legislation, if converting the property to residential use. There have been 18 notifications received by the Council between 2018 and 2022.

Derelict Sites legislation allows the Council to acquire properties that are considered vacant, and the owners are not carrying out appropriate improvement works. Between 2019 and 2022, the Council acquired 13 derelict sites/vacant properties via a CPO process.

MCC will continue to utilise the various schemes outlined above to bring properties back into use for social housing purposes.

Part V Planning permissions granted, and Part V projected.

Part V delivery is entirely dependent on the level of construction activity in the private sector. An average of 90 Part V units per annum was delivered during the last plan and this level of activity has helped inform the Housing Delivery action Plan for 2022 to 2026. The plan provides for an estimated 277 Local Authority Part V units (Ref Page 16) with the remainder to be provided under arrangements with the Approved Housing Body sector. Risk factors to achieving this include construction cost inflation and supply chain issues which may slow the pace of activity. The transitional provisions for Part V adopted as part of the Affordable Housing Act 2021, mean that it will take some time for the increase in Part V from 10% to 20% to flow through to house completions. Where feasible the Council also looks to secure additional units over and above the Part V requirement on a turnkey basis.

Cost Rental/Affordable

Affordable delivery in the county will be achieved through a number of mechanisms in addition to local authority provision, including the First Home Scheme and Cost Rental units provided by the Approved Housing Bodies. The Council's own target as set by the Department is to provide 151 units over the period of the Housing Delivery Action Plan. This will be achieved by a combination of turnkey arrangements, involving direct sales to approved applicants, in cooperation with local developers and the Land Development Agency as well as some direct construction activity. While it is anticipated that the majority of units will be for affordable purchase the Council will also examine the feasibility of providing cost rental units directly. The Council wishes to acknowledge the support of the DHLGH in sanctioning three additional staff for the purpose of Affordable Housing delivery.

Conclusion

Meath County Council intends to deploy all the resources at its disposal to implement the various measures contained in Housing for All and the foregoing outlines some of the key aspects involved in achieving this. We are happy to deal with any questions that the members may have.