

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing Local Government and Heritage
Opening Statement – Aine Stapleton, Assistant Secretary, Social Housing
Division

Social Housing Acquisitions 2023

21 March 2023

Chair, Members

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee today. My name is Aine Stapleton and I am an Assistant Secretary in the Social Housing Division in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. My role in the Department is to support the delivery of social housing, through Build, Acquisition and Leasing Delivery streams.

I am accompanied here today by David Kelly, Principal Officer with responsibility for Housing Finance and Social Housing Delivery Coordination and Rosemarie Tobin, Principal Officer with responsibility for Homelessness Policy, Funding and Delivery.

Under Housing for All, social housing forms a core element of housing delivery, with a target to deliver an average of 10,000 new build social homes between 2022 and 2030. Housing for All places on the focus on the delivery of new social homes through new build delivery by local authorities and Approved

Housing Bodies, with a reduced reliance on acquisitions and the phased elimination of long-term leasing by 2025.

With the primary focus on delivery through the build programme, Housing for All included targets for the acquisition of 200 social homes per annum. In January 2022, a circular letter was issued to local authorities setting out the arrangements for social housing acquisitions in 2022. Local authorities were advised that social housing acquisitions were to be focused on the following priority categories:

- One-bedroom units to deliver on Housing First and meet the short supply in this category;
- Other properties that allow persons/families to exit homelessness; and
- Specific housing required for/suitable for individuals with a disability or other particular priority needs;

Local authorities were also advised that limited acquisitions through the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) will also be approved, subject to the available budget for specific vulnerable cohorts, such as housing for older people, accommodation for individuals and families who are homeless and for people with a disability. However, the priority would be to support the delivery of construction projects using CAS funding.

In April 2022, the housing system came under increased pressure as the State sought to provide accommodation to large numbers of Ukrainians who had arrived in Ireland, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage reinstated delegated sanction to local authorities to acquire homes for social housing purposes for priority categories. As an important measure to prevent homelessness, local authorities were requested by the Minister to be proactive in acquiring properties where a HAP or RAS tenant had received a Notice of Termination due to the landlord's intention to sell the property. . .

In March this year, following an increase in the numbers of households in emergency accommodation and an increase in the number of Notices of Termination (NOTs) notified to the Residential Tenancies Board, the Government approved a significant increase in the number of social housing acquisitions for 2023, from 200 to 1,500. The additional 1,300 acquisitions are to be focussed on the purchase of properties where a HAP or RAS tenant has received a Notice of Termination, due to the landlord's intention to sell the property. This overall target will be kept under review in light of emerging experience.

To support local authority planning, each local authority was provided with an initial allocation for the number of acquisitions that would be funded in their area. Local authorities were advised that this allocation would be kept under review during 2023. All Local authorities will provide the Department with a short report by 31 March on the number of acquisitions that have been completed in 2023 to that point and that number that are in progress.

Value for money will continue to be a consideration for the Department and the delegated sanction issued to local authorities is subject to acquisitions being within Acquisition Cost Guidelines issued by the Department to all local authorities each year. However, properties above the cost guidelines can also be submitted to the Department for consideration. Where upgrade works are required to a property, this must be incorporated into the overall cost.

The Department has worked closely with the CCMA to prioritise this initiative with a focus on prevention of homelessness. All local authorities have been asked to nominate a contact point for dealing with queries on social housing acquisitions.

It is important to note that the acquisition of a property is just one of the supports offered to a tenant at risk of homelessness. Where a household presents to a local authority at risk of homelessness, the local authority will

work with the household to identify an appropriate solution. With the increase in social housing build output in 2022, there has been an increase in the stock available to local authorities to allocate to households on the social housing waiting list, with over 5000 homes added to social housing stock over the period of the deferral of Notices of Termination. A total of 9,100 new build social homes will be delivered in 2023. This delivery will be supported by changes to the CALF funding scheme, which will ensure that AHBs can deliver social housing in all local authority areas. Moreover, social housing stock will also be augmented by the Government's introduction of an additional 1,000 homes through a Targeted Leasing Initiative. The Department expects that 600 of these homes can be delivered this year and the remainder in 2024.

Despite the challenges in the rental market, an average of over 160 HAP tenancies are being established each week and local authority HAP Placefinder officers will also support households to identify and secure a suitable tenancy in the private rented market where possible.

Supporting households at risk of homelessness is a key priority for the Government and the increase in social housing acquisitions will play an important part in securing social housing homes for many tenants facing a Notice of Termination of a tenancy. The Department will work closely with the

local authorities to ensure that this programme of work is completed efficiently during 2023.

Thank you