

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COISTE UM THITHÍOCHT AGUS EASPA DÍDINE

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Dé Máirt, 26 Aibreán 2016

Tuesday, 26 April 2016

The Select Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy John Brassil,*	Deputy Kathleen Funchion,
Deputy Colm Brophy,+	Deputy Michael Harty,
Deputy Mary Butler,	Deputy Eoin Ó Broin,
Deputy Catherine Byrne,	Deputy Fergus O'Dowd,
Deputy Seán Canney,	Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan,
Deputy Ruth Coppinger,	Deputy Brendan Ryan,
Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,	Deputy Mick Wallace.

* In the absence of Deputy Barry Cowen.

+ In the absence of Deputy Bernard Durkan for part of the meeting.

DEPUTY JOHN CURRAN IN THE CHAIR.

BUSINESS OF COMMITTEE

Business of Committee

Chairman: Good morning. We have a quorum and are now in public session. Apologies have been received from Deputy Cowen. At the request of broadcasting and recording services, members are asked to ensure their mobile telephones are turned off completely or switched to airplane, safe or flight mode depending on the device. It is not sufficient for members to merely put their phones in silent mode as this will maintain the level of interference with the broadcasting system.

In accordance with standard procedures agreed by the Committee on Procedure and Privileges for paperless committees, all documentation for the meeting has been circulated to members on the document database. I propose we now go into private session to deal with correspondence and certain other matters.

The committee went into private session at 10.35 a.m. and resumed in public session at 10.52 a.m.

Interim Report of Committee

Chairman: The order establishing this committee requires it to provide an interim report to the Dáil outlining its proposed work schedule for consideration by the Dáil on 28 April. As discussed at our meeting of 20 April, a draft copy of the interim report was circulated to members last Friday and comments were requested to be submitted by 12.30 p.m. yesterday. Ten key issues have emerged which people seem to be happy to pursue. The real issue is who members feel should be our key witnesses.

This afternoon we will meet members of the City and County Managers Association. On Thursday morning, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will attend the morning session and representatives of the Housing Agency and the Irish Council for Social Housing will attend in the afternoon. That is the extent of the invitations issued to date. The rest will emerge from the piece of work we will now do.

Working through the issues presented, the first relates to the Government strategy for housing and homelessness and, as I said, the Minister will be in attendance on Wednesday. We are due to work over a six-week period so we need to manage the number of witnesses to be effective in what we are doing and prioritise who we want to attend in the different categories.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Does the Chairman propose to go through each of the headings and seek suggestions at this point?

Chairman: I was planning to seek suggestions and agree them as we go rather than coming back to items. We are dealing with the first item, which is the Government's strategy for housing and homelessness. We have agreed to discuss this with the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Kelly, on Thursday morning.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I wish to suggest a couple of obvious names. The first is Dr. Eoin O'Sullivan from Trinity College, one of the country's leading academic experts on homelessness. He would be a good witness to invite as he has probably done the most up-to-date research on the causes of homelessness, funding models and so forth. Another is Mr. Cathal

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Morgan, the head of the homeless agency which co-ordinates the services in the four Dublin local authorities. There is also a need to invite some of the NGOs but one of the difficulties is that there is quite a large number of homeless service providers in the NGO sector. Rather than us cherry-picking and inviting one organisation and upsetting another, there are some existing forums of those organisations which could be invited. There is, for example, the homelessness forum in Dublin, which represents all of the NGO service providers. There are similar forums in Cork and Limerick, which I understand cover both the county and the city areas. There used to be such a forum in the south east but I am not sure if it is still functioning. I am not suggesting that we invite all four but we did say that we wanted to get urban, rural and outside of Dublin perspectives. Perhaps a number of representatives from those forums could be invited. That would be preferable to inviting Focus Ireland or the Simon Community on its own and then upsetting Novas Initiatives, Sophia and so forth. There is also an argument for inviting one of the heads of homeless services from one of the councils that is under real strain, separate to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, as well as somebody from the Department responsible for homelessness. I know that is quite a long list but-----

Chairman: The Deputy has covered a number of topics in one go and we will return to them later.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is all under the homelessness heading.

Chairman: Yes, but I have not reached item No. 6, which is homelessness. We are still on item No. 1, the Government strategy for housing. The Minister has been invited. Is the committee agreed that he is the correct person in that regard?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Agreed.

Chairman: That is agreed. The second issue is social housing. Deputy Durkan mentioned the local authorities and this is the point at which we can focus on some of the issues raised previously.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The first issue that needs to be determined is the extent to which the local authorities are to be relied upon to provide social housing in the future. We moved away from that over the past ten or 15 years which was a big mistake. We have the problems we have now because the requirement to provide social housing was taken away from the local authorities. It is absolutely imperative that we ensure that the local authorities are fully aware of the responsibility that should fall to them in the provision of local authority or social housing. They are in the best position to provide such housing and they have the wherewithal to do it. They have at their fingertips all of the State-owned lands that are available in their respective areas as well as all of the housing developments. They also have available to them, arising from last year's budget, the resources to acquire and build houses and to introduce modular housing. We need to know how quickly they can put in place the necessary measures to address the requirements in their respective administrative areas.

Chairman: On potential witnesses for the subject of social housing, Deputy Ryan.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: On that issue, if there are barriers being experienced by the local authorities in terms of delivering what is required, they need to tell us about them. The witnesses coming before us this afternoon could certainly be linked with this topic.

Chairman: The committee has agreed that the witnesses appearing this afternoon will be asked to collate the relevant information from each local authority in respect of the issues iden-

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tified by Deputy Durkan and submit it to us. That information will come back to the committee as correspondence from each local authority.

The issue we are dealing with now is social housing and the witnesses we might invite to speak on it, separate to those we will be meeting this afternoon. Are there additional witnesses that committee members would like to call?

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: To follow up on that point, I read the opening statement which was circulated from the managers who are coming in this afternoon. The information provided therein is all bunched together so we do not have a sense of the situation in each of the particular areas. It is important that we address that.

Chairman: Yes. Deputy Durkan's suggestion will hopefully address that.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Given that they are coming in this afternoon, it is a pity they cannot bring that information with them.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Yes.

Deputy Mary Butler: The fact that the county and city managers are coming in this afternoon is very important.

They are, first and foremost, providing most of the social housing in the country. We need to ask them about the turnover advice. Sometimes they are very slow with the purchase of private houses in council estates. In many instances, council estates have been built for 20 or 30 years where people have purchased their own homes and then sold them on. It is difficult to get the council to repurchase one of their own houses, especially in the south-east. The problem is that one can turn over a house there for €95,000 or €100,000 but one certainly would not build a house for that price.

We should also examine adding extensions to council houses because a mother and children might require a three-bedroom facility. The option of adding on an extra bedroom would certainly help. We should also seriously examine the HAP scheme, which is causing huge problems everywhere.

Chairman: I would remind members at this stage that we are not discussing the issue as such. I am not disagreeing with the points that members are raising but we are trying to identify specifically what actions we can take as a committee. The first specific action we have dealt with today was Deputy Durkan's point. However, in order to address exactly the points that members are making, including those on social housing, we must determine who the committee feels would be best placed to answer those issues. I now call Deputy Canney.

Deputy Seán Canney: I was going to say exactly what the Chairman said - that we need to decide who we are bringing in and who will accompany them. I will have a lot of questions this afternoon for Mr. Eugene Cummins and his colleagues. This morning, we should decide to set out a structure and ask the questions this afternoon. If we do not do so, we will end up talking for six weeks. We should focus on what we are doing.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Yes.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I have some suggestions. We should invite the head of the Irish Council for Social Housing because they obviously represent all the voluntary housing providers in the social sector.

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Chairman: To be of assistance, representatives of the Irish Council for Social Housing will be our witnesses on Thursday afternoon.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Okay. I have a couple of other suggestions. If we have the South Dublin and Dublin city managers in today, we could also invite a couple of other managers and heads of housing from other local authorities. Limerick City Council would be interesting because they piloted HAP first, so it would be good to hear from the head of housing there. We could also include some of the rural counties which have particular homelessness problems. It would therefore be useful to invite two, three or four managers from other local authorities, in addition to the ones we have today, as well as somebody from the Department. If we are asking managers about the delay in drawing down funding, for example, it would be useful to have a departmental representative - it could be the relevant principal officer - in the same room at the same time to give his or her view on it.

Chairman: Deputy Ó Broin's proposal is to have three or four county managers with a representative of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in the session.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: We lack knowledge as to which local authority has the best performance and where is the most innovative and proactive council. I would like to find out which one it is, so maybe we should ask the county managers if they can help. I know what my own council does, but I do not know what every other council does. It is important to look for leadership within the local government structure, apart from the managerial structure. They might nominate somebody from their group who is innovative and bringing about significant changes. They would be building not on a bureaucracy but on commitment, expertise, drive and energy.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There is nobody doing it.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I do not agree that there is nobody. I do not know that that is the case but we should ask them how we can bring about real change.

Chairman: Some of that might be addressed this afternoon, Deputy.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Yes, but we should ask the local authorities to add to that list.

Chairman: I agree with the Deputy and that is effectively what Deputy Ó Broin was saying but in conjunction with the Department so that it would be a joint meeting. That was his proposal.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: On the provision of social housing, the approved housing bodies are significant players so we need to invite some of them in.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I have a couple of points to make. I would say that the problems facing various local authorities are very different. In Wexford, for example, where there is a waiting list of 3,800 on the social housing list, they do not have land; whereas in places like Dublin, they have land but they just have not got around to building on it. For example, if somebody is from a county like Wexford - it would not have to be Wexford - or a local authority without any land, compulsory purchase will have to be considered if suitable land is to be delivered quickly. It is a different area that must be considered in terms of immediate problems in turning around housing quickly.

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With regard to personnel to be invited for this, I recommend Dr. Rory Hearne of the geography department at Maynooth. I have heard him speak a few times on social housing and he might have a different take in some ways. He has put much work into this and thought much about it. He would be interesting. I have communicated with the committee secretariat but does the Chairman intend to deal with the ten points in order? If we are to deal with them one by one, I indicated that the order should be a little different.

Chairman: I spoke to the secretariat about how we might do it. As there is a very short timeframe, it might not always be possible to get a witness for a given day.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I accept that.

Chairman: We cannot afford to miss a session on a Tuesday or Thursday so we need a degree of latitude for the secretariat to try to get the relevant witnesses rather than just somebody from the Department or wherever else.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I am not saying we can get everybody when we want them. The element of finance is relevant to where and how we will get the money. It is crucial to many of the issues we will discuss in here. It should come earlier rather than later. That is all.

Chairman: Are members generally happy with that point? It is a general point and we still have to deal with potential witnesses, which is different. I do not want to get into that now, although I take the point.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We should-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I have sought to speak a few times.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: -----resolve initially to place the major part of the responsibility on the local authorities. They are best placed for this. By virtue of what has happened over the past number of years, we have reached our current position. There are no other bodies in the country better placed than local authorities. That requires money that can or has been provided in budgets and how they use it is up to themselves. They are the people who have the first charge on the issue and who are in the best position to be able to say how quickly they can do that job. If we diversify into other areas with other options, we will be here in six months or six years doing the same thing. We need to concentrate on the issue and put the responsibility fairly with the people who know the job better than anybody else.

Chairman: That is the first step taken by the committee. The County and City Managers Association will be here this afternoon and the representatives will be asked for the information outlined by the Deputy. There will be a follow-up meeting with local authority and Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government representatives to develop the exact point made by the Deputy. We will act on your proposal.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is very rarely that I find myself agreeing with Deputy Durkan on anything.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Indeed it is.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I agree that the local authorities must be key to delivering social housing as they delivered it in the past for 80 to 90 years, although there is now another agent, which is NAMA. We have NAMA as a separate issue but it could be asked to deliver much more social housing. Its representatives should come in soon after that session. The role of the

local authorities and NAMA must be teased out.

If we are inviting people to present, it is good to bring in representatives of the housing agencies. We should also consider academics and people who have studied the delivery of social housing, land costs and what has led to the current problem. I am not talking about big lectures for half an hour. People such as Rory Hearne have written extensively on this issue. We suggested others in our submission as well. I can name them if necessary: John Bissett, Professor Cathal O'Connell and Joe Finnerty from UCC. It should not just be us asking housing agencies.

Finally, it is good that Dublin City Council is coming in but there are other councils in the county of Dublin. For example, there are 769 families homeless in Dublin at present, one third of whom live in the Fingal County Council area where I reside. We have a disproportionate problem and yet there is nobody coming in from that local authority. We should-----

Chairman: That is only so far, Deputy. We have not done the list, so-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I was just going to say that either at that session or a later one, we need to have those people in because they are at the epicentre of the tsunami.

Chairman: It is your prerogative to make that proposal. We-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Yes. I did make it, in the submission, and you have not done it.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I do not know what criteria the County and City Management Association was given for this afternoon's meeting. I do now know whether the representatives were asked to come with a blank canvas or to bring all the necessary information, which I think they would have at their fingertips in any event. We cannot expect that any of the people the Chairman has said are coming would not to be able to do so and to bring with them some of the information that is needed. Many of the questions will probably be answered this afternoon and we should wait to see what happens.

I would like Alice Leahy from the Alice Leahy Trust to be invited to appear. She deals with the homeless at the coalface on a day-to-day basis. As well as academics, we should be looking at those people-----

Chairman: May I interrupt for a moment? I am not disagreeing with the Deputy but we are still on No. 2 on the agenda, social housing, and she has been referring to homelessness and Alice Leahy. I would like to finish deciding who we want to appear in respect of No. 2, social housing. We will take Alice Leahy later under the heading of homelessness, if that is okay with the Deputy.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Alice Leahy would be somebody who knows exactly what is happening on the street.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We need to talk about social housing, though, which is what we are talking about right now.

Chairman: We will just conclude on social housing.

Deputy Mary Butler: In respect of social housing and the financing of it, I would like the Irish League of Credit Unions to be invited before us.

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Chairman: Wait one moment. We are on social housing. We will come to the financing aspect presently. I am not being dismissive of it but it is a section in its own right.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: This relates not so much to a policy issue in terms of housing but rather to a practical matter that is hugely important, namely, the way applicants are dealt with by local authorities. It is about the protocols that should be in place. One of the key issues I find, which other committee members may have come across, is that if a person is on the list for a significant period - say, five to seven years - there may be issues with the local authorities, which were in the past a very good listening post, with people who were trained and able to deal with other issues that arise with families. There need to be universal protocols in place for dealing with applicants in terms of respect for them, about not discussing their business in front of other people and so on. It is very important.

Perhaps the best way to put it is to ask the county managers or whoever whether there should be protocols in place in every local authority area for dealing with applicants in the context of respect for them as human beings, how and where they are listened to and privacy. All those issues are very important. I have people coming to me who say they have to stand at a hatch and everybody can hear what is going on. There are all sorts of human issues that have to be dealt with. Without going through them all myself, we should get the managers to come back to us with a list of protocols as to how people are dealt with. It applies to every local authority query in any event but, in particular, to housing applicants who have significant family problems and who have huge difficulties besides their actual housing need, which is compounded by these other problems.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: On the issue of social housing, when we are talking about social housing, we are talking about the rapid delivery of social housing. The players are the Department, the local authorities and approved housing bodies. We do not have time to wheel in people to give us opinions - academics and people we have heard speaking well at meetings. We can find a way for those people to make a submission to this committee without necessarily having to appear before it. We need to focus on delivery, not on opinion.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: This afternoon we are starting with the local authority.

Chairman: The County and City Management Association.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: There is also an overlap as Cathal Morgan, director of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, is appearing before the committee. It is vitally important that he should be here when we are talking about homelessness. There will be overlaps as we proceed. Are we happy to give a blank invitation to the housing agencies for them to send their representatives on Thursday or will we identify particular housing bodies? I accept the point that if we leave some out, they might be offended. Have we decided to leave it to the overarching body to send who it wishes?

Chairman: That has been the arrangement-----

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Yes.

Chairman: -----at this point in time for this week because of the timescale that was available. As we go through this work programme, however, I ask members to focus on identifying specifically who they want brought to future meetings. In relation to social housing, members have spoken about the relevant local authorities with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. In terms of the people who would have an academic back-

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ground - to refer to Deputy Brendan Ryan's point - does the committee want written submissions or, bearing in mind the timeframe available, do members wish them to attend?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We have a further agenda item, which is a legal section. When I was proposing it, I was thinking of a legal academic. That is the point on which we would invite those people-----

Chairman: Is the Deputy suggesting that for the matter of social housing?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: -----and deal with those people under that section because they have an important contribution to make.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I agree with and support what Deputy Brendan Ryan said. We have all read books on social housing and people's-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I very much doubt that the Deputy has read anything that any of those people have written.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: We are working here to try to find solutions. If some of these questioners get the floor and have a point to make, they should be allowed to make it without interruption from other members.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: We must show respect for our grouping.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I will raise my hand to indicate I wish to speak.

Chairman: I ask members to speak through the Chair in order that we can conduct the meeting in as orderly a manner as possible. I call Deputy Coppinger.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Sorry, through the Chair, I had not finished.

Chairman: Sorry, Deputy, my apologies.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I am speaking as a person who has read many of the academic books on homelessness, housing and social housing. To sit here and have somebody accuse me of not having read them is very offensive.

I really believe, because we are dealing with social housing, that we need to speak to somebody within the social housing section of Dublin City Council and the local authorities as to why people in communities are reluctant to allow social housing to be built in communities and the reason there is such strong objection to modular housing. I suggest that somebody from the councils should come before the committee to identify the reasons residents in areas where there is an accumulation of social housing are set against social housing being built and, in particular, modular housing. I would like to see somebody appear before the committee from Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council and all those who deal with social housing on a daily basis.

Chairman: I will take that to be specific because we have agreed that we are going to invite in the local authorities. In terms of the Deputy's point about the reluctance and the objections to planning and the modular housing, we will advise them in advance that those questions will be raised so that they can provide the relevant answers. On the issue of social housing, are we happy to conclude?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I do not agree with the idea from the two previous speakers that we should not hear other points of view outside of the people who are already in the local authorities and in Government. The reason I said I doubt if the Deputy has read books on social housing is that in the past five years, there has been no vision in terms of providing local authority and public home building. These people have made those points. I do not think we should hear from the existing people who have a certain ideology. There is a need for other radical ideas.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: In response to that, we could be at cross purposes here. I have a strong view about the provision of local authority housing and have had all my life. I did not have to read about it anywhere. I grew up with it and have pursued it all through my political life, which is quite a long time. I have no hesitation in saying that unless we rely on the local authorities to provide it, to be responsible and to have the main thrust of the burden to deal with that, then it is not going to happen. The problems we are now experiencing are a result of dividing the responsibility and taking it away from the local authorities and handing it over to private agencies or voluntary agencies. The agencies do very good work in their respective areas but are not capable of dealing with the burden of local authority housing that is required now. The next part of the agenda is going to deal with that.

The system which is in place has failed for the reason I have just said. There were too many people with responsibility and nobody had responsibility. I spoke about this publicly and privately on numerous occasions over the past 15 years and I predicted that this was going to fail.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Given that the past five years have been a disaster in how the supply of housing for all sectors has been dealt with, I am inclined to agree with Deputy Coppinger that some fresh thinking is not going to kill us. I would not suggest that anyone should come in to this committee and talk for an hour, but if people with some fresh thinking are allowed in to the committee and are confined to 15 or 20 minutes, then I do not think that would kill us.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I agree with Deputy Coppinger but I do not believe the proposal is that we do not invite the likes of Rory Hearne, for example, or others. A session could be held with representatives from the local authorities and departmental staff on the technical aspects of the delivery of social housing. A separate session could be held around housing policy, to which people such as Rory Hearne and Michelle Norris could be invited. We should invite those who are not just academics but also have direct experience of this problem and lots of fresh ideas. I suggest we invite those people to a housing policy and law session.

Chairman: Let us be clear. If the people to whom Deputy Coppinger referred have not been included at the end of the schedule, can she please bring it up again?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Yes.

Chairman: Is that fair enough to all members? Agreed. With regard to the private rental sector, and I do not want a debate on the sector, I am looking for names of those whom the committee would wish to invite in as witnesses.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There are five concrete proposals. The National Economic and Social Council, NESC, produced a very good report entitled Ireland's Private Rental Sector: Pathways to Secure Occupancy and Affordable Supply. The author of that report could be invited to the committee. The chair of the Private Residential Tenancies Board, PRTB, could also be a good person to invite. I would also suggest a representative from Threshold, the overarching

body for those who live in the private rented sector. Mr. Bob Jordan is the head of Threshold. One of the two groups of landlord representative bodies could also be included.

There is a whole discussion to be had around real estate investment trusts, REITs, coming in and buying up significant portfolios of properties. I do not have a particular person in mind from that sector but it should be part of our discussion. Inviting somebody who is involved in the REIT sector would allow the committee to interrogate that matter.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The REIT issue is an important discussion because it is the basis for and the beginning of a lot of homelessness. I agree with some of the suggestions made by Deputy Ó Broin. Threshold runs a massive helpline and is at the cutting edge of the matter. I agree also with the inclusion of the PRTB. In addition - I do not know if it will be in this forum, perhaps the Chair could clarify - the committee needs to look at the whole area of rent controls. There was a proposal for a separate session on laws that may need to be brought in. I believe the committee needs to hear from a speaker on rent controls, how they operate in other countries and how rent controls could be implemented in Ireland. Rent control is a key issue which must be decided upon by this committee.

Chairman: I am not disagreeing with the issue but does the Deputy, or any member of the committee, have a speaker specifically in mind?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: In my submission, I suggested Professor P. J. Drudy from Trinity College Dublin to speak on rent controls. It depends on what aspect is to be taken and if we are to look at the legal question. It was suggested that rent controls are unconstitutional and I do not know if the committee will look at that separately.

Chairman: We have a section on legal issues generally.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Okay. Professor Drudy could be invited to give the committee an overview on rent controls.

Chairman: Are there further suggestions for a speaker on the private rental sector?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: If the first element is satisfactory, we will not have to talk so much about the second element because the local authority housing development will have taken place and we will not be reliant on the private rental sector, which, in turn, has been reliant on the Department of Social Protection, as a means of providing what used to be provided by the local authorities. In the course of our work, we need representatives - one at least - of the various groups but we do not need to go all round the houses for the rest of the year dealing with them. Everyone has a unique story. We all deal with them every day of the week so we should be familiar with them ourselves. At this stage, trying to invent a system that will resolve our housing problems through the private rental sector is not going to happen. It cannot happen because there are not sufficient houses available in the country to meet the demand. Hence, rents are going up. Incidentally, not all landlords jack up the rents on a regular basis. Some landlords are very conscientious and look after their tenants very well. Others are not so caring and that is the group of people we need to zoom in on in the first instance.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I have a query regarding the Department of Social Protection. I presume the reference was to community welfare officers.

Chairman: The rent supplement issue, specifically.

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Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: This is crucially important because they know better than anyone what is the level of supply and demand in their areas. They deal with the matter every day. There are differences, based on geographic or city location, as to the amounts that may be given. They relate to, say, rents in a city versus rents in a rural area. However, one of the key things I feel could make a significant difference is looking again at the rent-a-room scheme. The rent-a-room scheme is where people, usually just one individual, have a spare room in their primary residence. They rent out the room and can have a tax free income of €12,000 per annum from that rent. Second, the people who pay the rent can write it off against their tax liabilities.

There are issues with the scheme. For example, a couple cannot do it because the person must be living alone. There are issues around social welfare payments. There are issues depending on whether a person has a contributory or a non-contributory old age pension. What I am really asking is whether we could expand the availability of the room-to-rent scheme in the sector generally. Could we look at the rules and how they might change? I do not know who is the expert on this but I presume the Department of Social Protection may have a view on it. The other important point that comes in here is that, at the moment, I could bring in my nephew or my niece and he or she could get rent allowance to live in my home. However, there is no payment for my son or my daughter. A question arises. If the room or space is there - so we are not talking about overcrowded conditions - and as an exceptional measure only for a limited period of time, would it be possible for an existing family member to be in that situation? Is that possible? Could we do it at that as an option? It is certainly worth examining.

Chairman: Deputy, you are getting into the substance of it and my view-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Hold on a second now, Chairman. I might very well be getting into the substance of it but that is why I think it is important that when we are getting someone in from the Department of Social Protection, we get someone who actually knows the position and can talk about it. I appreciate that it may be detailed but if we do not get that information, we will be missing a potential plus.

Chairman: I was trying to be helpful. I was going to say that when we have representatives from the Department of Social Protection before us, the Deputy will be in a position to probe that issue.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I think, Chairman-----

Chairman: No-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: -----this needs to be looked at before they come. They need to have the answers.

Chairman: There are two elements to it. They will be advised of the issue. We can advise them of the issue.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: That is fine.

Chairman: However, the second part of it is that we may discover, as the issue is probed, that another Department or agency has an input as well and we may need to add that in at a later stage.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Of course, yes.

Chairman: The point I was trying to make is that it might not totally reside-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Sure. If, however, the Chairman ensures that witnesses know exactly what we - as best as we can tell them beforehand - are going to ask, it would make much more sense.

Chairman: We will do it. My only proviso was that it may go somewhere else.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I agree with bringing in Bob Jordan of Threshold. Another person who needs to be brought in is the acting Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan. Without a shadow of a doubt, many of the US investment funds have had a major impact on the private rental sector. The favourable tax arrangements put in place for them in the lifetime of the previous Government have had a major impact in this area. It would be good if the Minister was brought in.

Chairman: Does anyone else wish to comment on this section?

Deputy Brendan Ryan: Another element of this is rent control, rent certainty or long-term rental opportunities. We need to bring someone in at this point during this module to give us a view of international practice in this area rather than taking it out and putting it into a separate section on legal issues. We need to have a general debate on that.

Chairman: Yes, because it affects the market.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: It is appropriate that we leave it there.

Chairman: No. 4 relates to private housing. Who are our potential witnesses?

Deputy Seán Canney: I suggest that the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland be brought in. It represents estate agents and professional practitioners in quantity surveying and cost management. That would be a worthwhile organisation to bring in.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I agree. Other representative bodies could include those from the construction industry. We need to know their capabilities and how they propose to go about it. This includes the Construction Industry Federation. We should consider representatives of estate agents and mortgage brokers as well, although I am unsure whether I want to talk to mortgage brokers after recent years.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I recommend that the committee bring in Jim Keogan from the planning department of Dublin City Council. He has much to offer in this area.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: John O'Connor from the Housing Agency is another. I realise we will have the Housing Agency in during other modules but his expertise in private housing would be useful as well.

Chairman: John O'Connor will be in this Thursday with the Housing Agency. By the way, some of these people will overlap. At the meetings, we will have to allow some degree of latitude to broaden the questioning.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I want some clarity about what this session is meant to be about. As I have said already, I have something of an issue with having an entire session on private housing. Private housing is not affordable and that is the problem. It is fine if that is what we are discussing but some people simply want to increase housing supply. As I said at the outset, we can increase housing supply as we did during the Celtic tiger when many developers and speculators benefited but people could not afford that housing. I want clarity on the purpose of

the private housing session.

Certain issues need to be discussed. We have so-called millennials. These are people who are under 34 years of age. For them, the idea of owning a house is completely off the agenda. We need to have someone before the committee who will deal with that issue. It should not only be Tom Parlon of the Construction Industry Federation. We need to consider what is happening in the private housing sector, whether it is someone from NAMA or someone else. The statements from the private housing sector seem to suggest it is not profitable enough to build, that a mark-up of €20,000 on a house is not enough and that they need far more. Perhaps you could clarify the purpose of that session, Chairman.

Chairman: I will come back to you on that in a moment.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The issue of private housing has been raised. I do not take the position of the CIF but I believe there are major problems with the supply of private housing in Ireland. Affordability is the primary issue. Two thirds of the people are probably always going to use private housing. It is a huge issue and very problematic. It has not been addressed for years by any Government. There is a limit as to how much we can do but it would be negligent of us to ignore the fact that there are major problems in the delivery of private housing.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I know that there will be a section on mortgage difficulties and arrears. In respect of private housing, however, people need to be able to get a mortgage. Is there a need for one of the banks to be involved at that stage?

Chairman: I have considered this, based on the submissions, to be the physical building and provision of new houses rather than the mortgage and financing side. It could be included with No. 10. This is primarily about the provision of houses. As others have said, there is no construction.

To Deputy Coppinger, this committee is focused primarily on social and affordable housing but we have to have a mix. As Deputy Wallace said, two thirds of people will live in private housing. It is part of the big picture and we cannot consider one element without the other. Our remit is quite narrow.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The cost of housing to the average household is way above what would normally be expected. As a result, too much of the family income must go towards paying a mortgage or rent. In some areas rents are moving towards €2,000 per month. Some are higher already. How does a family exist if it has to set aside €2,000 per month to pay rent or a mortgage? Supply in the private sector does have an effect. The problem arose when there was speculation in the marketplace and properties were rolled over on three, four or five times, very often without a sod being turned on the site, to achieve an artificially inflated value which was then passed on in the cost of the house. We cannot allow that to continue because it caused serious problems. People may be upset that somebody should say that but it is a fact.

There are no circumstances in which half of the family income should go to paying the mortgage. It is not possible. It will lead to tears many years in the future. We need to recognise that the level of family income that goes towards meeting the mortgage or rent in the public and private sectors will have a major impact on our society.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Two thirds of people rely on the private housing sector but that is why we have problems because housing is primarily for speculation. In that session, we must consider the factors that have led to houses being so expensive. This is where we should bring

in somebody who has studied land ownership and speculation. We suggested in our submission Conor McCabe, who has written *Sins of the Father: Tracing the Decisions that Shaped the Irish Economy*. Rory Hearne could be there and Dr. Sinéad Kelly from the department of geography at National University of Ireland, Maynooth. There has to be some perspective on why this has happened.

Chairman: I do not disagree but I am conscious of the timeframe in which we are operating. It would be impossible to invite everyone.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: One of those people.

Chairman: I agree with what the Deputy is trying to do and will accommodate that but not everybody.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Conor McCabe would probably be the most appropriate of the three to deal specifically with land and how it relates to that discussion.

Chairman: We will endeavour to do that.

No. 5, NAMA, should probably be a stand-alone session. Let us not have the debate on it now. I know you all have lots of questions.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I do not want a debate, I just want to suggest a speaker.

Chairman: From NAMA?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I presume it is not just NAMA. I presume if there are other people who have interesting things to say----

Chairman: That was the proposal. I asked if we should do a stand-alone session. There seems to have been a lot of discussion about NAMA. Would that be a stand-alone session?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Yes.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Yes.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I want to suggest a speaker who would come in. We cannot just have NAMA on its own in here. That is not what the Chairman is proposing, is it? There are other people who have expertise on NAMA and on homelessness, who might have interesting things to contribute. Mark Kenney, for example, from Mazars, would be worthy of inviting in alongside NAMA.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The only problem is that we may have some questions to ask directly of NAMA ourselves, as elected public representatives. We may be able to come to a judgment as to what is realistic, achievable and attainable, what NAMA's responsibility might be and how it might be extended to accommodate the kind of housing situation we are faced with. I am not certain that we should have a general debate on the whys and wherefores at this stage. We know about NAMA. We have lived with it for the past seven or eight years now and I am sure we all have acquired a certain amount of expertise. There are things that are possible and things that are not possible. I think we should concentrate on NAMA by itself for a start.

Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Are we all agreed that we are inviting the CEO and the chair of

NAMA? That would be Brendan McDonagh and Frank Daly.

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I know what the Deputy is saying but there is no harm in having somebody in who also has issues to raise about NAMA.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I would hope there would be so many questions for NAMA it would go on for two days.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Absolutely.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: After that, if issues arise, that is when we should bring others in.

Chairman: If we can manage the work programme in a businesslike way, I would hope that we would have a session or two to spare so that if we wanted to bring somebody back or if something emerges during the process, we can add somebody. I hope that we work as efficiently as possible.

No. 6 is homelessness.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: What aspect of homelessness do we consider to be appropriate in this module?

Chairman: If we just reflect for one moment on the terms of reference of the committee, one of the key elements is to make recommendations. These might concern how people come into homelessness, what preventative steps can be taken, etc. We are to make very specific recommendations that might be helpful to people who are dealing with homelessness. We should consider whether there are things that could be done to prevent or reduce the risk of becoming homeless, for example. In respect of people who are homeless - this is where the agencies come in - what additionally could and should be done to move them back into accommodation? It is quite a complex area and people are homeless for myriad reasons. They would be some of the broader issues.

I take the point that some of the previous speakers have made. There is quite a range of bodies and organisations dealing with homelessness. It is not going to be possible to invite in every individual group but certainly homelessness is one of the key elements.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: We need to make sure that we are looking at homelessness from a regional point of view. A number of people have said it is not just a Dublin issue but the homeless situation is very different for someone in a rural area. A lot of people cannot even consider accessing emergency accommodation because it is 15 to 20 minutes away from where their kids are going to school. While I know we cannot invite in every single agency, in Carlow-Kilkenny and in the south east where Deputy Mary Butler is, Focus Ireland does a huge amount of work. In Dublin, they have an overarching agency for homelessness but we do not really have that in the south east. Focus Ireland sort of fills that role and I would like to see that organisation being invited in to get that point of view. We also have a situation in rural areas where people in emergency accommodation sometimes have to refuse an offer of a house because they have no transport and the house is 30 minutes or so away from where their kids are going to school. We need to remember that. Unfortunately, the focus appears to be on Dublin.

Chairman: I take the point about the regional side.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This is a difficult issue because we could all suggest many groups. We may need more than one session on homelessness because this is the Committee on Housing and Homelessness. There was a debate during the previous meeting about inviting organisations or those who are directly affected to come before the committee. We have to do both. It would send out a terrible message if the committee met but did not speak to people who are experiencing homelessness. We should agree that and not have a standing row about it.

Chairman: Let us discuss that point. Deputy Coppinger is asking whether the committee wants individuals who are currently homeless to come before it.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I do not think that would be of any great benefit at this stage. As public representatives, we deal with people who are homeless on a daily basis. We should at least be able to consider ourselves to be somewhat expert in the area. Putting people who are homeless through a question-and-answer session about how they became homeless and what we can do to stop it is not appropriate. We all know how to address the issue, namely, provide alternative housing accommodation. It is as simple as that. We need to decide on how that can be done quickly. I reiterate that the reason we are faced with the current situation is because too many public sector bodies had responsibility to provide housing. As a result, we got nothing. The slowdown in the construction sector means we are in a worse position.

A number of factors cause people to become homeless. Some are in the traditional category known as rough sleepers. Their situation is made worse by more individuals who have not been accommodated by local authorities by virtue of the fact they did not have accommodation for them coming off the list. There are emergency situations where people are sent to hostels. I spoke to somebody at the weekend who travels 50 miles to see their children, and has nowhere else to go but a hostel. It is sad and heart-rending to discuss such cases. I do not think we should do that kind of thing in public session.

Chairman: I take the Deputy's point. I do not want to open a debate. I ask Deputies to address whether they want individuals who have become homeless, agencies or both to come before the committee. I need a degree of clarity on that point.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I speak as somebody who has worked for a homeless services provider for three years. Most of the organisations which work with those who are homeless, whether they are the more traditional cases or those who have become homeless as a result of the financial crisis, will say it is really important that policymakers hear the experiences of those who have found themselves homeless. Clearly, some of those people can be very vulnerable and others have more resilience than those of us here. The homelessness service providers in Dublin have an informal network to assist people who want to be able to share their experiences. There is a real value, in terms of the committee's work, in hearing people's experiences.

Deputy Durkan is correct in saying that we all have people coming into our constituency offices. That is no substitute for hearing someone's direct experience of having to deal with a council, how it engages with him or her, whether he or she feels the service is user-friendly, etc. I would not limit such engagement to people living in emergency accommodation. We are examining a wide range of issues in the housing crisis. There is a value, whether in a stand-alone session or during a regular meeting, to bring before the committee a number of people who can outline their experiences. I am strongly in favour of that.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: We should invite agencies and individuals to come before the committee. I agree with Deputy Coppinger that we may need to have a second session.

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Deputy Mick Wallace: I also agree. I do not think that bringing people before the committee and questioning and listening to them, as Deputy Durkan suggested, would do any of us any harm. Such engagement could take place in private session.

Chairman: Somebody's phone is causing interference.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I apologise. Hearing about people's direct experiences can be very educational. We have all read a great deal about refugees. When I went to Calais the weekend before last and listened to people tell their stories, it gave me a different perspective. If we invite a few people to come before the committee who have direct experience of that, and the meeting can be in private session, we will learn from it.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It goes back to the point made earlier about the way social housing applicants and homeless people are treated. I agree strongly with the Deputy that we must articulate a process by which people are treated with respect across the board. It is unfortunate that sometimes people who were homeless are not treated with the respect to which they are entitled. A way of doing that is if they would agree that we could visit some of the hostels or hotels where people who are homeless are living.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: You cannot-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I will not split hairs with anybody here. I would like to be in a forum where I could meet people who are homeless who could relax and talk to us about those issues. I do not know whether that would be a public forum but I would like to hear what they have to say. Deputy Wallace made an important point when he said that if we were to meet them in committee it would allow them express their views without any of their personal details becoming public knowledge, if that was their wish, but it is important that we meet people. In terms of visiting places, I do not have a problem going to somewhere like Homeless Aid in Drogheda, which is a charity that looks after people who are homeless. I have visited it previously and met with people there who expressed their views to me. A forum in which we can listen to people outline their needs is important.

Deputy Mary Butler: It is important that we listen to homeless people. I spoke to homeless people yesterday in terms of preparing for this meeting but I do not believe it would be appropriate to bring two or three homeless people into the opulence of Leinster House to come before a full session of this committee with 14 TDs. It might be more appropriate for two or three of us to meet them in smaller surroundings; it might not be fair or appropriate to bring them into this type of setting. I have no problem speaking to homeless people. All of us speak to them every day of the week but perhaps three members could speak to them as it might be daunting for someone to have to come in here and tell their story.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: Under this heading of homelessness, we need to get at the key drivers of homelessness, split between rough sleepers and the other homelessness issue in terms of lack of supply. We need to come up with preventive measures. It is not necessary to invite people in here to get at the heart of this issue; the representative bodies can do that. However, if the general view is that we should hear from the people affected, it should be in private session.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: It is important that people would have the choice to do that. Many people would welcome the opportunity to come before this committee. Erica Fleming was in here a few weeks ago and met a number of TDs. It would be up to the people concerned whether they want to come in. There are many people who would want to come in and we

should not rule that out.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I hope we would not be seen to be using the people who are homeless in the context of attempting to resolve a problem. They are abused already. One of the contributing factors is where lending institutions repossess homes. We need to have an exchange of views with representatives of the lending institutions because it is an issue we all come across on a daily basis. Court cases are held on a regular basis. I would strongly support people in that position but two issues arise in that regard. The first is where the borrowers are intent on doing their best to meet their payments in so far as they can. We have to respect and acknowledge that. When people become homeless as a result of the lending institution foreclosing on them, we must be sympathetic towards them. All of us have dealt with those cases in recent years. It is not a thing that happened today or yesterday; it has been going on for a number of years. I request that the term “lending institutions” be inserted there.

Chairman: While I acknowledge that one or two members wish to contribute a second time, on the basis of those who have contributed, there are more people in favour of meeting individuals as well as the organisations. There also seems to be a view that this should be done in private session, whether here or somewhere else.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Agreed.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I do not agree with that.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: While I do not want to return to the discussion, I want to make a slightly different proposal to try to move this forward.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I would like to make a proposal as well.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: This is the first division of opinion we have had. There is a service users forum, which Focus Ireland and a number of other NGOs co-ordinate. Perhaps, it would be helpful if the Chairman contacted the person who co-ordinates that - she is a staff member of Focus Ireland - and have a chat to see what is the best way to proceed with this. When the Chairman has that conversation with these people, he will realise that some of the concerns expressed by members are not shared by professionals in the field and they are much more open to a presentation. I propose that as a way forward.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We should have both. We should have representatives and people experiencing homelessness.

With regard to private session, the way members are speaking about the homeless is in danger of being incredibly patronising. Homeless people are not a species apart who are sensitive and vulnerable. Anyone invited before the committee to speak will know they are speaking to members. They are intelligent people and they can make that decision for themselves. I am wary of the message that would be sent by meeting homeless people in private. Anyone who is invited will know he or she is being invited. Many homeless people have made the decision to speak out and that is what I am talking about.

Members are saying they are dealing with homeless people. Some are but others are not as much. However, there are particular problems we should deal with, for example, travelling between school and emergency accommodation at huge cost to the persons involved. We should propose something on that. There is also the issue of homelessness among non-Irish people. This has not featured but it is a massive issue in my constituency, which is affected

disproportionately. This is a problem for Muslims and Africans and there are different cultural issues. Meeting homeless people in private will send out the wrong message. We should invite people in.

Chairman: Can I follow up on Deputy Ó Broin's proposal that I make contact with the user group and bring back their proposals or thoughts?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Agreed.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: If members know homeless people or families who want to speak before the committee, we can suggest them.

Deputy Seán Canney: I refer to No. 9.

Chairman: We have not got to it.

Deputy Seán Canney: It is about social inclusion and, therefore, I presume No. 9 is being dealt with now.

Chairman: No, we are not dealing with it yet.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: On the substantive issue of the homelessness section, I would like to make a number of suggestions. Dr. Eoin O'Sullivan from TCD and Mr. Cathal Morgan from the homeless agency are two people we absolutely should have in. I reiterate there is a genuine difficulty in inviting individual homeless service providers in areas where there are networks. For example, there are more than 40 services providers outside the statutory organisations in Dublin. They have a forum. Alice Leahy and her organisation are on that forum, as are others. Where there is a forum such as that, we should consider approaching the forum rather than individual groups. However, I acknowledge the position in Cork and Limerick may be slightly different. Where there is a structure that represents the voluntary sector, we should invite representatives of the structure and where there is not, we should invite individuals recommended by members.

Chairman: That concludes No. 6.

No. 7 is legal issues. This can be broad because it relates to CPOs and so forth.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The first issue is the legalities relating to rent control.

Chairman: Has the Deputy somebody in mind for that?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Yes. Can I go through three areas and then suggest speakers?

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The first two are: security of tenure and sale of properties; and grounds for eviction. The third issue is compulsory purchase orders of privately owned property or land. It is an issue that has come up with regard to vulture fund, distressed vacant properties. One speaker I was thinking of was Edmund Honahan, Master of the High Court, who has spoken recently on the CPOs, or somebody like him. Barra Lysaght is a barrister and legal officer of Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. He was formerly a legal officer with Threshold, so he might be a good person on rent controls and security of tenure legal issues. The third group that could be invited is the Tyrrelstown tenants, who are currently in the situation of asking for their homes to be acquired because they are under threat from a vulture fund.

Chairman: Are there any other proposals in this area?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: We should broaden this out to include housing policy and law because it fits and there is some good overlap. Michelle Norris is with the Housing Finance Agency and is one of the country's leading policy experts with a good read on best practice in other parts of the world. She would contribute well. FEANTSA is a network of European housing and homeless charities. There is a FEANTSA Ireland person who could give the committee the broader legal and policy experience. Simon Brooke is a visiting professor of Trinity College Dublin. He works for Clúid but I suggest we invite him in with his TCD hat on. He has huge experience of housing and homelessness in Britain and Ireland in the legal and policy areas. I suggest those speakers and agree with Deputy Ruth Coppinger's suggestions.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We should invite a representative of the Law Society of Ireland.

Chairman: I do not want to harp back but I and others mentioned the issue of the Constitution and the right to housing during the debate. It has been mentioned and referred to both directly and indirectly. Perhaps the Law Society or a body like that might have a view on it. It would be worth probing at this stage. Is everybody happy at this stage?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: If the Law Society cannot do it, there is a professor of housing law in NUI, Galway who might be another person to add. His name is Pádraic Kenna.

Chairman: The next issue is mortgage difficulties.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is the area I referred to earlier. It comes in under the homelessness issue.

Chairman: The Deputy is getting his turn now.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am not so sure about the insolvency bodies. FLAC is one we should meet. We should meet representatives of people experiencing mortgage difficulties, which includes two categories of people. One group of people were busy during the recent election in my constituency putting stickers on posters and that kind of thing. They call themselves the New Land League. I want to emphasise that I do not hold any brief for people who do not wish to pay at all. It is not in our interest to hold a brief for people who do not wish to pay at all. It is in our interest and the interest of our society to ensure that we give careful consideration and support to those who are attempting to do their best and meet their payments to the best of their ability, very often at great sacrifice to themselves and their families. We most certainly need to support them. The bodies we need to discuss that with are the lenders. The time has come to have at least one slot where we can deal with them directly. By all means, if somebody wants to come in and make their case, I have no difficulty with that but I would prefer to do so privately. We all do our constituency work privately. People do not really want to have their private affairs aired in public if they can avoid it at all so we must respect their privacy. The lending agencies need to be brought in on that issue and so does the Central Bank because unregulated third parties are in control of quite a number of mortgages throughout the country at present. It behoves us to try to ensure, in so far as we can, that the rules of the Central Bank on lending and repossession and rights to houses and mortgages are observed by the unregulated third parties and that the unregulated third parties are regulated. This relates to some of the things that have already been said by Deputy Coppinger and others. I believe there is an obligation on us to ensure that "unregulated" third parties recognise the need to treat the

people with whom they are dealing with respect, honesty and fairness.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: To go back to an earlier point on the difficulties for people in getting a mortgage, we need the banks and the credit unions to come in-----

Chairman: I want probe that point as this follows on from something Deputy Ó Broin said. Are we looking for the individual banks or the banking federation to come in?

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: If we are going through the various overarching bodies, it is fine that we would do it through the federation but we would also involve the credit unions, given their role, and MABS.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I agree with other speakers that we would invite all of these people and if some cannot come, I would suggest some others to fill the other positions. David Hall of the Irish Mortgage Holders Association would certainly be close to the top of my list for this section. Claire Feeney runs the mortgage-to-rent section inside the Housing Agency and, if she was in a position to come in, I believe she would have very interesting things to say to us. There is an argument that there are specific individuals in some of the local authorities who are dealing with what role the local authority can play when somebody is in mortgage distress, for example, in terms of assisting in the purchase of the home, so it would be interesting to hear from them. I agree with Deputy Mick Wallace's point on the Minister for Finance. I would also like to hear the Minister for Finance on this, particularly as portfolios of mortgages are being sold on to unregulated funds. As we are seeing in Tyrrelstown, this is a major cause of some of these difficulties, so I would like to see either a departmental official or the Minister come in to deal with that aspect. To give a final name, Karl Deeter often has interesting things to say, although I do not always agree with him. He might be somebody we could consider.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I agree with Deputy Ó Broin. There is no doubt that what Deputy Durkan classified as unregulated third parties seem to have the power to run amok at the moment. The acting Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, is probably the best Government individual to address that issue. We have to look at whether we can stop them from running amok and if we have any control over them and how they treat Irish people who are in mortgage distress. That needs to be addressed. In terms of others to invite in, I would mention Ross Maguire.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This is an important session in that, while the people who get into mortgage arrears do not automatically become homeless, it is closely linked to the whole issue. We should consider inviting some of the receivers who are carrying out the reposessions of homes, which are then leading to homelessness. I agree with other speakers on the issue of the REITs and the vulture funds that have now acquired big books of mortgages in the market. We should invite in representatives of those like Mars Capital and others because this is now leading to the sell-off of these homes and leading directly to homelessness. I agree we should invite the Minister for Finance. Policy on the whole issue of mortgages is emanating from the Department of Finance, so he should come in.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: There are many groups that provide support for people in mortgage distress, for example, with regard to free legal aid, but sometimes the wait is very long. One group, the Hub, is very active in the south-east as well as in other areas. I believe we should consider inviting its representatives because they support people who cannot afford the cost of legal fees. It would be a good group to invite to the committee.

Deputy Seán Canney: The Credit Union Development Association, CUDA, which is part of the credit union movement, should also be brought in.

Chairman: In respect of this section, I would make the point that it has been a very extensive list so we must see what is manageable. I take it from the opening comments that either the Minister or the Department of Finance need to be at the front end of this session. We will go through the list, which we will circulate later. It dawned on me, as the Deputy was speaking, that there are an awful lot of names.

Deputy Mary Butler: We should get a balance and I agree with Deputy Coppinger that we definitely need representatives from the vulture funds. We need somebody from each section where people are affected and not the same individuals representing the same section in respect of the difficulties in which people find themselves. We definitely need somebody from the vulture fund end because that is a significant issue at present.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We do not need a commentary on what has gone wrong. We know that so what we need to do is engage with those who are making it wrong.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There is a big assumption that everyone knows what is going on.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: No disrespect to-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is a public body.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Some of us have been learning this for many long years and there are those of us who learned it lately. We have all done our bit at the coalface and we did not come late to the table. I want to clearly point out that this is not a new situation for most of us. If it is a new situation for most of us, then over the past five years people in this country have been reading the newspapers, watching television and listening to what certain individuals have had to say during the past seven to eight years. We know what the problems are and have acquired considerable knowledge of them. I strongly suggest that we bring the major lending agencies, of which there are only three or so, which have a direct input into what we are talking about and ask them questions.

The Housing Finance Agency is another organisation that used to have quite an amount of influence on both local authority housing and local authority loans. There was once a time when people could get local authority loans relatively easily provided they had a certain income. We need to hear from that part of the market as well. If we do not do that and just comment on how awful the situation is, we can wring our hands and tear our hair but we will be doing that in six months and two years. The time has come to deal directly with the issues and engage with those at the coalface. Let us hear from them.

Chairman: The next section is issues relating to social inclusion.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The idea behind this is that it would be the session involving those who are directly experiencing different aspects of the crisis. Obviously, we have dealt with the homeless aspect but I want to come on-----

Chairman: I agree because I know where the Deputy is going with this. We need to be careful that there is an opportunity with regard to people or groups we may have omitted at earlier sections. Some of them might relate to very specialist areas. This is an opportunity to think outside the box. It might be a bit more than just direct homelessness so this is an opportunity

to fill that space and address those issues specifically.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: In that spirit, I will leave the homeless section to one side because we have dealt with that for the moment but there are a number of groups who should be at this. I agree with Deputy Coppinger in respect of the Tyrrelstown residents. I suggest that it be done here, although I would not have a row about it. I think they need to be somewhere in the programme.

A very large number of families that were in the asylum system and have been granted status are now trapped in direct provision because they cannot get either private rented or council accommodation. There are approximately 40 such families in Clondalkin and the State-wide picture is much larger so they need to be involved. There are organisations that are working with those families that would be happy to provide a speaker and I will pass the name on to the clerk to the committee afterwards.

Traveller homelessness is a specific problem, both in terms of its causes and also the additional barriers that Travellers, particularly those who are single, face in accessing housing. Again, the Traveller organisations at a State-wide level would be the first port of call. In addition to homelessness - both the more traditional type and that relating to the financial crash - families facing eviction, people trapped in direct provision who should not be there and Travellers should be included in this section.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I detest the term “social inclusion”. I would have thought that the purpose of this session relates to groups with special housing needs because this is the housing committee. Traveller specific accommodation, for example, is an area of special housing need. Pavee Point, or one of the other Traveller groups, should come in. I agree the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, for example, or some other migrant group should come in on the issue of refugees and direct provision. I would prefer if the Tyrrelstown residents were not put in that category, as I think theirs is more of a financial issue. Those groups are the key ones.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: As we are talking about special housing needs, I want to mention two other groups. The first is prisoners leaving prison who are facing into homelessness. I know there is an overlap with homelessness on this but there are a couple of groups who work directly with former prisoners. The other group is those in recovery from addiction. Again, the difficulty is because of the lack of housing stock. For those in recovery, being in hostel accommodation where there is much active drug and alcohol use going on is difficult. This is another area of special housing needs that, if we get it right, we can prevent a revolving door.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: I agree with Deputy Ruth Coppinger that social inclusion is probably the wrong heading for it and special housing needs would be more appropriate. We need to deal with the Traveller accommodation issue, as well as accommodation for those with drug addiction, etc., as Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan said. Another category is those with disabilities who are a long time on the housing list because local authorities cannot provide them with specific accommodation or do not have modified houses. That is a specific category with which we need to deal.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Agreed.

Chairman: The last time I checked I was chairing this committee.

Does Deputy Brendan Ryan have a disability representative organisation in mind?

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: The Centre for Independent Living would be a good one.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: Yes.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Important issues are the elderly, what happens later in life, downsizing and special accommodation for the elderly.

Chairman: Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan spoke about those recovering from drug addiction. Much residential rehabilitation is done by the voluntary sector and is not particularly well funded. Several years ago, one residential centre, which I will not name because we are in public session, made a proposal that, for those going into residential care for extended periods and who had an entitlement to housing support but were not able to claim it, should have their support follow them. Perhaps the committee should examine that particular practical proposal. I will give the name of the organisation to the secretariat afterwards. The benefit of this proposal would allow for people to be in treatment for longer, meaning it would be more successful.

We will now turn to housing finance. Deputy Mick Wallace has several ideas on this area.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I would like to see the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, come in again, as well as Paul Sweeney from TASC, the Think-tank for Action on Social Change. We have a significant challenge in how we are going to fund a really good social housing programme. I do not believe we should be going down the PPP, public private partnership, route in which money costs 15 times more than what can be borrowed on the markets.

Given that this is an emergency, if we are to get €10 billion for infrastructural investment in the housing area, we will probably need a break from Europe on the fiscal rule. Being able to borrow money at 0.7% would be great value and would have significant knock-on effects for the whole economy, society and employment. Paying 15 times more for it through a PPP is not attractive. Europe leaves much to be desired as far as sums are concerned. At this stage, however, it is imperative that the Irish State be allowed to break the fiscal rule and borrow money from the markets at less than 1%.

Chairman: We should not get into the detail. What are the Deputy's recommendations for witnesses?

Deputy Mick Wallace: That is why I am saying that I want the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, to come before us. Mr. Paul Sweeney has done some good work in this area and it would do us good to listen to him.

Chairman: Deputy Ó Broin had somebody in mind.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I have a couple of suggestions. The chief executive officer of the Housing Finance Agency is an obvious one for this section. There is also the chief executive of the Irish League of Credit Unions in light of some of that organisation's recent proposals. I do not have a name but I am trying to follow Deputy Wallace's point. There should be somebody with some expertise in arm's-length and off-balance sheet mechanisms that may be an option for the State to use to increase borrowing capacity. That would certainly be worth examining and I will revert with a name if we can find one.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I agree with many of those suggestions. The issue is whether we are in a position to fund a social housing programme under current European Union fiscal rules.

There is no clarity about that. Somebody from the Department of Finance-----

Chairman: That was Deputy Wallace's first point and he referred to the Department and the Minister in particular.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We definitely need somebody who specialises in that. There are also academics who could be suggested, although there should not be too many. Dr. Michael Byrne and Sinead Kelly are from Maynooth university. I agree that the Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Finance will be critical in this regard as well.

Deputy Seán Canney: With the Irish League of Credit Unions, we should include the Credit Union Development Association, CUDA.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Yes, that is true.

Deputy Seán Canney: That is very important.

Chairman: We have that. Somebody said it.

Deputy Seán Canney: I read with interest in one of the Sunday newspapers about a company on the Stock Exchange raising money in London as a house builder in Ireland. It owns 20% of the land for development around Dublin. It is a problem when people buy land and hold it until the market comes right. We need to consider this in real terms because these kinds of companies will hoard land because they can afford to do so. They look at it as perhaps a five or ten-year programme by means of which to make a profit. At the same time, we cannot build anything. Deputy Durkan lives in the greater Dublin area and land is being bought to be held. There must be penalties so that people will use it or lose it. That is something on which the Department should contribute.

Chairman: To be helpful, we should look at an element of that in doing the legal section. That goes to one of the key issues around the possible right to housing as a constitutional matter. It would give strength to that type of possible legislation.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I strongly agree with Deputy Canney in that area. I agree with the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. They have a role to play and a comment to make. Each of us has approached them individually on many occasions in recent years in order to put forward proposals that have not yet been favoured. However, there is always a first time and our current position regarding housing requires a fairly dramatic and drastic response.

There are a number of agencies involved with the lending business. I met representatives of Trinity Ireland Housing Association some time ago and they had proposals to provide funding off-balance sheet. The difficulty is that most of these agencies borrow money at 3% or 4%, whereas the Government can borrow money at less than 1%. We should clearly try to position ourselves to get the benefit of the cheapest money available. That is in the national interest and in the interest of the economy in general, as well as everybody in the country. We must speak with the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform about this. As I have suggested before, a housing development bond could be floated, with a view to meeting the requirements under this heading off-balance sheet and trying to ensure we can do so in the shortest time possible.

Chairman: Does Deputy Wallace wish to come back in?

Deputy Mick Wallace: Yes. The land banking is going to come up in a number of sections. In section 3, on the private rental sector, when one strips away the clothes, one will see that the biggest primary problem with the affordability of the private sector is that we have a completely unregulated land-banking sector, which we do not tax. If we are serious, a “use it or lose it” policy will have to be adopted, and we will discuss that through the legal section.

Chairman: At this point I wish to make one or two general comments and then I shall do something specific. Obviously there have been a number of suggestions and recommendations and we will get the secretariat to collate them as far as possible and distribute this information among the members. It is important to note that while we have ten sessions set out, members will have to use their own experience and latitude when a witness is presenting to decide what we talk about, whether it is on the legal side or whether members want to drift into the area of land banking and so forth. Witnesses might not be coming back on different categories, so members must use the opportunity when we have them in.

At the very start of the meeting, Deputy Wallace was concerned that finance was towards the bottom of the agenda. I indicated that we will have to have a degree of flexibility with people because it is a six-week period and we cannot afford to say we have nobody in next week. Are there two or three items on this agenda that people want to prioritise in order that we will ask the secretariat to try to get those people in at an earlier stage?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I support the proposal to have someone from the Department of Finance as early as possible in the schedule. The rest flows pretty well.

Chairman: One of the other issues that had been mentioned with a degree of urgency at the previous meeting was NAMA. Is it agreed to have NAMA and the Minister for or the Department of Finance in here as early as possible? Agreed.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: My point is not about the order of discussions but is a suggestion that if we have time, we should have a special session for ourselves. Some of the solutions we are going to propose will be around social housing, modular housing and housing for groups with special housing needs. What we have got traditionally and will get in the future is local opposition to this kind of proposal. There will be councillors, in some cases representative of the parties around this table, who will be voting against those kinds of proposals. We should have a session about political opposition to it and how we address that as a group. It is something we should do if we have time, perhaps at the end. I recommend that we would have a short session on that for ourselves.

Chairman: With a view to being helpful to the Deputy and others, I think we will do the session as laid out. However, if we can do our business effectively and stick to a timescale, it is important in regard to issues that might arise during our deliberations that we have the opportunity to bring somebody back, to bring in somebody new or to add something we had not contemplated at the beginning. If we are going to work two sessions a day, two days a week and work our way through these issues, we may well be able to create enough space to visit a number of issues that will emerge, just like the Deputy has said.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I support Deputy Ryan’s proposal. We have to look at the possibility of emergency legislation, particularly in this area. What format it will take remains to be seen, but if we allow the objections to prevail in respect of how we address the issue,

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which is a major national issue at present, we are not going to resolve anything at all and it will go on forever. Without impinging on people's rights to any great extent, we may need legislation.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Without prolonged discussion, first of all, emergency legislation is already in place and my understanding is that it was used in the case of the Poppintree modular homes. Having just come from a council where we put through a number of what were perceived as very controversial Part 8 planning applications with cross-party consent, give or take one or two individuals, that is a matter for the political parties and the local authorities and political parties need to step up to the plate and make the right decisions. It is not a policy issue for this committee and, therefore, I have no objection to discussing it but I just do not see its direct relevance other than for parties who are opposing social housing where it is needed to stop doing it.

Chairman: At this stage I thank members for their contributions. The list of potential witnesses is fairly extensive and the secretariat will work on it. Obviously, we have to send out invitations for next week's meeting. I propose we adjourn until 3.30 p.m. when we will be in public session with representatives of the County and City Management Association.

In general, has the work programme as outlined been agreed? Agreed. In terms of next week's witnesses, given the short notice, are members happy to leave that to the secretariat? Agreed. We are working towards the priorities outlined by members but we cannot end up in a situation where we have nobody next Tuesday, therefore we need to move on that immediately.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There may be a need to change the order.

Chairman: Are members happy to leave it to the secretariat to work through that? Agreed.

Sitting suspended at 12.32 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

County and City Management Association

Chairman: I ask members and visitors to ensure their mobile phones are either switched off completely or in safe or flight mode, depending on their device, as mobile phones can cause interference with recording systems.

I draw attention to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter to only qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statement submitted to the committee will be published on the committee's website after this meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or persons outside the Houses or an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I welcome the representatives from the County and City Management Association, CCMA,

one of whom will make a brief presentation to the committee. The full submission has already been circulated to members. The association's representatives this afternoon are: Mr. Eugene Cummins, CCMA chief executive; Mr. Dick Brady, Dublin City Council; Mr. Cathal Morgan, Dublin Region Homeless Executive; and Mr. Billy Coman, South Dublin County Council. Mr. Cummins will make a brief presentation. I will then open the meeting up to members to ask questions, which the witnesses will answer. We will do them individually rather than banking the questions. I ask members to be concise in their questions and, perhaps, we will stick to five minutes each for the first question and then we can come back for additional questions, to give everyone an opportunity. I invite Mr. Cummins to make his opening statement.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I am pleased to be here this afternoon to assist the committee in its examination of the issues and challenges facing all of us in respect of housing and homelessness. I am accompanied by my colleagues, Mr. Dick Brady, assistant city manager of Dublin City Council, Mr. Billy Coman, director of services of South Dublin County Council, and Mr. Cathal Morgan, director of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive.

The primary focus of local authorities is on social, economic and community development at local level, with social housing provision, social housing accommodation and homelessness having our absolute priority and full allocation of resources and efforts. Specifically, on housing, the local authorities are continually striving to match an increasing and diverse client profile with appropriate solutions. We are the planning authorities and the housing authorities and we have a very important role in facilitating housing provision and development with the private sector and the approved housing bodies. I am conscious that the emphasis today is on how the obstacles that are currently impeding progress on the issue can be surmounted and the specific actions that need to be taken to achieve urgent implementation of measures to address the problems involved.

Let me make it clear that the local authorities are dealing with the issues as a matter of urgency and with the attention that they undoubtedly deserve. For the sake of context, I feel it is important to note the following. In 2010, there were 2,846 unfinished housing developments in the country. The number has now reduced to under 700, resulting in 2,178 completions. In the same year, there were 23,250 complete and vacant houses in the country. The number is now down to under 2,500 houses as a result of local authority intervention, which has resulted in a further 20,700 houses being brought back into use. Local authorities acquired more than 1,000 properties last year. A new streamlined process for delivering social housing units of under €2 million or 15 units in size has been approved, resulting in a quicker turnaround time. NAMA delivered 2,000 units for social housing by the end of last year.

Since its introduction, the housing assistance payment, HAP, has supported 8,000 households in the private rented sector across 19 local authorities with a target of 10,000 for this year. Increased rent supports on a case by case basis in HAP and rent supplement are now in place to reflect market conditions. Vacancy rates in social housing are down to as low as 1% in Dublin city. The first public private partnership was announced in October of last year and this will provide 500 homes across six sites in the greater Dublin area. The first 22 rapid build housing units are nearing completion and there is a target of 500 to be delivered in the Dublin region by the end of next year.

A new tenant purchase scheme was introduced in January of this year, providing opportunities for tenants to become home owners. The scheme is open to tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the scheme and who have been in receipt of social housing support for a minimum period of one year and have a minimum reckon-

onable income of €15,000 per annum. An increasing number of local authorities have implemented a choice-based letting allocation system, empowering clients to have more options and say in the process. Funding for homeless services has increased by 32% since 2014. The sleeping rough figures fell by 46% in Dublin between November 2014 and November of last year.

Also, legislative and policy developments have been introduced to respond to the current crisis. These include a reformed Part V of the Planning and Development Act, changes in the private rented sector to limit rent reviews to every two years and the introduction of free mediation. A vacant site levy will apply from 2019 and new national apartment planning guidelines have been introduced. The Government has committed €10 million for an affordable rental scheme pilot in 2016, which works on the basis of tenants paying the majority of the rental costs from their own resources, with the State providing a subsidy to meet the shortfall. It is aimed at those on low to medium-sized incomes.

Let us be clear. A multifaceted approach is required to tackle these complex issues. This needs a concerted effort and collaboration by all parties, including the political and regulatory system, the banking sector, the private rented sector, the construction industry and all those delivering housing solutions, including local authorities. We all need to understand that there are three key issues to be addressed, namely, supply versus demand, affordability and the need for developers to come back into the market. I will examine these one by one.

The first question is supply versus demand. As there has been little or no development over many years, the rate of growth of demand exceeds the rate of increase in supply. The population growth figures continue to rise, forcing a high demand for housing, and both social housing and private housing clients are competing for the same limited supply of units. There is an imbalance of availability within the major cities under pressure as compared with other counties. To address the demand problem, all stakeholders need to examine how to help people to get a mortgage to buy a home or rent. If we do not address affordability in accommodation, especially supports for low-income families, the problem will put increased pressure on public housing and funding. Caution is needed in keeping buyers with mortgage repayments or renters with rent repayments in place since the alternative only increases demand and tends to push up housing costs.

The question of affordability must be addressed. Many of those in employment are forced out of the market and into the private rented sector due to the lack of credit available for purchases and the lack of supply, thus driving up the price of units. The high cost of living is hampering the ability of individuals to save to purchase. These issues need to be addressed. There is also an increasing number of householders being displaced due to financial pressures. This is a concerning trend. We need to make every aspect of housing provision more affordable, including the cost of land, construction, labour, financing etc. We need to revisit tax incentives and credits for affordable housing. State investment in infrastructure for housing is required to reduce development contributions. Furthermore, we need to look at some of the additional costs of regulation.

The financial services market has an obligation to be part of the solution and should make credit available. There is a need for developers to come back into the market. We need to address the equity gap between the support of borrowing by banks and the willingness of developers as well as the capability to provide the required equity. Developers are protecting profit margins and balance sheet figures by not readily providing the required equity and, therefore, limiting the drawdown of credit. The continued move to availability of credit is important.

Like every other sector in Irish society, developers suffered in the economic downturn. We need to create an environment where quality developers and builders have the opportunity to share their experience and skills in building sustainable and quality homes for our citizens.

I call on the members of the committee to consider the issue of sustainable communities, whereby local authorities can plan accessible and well-serviced areas for all communities to thrive with easy accessibility to schools, community facilities, shopping centres and employment.

All citizens are stakeholders in this. We all need to adopt a culture that respects our communities and we all have a role in contributing to the provision and development of a good quality of life for our neighbours and ourselves. There are local difficulties with Part VIII provisions and there is no place in the mix for professional objectors who significantly frustrate local authorities and those engaged in the process of providing social housing. Changes in household composition and a trend toward smaller household sizes mean that the type of housing we will need will be different from the current stock.

I remind the committee of the serious challenges that all stakeholders must address as a matter of urgency. Homelessness is still an immediate priority, especially the growth in homeless families. The February homeless figures show a total of 5,811 as being homeless. Of these, a total of 3,930 are adults and 1,800 are children. There are 62,000 mortgages on principal dwellings and 29,000 buy-to-let mortgages in arrears of more than 90 days at the end of 2015. In addition, 121,000 principal dwelling mortgages were categorised as restructured and there were also 5,200 local authority mortgages in arrears. Demand for housing continues to outstrip supply, particularly in the Dublin region. Of 12,660 housing completions last year, a little over one fifth were located in the four Dublin local authority areas. The demand for housing is particularly acute in Dublin. It has been estimated that 60% of the additional housing is needed in Dublin alone. All local authorities will continue to work hard with the key stakeholders and those affected to overcome these challenges. We need practical support and solutions to enable us to continue this work. It is becoming increasingly difficult for local authorities to lease or rent properties. The number of suitable buildings available for purchase by either local authorities or approved housing bodies, AHBs, is also reducing.

The funding provided under the Social Housing Strategy 2020 is significant and increasing rent caps would have a negative impact on an already stretched market. The immediate concern for local authorities is the supply-and-demand situation. Unless the private sector returns to building properties immediately the problem, including homelessness, is going to get worse. It would be remiss of me to conclude without putting on record the excellent relationship that exists between the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the approved housing bodies, the Housing Agency and the local authorities but the absence of the private sector is a major concern for us all because without it the problem will continue to worsen.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Cummins. Before I call the first member of the committee to ask questions I remind those asking and answering to keep the questions and answers as direct and specific as possible, rather than making long statements. Every member is afforded an opportunity for the first five minutes to direct their questions to our visitors. There will then be additional questions. I ask that questions and answers be kept to the point.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I thank our guests for coming before us. What is the best way to encourage the return of the private sector to the construction area? For example, are there builders available now who can be employed directly by the local authorities, on a con-

tract basis, to build houses? I emphasise that this refers to direct build by the local authorities through the private sector. We have done this before on many occasions. To what extent do the witnesses think there are sites available, serviced or serviceable, within the areas most affected for those already homeless and those who will be homeless as various properties are sold or repossessed? How long do they think it would take to start providing modular housing? What provisions are necessary for that?

There have been discussions from time to time about the extent to which procurement impedes the speedy provision of housing. What, if anything, needs to be changed about procurement? How long do the witnesses think they would require to address the emergency in the greater Dublin area, adjoining counties or other counties if the money were available tomorrow morning, which it will be? How long before there would be houses ready for people to move into?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I want to stress that the solution to these problems warrants a collaboration between all of the stakeholders, the AHBs, local authorities and the private sector. Even if the local authorities were to build all the houses we have planned to build that will not solve the problem. We need the private sector to be involved. This is a huge solution. It is not just about providing social housing in terms of building it. It is about having a suite of measures and options available to us including purchasing, leasing, renting and building.

Chairman: Just to be helpful from the committee's point of view, the other sectors will be visited. Deputy Durkan is speaking specifically to the role and responsibility of local authorities. Builders, private building and all of that will be dealt with in other modules.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I will ask my colleague, Mr. Dick Brady, to respond on the issue of modular housing.

Mr. Dick Brady: Before I get to that, there are a couple of things regarding planning and sites ready. At this point there are 22,000 sites that have planning permission in the Dublin region. There are somewhere in the order of 4,000 units under construction. Taking applications, serviced zones and serviced lands, the total amount available would be somewhere in the order of 80,000. To answer the Deputy's question about serviced land, it is available. That is the first thing I would say.

Families will be shown around the first 22 modular units tomorrow. We will start to see occupation towards the end of this week and into next week. Looking at the timeframe involved, the Government issued its instruction some time around October and here we are now in April. The units have been procured and built and are ready for occupation. We are talking about 20 weeks or thereabouts to push along with 22 units. We also have 131 units in train. Site development works have been tendered in respect of those. Our first works are starting in Finglas either today or tomorrow. There was a little difficulty at the start but that has been resolved. Tomorrow they should be on site and we will move forward with the rest of them. Those units should be available for occupation some time in the autumn. For a normal build of that nature, we could be talking about two and a half to three years from planning to build-out. There is scope within the rapid build model to get early results.

Mr. Billy Coman: In respect of procurement, we are going to be different from Dublin city and the other authorities. The Office of Government Procurement, OGP, is working on a national framework and the other local authorities will be operating from that. There will be a procurement process but it will stem from an already established framework that will be in

place. Work has started on that already.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Can that process be shortened? The case being presented to me is that it takes a long time.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Up until 2015 we were actually purchasing social housing units because of the huge glut of properties that were available and at best value. It was not until last year that money was made available for actually going to construction. We have been looking for approval and have been planning Part 8 projects, the whole process of procurement, tendering and going to tender. The first tranche of houses will be in 2017. The procurement process is very lengthy. It is outside of our control as it is a statutory, regulatory process.

Deputy Seán Canney: I thank the gentlemen for coming in. On page one of his statement, Mr. Cummins describes how a new streamlined process has been developed for delivering social housing of up to €2 million or 15 units, so that the units can be delivered faster. Mr. Cummins should correct me if I am wrong - my understanding is that this is a devolved grant whereby the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government has to give just one approval and off we go and do the work. I understand local authorities are being saddled with any risk involved in that. If they have budgets and then come across abnormal costs, they have to take them on. Is that, in a way, making this less attractive for local authorities?

If the threshold were raised to, for example, €5 million with four units as a base number, would it help matters? Do we know how many voids exist in each local authority in each county? What is the cost of refurbishing such units? In an emergency situation, that would be the first step to put houses in place. Do we know the potential number of infill sites in towns and cities that can be bought by local authorities and on which houses can be erected?

Mr. Brady referred to 22,000 sites that have planning in the greater Dublin area. Is that what he said?

Mr. Dick Brady: That is correct.

Deputy Seán Canney: They have Part VIII planning. When he said 22,000 sites are available-----

Mr. Dick Brady: To clarify, that figure refers to sites with commercial private planning permission through the normal planning process.

Deputy Seán Canney: Okay.

Mr. Dick Brady: The figure does not refer to Part VIII planning permission.

Deputy Seán Canney: I want to know how much zoned land is within the grasp of the public sector or local authorities, how much of it has planning permission, how much of it is serviced and how much of it is what I would call shovel-ready for tenders. Is that information available across counties? Has it been collated by the Department?

I have a number of other questions. Local authorities would have had land and would have serviced sites which they would then have made available to individuals to build houses. Is that an option? Would such a plan speed up the process?

On the issue of voids, one problem we have is estate management. I have seen good and bad examples, and voids develop fairly quickly where there is not good estate management. Do the

witnesses have any proposals or suggestions on how to improve it? It is a resource issue, but it pays for itself in the long term.

Are the witnesses concerned about the fact that private property developers are buying up land, especially in the greater Dublin area? One particular builder has bought in excess of 20% of the land and his company is raising money on the London Stock Exchange to buy land here on, I presume, the basis that it will wait for greater scarcity and for land values to increase. Do the witnesses have any suggestions on how we, as legislators, can curtail such practices?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I shall answer some of the questions. In regard to the €2 million and 15 units, we would be quite happy with that. It will speed up things in terms of the smaller packages of units, something which applies to most local authorities. Local authorities have to manage risk, but if there are unforeseen risks, such as ground conditions, we will have an opportunity to revert to the Department. I would not see a major benefit to increasing the cap beyond the stated figure. I am sure that as we progress we will examine it.

In terms of the opportunities that present themselves in towns and villages in the form of derelict sites that are serviced and contributions, there are opportunities and we are examining the area. The Department will look very favourably on proposals we bring to it, provided there is a need.

Deputy Seán Canney: Yes.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I cannot comment on Deputy Canney's comments on some developers holding land and perhaps waiting for the market to improve. There is no question that land is being held up, for whatever reason I do not know.

Regarding better estate management, there are actions we can take. I ask Mr. Coman to comment on how we might deal with that.

Mr. Billy Coman: Regarding vacant units and voids, it is important to recall that between 2014 and 2015, 5,000 units throughout the country were brought back into stock and tenanted through a programme, with financial assistance from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Nobody wants to see voids in their area. Some local authorities are very good at managing that for a number of reasons but, unfortunately, a small number of local authorities struggle with it for a variety of reasons unique to those areas. Quick turnaround is important, and the turnaround has improved greatly across all the local authorities nationally.

In terms of anti-social behaviour, voids tend to be a magnet for anti-social behaviour because they are a gathering point. For that reason, every effort is made to bring those back into tenancy where at all possible. There are greater powers resting with local authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour. There is a whole process attached to it in terms of warning letters, rights of appeal and so on, but at least it is a streamlined process that everyone can follow.

Deputy John Brassil: I welcome the city and county managers. I have a few questions. Regarding the previous census, do the witnesses have figures on empty properties? In Kerry the figure is 10,000, which is substantial. The solution in Kerry might be different from what it is in Dublin but I am still interested to know if the witnesses have figures for Dublin.

In terms of the results of the census taken last Sunday night, I have a thought around giving the owners of empty houses an incentive to do them up. A grant scheme could be introduced whereby those houses would be done up and the return would be that the houses would be

made available to the city and county managers for rent under a long-term lease or some such arrangement. Is there merit in pursuing such a proposal? There certainly is in rural counties. Would it be beneficial in Dublin? My thought process is that it is much quicker to renovate something that is already built than starting from a greenfield site. I would like the witnesses' views on that, and if it is worth pursuing, it is something we should pursue.

What brings about homelessness? Is it repossession by banks or landlords not renewing tenancies? What is the key driver of homelessness and do we have a red flag system whereby a bank would contact a local authority to indicate that specific mortgages were in arrears and a problem could arise shortly? Do we have an ability in such a case to try to sort it? Allowing a family to become homeless becomes an expensive, cumbersome and difficult process for everybody whereas it would be very beneficial if we could solve the problem before it arises. We may have something in place but, if not, I hope we put something in place.

The following is an obvious question. Is money a problem for the witnesses? If they had more money available to them, could we solve the problem more quickly? There are anomalies with the local property tax, for example, whereby some local authorities have given a cut to the tax which has been of no great value to the householder because it does not amount to more than two or three euro a week per household, whereas in Kerry we have kept it at the set rate and we have an extra €2 million to invest. I believe in Dublin it would be as much as €15 million. Would that money go a long way to solving many of the problems?

I have looked at the tenant purchase scheme and I am struggling with it. It seems that the people who can afford to buy the house simply do not qualify and the people who cannot afford it qualify. It is a nonsensical proposal. Is there a need for a tenant purchase scheme? Is it wanted? Is it a model we should move away from? The majority of voids on any local authority housing estate are those that have been purchased, where the parents have passed on and the children have moved away, meaning the house is lying there doing nothing. I wonder, in the context of long-term housing benefit, whether we should continue with such a scheme. Respond and the other housing associations do not have a purchase policy and they retain houses for continued use, which might need to be considered.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Before I hand over to Mr. Cathal Morgan, I wish to refer to the significant numbers of vacant houses across the country and, especially, holiday homes in Counties Kerry and Clare. There is not necessarily need everywhere there are vacant houses, so we have to match housing to need. There are many vacant houses and unfinished estates throughout the country, especially in rural counties, but there is no expressed need for them. I like the Deputy's idea of incentivising people to get vacant houses back into the leasing market.

With regard to the question on the number of voids in Dublin and homelessness, I will ask Mr. Morgan to take that.

Mr. Cathal Morgan: With regard to the census, it makes eminent sense to use that data to attract as much property in that sector to social use as possible. I would caution against using the previous census, as opposed to Sunday's census, because the data may be just way too out of date, particularly in the Dublin region. It is my understanding that the CSO has agreed to issue a priority report on the basis of Sunday's census to make available data that will help housing authorities and AHBs to go after the property that is available.

The other note of caution we sound relates to our experience of constant campaigning around leasing arrangements and the HAP. Local authorities are at this on a day-to-day basis. There

have been numerous campaigns to attract properties from the private rental sector. We have to face the fact that Dublin has substantial constraints when it comes to making properties available. That is a fact of life and that will be the case for some time. We have made huge efforts regarding how we, as a sector, co-ordinate access to the private rental sector. For example, in Dublin, we have set up a unique Dublin Place Finder Service. Rather than having numerous housing bodies and homeless services going after the same types of property and contacting landlords, we have one unit that makes contact with all property owners. Six full-time staff try to attract landlords into the HAP scheme on a day-to-day basis. There has been some success. In Dublin, specifically under the homelessness remit, we have secured more than 180 HAP properties since late last year. That, therefore, has taken a few hundred people out of the homeless system. We will take the recent census data and we will do our best to go after properties in so far as they are available to us.

With regard to the reasons households become homeless, everyone knows and accepts there is not only one reason. It is a complex dynamic. Households may have complex social and health care needs ranging from addiction to mental health, and sometimes both combined, and may, for different reasons, be unable to manage their existing tenancies, which they then fall out of, or there may be a relationship breakdown, which is a significant factor. That dynamic has absolutely shifted in the past few years. The vast majority of families presenting are coming to us because their primary need is housing. It is straightforward. Concerns have been raised about managing day-to-day life, particularly in respect of income adequacy and poverty, which has become a huge factor for families, but the greatest cause of concern as a result of that is the level of insecurity within the private rental sector. We are satisfied that there has been substantial change from the point of view of trying to put rent certainty - in so far as it is rent certainty - in place to help existing tenants. We know that, given the squeeze on the private rental sector, families are losing their private rental tenancies and sometimes going home or going to friends, not wanting to come to us but eventually ending up on our doorstep looking for emergency responses.

We are an advocate for two other things which we think would help, if we are looking at solutions. The mortgage-to-rent scheme is something we would like to see kept in place and expanded and improved upon. We have also been on the record as calling for rent receiverships. This is something we are asking financial institutions in particular to come on board with. The principle here has to be that we cannot have a situation in which households are being made homeless. If that is our working principle, to what degree can we change the current situation when a mortgage gets into difficulty? If a landlord is renting a property out and he or she gets into difficulty, can we have rent receiverships whereby the family stays in place or goes into a mortgage-to-rent scheme, so that, at least, breathing space can be provided to that household to look at the alternatives over a period of time? It does not make sense to us because what happens then is that a family becomes homeless and unfortunately ends up in a commercial hotel setting, which means that, ultimately, we pay more. We have always said this is absolutely unsustainable. It makes sense for the State to be able to stand back and ask what can be done to alleviate this.

It is important also to say that we have not just been standing idly by. We have had excellent co-operation with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Social Protection. I can only speak for the Dublin region to this extent, but we established a tenancy protection service in the Dublin region which will now be spread out to the surrounding commuter belt. It is an early intervention whereby Threshold intervenes with the family. If the family is in difficulty paying its rent and is in receipt of rent supplement,

there is a direct intervention made with the Department of Social Protection. That initiative alone is not solving every problem. We are facing a huge calamity, but since that service was set up in 2014, 1,905 tenancies have been protected as a result of that specific scheme. Obviously it cannot protect every tenancy from falling down, because of the factors I have just mentioned such as receiverships.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I welcome the representatives of the County and City Management Association. It is clear from what they have said that they have put a lot of thought into the area of housing. I have a few questions, one of which the witnesses can come back to. In terms of best practice elsewhere, what has happened in other jurisdictions and in local authorities in the United Kingdom? Obviously we should not and cannot reinvent the wheel, but this has happened before, even in Ireland. It happened in the 1970s. It happened in the United Kingdom after the Second World War. If it is possible, will the representatives inform us what systems or schemes their research tells them worked? On that point, one thing that strikes me, looking at the 1911 census, is the number of people who lived in the centre of towns and over shops and businesses. That is practically gone, certainly in Drogheda and Dundalk. Would it make sense to have an attractive scheme, tax-incentivised, to allow developers or owners of those properties to upgrade to an apartment? The problem will be the physical size, shape and the type of those buildings but, provided they meet fire regulations, is there any reason we could not fast-track planning in town centres? Clearly it would help single applicants and childless couples, although it would not necessarily suit families with young children. It seems to me it is an obvious place where we could make a significant difference.

Some years ago there was a scheme under which local authority tenants could be assisted in buying homes. For example, I am a local authority tenant and I am working and have a certain amount of money saved, but maybe I cannot make the 10% deposit. I know families like that. Obviously there would have to be an affordability test, but is there a case to be made for people to get a significant grant to help them buy a home? That could relieve pressure for people and the house could be handed back to the local authority if they vacate the tenancy. Is that worth looking at?

I agree with the comments other people have made about empty homes, which is very important.

Many housing applicants who come to me are concerned about the treatment they get in local authorities. It is not specific to any place or time. In some areas people have to do their business in public through hatches and everybody can hear their problems. I do not like that and I think it should end. Perhaps the County and City Management Association might have a view on that.

The question was asked as to who or what causes homelessness. I have a different question. On Friday afternoon somebody who is homeless called to my office in Drogheda. Through no fault of their own nobody in the council could make a decision on that case on a Friday afternoon and that person ended up homeless again for that weekend. In such cases, should we not insist on a system whereby decisions can be made on those cases?

Sometimes some local authorities can put applicants into hostels and hotels. Some local authorities do not do that. The Department assures me that the funding is there to put somebody into a place of safety, but it does not necessarily happen. Do the witnesses propose any changes that ought to be made regarding homelessness? There should be uniformity of treatment across all local authorities. Regardless of who those people are and where they come from, there

should be the same positive reception to their needs and no doors should be closed against them for any technical or other reason.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I am conscious that Deputy Brassil asked about tenant purchase and whether money was a problem. Perhaps we might come back to that as well.

Deputy O'Dowd asked about best practice. We have looked at best practice across Europe and in the UK. It is very hard for us, representing the local authority sector, to have the broader conversation. We are here to assist and come back again, if necessary, to have the conversation. I emphasise that we on our own cannot solve the problem.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I accept that.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: We must have the private sector. We have looked at best practice. Across the world we did not have that cessation of private sector building.

Mr. Dick Brady: In comparing the system in the Republic of Ireland with the rest of Europe, we operate on a differential rent system and the rest would operate either on a commercial rent or some kind of affordable rent system. That is an extremely important point because differential rent is based on the ability to pay and is not based on the ability to maintain the properties or the costs of the service. If one is looking for best practice or if one wants to examine how we might change things into the future, it may require us to look at the basic principle of the differential rent. If somebody is in need of support, there may be other ways in which that support can be given other than through the differential rent system.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Deputy O'Dowd asked many important questions, especially regarding incentivising in the centre of towns and over commercial premises. Obviously a very strong need must be identified in whatever area or town it is. If we are having incentives, they should be specifically targeted at an area or a town and focused on renting. There is no point in refurbishing a building unless it is to be made available to rent or lease. It does not matter if it is to the AHBs, to us or to the private sector, provided it is there. There is merit in that and I believe it is a great idea. Incentives in specific, targeted areas where there is a need for new builds, in particular the incentivising of developers who are building new properties to rent, would also be worth considering.

We need to be careful in regard to giving grants because we cannot fuel the market. It is supply versus demand and the market is very sensitive to supports and subsidies. We all know the mistakes that were made in the past and we have to be very careful we do not go there again.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: We had a scheme years ago where a local authority tenant could get a significant grant - I am referring to a specific category of person with the income to sustain the bonded property. It made the difference between the tenant being able to buy a home or not.

Mr. Billy Coman: I refer to Deputy Brassil's query about the tenant purchase scheme because the two are very much interlinked. We had experience of this incentivisation before and, unfortunately, it did not work for many people and it affected communities.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I disagree with Mr. Coman on that. I remember it well, although it was 20 or 30 years ago.

Chairman: It will be open to the committee to draw its own conclusions afterwards.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I accept that, but I do not like it to be shot down just like that.

Chairman: It is not being shot down; it is being explained.

Mr. Billy Coman: I am certainly not shooting down the Deputy; I am just telling him of my experience. I have seen situations where strong people within communities, who could afford to move, did move, despite the incentives that came with it. The tenant purchase scheme has been linked with that over many years. It affords people in communities - strong people - the opportunity to stay within that community but to own the home.

With regard to the incremental purchase scheme, I am convinced there are enough safeguards within that in terms of exclusions. The Deputy rightly asks why we should sell local authority stock at a time when we have a shortage of social housing. However, apart from that, we have to keep strong people who can afford it and who want to own their home, and we can provide for that, which is important. Nonetheless, within the scheme there are quite a number of exclusions that can be applied. For example, one could exclude all the one-beds because, in terms of homelessness, single units are the biggest category of need. An area we should be looking at is the number of social housing units which have two, three or four bedrooms but only one person living in them. We must examine the provision of step-down accommodation in regard to offering a very safe and secure place for people of a like mind, who are happy to move closer to services, public transport and shopping. I believe that will free up some stock.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I have many questions but I will distil them into the time we have. The first question is why it is taking so long to produce housing. Mr. Dick Brady stated it would normally take two and a half years for a development to come about. Why does it take that long if the council owns the land? Mr. Brady referred to a period of 22 weeks for modular houses to be brought about. I dispute that it should take that long for housing developments to come about and I want to hear what are the obstacles. While I am not doubting what Mr. Brady is saying, we need to hear what the obstacles are, because that is the purpose of this committee.

An estate, Hollywoodrath, in Tyrellstown, is being built half a mile from my home. The housing started in September and was finished in December - it was built in three months because it was timber-framed housing and the rest of the work was just put up. It is now being advertised for sale. If they can build it so quickly, why can permanent homes not be built as quickly?

Why are the targets for local authorities so low? I recently met the housing director for Fingal County Council and the manager assured us it was reaching its targets. The fact that it is reaching its targets when we have a homelessness epidemic in parts of Fingal scares me.

It was stated earlier that 25,000 people are on the Dublin City Council housing list. However, the target for 2015 to 2017 is for only 3,347 new units. That is set out on page 15 of Laying the Foundations. This is across all schemes, including private rental and acquisitions. It would only impact on 21% of Dublin City Council's housing list. We have these really low targets that the councils are able to reach but they are not actually doing anything for the housing crisis. It is the same in all the local authority areas in Dublin and in those on the commuter belt - where the crisis is at its worst - such as Wicklow and Kildare. The figure for Dublin City Council is 21%, while it is 23% in the Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council areas. The problem is that the targets are too low. How management can say it has enough money is beyond me. Mr. Cummins stated that there is enough money but it is not working so why would it be enough?

The idea of depending on the private sector to provide affordable, secure housing - a con-

cept Mr. Cummins has invoked frequently - has not worked and is clearly failing. Mr. Cummins stated that unless the private sector builds houses, the problem will worsen. He also stated that local authorities can only build 10% to 15% of what is required. Can he explain that? Is he saying that the local authorities are only allowed to build 10% to 15% of social housing? Was he referring to passing it to housing agencies? What did he mean? These are the obstacles we need to know about in order to overcome them. In an edition of "This Week" broadcast by RTE on 27 March 2016 in which the question of housing was investigated, it was stated that processes to find off-balance sheet funding for thousands of social housing units have failed. In other words, if a county manager is waiting for the private sector to provide the housing, he or she will be disappointed.

Why is the capital funding to actually build houses still so low in respect of all the targets? On the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's website, it is stated that €500 million will be allocated this year for capital spend. In 2008, it was €1.45 billion. It is one third of what it was in 2008, yet a housing crisis that is beyond belief has developed since then. Why is management saying it is happy enough with the amount of money it is receiving?

In respect of modular housing, why is valuable council land being taken up with temporary housing? I know that solutions must be found and I am aware of how desperate is the situation. However, why is the council proceeding with expensive modular homes in Finglas, Poppintree and Fingal when, as has been reported in the *Dublin People*, there are approximately 40 houses, ranging in value from €115,000 to €200,000 - so they cost less than the modular houses - for sale on a property website? Why is there not more emphasis on acquiring them? Likewise, there are properties in Dublin 17 for sale for as little as €80,000. Some 14 houses in Dublin 10 with an average asking price of €150,000 are currently on the market. There were 20 homes in Dublin 12 for sale at less than €200,000 each so they would have been cheaper than modular homes. Why are they not being pursued?

I do not think we should say affordable housing is a matter for the private sector. The local authorities played a role in the past. I live in an affordable house which I bought from a local authority. I would like to see that vacuum being filled by the local authorities, so as to provide housing to workers who cannot get on the social housing list and who are being screwed with really high rents of €1,400, €1,500 and even €2,000. In his presentation, the manager said this was up to the private sector. I hope he does not think the local authorities or the public sector cannot play a role in this.

It is difficult for members to raise some questions with Mr. Morgan that we would have liked to. Maybe he could come back-----

Chairman: We can address that separately. When every member has had an opportunity to ask questions, further time will be available.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There are key issues with the placement service in Dublin. It is difficult to raise it in this time slot.

Mr. Dick Brady: There has been a wide range of questions.

Regarding the development at Hollywoodrath, which took three months, before that got the go-ahead, it had to go for planning permission and someone had to find finance, etc. One will probably find there was actually a long lead-in with this project.

Our modular units are rapid-build units, not temporary but regular houses.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: They have a lifespan of 30 years, though.

Mr. Dick Brady: They have a lifespan of 60 years. They are not temporary. These are regular houses. All of the elected representatives in the Dublin region were invited to look at the units when they were launched to see for themselves what we were talking about. We are not talking about temporary houses. The houses the Deputy mentioned in Hollywoodrath probably used the same construction methods used in the rapid houses in Ballymun. These are good quality, A-rated houses fit for families. They are not temporary. If I get that message across today-----

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Are they transient? Are they for people to move in and out of?

Mr. Dick Brady: That is a different matter altogether. Where did we start with this? Two years ago, the city council and the homeless executive saw that we had a problem coming over the hill. Families were being made homeless and the only places we could put them into were hotels. We agreed at that time with our elected members that hotels were not suitable places for families to be brought up in and we needed to do something about this. We had a three-prong strategy. Part one was to keep people in their properties for as long as they could. To do that, we made two suggestions. One was rent receivership, while the other was to give advice to people to help them stay there. This was advice and intervention from Threshold.

The second part of the strategy was to come up with an intermediate solution that would provide rapid-build homes in which people could live while we got on with the second part of the operation - namely, finding accommodation more suitable for their needs. These units, which people are calling transient, will be put in place in order for us to keep families in humane conditions while we find them alternative accommodation. I do not believe there is anything more transient than a hotel room. I believe the move towards rapid-build, as well as using it in the manner I have described, is a far better proposition for the citizens, the families and the children of this country.

The local authorities do not operate in a vacuum. All the targets we operate come from the Government's social housing strategy to 2020. Each local authority has been given its portion of those units that it must provide. Part of that strategy shows some 75,000 units being provided through the private sector by means of leasing, HAP, RAS, or some other variation. That is the framework in which we are working. When the managers say they are meeting their targets, they are meeting the targets as set by the Government.

With regard to money, the State has financed that particular programme. In speaking about money, it is worth understanding that the country collapsed some time around 2008 and the amount of money available to the State to put into housing and other essential services was extremely limited. It is only in recent times that we have started to see some sort of uplift and space in which the Government can move money. Somebody asked a question on off-balance sheet borrowing and so forth. The State has bought into a financial compact with its European partners and we have made agreements with the EU and the International Monetary Fund, IMF, relating to the State's borrowing. We in the local authorities have to abide by those rules just as much as the State as a whole. Those rules can and are causing some problems for housing finance.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I thank the delegation for the presentations. I have four short ques-

tions and three somewhat bigger queries. The presentation references 8,000 housing assistance payment, HAP, tenancies. What percentage of those are new tenancies and what percentage are rolling over from rent supplement? That would be people living in the same property but changing payment. The witness spoke about a target of 10,000 HAPs for next year but is that an extra 2,000 or 10,000 on top of the 8,000 that were mentioned? That is just for clarity. The witness mentioned 2,000 NAMA units. Are they tenanted units and are people living in those? Mr. Morgan is not able to tell us the outcome of the rough sleepers count because it is being processed but is he in a position to give us an indication as to whether it is up or down on the last year's figure? The last half year was down on the previous period.

I am one of the people who thinks we should stop calling the properties in Poppintree modular homes because they have timber frames, unlike the original modular properties presented at an early stage. It is an important difference. The potential cost is concerning some of us and there are all sorts of figures flying around. Is Mr. Brady in a position to clarify the issue raised by RTE approximately a week or so ago regarding the extra €500,000 or so, and whether that is related to construction costs or something else? That would help clarify the matter.

I have three substantive questions. This committee is going to try to compile a report and make recommendations on how to improve matters. We are not looking for people to come in and criticise some other agency or body. We are trying to identify weaknesses in the system so we can say to the Dáil and, I hope, the Government that certain changes could be helpful. There are three particular areas and I hope whoever is most appropriate can comment on them.

With respect to the new build programmes, what most of us do not understand is what happens between when the Part 8 scheme is agreed and the key is turned. Nobody has ever explained what are those processes. It would be really helpful if one of the witnesses would talk us through what is the process. Mr. Brady used the term "etc." and clearly the witnesses know this. We would like to know it too. It seems that it is one of the problems that a committee like this could usefully look at. We could see how we can shorten that period. It is two to three years from when a local authority makes a decision that it would be good to have houses in an area to when those houses are opened but it takes six months to build timber-framed houses. Surely procurement is of a similar nature and the requirements of spending are the same in both cases. How can we build the timber-framed houses in six months but brick houses take three years? It would be helpful for us to know that.

My second question relates to large-scale projects. Those of us who have just come from local authorities may have been passing through Part 8 schemes with ten or 15 units. I have picked Mr. Coman's poor head about this but in the South Dublin County Council area there are 44 acres of land in the Grange in Bawnogue. It is prime land for social housing and is caught up in discussions around public-private partnerships that seem to be interminable. Is it the case that local authorities are not in a position to put larger-scale proposals to the Department that would at least circumvent some of the difficulties with the private sector investment? Is that something that this committee should examine? If there are 44 acres of land, and one could have units in the multiples of hundreds rather than tens, is that not something we could look at?

My third question is on acquisitions. No matter how quickly one shortens the process, building the units from planning to turning the key takes time. There are, as Deputy Coppinger mentioned, lots of units available, many of which are in local authority estates and are in the private market.

In terms of funding allocations for local authorities for the first three years of the 2020 strat-

egy, almost €300 million has been allocated to Dublin City Council and €75 million to South Dublin County Council. How much of that funding can be spent on the acquisition of properties that are turnkey ready? Has the Department set a limit? Can local authorities spend as much of that funding as they want? Is there an argument for acquiring properties that are stuck in all sorts of legal difficulties but would be valuable social housing units? Can CPOs be used in such cases? Is that a way of increasing the number of units? Clearly, it is quicker to buy a unit that is turnkey ready than it is to build a timber-framed house. I am interested in this aspect.

My final question is on refurbishments. Is the delegation aware of units - in the local authority areas of which it is aware - that could be refurbished but for central government will not provide funding because it would be above whatever is the limit? Is that an avenue we should pursue?

Mr. Cummins emphasised the involvement of the private sector. I know he will not agree with or comment on what I shall say next but I just want to put it out there. In the context of over-reliance on the private sector, part of the problem is that under the Government strategy, 80% of the units that local authorities have as targets are in the private sector. In both instances, new builds for South Dublin County Council and Dublin City Council represent 17% of the total target for local authorities. A few extra refurbishments and acquisitions would bring that figure up to just 20%. I would like Mr. Cummins to answer but I know he will not. Would it not be helpful if the target set for local authorities by central government was not just 20% direct provision by them and housing associations but, rather, 40% or 80%? The measure would mean local authorities could get on with their business. If the money is there, surely that would be a better way of delivering those units?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Before I invite my colleagues to respond, a few significant questions have been posed and Deputy Canney broached the matter as well. There is a significant amount of land available to local authorities that we have bought over the years. As the communities that I listed in my presentation are sustainable, it is neither possible nor desirable to build out large tracts of land for social housing only. History shows that a good social mix is needed. We must be very careful, therefore, that we do not go down that road again. It is very tempting to obtain 40 acres of land and build social houses on it but that would create untold difficulties. It is unfair, inequitable and has caused huge problems in the past. When we are building out lands, especially in rural areas - not so much in cities - we need to be careful that there is a good mix of properties available. As referenced in our document, we must have full regard for the concept of sustainable communities.

It must be remembered - Deputy Coppinger also referred to this - that local authorities are not developers. We are developers in some instances but in the strict sense of the word, we are not. If we were to build out what we could as soon as possible, it would improve the situation but would not solve the problem. There were over 20,000 properties available after the collapse and we bought most of them. In other words, we purchased most of the properties that were available to buy and that represented good value for money. The properties that are left are either not in areas of need or are unsuitable for other reasons - perhaps they were not properly built or there are other issues with them. We have had due regard to all of that and we have purchased most of the properties in question.

I call on Mr. Coman to deal with the questions relating to HAP.

Mr. Billy Coman: We expect to have 10,000 tenancies in 2016, comprising a mix of new tenancies and a transfer of existing tenants in receipt of rent supplement.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Are those 10,000 in addition to the existing 8,000? In other words, an extra 10,000 tenancies.

Mr. Billy Coman: Yes. There were 8,000 delivered in 2015. There is a move to deal with the existing rent supplement tenants and to transfer those to HAP. The process in this regard is going to be ramped up. It will be ramped up, particularly by the wave 1 authorities during this year.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: What percentage of the 8,000 consists of transfers from rent supplement?

Mr. Billy Coman: It is quite low at the moment. I will say that. To give-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Would it be 25%?

Mr. Billy Coman: It is about 20%. I think nationally it is about 20%, but I will confirm that.

It is important to realise that we look at all options. We have to. Housing construction was only kickstarted where the funding became available in 2015 and it does take time. Local authorities had not been in the house-building game since 2008. It took a long time to build up that expertise and get the necessary expertise back in there again. It was a matter of identifying ideal sites, the proper locations. I take the Deputy's point that there is a lot of infill in there, but these are ones that we can turn around and do so as quickly as possible in areas where we have a housing need. This started in 2015 and realistically it is going to be 2017 and into 2018 before we will realise the plans for new construction. In the meantime, there are other options and avenues to look at. HAP is one and acquisitions is very much part of it, as is closer collaboration, which Mr. Cummins mentioned quite a bit through his presentation.

Local authorities are only one of the stakeholders. The approved housing bodies are a vital cog in the strategy itself in delivering social housing. That collaboration is getting stronger all the time. Approved housing bodies can borrow. That is one of the avenues. They can borrow to construct, which we cannot. We are working with them and for the Dublin region we have now developed a series of protocols for working together under four different streams directly with the Irish Council for Social Housing to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver on the strong role it has to play in terms of that.

There has been a reliance on the private sector for centuries and that has not changed. Deputies may say there is an over-reliance on the private sector and it is within their gift to say that. Whether I agree with that or not is not for me to say, but there is a strategy which has and continues to rely on the private sector. It has delivered heretofore, but what is needed is stronger regulation and security of tenure. Those are two avenues that have to be explored.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: In relation to the process that Deputy Ó Broin-----

Mr. Dick Brady: Maybe we will come back to the Poppintree thing. There is a limit to what I can say about that at the moment, given that the final account has not been agreed in respect of the site and given that we have another procurement process on the way in relation to the balance. It would not be proper to say anything. As soon as the final accounts are agreed, I will gladly release all those numbers to the general public for scrutiny. There is no issue-----

Chairman: Did Mr. Cummins have something further to add?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: On the procurement and why it takes so long-----

Mr. Dick Brady: Regarding rapid-build housing, I am sure members know that when the Government made a decision back in October 2015 to move with rapid-build housing, it was decided that the first 150 or thereabouts would be using an ultra-fast procurement system and the balance of 350 would be using normal procurement. When I say “normal procurement”, that has changed somewhat and the OGP is working on a framework in respect of it. In respect of the first 150, the city manager, in accordance with the planning Act, under section 179 said that having people in hotels and getting them out of hotels was an emergency and invoked emergency planning in order to move forward with the first 150 units. It is my understanding that the second tranche of 350 will move in the normal planning arena.

In order to address the issue of families in hotels, the city manager declared that we had an emergency planning situation. When one marries an emergency planning situation with an ultra fast procurement system, one gets a condensed first half of the game, which made the timeframe extremely short.

In terms of the normal procurement process, there are approximately five different stages that we must go through. First, a proposal must be developed. That proposal must then be approved by the Department. When it comes back from the Department, we then prepare the Part 8 proposal. The Part 8 proposal then goes through council and as Deputies know, that can take some time. That is the planning side of things. When the Part 8 proposal comes back, we must draw up tender documentation, carry out a cost-benefit analysis and essentially price the job. All of that gets sent to the Department for approval and there can be an amount of to-ing and fro-ing in that process. When that is approved and the drawings are finalised, the job goes out to tender. When it comes back from tender, an analysis of the tenders must be carried out and a recommendation made. That recommendation then goes back to the Department, which approves it and gives us permission to go ahead. We then carry out due diligence on the winning tender and away we go.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I wish to ask two quick supplementary questions-----

Chairman: I will come back to Deputy Ó Broin because there are several-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: They are directly related to the-----

Chairman: Very quickly please because there are eight people still-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Is there any reason the sped-up process for the rapid build units could not be used for regular Part 8 projects, once the planning process has been gone through? Second, specifically with regard to the point made by Mr. Cummins, is there anything preventing a local authority submitting a proposal for a large-scale development which includes social housing, cost-rental and affordable housing to achieve the income mix that Government policy requires? Is that something that could be done? Are there any obstacles to that?

Mr. Dick Brady: I will answer part of the Deputy’s question. Part 8 is a particular planning process which was dispensed with in the context of what was deemed to be an emergency-----

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is the post-planning part I am asking about.

Mr. Dick Brady: There had to be a declared emergency.

The Deputy asked a question about mixed tenure developments. He will know that Dublin City Council has been trying, for the last 12 months or so, through an initiative called the land

initiative, to develop three sites which have the potential to produce approximately 1,300 units. We are in the process of moving that along. While it is moving along, concerns have been expressed in some quarters. The communities adjacent to some of the proposed developments are extremely worried about their scale, even though the intention is to produce social housing alongside owner-occupier housing as well as another type of tenure that we are trying to develop. We see a gap in the market in that we have families who are not entitled to social housing but who cannot afford to purchase property. We see the need for some form of affordable renting in the mix. We could have what we are calling public housing which would be a mixture of affordable rental and social housing, supplemented by units for purchase. We are hoping to bring proposals to the council for one of the sites quite soon but are still working on the proposals for the other two sites. What we are trying to do is to bring such a model to fruition.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Thank you.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I want to mention-----

Chairman: Will Deputy Coppinger please hold on? Some eight other people have offered and I must be fair to all members. I will allow additional questions after everybody has had the opportunity to speak.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: May I clarify the number of sites with planning permission and the number under construction? Mr. Brady states that 22,000 sites have planning permission and 4,000 sites are under construction. Are the 4,000 sites under construction part of the total 22,000 sites with planning permission?

Mr. Dick Brady: Yes.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Has Dublin City Council the capacity on its own or in partnership with other private housing groups to meet the housing needs of those on the waiting list? I know that is a very broad question.

The Docklands was designated as a strategic development zone, SDZ. The 10% of houses which will be allocated to social housing is extremely low. I am aware of the issues, including the dangers of ghettoisation that Mr. Brady raised in his previous answer, but 10% is extremely low. Could this committee recommend that the figure of 10% be increased? We know there will be office and business type developments in the Docklands and housing will be built to attract employees to rent in the area. I am making a plea for people who need some place to live.

I know progress has been made on the turnaround of vacant housing, however the level of voids in Dublin Central is unacceptable. We know that it is costing a great deal and takes time to clear out perfectly good accommodation. Can that issue be looked at? I know new tenants want to put their own stamp on the place, but we know of cases where really good accommodation is being gutted. That is a waste of time and money. Has the city council the manpower with the skills to turn around the voids quickly in light of the Minister's statement on one occasion that money was no object in respect of voids?

When we visited the site of the modular houses in East Wall, the costs were extremely reasonable but the costs have risen considerably in certain places. What can be done about rising costs?

The average waiting period on the housing list is lengthening. Is it proposed to look again at the 50% of accommodation that goes to the homeless housing list as this is having unintended

consequences for those who have been on the other housing list for a very long time? I know that people who have been recommended from the homeless list who are not acceptable to the housing body because of their chaotic lifestyle and active addiction have held up the accommodation being offered to others. Can there not be more leeway in the allocation of housing between the two lists?

People will say they will not go into hostels because of the risky behaviour of the other residents. We have had previous conversations with Mr. Cathal Morgan on drug-free accommodation. I have been in a number of hostels and have met the staff and have checked on what training they have undertaken. Can he outline the level of unacceptable behaviour in hostels which people refer to when they say it is not safe to go into hostels?

Mr. Dick Brady: I thank Deputy O'Sullivan. I will start with the voids. Dublin City Council has a void rate of 0.79%, which is extremely low. In a normal operating environment, one would be looking at a range between 3% and 6%. Substantial sums of money have been invested in dealing with voids in the past year or two.

The Deputy referred to regeneration projects that are taking place in the inner city. Part of the regeneration project is a requirement to de-tenant the properties in order to prepare them for demolition before we build new units. The committee will be aware that the communities we are talking about, the regeneration communities, have suffered greatly in recent years and have had to endure broken promises in regard to their accommodation and their general environment etc. What Dublin City Council is doing in terms of regeneration is honouring the promises we have made to those tenants and those communities. My view is that we should continue to honour our promises to those communities and to effect the regeneration as promised, admittedly several years later than promised. We must honour and keep our word to those communities.

Mr. Cathal Morgan: For clarity, the allocations directive is a ministerial directive which states that 50% of all social housing is to be allocated not just to the homeless but also to other vulnerable categories of households for Dublin region only. There are different percentages for other parts where the issue is acute. For example, last year we achieved 1,059 tenancies; in other words 1,059 households moved out of homeless services. This was a record achievement for homeless and housing services in that year. A total of 87% of that 1,059 came from local authorities and approved housing bodies. That shows the housing authorities are literally pulling out the stops to see whether they can assist in the tumultuous challenge we face day to day in terms of households staying in homeless services. It is the view and the concern of the local authorities that while that directive certainly gave us the uplift that we needed because we are in a crisis, maybe we are at that tipping point where, perhaps, there is a concern that it is inducing. I stress that the households that come to the local authorities for assistance are all low-income households. We are not talking about millionaires coming in the door who can provide for themselves but very vulnerable households who need help. There is a balance to be struck. We are of the view that, perhaps, we are at a tipping point given the constraints in terms of the availability of property and that we may have to tell people we cannot respond to them immediately and that they will have to consider other alternatives while we wait for housing supply to kick in. That concern has been raised. We know that the Housing Agency is carrying out a review of the directive. All the stakeholders will be asked what they think of the directive and it will be up to the Government or the Minister or the Department to decide where to go from there. That is the view of the local authorities.

In regard to the concern around drug-free beds within the region and the issue of vulnerable persons who have very complex addiction needs, that is always an issue for us. I will say two

things about that. Last year in Dublin alone, the local authorities and the homeless services provided accommodation to 5,480 adults. That number does not include children. That is a phenomenal number of people. Some 38% of that cohort had never been in homeless services previously. For example, on 31 December, like a census of population night, 2,279 adults, not including children, were in homeless services. We have increased our emergency capacity by about 70% since 2014. That shows two things: we are at full occupancy and at full capacity. That is going to cause constraints around our ability to be able to match the right bed in the right service with the person to meet their needs. We do our best to do that. I hope the committee appreciates that we try to work on that day to day. We have in the region of upwards of 300 beds that we see as being drug and alcohol free.

The staff in homeless services who work under extreme conditions perform a most diligent and professional job to the very best of their ability. That includes local authority placement staff who are under extraordinary stress day to day. That is understandable because they are dealing with and working with very vulnerable households. Likewise our colleagues in State-funded NGO services are in the same position.

With regard to the qualification and the standards required to work in the sector, we have a competency based framework under our HR framework, where staff do have to have a basic level of commendation. Most staff are trained in the area. With Dublin City University's School of Mental Health Nursing and the Centre for Housing Research we set up a unique training programme which is the first of its kind. It has been in place for the past two to three years and the majority of our staff, as key workers, have to go through a training programme to be able to work with difficult circumstances. It is a condition of service level agreements that where one has anti-social behaviour it is the responsibility of the services to deal with the anti-social behaviour and to have good neighbourhood policies in place. If the behaviour is affecting the neighbourhood we can do two things; either the person is transferred to an alternative facility to try to deal with the immediate issue or there is some level of sanction involved. However, our sanctions can only go so far because fundamentally the situations usually involve people who are quite vulnerable because they are in a treatment programme and they may be experiencing a level of chaos on a particular day. This is something we try to work with and ameliorate on a day to day basis.

Mr. Dick Brady: A question was raised on the difference in cost between the units. In 2014 we suggested the possibility of using modular or rapid build housing. There was outcry across the country. Everybody assumed that we meant school prefabs that we all remember as being disastrous places in which we spent some, if not all, of our youth. In order to dispel some of those views we set up - with the industry - a demonstration project to contribute to the debate on the use of modular rapid build housing. Six companies from the industry, to which I am very grateful, came forward and said they would take part in the demonstration. We set aside a site and set up the demonstration project to allow the public and politicians to have a look at what might be possible with modular rapid build housing and to dispel some of the rumour or fears regarding the view of "old school prefab". The Government had a look at that, and in fairness to the Minister, the Taoiseach and other politicians who came to see the site, they said they would move forward with the idea, with a couple of additional stipulations. One of those stipulations was that the lifespan of a building had to be 60 years. The second stipulation on the advice note was that the units must comply with all building standards. Another requirement was that we could not use the name "modular" because there were other building technologies that could be brought to bear on the situation which might be just as good as a modular build. With these in mind the tenders went out and we are now where we are.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I thank the County and City Management Association and their colleagues who are attending today. Their presentation was very informative. I have a few questions. With regard to the 2,542 houses still vacant, are these in the Dublin area and how long will it be before they can be put back into use? What would the cost be and do the councils have the money to do this?

Mr. Dick Brady: Those figures do not relate to local authority houses.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Okay.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: There are quite a number of unfinished housing estates around the country and in areas where, unfortunately, there is no need. It is very sad to see some of these houses empty and in a derelict state. However, there is no demonstrated need for them. Having said that, in the case of all local authorities, extra moneys have been made available to try to bring them back into use in order that they will be available at some stage when the need is generated. It is still a significant issue to be addressed by all. Again, this is something we had to pick up. We did not build these houses, but we will finish them off.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I wish to pay tribute to the city council and the work it has done on the regeneration of St. Michael's estate, Fatima Mansions, St. Teresa's Gardens, Dolphin House and elsewhere in my area, in view of the number of people the council has had to re-house. People's homes were being taken away, so they were priority cases - I understand that very well. I compliment the council on its work. Great work has been done in moving people around in all of these complexes and it is continuing in Dolphin House.

Reference was made to the public private partnership for 500 homes. I do not mind whether we call them quick-fix houses or timber houses - it does not really matter. Are they all social housing units?

Mr. Dick Brady: My understanding is that the 500 units are contained in the social housing strategy and the PPP has been set up to deliver them. To my understanding, all 500 will be social houses. They need not necessarily be rapid-build; they could be traditional build. A process is starting or has already started for the procurement of those units.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: My next question is for Mr. Morgan and relates to the figure of 5,811 homeless people. How many of these are family units? Mr. Morgan referred to a certain number of adults and children, although I do not remember the exact figures. Mr. Morgan said there were 5,811 homeless and 1,800 of these were children. How many of them are family units?

Mr. Cathal Morgan: I will clarify that. The figures I gave were the end-of-year totals for placements in 2015. The local authorities placed 5,480 individuals. Obviously there are family cohorts within that, but that is the total number of individuals who occupied an emergency bed throughout the year.

I will take it one step further. Committee members should keep in mind that many households come into homeless services and, for different reasons, move on either into tenancies, back home or into treatment. It is dynamic and there is considerable churn within homeless services. Let us consider the figures for one night, 31 December 2015. We had 2,279 adults in homeless services. Within that figure there are adults and their child dependants. At the moment we have 790 families in emergency accommodation. In total, the adults have 1,616 child dependants. The kind of accommodation we provide in order to avoid the need to sleep rough

includes commercial hotel settings - we do not want to be doing this but we do not want families to be on the streets either. I am sorry about all the statistics - they are available on *homelessdublin.ie* for anyone who wants to see them. Anyway, of the 790 families, 581 are in commercial hotel settings. By the way, they are getting support from homeless action teams with a view to helping them to move on. The remaining 209 families are in what we call supported lodgings. In other words, they are in supported temporary accommodation where we have staff on-site. That is how the figures break down.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: My next question relates to something Mr. Coman said. One thing the city council did very well in the past was to build really nice senior citizen complexes. Are there plans in the councils to start building more senior citizen complexes? There are many people living in houses that basically do not suit their needs anymore. These people would be willing to move into smaller accommodation, especially if it was well built, under some kind of financial contribution arrangement. I could name many complexes but there is no need. I believe that is the way to go. It would release family homes into the market.

How much approximately do the 5,221 people in arrears owe? Is it thousands or millions of euro? How much is Mr. Morgan spending on homelessness at present? How much does it cost to put the voids back into use? That is a big issue for many.

The accommodation for people who have been on the housing list for 12 or 13 years does not suit the size of their families because the latter are older now. What chance do they have of being housed? They seem to be going further down rather than further up the list as a result of all the other people coming onto it.

Mr. Billy Coman: I shall speak for South Dublin County Council. We are preparing a big proposal for the Department. That emanates from shock at the number of people living alone in large units when there is a family need. We are working on that brief. This is nothing new. As the Deputy says, there are good examples of projects already. Age Friendly Ireland has worked with Louth County Council on the sustainable living integrating older adults with technological regeneration, SLIOTAR, programme and the Great Northern Haven housing project. These are good examples that can be copied.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I do not have the exact figure for the arrears but I can get it. It is a significant sum of money. We are very conscious of both it and the potential issues coming down the line.

Mr. Cathal Morgan: At the end of 2015 we had spent just over €70 million on homeless and housing support services. Just over €48 million of that came from the central Exchequer under the section 10 funding that comes to the Dublin local authorities. The balance is made up by the contribution from the local authorities. That expenditure relates only to the local authorities. The Health Service Executive, HSE, spends in the region of €15 million on the care side. Often people assume that is all spent on emergency accommodation and well over 40% is spent on hotels, supported accommodation and private emergency accommodation settings. However, what we spend in other areas is often missed. We spent €4.5 million on tenancy sustainment and resettlement services. We have long-term supported accommodation in the region that is made available to households who are deemed and assessed as not being able to live independent lives, even with visiting supports. In other words, staff are there on a 24-hour basis working with the tenants to assist them in their day-to-day lives. We spent just over €6 million last year on long-term supported accommodation. We spent €4.3 million on day services providing food, information and advice, ranging from Threshold to Brother Kevin's

day centre, Merchant's Quay and Focus Ireland. There are different categories of service that local authorities fund in order to do different things, from prevention through to emergency responses, to assisting households back into tenancies with support.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I wish to make the important point that not everyone on the housing list, especially in the rural counties, wants social housing. People are on the housing list for many reasons. A significant number of individuals on the list are perfectly happy to be and remain in private rented accommodation.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I welcome the delegation and thank them for coming in. Mr. Cummins says social and private housing clients are competing for the same limited supply. Does he agree that this is directly linked to the fact that we have been using private housing to satisfy the demand for social housing through the rent supplement scheme?

Mr. Cummins said we need to make every aspect of housing provision more affordable, and referred immediately to the cost of land. Does the local authority have powers to engage in compulsory purchase? He might fill us in on that. He also said that the financial services market has an obligation to be part of the solution and make credit available. I do not think the State is very good at telling the private banks what to do and it is probably not going to start now. Does Mr. Cummins not think that the State should be borrowing money itself, in order to find the money to do this?

Mr. Cummins said that we need to create an environment in which quality developers and builders have the opportunity to share their experience and skills in building sustainable and quality homes for our citizens. I am wondering how we can assess what a quality builder is. I wonder as well if Mr. Cummins is actually over-concentrated on the big developer and on going for the big bang effect. There are an awful lot of small city and country sites and I cannot help feeling that they are not being targeted nearly as much. There are plenty of very small builders in the country who are well able to build.

Mr. Cummins talked about the new tenant purchase scheme as if it were something very positive. There was some recent research in Britain which showed that over the last 30 years the scheme has not really worked at all. Firstly, 40% of the units sold through the scheme were not replaced, so stock was reduced, and secondly 40% of them ended up in the hands of landlords who were renting them back to tenants again. The State was actually supplementing the rent, so they were back to stage one.

Mr. Cummins has argued that unless the private sector returns to building properties immediately the problem, including homelessness, is going to get worse. Of course it would help things if they returned to the market, but does Mr. Cummins not agree that the State sector has actually been waiting for the last six or seven years, or more, for the private sector to get involved? The philosophy seems to have been that the markets will sort it out. Sadly the markets have not sorted it out and we need the State to get back in to building and providing houses.

The witnesses might be able to tell me how much social housing has been delivered in the Docklands area since 2008. There is a lot of high-end commercial property being built down there. Does the local authority have the wherewithal to insist on residential rather than commercial development in order to help alleviate our housing crisis in areas like this?

Could Mr. Cummins fill me in on why the regeneration of O'Devaney Gardens has not progressed? What is the plan and what do the witnesses expect to happen in the near future?

It was mentioned that they feel local authorities should not be building 100% social housing on any site. I agree completely because it creates ghettoisation and the social problems that go with that. Are there any plans to put 100% social housing on any site in Dublin city in the near future?

We were talking earlier about procurement challenges. I am fairly well aware of how long it takes to make all this happen. I did a bit of building in my time and I know plenty of the challenges involved. Do the witnesses think the local authorities are understaffed?

Chairman: Thank you, Deputy Wallace. Just before the witnesses answer, a number of specific questions were asked. If the information is not readily available, could the witnesses forward it on to the committee for Deputy Wallace?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Of course. I will deal with some of the questions and will then invite my colleagues in to deal with the rest, in so far as we can and based on information we have. In respect of the private rental sector, the economy, as we all know, has improved significantly and a lot of emigrants are returning to the country, thankfully. They are competing for rental properties. People who, in the past, were in a position to be able to save for and buy properties are, as a result of affordability and income issues, not in a position to do so and are also competing for properties that heretofore were used for social housing. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many people, including immigrants who have returned and people who cannot afford to buy properties, are all looking for the limited number of properties available. In some cases, both partners are working but such couples are forced to rent because of the issues around affordability.

On State borrowing and why the Government would not return to borrowing, it is important to have approved housing bodies because they can borrow money. Government borrowing for housing is regarded as on-balance sheet borrowing and is subject to the restrictions to which Mr. Brady referred.

I entirely agree with Deputy Wallace on quality builders. Everything is not done by large developers. We are all aware of smaller builders, and they perhaps build the best properties. What I mean by quality builders are those who adhere to planning permission, build according to the building regulations, have the correct certification and supervision and sign off on projects. My colleagues will address the issue.

On the question of whether to have 100%, 10% or 15% build-out, it depends on the site and its context. A small infill site in Dublin city, for example, could be built out by 100% because of the broader context and mix of properties in the general area, whereas a similar site in a town where there is a need for housing would not be so built out because there would not be a mix of tenure in the broader area and that might lead to the problems to which Deputy Wallace referred.

Mr. Dick Brady: Deputy Wallace referred to scale, in terms of the tenure mix and so forth. If one was building 700 houses, one might have an issue in regard to the mix of tenure, but if one were building or acquiring smaller numbers that might not be the case. We need to carry out some research.

It is assumed - an assumption I do not share - that all social tenants have certain characteristics which means they tend towards antisocial activity and the bad parts of ghettoisation. I have been involved in housing for a long time. From my experience, the vast majority of families and individuals who come to us for services are decent people who are trying to get from A to

Z in the same manner as every other family.

In terms of ensuring we have the best quality estates possible, we need to consider other elements besides building houses. We need to consider whether the services families need are in place when they are housed. In other words, there needs to be a health system, schools and shops in place. Some of our greatest failures have been a result of building large numbers of houses on the sides of hills in the suburbs of Dublin without putting in place the necessary social and other infrastructure to support family life. The question of ghettoisation is bigger than numbers and needs to be examined in that way.

I refer to O'Devaney Gardens. I mentioned that we looked at three possible sites in terms of bringing forward innovative ideas. These sites will have both social and purchased units and hopefully we will get to the stage where we can carry out the necessary work in respect of affordable renting because I believe a sector of the population is suffering as a result of the fact that the people in question do not have choices in that area. We will bring forward the proposals in this regard to our council within the next month or so. They are being worked on at present. The Deputy asked specific questions on the docklands but I do not have the numbers to hand.

Chairman: Mr. Brady can forward those figures to the secretariat and they will be passed on directly.

Deputy Mick Wallace: My final question was on understaffing.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: We came from a position where we stopped building some years ago. We were leasing properties and buying the properties that were built for us. All of the housing units across the country shrunk in terms of the number of people in them. Last year, all local authorities that sought additional staff members were allowed to have them and I believe that we have sufficient resources at present. However, as we gear up to meet the demand of the private sector, to plan with it, to co-ordinate and to help it and other stakeholders, we probably will need additional resources. That said, I am satisfied at this point that the issue of resources is not an inhibitor to the delivery of housing units and social housing units.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Cummins and call Deputy Funchion.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I remind the witnesses of two of my questions that were not answered; I am not inventing new ones. One was about compulsory purchase and whether local authorities have that power and the other was about the docklands. Foreign investment funds obviously have bought a lot of land there on which they are eager to put high-end offices, as is the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA. Do local authorities have the right or the wherewithal to insist on more residential units if they come seeking high-end offices?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: On the question of lands, we have sufficient lands at present to build out. Consequently, the availability of land is not an immediate problem. As for using our compulsory purchase order, CPO, powers, we do not need to exercise them at present.

On the docklands issue-----

Mr. Dick Brady: As the docklands area has been defined as a strategic development zone, SDZ, it has a full planning scheme for its development. It will be developed in accordance with the planning scheme and with the planning provisions. If proposals come in that are in accordance with the planning scheme, I assume they will get permission. I assume that will be the position with regard to the docklands.

COUNTY AND CITY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: To clarify, is Mr. Cummins stating there is enough land in all the local authorities for housing or was he referring to the docklands alone? He stated, “we have sufficient lands at present to build out.”

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I was not referring to the docklands. That was general.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Because this is blatantly not the case in, for example, Fingal.

Chairman: We can come back to Deputy Coppinger in a moment.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: It is just a very important statement.

Chairman: While we can come back to the Deputy, to be fair I wish to afford the other members who have offered to make contributions an opportunity to so do.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Yes, I know. It is just-----

Chairman: Deputy Funchion is next, followed by Deputies Butler and Ryan.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: I thank the witnesses for their attendance. At the outset, I must disagree completely with the statement that some people are content to stay on the list and to be in receipt of rent supplement. I represent a constituency that is both rural and urban in nature, comprising the two counties of Carlow and Kilkenny. In the seven years during which I have been a councillor, I have never met a single person who wished to remain on the list and was content to be in receipt of rent supplement. While many of my questions have been addressed, the point has been made that there are sufficient resources. I have a question about delays and do not refer simply to building social housing. While land is available in some areas, I also refer to a huge delay in buying social housing. It sometimes is taking six, seven or eight months when local authorities buy houses for people. What is the delay in this regard? I would have thought it was a staff resource issue because with the embargoes in recent years, staff have been stretched. If the witness is saying that there are sufficient resources, however, then how does it take a local authority six to eight months to purchase a house? It may not be a house that needs work to be done on it because it is in perfect condition, so what is causing that delay?

I wonder what the witness sees as the obstacles to the mortgage-to-rent scheme. Many people would be perfect applicants for that scheme, yet they do not seem to qualify. The problem comes back to housing. It could be a standard three-bedroom house with a couple living there whose family have moved out. They are being told that they are over-accommodated so they do not qualify for the mortgage-to-rent scheme. Common sense is required for such matters.

Chairman: I am sorry to interrupt but some mobile phones are ringing again.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: People in the system are going to court and their eviction cases are repeatedly adjourned, so they have that stress and worry. They could be perfect applicants for the mortgage-to-rent scheme, yet they might not qualify because of something silly like having an extra bedroom. The reality is different, however, because families can return home with grandchildren. We need to start thinking outside the box.

That brings me to the other point concerning voids. I am not talking about cases where major work must be done, but where minor works are due to be done. People might have the ability to do such work themselves with family and friends, so they can take the house as it is. Why can something like that not be examined? I am not referring to big works that would saddle someone with a large debt. If it will take a local authority a long time to turn over a house,

the person involved should be allowed to do it. We could then come up with some agreement whereby they would have the first one or two months rent free. We should think of things like that which may not fit into any particular category or box, but they are common sense matters. People often say they will take the house and their family or friends can help them bring it up to a certain standard. Much of the time only minor works are required. We need to consider things like that, so I would like to hear the witnesses' opinions on them. How can we cut out some of the red tape involved, particularly given the way things are at the moment, in order to try to speed up the whole system?

Mr. Dick Brady: I will deal with the first issue concerning the length of time it takes to purchase a house. Anybody who has been engaged in purchasing a house will know that the conveyancing process can be long and tortuous. Many delays in the acquisition or purchase of housing units are down to the conveyancing position and the hurdles one must surmount in order to exchange contracts and get clear title. A good deal of the delay therefore is down to the conveyancing process. Anyone who has bought a house will know that it can be a difficult and trying time.

The small works idea has been and is being used, for example, as regards interior painting of social housing. The city council scheme allows a tenant to take the house and paint the interior to their own liking. Generally speaking, we have found that when somebody walks into a social house they have been allocated, one of the first things they do is get a paintbrush and paint the interior to their own liking. There is a scheme within the city council that allows such work.

There are other issues concerning other works within a house. Given the mad world we live in, many things end up actionable. If something happens later on, one may end up with difficulties. However, there are works that can and should be done. Interestingly, some people do not want to avail of an allowance to paint their houses. It is available and we could do other common-sense things, as the Deputy said.

Mr. Billy Coman: No local authority sets out to make anybody homeless. That does not make sense. It is about keeping people in their homes.

The Deputy referred to the mortgage-to-rent issue. There are two schemes. There is the general mortgage-to-rent scheme, through which we deal with financial institutions. It can be difficult to engage with many of them. It is a difficult process and there are options to simplify and streamline it but, equally, work could be done on the mortgage-to-rent scheme for local authority loans. In our experience, the local authority scheme is voluntary and people often do not take that option because it effectively means giving up home ownership to rent instead. Work can be done on these processes to simplify them.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the CCMA members for attending, as the meeting has been informative. Much of our time has been given over to discussing issues in Dublin, with which I have no problem because that is where the need is greatest. Have our guests considered moving families with the greatest need in Dublin to more rural areas where there is less demand for housing? I represent Waterford city and county and, therefore, I am conscious of the urban-rural divide. Is it a rule of thumb that each local authority can make up its mind on purchasing private houses? I refer to council estates that might have been built 20 or 30 years ago. Residents may have purchased their homes over time but they are now up for sale. These are usually three-bed semi-detached houses or bungalows that are on sale for €95,000 or €100,000. It would be much cheaper to buy them rather than try to turn over a sod. The Waterford local authorities are only inclined to buy them if people present with health issues. They are not

bought to increase housing stock.

In the case of single mothers with three or four children in a two-bedroom house, would there be merit in extending the property rather than waiting for, say, two years until a three-bedroom house becomes available for them? Extensions are only built for people experiencing medical issues but they are not done to enable people to remain in their homes. For example, they could have been living in a nice house in a nice area for ten years but their family circumstances have changed and they need an additional room or bathroom. Is there merit in considering extension and refurbishment as a solution? I am trying to propose solutions that offer a quicker fix than building housing estates. I acknowledge this proposal may only help six or seven families in an area but that could make a big difference.

HAP has worked well but there is a problem in the south. The rent supplement rate in Waterford is €525 a month while it is €590 in Kilkenny or when one travels over the border to Cork, it is €750. It is difficult for people to rent houses in Waterford for €525. The average rent is €650. This results in people on low incomes trying to pay the additional €125 or €150 out of their pockets. Landlords are in a win-win situation because their money is secure but it is difficult to get them to sign up for rent supplement because many of the tenancies are not above board.

Mr. Billy Coman: I will deal with the HAP first. It is different. In some areas where it is difficult to get at the rent caps, allowances have been made to local authorities to get a percentage above the cap to facilitate people on a case-by-case basis. I am certainly not here to speak for the Department but I know it is evaluating right across the country. I am sure Waterford will be part of that review. The review will see what assistance is needed there and what is applicable in Dublin and some other areas.

Deputy Mary Butler: It is different.

Mr. Billy Coman: That may be of value as well. It is something that is being looked at.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: The point we are making here today is that there is an availability issue and Waterford has a particular problem. The point was made about a three-bed house being available and being cheaper, perhaps €90,000 or less. There are two issues - there should be a need and it should not upset the mix of tenure. We have to be very careful there. There is a mechanism and the Department is quite willing to support us in it if there are properties that are good value, if there is a need, and if the mix of tenure is correct.

On the very valid point made about building on, there is an anomaly there and we are working on it. It happens if there is a medical issue. We are aware of that and we are looking into it at the moment.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: On the new streamlined process referred to in terms of delivering social housing units of under 15 units or €2 million, can Mr. Cummins expand on that and tell us what that will deliver and what its potential is? What is the lead time on the public-private situation delivering 500 houses? Are there any more in the pipeline? In terms of the homeless units putting people in hotels and guest houses, is there any flexibility for people in that situation to find solutions for themselves? If somebody became homeless in Rush, for example, and there is a proposal to put them in a hotel up at the airport, it would be more satisfactory for those people if they could find something local.

Mr. Cummins outlined the legislative policy development in his paper which is a context for

much of what he had to say. In terms of delivery of units, is there any legislative barrier that prevents him from delivering? Is there anything he would do tomorrow by way of legislation which would help him to do his job better? Mr. Brady would know Fingal of old. There used to be a scheme in place there where the local authority would provide sites to people and young couples who were anxious to build their own houses and could do so if they got a reasonable site. Is there any legislation required for that to be done or could it be rolled out?

Mr. Cummins commented on the Threshold community welfare officer and the flexibility around that in terms of increasing rent supplement or HAP to reflect market conditions. It is my experience in Fingal that it is working very much on a case-by-case basis. Many people and bodies I talk to on housing say that, generally, it is not working across Dublin. What is Mr. Cummins's sense of that? If it is working in some parts of Fingal, why is it not working elsewhere? I am not referring to areas where there might be a receiver, but in a normal situation? Given that it might be working on a case-by-case basis, is there justification for increasing the rent caps across the board?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: It is a question that we deal with on a continual basis. One of the points I made in the presentation was that caution is needed in helping owners with mortgage repayments or renters with rent. As it is such a tight supply and demand market at the moment, if we interfere in the market we will make it worse and we will drive rents up across the country and actually make it worse. I would not be in favour of a broad increase for that reason because it would make it worse for a broader reach of people. Again, the landlords would be the winners and the potential tenants would be the losers. There is a targeted approach and it has success. Mr. Morgan might come in on that later on. It is specifically targeted where people are in danger of becoming homeless. That was the primary reason it was introduced and it has worked very successfully.

In terms of legislation and interventions that might be made, there is one problem we have as local authorities. I say this with all due respect to all the tenants who work, as we do, to the legislation that is there. It is very frustrating for us, as local authorities and housing authorities, that when we make a house available to someone, they say they do not want it there because it is not where they wanted. On the issue of choice, one would imagine that people in their need to have a house and a home would take a house and a home anywhere within reason and certainly within the county. That is a major issue in terms of refusal after refusal. One of the reasons it can take so long to let a property is that having gone through the process, the prospective tenant does not want it and we have to go through it all again. The constant refusal is a major problem for us. As some of the members here today have said, if a house was not available in Dublin, why would someone not come down to Roscommon? Something might be done in terms of limiting the choices to the county. When I worked in Galway, people had a multiplicity of choices, which did not help things.

I ask Mr. Morgan to come back in regarding the-----

Mr. Dick Brady: I might comment before Mr. Morgan comes in. The Deputy asked in essence about small builders and serviced sites. That has worked extremely well in the past in providing accommodation for a certain cohort of the population. They have never delivered major numbers, but they delivered fairly significant projects, one of which is in Donabate, as I am sure the Deputy is aware. They delivered significant projects for particular areas.

I do not believe there is any great barrier to us moving in those directions again. Maybe some buildings by small builders, serviced sites or local co-operative developments might be

facilitated in some of the other plans we have for housing. It has worked well in the past and has been extremely beneficial for certain communities.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I seek clarification on how long the committee will continue.

Chairman: We shall continue until 6 o'clock.

Mr. Cathal Morgan: The tenancy protection service started in June 2014. That is an initiative whereby Threshold works with us and the Department of Social Protection to assist vulnerable tenants in receipt of rent supplement who may lose their tenancies as a result of income inadequacy. Since June 2014, it has had 7,500 direct contacts from tenants in the private rental sector. Out of those 7,500 Threshold - not us - has deemed that approximately 3,700 were at immediate risk of losing their tenancies. Within that number since this scheme began, 1,600 have had the uplifts. It is important and this is why I am raising this. Only 22 households out of the 7,500 came into homeless services.

As Threshold would probably confirm, we think that we probably need to do more awareness raising because it can be too late by the time the tenants reach us. Quite often there is a receivership problem. Often there is a legal reason that allows the tenancy to be relinquished, unfortunately. There is nothing that can be done and we have to move in with an emergency intervention.

The Department of Social Protection would have to answer for itself regarding the operation of the scheme generally. However, within our own structures it has emphasised that it carries out regular mailshots to make contact with those in receipt of rent supplement. This is to try to make people aware that, if they are in trouble, they should come to us at the earliest opportunity.

The Deputy asked about flexibility around accessing hotel accommodation, where it is assessed by the local authority that there is no other alternative. While that flexibility exists, I would make the following point. Literally every day we have scenarios where we might contact a hotel and it says it does not want to do business with us because it is full, yet a household might make contact themselves and get through, and *vice versa*. The committee should keep in mind that we have 790 families in emergency situations, of which 580 are in commercial hotel settings. We are not hiding behind the door here. We make the point all the time that this is not sustainable, which is why we have to look at fast-track building to get away from that. This is just not sustainable for families and there will be a reckoning down the line in terms of the impact on children and families. In particular, we know that children are massively discommoded. We try to work on a case-by-case basis when this is brought to our attention, but the sheer scale and volume of what is coming at us make it extremely difficult. I am not making excuses. Of course mistakes are made and we will admit them when they are made, and if we can resolve the issue, we will try resolve it. However, to answer the question directly, if it is brought to our attention that there is a situation where it is said, "This is too far for us, we need to make a change", we will do as much as we can to try to facilitate the family.

Mr. Dick Brady: We operate the system based on a credit card system but it is an extremely difficult thing to do within the rules. If it is a case of a family getting housed or keeping within the rules, the family gets housed.

Chairman: I ask everyone to bear with me for a moment as I want to clarify the figures that were given today. At the start of the meeting, Mr. Brady stated that planning permission was granted for 22,000 housing units in the greater Dublin area. Is that correct?

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Mr. Dick Brady: It is 22,611, to be exact.

Chairman: Are they all private or public, or a mix of both?

Mr. Dick Brady: They are all units for which planning permission has been granted but not commenced, so they are private.

Chairman: They are all private. Does Mr. Brady know the number of units where local authorities have gone through the planning process for their own developments?

Mr. Dick Brady: No.

Chairman: Will he supply that to the committee?

Mr. Dick Brady: Yes.

Chairman: Mr. Brady mentioned that the targets set out by the Government were 75,000 units of accommodation to be delivered across the various schemes by 2020. Is that correct?

Mr. Dick Brady: That is contained within the Government social housing strategy, which talks about 35,000 units to be delivered by the approved housing bodies, AHBs, and the local authorities, and 75,000 units to be delivered using revenue leasing-type models.

Chairman: Those 75,000 units are from the private sector and others under the housing assistance payment, HAP.

Mr. Dick Brady: It is set out clearly.

Chairman: There are 35,000 to be constructed.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: No, they are not to be constructed.

Chairman: They are to be acquired.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The 75,000 is under HAP. The 35,000 is everything else, including the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, and long-term leasing.

Chairman: I ask the delegation to explain this again because we need clarity.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: The 35,000 figure is additional social housing units by way of acquisition, leasing, renting or RAS. It is an additional 35,000 units added to the stock of social housing between AHBs and ourselves.

Chairman: Do any of those involve construction?

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Yes.

Chairman: How many?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: It is about 14,000.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: All of this is contained in the social housing strategy.

Chairman: I am not disputing any of this.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: We will get the Chairman the exact figures.

Chairman: If this is taken with the previous question I asked, which concerned the Part VIII schemes that have been completed, then we as a committee can try to understand the timeline in this respect. Deputy Ó Broin spent some time earlier setting out the process of delivery. We are considering where the Part VIII plans are at with regard to the programme the association is trying to deliver. We need to marry those pieces together. Mr. Cummins knows where I am coming from on that.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: I do. I know exactly.

Chairman: It is to marry those elements to get the complete picture.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: We will get more information on that for the Chairman and send it to the committee.

Chairman: We have concluded on time but if any member wants to ask for additional information that can be forwarded to the committee, I will afford them the opportunity to do that now. I ask them to confine their remarks to specific questions or a request for additional information rather than statements, as we will conclude shortly.

Deputy Seán Canney: I am probably going back over my initial questions in asking whether Mr. Cummins knows the number of voids there are nationally and in each county? Is that information available and, if it is, can it be sent to the committee? Has a cost been put on the refurbishment of them?

The only other comment I would make is that we went through the procurement and approval processes for any type of building project and I fail to understand why the association is happy enough that the threshold is only €2 million which would deliver 15 units but the delivery of 30 units would involve a process of four approvals from the Department on each occasion. My understanding is that the Department does not have the resources to deal with volume that is coming in and that is causing massive delays. We are wondering how long it takes to deliver units, but this adds about six months to that process at a minimum. Why is Mr. Cummins saying that the threshold of €2 million is adequate when it should definitely be €5 million? I would welcome a response to that question.

Chairman: Mr. Cummins might respond to that question by way of correspondence.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: On the need for one-bedroom, two-bedroom or three-bedroom units, and I know Mr. Cummins has the figures, there is a problem regarding the availability of one-bedroom units. It would be helpful to know the demand in each of those categories and the way it is being matched up with the supply that is coming on stream.

Mr. Dick Brady: Is the Deputy seeking the national figure?

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: No, the figure for Dublin. I am sorry but I am only interested in Dublin as it has the longest list.

Mr. Dick Brady: Those figures are published every quarter and the last quarter was published within the past week or so.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Is there a problem with the availability of one-bedroom accommodation? Are we building enough one-bedroom units because providing accommodation for single men is the particular issue we need to address. Is there potential or scope for an organisation such as Habitat for Humanity which takes over buildings and has a system for

people to buy properties? Is the association addressing the difficulty people face in being included in RAS?

Deputy Mary Butler: I asked Mr. Cummins this question and he may have answered it. Did the association consider moving people who are in most need from Dublin down the country? Did he answer that question?

Chairman: He is not answering it now, unfortunately.

Mr. Eugene Cummins: Yes, I did.

Deputy John Brassil: With respect to voids, and the point that was made that not everybody on the housing waiting list wants a social house, that figure is important. Is it possible to get it? I have asked the question and I am now answering it in my head and realise that it is not possible. When we talk about the housing need and demand, the figures are distorted and it is hard to work from them to progress to solutions. We need to put some thought into that. If we are trying to solve a problem and we have figures that are not accurate, we are going around in circles to some extent. We all need to put some thought into that one in order that we might come up with better solutions.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: My questions are whether the faster procurement process that was used for Poppintree can be used for Part 8 schemes once they are in place. It is not a question about planning but about procurement. Is there a limit on the amount for which a local authority can apply for a refurbishment of an individual building? If so, what is it and are there many units that would cost more to refurbish? On acquisitions, and a few members asked this question which was not answered, of the association's allocation for the next three years, is there a maximum amount of that allocation that it can use for acquisitions of turn-key properties? The second part of that question is whether compulsory purchase orders, CPOs, can be used. South Dublin County Council and Dublin City Council have targets under the strategy. They are 3,347 units for Dublin City Council and 1,445 units for South Dublin County Council. Can Mr. Cummins tell us what percentage of those targets have been met after the first year of the strategy? I would like to know the one thing Mr. Cummins thinks could change in terms of policy, legislation and process that would make it easier for the local authorities to do the job of stopping people becoming homeless or to do the job of supplying more houses. Mr. Cummins could e-mail this information or, if he is not comfortable e-mailing it, he could phone people individually. If Mr. Cummins could answer that in whatever way he thinks appropriate, could he let us know because that is what we are looking for?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Could the association supply us with an audit of all local authority-owned land in each local authority taking in the acreage, zoning and location? It is critical that we have this information because the manager says that there is enough land to build houses when there is insufficient land in some locations.

Why have local authorities not developed a scheme for buying second-hand properties where residents are *in situ*? This will be very important for the vulture fund and distressed property situations. An article in the *Irish Independent* last week that dealt with this stated that Dublin City Council apparently could have bought a block of apartments but because there were some-----

Chairman: Could the Deputy stick with the questions?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Some tenants were living in it so Dublin City Council did not

buy it. This could have been a great mixed tenure development involving the development of an affordable mortgage scheme alongside people renting instead of those people having to be evicted. This is critical for the likes of Tyrrelstown.

It is constantly brought up that local authorities turn down loads of NAMA properties. Could Mr. Cummins tell us why this is the case and what is unsuitable about them?

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I welcome the time the witnesses have given us. My first question is about the homeless. I do not know the name of the website referred to because I live in a different county. I am very interested in the social and family supports about which Mr. Cummins spoke, how local authorities work with families, which is a hugely positive engagement, and how they fund that.

Returning to my best practice question, I acknowledge the interpretation Mr. Cummins gave me but there must be cities in England that have tackled a huge housing crisis. What is best practice there? Again, it is one for people who know the trade because I do not. There must be new and existing initiatives. There was a housing conference in Brighton years ago. I do not know if anybody remembers it. I attended it once or twice and very good ideas were brought forward by city governments, particularly administration.

Can we visit these modular houses because I do not know where they are?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We have all seen them.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I have not.

Chairman: We will arrange that separately.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I live in County Louth and have not seen them but I would love to do so.

Chairman: We can arrange that for individuals who have not seen them.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Leading on from my question about the homeless list and the 790 families, have the witnesses any idea how many family units they are talking about in respect of the housing list? I include single people in that. I am talking about the larger housing list for the country.

Mr. Dick Brady: The national figure?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Yes, do the witnesses know how many family units are involved in that, including single people?

Chairman: I thank colleagues for the extensive range of questions this afternoon. I thank the members of the County and City Management Association who attended here this afternoon - Mr. Eugene Cummins, Mr. Dick Brady, Mr. Cathal Morgan and Mr. Billy Coman. Their contribution was very worthwhile and informative. We look forward to responses to the questions we asked. I assure them that it is not being taken in isolation. I know it is difficult for the delegation sitting here today. However, other sectors and relevant agencies will be brought through it too. The committee is trying to compile a report based on the advice, information and answers from a whole range of sectors. The committee appreciates the delegation's attendance and participation this afternoon.

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Mr. Eugene Cummins: On behalf of the four of us, I thank the Chairman and the members for the opportunity to present here today. We will give any assistance we can. We would be more than pleased to bring back more information and attend the committee again, if required to do so. We are all in it together. I thank the committee for its attention. This session was beneficial to us also.

The committee adjourned at 6.15 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 28 April 2016.