

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM THITHÍOCHT, PLEANÁIL, POBAL AGUS RIALTAS ÁITIÚIL

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, PLANNING, COMMUNITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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*Dé Céadaoin, 20 Meán Fómhair 2017*

*Wednesday, 20 September 2017*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	Seanadóirí/Senators
Mick Barry,*	Victor Boyhan,
Pat Casey,	Jennifer Murnane O'Connor,
Mattie McGrath,	Grace O'Sullivan.
Fergus O'Dowd,	
Eoin Ó Broin.	

\* In éagmais/In the absence of Deputy Ruth Coppinger.

I láthair/In attendance: Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett, Dessie Ellis and Danny Healy-Rae.

Teachta/Deputy Maria Bailey sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** As we have a quorum, I call the meeting to order. At the request of the broadcasting and recording services, members are requested to ensure that, for the duration of the meeting, mobile phones are turned off completely or switched to airplane, safe or flight mode, depending on their device. It is not sufficient for members to put their phones on silent mode as this will maintain a level of interference in the broadcasting system.

No apologies have been received, though a couple of members are running some ten minutes late. I propose we go into private session to deal with housekeeping matters. Is that agreed? Agreed.

*The joint committee went into private session at 9.35 a.m, suspended at 9.55 a.m. and resumed in public session at 10 a.m.*

### **Housing Report: Dr. Mary Murphy and Dr. Rory Hearne, NUI Maynooth**

**Chairman:** We are here to discuss a report, Investing in the Right to a Home - Housing, HAPS and Hubs, by Dr. Mary Murphy and Dr. Rory Hearne. There will be two separate sessions. During session A, members will engage with the authors of the report. During session B, we will hear from officials of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and members of the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive. On behalf of the committee, I welcome Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne. I remind them that they only have three minutes each in which to present their opening statement.

I draw the attention of the witness 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 the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a 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 they 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. 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 outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

Apologies have been received from Deputy Barry Cowen.

I invite Dr. Rory Hearne to make his opening statement.

**Dr. Rory Hearne:** I thank the committee for the invitation to attend. We want to stress the devastating impact of the housing and homelessness crisis on the well-being, human rights and dignity of our most vulnerable citizens; homeless families and children. In particular, there is an urgent need for the State to move away from the private market approach to social housing delivery. We argue that the State should put the same effort it put into saving the financial system in 2008 into addressing one of the most serious social crises the nation has faced in many years.

The research for our report, *Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPs and Hubs*, was conducted as part of a European Union Horizon 2020 funded research project called RE-INVEST. This used a human rights capability, theoretical frameworks and participatory approach. In our report, which was launched in July, we stated that the homeless crisis is going to worsen significantly. Unfortunately, we have already been proven correct. There was a shocking increase of 153 new children made homeless in Dublin in July. The number of children who are homeless in Dublin has risen from 567 in June 2014 to 2,423 in July this year. This is a 327% increase in three years. At this rate of increase, we could see a situation where more than 6,000 children are homeless in Dublin by 2020.

Our research investigated the structural causes of the crisis of family homelessness. We found it to be the outcome of the shift away from local authorities directly building social housing to neoliberal policies that have marketised, privatised and financialised the delivery of social and private housing. This has shifted housing towards being a speculative commodity rather than a basic need and a human right. Austerity, in particular, dealt a devastating blow to the provision of social housing. In 1975, more than 7,000 local authority housing units were built in Ireland; in 2015, the figure was just 65. The delivery of social housing was shifted primarily to the private rental market in 2014 with the introduction of the housing assistance payment, HAP, a measure that was cemented in *Rebuilding Ireland* whereby private rented housing was to provide over 65% of all new social housing.

The housing rights of the most vulnerable have diminished over time as policy has shifted from traditional social housing building programmes to the greater use of private rental subsidies. Our research found that given the ease with which landlords can evict tenants from the private rental sector, the housing assistance payment fails to provide security of tenure and thus does not fulfil the right to housing of homeless families. We found that vulnerable homeless families suffer a structural exclusion from the private rental market because they cannot compete with professionals for the limited available property. They suffer a double discrimination from landlords as homeless families and as single mothers. The families we worked with were putting huge effort into trying to find private rented accommodation. This rejection, and their failure to compete, results in severe socio-emotional impacts on the mental health of the parents. They feel they are responsible for failing to provide a home for their children. This approach puts the responsibility for the homelessness crisis onto the families and thus exacerbates their feelings of social exclusion, shame and failure.

In addition, from a cost perspective, we found that direct social housing presents a far greater return than the housing assistance payment approach and State investment. Over a 30-year lifetime, the HAP system will be €23 billion more expensive than local authority provision. International research shows that countries such as Denmark and Austria that provide a high level of state and non-market social and affordable rental housing meet the housing needs of their populations much better than countries like Ireland where just 9% of the housing stock is social housing. In Austria, for example, 24% of the housing stock is social housing. Given the lack of supply in the private housing market, which is going to remain the case for a number of years to come, the only scenario we can see is a dramatic worsening of the housing and homelessness crisis unless the State draws on international best practice on housing provision and provides an emergency State-building programme.

Our research has put forward five recommendations. We feel that the State is failing these families and their children. All the evidence points to a lack of institutional willingness to turn the State's resources towards meet basic housing needs of our most vulnerable. We propose

an increase in capital funding for local authorities, the redirection of the use of State-owned land for emergency building rather than marketing it to developers and the establishment of a semi-State affordable homes company. Local authorities should have the obligation to source HAP accommodation for homeless families and to rehouse families if they lose their rented accommodation. We also feel there needs to be an amendment to the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act in order that it will become more difficult for landlords to evict tenants.

I shall now hand over to my colleague and co-author of the report, Dr. Mary Murphy, to speak about hubs and the human right to housing.

**Dr. Mary Murphy:** In our report, we wanted to draw attention to the reality of life in emergency homeless accommodation and the emerging family hubs. We concentrated in particular on the emerging family hubs because we have a concern that these are seen as a panacea and a solution - albeit a temporary one - to the situation in which families in emergency hotel accommodation find themselves.

Our research found that while the family hubs are better than hotels, especially from a safety perspective - families told us they felt safer there - there are still a lot of shortfalls around the capacity of families to live any kind of normal family life in the family hubs. Families are restricted in their capacity to parent and child development is restricted along with child well-being. Education and employment is restricted and the maintenance of family and social networks is restricted. Anything that one might care to name becomes very difficult to do. To some degree, it is more difficult in a family hub than in a hotel because when one tries to maintain a regulatory environment that respects child protection guidelines, one is forced to put in a fairly strict regime of co-living. That strict regime of co-living restricts people's capacity to live what we would might think of as a normal day; there are a lot of rules and regulations. People feel they are under surveillance and they feel their lives are very controlled by the institutionalised system in which they are living. There is a sense that it adds up to therapeutic incarceration whereby people are institutionalised and their capacity to function by themselves is curtailed and narrowed.

Ireland has a long, sad history of institutionalised responses to gendered forms of poverty and exclusion. We need only think of the Magdalen laundries and direct provision in this regard. Our real fear is that even with the best of intentions we may again be setting the State up with a system of institutionalised response to a social policy problem that will dig in and be with us for decades. We are sounding strong warning bells in that respect.

It is very clear that even with the best response, as Dr. Hearne has outlined, this housing crisis will not be solvable in the next five or six years and these families are going to be there for a longer term. It really worries us that there is not much sign or evidence that the State is taking seriously its obligation to these families over that longer period. We do not see a plan to minimise the potential long-term damage that can happen to families when they are in such institutionalised settings, be they hotels or family hubs.

We would like to see a much more definitive policy. Why are we using family hubs? What is the policy rationale? What is the funding? What are the operational guidelines? What is the regulatory framework? What is the monitoring? What are the rights of the families in those hubs and how are those rights enabled? What is the redress when there are problems? What are the safeguards to make sure they are not pushed, in a very coercive regime, sanctioned or penalised for failing to meet these rules we have been speaking about? There is an awful lot

more work to be done to explain the policy rationale behind family hubs and to minimise the potential long-term damage when families find themselves living there.

We caution that what we are seeing in this context is between that and a harder discourse beginning to emerge around families being too choosy in the context of whether they take up social housing offers. We see a variety of different types of comments being made that add up to a sense that families and not the structural issue of housing shortages are coming to be seen as the problem. That is really the problem. Our fear is that over the next couple of years we will see families being blamed for the problem of homelessness rather than the shortage of social housing being identified as the structural problem we need to fix. For that reason, we really do believe that we need to keep the spotlight on the need to make sure there are legislative obligations on the State to eradicate the problem of family homelessness. That can be translated into small statutory instruments, such as time limits on the use of family hubs or sunset legislation that would require the State to dissolve the use of institutionalised responses to family homelessness within a certain timeframe, for example by 2020. There are various ways of setting out legislative guarantees to make sure that family homelessness stays on the agenda and is managed out of the system. We believe none of this will happen without a larger attempt to recognise that we are talking about serious power inequalities in this regard. We are talking about a housing market dominated by big financial actors, increasingly international financial companies and financial speculators, and we are talking about a relatively conservative approach to interpreting the right to property in the 1937 Constitution. That, alongside powerful political and media narratives, makes people accept the market as an almost inevitable natural response to housing and we would argue that the cognitive lock of the market being seen as the primary vehicle to redress the housing problem, which is beginning to be edged out gradually, really needs to be broken much more forcefully in the political discourse.

We believe there is much merit to stressing a strong rights-based approach to housing as a way of breaking that strong narrative of the market being the only solution. The economic and social rights campaign had brought the case for a right to housing in the Constitution to the Constitutional Convention. We still argue that this could be useful. Beth Watts makes the point that when one has a rights-based approach, it allows one to find a priority when there are competing policy objectives. For example, it is often said that we do not want to build large social housing complexes because they recreate social housing problems of the past. That is put up as the reason the State needs to be timid about its response to building social housing. We argue that if a right to housing was embedded, the right of a person to housing would trump the other kind of policy objections that exist to forcefully taking on board a strong social housing building programme, so it also-----

**Chairman:** I am going to cut Dr. Murphy off, if that is okay, and move to questions. I am sure that much of what she wants to say will come up in the questions that are being asked.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I thank the witnesses for the presentation and report. Dr. Hearne's focus was on the longer-term solutions on the best way to meet the social housing need that exists. The Government keeps telling us that it is spending more money on social housing delivery than ever before, that money is no object and that the programme for newly built social housing is very ambitious. This year, the capital spend is approximately €733 million, which is half what it was back in 2007. I seek the witnesses' comments in respect of their recommendation around a capital funding increase. What do the witnesses believe is the required level of investment, irrespective of what the delivery mechanism is, and what do they think is the requisite output of social housing? This year it will be approximately 4,500 real social housing

units. Only about 25% of the total social housing solutions, according to the Government, will be real social housing in that sense.

I am highly supportive of Dr. Murphy's proposals in terms of the sunset clause and the time limits. One thing that has exercised this committee is the question of families in hubs. I have been to the hub at the Mater Dei Institute, which is immeasurably better than a commercial hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation. What does the Department need to be putting in place to ensure the best possible standards are met and that some of the reports from families in emergency accommodation to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive that have got into the newspapers are not repeated in the hub? Do the witnesses have specific recommendations in terms of standards, inspection regimes and such matters?

**Deputy Pat Casey:** I will be fairly brief. Dr. Hearne provided a statistic that Austria has 24% social housing. Ireland has a social housing stock of 9%. I wonder is that the solution, and should our aim be, at a minimum, to achieve the average European level, which is 17% social housing stock? If we achieve that, would we be protected from the housing bubbles and the boom-and-bust cycles we seem to continue to go through?

Most, if not all, social housing stock across Europe is off-balance sheet and is not constrained by fiscal policy. I wonder whether we should be looking at a model in which our local authorities could deliver off-balance sheet social housing stock. We need affordable housing as well as social housing. I believe that this is putting huge demands on the whole housing sector. I am aware that we will debate the constitutional right to a home in the Dáil this evening and I wonder how much difference that would make if it was in place tomorrow morning. Is this not the result of Government policy over a number of years where we have moved away from investing directly in public housing?

**Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor:** I agree totally with Deputy Casey, and I agree with the points made by the witnesses. The private rented market has been taken away from local authorities. If one wants to apply for housing assistance payment, HAP, one has to go to Cork. If one wants to get on the housing list, one might be waiting for up to six weeks before getting an appointment. In an emergency, that should be done automatically and within a week. The landlord must then fill out the HAP form. As that form goes to Cork, it again is taken from the local authority. Do the witnesses think that in the future, the Department should return those powers to the local authorities? They used to look after all of the different rental schemes, such as rent allowance. For one's first-time deposit, one must now apply to a social welfare office. If someone comes to one's clinic and it is their first time applying for the housing list, they must now be sent to social welfare. Everything is mixed up. The local authorities should be given back the power to deal with all these situations.

The Government is looking at private arrangements. It is looking at Clúid, housing co-operatives and all the different private housing bodies. That is not the way forward. We need to build local authority houses, ensuring that extra staff are put into every local authority in the country and that they have all the powers necessary until this emergency housing crisis is over in order that it can be dealt with quickly. There is nothing as quick as a local authority that can deal with the housing lists and HAP in its own area.

The Minister is now setting a cap. If one earns more than €26,500 one cannot go on a local authority housing list and therefore will not receive the HAP payments. We are technically making these people homeless, because they are then in rented accommodation and they cannot afford to get a house or go on the housing list. A whole new type of homelessness exists which

is not being addressed. Are these issues the witnesses believe the local authorities need to look at?

**Senator Victor Boyhan:** I thank Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne for their presentations this morning but more importantly, for their report. It is a serious piece of research and it raises many issues. There are the five key issues the witnesses discussed, namely, prevention, stocks and flows, emergency housing, HAP - which was discussed in great detail and about which I share many of their concerns - security of tenure and the difficulties where tenants are walking the streets trying to identify a place in HAP. I happen to live in Dún Laoghaire and I can tell the committee that HAP accommodation cannot be found. These people go back to the housing authority the next day and are told they need to go back out again, to get up a bit earlier and go on *daft.ie*. These people do not even have a battery, never mind a plug or the ability to power up an IT platform. They are simply demoralised.

There are places all around the country where rents are much higher than others and the witnesses have raised many concerns. The reality is that it is Government policy. HAP is a principal Government policy in respect of housing. That needs to change. I would be interested to hear about the witnesses' advocacy and campaigning in that regard.

I want to touch on a few of the other issues referred to. The witnesses said the fastest, most effective way to prevent homelessness was to build houses and strengthen security of tenure. I agree except that it is not the fastest way. The reality is that it is taking time. It is a slow process to roll out and it needs to happen faster. That is the reality of it. However, it is the most effective approach. We need to avail of our landbanks and State assets in real estate. We need to roll out the delivery of all forms of housing, be it private, affordable or social. Let us not draw a distinction. People are having difficulty accessing all forms of housing. The witnesses said they would like to see the establishment of a new semi-State Irish affordable homes company as proposed by the National Economic and Social Council and detailed in the Nevin report. We have recently heard about NAMA or the Government coming up with suggestions about that body's role in all of that. I would like to hear the witnesses' comments. I am not sure that NAMA is particularly the right vehicle, given its history, to be doing this but I would be interested to hear what the witnesses have to say. The witnesses said greater clarity is needed on HAP tenants and who sources them. They might just share some of those experiences and what alternative there is in terms of local authority obligations and responsibilities.

The biggest difficulty I have with the presentation was what was said about hubs. It is a little disingenuous and unfair to suggest hubs are potentially the next Magdalen laundries. That is just carrying it a bit too far. I had to bring an elderly man in his 70s to a hostel recently. He had never been in a hostel before but had lost his home and his family through various circumstances. He was in need of a home. The first thing he said when he stepped into my car was that he was afraid and that he feared for his safety. He was not talking about the wallpaper on the wall, a roof, or a two-storey, one-storey or bedsitter dwelling. He was talking about being afraid. He said he did not mind going into support accommodation but he wanted to be secure. Security was, strangely, more important than a roof over his head. That is something I learned on that journey into town. I have had the experience of having to bring people to hostels, which have been terrible places. They have met people outside the door and been in fear. Anything has to be better than what we called "wet hostels" and had in the past.

I am not saying it is a long-term solution and it needs to be something the Government clarifies. It is a short-term response, which we need to emphasise, to an emergency need for people who are homeless and, in many cases, destitute. Forget about the circumstances; they need

a home and they have children. We have seen time and again on television the one-bedroom accommodation for families. I have spoken to people who have been in hubs and had a good experience. It is not ideal but it is a hell of a lot better than what we are coming from. It is important to get that out there. I agree about the sunset clause and that it would be ideal in 2019 to phase them out, which may be what I would like to hear more about. I take it the witnesses accept that hubs are better than the traditional emergency homeless accommodation we have had in the last two or three years. While I accept that it is not enough, it is an improvement, which is worth noting. It is not the panacea or solution and I agree with the reference in the presentation to the possibility of a sunset clause and phasing these hubs out. That is positive. It is also important that people go into hubs and are given a care or support plan and some guarantees about their transition from that hub to more permanent accommodation which is suited to their needs. I refer to accommodation that is suitable to their needs because in this great debate about social housing we have lost sight of that idea of accommodation that is suited to their needs at this particular time. That is something about which we have to be realistic in our housing policy. I would appreciate it if the witnesses would touch on those points.

Finally, I agree with 99% of what the witnesses are saying. It is positive and I am delighted that they have come here to share their experience and research. They have put a spotlight on it, which is positive. All of us across the room are open to new ways of looking at this issue and addressing it, regardless of ideology. The final point about power, voice and participation goes for every one of us. It is really important and valid that the people involved are empowered and part of the decision-making process. However, it is a slow process. Can the witnesses set out some of the weaknesses of the few hubs they have seen in recent times? Can they identify additional matters that need to be addressed in respect of those hubs?

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** I welcome the speakers. I missed some of the presentation but if I picked it up correctly, it seems the witnesses were critical of HAP and the 30-year timeline. As I understand it, HAP is initially intended to allow those who were on a severely restricted rent allowance and could not work to compete in the market for any accommodation in their city, town or village. It empowers people in my area significantly. I live in Drogheda and am delighted that the Minister introduced rent controls there yesterday. It allows families who could never otherwise compete for a house to do so. I disagree with the witness who said it was not value for money, although I may have misinterpreted what was said. Of course it is value for money. It puts power in the pockets of people to get a home which they otherwise could not, albeit to rent it. Second, it allows people to work while continuing to receive HAP. That is a significant change, which I very much welcome. Under the old rent allowance system, one could not do that, which made it a real poverty trap.

I accept and acknowledge the points about the housing list problems and so on. I do not know if the witnesses are aware of the Government's housing plans. I am not aware that they referred to them, but there is significant funding for 47,000 social housing units in the Government policy to be constructed by 2021 with a budget of €5.3 billion. I do not know if that was mentioned but my impression is that it was not. Perhaps I missed it being said. From listening to the witnesses, I agree on all of the issues around family pressures and other difficulties. If one does not have a home and a place to lay one's head, if one's children are not in secure accommodation and one does not have a park or a normal life as most of us who are older would define it, one has serious disadvantages. I welcome very much the initiatives which have been taken and I would like the witnesses to comment on them if they can.

My next point goes back to a core issue for me. More than 6,000 homes were offered by

the Housing Agency to local authorities up and down the country, including Dublin. More than 1,000 homes in Dublin were refused by local authorities under the process in which the Housing Agency was acting as an agent for NAMA. When we talk about local authorities, I am not convinced. I do not know if the witnesses have a view. They did not want these houses and they did not take them. I am not taking any blame from the Government as to what is and is not happening. The fact is that local authorities did not perform. When people talk about local authorities building homes, I am not convinced they have the capacity to do that. I welcome the comment about a not-for-profit organisation that would do that or indeed a State body such as NAMA which might build homes. That makes sense. Such a body would have the scale and capacity to do it. The National Building Agency built thousands of homes in the past. I do not know if there are other people here who were on local authorities at the time. The agency designed, built and managed houses on behalf of local authorities and made a very significant difference, certainly in the 1970s and 1980s when I was a local authority member. The witnesses' comments are very welcome. As Senator Boyhan said, they are putting the spotlight on issues. However, they were not particularly balanced. That is the truth of it.

While we are in this very difficult situation, for Sinn Féin to compare the amount of money spent in 2007 on housing, which was at the height of the boom, with the position now, which is at the end of the bust, is unreasonable. The fact is that 100,000 houses a year were being produced then and the manner in which that was being done was unsustainable. The Government is ramping up, although houses take a long time to build, a proper and adequate response, notwithstanding the huge issues that are there. The Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, has the capacity to deliver and he is making the changes. Do the witnesses have any comment, good, bad or indifferent, on Government spending policy? I would be happy if they, as academics, would refer to those in their reply.

**Deputy Mick Barry:** I have three questions. My first question is on the housing assistance payment, HAP. Some of the statistics the witnesses have provided in the section on HAP are staggering. Mind-blowing would not be an exaggeration. Their report states that HAP is an expensive policy option and far more costly than building social housing directly. They calculate that over a period of 30 years in Dublin, €274,128 more would be spent on securing a social house through HAP than would be spent on a direct State build through the local authorities. Using Rebuilding Ireland's figure of 87,000 private rental units, they calculate that it would cost €23.8 billion more than direct State builds by local authorities over 30 years. If those statistics are anywhere near being correct, it means that Government policy on this issue is criminal and it is enriching landlords at the expense of society on a massive scale when better options are available. I ask the witnesses to stand over those figures and go into them in more detail because the implications are huge.

When local authorities meet in November to set their budgets for next year, there is a very strong case for them to decide that enough funding should be set aside, whether through loans or direct Government grants, and enough plans should be put in place to build very large numbers of local authority homes in their jurisdictions next year. There is a very strong argument that if those funds and plans are not in place, those budgets should not be passed and it should be put back into the court of Government, if necessary provoking a political crisis over this. The statistics in the report indicating 8,794 local authority builds in 1975, more than 4,000 in 2006 and 75 in 2016 would justify such a stance. Will the witnesses comment on a tripling of Exchequer capital funding to €1 billion per annum to allow 5,000 such homes to be built within 16 months?

If tenants receive notice to quit coming into this winter on foot of economic evictions and rent rises, they should give serious consideration to the difficult step of refusing to co-operate to the notice to quit, thereby refusing to play a part in making themselves homeless. I believe there would be strong support in many cases from friends, family, neighbours, housing activists and political parties of the left for such a stance. I am putting that out there, but I am asking the authors of the report to comment on their call for the amending of Part 4, section 34 of the Private Residential Tenancies Act, essentially to allow a greater security of tenure for tenants, which would be a very important legislative change. What do the witnesses have in mind in this regard?

**Chairman:** I call Senator Grace O’Sullivan, who is the last committee member to speak.

**Senator Grace O’Sullivan:** I thank Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne for their report, Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPs and Hubs. It is fantastic because it enables debate. It highlights that we continue to be in a serious emergency state with regard to the supply of homes and the social responsibility of the Government. The market forces are not delivering housing with any speed given the crisis we face. The Government and we, as Members of the Oireachtas, are firefighting and not finding solutions at all. Hubs are not homes. Based on my understanding of the witnesses’ report, the hubs are enabling a long-term problem in our society. For the moment they are putting roofs over people’s heads, but that may not be the right social response in this emergency situation. Local authorities should be empowered and given the capital to start supplying housing as soon as possible. On security of tenure, people should not be forced to compete in the market and should not suffer the possibility of being evicted from their homes. Is the Government’s current policy sustainable given that we are in housing poverty and that we are seeing inequality in housing supply and a lack of sustainability?

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** I thank Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne for a great report and for highlighting a number of key issues facing us with this housing emergency. I have a few questions on different areas that the report touches on. I agree with them that ultimately we need to build social housing. If we do not do that, everything else will not work and is not sustainable in the long term. What annual output do we need to clear the waiting lists and deal with the current emergency? Our view is that we need a minimum of 20,000 council houses a year for the next five years. In so far as there may be a problem in ramping up output in year one - it could certainly be done by year two - what is the witnesses’ view of compulsory acquisition and leasing of vacant properties as a way of ramping up output of social housing to the degree we need?

Do the witnesses believe we should stop using the term “social housing”? In my opinion social housing has become a slippery term which can embrace everything including HAP, which they rightly criticise, voluntary housing, the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, and council houses. Would they agree with the contention that a negligible proportion of the 110,000 social housing units that Rebuilding Ireland claimed it would deliver were actual council houses? Should those of us who want to see increased output of public housing stop using the term “social housing” and be specific by saying “council housing” or “public housing”? What do the witnesses have to say about affordable housing?

Connected to that is the issue of Part V and the reduction of the allocation to 10% rather than the 20%, which was made up of 10% social housing and 10% affordable housing, that we had in the past. What are the witnesses’ views on that and how it connects to the local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF? We have estimated that the development at Cherrywood, which at 8,000 units is going to be one of the biggest developments in the State, could solve the

entire Dún Laoghaire housing crisis, in my opinion. It will not, however, because we are only going to get 800 social housing units and we may only get as little as 1% affordable housing from the LIHAF funding for the €15 million we have put in. Have the witnesses any comment on that?

Do the witnesses think that the social mix argument that is being used by the Government essentially to privatise, part-privatise or to have public private partnerships on public land, which is what the Government proposes, is just an ideological argument to justify privatisation? Is the stigmatisation of social housing implicit in this? The implication is that if one has lots of public housing together, there will be anti-social problems. Do the witnesses believe this is stigmatisation? I do. I believe it is also an excuse rather than pointing to the lack of services and infrastructure that were often associated with big public housing developments in the past.

With regard to HAP, Dr. Hearne is absolutely right to point out the issues around security of tenure, but I will agree with Deputy O'Dowd in one respect: the one and only positive aspect of HAP is that it has a differential rent that allows a person to work. The problem is the lack of security of tenure. I am unsure if it was mentioned in the report but as well as the aspects of insecurity of tenure with HAP, it is even less secure than the previous rental accommodation scheme, RAS. With RAS the local authority had an obligation to rehouse people if the private landlord pulled out, but people do not even have that option with HAP. The suggestion that it is social housing in any shape or form is nonsense because a person is thrown back out to the wolves if the landlord pulls out. This week I had dealings with a woman who was for the third time being thrown out of a HAP tenancy. I will, by the way, credit the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy. I rang him up and asked if he could help this lady because they would not give her the homeless HAP. She had had the homeless HAP but then was not homeless, so they would not give her the homeless HAP rate to get new accommodation when she was being evicted. In fairness, after a phone call, the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, dealt with it. It should not, however, have come to that. It is crazy.

I will now turn to the eligibility thresholds. This relates to the stigma and social mix aspects. Do the witnesses think that rather than stigmatising groups we should raise the eligibility thresholds for social housing in order that it is not seen as something just for the very poorest of people? In many other jurisdictions it is the case that social housing is a much more widespread option for people to get housing, regardless of social background.

The witnesses referred to the right to housing and constitutional issues. The Dáil will face a Bill today put forward by People Before Profit on precisely this issue. Many housing NGOs have called for this measure over the years. Will the witnesses assist us in the debate that will happen today? I hope I am wrong but I suspect the Government will say it will not make any difference at all as a means of justifying voting down the Bill, even though for years the Government has been saying that the lack of such a guarantee was an obstacle to introducing some of the more radical measures we might take to deal with housing. Perhaps the witnesses will elaborate a little more specifically on how inserting a constitutional right to housing and re-shifting the balance between private property rights and the common good in respect of housing would be beneficial in dealing with the housing crisis, stopping evictions, getting hold of landbanks, etc.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Every day we hear figures of money being announced for housing here and there. Let us take Kerry, for example. Going back to sometime in late 2015, €62.5 million was announced for housing in Kerry. To date, we certainly have not got €10 million of that. In 2013, eight houses were to be built in Killarney. Four years later there has been

much toing and froing between the local authority and the Department, after going through four stages of approval with the length of time the Department takes to come back. That is why we still have almost 5,000 people on the waiting list in Killarney.

I was very disappointed to hear Deputy O'Dowd say that he believed that local authorities had lost their way in building houses. He is just reiterating what the former Taoiseach said. I was very angry when the Taoiseach said in the Dáil that local authorities had lost their way in building houses. They have lost their way because houses cannot be built if they do not have money. The Department has created such a length of time before they finally give back the money. One of the stages of approval requires that the price for the 20 houses, for example, be reduced. We all know, however, that the price will be determined when the actual tender goes out and the contractors apply. This is what determines the actual price and what the houses will cost.

**Chairman:** The representatives from the Department will be in to the committee next and the Deputy's question might be more relevant for them rather than for the authors of this report. The Department officials are sitting behind the Deputy now and are taking note of his question.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Yes. Money is announced here every day but we cannot build houses if we do not give it out. The money is being held up by the Department. Does the Government have the money or not? These talking shops will build no houses if the Government and the Minister do not approve the funding and give the money to the local authorities. The local authorities were building houses before I came on the scene and before any of us here was born. I say to Deputy O'Dowd that they have the ability to do it but they cannot do it if the Government does not give them the money. That is straight up.

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** On a point of information, I wish to clarify an issue for Deputy Healy-Rae. He is not listening properly. They were offered these houses. The houses were built. They had roofs, doors and windows. They were actually there. These were 6,000 houses that were built and offered and they said they would take 2,000 of them-----

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Deputy O'Dowd said that the local authorities had lost their way and were not building houses. That is what I heard him saying and if anyone else heard something different-----

**Chairman:** We are tight on time and we will leave it at that. Dún Laoghaire is to get approval for €1 million as of yesterday, so there is money being given to particular local authorities.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** I thank Dr. Hearne and Dr. Murphy for their contributions. We have been speaking of the points they raised for a long time. I believe, and we have always said, there should be a rights-based approach to housing and we totally agree that people should have a right to a home. Dr. Hearne gave some statistics about 2015 during which 65 social houses were built, and it is quite clear where this crisis is coming from. It is the lack of social housing. Anyone who studies this issue can see this. We have no affordable housing scheme from the Government, which is crazy. The reality is that this is the nub. We have heard the argument numerous times that we cannot build social and affordable housing schemes in areas and that private housing must be built. I have had this up to the eyeballs. We need to get down and build large housing estates, social and affordable. We have to do it. If this means buying land outside the perimeters of the city, that is an issue we should consider.

I listened to the programme on housing last night and it was interesting to hear the developers say that the price of land was a major problem. Obviously, that is the case and we need to address that. We cannot allow people to set massive prices on lands. Some controls must be put in place and I would like to hear the witnesses' opinions on that.

On the cost of building, the prices continue to inflate. From what I can see, the prices on houses are higher now than was the case at the height of the Celtic tiger period. That was confirmed in the programme last night. What is happening is ludicrous.

People talk about HAP. There is one aspect of HAP that really gets to me. We have to get people into homes but we get them in and we talk about subsidising them. It is the money landlords are getting that is driving many people out of their homes. Landlords see that they can get €1,300 or €1,400 a month in rent. The figure is creeping up all the time and whether we like it or not, there is a drive to put people out of homes. It is sickening to see that. Every day of the week people come into my office for the same reason, namely, the landlord is looking to get the house back to sell it. It is disgusting.

I would like to hear more about the proposal on semi-State companies building social and affordable housing. Regardless of whether it is done by the local authorities through a semi-State company that is set up, we have to go down that road as otherwise, this problem will plague us for the next number of years.

One of the greatest tragedies has been the remit NAMA was given to sell land and all the properties. It is scandalous. It is selling off land that speculators are buying and hoarding. That is outrageous. NAMA's remit should be changed. It could have been changed by any Government. Its social and affordable housing remit could have been given to local authorities instead of the nonsense we hear that housing units were offered to local authorities. They were offered to the local authorities, which had to pay NAMA for flipping properties. It baffles me that this was allowed. I will finish on that point.

**Chairman:** I thank Deputy Ellis. I wish to make some points also and I will then call the witnesses. To go back to what the report is about, namely, investing in the right to a home, without rehashing the debate, we all know what we have come from here. Most of us in this room have been members of local authorities for long periods of time. We saw the lack of direct build and when it was pulled back and went to private developers and so on; we do not need to rehash all of that. However, we cannot provide social housing at the pace required for obvious reasons. As there is a shortage of approximately 100,000 construction workers who are required in the next three years, to provide the homes we need we must have the skilled workers to go with that.

In the interim, it is emotive and disingenuous to refer to a hub as a Magdalen laundry or direct provision. This committee was invited to the Mater Dei hub on Monday and to various other facilities that are provided. I accept it is awful that any family should end up here but I was blown away by the hub in terms of the facilities that were provided and the supports for families and individuals. There were family rooms and playrooms, chickens and hens running around the gardens, playground facilities, television rooms, computer rooms and private rooms for families if their child wanted to have a birthday party. I am not saying all of that is ideal but it is making the best of a very bad situation for those families. It is a short-term solution to allow time to provide long-term social homes. It is important that we keep in mind the purpose of hubs. They are a short-term solution to provide a better environment than a hotel room for families where they can bring up their children. Crosscare is doing a tremendous job. In the

first eight weeks, of the 29 families that are there, 14 now know where they are going in the next week or two and consequently, to say they will be there for the long term is a little unfair. I am aware it will be site-specific but half of the residents will be moved out within eight to nine weeks of first arriving at those hub facilities.

To return to some of the comments, Dr. Hearne mentioned State-owned lands being given to private developers. I can only speak about a site we have in Shankill, which certainly is not being given to a private developer. Senator Boyhan and I were very involved in this. We have a concept for 540 social and affordable homes because affordability is equally a problem in terms of social houses. That site is not being given to private developers. It is being given to people who need a home, whether it be social or affordable. We have to give people an opportunity to stay in their communities as well.

I fully agree with giving the Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, more powers. I am aware that has been ramped up but the new initiative where the landlord has to inform the RTB, at the same time as informing the tenant, if he or she intends to evict a tenant is a step that will not solve a problem but will help towards a solution.

The comment about lack of capacity to live a normal life in a hub is a fair one to make but it is a short-term solution. We have to do our utmost to support any family who finds themselves in that situation but the services provided in Crosscare, whether they be babysitting, social services or educational facilities, were vast. They even included cooking classes. The clerk to the committee, Fiona Cashin, and I met some fantastic people who gave me great hope about the system. It is rare to come across that because all we ever hear is negativity. There was a gentleman there with his three year old child - I will not mention his name - who inspired me in terms of how he is trying to better himself. The services being provided to him and his family have helped him greatly to get back on his feet. It is important to recognise the help those families are getting. He did not mention anything about a strict regime. There were rules and regulations but to date there has not been a need to use them.

Local authorities have been given more powers and control. I know it depends on the local authority area in which one resides. Finances are not a problem in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. As the capital funding has been given to provide social housing upfront, it is not a problem. However, the lack of schemes coming forward from the local authority is a problem. A piece of land cannot be financed unless one has a scheme in front of one. We can complain about the delays in the Department but one can still come up with a scheme. That can all follow suit. Money cannot be given to a piece of land without a scheme or concept on site. It took local councillors in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown to come up with a scheme to go forward with a concept. Many of those schemes, such as O'Devaney Gardens in Dublin City Council, are solutions that can be copied by other local authorities. They should be encouraged to do so.

Many local authorities need additional staff and so on. We all know the restrictions that are in place but to build the number of houses we need takes time. We have a massive deficit in skilled workers who left this country during the recession to go to Australia or Canada. How do we get them to return? They need to know that this is not another boom-and-bust cycle and that there is longevity in the construction industry for them and their families before they will come back to this country. Government policy is facilitating that in that what is happening is sustainable development.

We are pressed for time. Many of the questions put are probably more relevant to the Department. If there is anything Dr. Hearne does not get to cover in his response, he might do that

in a written submission to the Department. Who wants to go first?

**Dr. Rory Hearne:** To clarify, how much time do we have to respond?

**Chairman:** We said 11 a.m. but we will go to 11.10 a.m. We must bring in the departmental officials after that.

**Dr. Rory Hearne:** I thank members for their questions and comments, which we appreciate. We cannot answer them all directly but will try to give a response to some of the key questions.

From our perspective, the reason this research is so important and what it raises is the impact on families as a result of their exclusion from what we call the market in terms of the use of the housing assistance payment, HAP. They might get a house through the HAP in three or six months or two years' time but we found that there was an impact on their mental health and self-esteem as a result of trying to find private accommodation and being turned down and not getting replies from landlords. That was having a devastating impact on them and their children. We are destroying them as human beings in this period. One day is too long in emergency accommodation. We should not accept, as a republic, that we are putting our citizens through this. In the analysis, we highlight there is a problem at the core of current housing policy, which is the over-emphasis of and over-reliance on the private rental market. We feel the balance is wrong. Deputy O'Dowd is right that HAP has a role. It can provide flexibility to people and it is very positive in terms of its ability to work when people are receiving it. The problem is policy is too skewed towards it. If we look at the Rebuilding Ireland plan, only 15% is to be newly constructed social housing. The rest is various private market and predominantly private rental accommodation. The problem is that it is exacerbating the housing crisis. This brings us back to the need to build. Rebuilding Ireland was welcome because it focused on the need for the State to do it. There is a general consensus now that the State has to get out and build social housing. There are a number of different ways it can do that. It can do it through local authorities which are increasing their role at the moment. We believe that should be the primary role and there should be increased capital. Deputy Ó Broin asked this question. There should be about €1.5 billion being spent right now for local authorities to build social housing. It is a question of priority. It would be a significant increase in budget. If we want to address the housing crisis, we should be building 10,000 social housing local authority units per year. On top of that, we should be building 20,000 affordable units. That could be done through a semi-State housing body, either an arm's length company from local authorities or, as the Nevin Economic Research Institute has proposed, a separate company.

The political system in the State does not have a sense of the scale of the crisis yet. The housing and homelessness crisis will get significantly worse unless the State intervenes. I have gone through the figures. Rebuilding Ireland is inadequate if we look at what is coming down the pipeline. I went through the first quarter figures for Rebuilding Ireland and in the four Dublin local authorities there are only 1,000 units on site at the moment and almost 2,000 further at various stages of planning. At the quickest, over three years about 3,000 new social housing units will be delivered in the greater Dublin area. It will not cover the new people who will become homeless in the next three years. With waiting lists of 40,000 people in the greater Dublin area, we are talking about 40 years at that rate before we address the waiting list. I highlight those figures because the scale of the response is required to meet the scale of the crisis. Land is really important because we have significant public landbanks. We looked at the evidence on this approach by public-private partnerships in the past. The land has been advertised to developers; it is not just being developed by local authorities. There are ten sites in the greater Dublin area that are held by local authorities that on current plans will provide

3,000 social units and 7,000 private units. Why are we not building a majority of social housing units? Why are the local authorities not being supported to do that?

I can provide statistics on the question that was asked about value for money. Essentially what we are doing is giving between €500 million and €800 million to private landlords. It is housing people but it is not providing housing through HAP. Over the 30-year period, that would provide 127,000 social housing units if the money was put into building rather than into the-----

**Chairman:** I would not normally interrupt Dr. Hearne, but can I ask him what the other option is in the interim instead of that €800 million that goes to private landlords for HAP or other measures? It takes a year to build a house.

**Dr. Rory Hearne:** Absolutely. I am highlighting the point that it is lost investment. We should be shifting towards investing in direct build rather than the private rental sector. I am highlighting it to show the point rather than saying we should stop-----

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** We actually are doing that anyway. Dr. Hearne's figures are wrong.

**Dr. Rory Hearne:** No.

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** Dr. Hearne's figures are wrong. One quarter of new builds next-----

*(Interruptions).*

**Chairman:** I should not have interrupted Dr. Hearne for clarification. I apologise. Does Dr. Hearne want to continue?

**Dr. Rory Hearne:** No, I will hand over to my colleague.

**Chairman:** Dr. Mary Murphy, without interruption.

**Dr. Mary Murphy:** I apologise that we cannot fully engage in everything. I will address the comments on the family hubs raised by Deputy Ó Broin, Senators Boyhan and O'Sullivan, the Chairman and others. We have been accused of being emotive and disingenuous. Our job was to go in as academics to look hard at what we saw and use the academic literature and international research to try to understand the situation and to take a long-term view of what we saw. It is very clear the State is between a rock and a hard place. Homeless families are between even sharper rocks and sharper hard places. We have been absolutely clear that the family hubs provide a safer environment to live in than emergency accommodation, hotels or hostels. We are absolutely clear about that. That does not mean they are not problematic and that the longer a family is living in them, the more they are subject to the damage caused by institutionalising their family life, by deteriorating their capacity to parent effectively and reducing the opportunity for child well-being and development to happen as it normally would. All the international research says not to do this. All the international research says the longer families are in it, the more damaging it is. We want people to hear this. We are not being disingenuous.

We understand the pressure on the State to provide something that is not emergency hotel accommodation. We would, like everybody else in the room, prefer that it was housing and we are stressing the need to build those houses. In the meantime, if the State is reverting to an emergency policy response of using family hubs, it has an obligation to those families to miti-

gate the potential damage. It can only do that by legislating for timeframes so families will not be in them long term. It can only do it by having a sunset clause on the long-term use of these places by the State. It must have operational guidelines informed not only by child protection guidelines, which are absolutely essential, but also by other guidelines on family well-being and parental autonomy.

There are lots of examples of best practice where families have to live in emergency accommodation. There are other actors the State can draw in. All the academics, including Irish academics, such as Paula Mayock, point to this. IHREC has looked at it and pointed to it as well. Things such as operational guidelines and systems of rights and redress are important. There must also be systems whereby the residents in these places have participation rights and the power to inform the policy on how the places will be run as well as an inspection and regulatory regime. We suggest it is the responsibility of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive.

A new national homeless agency was also announced in the early feedback on the Rebuilding Ireland review. There is obviously potential there. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs clearly has a role to play as well. It is understandable why these places have evolved. We spent time in them and we respect the work being done in them. We know what are the aspirations of the families in them. When we did the research, we also saw that the longer-term reality of living in these places, even over a ten-week period, was that the families' mental health and capacity to make their lives work for them began to really deteriorate. This is very real and we are not being disingenuous. We are clearly saying they are better than some of the other alternatives but we need to take seriously that they really cannot be long-term. The only way we will be satisfied they will not be long-term is if there are legal guarantees that they are not long-term. Legislation and a regulatory framework is required or those families run the risk of being left there for very long periods of time. We make no apologies for the language we used and the historical examples we offered to stress the point we make.

I will make another point very quickly because I know we are constrained by time. Deputy Pat Casey and Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett raised the issue of the rights-based approach. I have offered one example of a rights-based approach and the need for a regulatory framework with legislative guidelines for the operation of the family hubs. We are talking about a broader constitutional campaign on the right to housing. We are asking whether it would make a real difference. I think the difference it would make would be subtle. It is not a panacea. It would not solve anything overnight but in terms of the power imbalance that exists, it is worth having. Beth Watts's research is very clear. Not only does it have the capacity to shift the power narrative and the discourse I talked about, but when there are competing policy objectives, the right to housing as a clear policy priority in the context of competing objectives can take away vetoes that exist to the right to housing. If you give the right to housing, you at least equalise those two competing rights. You make it different. It also raises issues of rights, voice and participation. The other issue it raises, which does not get enough attention but I think it is important, concerns the context of the fiscal deficit and expenditure thresholds that are now being used as an international veto on expenditure on increasing the budget for social housing builds. There were examples during the crisis of countries that had strong constitutional rights provisions for social policy in their constitutions being able legally to contest some of the fiscal rules that were given to them by the European Union. Germany, Portugal and Latvia did it. Having these provisions in our Constitution over the longer term gives us more national power as a sovereign State to contest some of the fiscal frameworks that are stopping us from doing what we might otherwise want to do as a nation. I think that is a very powerful argument that has probably not got enough examination in the debate to date. There are many reasons to pursue a right to

housing in the Constitution. As I have said, it is not a panacea and nobody should argue that it is the answer. It is part of a suite of actions that are needed, but it certainly gives some tools that might be very useful both in the short and long term.

**Chairman:** I apologise for having to cut Dr. Mary Murphy short, but if she would not mind, she could send responses to the questions that she did not get the opportunity to answer to the committee secretariat.

**Dr. Mary Murphy:** I have them all written down and we will be able to do that.

**Chairman:** On behalf of the committee, I thank Dr. Mary Murphy and Dr. Rory Hearne for coming before us this morning. I ask them to keep in touch with us in the future.

**Dr. Mary Murphy:** Yes, definitely.

**Chairman:** I propose to suspend the meeting to allow the witnesses to change seats.

*Sitting suspended at 11.12 a.m. and resumed at 11.15 a.m.*

### **Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and Dublin Region Homeless Executive: Housing Report**

**Chairman:** I welcome the officials from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Ms Mary Hurley, Mr. Brian Kenny and Mr. Thomas Gallagher, and the members of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, Ms Eileen Gleeson, Dr. Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes and Mr. Anthony Flynn. I apologise that we also have to shorten the time for the opening statements of the witnesses.

I draw the attention of the witnesses to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a 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 they 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.

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 outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I call Ms Mary Hurley.

**Ms Mary Hurley:** I thank the Chairman and members for inviting my colleagues, Mr. Brian Kenny and Mr. Thomas Gallagher, and I here today to discuss the research report of Dr. Hearne and Dr. Murphy. Given that there is a time pressure, I might deal with two issues. First, I will provide the committee with a quick update on the actions we in the Department have been progressing in terms of addressing homelessness and second with the issues reflected in the report.

Members will be aware that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, arranged for a housing summit in August. I will give the committee

a quick update on what happened at that summit and I will provide the committee with a note after the meeting today in respect of the summit.

In respect of the actions that have been under way in respect of homelessness, members will be aware of and have discussed today the budget provided for housing. A sum of €1.3 billion has been provided by the Government this year for social housing delivery, including longer-term accommodation for homeless families. Last year, 3,000 households left homelessness and moved into sustainable tenancies. In the first quarter of this year we have seen 900 additional households supported in exiting homelessness. In spite of this very significant progress in supporting households to secure longer-term housing solutions, the level of new presentations remains challenging and the number of families accessing homeless accommodation has increased in the past year. August will show a slight decrease in the number of families homeless in the Dublin region. In terms of the commitment to use only commercial hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation, which we have discussed previously, for families in exceptional circumstances, more than 1,000 families have now exited such emergency accommodation since Rebuilding Ireland was published last year. Five hundred families have been prevented from entering hotels. In terms of the 647 families who were in hotels in the Dublin region at the end of May 2017, we have been working very hard with the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, DRHE, to exit these families from hotels and more than 280 of these families had exited hotels and moved into more appropriate accommodation by the end of August. We will be working in the coming period to exit the remaining families out of the hotels.

Members will have heard a great deal about hubs. I will not go into detail on them but we can discuss them after my statement. A sum of €25 million has been made available for family hubs and the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, recently announced a further allocation of €20 million. This is for the capital costs around the hubs and the very much needed wrap-around supports that we discussed earlier this morning, which we are putting in place in the hubs. It is important to note that in excess of 1,000 homeless housing assistance payments have been put in place in Dublin since January 2017 arising from the recent housing summit. Deputy Boyd Barrett and the Chairman have been very supportive of the place-finder service. Arising from the housing summit, the HAP place-finder service is now also being rolled out nationally to each of the 31 local authorities to target HAP-supported rental properties for the households in emergency accommodation which we heard about this morning. We will also have 200 additional beds in place in Dublin by the end of the year, which is on top of the 2,500 emergency beds in place nationally. We have also heard this morning some discussion of the inter-agency group established by the Minister. The group will be key to addressing some of the issues we heard about in family hubs around medical and psychological supports.

Turning briefly to the report, the Government has been very focused in terms of Rebuilding Ireland and the key issues raised in the report on addressing what is well understood as the key cause of the significant challenges in the housing sector, namely, undersupply. The Rebuilding Ireland plan and the strategy for the rental sector published in December 2016 set out a range of measures to accelerate supply. These include: the use of public land; changes to the regulatory and planning processes; funding for housing-related infrastructure; schemes to get vacant properties back into use; and a significantly increased social housing programme, which we can discuss shortly. In addition, the Minister announced recently a change to social housing building policy which will see the housing budget being reoriented to direct-build programmes for local authorities and housing bodies. As a result, the current target for 2018 of 3,000 newly built homes will increase by almost 30% to 3,800 such units.

HAP is a key delivery mechanism in the context of Rebuilding Ireland and an immediate and flexible form of housing support for households with a long-term housing need. Any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the HAP scheme. HAP recipients can avail of full-time work and retain their housing support with an adjustment in their differential rent. Under rent supplement, these households would have lost their housing support. There are currently 27,100 active HAP tenancies with a total of 12,695 such tenancies being set up in 2017 to date. These numbers indicate that Rebuilding Ireland's target of 15,000 tenancies to be supported by the scheme in 2017 will be met. These tenancies involve more than 20,000 separate landlords and agents.

The evidence of the success of the HAP scheme suggests that many households want what HAP has to offer, namely, flexible housing support with access to long-term policies at a rent that is based on their ability to pay and the security of knowing they can work full-time without losing their household support. Comments made in the report on landlords being uninterested in the scheme certainly do not tally with the overall experience of the scheme's operation. HAP addresses many long-standing issues raised by landlord groups and housing academics on the operation of rent supplement. HAP scheme payments are made to the landlord on the tenant's behalf, which is to say that all payments are made electronically directly to the landlord. In essence, the landlord does not have to collect the rent. It is important to recognise that in developing the HAP scheme, every effort has been made to provide a strong level of long-term support while allowing for far greater flexibility of support, including speed of access to the scheme comparable to rent supplement. All parties to the administration of the scheme are committed to providing prospective HAP tenants with the capacity to secure good-quality, appropriate accommodation in the private market in the areas in which they want to live.

I move now to deal quickly with hubs. In respect of the comments of Dr. Hearne and Dr. Murphy, it is important to be very clear that family hubs are designed to be an important first response for families who become homeless and who have no alternative other than commercial hotels. Family hubs provide more appropriate and suitable accommodation for families than commercial hotels. They are not a long-term housing solution as families will move into houses and apartments that will be provided under social housing supports as supply becomes available. Housing authorities are working hard to ensure the progression of homeless families into independent tenancies as quickly as possible. Indeed, since opening in June 2017, more than 50% of the families accommodated in the Mater Dei family hub, referred to by the Chairman earlier, have transitioned to more permanent homes. Family hubs provide a more secure and stable placement for families on an ongoing basis, unlike the insecurity of hotel accommodation, especially during peak periods and holidays. These custom-developed facilities offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Such arrangements facilitate more co-ordinated needs assessment and support planning, including on-site access to required services such as welfare, health and housing services, cooking and laundry facilities and appropriate family supports.

The Department recognises that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to meeting housing needs. Households are different and their housing needs are different and will change over time. If meeting housing need were simple, we would have no vacant social or private units in any local authority area, we would have no households refusing offers of social housing on multiple occasions and we would not be striving to introduce greater choice and autonomy in the housing allocation process through initiatives like choice-based letting. Achieving a balanced mix of solutions must remain a priority, even in the midst of the current housing issues we face.

The introduction of HAP is a major step forward in introducing flexibility to meet housing need. Many of the households in HAP today will move to other forms of social housing support over their lifetimes as their needs change and as more units become available. Many will move out of social housing supports as their need lessens.

I thank the committee for inviting us here today. My colleagues, Mr. Brian Kenny and Mr. Thomas Gallagher, and I are more than happy to take any questions the members have.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Hurley. Does Ms Gleeson mind if I ask her to shorten her statement also? I apologise.

**Ms Eileen Gleeson:** I will do my best. I thank the committee for its invitation to the DRHE to attend this meeting to discuss the report. My submission outlines the background to the DRHE's participation in the research of Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne. I will respond to the policy recommendations for which the DRHE has responsibility, namely, the development of family hubs, initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness, the homeless HAP initiative, social housing allocation policy relating to homeless persons and service-user participation. Central to the business of the DRHE is a commitment to evidence-informed decision-making. To this end, the DRHE has a dedicated research unit staffed with trained researchers who are tasked with the production of verified, quality and comprehensive research and data. This information is used to inform the development of operations and policy decisions around the DRHE's response to growing rates of homelessness. Our national PASS office is the primary data source which has enabled us to track and report on the increase in family homelessness in the Dublin region.

Family homelessness became a noticeable issue towards the end of 2014. In line with other major cities, hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation was used to deal with the sudden influx of families. While the allocation of social housing to homeless households in the Dublin region increased, the rate was not sufficient to reduce or stabilise the number of housing homeless presentations. It was not until the homeless HAP pilot began to take off in 2016 that the numbers entering homeless services began to stabilise with homeless presentations being prevented from entering homelessness as a result of using homeless HAP. My submission outlines the numbers in homelessness moving to tenancies in the Dublin region and the types of tenure.

I turn to the rationale for the development of family hubs. While the development of hubs has been unprecedented internationally, the decision to proceed was based on evidence that on-site support in temporary accommodation services was a more effective model of service delivery. Emergency accommodation dispersed across the region, serviced by visiting support and support planning, has increased since the provision of the hubs. In quarter 1 of 2017, we had 2,350 cases with support planning in place. In quarter 2, following the introduction of the hubs, we have gone up to 2,550. In addition, research conducted by the DRHE in 2015 identified similar issues to those identified in the report before the committee. It highlighted the need for improved physical design of spaces for families that operated to respect autonomy and facilitate moves to tenancies within the shortest possible timeframe. As such, the DRHE began planning for the development of hubs containing the range of services outlined in my report. It should be noted that the national quality standards and departmental guidelines were being developed and actively used to inform the development of services prior to the publication of the report of Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne. It should be noted that the national quality standards and the departmental guidelines were developed and were actively used to inform the development of services prior to the publication of the report compiled by Dr. Hearne and Dr. Murphy. The guidelines include inspection, evaluation, redress and participation, all issues which were

raised by Dr. Murphy and Dr. Hearne. There is broad recognition that hubs are more favourable than hotels and are an important first response to families who become homeless and have no alternative other than commercial hotels. They are not long-term housing solutions, however. As Dublin is the first region to adopt hubs as an emergency accommodation mechanism, the research unit of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive - I am joined today by the head of research - will develop an evaluation methodology using the national quality standards framework as a reference point to monitor and inform best practice in their operation.

I want to outline briefly the features that are in the hubs. This issue was raised by Dr. Murphy. All family hubs are retrofitted to adhere to current building standards. Strict quality controls are in place to ensure all facilities are fully regulated with regard to fire and disabled access. There are space standards in place. The hubs are operated by professional staff. They are subject to service level agreements with the Dublin Region Homeless Executive. All families retain their homeless priority on the social housing list. All hubs are subject to good neighbour, good visitor and child protection policies. We have a community liaison officer in place who is tasked with ensuring everyone who accesses these services is linked with local community services. All hubs have access to key workers for support planning. As I mentioned earlier, the effect of this is that support planning is now in place for more families than heretofore. There is an exit strategy. Nobody is being held in family hubs against his or her will. Everyone has a right to move on and to exit into HAP or any other form of social housing he or she wishes to use. There is assistance with travel costs. Leap cards are available to people in hubs. Free child care places are provided.

Preventing homelessness in the first instance and supporting people to retain their homes is one of the main priorities of central government, statutory services and State-funded homeless services. The four local authorities and Threshold, through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, work in collaboration on the tenancy protection service. Since the launch of that service in June 2014, some 3,160 households have had their tenancies protected. In addition, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive appointed prevention officers in February of this year. They work with families as they present to assist them to remain in their current accommodation or to move on to alternative appropriate accommodation as quickly as possible through our place-finder service.

**Chairman:** Does Ms Gleeson mind if I move on to questions at this point? She might be able to make some of the other points she wishes to make in response to those questions.

**Ms Eileen Gleeson:** Just one minute. I am nearly finished.

**Chairman:** Sorry.

**Ms Eileen Gleeson:** We have exceeded the HAP targets for homeless families that we were set under Rebuilding Ireland. We facilitated 974 adults in moving to HAP tenancies under the homeless pilot last year. We have helped a further 841 people to make similar moves so far this year. I want to make it clear that families taking up HAP tenancies are not taken off the housing waiting list. They remain on the transfer list. Tenancy sustainment is a big part of our role. We have a huge range of visiting supports for people who move on to tenancies. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive has been investing in the development of prevention of services and will continue to do so. We can verify the allocation mechanism for our social housing. It is transparent. Allocations to local authorities or approved housing bodies continue to account for significant numbers of tenancies. Overall, the infrastructure is now in place to continue to develop hubs and to ensure we capture learning and feed it back to ensure services work as

effectively as possible. In line with most research and commentary on homelessness, we acknowledge that housing supply and security of tenure are ultimately the most critical issues that need to be addressed to resolve homelessness.

Along with my colleagues, Dr. Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes, who is the head of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive's research unit, and Mr. Tony Flynn, who is the head of housing development in Dublin City Council, I will be happy to respond to any questions that members might have. I thank the committee for its time.

**Chairman:** I remind members that we are under severe time pressure. I am going to confine contributions to a minute so that everybody gets in. I ask members to stick to their points, where possible, rather than elaborating on stories.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I have a few questions. When we are discussing hubs, it is important to note the concern that not all of the hubs will have the level of service and quality of Mater Dei, which many of us have visited. I refer particularly to the hubs that will be in refurbished commercial units. I think that concern is part of what is driving this conversation. There is also a fear that the significant level of public pressure that has developed on foot of the housing of large numbers of families and children in commercial hotels will diminish as more and more families move into hubs and, as a result, families could end up being in hubs longer than we might want, even if that is not what is intended. I want to make our concerns in this regard clear.

I would like to ask Ms Gleeson about the quality standards framework and the quality standards office that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive and the lead authorities have been working on. Can she tell the committee what level of resourcing will be required? What staff levels will be required? I am aware that a three-year roll-out programme is being developed and discussed with the Department. It is all very well to have very good quality standards on paper. I am fully supportive of the work that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive wants to be done. We need to know what the Minister needs to provide in next month's budget to make the work that the executive has been doing in recent times a reality.

I disagree with Ms Gleeson in one regard. HAP families are taken off the principal housing waiting lists. They are not featuring in the figures. In all but one local authority, they do not have access to the main allocation system. Ms Gleeson is right when she says they have access to transfers, but that is a very fundamental difference.

I have a question for the officials from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. How many families are in hubs now? What is the timeframe for the future roll-out of a number of families into hubs? Some commercial sites are currently being refurbished into hubs. Obviously, that is taking beds out of the emergency system. How many beds have been taken out as a result of that? How many adults and children are still in commercial hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation? The idea underpinning hubs is that there will be a reduction in the number of families in commercial hotels as the number of families in hubs increases. My fear is that because of the increasing number of presentations, we will have the same number of families in hotels, albeit new ones, as well as the families in hubs.

**Chairman:** I thank the Deputy. I will come back to him if there is time.

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I will conclude with two quick questions. First, can the departmental officials tell us where the Department is at with the resourcing of the quality standards framework office? Second, the crucial problem with HAP in all local authorities other than

South Dublin County Council is that it leads to families being taken off the principal choice-based letting allocation system. One local authority has made a change to ensure families do not lose their crucial places on the allocation system. Will the Department seriously consider changing the HAP rules to allow all local authorities to do what South Dublin County Council is doing? Such a move would resolve the central problem with the current approach to HAP, which was adding six years to the wait for a council house in south Dublin, in addition to the 11-year waiting time that exists anyway. I think the Department should recommend this very simple change, which does not require legislation, to all local authorities.

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** I welcome the clarity in the figures. I also welcome the extremely active and welcome response of the agencies and the Department. I will concentrate on questions. I presume the witnesses are aware of Louth County Council's successful initiative which involves compulsorily purchasing empty homes at an average cost of less than €100,000 per household, including all legal and reconstruction costs. Over 30 homes have been brought back into full family use within a year. Will the Department or the agencies accelerate this extremely helpful programme? I reckon it should be possible to bring at least 2,000 additional social homes into commission within a year.

I am very concerned about the second issue I would like to raise. The CSO seems to disagree profoundly with Fingal County Council on the number of empty homes in the Fingal area. The CSO is very clear on what defines an empty home or an empty property. Fingal County Council disagrees profoundly with that. According to the CSO, there are approximately 36,000 empty homes in Dublin. A gain could be made by bringing 3,000 of them back into commission by means of an empty homes tax or some other approach. Can we clarify whether these properties are vacant? The CSO has suggested that as it surveyed homes in Dublin in 2016, it found that one in every ten homes was vacant. If it transpires that there are families in these homes, it will have been a huge error. Perhaps Fingal County Council has made an error. This goes to the heart of the credibility of the CSO statistics themselves, never mind the Garda breath tests. I know the CSO figures are not wrong by 185,000. What is the real figure? It could be a big gain for everybody, particularly families on the waiting list.

**Senator Victor Boyhan:** I am quite conscious of the time. By the way, it was very helpful that many of the witnesses were here at the first session because these two issues totally overlap. The witnesses might comment on the sunset clause set out by Dr. Hearne and Dr. Murphy with regard to the ending of hubs in December 2019 and the practicalities of that. Would they share that ambition?

On hotels, we had great fanfare when the previous Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, was in here about Rebuilding Ireland. He emphatically told us there would be no hotels in a year or so. That has not happened and we cannot go back on it. However, what is the objective of the Department in terms of a date and a timeframe for the total cessation of anyone being accommodated in hotel accommodation? Could we have a date and an ambition for, and no vagueness on, that? When is it intended to do that?

I welcome the shift back to direct building. That is important. The Minister talks about the new inter-agency homeless group. Who is on that group? What is its remit and its format? How will it actively set about its work? The witnesses might share that with us in the next week or two. Whenever they have a moment, I would like to hear more about it.

My fourth point concerns the use of public lands. I have raised time and again the lack of verifiable data on public lands. I want to zone in on local authority lands. We know from

the Department's own local government auditors, who examine internally within the Custom House the returns for the 31 local authorities, that they have found substantial shortcomings in them. I mention particularly Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council because that is the one I know. I looked at the last audit report today. It is on the Department's website, which states that there is a shortcoming here and that it wants a complete inventory of the lands within the local authority. I have written to the Department about it. I do not know what is going on here. The last audit carried out, which is published online, for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is that of 2015-2016. That is really important. We need hard facts and hard data on sites. If we are serious about availing of and building on local authority lands, in particular, although I would not rule out any other State lands, we need a detailed inventory. I would like that to be prioritised if at all possible.

I know it is pre-budget so they may not wish to comment on it, but is there any intention to look at increasing the housing assistance payment or the rent supplement limits given current market rents? What is their view on it? Are they thinking along those lines? They might share that with us.

**Deputy Pat Casey:** I will be as brief as I can. First, I acknowledge the work that the Department has done in terms of what it has achieved, such as 3,000 exiting homelessness. Equally, however, we must acknowledge that the cumulative effect of homelessness is continuing to rise. While 3,000 exit, another 3,000 plus replace them.

On the use of hotels as emergency accommodation, is there evidence to show that we are expanding outside Dublin and using hotels in the neighbouring counties to address the homelessness crisis in Dublin? I am getting anecdotal evidence from my county that is in fact the case and that we are now moving people out of Dublin into, for example, rural areas in County Wicklow.

I agree with the policy shift to direct building housing by the local authority. However, are we just moving the same funding from one source of supply to another source of supply? Will it deliver additional housing units or is it just that the method by which they will be delivered has changed?

Why did we create the transfer list in the first place? Is it that we are trying to present figures in a different way, which makes the crisis worse, because their long-term housing needs have not been met?

**Deputy Mick Barry:** I only have the one question. It is on the issue of hubs. I want to briefly read into the record some quotes because the quotes in the report are really interesting and important and it is important the voice of the people in the hubs is heard. The researchers were told by various parents that they felt their parenting was being checked all the time, that they got warnings, that the hubs felt like institutions, that they did not need their authority taken away from them in front of their children, that they were taking the parenting role from the parent and that when someone spoke to them like this, they feel they are on the bottom.

The hub at Clonliffe Road has been mentioned more than once in this discussion. My first question is whether the witnesses feel there is a possibility of so-called good, showcase hubs being promoted whereas the reality in other hubs is quite different. On the question of a sunset clause, would Ms Gleeson and Ms Hurley comment on reports and information that we have that the State is in negotiation with owners of buildings to get those buildings for hubs and what is being discussed is five-year leases.

**Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor:** I agree with previous speakers on the housing assistance payment. Things need to be clarified. The HAP forms go to the landlord and then to Cork, because it has left local authorities. I have massive issues with that. All the HAP applications should be left with the 31 local authorities. When put on the HAP, there was a question on the form asking if the applicant wanted to stay on the housing list. That was on the form but many people did not understand it and did not fill it in. There was massive confusion and that needs to be sorted.

The other issue is the cap. Many people are becoming homeless because of the cap. They are not qualifying. We all want to welcome the €45 million going into the hubs in Dublin. That is fine and it is welcome. Everyone needs a home. However, it is necessary to qualify to get the benefit of rent control. A list was made recently in respect of rent control. Carlow-Kilkenny is my area. Most of us do not qualify. That is unreal. We are putting hubs in the cities, which is fine and I have no problem with the €45 million going into that. However, we need to examine the rural areas and say that they should be put into the rent control categories. What is happening is resulting in a divide. Rural areas are being forgotten and the focus is on the hubs, Dublin and the cities. The Department needs to look at other areas.

I have massive issues with the housing list. As the witnesses know, many people do not qualify for the housing list if they already have a home. However, if their home is repossessed and the house is sold, it takes a long time to get that sorted. If the person's name is still on that house, although he or she is not in it because the bank has taken it or it is up for sale and the person is renting somewhere else, he or she is not able to go on the housing list because his or her name is on another house.

We are making people homeless. We have the cap and they do not qualify to go on the housing list. We have people whose houses, through no fault of their own, are being repossessed by the bank. The process is so long that they are not qualifying to go on the housing list. Furthermore, they are not qualifying for rent allowance because the Department is now taking away the rent allowance that used to help those who did not qualify to go on the housing list. I have massive issues with that.

We were delighted to have the Minister in Carlow over a month ago. I was not at the meeting, although I am highlighting it. He announced more than 100 houses. Some of them are co-operative houses and some of them are local authority houses and I welcome that. However, the problem is that a sod has not been turned in a month and there is no timescale. We knew about these projects a year ago but the Minister announced them a month ago. We cannot get a timescale. What I am saying is that all the money we are told is there is not coming through to local authorities. That is why local authorities are not able to do the work they have to do. The powers need to be given back to the local authorities. They need to build more housing and we need to ensure that happens as I do not think it is happening.

To return to the rental accommodation scheme, which is similar to the housing assistance payment-----

**Chairman:** If the Senator does not mind, I will bring her back in. She is the only one to go over three minutes. I do not want to cut her off but, if we have the time at the end, I will come back to her.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** Those in receipt of HAP are obviously a combination of people who were on the rental accommodation scheme or in receipt of rent supplement. Some of them are

in receipt of the homeless HAP. How many more extras will we get? A target of 15,000 tenancies has been mentioned and the Department has set up 12,000 to date. How many more extras has the target taken into account?

In terms of hubs, we all accept that a hub is better than a hotel. I am interested in hearing about the long-term effects of hubs. How many more hubs are planned? Is there a deadline for moving people out of hotels? Has a new realistic deadline been set?

Ms Hurley has stated that 3,800 social housing units will be built in 2018. Is that figure not totally inadequate? It has been recognised that the big problem is building more social housing. I find it hard to believe that politicians will accept such a target. Have the local authorities advised the Minister that a State company must be established, perhaps with local authorities, to build more social and affordable housing? I would like to hear about the engagement on that matter. It is crucial that we establish such a company to address our social and affordable housing needs.

In terms of CPOs, I have talked about compulsory purchase orders to Mr. Tony Flynn and Mr. Brendan Kenny on many occasions. Dublin City Council has been slow to get CPOs and has only barely started. Dublin City Council is the biggest local authority in the county yet it has only 20 CPOs at present. It is a poor record that needs to be addressed in a big way.

**Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett:** Can the witnesses tell me how many people have joined the housing list over the past three years? What figures are available for same? How many new applications for housing have been made nationally? What is the pace of the new applications? Such information has not been taken into account. Anecdotally, in Dún Laoghaire, I can say that there are more applications than planned houses. That means the list of 5,000 will be longer, even with the current plans, than it is now at the end of the next year or the year after. Is the Department tracking the amount of new applications? If so, how will they impact on the list and plans to deal with the housing crisis?

Do the witnesses know how many people on average have been knocked off the list over the same period because they exceeded the eligibility criteria? Unfortunately, people have been knocked off the list due to receiving a small pay rise, working a few extra hours or whatever even though they still have absolutely no chance of getting a mortgage from a bank. What provisions have been made for them?

Can the witnesses tell us anything about LIHAF funding? How much will we get back in affordable housing? What is the latest thinking on defining affordable housing? At the end of last year the Minister issued a circular saying that the €300,000 limit must be varied because the market figures are much higher. That means affordable housing will mean more than €300,000. A huge number of people cannot afford to pay €300,000 for a home. Therefore, going above the sum of €300,000 makes the words “affordable housing” meaningless. What proportion of money will we get back for LIHAF funding? We understand in Dún Laoghaire that for €15 million LIHAF funding for Cherrywood we will get 1% of the Cherrywood development. It is shocking if that is true.

Does the Department plan to engage with NAMA given the current discussions and the Taoiseach stating that using NAMA’s assets and capacities is long overdue? Has the Government engaged with NAMA about the remainder of the NAMA properties and landbanks?

**Chairman:** The Deputy has run over time. I must cut him off because I cut off Senator

Murnane O'Connor in terms of time. I will allow him to comment later, if we have time. Does Senator Grace O'Sullivan have a question?

**Senator Grace O'Sullivan:** We are here to discuss the Rebuilding Ireland policy. All we have heard about is rehousing Ireland, not rebuilding. What steps has the Department put in place to work with local authorities to build social and affordable houses?

**Chairman:** The Minister mentioned people on housing lists. If they live in an area of high demand is there flexibility that allows them to move to an area, even a rural one, if they so choose?

To follow on from what Deputy Boyd Barrett has said, it was mentioned at the council meeting last week that no figure of 1% or a further 10% was given for the Cherrywood development. What was said was that no decision will be made on the percentage until the council negotiates with the developer but I confirm that figures have been bandied about.

I wish the officials luck in providing answers to all of the questions because they have only five minutes to respond. The secretariat has noted all of the questions. A bit like Dr. Mary P. Murphy and Dr. Rory Hearne in the last session, I suggest that the witnesses supply us with their answers as well.

**Ms Mary Hurley:** I can move quickly through some of the questions. Deputy Ó Broin asked some questions about hubs. At present there are nine hubs in operation that accommodate 304 families. A further 11 hubs will come onstream. They have been delayed because we want to put quality services and supports in place. Three or four additional hubs will come onstream over the next two months, which will accommodate a significant number of people. We are not showcasing. The reason the hubs have not been supplied as quickly as we wanted is because of our wish to meet quality standards.

Deputy Ó Broin mentioned the staffing levels of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, DRHE. One of the discussions that took place at the housing summit was on upskilling and putting the right people in place to support Ms Gleeson and her team with their excellent work. The Department will work very closely with Ms Gleeson to supplement the number of her staff and identify additional needs. One of the needs that has been identified is the need to appoint a director for the Housing First Service. We will move forward with that matter.

Funding has been mentioned. I can confirm that the Government has ring-fenced €5.35 billion to deliver social housing out to the end of the programme. This year alone we have spent €750 million, so money has reached local authorities. We are working to improve our systems in the Department in terms of the approval process. There is work under way with the local authorities to concertina the process.

Deputy O'Dowd had a few queries. We have worked hard with Louth County Council on compulsory purchase orders, CPOs. The county council is a fine example of making it work. There is funding available for CPOs and we will continue to work to advance the initiative.

Deputy O'Dowd mentioned the difference in the number of empty houses compiled by the CSO and local authorities. Yes, there seems to be a divergence in numbers. The Minister has established a vacant house unit in his Department. We are working on the vacant house strategy at the moment so many matters will be clarified. One thing is certain there are not the amount of vacant units that people think exist. Obviously the Department will try to maximise the use of vacant units through various social housing schemes. For example, the repair and leasing

scheme, the buy and renew scheme and also making vacant units available for private use.

Senator Boyhan raised a number of queries. He said it was critical to establish an inter-agency group to address the homeless issue and provide joined-up services. We are all aware that homeless people have complex needs. An inter-agency group has been established and Mr. John Murphy, the former Secretary General of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, has been appointed to Chair the group. The Minister and I have met him. Plus the inter-agency group will hold its first meeting on 5 October. The meeting will involve engagement with a range of stakeholders that deliver services to homeless people.

The Senator mentioned sunset clauses and hubs. Our overall ambition is to move people out of hubs as quickly as possible and there is evidence of a 50% turnover in the number of families who resided at the Mater Dei facility. Some cases are a little more complex than others and it can be hard to move people on. Members can rest assured that we will be working to get people out of the hubs as quickly as possible. Ms Gleeson and her team have put various initiatives in place and key workers and place finders to assist families. I know Deputy Boyd Barrett has raised the place finder service on a number of occasions. In the four Dublin authorities the DRHE provided a place finding service but the Minister, Deputy Murphy, has committed to a physical place finding service in each of the areas and across the 31 local authority areas.

**Chairman:** I am sorry but I have to cut Ms Hurley off as another committee is coming in. I have a copy of the questions. Perhaps Ms Hurley can email the clerk, Ms Cashin, with responses. We will then circulate them to members. I am sorry that I am obliged to cut the meeting short. I thank Mr. Gallagher, Ms Hurley, Mr. Kenny, Ms Gleeson, Dr. O'Donoghue Hynes and Mr. Flynn for attending.

The joint committee adjourned at 12 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Thursday, 28 September 2017.