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| **Action No.** | **TABLE OF VACANCY ACTIONS** | **TIMELINE** | **UPDATES @ June 2022** |
| **1: ESTABLISH ROBUST, ACCURATE, CONSISTENT AND UP-TO-DATE DATA SETS ON VACANCY** | | | |
| **1A** | Establishment of a Vacant Homes Unit within the Department and appointment of Vacant Homes Officers in local authorities to drive and co-ordinate actions at a national and local level, including data collection and analysis. | Complete | VHU Established August 2017. Continued funding to support Vacant Homes Officers in LAs 2021/2022 - €50,000 p.a. Under Housing For All the Government has committed to ensuring that these are full-time posts by end of Q2, 2022 along with increasing funding to support Vacant Homes Officers 2022/2023 - €60,000 p.a. |
| **1B** | Establish a vacancy sub-group (under the Department’s Housing Data Analytics Group), including representatives of the Department, CSO, local government sector and the Housing Agency and task the Vacancy sub-group with developing a standardised methodology of data collection that is accurate and consistent for utilisation across the local government sector. | Commenced | Vacancy Sub-Group established. |
| **1C** | Conduct a Pilot Survey to ensure methodology development is robust and produces reliable output and consider whether to roll out as a national survey. | Completed March 2019 | Pilot Survey concluded. Full roll out at national level is being considered in conjunction with the Vacant Homes Offices in each Local Authority, in the context of the wider data gathering as part of Housing for All. |
| **2: BRING FORWARD MEASURES TO ENSURE, TO THE GREATEST DEGREE POSSIBLE, THAT VACANT AND UNDERUSED PRIVATELY OWNED PROPERTIES ARE BROUGHT BACK TO USE** | | | |
| **2A** | Gain a better understanding as to the barriers that exist to the reuse of privately owned vacant properties. | Ongoing | Mail shot issued to Licenced Property Service Providers to identify & assist with vacant properties, especially access to apartments.  Specific consideration given to vacancy as part of the development of Housing for All, and a specific pathway included to address vacancy in the housing stock. |
| **2B** | Continuously review and evaluate existing schemes to ensure they are effective in bringing homes back to viable use. | Ongoing | 279 homes delivered back into use under Repair & Lease (End Q4 2021). Since the Buy and Renew Scheme was introduced, local authorities have used it to acquire and renew approximately 750 homes for social housing use. |
| **2C** | Address vacancy in commercial/over the shop properties – reducing where possible regulatory barriers and providing guidance to bring clarity on what regulatory requirements apply to such properties. | Ongoing | Bringing Back Homes - Manual for the reuse of existing buildings was published in December 2018.  The appointment of Vacant Homes Officer to act as a central point of contact in each LA was also to address this action point. |
| **2D** | Examine the potential for the greater use of legislative powers available to local authorities to reactivate vacant dwellings. | Ongoing | The planning regulations, introduced by SI 30 of 2018, which exempted certain vacant commercial premises from requiring planning permission to change to residential have been extended until 2025. The extension of the 2018 legislation provides an immediate and seamless continuance of the previous exemption regulations. In addition, the scope of the exemption was also extended to include an extra class of use, that of public houses. While a number of authorities have been successful in using their CPO powers, Housing for All launches a new nationwide programme with specific targets for activation of vacant homes through the use of CPO. |
| **3: BRING FORWARD MEASURES TO MINIMISE VACANCY ARISING IN SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK** | | | |
| **3A** | Review funding mechanisms on an on-going basis with appropriate adjustments made to ensure that the sector has the capacity to prioritise bringing vacant properties back into use. | Ongoing | Funding of €2.99m made available to Vacant Homes Unit for 2022 to support the work of the unit as well as the Vacant Homes Offices in local authorities including the funding of posts of Vacant Homes Officers. The Vacant Homes Unit ran an advertising campaign in October 2020. The VHU also placed advertisements overseas newspapers and ran an online social media advertising campaign in March 2020 to publicise vacant homes initiatives.  Housing for All now contains a number of measures to expand existing schemes to tackle vacancy, including using the Better Energy Homes Grant to support retrofit for vacancy properties and the establishment of the Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund to support bringing properties back into use in towns and villages, where the vacancy/dereliction is high. |
| **3B** | Continue working with local authorities to introduce preventative maintenance approach of housing stock. | Ongoing | These measures are ongoing and specific commitments in this regard are set out in Housing for All (Section 4.2 and Action 20.6). |
| **3C** | Continue to liaise with local authorities with a view to ensuring that Choice Based Letting is implemented as widely as possible across the country. | Ongoing | Choice Based Letting (CBL) is a method whereby available social housing stock is let by being openly advertised by Local Authorities to persons on the social housing waiting list. This allows qualified applicants to 'register an interest' in available homes. While many housing authorities have adopted CBL, it is not yet in operation in all Local Authorities. The DHLGH is working with the Local Authority sector, through the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) to progress this and funding has been made available in 2022 to encourage Local Authorities to adopt this method of letting. The Department will continue to work with Local Authorities who do not yet have CBL to progress the standardisation of the CBL systems in place across Local Authorities. |
| **3D** | Engage with the Housing Agency and the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector to identify, support and enter agreements with AHBs best suited to playing a significant role in bringing vacant properties back into use. | Ongoing | The Housing Agency is engaging with local authorities in bringing vacant properties back into use. |
| **4: CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT WITH, AND PROVISION OF SUPPORT TO, KEY STAKEHOLDERS, TO ENSURE SUITABLE VACANT PROPERTIES HELD BY BANKS, FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND INVESTORS ARE ACQUIRED FOR SOCIAL HOUSING USE** | | | |
| **4A** | Ensure adequate capital funding is in place for Housing Agency to purchase and acquire vacant properties. Housing Agency to continue to engage with banks, financial institutions and investment companies to purchase suitable units, selling ultimately to AHBs to tenant. | Annually | The Housing Agency Acquisition (HAA) Fund was established with effect from the 1 January 2017 with the objective of acquiring vacant property portfolios of financial institutions that could then be used for social housing. The fund was designed to be a short to medium term initiative that complements ongoing targeted acquisition activity by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). By the end of Q1 2022, the fund has enabled the acquisition of 931 homes and supported the Local Authorities, through an advisory service, in their purchase of other units through their own or other funding streams.  The success of the HAA fund can also be strongly attributed to the skills and expertise held by The Housing Agency Acquisitions team and their legal advisors.  Since 2017, the number of acquisitions have decreased each year, reflecting the reducing availability of suitable units from banks and equity funds. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) is undertaking a review of the fund. |
| **4B** | Ensure suitable portfolios of vacant properties are acquired from financial institutions and investors. | Ongoing |
| **4C** | Continued engagement of Housing Agency with NAMA and other relevant stakeholders to deliver homes to the social housing sector. | Ongoing |
| **4D** | Department to engage further with local authorities and stakeholders, in respect of unfinished housing estates, to explore the range of strategic acquisition options available to local authorities to take up remaining, suitable and required vacant units. | Ongoing | Local Authorities are responsible for the management and administration of unfinished housing developments. The latest data from a 2020 survey shows that 123 developments remain on the ‘unfinished’ list. Within the remaining cohort of 123 developments, 58 developments are unoccupied. These developments mainly contain partial shells and units at foundation level, are securely fenced off and are located in low demand areas. The remaining 65 developments containing residents will be the focus for Local Authorities to work towards a satisfactory resolution. In total, at the time of survey, there were 326 houses vacant and 13 apartments. Housing for All reflects the commitment for Local Authorities to work with appropriate stakeholders towards minimising that vacancy level. |
| **5: FOSTER AND DEVELOP CROSS-SECTOR RELATIONSHIPS, COLLABORATING IN PARTNERSHIP TO TACKLE VACANT HOUSING MATTERS** | | | |
| **5A** | Draw from the overall National Planning Framework Strategy, having particular regard to its objectives addressing vacancy. | Ongoing | Work has been advancing on the implementation of the National Planning Framework - National Policy Objective 16, National Policy Objective 25 and National Policy Objective 35. The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) have been game-changers in providing substantial resourcing to support more development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland’s five cities, large towns and villages. Housing for All, commits to the incorporation of activation of vacant properties in the key criteria for future funding from both funds. In addition, the pathway on addressing vacancy and the efficient use of housing stock, has many actions, in line with the NPF objectives, and the Town Centre First policy (launched on 4 February 2022) to address vacancy. |
| **5B** | Development, rollout and monitoring of dedicated Urban Regeneration Scheme. | Ongoing | The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is a flagship element of Project Ireland 2040.  Under the stewardship of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government the Fund was established in 2018 to support more compact and sustainable development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland’s five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan (NDP).  Under the NDP 2021-2030 the URDF has been extended to 2030 with a total allocation in excess of €2 billion, including €159 million available to fund URDF-supported projects in 2022.  To date there have been two calls for proposals under the URDF, the first in July 2018 and the second in January 2020.  So far almost €312m has been allocated in respect of the 87 projects approved under Call 1, while in March 2021 funding support of €1.3 billion was announced in respect of a further 45 proposals approved under Call 2. Almost €107m has been recouped by the URDF to successful applicants since 2019.  The important role of the URDF is outlined in Housing for All, particularly, in relation to the tackling vacancy, and encouraging residential development in brownfield areas of towns and cities.  It is intended that there will be a third call for proposals for the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) in the second half of 2022.  This will include a particular emphasis on proposals that focus on implementation of the Town Centre First Policy that include measures to tackle vacancy and dereliction through greater occupancy for residential purposes. |
| **5C** | Consider utilisation of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund as a mechanism for addressing vacancy in urban areas and support the submission of proposals to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund with a view to reducing the level of vacancy in rural areas. | Commenced | The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development and seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities.  The fund focuses on all settlements and rural areas with fewer than 10,000 people which are located outside the five city metropolitan areas.  The Government has committed €1 billion over 10 years to the Fund and €315 million is allocated to the Fund for the period 2019-2022.  Housing for All, commits to the incorporation of activation of vacant properties in the key criteria for future funding. |
| **5D** | Work in close partnership with other relevant Government Departments on addressing such issues as rural vacancy, examining possible measures to address vacant homes when an owner moves to nursing home care under the Nursing Home Support Scheme and exploration of possible taxation measures and providing additional legislative powers to increase capacity of local authorities to bring vacant properties back to use. | Ongoing | The Department has been working intensively with the Department of Health who are the lead department on the Nursing Home Support Scheme and, as a result, the Government has introduced amendments to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme to cap the payment on sale of an applicant’s principal private residence to three years. Up to now the sale of a principal private residence by a Fair Deal applicant could have led to uncapped contributions to the scheme. The amendments brought forward will cap this contribution to three years at 7.5% of the value of the property per annum, as is the case where the property remains unsold. In line with the commitment in Housing for All, further amendments are expected to be made to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme in order to exempt rental income from a principal private residence when calculating the income of an applicant. |