

*Dé Máirt, 29 Meán Fómhair, 2015
Tuesday, 29th September, 2015*

2 p.m.

**GNÓ COMHALTAÍ PRÍOBHÁIDEACHA
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

Fógra i dtaobh leasuithe ar Thairiscint : Notice of Amendments to Motion

206. “That Dáil Éireann:

accepts that there is an emergency social housing crisis resulting from years of underinvestment in social housing builds and acknowledges that the only way to fully address this crisis is to immediately commence a major social house building programme;

further accepts that, as a consequence of lack of investment, bad planning, property speculation and incompetent governance, combined with successive ideologically similar Governments that have incentivised the private sector to increasingly deliver social housing needs, there is an unprecedented homelessness crisis;

demands that the Government address its abject failure to deal with the housing and homelessness crisis which has resulted in almost 5,000 people State-wide living in emergency accommodation; an estimated 2,298 people living in emergency accommodation in Dublin, 1,275 of whom are children; and an estimated 80 plus families presenting to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive on a monthly basis;

notes that in the period succeeding the temporary provision of 260 extra beds last Christmas in response to the death of Jonathan Corrie on Molesworth Street, Dublin, the number of people sleeping rough on the streets has doubled;

commends charitable organisations, community groups and housing agencies for the work they are doing to assist people who are homeless or living in housing distress throughout the State;

acknowledges the findings of the Dublin Simon Community Annual Review 2014, that highlighted the unprecedented levels of homelessness and the growing numbers of people sleeping rough and in emergency accommodation in the capital;

commends Threshold's Dublin Tenancy Protection Service in preventing 900 families from homelessness over the last year;

agrees that current Rent Supplement levels are wholly inadequate to meet people's needs as illustrated by figures released recently by the Private Residential Tenancies Board, (PRTB) that reveal a significant increase across both the private rental housing and apartment markets in Ireland up to June, 2015, with average rent for private accommodation increasing 7.1 per cent in 12 months from the second quarter of 2014;

notes:

— that since this government came to power the spend on Rent Supplement has reduced

from €516,860,000 in 2010 to an estimated figure of €298,415,000 in 2015 and that the Mortgage Interest Supplement decreased during the same period from €77,246,000 to €11,930,000 and that this Government has made it easier for the banks to evict people in mortgage arrears, resulting in more homelessness and housing overcrowding;

- recent figures released by the PRTB that starkly show housing rents were 6.4 per cent higher in the second quarter of this year, while apartment rents increased by 7.6 per cent, meaning tenants leasing a house paid out an average of €878 per month in rent - €50 more than in the same period in 2014 - and for people renting an apartment, the national average rate was recorded at €922; and
- that in Dublin, rental rates continue to increase close to ‘boom’ time levels, with housing rents increasing by 8.8 per cent, while apartment rates went up by 9.4 per cent, meaning the typical rent for a house in Dublin in the second quarter of this year was €1,387 and €1,260 for an apartment, while the Rent Supplement threshold is €950 a month;

recognises the key role approved housing bodies have in providing and managing social housing;

agrees that housing homeless families in hotels and bed and breakfasts is wholly unacceptable and unsustainable;

further agrees that modular housing as proposed by this Government as an emergency response measure is not the correct response to the crisis but does not oppose the provision of any shelter for homeless families on condition that modular housing is of high quality, is short-term, is well integrated and does not act as a replacement or financial impediment to a proper social housing build programme; and

calls on the Government to:

- review Part VIII of the Planning and Development Act 2000, with the view to temporarily amending legislation in order to provide social housing in a more timely manner;
- significantly increase the direct funding to local authorities to commence a long-term plan of social housing expansion;
- provide the legislative framework for local authorities to be able to access Housing Finance Agency loans off balance sheet to further supplement a major expansion of social housing;
- reverse the prioritisation of State-subsidised private rented accommodation through schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and leasing, in favour of local authority and Housing Association direct build, or purchase social housing;
- implement immediately a number of measures to address the housing and homelessness crisis which Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government has conceded is now a ‘humanitarian crisis’;
- contact the European Union Commission and have the housing crisis declared a ‘national emergency’, allowing the Government to speed up the public procurement process when building social housing and to fund the building of social housing off balance sheet;
- work in tandem with the PRTB to introduce emergency legislation to cap and reduce rents to reasonable rent levels and to index-link future rent rises;
- accept that with approximately 38,000 mortgage holders experiencing severe mortgage distress, there is a need to introduce emergency legislation to cap mortgage interest rates;

- strengthen the protection of the family home in the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2013;
- compel the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to engage in an emergency consultation with local authorities, and give local authorities the funding and power to have the first refusal on suitable NAMA properties or land banks;
- review all property-related tax reliefs that encourage speculation for profit;
- set up municipal trusts with local authorities to source off-balance sheet funding to build social housing;
- give local authorities first option on empty State lands and buildings to address social housing needs;
- adequately fund local authorities to allow for regeneration projects, new-build social housing, making voids ready for allocation within the agreed six week period, and to refurbish existing stock;
- acquire on a temporary basis empty buildings, including office space, unused retail units and other vacant properties that can be suitably converted quickly for accommodation use;
- increase requirements under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 to 20 per cent social and affordable housing on all new developments;
- increase funding for local authorities to build extensions to address overcrowding and disability adaptation needs in existing housing stock;
- reintroduce the Financial Contribution Scheme for senior citizens with monies raised being retained for future social housing needs;
- accept that local authorities are severely hampered from addressing the homelessness issue due to a lack of State funding and commit to adequately fund local authorities to address the short-fall in funding required for homelessness;
- ring-fence and increase funding to refuges that house survivors of domestic violence;
- re-examine the feasibility of the rural resettlement scheme;
- provide adequate funding to approved housing bodies to ensure they play a full role in provision of social housing; and
- expand and extend Threshold's Tenancy Protection Service to include Galway, Limerick, Wicklow, Meath and Kildare.” — *Dessie Ellis, Gerry Adams, Jonathan O'Brien, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, Mary Lou McDonald, Michael Colreavy, Seán Crowe, Pearse Doherty, Martin Ferris, Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, Sandra McLellan, Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Brian Stanley, Peadar Tóibín.*

Leasuithe:

Amendments:

1. To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“confirms:

- some 15,000 social housing units were built from 2007-2010 in contrast with 1,250 from 2011-2014; and
- the current Government has halved Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 from 20 per cent to 10 per cent of units;

notes:

- that Freedom of Information (FOI) material has revealed social housing waiting lists have soared by 45 per cent to over 130,000 households across Ireland;

- that there are 2,650 vacant housing units in Ireland and that funding for refurbishment has been reduced by €6.15 million;
- that an estimated 25,000 additional units are required per annum to accommodate demographic change;
- overall construction levels has slumped to approximately 10,000 units this year; and
- that spiralling rent levels are forcing many families into homelessness;

condemns:

- the Government’s failure to recognise and address the escalating housing crisis over the past four years;
- the continued freezing of Rent Supplement levels despite massive rent increases; and
- the on-going failure to deliver housing units on the ground;

calls on the Government to:

- launch a €4.5 billion social housing building program;
- restore Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 to 20 per cent;
- establish rent certainty measures;
- introduce mortgage interest relief for landlords to encourage long-term leases and tax incentives to retain landlords in the private rental sector;
- create a Home Building Bond to fund National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) development projects on NAMA and State lands;
- use the Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) to help finance private developers;
- amend planning laws to encourage above shop living and town centre residential development; and
- revise density levels to encourage greater levels of building in the right locations.”—
Barry Cowen, Seán Fleming, Colm Keaveney, Niall Collins, Michael Moynihan, John Browne, Micheál Martin, Charlie McConalogue, Brendan Smith, Robert Troy, Dara Calleary, Seán Ó Fearghail, Michael P. Kitt, Seamus Kirk, Michael McGrath, John McGuinness, Billy Kelleher, Timmy Dooley, Willie O'Dea, Éamon Ó Cuív, Bobby Aylward.

2. To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“notes that the economic downturn and contraction in construction activity, which began in 2008 and continued for a number of years, have created a significant shortfall in housing supply generally, including social housing;

recognises the high priority which the Government has afforded to increasing housing supply, including through its Construction 2020 strategy;

acknowledges the Government’s on-going commitment to ensure that a full range of options is available to distressed borrowers and to keep as many people as possible in their homes;

welcomes the decisive action taken by the Government in relation to mortgage arrears, including the package of measures announced in May 2015 to provide additional support to early engagement borrowers, raise awareness and improve take-up of insolvency measures, improve the operation of the Courts Service of Ireland and the support available to borrowers through this process, and improve schemes to try wherever possible to keep people in their home, including changes made to the Mortgage-to-Rent Scheme to enable more properties to qualify for the scheme;

recognises that social housing is a key priority for the Government and, in particular, welcomes

the:

- additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for social housing in Budget 2015;
- Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, targeting the provision of over 110,000 social housing units in the period to 2020, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units, at a cost of €3.8 billion, and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), to address the needs of all households on the housing waiting list, with flexibility to meet potential future demand;
- implementation of the HAP scheme, a key component of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which is also progressing at pace, with almost 4,000 households now in receipt of HAP across the 13 local authority areas involved, and the intention to expand the operation of the scheme to a further cohort of local authorities in the coming months;
- significant progress made in bringing vacant local authority housing stock back into use, with over 2,300 vacant units funded in 2014 and a further 2,500 units targeted for 2015;
- enhanced role for Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in the provision and management of new social housing under the Social Housing Strategy 2020;
- important contribution made by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) in the delivery of social housing, sourcing almost 1,400 houses and apartments for social housing use by local authorities and approved housing bodies and investing some €40 million in making these properties ready for social housing;
- recent amendments made to the Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 mechanism by the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, which will mean that in future, the focus of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 will be on the delivery of completed social housing units; and
- innovative funding mechanisms provided for in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, including the progress being made on site selection under the proposed €300 million programme of investment in social housing via the Public Private Partnership model, which is expected to deliver 1,500 housing units;

welcomes the multi-stranded Government response to the homelessness issue, in particular the:

- key measures identified in the Government's Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness (May 2014) and in the Action Plan to Address Homelessness (December 2014);
- whole-of-Government approach to dealing with the complexity of homelessness, involving all key State agencies concerned, including the Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government; Social Protection; Health; Children and Youth Affairs; the Health Service Executive; Tusla (the Child and Family Agency); the Irish Prison Service; and local authorities;
- supports provided for the critically important role performed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with homeless persons and helping to deal with the multi-faceted issues that homeless households face;
- increase of over 20 per cent in funding provided for homeless services in 2015, and the commitment of the Government to provide additional funding, where necessary;
- excellent work being done through the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operating in conjunction with Threshold in Dublin and Cork, with over 1,200 of the 4,000 cases supported with increased rent supplement limits arising from engagement under this Protocol arrangement, with active plans to extend the Protocol to Galway city; and
- proactive approach being taken to the exploration of further steps to fast-track the

delivery of additional social housing to meet the needs of homeless households, including through a programme of modular housing;

notes the important role that the private rental sector plays in the overall housing market, with approximately one in five households now privately renting their homes, and in that regard:

- acknowledges that the continued increase in rents is a cause for concern, with the latest Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) figures showing that housing rents were 6.4 per cent higher in the second quarter of this year, while apartment rents increased by 7.6 per cent;
- accepts that a shortage of housing supply is at the heart of rising rents and that the Government is addressing this on a number of fronts, including through its Construction 2020 strategy;
- acknowledges that the housing supply shortfall will take time to address fully but welcomes the signs of recovery, particularly the increase in the number of house completions in 2014 to 11,016 units nationally - an increase of 33 per cent on the 2013 figure - and the 16 per cent increase in completions in the first seven months of 2015 compared to the corresponding period in 2014; and
- notes that the regulation of rent raises many complex economic and legal issues and that in any consideration of such measures, it is critical that they are balanced and have the desired effect on the rental market, while being fair to landlords and tenants alike;

notes, in respect of Rent Supplement, that:

- the scheme plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 65,000 recipients at a cost of €298 million in 2015; over 13,700 rent supplement tenancies have been awarded this year, of which almost 4,300 are in Dublin, showing that landlords are accommodating significant numbers under the scheme;
- a review of the rent limits undertaken by the Department of Social Protection earlier this year found that the impact of increasing limits at a time of constrained supply will increase costs disproportionately for the Exchequer with little or no new housing available to recipients; and
- continued flexibility will be applied through the National Framework for Tenancy Sustainment for both existing customers of the scheme and new applicants, under which a tenant's circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis, and rents can be increased above prescribed limits as appropriate; this flexible approach has already assisted approximately 4,000 households throughout the country to retain their rented accommodation;

welcomes the additional safeguards included in the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2013 which already provide the Courts Service of Ireland with a very broad margin of discretion when dealing with repossession applications in respect of principal residences;

notes that the extension of the Living City Initiative beyond the original pilot cities of Limerick and Waterford, to also include the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Kilkenny, followed from a comprehensive, independent *ex-ante* cost benefit analysis, in line with the Government's commitment to evidence based policy-making, and that this Initiative is targeting particular areas of these six cities which are most in need of regeneration, and is available to owner-occupiers and certain commercial premises only; and

welcomes the steps taken in 2015 to centralise the funding for domestic violence services under the aegis of Tusla (the Child and Family Agency).” — *An tAire Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil*.