



1,000 CHILDREN
IN EMERGENCY
ACCOMMODATION

WHY?

SINN FÉIN

BETTER4HOUSING

Better for housing
Níos Fearr le haghaidh Tithíochta

A Sinn Féin Policy Document
December 2015



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Introduction

Housing and homelessness is one of the dominant issues facing our society. Finding a home and shelter is currently laden with difficulties for private buyers, renters and those in need of State assistance. People are dying on the streets as a result of homelessness.

Solving the housing crisis across the island requires great vision, innovation and an holistic approach to tackle social housing need, private market provision, rent inequities, discrimination and community-based inclusivity.

Most importantly, it requires political will.

We face social housing shortages; a crisis of homelessness; rising private property prices; increasing rents; shortages in emergency and specialty accommodation; burdensome mortgages; and a legacy of poor build quality and unsustainable planning.

The idea that the market will solve everything, the key pillar on which successive government policies have rested, has been shattered by the boom and subsequent bust. In its wake lie destroyed lives and broken communities.

This document sets out a series of visionary and principled steps to deal with the housing crisis and plan strategically for the future. Proposals such as a massive social housing build programme for the state, **2030 – Project 100,000**, which would increase the social and affordable housing stock and eradicate huge housing lists.

Sinn Féin is promising that, if in government, we will deliver a housing blueprint for this island that makes boom and bust property cycles, housing waiting lists, homelessness and environmentally-unsound housing, things of the past.

Sinn Féin Vision

- Every person in Ireland has the right to adequate and appropriate housing, regardless of income, age, economic or other affiliation or status, and has a right to freedom from discrimination in housing.
- Every person has the right to security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment or other threats, regardless of the form of tenure.
- Every person has the right to a home of a standard that provides inhabitants with adequate privacy, space, security, lighting, ventilation, infrastructure, and location with regard to work and basic facilities – all at a reasonable cost Every person should have housing that protects them from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, including structural hazards, disease and environmental contamination. All tenants have a right to repair of housing.
- Housing policy must adequately meet the needs of disadvantaged groups including, but not limited to, the elderly, children, people with disabilities and lone parents.
- Travellers have the right to housing that is culturally appropriate.
- New Irish communities – housing policy and delivery must address the needs and experiences of our new communities who now form part of our modern society.
- Everyone has the right to participate in public decisions that affect their right to housing.



Better for Housing - Sinn Féin key commitments in government

- 100,000 new social and affordable homes will be delivered by Local Authorities and approved Housing Bodies over the next 15 years.
- Estates will include both income mix and a mixture of social rental tenants, cost rental tenants, cost purchase owner-occupiers, sheltered housing and independent living units.
- Over the period 2016 – 2021, Sinn Féin will build and deliver almost 36,500 social and affordable homes.
- We are committing €2.2 billion additional capital spend, over and above the government's capital commitments, for house build – because we realise the magnitude of this crisis.
- Examine the introduction of a new Strategic Planning National Housing Agency.
- Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 will be strengthened, removing opt-outs for developers to ensure 20% social and affordable housing on all new developments.
- Introduce legislation to empower the Central Bank to limit the interest rates that banks can charge.
- Abolish the Local Property Tax.
- Provide rent certainty by index linking rent increases and decreases to the Consumer Price index.
- Amend the Residential Tenancy Act to restrict the grounds on which landlords can serve notices to quit to provide greater security of tenure.
- Examine all tax reliefs with a view to reducing and eliminating those that encourage speculation on private property.
- Work with the PRTB, tenants' advocacy groups and relevant expert groups to introduce a tenants' rights charter.
- Alongside the introduction of rent regulations, look at the capping of rent subsidies.
- Recipients of Housing Assistance Payment will no longer be removed from principle housing lists and top-ups to landlords by tenants will be banned.
- Establish an Office of the Planning Regulator and ensure that recommendations are made binding on the Minister responsible.
- Make an additional €30 million available to Local Authorities to emergency house the homeless in our first year of government.
- Introduce a Travellers' Ethnicity Bill to ensure Travellers' accommodation needs are addressed.
- Scrap the Direct Provision Service and ensure refugees are housed with dignity.
- Establish Universal Design and Lifetime Adaptability Guidelines and incorporate them as a legal requirement for all new build houses.

An all-Ireland approach to housing policy

- Departments in both jurisdictions to develop integrated spatial plans.
- Measures to enable social housing lists to move from one jurisdiction to the other, particularly around the border regions.
- A one-stop shop ran through the cross-border bodies on advice for buying a house in either jurisdiction (local taxes, stamp duty, estate agent fees etc).
- Harmonisation of local taxes, stamp duty, estate agent fees etc.
- Coordination of resources between councils applying for European grants.
- Joint inspectorates for scrutinising construction materials and standards, and cooperation between departments on regulation procedures.

- Establish an Island-wide Housing Ombudsman to provide an administrative remedy short of the courts, in the interests of speedier and less expensive resolution of housing disputes and redress of violations of the right to housing.
- Enshrine the right to adequate housing in any future Constitution for a United Ireland.
- Integrated and island wide controls on rents and repair with measures for increased security tenure can be introduced immediately.
- Integrated regulation and accreditation of landlords on an All-Ireland basis alongside the cessation of tax reliefs to landlords.
- Secure the transfer of economic powers from Britain to north to harmonise taxation including the introduction of windfall tax on an island-wide basis.
- The implementation of an island-wide property register and island-wide measures to deliver transparency in the house purchasing process and the regulation of construction and trade.

Key facts – Government policy caused the housing crisis

- There are officially 89,872 households on local authority waiting lists, with some people waiting 9-10 years for a home.
- In the first 6 months of 2015, 499 social houses were build, down from 4,209 in 2005.
- 121,384 households are in receipt of rent subsidies costing €340million per year.
- The average monthly rent is €960, rising to an average of €1,358 per month in Dublin.
- 98,137 family homes were in mortgage arrears in the first half of 2015.
- Up to 80% of women fleeing domestic violence were turned away from Dublin refuges in January-March 2015.
- In the first six months of 2015, over 1,000 children were sleeping in emergency accommodation. In July 2015 1,495 children were homeless.
- In Budget 2016, the government allocated €17 million to tackle the emergency homeless crisis. In the same budget, it allocated €28 million to increase the thresholds for tax-free inheritances and gifts.
- The Disability Federation of Ireland reports that 2,900 people are currently living in congregated settings, denying them their right to privacy and independent living.
- There are currently 4,500 people in the Direct Provision system, one third of them children.
- 300,000 mortgage holders are paying thousands extra each year because the Government refuses to deal with exorbitant variable interest rates. A 1% reduction would save mortgage holders an average of €2,000 a year on a €200,000 mortgage.



Government housing policy - the move from social housing provision to subsidising private landlords

Housing policy has changed dramatically over the last 30 years. The 1970s saw the largest investment in Local Authority social housing in the history of the State, providing almost 62,000 new homes during the decade. In the first six months of 2015 only 499 social housing units were built.

Over the last three decades Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour have changed the State's housing policy to suit their own agendas. Instead of the State having direct responsibility for meeting the housing needs of those who cannot afford to buy homes those parties have left housing provision to the private market.

Instead of building enough social and affordable homes, the state fueled a housing bubble in the private sector and met the shortfall in the supply of social housing with a range of subsidies to private landlords. This is done at huge cost to the taxpayer and at huge cost to those forced to live in sub-standard accommodation with no rent certainty and no stability. These combined policies have led to the current housing crisis and caused misery to hundreds of thousands of families.

1964 – White Paper set out the government's strategy to build between 12,000 and 14,000 homes a year to tackle housing need. However little consideration was given to the need for community amenities, shops, supports and resources.

1970s – this decade saw the largest investment in Local Authority social housing in the history of the State providing almost 62,000 new units.

1980s – by the end of the 1980s social housing output had fallen from almost 7,000 a year to 768 units a year.

1990s – throughout the 1990s, government policy set its face against council estates as an approach to social housing provision. Instead they promoted the idea of private developments with a portion of social housing bought and managed by Councils or Housing Associations. This meant social housing output was generally small scale and unable to meet the growing levels of demand.

It is worth noting that in the 1990s just 20,184 social housing units were built and in the same decade 17,024 were sold to council tenants.

2000s – An unholy alliance between corrupt politicians, bankers and developers in the run-up to and during the property boom – saw some developers throw up houses of poor quality to avail of generous tax breaks.

2005 – State built 4,209 social units. At the same time they introduced the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) for long-term recipients of rent supplement.

2008 – Exchequer funding for social housing was €1.7 billion. 5,692 social housing units were completed or bought by Local Authorities and 1,896 completed by Approved Housing Bodies. In the same year legislation was introduced to define social housing as including local authority, housing association and state subsidised private sector schemes such as RAS and SLI.

In the crash, property speculators and private landlords bought up landbanks and houses and hoarded them, contributing to land and property shortage. This situation has not been helped by the NAMA policy of releasing properties in its portfolio whole – i.e. selling



off entire apartment blocks so only very wealthy investors and speculators can bid, as opposed to selling the individual units in the block at affordable prices.

2010 – government introduced the Social Leasing Initiative (SLI) also known as the Long Term Leasing Initiative, as a third state subsidized scheme to house social housing tenants in private rented housing.

2011 – Funding for social housing was slashed. In the same year there were 96,803 in receipt of the Rent Supplement and 37,759 on the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) costing the State over half a billion.

2013 – Exchequer funding for social housing dropped to €593 million. 750 units were built or bought by Local Authorities plus 1,200 through leasing arrangements.

2014 – Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) was introduced as a de-facto long-term rent supplement – recipients are removed from principle housing waiting lists.

Last year, Minister Alan Kelly launched Social Housing Strategy 2020. The government has claimed that the policy will build, buy and refurbish 35,000 social houses over 6 years and transfer 75,000 long term Rent Supplement claimants onto two other government subsidised schemes – RAS and HAP. However, details and figures in the policy are sketchy and a large amount of the housing will allegedly be sourced from private landlords, the private market and via Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) – a failed vehicle that has proven costly and ineffective when it comes to essential housing delivery. The capital spending promised by the government – as outlined further into this document – does not reflect the number of houses the government claims it can deliver. In fact, it falls far short.

Réamhrá

Tá ceist na tithíochta agus easpa dídine ar na mórcheisteanna atá roimh shochaí an lae inniu. Bíonn sé iontach doiligh ag ceannaitheoirí príobháideacha, cíosaíthe agus acu siúd a bhfuil cúnamh ón stát uathu teach nó dídean a fháil ar na saolta seo. Tá daoine ag fáil bháis ar shráideanna Bhaile Átha Cliath mar gheall ar easpa dídine.

Tá fíis ollmhór, nuálaíocht agus cur chuige iomlánaíoch ag teastáil chun an ghéarchéim tithíochta in Éirinn, soláthar an mhargaidh phríobháidigh, míchothroime cíosa, éagóir agus uileghabhálacht phobalbhunaithe a réiteach.

Is tábhachtaí i bhfad toil pholaitiúil bheith ann.

Tá ganntanas de thithíocht shóisialta; géarchéim easpa dídine; praghasanna de réadmhaoin phríobháideach ag ardú; cíós ag dul in airde; ganntanais i gcóiríocht éigeandála agus speisialta; morgáistí troma; agus oidhreacht de fhoirgníocht lag agus planáil neamhinbhunaithe i ndán dúinn.

Bhíothas den tuairim go réitíonn an margadh gach rud, agus bhí rialtas i ndiaidh rialtais ag brath air seo, ach bréagnaíodh an tuairim sin i ngeall ar an mborradh agus an teip a tháinig dá bharr. Tá saolta millte agus pobail scriosta mar thoradh air.

Leagtar amach sa doiciméad seo roinnt céimeanna straitéiseacha ar bhonn prionsabail le dul i ngleic leis an ngéarchéim tithíochta agus le planáil straitéiseach a dhéanamh don todhchaí. Moltaí togra ar nós cláir ollmhóir tógála le haghaidh tithíocht shóisialta don stát, **2030 - Tionscadal 100,000**, a mhéadóidh an stoc de thithíocht shóisialta agus inacmhainne agus a chuirfeadh deireadh le liostaí móra feithimh le haghaidh tithíochta.

Tá Sinn Féin ag gealladh, má bhímid sa rialtas, go ndéanfaimid treoirphlean tithíochta a fhorbairt don oileán seo a chuirfidh deireadh go deo le timthriallta borrhtha agus teipe, le liostaí feithimh le haghaidh tithíochta, agus le heaspa dídine agus le tithíocht nach bhfuil fónta don timpeallacht.

Fís Shinn Féin

- Tá sé de cheart ag gach duine in Éirinn tithíocht iomchuí bheith acu, beag beann ar ioncam, aois, stádás eacnamaíoch ná eile, agus níor chóir go ndéanfaí leithcheal ar bith i gcúrsaí tithíochta.
- Tá gach duine i dteideal sábháilteacht tionachta a dheimhníonn cosaint dhlíthiúil in aghaidh na díbeartha éigeantaí, an chiaptha nó bagairtí ar bith eile, is cuma faoin gcineál tionachta.
- Tá gach duine i dteideal caighdeáin tithíochta a thugann príobháideachas, spás, sábháilteacht, soilsiú, córas aerála, bonneagar, agus suíomh iomchuí maidir le bunsaoráidí agus saoráidí oibre - iad uile ar luach réasúnta. Ba chóir go mbeadh an tithíocht ag gach duine a chosnaíonn iad ón bhfuacht, ón tais, ón teas, ón bhfearthainn, ón ngaoth agus ó bhagairtí eile don tsláinte, lena n-áirítear guaiseanna struchtúrtha, galar agus truailliú timpeallachta. Tá gach tionónta i dteideal athchóirithe ar a gcuid tithe.
- Ba chóir go mbeadh polasaí tithíochta oiriúnach do ghrúpaí atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste lena n-áirítear, ach ní go heisiach, daoine scothaosta, leanaí, daoine míchumasacha agus tuismitheoirí aonair.
- Tá an lucht taistil i dteideal tithíochta atá oiriúnach ó thaobh an chultúir de.
- Pobail nua na hÉireann - ní mór do pholasaí tithíochta agus soláthar dul i ngleic le riachtanais agus le heispéiris ár bpobal nua atá anois mar chuid de shochaí seo an lae inniu.
- Tá gach duine i dteideal páirt a bheith acu le cinntí poiblí a mbíonn tionchar acu ar a gcearta maidir le tithíocht.

Níos Fearr le haghaidh Tithíochta - Príomhghéalltanais Shinn Féin sa Rialtas

- Déanfaidh Údaráis Áitiúla agus Forais Tithíochta 100,000 teach shóisialta agus inacmhainne a sholáthar sna 15 bliana atá amach romhainn.
- Beidh idir mheascán ioncaim agus mheascán de thionóntaí sóisialta, tionóntaí costais chíos, úinéirí-sealbhóirí costais cheannaithe, sciath-thithíocht agus aonaid neamhspleácha chónaithe sna heastáit.
- Thar an tréimhse 2016-2021, cuirfidh Sinn Féin ar fáil níos mó ná tiomantais chaiteachais chaipitil an rialtais, agus tógfar 36,500 teach mar gheall ar ár bplean.
- Imscrúdú a dhéanamh ar Ghníomhaíocht Náisiúnta um Pleanáil Straitéiseach Tithíochta a thabhairt isteach.
- Déanfar Cuid V den Acht um Pleanáil agus Forbairt, 2000 a neartú, agus cuirfear deireadh le scar-roghanna le haghaidh forbróirí lena chinntiú go mbeidh 20% de thithíocht shóisialta agus inacmhainne i ngach forbairt nua tithíochta.
- Tabharfar isteach reachtaíocht chun srian a choinneáil ar an ráta is féidir le bainc a ghearradh thar bhonn le haghaidh úis mhorgáiste.
- Cuirfear deireadh leis an gCáin Maoine Áitiúil.
- Déanfar cinnteacht cíosa a sholáthar trí mhéaduithe agus laghduithe cíosa a innéacs-nascadh leis an bPraghasinnéacs Tomhaltóirí.
- Déanfar an tAcht um Tionóntacht Chónaithe a athchóiriú chun srian a choinneáil ar na cúiseanna inar féidir le tiarnaí talún foláirimh a thabhairt chun daingne tionachta a sholáthar.

- Déanfar imscrúdú ar fhaoiseamh cánach sa dóigh is go laghdófar agus go gcuirfear deireadh leo siúd a mholann amhantraíocht ar réadmhaoín phríobháideach
- Déanfar athscrúdú ar an gcleachtas fóirdheontais chíos a chaidhpeáil, ag an am céanna is a dtabharfar rialúcháin i dtaca le cíós de isteach.
- Ní bhainfear iad siúd a fhaigheann Íocaíocht Cúnaimh Tithíochta de na príomhliostaí tithíochta agus cuirfear cosc ar bhreis cíosa á híoc ag tionóntaí le tiarnaí talún.
- Bunófar Oifig an Rialtóra Phleanáil agus cinnteofar go mbíonn na moltaí a dhéantar ina gceangal de réir dlí ar an Aire atá freagrach.
- Cuirfear €30 milliún sa bhreis ar fáil d'Údarás Áitiúla chun tithe éigeandála a chur ar fáil do dhaoine gan dídean sa chéad bhliain dúinn sa rialtas.
- Tabharfar isteach Bille Eitneachais don Lucht Taistil.
- Cuirfear deireadh leis an tSeirbhís um Sholáthar Díreach.
- Bunófar Treoiríní Inoiriúnaitheachta don tSaolré agus do Dhearadh Uilíoch agus déanfar iad a ionchorpú mar riachtanas dlíthiúil do gach teach nuathógtha.

Cur chuige uile-Éireann i leith polasaí tithíochta

- Ní mór do rannóga sa dá dhlínse pleananna spásúla comhtháite a fhorbairt
- Bearta le mbeifear in ann liostaí maidir le tithíocht shóisialta a aistriú ó dhlínse amháin go dhlínse eile, go háirithe i gceantair na teorann.
- Ionad ilfhreastail á reáchtáil tríd na forais tras-teorann faoi chomhairle maidir le teach a cheannach i gceachtar den dá dhlínse (cáin áitiúil, dleacht stampála, táillí gníomhaire eastáit, srl);
- Comhchuibhiú ar cháin áitiúil, ar dhleacht stampála, ar tháillí ghníomhairí eastáit, srl.
- Comhordú ar shaoráidí idir comhairlí atá ag cur isteach ar dheontais ón Eoraip.
- Comhchigireachtaí le imscrúdú a dhéanamh ar ábhar agus ar chaighdeán tógála, agus comhoibriú idir rannóga ar nósanna imeachta i leith rialúcháin.
- Ombudsman Tithíochta uile-Éireann a bhunú chun réiteach riaracháin lasmuigh de na cúirteanna a sholáthar, ionas go ndéanfar aighnis ar cheisteanna tithíochta a réiteach níos gaiste agus níos saoire agus go gcuirfear ina cheart sárú ar bith ar an gceart atá ag daoine i leith tithíochta.
- An ceart do thithíocht chuí a chosaint i mBunreacht le haghaidh Éireann Aontaithe a bheadh ann sa todhchaí.
- Is féidir rialaithe comhtháite fud fad an oileáin ar chíos agus ar dheisiú a thabhairt isteach láithreach le bearta iontu le haghaidh tionachta méadaithe sábháilteachta.
- Rialú agus creidiúnú comhtháite ar thiarnaí talún ar bhonn uile-Éireann chomh maith le deireadh a chur le faoiseamh cánach do thiarnaí talún
- Aistriú cumhachtaí geilleagracha ón Bhreatain go dtí an tuaisceart a dhaingniú chun cúrsaí cánach a chomhchuibhiú lena n-áirítear cáin amhantair a thabhairt isteach ar bhonn uile-oileáin.
- Cur i bhfeidhm cláir mhaoine uile-oileáin agus bearta uile-oileáin le go mbeidh follasacht ann sa phróiseas atá ann chun tithe a cheannach agus rialú tógála agus trádála.

Príomhfhíricí - Ba é an Rialtas ba chúis leis an ngéarchéim tithíochta

- Go hoifigiúil tá 89,872 teaghlach ar liostaí feithimh leis na húdaráis áitiúla, agus daoine áirithe ag fanacht idir 9-10 mbliana ar theach.
- Sa chéad 6 mhí de 2015, tógadh 499 teach shóisialta, titim ó 4,209 sa bhliain 2005.
- Tá 121,384 teaghlach ag fáil fóirdheontais chíos a chosnaíonn €340 milliún sa bhliain.
- €960 in aghaidh na míosa an cíos míosúil, agus ardaíonn sé sin go €1,358 ar an meán sa mhí i mBaile Átha Cliath.
- Bhí riaráistí morgáiste ar 98,137 teaghlach sa chéad leath de 2015.
- Diúltaíodh áit i dtearmainn Bhaile Átha Cliath do bheagnach 80% de mhná a bhí ag teitheadh mar gheall ar fhoréigean teaghlaigh idir Eanáir agus Márta 2015.
- Sa chéad sé mhí de 2015, bhí breis agus 1,000 leanbh ag codladh i gcóiríocht éigeandála. [I mí Iúil 2015, bhí 1,495 leanbh gan dídean]
- I mBuiséad 2016, chuir an rialtas €17 millún ar fáil le dul i ngleic leis an ngéarchéim easpa dídine. Sa Bhuiséad céanna, chuir sé €28 milliún ar fáil leis na tairsí d'oidhreachtáí agus do bhronntanais saor ó cháin a ardú.
- Tá sé tugtha le fios ag Cónaidhm na hÉireann um Míchumas go bhfuil 2,900 duine ina gcónaí i láthair chomhchónaithe agus go bhfuil sé seo ag séanadh príobháideachais agus cónaí neamhspleách orthu dá bharr.
- Tá 4,500 duine anois sa chóras um Sholáthar Díreach, agus trian acu ina bpáistí.
- Tá 300,000 sealbhóirí morgáiste ag íoc na mílte sa bhreis in aghaidh na bliana as siocair go ndiúltaíonn an Rialtas plé le rátaí ollmhóra inathraitheacha úis. Dá mbeadh laghdú de 1% ann is amhlaidh go sábhálófaí €2,000 ar an meán gach bliain ag daoine a bhfuil morgáiste de €200,000 acu.

Polasaí tithíochta an rialtais - an t-aistriú ó thithíocht shóisialta a sholáthar go fóirdheontais a thabhairt do thiarnaí talún príobháideacha

Tháinig athrú suntasach ar pholasaí tithíochta le 30 bliain anuas. Sna 1970í a tharla an infheistíocht is mó i dtithíocht shóisialta Údaráis Áitiúil i stair an Stáit, agus cuireadh beagnach 62,000 teach nua ar fáil le linn na ndéic mbliana sin. Sa chéad sé mhí de 2015 níor tógadh ach 499 aonad nua tithíocht shóisialta.

Le tríocha bliain anuas, d'athraigh Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael agus an Lucht Oibre polasaí tithíochta an Stáit le go bhféirfeadh sé dá gcláir oibre féin. In áit freagracht dhíreach bheith ar an Stát do na riachtanais tithíochta atá acu siúd nach bhfuil in ann a gcuid tithe féin a cheannach is amhlaidh gur fágadh soláthar tithíochta don mhargadh príobháideach.

In áit go leor tithe sóisialta agus inacmhainne a thógáil, chuir an Stát le borradh tithíochta san earnáil phríobháideach agus líon sé an t-easnamh i soláthar tithíocht shóisialta trí roinnt fóirdheontais chuig tiarnaí talún príobháideacha. Cosnaíonn sé cuid mhór don cháiniócoir agus dóibh siúd a mbíonn orthu cónaí i gcóiríocht atá faoi bhun caighdeán nach bhfuil cinnteacht cíosa ná seasmhacht acu.

Ba iad na polasaithe seo a chruthaigh an ghéarchéim tithíochta atá ann faoi láthair agus ba chúis le cruatan do na mílte teaghlach.



1964 – leagadh amach Páipéar Bán ina raibh straitéis an Rialtais chun idir 12,000 agus 14,000 a thógáil in aghaidh na bliana chun dul i ngleic leis an riachtanas tithíochta. Níor tugadh mórán airde, áfach, ar an ngá le haghaidh saoráidí pobail, siopaí, tacaíocht agus áiseanna.

1970í – an infheistíocht is mó i dtithíocht shóisialta Údaráis Áitiúil i stair an Stáit, agus cuireadh beagnach 62,000 teach nua ar fáil.

1980í – faoi dheireadh na 1980í thit aschur tithíocht shóisialta ó bheagnach 7,000 sa bhliain go 768 aonad sa bhliain.

1990í – i rith na 1990í, chuir polasaí an rialtais in aghaidh eastáit chomhairle mar chur chuige chun tithíocht shóisialta a sholáthar. Ina áit sin chuir siad chun cinn an smaoineamh chun forbairtí príobháideacha a fhorbairt agus cuid den tithíocht shóisialta ceannaithe agus bainistithe ag Comhairlí nó ag Cumainn Tithíochta. Mar gheall air seo bhí aschur tithíocht shóisialta ar scála beag go ginearálta agus ní raibh sé in ann an t-éileamh nua a shásamh.

Is fiú tabhairt faoi deara nár tógadh ach 20,184 teach shóisialta sna 1990í agus sa tréimhse chéanna díoladh 17,024 le tionóntaí de chuid na comhairle.

2000í – Comhghuaillíocht mhíshláintiúil idir polaiteoirí, baincéirí agus forbróirí corbacha roimh agus le linn an bhorrtha maoine - thóg forbróirí áirithe tithe a bhí faoi bhun an chaighdeáin chun buntáistí flaithiúla cánach a fháil.

2005 – Thóg an Stát 4,209 aonad sóisialta. Ag an am céanna thug siad isteach an Scéim Cóiríochta Cíos (SCC) dóibh siúd a bhí ag fáil fordheontais chíos ar feadh tréimhse.

2008 – Ba é €1.7 billiún an maoiniú ón Státchiste le haghaidh tithíocht shóisialta. Thóg nó cheannaigh Údaráis Áitiúla 5,692 teach shóisialta agus thóg Forais Cheadaithe Tithíochta 1,896 acu. Sa bhliain chéanna tugadh reachtaíocht isteach chun sainmhíniú a dhéanamh ar thithíocht shóisialta le go mbeadh scéimeanna údaráis áitiúil agus na gcumann tithíochta san áireamh chomh maith le scéimeanna fordheonaithe ag an earnáil phríobháideach ar nós SCC agus SLI.

Nuair a thit an geilleagar, cheannaigh amhantraithe réadmhaoine agus tiarnaí talún príobháideacha bainc talún agus tithe go ndearna siad cnapaireacht orthu, agus chuir sé seo go mór leis an easpa talún agus réadmhaoine. Níor chuidigh polasaí NAMA inar scaoileadh réadmhaoin ina phunann - is é sin gur díoladh bloic iomlána árasán ionas nach bhféadfadh ach infheisteoirí agus amhantraithe atá an-saibhir tairiscint a chur isteach, in áit na hárásáin a dhíol ceann ar cheann ar phraghasanna inacmhainne.

2010 – Thug an rialtas isteach an Tionscnamh Leasaithe Sóisialta (SLI) ar a dtugtar freisin an Tionscnamh Leasaithe Fad-Téarma, mar scéim ffordheonaithe tríú stáit chun tithe a chur ar fáil do thionóntaí tithíocht shóisialta i dtithíocht san earnáil phríobháideach cíos.

2011 – Baineadh cuid mhór den mhaoiniú le haghaidh tithíocht shóisialta. Sa bhliain chéanna bhí 96,803 a bhí ag fáil forlíonadh cíos agus bhí 37,759 ar an Scéim Cóiríochta Cíos (SCC) agus bhí costas níos mó ná leathbhiliún ar an Stát mar gheall air seo.

2013 – Thit maoiniú an Státchiste le haghaidh tithíocht shóisialta go €539 milliún. Cheannaigh Údaráis Áitiúla 750 aonad chomh maith le 1,200 trí shocruithe léasaithe.

2014 – Tugadh isteach Íocaíocht Cúnaimh Tithíochta (ICT) mar fhorlíonadh fad téarma cíos *de-facto* - baintear iad siúd a fhaigheann é de phríomhlíostaí feithimh.



Anuraidh, sheol an tAire Alan Kelly an Straitéis um Thithíocht Shóisialta 2020. Tá sé curtha in iúl ag an Rialtas mar gheall ar an bpolasaí seo go dtófar, go gceannófar agus go n-athchóireofar 35,000 teach shóisialta tahr 6 bliana agus go n-aistreofar 75,000 acu siúd atá ag éileamh Forlíonaidh Chíosa go dhá scéim eile atá fóirdheonaithe ag an rialtas - SCC agus ICT. Níl na sonraí iontach soiléir, áfach, agus is cosúil go bhfaighfear cuid mhór mhaith den tithíocht ó thiarnaí talún príobháideacha, ón margadh príobháideach agus trí Chomhpháirtíochtaí Príobháideach Poiblí (CPPanna) - gléas ar theip air agus a bhí costasach agus mí-éifeachtach maidir le tithíocht riachtanach a sholáthar. Ní léiríonn an caiteachas caipitil a gheall an rialtas - mar a bhfuil léargas tugtha air sa doiciméad seo - ní léiríonn sé líon na dtithe a mhaíonn an rialtas a chuirfidh sé ar fáil. De dhéanta na fírinne, teipeann air.

A new strategic planning National Housing Corporation

Comhlacht nua Náisiúnta um pleanáil straitéiseach Tithíochta

The proposals set out in this document, particularly in relation to social housing, reflect the need to deal with an immediate crisis. Increasing government capital spending on housing is an initiative that Sinn Féin is committing to prioritise upon entering a five-year term of government.

However, our vision for housing is a long-term one. We believe that what has been lacking in housing planning under Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil governments is strategy. Ideologically, they know what they are doing, but strategically, they are in chaos. All of the policy decisions that lend themselves to the boom and bust cycle – the tax breaks; the shifting social housing to the private sector for profit purposes; the loose regulation of construction standards and materials; how mortgages are awarded – are all cyclical under these parties. The economy is only beginning to recover from one property crash designed by Fianna Fáil, and this government is writing finance bills to facilitate speculation in property through measures such as Real Estate Investments Trusts and cheap NAMA sell-offs.

If problems with housing are to be minimised and eradicated in the future, we believe serious consideration must be given to the establishment of a Strategic Planning National Housing Corporation which would be involved in all elements of the policy, design and planning process for meeting future housing needs. The corporation would bring together experts in architecture, finance, taxation, spatial planning, Local Authorities and government.

In Government, Sinn Féin will proceed with the immediate exploration of establishing such a corporation.



Social and Affordable Housing

Tithíocht shóisialta agus Inacmhainne

The social housing crisis is getting worse. The number of people on council waiting lists is rising. The length of time families have to wait on these lists is lengthening. The cost to the state of subsidising the private rent of these families is increasing. There are officially 89,872 households on local authority waiting lists. Approximately 47% of these are in receipt of Rent Supplement, however recent figures suggest the number could be significantly above 100,000 households.

In Councils where social housing is in high demand the average length of time a family can spend waiting for a home allocation is 9 to 10 years. In July of 2015, Limerick City Council announced it didn't have a single three-bed home to let. Its waiting list stands at 4,000 households.

The total number of households who are dependent on government to meet their housing needs is 260,384 - 16% of the total number of households in the state. Of these households:

- 139,000 live in Local Authority (112,000) or Housing Association (27,000) houses.
- 121,384 live in the private rented sector with their rent subsidised by the state via Rent Supplement, the Rental Accommodation Scheme and the Long Term Leasing Initiative. The cost to the state of these subsidies is an average of €340 million per annum.

Social housing need has increased dramatically over the last two and a half decades. Since the start of the recession housing waiting lists have increased by 40%. Between 1989 and 2013 social housing stock increased by only 30%. The state has met the shortfall in supply of social housing with a range of subsidies to private landlords.

We have not arrived here by chance. Subsidising private landlords is a policy of Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil.

A New Approach to Social Housing

Sinn Féin believes that the solution to the housing and homeless crisis in the 26 Counties lies in a return to large scale Local Authority building. However, community facilities and economic opportunities must be provided in parallel with housing. Estates must include both income mix and a mixture of social rental tenants, cost rental tenants, cost purchase owner-occupiers, sheltered housing and independent living units. We also need a new and participative approach to estate management that gives local people a real say in how their estate is run. And we need the estates to be designed in an aesthetically appealing and environmentally friendly manner.

Such an approach would combine the strengths of previous periods of social housing expansion while also learning the lessons from the mistakes of the past and present. We believe, too, that there is an important role for the Approved Housing Bodies in the Voluntary Housing Sector and for Community-Council partnerships in developing mixed-use developments on public land.



How many houses? Project 2030 – 100,000 homes

The 2005 landmark NESC study Housing in Ireland estimated that by 2014 the state would need a total stock of 200,000 social units *in any given year*.

There are currently 139,000 Local Authority and Approved Housing Body units across the state. This means that, at a minimum, the State needs an additional 60,000 social units.

However, given the rising level of housing need there is clearly a need to revise upwards the 2005 NESC estimate so that both current and future needs are met.

This will also require a new approach to affordable housing (see below) and new social housing output to take account of future tenant purchase (see below).

On this basis, Sinn Féin believes that the State needs to provide a minimum of 100,000 units over the next 15 years (in addition to the refurbishment/renovation of existing empty stock). These units would include a mixture of traditional social rental (70,000), a new form of controlled rental known as 'Cost Rental' (15,000) and a new form of affordable housing known as 'Cost Purchase' (15,000).

The identification of land for this purpose will be paramount and will provide difficulties, but they will not be insurmountable. Dublin City Council, for example, has enough land zoned for housing to build 29,300 units over 298 hectares.

The delivery of our plan is slower in the first couple of years, reflecting both the need for planning and design; and also the restriction of funding in the next couple of years due to the expenditure benchmark.

What kind of estates?

Sinn Féin believes that as we move into the decade 2020-2030, the State should start constructing housing estates that provide three distinct types of housing integrated in a meaningful way.

1. A portion of the houses would be traditional social housing allocated from the Council list and paying differential rent. Included in this portion would be sheltered housing for the elderly or independent living units for people moving from congregated settings.
2. A further portion would be 'Cost Rental', owned by the Council and leased to working households whose income does not entitle them to social housing but is still below a certain threshold – to be set after consultation with bodies such as MABs and the Dept. of Social Protection. The leases would be long term and the rent controlled.
3. The final portion of the houses would be 'Cost Purchase' meaning that they would be sold at cost price **plus a small margin** on strict criteria similar to tenant purchase (see below).

The reason for this mixed approach is two-fold. Firstly it designs into new estates a level of income mix that is characteristic of older and more settled Council estates.

Secondly, the revenue generated from cost rentals and sales would provide Local Authorities with a more viable means of financing a portion of their overall social housing build.

The exact proportion of each type of housing –either in an individual development or through a Local Authority- would be determined on the basis of local housing need and



through dialogue between the Local Authority and the Department as part of new Local Authority 15-year Housing Action Plans and business plans (see below).

The design of estates would also include community facilities such as community centers, sports facilities, health centres, crèche and play areas at the design stage and Local Authorities would work with the business community to ensure that, as estates are being built, shops and sources of employment are attracted into the area if none already exist. The community and economic infrastructure must be provided in parallel with the building and tenancing of the housing.

The development of housing estates will be integrated with other infrastructural development plans (Government and Local) in job creation, transport systems etc. and coordinated through integrated interdepartmental teams led by the Minister.

The estates would also have, from the outset, a new model of estate management in the form of Community Estate Management Forums bringing together residents, Council staff, employers and statutory bodies to manage the development of the estate in a structured and participative manner.

Housing Action Plans

In order to achieve the ambitious plans as outlined above all Local Authorities would be required to provide Housing Action Plans beginning 2016 to 2030. These plans similar to those already required under the 2010 Housing Act would set out the existing level of housing need in the administrative area of the Local Authority, the projected future need taking into account population growth projections, and a comprehensive plan outlining how the Council intends to meet these needs directly (in terms of social and affordable housing) and indirectly (in terms of facilitating Approved Housing Bodies for social and affordable housing and private developers for standard and affordable purchase).

Housing Action plans would, in the first instance, be developed by the Local Authorities, but would require engagement with the voluntary and private sectors and ultimately be approved by the Department.

Financing Social Housing

Sinn Féin believes that the best way of funding the social housing programme as outlined above is through direct exchequer funding to begin with and a combination of direct capital spending and Local Authority borrowing as the plan progresses.

At current prices, the housing programme outlined above would cost approximately €14.8 billion for the social housing and cost rental build, if the average price of building a house is used (approx €175,000 per unit). This would build 70,000 social houses and 15,000 cost rental. 15,000 affordable houses will be delivered in that period at a minimum.

We have gone with the higher estimation of €175,000 for house build to allow for land purchase and infrastructural development. As the decade 2020-2030 progresses, house construction prices will most likely increase and we will adjust capital spend in that decade to accommodate this.



Over the period 2016 – 2021, the government has proposed the following capital spending allowance for housing:

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
€432mn	€570mn	€580mn	€450mn	€400mn	€400mn

We are proposing that, in government, for the period of 2016 – 2021, Sinn Féin would invest the following capital spend:

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
€432mn	€670mn	€680mn	€675mn	€1,175mn	€1,400mn

The difference in the number of houses built directly by a Sinn Féin government in the next six years verses Fine Gael and Labour would be as follows:

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Gov build	2,468	3,257	3,314	2,571	2,285	2,285
SF build	2,468	3,828	3,885	3,857	6,714	8,000

House Build – 2017-2021	
Government total house build 2016-2021	16,180
SF Capital plan house build 2016 – 2021	28,752

NAMA is promising the build of 20,000 by 2020. We will direct NAMA to build all social housing in this component, using their Special Purpose Vehicle. This will deliver an additional 4,000 social houses at no immediate cost to the State over the life-time of the plan above.

In addition to this, we are strengthening Part V to ensure 20% social and affordable units in new private developments. CIF has stated that at the moment builders are constructing in the region of 12,000 new housing units annually across the country, which is far short of the broadly agreed national amount needed of 25,000 units. The affordable unit aspect of these developments under the new strengthened Part V could bring in the region of 3,600 – 7,200 homes on stream. The 3,600 figure is based on a 5% traditional delivery, when in reality, we will strive for the 10% delivery of affordable units.

This brings the total social and affordable houses built and delivered by Sinn Féin over the next 6 years to a minimum of 36,352 (including just 3,600 Part V affordables) – and they are definite builds and realistically deliverable affordable units.

For the period of 2022 – 2030, under our plan, Sinn Féin would build over 52,000 houses (comprising both social and cost rental) - an average of 5,777 houses per annum, at a



minimum cost in capital build of €1 billion each year. We would source a further 5,400 affordable units through Part V (this is an extremely conservative figure) and we would direct Local Authorities to build a further 6,000 affordable units through borrowing.

This may seem like a large investment for housing construction, but it is in response to a crisis of such magnitude, the argument could be leveled that the State should go beyond the numbers as outlined here. *And we will examine, in government, the potential to establish off-balance sheet trusts to secure more funding for housing so we can reduce the capital spend on balance sheet.* Bodies such as the League of Credit Unions have expressed a desire to invest their €8 billion in reserves, currently lodged with banks and earning little if any interest, in social housing construction.

All of this, we will bring under consideration, but we are making a commitment here with regard to capital spending by government that will deliver tangible housing units and construction work, and to increase Part V. Our figures are realistic and based on the restrictions of the expenditure benchmark and fiscal space available over the period 2016 – 2021, as well as the need for proper planning and design. The level of output from the State increases as the years progress, reflecting the increased sums available to spend and the design and business plans of LAs.

We will not, unlike the government, promise large numbers of houses without doing the sums necessary or providing any detail; we will not use the failed PPP model to deliver housing; and we will not continue to use the private market as some sort of substitute for actual housing construction.

This plan is but one section of our approach to ensuring housing needs are met. Throughout this document, whether it is regulating rents in a way that will actually work; examining rent supplement; increasing funding for homeless services; assisting those in mortgage distress; facilitating people to build their own homes; working with cooperatives; restoring Part V requirements; or issuing directives to NAMA - we have come at the issue of housing in a strategic, deliverable and holistic fashion, that will allow the crisis to be solved and prevent future crises from emerging.

Reforming Part V

There needs to be a comprehensive review of the operation of the Part V system which takes into account the views of developers, the Council or Approved Housing Body, the social tenants and their private purchasing neighbours.

There is a strong argument to retain Part V and, contrary to the government's reduction of Part V to 10%, Sinn Féin would increase it. Sinn Féin would also consider directing an increased portion of new Part V units to the affordable sector. These units must be integrated into estates and not left to the side at the discretion of developers. Sinn Féin would also end opt outs for developers under new Part V legislation which allows them to offer leasing arrangements to councils in lieu of actual social housing.

Approved Housing Bodies

Sinn Féin believes that Approved Housing Bodies in the Voluntary Sector play an important role in providing both general and special needs social housing. The Voluntary and cooperative sector should not be seen as a competitor with the local authority but as a body with a key role to play in increasing the supply of social housing.



We would work with the sector both through direct access to grant funding and through increased access to Housing Finance Agency and private sector finance.

Sinn Féin would also review the Mortgage to Rent scheme and consider the addition of a lease-funded scheme to increase access to the scheme for families in mortgage distress. Sinn Féin would also consider providing a new multi-annual funding stream targeting larger housing associations to allow them to plan and fund projects in a more strategic manner.

Recommendations

- Launch plans for 2030 - Project 100,000 to bring the State ownership of housing stock to a minimum of 200,000 per annum (our plan would achieve 210,000) and introduce at least 30,000 cost purchase and cost rental housing stock into the system.
- Deliver almost 36,500 social and affordable houses over the next 6 years
- Strengthen Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, removing opt-outs for developers. Restore and increase requirements under Part V to 20% social and affordable housing on all new developments with 10% social and 10% affordable housing.
- Ensure that future social housing construction is designed in mixed tenure developments with good infrastructure and amenities.
- Explore the establishment of a Strategic Planning National Housing Corporation to strategically direct housing policy and provide assistance and guidance to those seeking to build their own homes.

Affordable housing & Community Land Trusts

There must be a sea change in how government approaches the area of affordable housing in general and there are a myriad of policy tools to create this environment:

- Restricting land speculation through the reintroduction of the windfall tax at marginal tax rate levels (40%).
- Providing adequate housing supply through all channels, including social housing, and regulating rents, to prevent demand side pressure for supply side shortages.
- Transparent property register showing property ownership across the whole island of Ireland.
- Registering all interests in development land and notifying the Local Authorities of such interest with first refusal given to the LA as per the Kenny Report
- Ensuring transparency in the house selling/buying process – no more closed bids through estate agents and a regulation of the trade.
- Limiting interest rates banks can charge on mortgages and retain a State bank to facilitate affordable mortgages.
- Investing in Community Land Trusts to allow people build their own homes on community-leased land (ensuring land costs are not determining house prices and avoiding property speculation).
- Review tax reliefs for landlords – While the State needs private landlords, only the productive activity of landlords / residential investors (construction and refurbishment of buildings) should be supported by the State.

Co-operative housing models

As an alternative method of providing affordable housing for communities, cooperative models, led and managed democratically by those involved have been shown to be effective in isolated cases in Ireland and much more commonly across Europe, particularly in cases where state support was provided. They could be particularly effective in developing new self-build communities in rural areas where currently, sites with planning permissions are only available in open countryside to families with land.

Recommendations

- Pass legislation to limit mortgage interest rates overbase
- Review all property related tax reliefs
- Ensure that building regulation of house construction and renovation does not impede production of new units
- Local Authorities to offer land at cost price plus a small margin to community land trusts to enable residents to build their own homes on community leased land.
- Ensure adequate supply of housing to prevent supply shortage demands driving up prices
- Work to establish that the majority of new housing is built on community owned land, and planned and built cooperatively

NAMA and social/affordable housing

The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) has a role to play in the provision of social and affordable housing and should be better able to effectively manage its portfolio for the benefit of the Irish taxpayer, than the foreign REITs or investment firms snapping up the NAMA loan book.

At the end of March 2015, NAMA had delivered a total 1,198 residential properties for social housing use, comprising of 950 completed properties with a further 248 that have been contracted where completion work is on-going.

To date demand has been confirmed by the Local Authorities for 2,483 of the properties that NAMA has made available. Another 45 properties are being evaluated bringing the total that may be deemed suitable to 2,528 potentially.

NAMA originally identified over 6,300 properties but some were deemed unsuitable by LAs as being outside areas of housing demand, or unsuitable under sustainable planning guidelines. A further 1,500 properties identified for social housing were ultimately sold or privately let by the owners or receivers.

In Budget 2016, the government stated it had directed NAMA to fund developers to build 20,000 houses over the next 5 years. These houses will be in the main for the private market and will be built by developers who ended up in NAMA because their loans were so toxic. Sinn Féin has argued for NAMA to fund the completion of projects to make them saleable and to invest in State infrastructure, such as housing, but this project must be monitored closely to ensure the developers who contributed to causing the crash do not profit from housing need now.

Recommendations

- Suitable land banks, and any housing deemed suitable for social housing, should be passed back to the Local Authorities for the provision of social housing as part of a 'social dividend' to the taxpayer in lieu of a direct financial return to the exchequer (NAMA's key objective).
- Maximise the use and value of NAMA land banks by allowing the agency to proceed to a recommitted 2020 wind-down and proceeding with future new builds as opposed to selling the land banks in fire sales.
- Ensure NAMA commits 20% to Part V requirements as per Sinn Féin plans
- Map information on all NAMA properties and review all land held by NAMA where there is good potential for LA housing development. Reasons for Local Authorities refusal of certain properties made available by NAMA must be made public.
- Put a stay on the government directing NAMA activities until a full review is conducted of the body's work, as per Sinn Féin's previously released NAMA policy paper.

Protecting the rights of Local Authority tenants

Tenants have the right to live in homes that are well maintained. Cuts to Local Authority funding has resulted in substantial cuts in Local Authority maintenance grants. This will be costly in the long run. In the Six Counties, cyclical maintenance is undertaken to ensure buildings do not fall into disrepair. Repairing a building that has been neglected for a period always costs more than maintaining that building to a certain standard in the first place.

We also believe tenants, both social and private, should be encouraged and supported in creating tenant associations to lobby for and protect their rights, particularly when it comes to key areas of consultation around issues like anti-social behaviour and wider housing policy.

Recommendations

- Make it illegal for Local Authorities to share the details of their tenants with Irish Water or any commercial or private body without their consent.
- Incomes from Local Authority rents should be ring-fenced for housing related maintenance and repairs.
- Extend remit of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB)
- to cover tenants of Local Authorities
- Have Local Authorities design budgets to allow a maintenance cost 'per unit' to ensure it is factored in to annual spending plans.
- Put in place a framework for Local Authorities to responsibly engage with tenants who have arrears and to arrange fair remuneration processes. This could possibly be arranged through engaging Local Authorities and their tenants in the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears, reconfiguring the Code to reflect the agreement between LAs and tenants.

Tenant Purchase – Right to buy

There are positives and negatives with tenant purchase schemes. They enable lower income families to purchase their own homes ensuring a strong income mix within Council estates and giving families security of succession for their children. However, they also result in the depletion of the social housing stock and the potential for some tenant purchasers to profit from what is essentially a public asset.

Recommendations:

- Temporarily continue the stay on tenant-purchase while the housing stock numbers remain at crisis level.
- In the short term, reform tenant purchase schemes to ensure that houses would not be sold to tenants at deep discounts. We would also ensure that any housing stock sold would have to be replaced one-for-one.

Rent certainty and security - Cinnteacht cíosa agus sábháilteacht

Private rental sector

The private rental sector is dysfunctional. It serves neither tenants nor landlords well. Sinn Féin believes that there is a need for a long-term strategy for tackling the structural weaknesses in the private rental sector. This will require significant changes in landlord-tenant regulation, social supports, and the composition of who provides and who lives in the private rental sector.

Two thirds of landlords own just a single property. The system has too many accidental landlords with little time or training to provide a high quality service.

We need landlords who are seeking long-term stable returns from their properties, not a quick, exploitative buck. In turn tenants require security of tenure, rent certainty and minimum standards.

Regulating the rental sector – rent certainty & security of tenure

With the shortage of rental properties caused by a substantial decrease in social housing construction; the end of the affordable housing scheme; the resurgence in house prices in Dublin and other urban areas and greater difficulty in accessing credit all leading to higher demand, rents particularly in Dublin have soared to a level beyond the accepted percentage of average household incomes people should pay.

We are witnessing increased hardship for renters as well as severe instability of tenancies with many former private tenants losing their homes due to rent increases beyond their ability to pay. As a result we have seen people in full time employment seeking emergency accommodation and the support of homeless charities and adults, with children of their own, being forced to move back to the parental home.

This failure of the supply and demand market mechanisms to provide affordability and security in the private rental sector requires immediate corrective action. Sinn Féin will introduce short-term rent regulation to address unrealistic and damaging rent levels in relation to the real economy. Market failure also mandates the introduction of a new long-term system of controlled rent increases and longer-term tenancy arrangements to provide stability and predictability into the future.

Recommendations

- Provide rent certainty by indexing linking rent increases and decreases to the Consumer Price Index.

- Amend the Residential Tenancy Act to restrict the grounds on which landlords can serve notices to quit to provide for a greater security of tenure
- Local Authorities to work with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to ensure standard rent rates based on Department guidelines are made legal requirements for landlords.
- Extend remit of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to cover tenancies of Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies
- Allow for greater cooperation with government departments to identify unregistered landlords
- Introduce a more robust minimum standards regime and fund local authorities to increase the number of inspections

Ending the preferential tax treatment of private landlords

Sinn Féin sees a role for landlords and a private rental sector but the preferential tax treatment they have received to date must end. The State's tax policy should not be designed to make property speculation more attractive than it would be in normal market conditions. At the moment, landlords may deduct interest on money borrowed to purchase, improve or repair residential property from the gross rent when computing their rental profits for tax purposes on that property.

Landlords who have mortgages can also write off their mortgage interest payments against the tax bill levied on rental income received on these properties. The mortgage interest deduction allowable is 75%. In the last full tax year accounted for, 2012, the cost to the State of this tax relief was €577 million. This was in a year when €4 billion was declared in gross domestic rental income. This tax relief needs to be incrementally reduced. Such a high tax relief on speculative assets is unjustifiable, especially as the government is phasing out Tax Relief at Source (TRS) on mortgage interest for family homes. There is also a need for a review of the tax treatment of landlords.

Recommendations:

- Reduce the tax relief for landlords on mortgage interest relief, considering eventual elimination
- Ensure all property/landlord related tax reliefs are analysed for their societal and economic value, and are not contributing to property speculation, higher rents or property values.
- Conduct a review of the tax treatment, registration and training of landlords with a view to introducing a comprehensive reform of the sector.

Social supports

Rent Supplement, originally meant to be an emergency stopgap measure to deal with unemployed people who could not be housed yet by the Local Authority and could not afford to pay private rent rates, is a policy which has become an integral part of how we house people. At its height, the State spent over half a billion euro subsidising private rents because it had failed to build tens of thousands needed social houses. Rent Supplement now subsidises rent paid to private landlords for over 68,000 households. The total cost in 2014 was €340 million. This is bad value for public money, distorts the rental market and locks the recipient into under employment, tenure insecurity and poverty.

In 2014, a new model, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) was unveiled as a admitted de-facto long-term rent supplement and to allow for the return of Rent Supplement to serve its original purpose as a stopgap measure.

Recommendations

- End the practice of removing Housing Assistance Payment recipients from principle housing waiting lists and legislate to ban additional pay-outs to landlords by tenants
- Reform Rent Supplement to make payments directly to landlords; to make payments at the start of the month; and allow tenants to work full time
- Alongside the introduction of rent regulations, look at the capping of rent subsidies, to ensure rents demanded by landlords do not escalate to meet any increase in the rent cap.
- Establish working group to develop long term plan for housing support payments the aim of which is to merge all existing subsidies (rent supplement, rental accommodation scheme, housing assistance scheme) into a single form of Housing Benefit administered by local authorities.

Abolition of traditional Ground Rent

Ground rent is an annual rent paid to a ground landlord in return for no service whatsoever. Sinn Féin has long opposed the rents and called for the abolition. The majority of ground rents are charged on foot of leases that are in perpetuity. We do not believe that amendment of the 1937 Constitution is required and we do not agree that ground rent landlords should be compensated.

Recommendations

- Immediate abolition of historical ground rents.
- Appropriation of ground rent lease-holdings by the State.
- No compensation for ground rent landlords.
- Amend the Ground Rent Act to outlaw all new ground rents for all use categories except for leases created by public agencies, local authorities and Community Land Trusts (registered).

Deposit Retention Scheme

The illegal withholding of a tenant's deposit by a private landlord is one of the most common issues dealt with by housing charities. Many more tenants are unaware of their rights in regard to their deposits and so allow landlords to abuse the system.

To tackle this problem, which can lead to severe hardship for renters seeking to relocate, a deposit retention scheme is required.

This scheme would hold deposits with a third party that would award the money to the party rightfully entitled to it at the conclusion or breaking of a tenancy agreement. Due to their experience in the field, the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) would be best placed to take up the role of the third party.

Recommendations

- The establishment of a Deposit Retention Scheme, which would allow for the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to hold private tenancy deposits until the conclusion of a tenancy agreement.
- Empower the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to issue fines to landlords who hold onto tenant's deposits without grounds.

Private build - Forbairt phríobháideach

Planning & zoning

The Mahon Tribunal exposed the extent and scale of corruption and made a series of detailed recommendations relating to planning. However, 18 years on; three years after it made its final report; and four years after Fine Gael and Labour assumed office, the recommendations of the Mahon Report have still not been implemented.

In fact, rather than implement this report, Fine Gael and Labour have published an outline for their planning proposals, which make the Regulator subservient to Minister for the Environment. This completely contradicts the Mahon Tribunal's recommendation for a regulator with powers separate from the Department of the Environment.

Recommendations

- Ensure significant legacy issues regarding planning are properly investigated and people held to account.
- Establish an Office of the Planning Regulator, with the appointment of a Planning Regulator to be made following open public competition by an Independent Appointments Board
- Ensure that recommendations of the Planning Regulator be made binding on the Minister responsible.
- Provide national standards for urban and rural planning of all future developments.

High-density housing

Sinn Féin is opposed to low quality, badly planned housing. High-density housing developments are at particular risk of degrading into ghettos of poverty and exclusion due to the pressures they put on local services.

Genuine community partnership with Local Authorities can provide not only more homes through high-density in urban areas, but also lower transport, energy and waste bills, convenient schools, care centres and varied employment opportunities in a green nurturing environment.

High density does not necessarily mean high-rise. People-centred settlements can meet quite high-density targets with a mix of two to five storey buildings.

Recommendations:

- Support high-density housing developments where they are:
 - planned in partnership with the local community and prospective residents
 - designed to support all kinds of families that need homes (as regards unit size);
 - offering mixed tenure and/or located in mixed tenure areas to promote intergenerational sustainability;
 - located in walking accessible areas with good transport links;
 - located in areas with access to employment;
 - close to schools, shops and other essential services and facilities; and
 - where they will have access to sufficient and varied public and green spaces.
- Require Councils in urban areas to examine the option of higher-density developments in their Local Area Plans where there is high housing demand in any



housing sector. High-density housing should not be reserved only for public and social rental housing tenants. Apart from the potential negative association of high density with low income and vulnerable people, there is also a real need for higher density privately owned and rented apartments.

Management fees

It is necessary to have management bodies in blocks of apartments. However, at present though they are subject to company law, such private estate management companies are unregulated. There is a total lack of accountability to the residents who pay for their services, and the fees charged are often exorbitant and subject to huge increases (in some cases by up to 300% in a single year) without corresponding improvement in service. Poor urban design of developer-led housing has resulted in ubiquitous cul-de-sac or gated estates unconnected with the older streets, neighbourhood or village centres, or even adjoining estates. This has contributed to this divergence of open space maintenance.

Recommendations

- Ensure all public areas are finished by the developer by requiring lodgment of a realistic bond to cover the works.
- Developers and/or builders that do not finish their developments to the required standard will be put on a shared Local Authorities list and barred from applying for planning permission for further housing developments.
- Local authorities will be resourced to assume the maintenance promptly when estates are fully completed and handed over under a transparent system.
- Ensure that a non profit Management Company (comprised of the residents /owners) for the apartment block/s will be set up when 50% of the units are sold/allocated and not as is the case now, when the last unit is sold.
- Legislate to ensure that no management fees can be charged until the development is deemed complete by the local authority, therefore preventing the gouging of residents for development construction costs.
- The proposed Housing Ombudsman to adjudicate on disputes between residents and management companies.
- Promote Community Land Trust two-stage development process with good interconnection to existing and planned neighbourhoods and service centres.

Mortgages & mortgage distress

Four family homes a day are now being repossessed or surrendered.

In the first six months of 2015 there were 98,137 family homes in arrears. That is 13% of all family homes. 70,200 were in arrears of over 90 days. At end-June, there were 15,276 Buy To Let (BTL) accounts in arrears over 720 days.

Non-bank lenders now hold almost 46,000 mortgage accounts for Principal Dwelling House (PDH) and Buy To Let combined. Of this number, 19,818 are in arrears of more than 90 days.

The numbers in mortgage arrears doubled under Fine Gael and Labour. After 4 years in government, Fine Gael and Labour changed the law to make it easier to repossess and allowed banks include repossession as “solutions”.

They allowed the Central Bank to amend the Code of Conduct on mortgage arrears so that the position of borrowers was weakened and the banks strengthened to be more aggressive.



They removed the legal protection in the Land and Conveyancing Act so that family homes could be repossessed without replacing it with any protection.

They set up “targets” for the banks, which could be met by repossessing homes.

Recommendations

- Introduce legislation to empower the Central Bank to limit the interest rates that banks can charge. This legislation should be designed to lapse at some point in the future if a healthier market emerges.
- An end to the banks’ veto in cases where the family home is involved regardless of when the arrears began.
- A strengthening of the role of MABS in advising and helping struggling homeowners.
- Reduce the bankruptcy term to 1 year, from 3.
- Provide/ restore greater legal protection to the Family Home
- Ongoing reviews of the Central Bank’s macro prudential lending rules and its impact on the housing market in terms of rent levels and house prices

Dealing with distressed Shared Ownership mortgages

The Shared Ownership Scheme was aimed at people who could not afford to buy their entire home in one go. It has now been closed. Shared Ownership mortgage holders agreed to split the purchase of a home with their Local Authority. They then paid half the mortgage and rent for the property, while the council made up the rest. In recent years their mortgage rates have increased along with their rent while many of the families involved experienced unemployment, cut hours and decreased earnings. This led to more and more of the shared ownership mortgages falling into arrears.

Recommendations

- Local Authorities to freeze rents on Shared Ownership mortgage holders until they have come out of distress
- Fast track the move of some of the most distressed shared ownership mortgages into the Mortgage to Rent Scheme

A vacant site levy & windfall tax

After many years of inaction the government have produced legislation for a vacant site levy but it could be a lot stronger and so more effective in encouraging developers and property owners to sell or develop zoned land and sites for housing and related uses. The levy is set as an annual charge based on 3% of the value of the land/site.

The government has also proposed completely abolishing windfall tax which is paid on profits from land sell-off when planning permission meant your land had benefitted. When it was first introduced the government set the rate at 80%, effectively halting the sale of prime land by placing the tax on profits too high.

We do not agree with its abolition, but instead would like to see it operational at a rate akin to the marginal income tax rate of 40%.

Recommendations

- Local Authorities to have first option to build housing developments on formerly vacant sites.
- Provide for the handover of vacant sites to local authorities, which have been established to have no market value.



- Derelict sites to be taken into the possession of LAs, using CPOs where necessary.
- A 3% annual levy on all land idle for 12 months preceding, set in 2016 excluding land held by Local Authorities with a higher band of 5% for land of a greater size than 1 acre. Increase levy in annual increments for sites which remain idle in areas of high need.
- Provision for use of levy receipts to be used by Local Authorities with an annual review by Minister in conjunction with the Oireachtas Committee on Environment.
- The re-introduction of the windfall tax at 40% on all zoned-development land.

Property tax

The Local Property Tax is a failed, regressive tax. It doesn't take into account the thousands paid by people who bought their homes in the boom. It makes no link between income and the ability to pay and it is not directly linked to any services from Local Authorities. Householders still pay for the Local Government fund through all forms of taxation, and are still expected to pay water charges, refuse service charges, and high rate of VAT on utility bills.

Tenants in rental accommodation and Local Authority Housing are subjected to the tax in real terms too. In contrast, the extra surcharge of properties of over €1m has raised insignificant funds.

As a model of funding local government the Local Property Tax is a failure. It is by its very design going to create huge variations in revenues raised across Counties and local authorities.

Recommendations:

- Abolish the Local Property Tax (costs an approximate €440 million, provided for in Sinn Féin annual budget submission)

21st century quality construction

Sinn Féin believes that all houses and accommodation should be built to the highest safety and quality standards and legislation should provide for these standards. Developers who deliberately flaunt this legislation should be prosecuted. Any developer who puts the lives of residents at risk for the sake of profit should be struck off from further development.

By March 2014, the Government introduced S.I 9, a long overdue set of regulations to ensure against shoddy building and self-regulation in the construction industry.

Throughout the boom, buildings shot up – not just in urban centres like Dublin and Cork, but all over the 26 Counties. Spurred by tax incentives, in some cases, questionable zoning and planning permission, huge consumer demand, and easy credit fueling high prices, developers competed to produce the most properties. The whole process was undertaken under a voluntary certification and light-touch regulation. The result has been disastrous. Priory Hall in Dublin had been shut down when the dangerous, shoddy workmanship was deemed to be a massive fire hazard with Longboat Quay residents now finding themselves in a similar position. Revelations of more disastrous building examples continued into 2014. A fire in Newbridge, Co. Kildare engulfed six homes in less than a half hour;

A number of concerns have been raised about the S.I 9 process and there are ongoing discussions between professional bodies, the construction sector and the department on reducing uncertainty, assigning responsibility to the right parties and ensuring a prompt remedy for consumers such as project insurance.

The generally accepted issues with the regulation boil down to:

- Lack of timely remedy for the consumer
- Builder not required to improve standards or take on fair responsibility
- Lack of effective measures and incentives during design and construction to avoid errors and if made, timely remedial work
- The impact on housing production
- The impact on building costs
- The reduction of self-builds
- The failure to address the completion of multiple unit developments
- The lack of clarity over simple residential extensions
- The failure to coordinate Completion Certification with the legal conveyance of property

We need to make sure that while self-builds in sustainable settlements aren't hindered by unnecessary expense, the S.I 9 legislation is not watered down by an industry revving its engines and desperate to make the easy profits it used to enjoy.

Pyrite & Mica Block Resolution Policy

Thousands of homes across the east coast are affected by pyrite. The Pyrite Remediation Board set up by the Government in 2011 has not dealt sufficiently with the homeowners with only 5 of 20,000 homes gone through the remediation process as of April of this year. Sinn Féin are committed to expanding the Pyrite Remediation Scheme so that all homeowners affected by pyrite can have their homes fixed should their insurers not pay. We believe that this scheme should be extended to homeowners suffering with MICA muscovite block issues – a crisis predominant in Donegal.

Families living in homes with pyrite face a complex and lengthy redress system. Homes are divided into category 1 or 2 depending on the severity of the problem. Many families face up to three years waiting for redress. Homes have to be evacuated for the remedial works and this is very stressful for families.

The law needs to be strengthened to shift the responsibility firmly onto the developers and away from families, and the redress board needs to be adequately staffed to ensure that help is available for families who need it to navigate the system. In Budget 2016 the government allocated €19million for remedial works and while this is welcome it is money being funneled into a system that needs to be simplified and refined. There are over 500 homes in Fingal currently awaiting pyrite remedial works and there are more likely to come to light. It is believed up to 2,000 households in Donegal may be suffering with Mica issues.

Recommendations:

- Any changes to building regulations laid out in S.I 9 must only be made following full and transparent public consultation with all relevant groupings from Local Authorities, Fire Authorities, consumer bodies and professional and industry experts.
- Bring in requirement for the statutory Registration of Builders that have demonstrated adequate experience and competency in their trade, thorough knowledge of the Building Regulations and kept up to date by continuing technical

skill development. The Registration body to have responsibility for monitoring incidences and claims under the BReg system and the power to remove incompetent and negligent builders from the Register.

- Legislate for the highest quality of safety and design for all accommodation and prosecute any builder who flaunts the standards.
- Establishment of an independent panel of experts to undertake a comprehensive investigation into the extent, cause and possible remediation of the defective blocks issue (Mica muscovite, or weetabix block).
- Ensure defective block suppliers adhere to new quality standards of blocks/cement as per recent legislation.
- Provide exemption from payment of the Local Property Tax (LPT) while it is operational for all homeowners affected by the issue of defective blocks. (as offered to Pyrite homeowners)
- Reform and simplify the Pyrite redress scheme and extend it to Mica brick homes – ensuring the scheme is full funded and homeowners are supported through the process.
- Adequate resourcing of local authority building control oversight function of the BRegs including enforcement powers following a negative report by the assigned certifier.
- The exploration of a statutory system of Project Insurance to which all parties in the design and construct process must contribute. The insurer will then pursue the responsible party under their respective professional and building insurances. The Insurer will have the power to approve or nominate the assigned certifier as it is in their interest that the certifier is effective in eliminating defects and non-compliance at all stages of the contract.

Sustainable homes

The residential sector accounts for more than one quarter of Ireland's primary energy consumption and energy-related CO₂ emissions – the second largest sector after transport. The European Commission has called on Member States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% by 2020, a figure that many environmental groups feel is still too low.

People on low incomes are most likely to live in the least energy efficient housing – that is, housing that costs more to heat – and to experience 'fuel poverty': the inability to heat one's home to an adequate (safe and comfortable) level owing to low household income, and the need to spend more than 10% of household income on fuel to achieve an acceptable level of comfort.

According to publichealth.ie, international research reports higher levels of excess winter mortality in the Six and 26 Counties than in the rest of Europe and that: *'In Ireland around 70% of excess winter mortality from cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease arises in the poorest socio-economic groups.'*

There have been a number of initiatives taken to improve standards in recent years, for example, the Warmer Homes initiative and the BER system (building energy rating). These are ambitious in terms of energy efficiency but they are complicated, occasionally contradictory and do not give the full picture.

The most effective way to reduce fuel poverty in existing buildings, is not at the building scale but at community scale.

Recommendations

- Increase fuel allowance by 3 weeks as proposed by successive Sinn Féin budget submissions. This policy will increase payments to the benefit of 413,000 households (costs in the region of €30 million).
- Extend the Warmer Homes Scheme to include window and door insulation and increase funding to the grant system.
- Promote Combined Heat and Power using renewables for existing local authority estates and other areas of older houses with high levels of fuel poverty
- Ensure all new social housing is fitted with sources of renewable energy sources with emphasis on community scale Combined Heat and Power.
- Revise Part L to more closely accord with Passive House.
- Revise BER to include embodied energy and location factors
- Encourage and support the development of indigenous industries and training programmes that contribute to cost-effective, environmentally sustainable and thermally efficient housing construction technologies, methods and materials.
- Encourage and support indigenous technology and business models in distributed energy particularly community-owned renewable CHP and local energy grids
- Fully enforce environmental sustainability regulations on new build, and review these to ensure they are sufficiently robust.

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)

Since their introduction through Finance Bill 2014, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) have become major players in the Irish property market, with aggregate holdings in the billions of euros.

Their purchase of distressed loan portfolios and assets from NAMA and other sections in the Irish property market since July 2014 has been a cause of concern. Sinn Féin believes their largescale predatory buying has both seen a loss for the taxpayer via NAMA and that their holding of Irish real estate will affect rents into the future.

A Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) is an investment company that holds rental properties. Through a series of complex taxation arrangements, these bodies receive a significant if not complete reduction in their Irish tax bill.

As most of those who invest in REITs are institutional investors and specialised international property investors, Sinn Féin is very concerned about the possible tax avoidance which they may be engaging in, which is facilitated through current Irish Tax Legislation and the International Irish Double Tax Treaties. There is a stark possibility that the Irish Exchequer to be missing out on massive sums of taxation.

Recommendations

- Full review of effective tax rate paid on distributions by all major REITs operating in Ireland.
- Ensure that these major international and institutional investors in REITs pay a comparative amount of taxation on income and gains as an Irish resident investor would have to pay.

Communities & Inclusivity - **Pobail a thógáil - ní mór tosaíocht a dhéanamh de chuimsiú**

Emergency accommodation

In the first half of 2015 over 1,000 children were sleeping in emergency accommodation every night. A record 71 families presented as homeless in April 2015. Funding for homeless services from the Exchequer in 2015 is to amount to €52.8 million (the regional Local Authorities assign more individually to homelessness – the total spent in the Dublin region in 2015 will be in the vicinity of €68 million).

The main solutions to homelessness are obvious, we need to house those in emergency accommodation and stop the flow of tenants into homelessness. How this can be done quickly is a more difficult task and requires a real dedication to a better housing system as well as a willingness to be pragmatic in order to immediately tackle the crisis which is causing so much suffering.

Recommendations

- As a short-term measure while awaiting the ambitious social housing build plan, make an additional €30 million available to Local Authorities to emergency house the homeless in the first year of a Sinn Féin government.
- Amend Section 10 of the Housing Act to include 'prevention of homelessness'
- Adopt a Housing First approach to meeting homeless peoples housing need and in conjunction with Local Authorities set clear allocation targets
- Place a statutory limit on how long somebody can be in emergency accommodation without being moved on to transitional or permanent housing.
- Landlords must report all evictions notices to the relevant local authority housing departments.
- Encourage Landlords to engage in Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) run arbitration in cases of prolonged rent arrears with a tenant.
- Implement a fair rent system to stop flow of tenants into homelessness
- Put in place a binding code of conduct for lenders taking into receivership properties that have tenants or have been available for rent in the recent past.
- Establish Mortgage to Rent type scheme for distressed buy-to-let mortgages
- Tie local authority homeless funding to need, committing not to cut homeless services.

Rural housing

People should have the right to build their own homes once that does not conflict with the overall interests of the community or violate planning guidelines and regulations.

In particular, people who own their own land or who buy their own land ought to be able to build homes for themselves, and for their children who leave the family home. That has long been a tradition in rural Ireland and has helped to address the issue of providing homes and easing pressure on the local housing market.

The infrastructure required to service isolated dwellings can cause huge costs to the State. Cluster living around villages is the preferable option, but we recognise that cannot be achieved in every case.

Housing in rural Ireland outside of the many urban centres currently poses a number of problems – particularly for young people. Not only is it difficult to secure a mortgage but the costs of building a house has now become substantial and include the Engineer's application of €5,000 approx, the local authorities development charge, connection charges for services.

In addition to these costs before the house is even built, the new building regulations (S.I.9) are claimed to add in the region of €3,000 to €11,000 for self-building to be inspected at each stage. In other jurisdictions the local authority has responsibility for inspections and absorb the cost. The new regulations in effect now mean that self-builds may only be completed in cases where there is a certifier willing to accept liability and inspect at each stage.

We also need to carefully manage the issue of second 'holiday' homes. The development of cottage type holiday accommodation in the form of single units or small groups should be permitted where it can contribute to farm diversification and promote tourism for the benefit of the local economy.

We believe that rural housing must also be developed in keeping with the countryside. The planning services have abjectly failed to control for excessive size of houses, unsuitable exterior finishes, unsuitable location of new builds and the unnecessary removal of mature vegetation.

Recommendations:

- Continue to allow and smooth the planning process for the building of houses in rural Ireland as a primary residence, once it is agreed that the build is sustainable.
- A return to the building of houses in clusters, saving in infrastructure costs.
- The reintroduction of social housing built on land offered over by a landowner and which the council would take ownership of on the death of the occupant (landowner). (Rural Dwellings Scheme)
- Extend the Home Renovation Incentive grant to encourage the restoration of existing properties in isolated rural areas. We would also like an examination of some form of assistance to aid rural residents upgrade cheap/abandoned housing stock (non primary residences).
- Identify infrastructural corridors by councils where houses will not receive planning permission. These corridors to then be used for infrastructural work that won't cause disruption to peoples homes.
- Allow all households who wish to upgrade their septic tanks and percolation areas to be eligible to access the Septic Tank Grant Scheme.
- Examine current blanket bans on planning permission in designation areas and low volume traffic that work against people building homes in their own areas.

Traveller Accommodation

Travellers as a community continue to endure some of the worst and most overcrowded living conditions in Ireland today. In the last seven years, funding for Traveller accommodation has been cut by 93% from €70 million in 2008 down to €4.3 million this year. 1,536 families are in overcrowded or unsafe conditions. Many Travellers have no access to basic facilities such as sanitation, water and electricity. Travellers fare badly in all key indicators of disadvantage including employment, poverty, health, infant mortality, life expectancy and education. At the root of all these problems are the levels of prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion experienced by these citizens.

Travellers have been criminalised in Irish legislation in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002. This Act allows the Gardaí to move families on demand and without notice. Failure to comply with such a demand may result in a heavy fine or term of imprisonment. This in itself constitutes a major human rights violation.

Little consideration has been given to the cultural values of travellers when providing accommodation to date. As a result, much of this has not been designed in a way that meets travellers' specific needs. Indeed, some of the current Traveller Accommodation Programmes also do not meet basic standards.

For too long bigotry and discrimination has been allowed to hinder the provision of traveller accommodation. We must ensure that funding for traveller accommodation is used and that providing homes for the traveller community is no longer allowed be a political football.

Recommendations

- Introduce a Travellers' Ethnicity Bill.
- Frontload funding to Local Authorities with a good track record of drawing down funds and delivery traveller accommodation with penalties for those who refuse to build needed traveller accommodation.
- Reform all legislation that penalises traveller culture and ways of life.
- Amend legislation to make the Traveller Accommodation Programme a mandatory consideration on an application for planning permission
- Empower the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee to take charge of the provision of traveller accommodation with an annual budget and targets.
- Establish an all-Ireland programme for provision for nomadism, in co-operation with all local authorities in the 6 and 26 Counties.
- Incorporate local development plan zoning objectives with provisions of the Traveller Accommodation Programme (especially in relation to the use of temporary or transient halting sites).
- Prescribe that the use of land as a transient halting site for a specified number of weeks per year should be as an exempted development (for example, under Section 4 of the 26 Counties Planning and Development Act, 2000).
- Bring the development of private halting sites within the 'open for consideration' or 'acceptable' categories under agricultural zoning.
- Use external mediation of disputes where Traveller and settled communities come into conflict over traveller accommodation issues, and develop a broader, meaningful traveller-settled reconciliation process.

Student accommodation

The Union of Students of Ireland believe a combination of private sector rent price increases and continuing shortfall in purpose-built student accommodation, is on course to fuel a dropout culture in third level education unless immediate action is taken.

Throughout this document, Sinn Féin sets out a series of measures surrounding social and affordable housing build, rent regulation and accommodation standards, which will all benefit students seeking accommodation. For example, an increase in social housing build will directly contribute to a freeing up of rental properties.

In addition to this, we commit to the following.

Recommendations

- Ensure homeowners availing of the rent a room relief register with the PRTB, which will then provide deposit protection for students.
- Work with colleges and student bodies to plan suitable student accommodation on education sites, subsidised through state financing.
- Binding contractual clauses to be inserted for entities such as REITs who purchase properties for the purpose of student accommodation from public agencies like NAMA, that the properties will be maintained for the specific purposes of student accommodation for a set period of time.
- A national housing strategy agency, as considered in this document, to strategically address the issue of student accommodation in the longer-term.

Independent living for people with disabilities

Sinn Féin recognises that people with disabilities are equal citizens and are therefore entitled to equality in relation to housing. The right to independent living for the 600,000 people with disabilities should underpin housing policy. The inaccessibility of Irish housing for people with disabilities impacts negatively on their ability to live independently and play a full role within the larger community.

According to the Disability Federation of Ireland; 'Despite an ageing population and the growing numbers of people with disabilities, funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme was cut by a staggering 56% from 2010 to 2014. Longer waiting lists for the Scheme and people living in intolerable conditions have been reported.'

The Federation also points out that 2,900 people are currently living in congregated settings, denying them their right to privacy and independent living. The figure does not include people living with disabilities in nursing homes.

The main barriers facing people with disabilities with regard to housing are the following:

- The link between disability and low income usually puts owner-occupation out of reach for first time buyers with a disability
- There is no standard requirement on local authorities or private developers to provide accessible housing as the 'norm', nor any national guideline for the number of universally accessible houses to be built each year.
- Inaccessibility of surrounding infrastructure and the wider environment leads to isolation from other services and support systems.

All new developments should be built with the idea of 'universal design' in mind. Universal design also facilitates 'Lifetime Adaptable Housing' standards. An 'adaptable' home is one where features can be easily added or removed depending on the needs of the individual.

The main features of universal design and Lifetime Adaptable Housing are:

- No steps at entrances
- Wider doors and corridors
- Low level light switches
- Main level toilet facilities
- Bigger, more accessible bathrooms to allow installation of grab-bars
- Easy to operate taps and fittings
- Easy-open doors and windows

If Lifetime Adaptable Housing becomes the norm, some specific financial supports for independent living (like the Disabled Persons Grant) will only need to be used in unusual circumstances.

Sinn Féin aims for Ireland to become a model of best international practice in providing housing for people with disabilities.

Recommendations

- Make funding such as the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities payable to voluntary housing agencies and private landlords who are willing to adapt to the requirements of a long-term tenant.
- Allow tenants of Local Authorities claim the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities.
- Establish Universal Design and Lifetime Adaptability Guidelines and incorporate them as legal a requirement for all new build houses, with a national monitoring system for implementation.
- Introduce national standards for support for housing adaptation and ensure that such grants fund increasing levels of housing adaptation.
- Fully integrate supported housing for people with intellectual disabilities and for people who experience mental illness in the community, and increase support for sheltered accommodation schemes.

Domestic abuse survivors & refugees

The recent recession saw a dramatic increase in the number of survivors of domestic violence coming forward and seeking support. Women's refuge centres and other groups which provide transitional housing for survivors of domestic abuse have reported much higher demands on their services which they are struggling to meet due to funding cuts. Survivors of domestic abuse must be protected by the law and supported to find a safe place to live and rebuild their lives.

Recommendations

- Remove blocks on survivors seeking social housing if they are named on a mortgage with their former abuser
- Ringfence funding for the domestic abuse survivor services from cuts
- Implement a pathway for councils to deal with domestic violence in Local Authority housing and among rent support recipients.

Direct provision

The record of this State in supporting and protecting asylum seekers is shameful. Since 2003, Ireland is the only State in the European Union to opt out of EU Directives laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers.

For 15 years, the State has placed asylum seekers into the discredited Direct Provision System, condemning them to years in limbo and denying them the right to work. This history of inaction and indifference to the plight of asylum seekers has been the hallmark of this government and previous governments. Private businesses have made huge profits from the lucrative Direct Provision business. There are currently almost 4,500 people in the system, one third of them children. Despite it meant to have been a short-term measure, many have been there for up to seven years. The system must end.



Recommendations

- Scrap the Direct Provision service
- In the interim increase the Direct Provision allowance and allow people in the centres to find work
- Ensure the safe and integrated housing of all people in the centres and future refugees, working with both the residents and communities to ensure there is knowledge and understanding of what the refugees are fleeing and what they can bring with their individual talents to Ireland.
- Implement the recommendations of the Oireachtas Petitions Committee report which Sinn Féin was instrumental in bringing forward.





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