

HOUSING

SINN FÉIN
PROPOSALS
ELECTION
2020





Housing

The housing crisis can be solved. But only with a radical change of policy and increased investment in public housing to meet social and affordable need. Sinn Féin plan to deliver the biggest Council-led house building programme this state has ever seen.

For thirty years there has been a housing policy consensus shared by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Both parties, when in Government, underinvested in council housing and over relied on the private sector to deliver housing for workers and families.

This consensus has failed. It is why we have record levels of homelessness, why rents continue to spiral upwards, why an entire generation is locked out of the prospect of ever owning their own home, why our housing system is so utterly dysfunctional.

It doesn't have to be this way. The housing crisis can be ended. But any Government which wishes to do so must break with the Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael consensus.

Sinn Féin believes that housing is a right, a social good and not a commodity. We believe that Government policy must be tenure neutral, allowing individuals and families to decide what tenure -public, private rental or owner occupation- best suits their needs. Housing policy must work to ensure that every person has appropriate, secure and affordable accommodation.

KEY PRIORITIES OF A SINN FÉIN GOVERNMENT

- » **Deliver over 100,000 public homes on public land to meet social and affordable housing need**
- » **End long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough**
- » **Reduce rents by up to €1500 a year and freeze them for three years**
- » **Hold a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution**
- » **Introduce a comprehensive package of social housing reform**
- » **Introduce a comprehensive package of private rental sector reform**
- » **Make reducing house prices a policy objective**
- » **Tackle land hoarding and speculation through a stronger vacant sites tax and a new Active Land Management Agency**

The most ambitious public housing programme in the history of the state

Sinn Féin believes that the only way to end the housing crisis is to build public housing on public land. We also believe that public housing should be provided for those in need of social housing, affordable rental accommodation and affordable purchase homes.

In Government Sinn Féin would commence a decade long Council-led house building programme to meet social and affordable need.

The central role of Local Authorities would be enhanced by Approved Housing Bodies, co-operatives and community land trusts.

New targets would be set for all local authorities to meet this ambitious programme and Council Housing Managers would be given greater flexibility in design, procurement and approval to deliver the best quality homes in the timeliest manner.

SINN FÉIN'S PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMME WOULD:

- » **Deliver on average 20,000 public homes each year to meet social and affordable need**
- » **Prioritise the use of public land for the delivery of public housing by Local Authorities**
- » **Increase the Part V obligation on private developments to 25%**
- » **Staff Local Authorities to aggressively bring vacant private homes into use**
- » **Ensure that a minimum of 7% of all public houses are designed for people with disabilities and are fully wheelchair accessible**
- » **Restore funding for Traveller specific accommodation to its 2008 levels and fully implement the recommendations of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation**
- » **End the use of PPPs, Joint Ventures & Land Initiatives in the delivery of public housing**
- » **Double funding for and improve access to housing adaptation grants for people with disabilities**
- » **Increase the funding and targets for the retro fitting of public housing**

The right to a home

Sinn Féin believes that people should have the right to a home and that this right should be enshrined in the Constitution. This does not mean that Government would have a responsibility to give every person a set of keys to a new home. Rather it would place a strong obligation on Government to vindicate the right to a home through its laws, policies and budgets.

WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR OF GOVERNMENT SINN FÉIN WOULD:

- » **Hold a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution**



Public Housing Reform

In Government, Sinn Féin would introduce a major programme of housing reform with a Public Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. The aim of the Bill would be to reaffirm the public nature of social and affordable rental housing and end the privatisation of social housing promoted by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The Bill would also introduce important reforms to modernise the delivery and management of public housing stock.

In addition, we would work to develop a North-South facility to enable council list transfers.

THE BILL WOULD INCLUDE MEASURES TO:

- » **Define public housing as social and affordable rental units owned by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies**
- » **Define social housing supports such as ASH, RAS and HAP as temporary supports for those waiting to secure permanent public housing**
- » **Enable all current ASH, RAS and HAP tenants can return to the principal housing list with their full years intact**
- » **Raise the income limits for eligibility for social housing in line with inflation**
- » **Facilitate social housing applications to move from one Local Authority to another through the introduction of a social housing applicants' passport**
- » **Facilitate inter county public housing transfers and council list transfers**
- » **Provide public housing tenants with access to the Residential Tenancies Board**
- » **Allow Approved Housing Bodies access the Capital Advance Local Facility to deliver mixed social and affordable public housing schemes**

Reforming the Private Rental Sector

A stable and affordable private rental sector is a necessary element of any functioning housing system. For decades our private rental system has been badly regulated creating enormous instability and security.

In Government Sinn Féin would introduce a series of emergency measures to tackle sky high rents. We would also reform the Residential Tenancies Act.

SINN FÉIN'S EMERGENCY MEASURES WOULD INCLUDE:

- » **A three-year refundable tax credit for all existing and new tenancies that would put a month's rent back in every renter's pocket**
- » **A three-year freeze on rents for all existing and new tenancies**
- » **A major investment in affordable cost rental accommodation delivered by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies**
- » **A year on year reduction in the number of private rental tenancies used for social housing tenants via HAS, RAS & HAP freeing up additional rental stock for private renters**



THE RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL WOULD:

- » **Create tenancies of indefinite duration**
- » **Link rent reviews after the three-year rent freeze to the Consumer Price Index**
- » **Remove all Residential Tenancies Act Section 34 grounds for new and renewed tenancies**
- » **Introduce an NCT style certification to ensure compliance with building and fire safety standards**
- » **Ensure that 25% of all private rental properties are inspected by Local Authorities every year**
- » **Place a legal obligation on estate agents and letting platforms to ensure that all long- and short-term rental properties are compliant with minimum standards and planning requirements**

Homelessness

Homelessness can and must end. It is not the result of individual failings but of a broken housing system that failed to meet people's needs. A Sinn Féin Government would, in consultation with Local Authorities and the homeless NGO sector, set a date for ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough. Our focus would be on reducing the flow of people into homelessness and reducing the time spent in emergency accommodation.

IN GOVERNMENT SINN FÉIN WOULD:

- » **Set a date, within the lifetime of the Government, to end long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough**
- » **Double the provision of Housing First housing allocations**
- » **Limit the length of time any person can stay in emergency accommodation to a maximum of six months**
- » **Phase out use of dormitory style emergency accommodation for homeless people within the lifetime of the government**
- » **Place a legal obligation on Local Authorities to put in place homeless prevention plans for those at imminent risk of homelessness**
- » **End the use of vacant possession notices to quit to prevent families being evicted into homelessness**
- » **Fully implement the 2019 Joint Oireachtas Housing, Planning and Local Government Committee report on family homelessness**
- » **Increase funding for domestic violence refuge provision to meet need within the lifetime of the Government**



Home Ownership

Sinn Féin believes that affordable home ownership is an important element of any functioning housing system. Increasingly young people are being locked out of the prospect of ever owning their own home. It is not enough to focus solely on increasing private sector supply in the hope that prices will come down. Making homes genuinely affordable requires specific policy interventions to ensure the homes that are built are within reach of workers' modest incomes.

Home owners should not be burdened with higher mortgage interest rates than their European counterparts and the unfair Local Property Tax. In government, Sinn Féin would reduce mortgage interest rates by introducing our Bill which would cause the Central Bank to instruct the banks to lower the rates.

IN GOVERNMENT SINN FÉIN WOULD:

- » **Deliver a stream of affordable purchase homes through Local Authorities**
- » **Amend Home Building Finance Ireland to focus on delivering homes at prices below €250,000**
- » **Review the Local Authority home local scheme to make the criteria and decision making more transparent and extend the scheme to certain categories of second time buyer**
- » **Prioritise the placing of the Construction Industry Register on a statutory footing**
- » **Abolish the Local Property Tax and reduce mortgage interest rates**

Planning, Building Control and Land Use

Under Fine Gael, planning policy has become increasingly centralised, undermining local democracy and ignoring the recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal.

Sinn Féin in Government would seek to reverse these trends while at the same time promoting a planning policy that equips Local Authorities to meet the challenge of climate change and well planned, integrated, mixed use communities with proper social, economic and transport infrastructure.

IN GOVERNMENT SINN FÉIN WOULD:

- » **Repeal the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2015 allowing Ministers to introduce mandatory planning guidelines**
- » **Repeal the mandatory Ministerial guidelines on apartment design and building heights introduced in 2018**
- » **Repeal the Strategic Housing Development legislation and return all planning decisions to local authorities**
- » **Reform the planning process to impose strict statutory time lines on the pre planning process, requests for additional information and An Bord Pleanála appeals**



- » **Amend the legislation underpinning the Office of the Planning Regulator to make the office fully independent as recommended by Mahon Tribunal**
- » **Initiate a time limited review of the National Planning Framework and allow the Oireachtas to vote on the amended plan**
- » **Transform the Land Development Agency into an Active Land Management Agency with responsibility for strategically managing all public land while returning all residential development functions to Local Authorities**
- » **Develop universal design and lifetime adaptability guidelines and regulations so that all new buildings meet the needs of people with disabilities**
- » **Initiate a time limited review of land use and land value issues with a view to introducing measures to constrain land hoarding, land speculation and land price inflation**
- » **Strengthen the NZEB regulations and introduce a clear mechanism to ensure compliance**
- » **Fully implement the 2017 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local government report Safe as Housing including the creation of a Building Control Agency, a reformed BCAR process and a latent defects redress scheme for owners of Celtic Tiger properties with latent defects**
- » **Immediately introduce mandatory fire safety inspections by Local Authorities of all new build multi-unit residential developments**

