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**SINN FÉIN SPOKESPERSON ON HOUSING**

# **SINN FÉIN SUBMISSION TO HOUSING FOR ALL**

**JUNE 2021**

**Sinn Féin welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the government's new housing plan, "Housing for All". There is an opportunity for the government to move on from the failed policies of Rebuilding Ireland and to introduce a radical new plan for housing.**

**The Sinn Féin recommendations below will be laid out under the headings of public housing (social housing and affordable housing), the private rented sector, vacant homes, homelessness, and planning.**





## **Deliver Public Housing**

Sinn Féin believe that if this government is serious about tackling the housing crisis it needs to at least double capital investment in public housing. By public housing we mean social, affordable cost rental and affordable purchase homes on public land delivered by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and community housing trusts. The target must be at least 20,000 social and affordable homes to be delivered every year. This will require a doubling of capital investment from €1.4bn to at least €2.8bn. This will enable the government to wean itself off its dependency on the private sector to meet social and affordable housing need.

# Social Housing

If this government is serious about tackling social housing waiting lists it must significantly ramp up its real social housing delivery targets. A key problem with Rebuilding Ireland was that the delivery targets were too low.

## Recommendations:

- Sinn Féin believe that the government must target the delivery of at a minimum 12,000 real social homes per year, delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies.
- To facilitate this delivery local authorities must be provided with multi annual capital funding from the Department to ensure funding certainty for housing projects.
- The procurement, tendering and approvals process must be urgently addressed. Sinn Féin believes a one stage approval process should be put in place which can deliver units from conception to tendering in less than a year.
- Public Private Partnerships, Joint Ventures and Land Initiatives should be abandoned, and local authorities should be fully fund local authorities to develop mixed tenure, mixed income estates.
- The government must prioritise the full implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation.

## The government must also:

- 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.
- Introduce rolling social housing stock condition surveys in order to reach an inspection rate of 25% per year.
- Establish and resource an effective social housing tenants' participation mechanism to involve residents in decision making regarding the future of their homes.

# Affordable housing

Sinn Féin believe the government's priority must be to deliver public homes on public land to ensure working people have access to genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy.

The government must move on from a housing policy that over relies on the private sector to meet affordable housing need. This means that the government must stop the sell off of public land to private developers.

## Recommendations:

- Sinn Féin believe that the government must scrap the shared equity homeloan scheme as it will have an inflationary impact on house prices.
- The government must target the delivery of 8,000 affordable homes, 4,000 affordable cost rental and 4,000 affordable purchase homes per year.
- Affordable rents would be set at prices of between €700 and €900 per month in Dublin and lower elsewhere, with affordable purchases would be set at prices of €230,000 or less in Dublin and lower elsewhere, with no hidden equity charges.

More comprehensive detail on Sinn Féin's affordable housing plans are available in appendix one.



# Private Rented Sector

The rental market in this state is truly dysfunctional. Monthly rental payments in many urban centres are now higher than mortgage repayments. The RPZ legislation has failed and the government has failed to articulate a plan to deal with the disorderly exit of landlords from the market.

## Recommendations:

- Sinn Féin believe that the government must urgently introduce a three year ban on rent increases on all new and existing tenancies.
- The government must introduce of a refundable tax credit for all existing and new private rented tenancies.
- Increased investment in affordable cost rental accommodation at scale delivered by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.
- We note the Minister has stated he is bringing forward rental legislation in the autumn and this is welcome. This legislation must prioritise tenancies of indefinite duration and the removal of the Residential Tenancies Act Section 34 grounds on the sale of the property, use the property for a family member and the renovation of the property, for new and renewed tenancies.
- We would also like to see the government introduce an NCT style certification to ensure compliance with building and fire safety standards and also ensure that local authorities are adequately funded to conduct inspections of at least 25% of all private rental properties every year.
- Further regulation of the short term letting sector is also warranted and we believe the government must 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.
- Commission the Housing Agency to undertake research into the disorderly exit of landlords from the private rental market and to report back within 3 months.

# Vacant Homes

Rebuilding Ireland failed miserably to tackle the issue of vacant homes. The policy had a target of 5,600 homes by the end of this year. However latest figures show that only 1,672 homes have been delivered to date via three government schemes; Repair and Lease, Buy and Renew, and the Housing Agency Fund.

The Geo Directories residential buildings report for Q 4 of 2020 published in January this year stated that the average vacancy rate in Ireland in December 2020 was 4.6%, which equates to 92,251 homes.

The government needs an ambitious plan to target these properties in order to reach 35,000 home completions annually. Identifying vacant properties and returning them to use will also help the State to meet its climate action targets.

Returning more vacant homes to use is quicker, cheaper and better for the climate than building new homes from scratch. We believe any new vacant homes strategy must include the following:

## Recommendations:

- A dedicated vacant homes officer in each local authority
- An increase funding and support for Repair and Lease, Buy and Renew and the Housing Agency fund so that they can reach their potential .
- An increased use of CPO powers by the Councils .
- The roll out a specific scheme, ran in conjunction with the Department of Health and the Department of Housing to bring some homes in the Fair Deal schemes back into use.
- Specific year on year targets for returning vacant homes to use must be set in each local authority.
- Government should introduce a vacant homes tax applicable to properties vacant more than 6 months within DED's or LEA's determined by the Local Authorities as having a high level of housing need and a high level of vacancy.<sup>1</sup>

To view Sinn Féin's comprehensive Vacant Homes Strategy please see Appendix 1 of this document.

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1           \*Any such proposal would have exemptions for homes in probate or in the Fair Deal scheme

# Homelessness

Housing for All must truly be a policy that prioritises housing for all especially the most vulnerable in society. The government must be ambitious in terms of tackling homelessness and it must set a date for ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough. The focus must pivot to preventing people from entering homelessness and reducing the time spent in emergency accommodation. We must also see the government be more ambitious in its Housing First funding and targets.

## Recommendations:

- Double the provision of Housing First housing allocations.
- Introduce a co-ordinated approach to reduce the number of deaths of people accessing homeless services.
- Limit the length of time any person can stay in emergency accommodation to a maximum of six months and phase out use of dormitory style emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness.
- Place a legal obligation on Local Authorities to put in place homeless prevention plans for those at imminent risk of homelessness and end the use of vacant possession notices to quit to prevent families being evicted into homelessness.
- Progress the Homeless Prevention Bill 2020 which is currently at Committee stage.
- Fully implement the recent Joint Oireachtas Housing, Local Government and Heritage Committee report on homelessness.



# Planning

The planning changes introduced and extended under the guise of Rebuilding Ireland have been detrimental to both local democracy and the planning process. The Strategic Housing Development process has not worked. Sinn Féin opposed this legislation at the time and proposed an alternative which would have included placing statutory time limits on turn around times for planning decisions on An Bord Pleanála and on developers. The use of the Minister's unchecked power to impose mandatory planning guidelines on local authorities has also seen apartment standards being diminished.

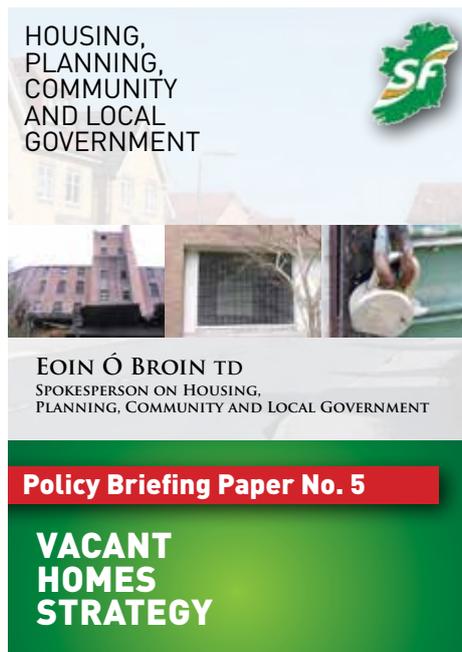
## Recommendations:

- The Strategic Housing Development legislation should not be renewed, and all planning decisions should be returned to local authorities.
- The planning process should be reformed to impose strict statutory timelines on the pre planning process, requests for additional information and An Bord Pleanála appeals.
- The Land Development Agency should be repurposed into an Active Land Management Agency with responsibility for strategically managing all public land while returning all residential development functions to Local Authorities.
- The new Housing for All policy must review land use and land value issues with a view to introducing measures to constrain land hoarding, land speculation and land price inflation .
- The plan must also contain a mechanism to fully implement the 2017 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government report Safe as Houses as per the programme for government.
- Facilitate the private sector delivery of affordable homes by amending the planning act to provide for the rezoning of brownfield sites near urban centres that can be master planned by local authorities to deliver residential units.
- Introduce a new tenure condition for all existing and new planning permissions that would allow the planning authority to determine that up to 100% of any residential development be reserved for owner occupiers.

# APPENDIX 1



[https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2020/Delivering\\_Affordable\\_Homes.pdf](https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2020/Delivering_Affordable_Homes.pdf)



[https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/EOB\\_Vacant\\_Homes\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/EOB_Vacant_Homes_Strategy.pdf)



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