Introduction

Availability and access to good quality, secure and affordable housing is a central focus for Election 2016. The true scale of the current housing market is not only reflected in the housing waiting lists and homelessness figures but as a broader issue encompassing households forced out of the rental market e.g. those living in overcrowded accommodation, young people unable to move out of the family home, key workers, older and disabled people in inappropriate accommodation.

Investment in housing is a key economic driver through the creation of employment and training, enhanced labour mobility and economic activity for associated suppliers leading to a strong local economic multiplier as well as increased return to the exchequer. More importantly, a good home provides stability and a platform for improved educational attainment for children, reduction of health problems and the placement of excessive demands on the hospital and health care systems. Housing, and in particular, social housing provision are key to ensuring sustainable economic growth and housing associations have a key role to play in delivery of a range of housing options.

In what often becomes a complex debate on housing supply, the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) has proposed a number of simple solutions which will effectively address many obstacles to housing delivery as well as contribute to a more sustainable housing system.

| Land & Supply | • Active land management through a delivery agency to lead and co-ordinate a continuous pipeline of building land for social housing and other housing in partnership with planning and housing authorities; • Identification and transfer of land banks from state sources and NAMA for social housing to housing associations. |
| Capacity & Delivery | Support an enhanced capacity building programme for housing associations to fulfil the social housing programme in partnership with housing authorities through the following measures: • Establish a single, dedicated unit centrally co-ordinated with responsibility for increasing delivery by housing associations and drive policy forward; • Support housing associations in their establishment of an off-balance sheet financial vehicle (SPV); • Review and streamline procurement and funding approval processes to ensure best value and most efficient and quicker delivery of social housing. • Seek a 20% requirement of social housing under Part V. |

The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) is the national representative federation for non-profit housing associations with over 270 members. Housing associations provide over 30,000 homes for older people, people on low incomes, people with disabilities and formerly homeless persons.

The ICSH believe housing associations and housing authorities can work in partnership to maximise the supply of permanent social housing to create an expanded and more flexible stock of social housing at a level of 200,000 homes\(^2\).

**Active land management**

The ICSH have called for the reactivation of the Local Authority Low Cost Sites Scheme which made land available to the AHB sector for a nominal fee.

In the Netherlands, the development of land for new construction was traditionally undertaken mainly by local authorities. Local authorities are the dominant buyers in the land market. They prepare the land for building and then make plots available, either through sale or lease. They have compulsory purchase powers but these powers are rarely used (Needham and Verhage, 1998). Local authorities make land available to housing associations at low prices to enable the associations to provide social housing. This model worked very well for several decades. (NESC Paper 7: Background Analysis, Paper 112, pg 12). This approach links in with the recommendations of the 1974 Kenny report that building land should be compulsorily acquired by local authorities for 25% above its agricultural value.

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\(^2\)This figure was recommended in the 2004 NESC Report No 112: Housing in Ireland: Performance and Policy