SOCIAL HOUSING
Newsletter of the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)
Spring 2017

Sector Activity and Innovation
Residential Tenancies Act One Year On
Rebuilding Ireland Progress
ICSH Tenant Experience Survey 2017
The Rebuilding Ireland progress reports identify significant activity being undertaken to ensure greater delivery in both the private and social housing sectors. These are positive trends. In the social housing sector, the key challenge for the 10,000 plus homes in the development process from appraisal to practical completion, is to progress these projects through the various development stages as quickly as possible. For housing associations, the mixed funding regime of loan finance and more capital funding through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF), has generally yielded positive turnaround times in terms of approvals and, in turn, the letting of homes to households on the waiting list.

Speed of decision-making is essential in the mixed funding environment for housing associations when you are dealing with external stakeholders who want predictability, such as vendors, developers and financial institutions. The new tracking of social housing developments, as part of a project management approach in Rebuilding Ireland, is important in this regard.

The key change with accessing loan finance is that housing associations are taking the first layer of risk in the new financing arrangements followed by the financial institution providing loan finance, and the state through CALF. Requirements from financial institutions and the interim regulator has ensured those housing associations accessing loan finance have had to introduce enhanced risk management processes in managing loan finance.

The significant delivery route for housing associations in recent years has been through turnkey and acquisitions. Housing associations have used the development opportunities in the private sector to deliver on housing need. The renewed focus will now again be on new construction. That is why we believe that the provision of sites for construction purposes is central to an expanded delivery programme for new builds to 2021. The recently produced Housing Land Map provides visibility on potential sites that could be used for a programme of new build social housing. The next step is to ensure there is a structure and process in place to ensure that sites identified are translated into a development pipeline for housing associations.

There has been significant work involved in the housing association sector’s engagement with regulators in recent years. These include the Charities Regulator, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), the interim housing regulator and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), in cases where there is a care dimension. All these have been introduced in a period when housing associations have also been trying to increase their own management and development capacity to provide more homes. All these regulatory requirements have been an additional new ask on existing resources and will have benefits for a changing sector in the coming years. Registration with the RTB, which amounts to nearly 26,000 tenancies over the space of one year from 270 housing associations, as well as the fact that 240 organisations have signed up to the voluntary regulation code means housing associations are rapidly becoming a highly regulated sector. The next step requires support for the organisational development of the sector itself to ensure its continued sustainability over the long-term.
Focus Ireland- 28 New Homes for Families, Couples and Singles

Focus Ireland is committed to doubling the number of homes they directly provide over the next five years. This increased housing delivery is already playing a key part in their work challenging homelessness and changing lives. The end of 2016 saw the completion of one of Focus Ireland’s most ambitious housing development projects: the provision of 28 new homes for families, couples and singles in Greenmount Close, Dublin 6.

Delivering these new homes has been a study in persistence and passion for the staff and Board of Focus Ireland over a 16-year journey since the Sisters of Charity decided to kindly donate the land to Focus Ireland back in 1999 for social housing use. It took time to develop a suitable plan for this sensitive site in consultation with neighbours, including the Hospice. By the time planning permission was approved in 2007, the economy had crashed and finance was impossible to find. Each year during the dark days of the recession, staff worked hard to come up with new plans for getting the project underway. However, despite their great effort, it was without success due to the economic downturn.

This was until new funding programmes from the Housing Finance Agency made it possible for Focus Ireland to finally get builders on site and building these much-needed homes. Without the support of Dublin City Council, Our Lady’s Hospice and the local community, Focus Ireland could not have turned this generous gift of a vacant site into 28 much-needed new homes, which will change the lives for the families and people living there who now have a place to call home.

The overall development consists of 19x1 bedroom, 8x2 bedroom and 1x3 bedroom apartments, which have all been finished to a high standard, with a green area at the centre for recreation. Focus Ireland is set to officially launch the new model Cross development alongside the launch of its Annual Report 2016.

North & East SEAI Upgrade of 55 Homes

North & East are delighted to announce the upgrade of 55 homes in Killegland, Ashbourne and An Chearnóg, Dundalk. The upgrade works were made possible under the SEAI Better Energy Communities Scheme and an innovative funding arrangement between SEAI, transport companies and community organisations.

The grant was administered by Leettherm and measures included insulation upgrades, boiler and heating controls, together with stove installations. Killegland, Ashbourne and An Chearnóg, Dundalk are all hot water systems. The works cost €555,000 in total with North & East contributing €192,000 towards the cost of the project. As a result of the upgrades, tenants will see a substantial improvement in the energy efficiency of their homes, with fewer emissions, increased comfort and lower fuel costs.

North & East was previously a recipient of the SEAI grant in 2014 that allowed similar works to be undertaken in Seaview Grove, Laytown. North & East remains committed to upgrading its homes in line with their planned maintenance programme, and this cooperative approach ensures that they can continue to maintain their homes in a comfortable and energy efficient manner.
Regulation and Legislation Update

Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act One Year On

In April 2016, the commencement of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 brought tenancies of housing associations under the remit of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), and now, one year on, there are nearly 26,000 tenancies registered and an evident positive shift in attitude towards these regulatory changes.

Initially met with trepidation and concern, particularly around an ever-increasing regulatory environment and the growing administrative and financial burden on housing associations, the sector has gone above and beyond in meeting the legislative requirements. Indeed, queries of what is this going to do for us? have diminished, and many housing associations have availed of the RTB’s dispute resolution services in resolving ongoing issues with tenants.

There have been over 70 dispute cases referred to the RTB to date, with adjudication being the most favoured dispute resolution method to date. The most common disputes include invalid notice of termination, anti-social behaviour, withholding and rent arrears. Feedback from our members on the dispute resolution processes has been positive with members reporting that the process was fair, with time allowed for both parties to put their case across. ICSH will continue to monitor these cases and share feedback, useful tips, trends and learning with our members.

Over the past year, and indeed for many years before that, in the development of the legislation, ICSH has put measures in place to ensure that the legislative transition has been as smooth as possible for our members, with a dedicated support officer in place, information seminars, regional meetings, preparation of guidance materials and practical support with registration and implementation of the legislation, such as updating tenancy agreements. ICSH would like to extend a big thank you to all our members who have worked so hard in achieving this positive result for the sector.

For further information on the Residential Tenancies Act, please contact Keelin McCarthy, Tenancies Registration Support Officer at keelin@icsh.ie or 01 6618334.

Repair and Lease

The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) is a key action under Government’s Rebuilding Ireland – an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. As identified by the CSO in its recent housing data module, despite a 15% reduction of vacant dwellings since 2011, vacant housing remains a persistent issue, with a national vacancy rate of 12.5%.

A significant construction and acquisition pipeline of new social housing units is in place across the country. However, given the necessary lead-in and construction times, this pipeline will provide incremental growth of new units over the period 2018-2021. Targeting vacant units that require only limited works (and no planning permission) involves significantly less development risk or conveyancing periods, and can supplement the delivery of units while this pipeline is realised.

The RLS is targeted at vacant property owners who cannot access funding to upgrade to rental properties, offering upfront investment to the owner that is offset against reduced lease payments over the duration of the lease. The scheme offers potential for social housing in existing unused properties in town centres, urban and rural settings.

How it will work:

- Local authority will determine eligibility of scheme under location, suitability & extent of repairs.
- Properties must only require moderate upgrades i.e. not require planning permission.
- Maximum repairs of €40,000 to be met upfront by local authority or housing association.
- Property owner then signs the lease agreement with length tied to value of repairs (min 10 years).
- Landlord responsibility will remain with local authority or housing association.
- Properties must be vacant for one year prior to entering scheme.

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has prepared a National communications and advertising campaign, which will advertise the scheme to owners of vacant properties and raise the profile of RLS nationwide. It is the Department’s intention that this campaign, together with the forthcoming launch of the National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy, will provide further media focus on the scheme, thereby helping local authorities to identify suitable properties and minimising the impact of the scheme on existing resources.

Smaller housing associations, in particular, with an intimate knowledge of their locality, are well-placed to deliver these units. ICSH are here to support members in achieving the ambitious targets of bringing 3,500 vacant houses into social housing by 2021.

Mortgage to Rent

Following the implementation of the recommendations in the Keane Report (2011), a number of housing associations have been at the forefront in assisting in the development and implementation of the Mortgage to Rent scheme. Whilst the scheme was never intended as a solution for the vast majority of arrears cases, meeting the needs of households with unsustainable mortgages and acute arrears, has proved challenging for housing associations.

In our submission for the Review, we identified that the administrative aspect of the funding would benefit from centralisation within the Housing Agency, and we also raised issues around training and awareness, protocol and process delays. We also recommended that the repairs cap approved by the Housing Agency should also be increased to a minimum of €20,000 and that a development allowance be considered to meet additional costs of purchase.

Last year, the Government invited submissions to revisit provisions in the Mortgage to rent scheme, publishing their Review of the scheme in February 2017. The review announced several changes including a more formal communication protocol between the lenders and borrowers; changes to the eligibility criteria of the scheme; refining the conveyancing, valuation and repairs process; a borrower, lender and local authority awareness raising and training programme; and a key role for the Abhaile Service, the Insolvency Service and the Money Advice and Budgetary Service (MABS). In addition, the Review proposes an alternative funding model for the scheme: the Housing Agency will work on a number of pilot projects with financial entities interested in the MTR scheme.

As of March 2017:

- A total of 3,672 cases have been submitted to date. Of the 3,672 cases: 2,816 were ineligible or terminated during the process, of which 293 cases were not progressed because the household in question was deemed to be over/under accommodated. Agreement on the sale of the property could not be agreed on a further 82 cases.
- Of the remaining cases submitted: 621 are actively being progressed and 235 have been completed.

You can access the Review of the Mortgage to Rent Scheme at www.rebuildingireland.ie

CAS Call

The ICSH has engaged in continuing talks with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG) with hopes for an imminent CAS call. Ideally this will be an open call with a rolling programme for construction & acquisitions. Housing associations are urged to forward any acquisitions to Local Authorities now for their consideration.

The ICSH are aware of difficulties experienced last year by housing associations and have flagged these to DHPCLG with hopes to achieve a higher uptake this year. Measures include:

- Progress Tracker chart published quarterly online
- Clarification on delegated sanction for local authorities
- Cost issues relating to catering for those leaving congregated settings

The ICSH are keen to utilise this funding stream as it offers much needed housing options to vulnerable groups such as elderly people, people with disabilities as well as homeless individuals and families. So we would encourage submissions in 2017.

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The report identifies a number of milestones reached by the end of 2016 including the following:

- 2,700 sustainable exits from homelessness during 2016 (up from 2,322 in 2015).
- Homeless funding of €98 million in place in 2017.
- 350 rapid build homes were advancing in 2016 with 22 built and a Procurement Framework in place to facilitate delivery during 2017-2018.
- Extension of the Threshold Tenancy Protection Service nationwide.
- 18,300 households had their social housing needs met in 2016/15, 2,808 homes built, refurbished, or acquired; 12,000 HAP tenancies; 1,000 families accommodated under RAS).
- Funding of €1.2 billion for social housing in 2017.
- Housing Procurement Unit and AHB Support Units established to support and advise LAs, AHBs.
- One-stop-shop within the Housing Agency to support AHBs.
- Choice-based letting rolled out.

- 23 Major Urban Delivery Sites under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) (identified with the capacity to deliver 30,000 new homes (sites identified for funding were announced in March 2017).
- The establishment of rent pressure zones (which have been subsequently extended) designated for capping rent increases at 4% per annum for up to 3 years.
- Repair and Leasing scheme with funding of €140 million for LAs and AHBs to bring 3,500 vacant houses into social housing by 2021.
- Buy and renew scheme (€25 million) to support purchase private housing for social housing use. All of these initiatives are progressive and commendable and some are innovative. However, in the context of acute housing shortages and a homelessness crisis, it is really important that efforts are put into those projects that yield results as quickly as possible. The housing association sector will benefit immensely from the Housing Agency's procurement office as well as the one-stop-shop and we are also primed to deliver through the Repair and Leasing scheme and Buy and Renew scheme, subject to owners' participation. These are also a perfect opportunity for interagency working and partnership to be put into practice.

Social Housing Construction Status Report

Minister Coveney published a comprehensive status report on social housing projects nationwide on 20 February 2017. The report lists over 500 local authority and housing association projects at different stages of development, identifying the funding scheme, local authority area, project name and housing association (approved housing body) where applicable. As the status report is a snapshot of projects at end of quarter 2016, subsequent quarterly status reports will enable us to track these and new projects coming online, offering a coherent (and transparent) listing of the ICSH membership development pipeline.

It’s worth noting that a national procurement framework for Rapid Delivery Housing projects was established in January 2017 and is available for both local authorities and housing associations. It facilitates the delivery of social housing developments under Design Build Contracts and will save time on design, procurement and on the construction period.

To download the Status Report, go to www.rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments. In order to learn more about the national procurement framework for Rapid Delivery Housing, contact the Office of Government Procurement (www.ogp.gov.ie).

Monthly Housing Activity Reports

The Monthly Housing Reports draws together data on residential planning permissions; housing commencements and completions, and social housing output. January-April 2017 monthly reports have been published and are available to download at rebuildingireland.ie. Of interest to the housing association sector, in particular, is the February 2017 report. The report states that well over 1,000 homes were built, acquired and leveraged by housing associations during 2016, with Housing Finance Agency (HFA) data also showing record lending to housing associations during 2016: loan approvals exceeding €250 million (more than double the €116 million approvals in 2015) and loan advances exceeding €100 million (up from €34 million in 2015). Committed financing is now in place for over 1,500 new homes.

Strategy for the Rented Sector

On 13 December 2016, Ministers Simon Coveney and Damien English published a ‘Strategy for the Rented Sector’. The strategy outlines the Government’s vision under Pillar 4 of Rebuilding Ireland, which aims to ‘address the obstacles to greater private rented sector delivery and improve the supply of units at affordable rents’. The Department issued a call for submissions on a rental strategy in October 2016 and the ICSH made a submission.

The key element of the strategy, and the most contentious issue, was the announcement of a cap on annual rent increases of 4% for three years in the ‘Rent Pressure Zones’ (RPZs) of Dublin and Cork. It’s worth noting that subsequently, the RPZs have been extended to include Galway, Limerick and Waterford as well as Cobh and Maynooth. The Strategy includes additional measures under the thematic areas of security, supply, standards and services; a move from 4 to 6-year tenancy cycles; making local authority sites available for 1,000 units of affordable housing and commitments to improve standards as well as the housing inspections regime.

In our December press release, the ICSH welcomed provisions for affordable rental as ‘a maturing of Government policy in recognition of long-term rental as a tenure of choice for middle income households’. However, it’s worth noting that there has been very little open discussion on affordable rental over the past few months. Clarification has been sought from public representatives, notably Deputy Eoin O’Broin, in the Oireachtas Housing Committee on the extent of the Government’s commitment to developing a model for affordable rental. Secretary General John McCarthy told the Committee that there would be a social housing piece and a private housing piece within the O’Deveney Gardens project and that they would try to work in the new approach to affordable rental and get a return for the public good with lower rents. There has not yet been a defined affordable rental model beyond reference to the role public sites could play in ensuring affordability. However, the ICSH has recommended a new tenure of long-term affordability to ensure mixed tenure developments. With an affordable rental structure in place, housing associations would then be well placed to deliver.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Sites

The €226 Local Infrastructure Housing Activation fund (LIHAF) was announced on 28th March 2017. The fund covers 34 projects across 15 Local Authority areas with a view to developing 23,000 homes by 2021. Under the terms of LIHAF, the Exchequer will fund 75% of the cost of each infrastructure project by way of a grant to the local authority, with the local authority covering the remaining 25%. The fund’s aim is to address significant public infrastructure deficits, where the lack of enabling and accessing infrastructure has been hindering the early development of housing. Minister Coveney has stated that there is a strong focus on affordability in the LIHAF funded projects, with local authorities having received affordability commitments from developers. However, no affordable housing model as yet has been agreed upon, and the number (or percentage) of affordable homes that will be built on these LIHAF sites is still unclear.

Housing Land Map

An online Housing Land Map was launched by Housing Minister Simon Coveney on 27th April as a key part of the Rebuilding Ireland initiative. The ICSH issued a press release welcoming the publication of the Housing Land Map, which identifies 800 sites available for housing, including sites that have enjoyed a 1,700 hectares as well as key urban sites in semi-state ownership amounting to 700 hectares. The ICSH has been calling for the Government to embed an active land management strategy into the housing system to ensure a continuous pipeline of building land for social housing. These sites present an opportunity for housing associations across the country to work in partnership with local authorities and private sector developers to build affordable homes. You can access the land map here at www.rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map.
Framework Statutory Dublin Region Homeless Action Plan 2017-2020

The ICSH made a Submission to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive on the development of the Framework Statutory Homeless Action Plan for the Dublin region 2017-2020. The ICSH have long advocated for a housing led and Housing First approach to the challenge of homelessness and welcomes commitments in government policy that this will be a core principle of any strategy or action plan.

Our submission made recommendations under the following categories:

- **Housing Supply:** CAS reforms to include multi-annual funding, an ‘open-ended’ CAS call, a dedicated housing unit to deal with all funding applications consistently and consistent operational processes across all local authorities.
- **Housing First:** ICSH supports the Rebuilding Ireland commitment to advance a Housing First approach with the participation of housing associations, local authorities and other statutory bodies.
- **Section 10:** The ICSH recommend that section 10, as a revenue funding stream, should continue to be focussed on staffing, services and supports for homeless services.
- **Nominations Protocol:** Ensuring timely nominations to housing associations from local authorities.
- **Social Rental Agency:** The use of a social rental agency should be explored in Dublin, on a pilot basis.
- **Older Persons:** Support construction of lifetime homes, targeted for older persons by local authorities and housing associations; review financial contribution schemes that support older persons to trade down.
- **Encourage mixed developments; expand grant scheme for private housing adaptations and national support coordination services for all older people.
- **Single Persons:** Priority measures needed for housing and supports for single persons.
- **Rapid Build Housing:** Rapid build housing options can offer a much-needed alternative to emergency accommodation, B&Bs and commercial hotels. But modular housing must be part of building sustainable and diverse communities.

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**Update on Homelessness**

Homelessness figures continue to rise and have reached 7680 according to the April 2017 homelessness report. The number of homeless adults increased from 3685 in January 2016 to 4760 in January 2017. It now stands at 4972. There has also been a very significant increase in children living in emergency accommodation. The figures for children, in particular, are as follows:

- January 2017: 2407
- February 2017: 2546
- March 2017: 2563
- April 2017: 2708

**Census 2016 Housing Profile**

On 20th April, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the first thematic report of the Census 2016 results – ‘Profile 7 Housing in Ireland’. The CSO decided to publish the housing module first “in recognition of the demand from users, and society in general, for a better understanding of housing in Ireland”.

Topline figures are concerning: total housing stock has only increased by 0.4% (8,800 units) since the 2011 Census. This is in spite of a population increase of about 4% and is in sharp contrast to the 225,232 additional units recorded between 2006 and 2011. Statistics also confirm the steady decline in home ownership which, at 67.6%, is now at a rate last seen in 1971. Figures also identify that renting is more common amongst those under the age of 35. These are important findings for our sector as we seek to grow our housing stock and advocate for a housing landscape with greater provision for social and affordable rental.

However, some problematic statistics have again arisen for the housing association sector. CSO data identify only 16,765 households renting from a voluntary body (a housing association or approved housing body). The regulator of housing associations stated in its annual report for 2015 that 24,914 housing association homes were regulated and this represented 90% of the total housing association stock in 2015. In the Census figure at less than 40% of the actual stock. This is definitely an issue for our sector, and one the ICSH membership needs to consider and resolve in advance of Census 2021.

Separately, the CSO has been asked by Eurostat to examine the classification of housing associations and whether they should be included in the Government’s national accounts, and part of the Government sector. A recent survey, conducted by the ICSH through Housing Europe, identified that the vast majority of housing associations in the EU were independent and outside the Government sector. Social housing tenancy, it was found, need state support, whether direct or indirect and this should not be confused with the control of organisations. The ICSH prepared a paper and factsheet on this.
Changing Perceptions: Stigma and Social Housing in Ireland

Clúid Housing recently launched Changing Perceptions; Stigma and Social Housing in Ireland, an important piece of research that assesses the scale and impact of stigma on social housing in Ireland, and outlines a range of responses. Clúid’s Head of Policy, Simon Brooke said, “There is no doubt that stigma is a feature of Irish social housing today. Some people have preconceived negative views about social housing tenants, who are depicted as work shy, exploiting the benefits system, living rent free, and likely to engage in anti-social behaviour.” He went on to say that stigma was far from universal, and that tenants in many social housing estates do not feel stigmatised; they identify strongly with their neighbourhood and feel a strong sense of pride in their community.

The study, which was carried out by a team from University College Dublin, examined three case study estates in Dublin – Fatima Mansions, Ballymun and Clarion Quay and found that the concentration of low income households in social housing tended to exacerbate the level of stigma, and that once established, stigma was difficult to shift.

The research identifies a number of responses to tackle stigma in social housing. These include:

- Ensuring that as far as possible, new social housing is located in the least desirable part of the development.
- Stigma is exacerbated by design features that clearly distinguish between different tenures. Residents of Ballymun and Fatima Mansions reported that new design of their neighbourhoods had helped to reduce external stigma.
- Some tenants of social housing have actively resisted being stigmatised through the use of public image management strategies designed to promote local identities and provide an alternative narrative to the dominant media rhetoric.
- Community buildings with a wider range of services such as crèches and gyms as well as space for community events are likely to be more successful in encouraging the integration of mixed tenure communities.

You can download the report from the Clúid Housing website (www.cluid.ie).

Peter McVerry Trust Empty Homes Conference

Peter McVerry Trust organised Ireland’s first Empty Homes Conference in early March. The conference was organised to further the debate on empty homes, derelict sites and underused spaces. Peter McVerry Trust has been campaigning for Government led action on these issues since 2014 as a means to increase housing availability in urban areas.

The conference heard from a range of Irish and international speakers on issues relating to data and information, planning and building regulations as well as the practical delivery of housing reuse schemes. Over 100 people attended the conference from public, private and the non-profit sectors with attendees coming from across Ireland and the UK.

Presentations from the conference can be found at www.pmvtrust.ie/emptyhomes

ICSH News and Events

ICSH Tenant Experience Survey 2017

On European Neighbours’ Day 2017 (Friday 19th May 2017), the ICSH alongside tenants and staff of ICSH member organisations, Tusla Housing, and HAIL launched the Tenant Experience Survey 2017. Key findings from this, the most comprehensive housing association survey to date, confirm that eight out of ten housing association tenants are happy with the services they receive.

The survey findings demonstrate the success of social housing delivered by housing associations, and represent an overwhelming endorsement of a sector that manages more than 30,000 social homes in Ireland. Recent local authority inspections of private rental found that 55% of inspected properties failed to meet rented housing standards, and a 2015 survey found that only 58% of local authority tenants were happy with their housing maintenance. It’s reassuring that more than 80% of our surveyed tenants are telling us they’re happy with the quality of their homes and the services housing associations provide. Delivering secure, safe and affordable housing helps ensure community cohesion and this is the essence of the European Neighbours’ Day celebration.

In particular, was rated very highly and the ICSH also noticed that estate management issues, such as the upkeep of common areas, proved as important for tenants as issues such as housing quality. The ICSH survey has also revealed a worrying trend around heating affordability. Some one in three of all tenants who responded said that they found it difficult to heat their homes.

ICSH Tenant Experience Survey 2017 Highlights:

- Over 8 in 10 tenants are satisfied (or very satisfied) with the services that they receive from their housing association and almost 9 in 10 tenants are satisfied with the performance of their housing staff.
- 85% of tenants are happy with how their housing association deals with anti-social behaviour.
- When asked to rate their housing association against other landlords that they are aware of (including local authority), almost one in two responded that they felt they were either a lot better (18%) or better (31%).
- Tenants were asked how important they considered it to one day be able to purchase their own home. 45% of respondents indicated that it was important, 39% of respondents indicated it was not important and 18% stated it was neither.
- Housing quality and estate management are the most important factors for tenants.
- 75% of tenants who contacted their housing association in the past 12 months were satisfied with the service they received and almost three in four tenants felt their housing association is good at keeping them informed of issues affecting them.

You can download the ICSH Tenant Experience Survey 2017 at www.icsh.ie

ICSH Resident and Tenant Tenancies Board Joint Event

100 representatives from housing associations across the country attended the event. Topics covered included the registration of tenancy dispute resolution processes and a review of Housing Association (HAB) dispute cases received to date, as well as a case study from the sector (Novas). Attendees found the dispute case study presentation from Novas very useful as it was applicable to their own areas of work. We would hope to use similar case studies as a useful tool for learning in future information seminars.

Presentations from the seminar are available by contacting Keelin McCarthy, Tenancies Registration Support Officer at keelin@icsh.ie or 01 6188346/085-8956571.

ICSH Annual General Meeting 2017

The ICSH AGM is scheduled for Monday July 3rd at 11am. The venue will be the Ashling Hotel, Parkgate Street, Dublin 8, adjacent to Heuston Station. The venue is easily accessed by Luas or Dublin Bus and there is convenient parking available in the grounds of Collins Barracks, should the hotel car park be full. Refreshments will be available from 10:30am and a light lunch following the meeting at about 2pm.

Each member organisation should appoint representative delegates, and other Board officers and staff members are also very welcome to attend.

AGM AGENDA 2017

1. Minute of previous AGM 2016 and Address by ICSH President
2. Report by ICSH Chief Executive on behalf of the ICSH Board of Directors
3. Reports from Chairs of ICSH Specialist Sub-committees
   - Housing Management & Special Needs
   - Housing Development & Supply
   - Finance Working Group
   - Tiers 1, 2 and 3 Specific Reports
4. Presentation of 2016 Annual Accounts and Appointment of Auditors
5. Topical Reports
6. Open Discussion with Speaker

Any queries to Margaret O’Leary, ICSH Company Secretary: margaret@icsh.ie
Cavan (North/East)

We kicked-off our regional meeting schedule in Cavan on 26th April with Councillor Madeleine Arue outlining some of the challenges and issues facing housing associations and local authorities in Cavan. Garda vetting and RTB issues were raised, as well as difficulties in accessing adaptation grants. Problems with regulation areas, such as the logistics of board members working full-time, but being asked to meet in Dublin during business hours. There was conversation on ICSH’s role in driving the housing for elderly agenda as well as discussion around collaboration and related issues. Donal Mc Manus, CEO, identified the need for resource such as IT services, particularly for capacity building, and associations coming together for shared staffing and administration.

Dublin (North/East)

Councillor Daithí Doolan gave a wide-ranging and informative presentation in Dublin, thanking ICSH staff for their work with the Housing SPC and noting the frequency of housing queries in his clinics, the need to address homelessness and the private rented sector. He said that selling land and getting a return was key, the Peoebeg scheme. He also said there was a need to address stereotypes in social housing. Nearing challenges around procurement, Councillor Doolan said there was a pressing need to think big. Additional challenges included moving homeless families to the new family hubs and the failure to define an affordable housing model. Questions that arose from the meeting included issues around culturally appropriate homes, social supports for homeless households and zoning. Hugh Brennan of Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance mentioned the Ballymun area and whether volunteers had the skill base to carry-out this work. 

Lease and Buy and Renew schemes for rural repopulation. Councillor Mike Donegan of Limerick City and County Council said that councillors want to be part of collaboration and have a role to play. He responded to the negative statements made by some councillors and Limerick residents over housing association managed social housing, stating that this was definitely not the view of all Councillors. The Limerick regional meeting was a lively event at which over 50 attendees participated. One of the key issues that was raised was the potential to use the CALF scheme as bridging finance for CAS delays. Reference was made to Kerry County Council’s in-house Capital Infrastructure Unit doing the first phase of procurement for associations and attendees also raised the issue of ceiling costs in the Buy and Renew Scheme, stating that this would price them out of housing in Tralee and Killarney (for example). The potential of CPOs was raised (citing the example of Louth County Council) as well as the Repair and Lease and Buy and renew schemes for rural repopulation. Homecare and integrated supports at county level was another discussion point at the meeting.

Kilkenny (South-East)

The ICSH regional meetings concluded in Kilkenny on 13 June. Martin Mullally of Kilkenny County Council encouraged small associations in particular to develop/extend CAS projects in the new call, stating that a couple of units in each scheme would make a difference, and would be an effective way of dealing with ageing populations. CAS obstacles were raised including what constituted 100% funding. Other issues that arose included concerns around sustaining tenancies that require care supports as well as the range of homecare packages that are available. A lack of recognition of volunteer effort put in by associations was highlighted by one attendee and the issue of income discrepancies across housing authority areas was also raised.

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Cork (Munster)

Councillor Sean Martin delivered a presentation at our Cork regional meeting on 23rd May, at which he described how the work of councillors and local authority staff were being inhibited by central government and that devolved decision-making was key. He said that voids were a council issue 4-5 years ago and that government was only focusing on them now. Rough sleepers were tackled back in 2010, but the Council was back to square one with funding cuts. In relation to social housing output, he said that Council debts on loans was inhibiting new housing, and he recommended that debt relief for local authorities should be considered and that VAT should be put on hold for social housing for a period of 4-5 years. Councillor Martin also spoke enthusiastically about the merits of mixed tenure and low cost co-op housing. Local residents helped ensure the success and integration of new social housing projects. Key issues from members echoed those raised at the other regional meetings: attendees expressed their frustration over CAS delays and procurement obstacles with one attendee stating that CALF funding was a more attractive vehicle as the process was faster. 

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England – Housing Associations Delivering Spread of Options for Different Tenures

Comprehensive figures released from the National Housing Federation (NHF), the representative body for housing associations in the UK, have shown that NHF member associations have completed over 38,000 homes over the last year. Figures show over 12% of completions by housing associations were for social housing, 23% for affordable ownership, just under 4% for market rent and 11% for market rent sale. It’s worth noting that, as a proportion of development activity, the section 106 contribution (similar to Ireland’s Part V) contributed 45% of overall activity. Housing associations have been suggesting that official Government statistics were underestimating the contribution of section 106.

New Zealand – 30% Waiting List Increase

There are currently almost 66,000 social rented homes (through ownership or leasing) in New Zealand. These are provided by state body Housing New Zealand, as well as community housing providers. The social housing register which is updated quarterly, had 4,865 waiting for social housing options; that’s an increase of over 30% on last year. There were also 1,289 on the transfer register. Over 55% of applicants on the waiting list were single and aged 25+ and more than 40% were single parents with children. The average time it took to get housed was just over 107 days, with over 50% of households on the register requiring a one-bed room home and 44% requiring a two-bed home.

USA – Improvement in Housing Markets

Data from the US housing market for 2016 showed that house purchases had increased and the level of homeowner foreclosures was down. Data has also been provided on the level of affordability through the US, both in terms of homeownership and rental, and calculated as a percentage of monthly wage. The most affordable housing market was found in Greene in the State of Tennessee, where home ownership cost, on average, 14.5% of monthly wages, whereas rent was 29.6% of monthly wages. It was also found that rents were rising faster than wages but wages were rising more than house prices.

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Welsh Housing Association SPV Receives £93M

The Welsh Housing Partnership, a housing association Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) comprising a number of developing housing associations in Wales, has obtained £93m in secure debt funding from Pension Insurance Corporation. The Partnership is a company owned by 4 housing groups: Coastal Group, Grwp Cynefin, Hendre Group and Pobl Group. The partnership, which was formed in 2011, owns almost 1,000 homes and has provided these homes without a large amount of capital funding. Maturing in 2033 and with £10m deferred for four years, this new £93m loan is reported to be the largest single borrower finance deal in Wales.