**Scotland**

Suspension of right to buy approved

A sixth council in Scotland has been allowed to suspend the right to buy for some social rented homes. Dumfries and Galloway has become the latest council to introduce the measure which will mean that the right to buy will be suspended for five years. This applies to tenancies which started on or after 30th September 2002. Ministers in Scotland accepted the argument that nearly 70% of social rented homes in the Dumfries and Galloway Council area have been designated as pressured areas in the Dumfries and Galloway Council area. The pressured area status was an attempt to overcome the problem of lack of social rented housing in some rural areas. With the absence of sufficient social rented housing in Scotland many local areas are more dependent on the supply of reasonably priced private rented accommodation. Restricting the right to buy in Scotland is a means of tackling the shortage of affordable rental housing as demand varies between different areas.

**OECD report on Irish Housing**

The Paris based think tank the OECD in a latest economic survey in 2006 has called for Ireland to have a more neutral approach to housing policy. This is in line with commitments in the 2005 ‘Building Sustainable Communities Document which echoed a similar path for Irish Housing Policy in the future.

Other recommendations in the OECD report included phasing out the strong bias towards housing in the Irish tax system such as ensuring mortgage interest is not tax deductible unless a broader capital gains tax is introduced. Introduce a property tax to fund local infrastructure and services and encouraging banks to be more prudent in their lending.

**United States**

New York: Five billion land sale concern for communities

One of the last areas of affordable housing in Manhattan is under threat from a massive land sale. An 80 acre site built in the 1940s houses over 25,000 rent stabilised flats for low income households and veterans. The apartment development of Stuyvesant and Peter Cooper Village are close to the Empire State building. The development is currently being offered for sale by the landlord, insurance company Metlife. This will attract huge interest from property speculators all over the world. Currently low income New Yorkers spend around 46% of their household outgoings on rent. These designated rent stabilised flats in New York generally have rents less than $2,000 per month. The tenants can stay as long as they like but the landlords can change the rent level when they leave.

In these communities in New York some of the original community services still exist in the developments including community centres, book clubs, ‘favourites for neighbours’ schemes and the concern is these community aspects will be lost especially when older tenants move out. Lower income tenants in New York are being forced to live in suburbs such as Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island.
What Can the Next NDP Deliver for Social Housing?

The current National Development Plan 2000-2006 is nearing its end and focus has firmly turned to its successor NDP 2007-2013. There are great hopes for what the next NDP can achieve given the level of funding to be channelled through it with the added advantage this time of the wealth of learning from the experiences of different sectors in the first NDP.

Housing is no different from other infrastructural sectors and the ambition for the next seven years is high. Given the timing and timeframe of the new social partnership agreement, one would imagine the next NDP will be the major tool of Government to enable and deliver the commitments in Towards 2016. In Towards 2016 the opening paragraph of the housing section states “the longer timeframe of a ten-year framework agreement allows for pathways to be developed to transform the Irish housing environment: to improve not only responsiveness of services but also quality of services”.

Can the new NDP delivery on this lofty agenda to transform the housing environment as we know it?

NDP 2000-2006 – Lessons Learned

It is useful to consider the experience of the first NDP in relation to housing before assessing what needs to be embedded in the next plan for the goals and ambitions to be reached. In terms of the experience of housing associations there were a number of positive and negative factors. The fact that specific targets were established for the sector was very helpful in determining overall level of supply and influencing expansion of the capacity of the sector. On the flip side the linking of appropriate levels of funding to any targets set would be crucial as the funding for the voluntary housing sector did not keep pace with the targets set.

The level of funding provided at the start of the plan became the benchmark for the scale of funding throughout. So that each year there was an incremental increase but as the targets became higher the funding did not increase sufficiently to match this. As a result the targets became unachievable and as such irrelevant.

In order to achieve an expanded stock of social housing delivered to some extent by this sector, the difficulties (in addition to funding) in reaching targets should be dealt with. It was the case in the first NDP that spiralling costs, the problem of land/sites and administrative delays inhibited the level of output.

Need for Better Social Infrastructure

While there is no official measurement of the housing stock in Ireland, total ESB connections suggest a stock close to 1.6 million dwellings or 400 per 1,000 population. The EU average is 450 per 1,000. It is estimated that there are approximately 127,000 units of social rented accommodation between local authorities, voluntary and co-operative housing associations. According to the CSO, social housing stock as a percentage of the national housing stock accounts for 7.2%.

In order to overcome the shortfall in social housing stock the Government and Social Partners recommend increasing the total stock of local authority, voluntary and co-operative housing to approximately 200,000 units by the year 2012.

Key Principles for NDP 2007-2013

The social housing programme will support and underpin other key aims of the NDP - such as achieving balanced regional development under the National Spatial Strategy, promoting social inclusion and the Disability Strategy.

- Funding should be clearly linked to targets and established within the capital envelopes. Focus should be on outcomes. The next NDP should take account of structural and economic factors that will change over the course of the seven years and make commitments to deal with these through lead departments.
- Delivery on the commitment of 3,000 sites for the voluntary & co-operative housing sector between 2007-2009.
- Improve the operation of the capital and revenue funding system to ensure project completion times are shortened.
- ICSH propose an NDP target output for housing associations of 20,550 units over the seven year period 2007-2013.
- Support from local housing authorities is key. Housing associations ability to deliver an increased new build programme relies heavily on local authorities in four key areas - confirmation of profile and scale of housing need, applying for planning permission, provision of low-cost sites and administration of funding.
- Flexibility over the period of the agreement - Lead Department should address emerging issues that hamper the delivery of housing. For example, implementation of Part V, emerging management issues such as service charges.
- Focus direct-provision of housing on those most in need. This NDP should focus on those living in disadvantage and most in need of accommodation in the social housing sector and through this meet aims such as eliminating long term homelessness.
What Are Sustainable Communities?

It is by now common to find the concept of sustainability woven into many aspects of public policy and indeed society. Sustainable development is probably most readily understood but what does the term ‘sustainable communities’ mean and is there an agreed understanding of it?

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government launched a new housing policy framework document entitled “Building Sustainable Communities” last December 2005. In this document the Department looked at some of the policy areas that will be developed in relation to housing in this new framework and it promises a new policy statement for housing in 2006 that will focus on underpinning the building of sustainable communities. Housing is a key element of sustainable communities but there are a number of factors that are considered to be intrinsic for the planning and development of sustainable communities.

**Bristol Accord on Sustainable Communities**

At an Informal Meeting (also December 2005), EU Ministers endorsed the “Bristol Accord” which sets out eight characteristics of a sustainable community. Ministers also adopted specific proposals designed to enhance the ability of Member States to create sustainable communities across Europe.

In the Accord, sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

**Bristol Accord - Eight characteristics of a sustainable community.**

The characteristics apply to all aspects of how we live and interact as communities and as a society. Well designed housing is a key factor as well as a sufficient range, diversity, affordability and accessibility of housing within a balanced housing market.

*The challenge to policy makers and planners to create neighbourhoods and communities which are consistent with these characteristics is a significant one. It will involve cross department and agency working and a clear understanding of the long-term vision. A genuine political commitment will be required to provide the leadership necessary to drive through such an extensive policy agenda with no discernible short term gains. Perhaps even more challenging in the Irish context is the fact that one-third of our housing stock is less than ten years old and some of this recent housing development is not linked to transport and public services. The commuter belt phenomenon where families are not linked into their new communities, do not have access to transport links or adequate public services and work in a different county is significant. The challenge is not only to provide places for people to live that are considerate of the environment*

**Active, Inclusive and Safe**

Fair, accessible and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities

**Well Designed and Built**

Featuring quality built and natural environment

**Well Served**

With public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all

**Well Run**

With effective and inclusive participation and leadership

**Well Connected**

With good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services

**Environmentally Sensitive**

Providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment

**Thrive**

With a flourishing and diverse local economy

**WELL DESIGNED**

AND BUILT

Providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment

**WELL RUN**

With effective and inclusive participation and leadership

**WELL CONNECTED**

With good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services

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**WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY?**

Advances in Sheltered Housing for Older People

The issue of sheltered housing has been a major priority for the ICSH for many years - both in terms of funding allocation for 2006 is low (€928,000) it is hoped that this is just a start and the level will increase in line with demand. The ICSH has worked with the HSE sheltered housing sub-committee to put in place mechanisms whereby this funding can be applied for by housing associations.

**Revenue funding – who should apply?**

Housing associations who provide accommodation with some level of support for older people can now apply for this funding. The funding is for revenue costs associated with provision of on-site care and support services such as:

- domestic home care and personal care services
- meals services
- security/alarm systems
- social day care services
- chiropody services
- physiotherapy and other rehabilitation services
- laundry services
- information and advice services,
- recreational activities
- transport.

Housing associations who require revenue funding for such services in 2006 should contact the local HSE office to request an application pack.

Recent Developments

After many years of highlighting this issue the ICSV welcomed the announcement of revenue funding from the Department of Health and Children last year. While the

Sheltered Housing Scheme

Kilmihil Housing Association, Co. Clare

Sheltered Housing Schemes offer many benefits beyond the basic provision of housing. Kilmihil Housing Association in Co Clare provides sheltered housing for the elderly. The scheme consists of 16 two bedroom units and a day care centre. Pictured to the left are some residents of “The Meadow”, Kilmihil.
Housing Commitments in New Social Partnership Agreement - Towards 2016

Towards 2016 establishes the framework for the economic and social development of Ireland over the coming ten years. The Irish Council for Social Housing, a member of the Community & Voluntary Pillar of partnership, has been actively involved in pursuing the social housing agenda during the five months of negotiations in 2006. The purpose of this article is to highlight the social housing commitments which are now included in the new agreement and to identify the main issues for housing associations. There are however many other social issues dealt with in the agreement (such as benchmarking lowest social welfare rates) which will hopefully impact positively on the lives of tenants in social housing and help to create a fairer, less polarised society.

Social Agenda

The Agreement is based on a ten-year timeframe which recognises the complementary relationship between social policy and economic prosperity. Essentially the vision of the agreement is to strive towards a sustainable, competitive Ireland with strong social policies that we can be proud of.

To this end the Agreement adopts a new social policy perspective which is built around the life cycle approach. The life cycle approach adopts the perspective of the citizen as the centrepiece of building a new social policy approach. The key life cycle phases include children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities. At each stage of the life cycle it is recognised that there are key services, income supports and activation measures required to meet the needs of people. Also underpinning this is the understanding that a range of infrastructural policy supports are required such as housing.

There are a number of major housing commitments as follows:

- Increase overall supply of social housing to 200,000 stock
- Measures to assist housing associations such as improved funding systems and government commitment to 3,000 sites
- Improve provision of housing and care for example for older people, people with disabilities
- Eliminate long-term homelessness by 2010.

Below is a summary of some of the main commitments on social housing in the new partnership agreement. Housing is a core part of social infrastructure and as such spans all aspects of the lifecycle. The ICSH, with colleagues in the Community and Voluntary Pillar, sought the following commitments to ensure that housing for those most disadvantaged be fully incorporated in the new agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Commitment in Agreement</th>
<th>Progress Required to Reach Objective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supply of Social Housing</td>
<td>Commitment to 73,000 additional social housing units by 2012. Commitment to commencement of 27,000 units over 3 yr period '07-'09. Special recognition of housing within the next NDP.</td>
<td>This is very significant and will greatly boost the available stock of social housing to those vulnerable in our society. Progress on these targets will require timely and consistent availability of sites, improvements in sanctions and administration of schemes and sufficient levels of budgetary allocations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needs Assessment</td>
<td>New means of assessing housing need will be developed.</td>
<td>New legislation to rectify current problems with the assessment of scope, inclusion of persons with a disability, frequency and accessibility. A needs assessment that fully incorporates the individual’s requirements and can assist in the better management of housing waiting lists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary Housing Associations</td>
<td>Commitment of additional 1,000 units over 2007-2009 bringing total to 2,000 units per annum by the sector. Active engagement with the sector to improve administrative and approval arrangements, funding arrangements and measures to enhance governance of the sector and an expanding role for the sector under the Rental Accommodation Scheme. Commitment of additional land/sites sufficient to supply some 3,000 dwellings will be identified and made available over the period 2007-2009.</td>
<td>The Agreement will provide a boost to housing associations to increase output over the next NDP. Resolving difficulties in the capital funding system and the commitment on sites will require immediate attention to ensure progress in this area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and Care</td>
<td>Develop inter-agency cooperation where there is a care dimension.</td>
<td>Inter-departmental/ Agency co-operation has been greatly lacking in the system to date with detrimental impact on housing associations and tenants. The ICSH view is that there needs to be specific progress through proposed actions dealing with means of assessment, synchronised funding systems, clarity on statutory roles, responsibilities, legislative compatibility.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People with Disabilities</td>
<td>National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities will be developed, with particular regard to adults with significant disabilities and people who experience mental illness. National Group will be established under the aegis of the Housing Forum, headed by the DoHHLG, and involving the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive, social partners and other relevant stakeholders.</td>
<td>The ICSH has highlighted many issues experienced in the field of housing provision for people with disabilities and seek the early establishment of this National Group. This will be key to dealing with the many issues to be included in any comprehensive strategy for accommodation options for people with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older People</td>
<td>The continued development of sheltered housing options, with varying degrees of care support will be encouraged, for example through Housing Action Plans. A cross-departmental team on sheltered housing is being established by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to oversee progress in that area.</td>
<td>Significant number of issues to make progress on to meet this including funding issues, co-operation and understanding between local authorities and HSE, development issues such as suitable sites, communal facilities all needs to be addressed. Better information on and awareness of sheltered housing needs to be promoted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Amalgamate and update the Government’s Homeless Strategies taking on board the recommendations of the recent independent review of the strategies. Situation of people in long-term emergency accommodation is of particular concern. The revised strategies will have as an underlying objective the elimination of such homelessness by 2010 (Recognising that this involves addressing the needs of up to 500 households).</td>
<td>There are a number of areas to be progressed in particular the focus on delivering accommodation to homeless people should be increased. The Consultative Committee will play a central role. ICSH welcome commitments on eliminating long term homelessness and housing associations are keen to assist in meeting this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Rented Sector</td>
<td>Minimum standards regulations for the private rented sector will be updated by the Dept of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and effectively enforced by Local Authorities.</td>
<td>Progress underway – Minister Ahern has announced Action Plan with measures aimed at promotion, information, appropriate regulation and strategic enforcement. Enforcement is a key problem and resources to do this. The commitment should be followed up on by the PRTB to continue to improve the service to tenants in the private rented sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller accommodation</td>
<td>Implementation of the Local Authority Traveller accommodation programmes.</td>
<td>Continued focus and support of this required from all sectors.</td>
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ICSH Social Housing
Local Authorities Housing Indicators – Measuring Performance

Performance measurement in housing has gathered momentum in recent years. The second report from the Local Government Management Services Board on Local Authority Service Indicators recently published details on the performance of local authorities in 2005 in relation to 42 indicators of service covering the full range of local authority activities e.g. housing, water, planning, fire service, environment, and finance.

The Report covers 42 indicators with a total of 166 pieces of data. The report provides a useful guide to local authority performance in a number of housing management functions.

Status of Stock
The total number of Local Authority dwellings in 2005 is over 113,000. This is a very small increase on 2004. The mean average increase between 2004 and 2005 is 65 dwellings per local authority.

Across all local authorities, 5,265 dwellings (4.6%) are empty compared with 3.9% of all dwellings in 2004. It is important to note that a sizeable proportion of empty or refurbished dwellings are accounted for by a small number of large-scale urban renewal housing projects funded by the DoHLG or by planned maintenance programmes funded by local authorities themselves, designed to improve the quality of the housing stock.

The figures suggest that one third of local authority dwellings that are empty, excluding those subject to major renovation work, are dwellings that are available for letting. The average time taken to re-let dwellings available for letting is 4 weeks- Galway County Council and Wexford County stood out with 24 weeks however there could be explanations such as repeat refusals.

Until performance measurement was introduced in 2004 a number of local authorities did not have formal reporting procedures on repairs requests. In 2005 the average percentage of repairs completed was 87.2% of valid requests.

Dealing with Applications
For shared ownership the average time taken to inform applicants was 11 days; housing loan applicants was 13 days and time taken to inform applicants of local authority housing was 30 days. The disparity between local authorities on the last indicator is enormous. In Cork County Council the average is 61.4 days, 126.2 days in Kerry and 483 in Galway County Council whereas Wexford takes 4.4 days. Explanations from those local authorities with excessive waiting times would throw some light on these extreme waiting periods for applicants. In some cases it appears that the process is lengthened by time taken by HSE staff to complete the assessment.

Strengthening the Report
Local authorities play an enabling role in relation to housing as well as one of direct provision. Other Indicators that could be included which would be of assistance to the voluntary housing sector include:

• Average length of time for scheme approval of applications made by housing associations under the capital funding schemes.
• Percentage of local authority housing stock allocated to homeless, people with disabilities, elderly.

Analysis in the report points to a lack of consistency across local authorities which can lead to difficulties with comparisons. The Report is available on http://www.lgmsb.ie/

Disability Strategy & Housing for People with Disabilities

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has published its sectoral plan as required under the Disability Act 2005. In relation to housing the key objectives of the Sectoral Plan are to update standards set out in Part M (Access for People with Disabilities) of the National Building Regulations and provide for more effective enforcement of these standards and to encourage and facilitate access to appropriate housing and accommodation for persons with disabilities.

There are a number of practical ways in which the Plan seeks to assist in the provision of appropriate housing for people with disabilities. Of major importance is the reiteration of the commitment in TOWARDS 2016 to develop a National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities. New protocols will be established for inter-agency co-operation for all special needs housing. Legislation will be introduced that will result in a new means of assessing housing need to ensure that all people can live with maximum independence within their community. Schemes of letting priorities will be reviewed also.

National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities

To bring a new focus to addressing the needs of people with a disability, a National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities will be developed in order to support the provision of specialist housing and housing supports to people with disabilities, including, in particular having regard to adults with significant disabilities and people who experience mental illness. This will be progressed through the establishment of a National Group under the aegis of the Housing Forum headed by this Department and involving the Department of Health and Children, the Health Services Executive, social partners and other relevant stakeholders including the National Disability Authority.

Inter-Agency Protocols

Protocols to deal with co-operation between the Health Service Executive (HSE) and housing authorities in the sectoral plan.

• Assessment of housing needs - a protocol, to be developed in the short term, will aim to govern liaison between HSE and housing authorities on the assessment of individual accommodation needs of people with disabilities.

• Strategic assessment of the nature and extent of local housing needs of people with a disability - a protocol will be developed, in the medium term, aiming to govern liaison between HSE and housing authorities on the exchange of information necessary for this purpose. This will input into the development of housing action plans.

• Support costs for social housing projects provided for people with disabilities – this protocol, to be developed in the short term, would apply to projects provided by housing authorities and the voluntary housing sector where there is an ongoing care/support dimension required in addition to accommodation needs.

The Department has committed in the plan to continue to support a vibrant voluntary and co-operative housing sector. The voluntary housing sector has become a major provider of specialist supported accommodation to people with disabilities across the country. While there are significant barriers to the further development of this work, delivery on the commitments in TOWARDS 2016 and in the Sectoral Plan will hopefully remove these to allow the sector to meet a severe and complex housing need.
Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour Seminar
Wednesday 18th October 2006, Mercer Hotel, Mercer Street, Dublin 2

The ICSH is holding a one day seminar specifically tailored to provide an essential update on policy and good practice on tackling anti-social behaviour for social housing organisations. It will outline strategies for tackling anti-social behaviour and breach of tenancy and provide practical guidance on how to implement these strategies.

It will include a review of legislation, understanding the legislation and its application, practical advice on obtaining possession and on preparing legal files.

Throughout the day practical examples of anti-social behaviour in various scenarios will be presented to the seminar.

Participants will then have the opportunity to work through real life case studies and discuss potential solutions.

The seminar will be delivered by Mr Liam O’Donovan who is a Senior Inspector with the Housing Department in Dun-Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council.

Full details and an application form are available from the ICSH. Please be advised bookings are limited so applications should be returned as soon as possible.

ICSH Certificate Courses:
January – May 2006

Application forms and a booklet with details of the upcoming three ICSH third level certificate courses will be available from November 2006. The three courses offered are:

- Housing Management
- Housing Development
- Special Needs Housing Management

For further information contact Caren Gallagher, Projects Officer, Tel: 01 6618334, caren@icsh.ie.

Regional Meetings 2006

Members from all regions of the ICSH met during the Regional Meetings held across the country in May. These meetings involve all members in the federation in the development of social housing policy, provide members an opportunity to meet and exchange information and update members on the work of the ICSH.

Each region also elects representatives onto the Board of the ICSH. The elected regional representatives for the seven regions are:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Representative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Large Organisations</td>
<td>Fred Stephens - The Iveagh Trust</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brian O’Gorman - Clúid Housing Association</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John Hannigan - Respond! Housing Association</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pat Cahill - Society of St. Vincent de Paul</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>John Burke - Tullamore Housing Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Dr. Jerry Cowley - Mullamore Day Centre Housing Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Justin O’Brien - Circle Voluntary Housing Association</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Muireann Morris - Sonas Housing Association</td>
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<td>David Burke - Focus Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Mattie McGrath - CaisleÁn Nua Housing Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Sr. Celestine Farrissey - Charleville Sheltered Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>Frank Gunter - Inagh Voluntary Housing Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>Josephine O’Hagan - Monaghan Housing Association</td>
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ICSH AGM 2006

The Annual General Meeting of the Irish Council for Social Housing took place on 28th June 2006. The meeting was attended by members of the ICSH countrywide. Reports from the management and Board of the ICSH looked at the growth of the housing association movement and challenges to further development. In his address ICSH President Mr Fred Stephens told members that the voluntary housing sector now provides 18,000 social rented homes.

There was a report to the members on the involvement of the ICSH in the Social Partnership negotiations and the commitments on housing in the Agreement Towards 2016. Under the new agreement the sector will grow by 2,000 units per year over the coming years.