Role of the Irish Council for Social Housing

The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) was established in 1982 as the national social housing federation to promote the development of good quality social housing in Ireland as a vital social service. The ICSH represent almost 300 housing associations across Ireland. Members of the ICSH are involved in the delivery and management of social housing and related services to families on low incomes, homeless people, people with disabilities and the elderly.

The ICSH supports the work of housing associations in Ireland through:

- Promotion of the role of housing associations in meeting housing need and homelessness.
- Acting as a representative body for affiliated members with Government, statutory agencies and other stakeholders.
- Promoting and facilitating best practice amongst members in relation to planning, provision and management of social housing.
- Provision of information, advice, guidance, education, training and research.

What are Housing Associations?

Housing associations, also known as approved housing bodies, are non-profit organisations whose purpose is the provision and management of housing for households in housing need\(^1\). They provide good quality housing at affordable rents. Housing Associations have a 150 year history dating back to when a number of philanthropic housing efforts were initiated by housing trusts. However a significant part of the sector has developed since the 1980s. Housing Associations are governed by management boards comprising board members with various skills and expertise who act in a voluntary capacity\(^2\). Provided they meet certain criteria, voluntary housing associations can apply for ‘approved status’ issued from the Minister at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Scale of the sector

The housing association sector manages over 27,000 homes and has been growing significantly over the past 10 years. Housing associations traditionally played a complementary role to local authorities, however the Government Housing Policy statement [2011] now places the sector at the heart of the Governments’ vision for housing provision. The sector is now a main provider of social housing including the leasing programme. The ICSH work with the Department of Environment, community and Local Government, Local Authorities and other key stakeholders in delivering housing solutions\(^3\).

What types of housing does the sector provide?

Housing associations are responsible for management and maintenance of their properties. They primarily provide social housing for the following:

- Families on low income,
- Older people,
- People with disabilities,
- Homeless households.

The type of accommodation provided ranges from standard terraced/semi-detached housing to apartment units. There are also many housing associations within the sector who provide supported accommodation to special needs groups such as the elderly and this is often in the form of sheltered accommodation and group housing.

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\(^1\) Housing associations in the main are Companies Limited by Guarantee without a share capital or in some cases Trusts or Co-operatives.

\(^2\) The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government are currently developing a regulatory code for approved housing bodies.

\(^3\) These comprise the Housing Agency, HSE, HFA, Developers, Landowners, NAMA and other financial institutions.
Who are our Members?
Members of the ICSH federation are spread throughout Ireland. They range from large approved housing bodies who operate over multiple local authority areas to small locally based associations who provide accommodation for their local communities. ICSH housing association members have approved status under legislation and have charitable status.

Who are our Tenants?
Housing associations work in partnership with local housing authorities and allocate tenancies to households from the local authority housing list. Households in need of housing apply to the local authority to assess eligibility under the social housing needs assessment.

Housing associations are encouraged to provide tenants with Tenant Handbooks and clear information on their rights and responsibilities such as through pre tenancy courses. Housing associations strive to develop sustainable neighbourhoods and encourage proactive estate management in partnership with the local community.

Do housing associations provide support/care services?
Some housing associations provide ‘supported housing’ which offers accommodation with care and support to the tenant often with communal facilities.

Promoting good housing management practice
The ICSH has introduced a performance measurement system called HAPM (Housing Association Performance Management). This is a voluntary framework which members participate in to promote good housing management practice in the sector. The HAPM framework evaluates an association’s performance outcomes in areas such as rent control, allocations, management and maintenance, voids management, landlord/tenant relations. The HAPM results for the sector are monitored on a quarterly basis by the ICSH and demonstrate consistent quality housing management practice in the areas of re-lets, voids management, rent control, management and maintenance.

Property Management Services
A number of our members provide other property management services, for example local authority housing schemes, Part V developments, mixed tenure etc. Housing associations have a proven track record in professionally managing housing stock and have developed expertise and increased capacity in managing housing schemes and multi-unit developments.

4 A full list of ICSH members can be found on www.icsh.ie.
Contact the ICSH

The ICSH team can provide information and access to housing associations working all over Ireland. The ICSH fulfils a number of functions including:

- Provision of a range of services to our members to assist them in delivering and managing housing,
- Liaising with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in developing measures for the delivery of housing by the sector,
- Working with local authorities in developing social housing options in their administrative areas involving members,
- Providing advice and guidance to financial institutions on the housing association sector,
- Liaising with other state agencies on housing related issues.

Through our Field Advice Service the ICSH works with members operating in every county in Ireland. For further details on housing associations in specific locations contact the ICSH.

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