



**Submission to**

**Joint Housing Strategy for Cork**

**By**

**Cork Social Housing Forum**

**20<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

## Introduction

### **Joint Housing Strategy for Cork.**

The Cork Social Housing Forum welcomes the primary purpose of the Joint Housing Strategy for Cork that seeks to *ensure that the overall supply of housing is sufficient to meet the planned population of Cork.*

We in the Forum are particularly concerned that over the past three years there has been an increase in the number of applicants on Cork City Council's social housing waiting list with a majority of households facing affordability issues. In the context of a projected increase in the population of Cork it is critical that the Joint Housing Strategy for Cork puts in place actions to address current needs and anticipates in so far as possible future needs. It is important too that development plans for Cork city's hinterland include mixed tenure developments particularly on the north side of the city and appropriate infrastructural facilities to accommodate population growth in these areas.

In 2006 the Forum published the research report, *Building on Reality: A Report on the Trends in Social Housing Demand and Supply in Cork City and Cork South County*. Mr. Joe Finnerty and Dr. Cathal O Connell, U.C.C. undertook this research project. The research report found that as well as the increase in the number of applicants on Cork City Council's Housing Waiting List the trend in the composition of these households revealed an increasing number of single persons households and households with one adult and one child. The report also noted the increasing number of younger applicants. The main cause of current housing need in both City and South County was financial and this continues to be a principal factor. A key finding of the report was that the 2005 level of lettings would take approx 4.5 years to clear the waiting list, however the 2006 waiting list would take 9 years to clear if set against the 2005 level of lettings. Finally the report found that the supply of housing was not meeting the scale of demand particularly in the City.

The most recent figures available to the Forum reveal that at the end of year 2007 that there were 6,257 households on Cork City Council's waiting list with a further 779 waiting for assessment. The Forum regards this upward trend a major challenge for the Strategy in terms of addressing social exclusion and poverty in Cork where social exclusion is defined in the Partnership 2000 Agreement as cumulative marginalization from work, income, community, family and neighbours. Poor inadequate and inappropriate housing is a critical form of material deprivation and impacts on all levels of social exclusion for example health, education, security and peace of mind which represent just some exclusionary indicators.

This current crisis will continue to exacerbate unless adequate and appropriate accommodation provision, supports and services are provided.

## **Submission**

### **Approach to Housing.**

Our submission constitutes four sections with Section One outlining some of the approaches and vision to housing and accommodation that we view as a necessary requirement if the Joint Housing Strategy for Cork is to address the differing composition of households in Cork. Section Two outlines some of the actions that the plan needs to adopt in order to achieve this vision. Section Three addresses some examples of areas of activities requiring analysis and research and finally Section Four addresses evaluation and monitoring of the Plan.

### **Section One: Approach and Vision.**

It is essential that the plan upholds and articulates the perspective that housing is one of our most basic human needs. Secondly that housing is a home and a social good like education or public health, and therefore should be produced in response to need as well as the ability to pay. Housing also needs to be enshrined into the Constitution as a right. The updated Plan needs to develop a strategy to ensure

that all housing, public, subsidised and private is recognised in policy by the State and Civil Society as being of equal worth and status.

The Strategy therefore needs to be in keeping with the key housing principles and commitments contained in the ten year National Social Partnership Agreement – Towards 2016. This is a key strategy context document relevant to the formulation of the Joint Housing Strategy for Cork. Some of the key principles underpinning housing policy in the current National Agreement Towards 2016 include:

- To enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible tenure of choice
- Create sustainable communities
- To ensure that all housing is seen as being on an equal footing whether provided fully by the State or supported in some way.

## **Section Two: Actions.**

The Forum submits the following actions based on Government commitments, emerging issues, its research report and the subsequent Roundtable Discussion Session held in January 2007 attended by representatives from, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, the Health Service Executive, Cork City Development Board, Auctioneers, Property Developers, the Medical Profession and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Cork Social Housing Forum recommends that the Strategy:

- adopts the lifecycle approach as undertaken in the National Social Partnership Agreement Towards 2016. The life cycle approach of the Agreement places the citizen at the centre of building a new social policy approach. The implications for the updated Plan include commitments that

- ❖ every child should have access to suitable accommodation
  - ❖ people of working age and every family would have access to affordable accommodation appropriate to their needs
  - ❖ every older person would have adequate support to enable them to remain living independently in their own homes for as long as possible
  - ❖ and every person with a disability would have access to appropriate housing.
- A diversity of responses to the needs of households on waiting lists is required, for example, the provision of adequate local authority housing and voluntary housing, the implementation of the Rental Assistance Scheme, implementation of Part V and private rented accommodation of good standards and quality.
  - To make available to housing providers and other interest groups all documentation in regard to lands, units and monies received under Part V for social housing and affordable housing since its implementation, and to ensure this level of transparency in the future.
  - A house is a home and much more than bricks and mortar. Some households will for example require specific support services in the community that need to be put in place at the planning stage. Every community however requires a range of community services which ideally can best be organised and developed in conjunction with communities before and during the planning stage.
  - Housing tenures in the City should be of a social mix and sustainable. If the building programme cannot keep pace with housing need then a variety of initiatives need to be in place such as the acquisition of units from the open market as a means of increasing housing stock.
  - With respect to Part V, ensure 20% of building land is allocated to social and affordable housing with at least half of this being allocated for social housing.
  - In relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme, insofar as this becomes the long-term accommodation of many of the participating households, it is recommended that this rental

accommodation meet quality standards in relation to e.g. cooking, washing, ventilation and storage facilities, and that regular inspections by councils occur to ensure these standards are maintained. This would imply, inter alia, that the 1993 standards of regulation in rental accommodation be upgraded in keeping with current standards.

- It is recommended that the voluntary/non-profit sector be adequately resourced and supported to carry out their work in providing appropriate accommodation and community services to ensure the development of vibrant sustainable communities in which people can participate and plan for the needs within their communities.

### **Section Three: Analysis and Research**

There are a number of emerging issues requiring attention. There is a need to carry out analysis and evaluation of current practices, particularly in relation to:

- ensuring that the building programme is reflective of the profile of the household applicants
- The timeframe from vacancy to re-letting of accommodation
- the ‘viability of housing offers’ and the consideration of family and social networks and supports, employment, access to public transport and other facilities such as school, childcare etc
- ensuring that the responses meet the housing needs of people with special needs such as people with mental health issues
- Payments in lieu and the provision of dwellings, in the implementation of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and 2002 (Amendment) in the city.

Also there are required policy changes for improving access to housing for people with disabilities. According to Cork Centre for Independent Living Limited Focus group participants were asked to identify policy changes required to improve access to accommodation by people with disabilities. Six main themes emerged from the discussions – equality of access, choice, life-cycle approach, independent living, person-centred planning and mainstreaming of housing provision for people with disabilities. Further information may be obtained from Cork Centre for Independent Living and their report entitled, *The Right Living Space, Housing and Accommodation Needs of People with Disabilities.* This is a Citizens Information Board/Disability Federation of Ireland Social Policy Report (Social Policy Series November 2007) and prepared by Michael Browne.

#### **Section Four: Evaluation and Monitoring.**

It is critical that the Strategy is monitored and evaluated regularly so as to ensure progress and adaptation to emerging needs. In this context the Forum proposes that a structure be established where groups can feed in the experiences on the ground on the emerging issues as they arise and that there is an open and transparent line of communication which can function both ways.

ooo000ooo000ooo000ooo

## Cork Social Housing Forum

A core recommendation in the Cork City Partnership Local Development Social Inclusion Plan 2000 – 2006 was to raise awareness around the issue of social housing as a measure to prevent homelessness.

The Community Development Unit of Cork City partnership facilitated the Social Housing Working Group, which was set up in April 2001 to organise a seminar on social housing. Various recommendations arose from the seminar held in October 2001. The Housing Department, Cork City Council, hosted a follow up meeting to the Social Housing seminar in City Hall in March 2002. The Housing Department recommended that the Social Housing Working Group submit a proposal regarding the development of a Housing Forum at a forthcoming Strategic Policy Committee meeting. The role of the community and voluntary sector was seen as one of working in partnership with the local authority to develop coherent and effective accommodation strategies to address the needs of those most disadvantaged in society.

The Cork Social Housing Forum was established in December 2002 and officially launched in December 2004. The aims of the Cork Social Housing Forum is to raise awareness of Social and Affordable Accommodation issues and to lobby the government and policy makers with a view to enhancing accommodation provision in Cork City and City Hinterland area. Objectives include influencing policy, research and networking. If you would like further information on Cork Social Housing Forum contact the

Margaret O' Neill, (Chairperson)  
Threshold,  
22 South Mall,  
Cork.  
Ph. 021-4278848.

## **Cork Social Housing Forum Membership**

*Baile an Aoire Sheltered Housing*

*Cluid Housing Association*

*Cork City Partnership*

*Cork County Council*

*Cork Simon Community*

*Focus Ireland*

*Good Shepherd Services*

*Nasc– The Irish Immigrant Support Centre*

*Respond Housing Association*

*Sophia Housing*

*Social Housing Development Company Ltd*

*Health Service Executive*

*Society of St. Vincent De Paul*

*Schizophrenia Ireland Cork Housing Action Group*

*Threshold Limited*

*Traveller Visibility Group*

*Sophia Housing Association*

*Disability Federation of Ireland.*

Sources.

Cork Social Housing Forum Research Report 2006 – Building on Reality

Cork City Council

Cork Housing Market Area 2002 to 2020

CSHF Roundtable Discussion Session 2007

CORI Justice Commission

Drudy P.J.: Out of Reach 2005

Draft Joint Housing Strategy 2007

National Agreement - Towards 2016

National Agreement – Partnership 2000

The Right Living Space, Housing and Accommodation Needs of People with Disabilities. A Citizens Information Board/Disability Federation of Ireland Social Policy Report November 2007.

United Nations - Fact Sheet 21.