

COMMISSION RECOMMENDS

Review Of Housing System In Ireland



An overall review of Ireland's housing system including a proposed referendum on housing are some of the main recommendations contained in a series of reports by the Housing Commission. Many of the 83 recommendations are at varying stages of implementation under the Government's 'Housing for All' strategy plan, with a radical shift now underway, as recommended by the Commission.

More than 110,000 homes have been delivered since 2020, serving to show that increased supply is key to addressing the housing deficit. As part of its 'Housing for All' Action Plan, the Department of Housing detailed the approach to the planned review of targets with new targets to be published this autumn, based on independent, peer reviewed research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

This review will also take account of other inputs, including the hypothetical scenarios set out in the Housing Commission's report regarding housing demand to 2050.

The Report of the Housing Commission has included 83 recommendations together with hundreds of suggested actions, based on over two years of deliberation by the Commission.

As part of the next steps this report will now be sent to the Housing Agency to undertake an analysis in terms of costings, timelines and prioritisation of the recommendations to allow for full consideration. Once that work is complete the Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien will bring policy recommendations to Government.

The Housing Commission was also set the specific task of making a recommendation to the Government on a proposed referendum on housing. The complexity of this constitutional issue is reflected in the submission of both majority and minority reports on possible wording, which provide a comprehensive examination of the options as well as expert analysis.

The Commission's Reports will be submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for its consideration. An inter-departmental group will also be convened to develop policy recommendations for Government on foot of the Commission's work. The advice of the Attorney General will also be sought before recommendations are brought to Government.

REPORT DOCUMENTS SHORTCOMINGS

According to the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), the report documents the shortcomings of the current housing system, and crucially proposes a set of structures and responses that will assist AHBs and housing providers more broadly to tackle the current housing undersupply.

Donal McManus, CEO of the ICSH, said, "The Housing



Commission's proposals for a strategy for the AHB sector that responds to the capacity of both our larger and smaller members are essential. The recommendations further support our sector's mandate to increase and safeguard our affordable rental housing stock.

"It also references the need for AHBs to access alternative and off-balance financing to scale-up and accelerate our public housing delivery. The report highlights that for a well-functioning housing system, the state must ensure that 20% of overall housing stock is social and cost rental homes that remain public in perpetuity. This is a radical departure from existing policy and practice where there has been a long tradition of selling public housing with large discounts.

"In addition, one of the significant proposals is that new social housing in future would be financed and provided on a cost recovery basis to ensure the management and maintenance of social housing is kept to a high standard over its lifetime."

The AHB sector succeeded in delivering almost 6,000 homes and increasing the public housing stock of the ICSH to more than 61,500 social rented homes in ownership and management in 2023. With the right support, we can significantly scale-up delivery, providing an even wider spread of housing options for changing households by 2030.

The report's proposals seek to reposition the housing sector over the long-term build on work that has been evolving over recent years. This includes a more central role in housing delivery for the housing association/AHB sector, a sector that has grown from providing 20% of new social housing 20 years ago, to almost 50% in 2023.

The five recommendations that are specific to AHBs note the recent growth of a sector that is 'pivotal in expanding the availability of affordable housing options'. It further identifies the need for greater support for collaboration and mergers within the Council's AHB members to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale.

This programme is already underway with targeted funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to the ICSH. It proposes an innovative partnership model with new local authority housing organisations that have

a specific housing mandate, and it recognises that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not work for the AHB sector.

"The report provides welcome analysis of the AHB sector that differentiates between the size and capacity of our members. It identifies the risk in the overreliance on the largest AHBs and calls for additional supports to scale-up mid-sized AHBs to mitigate this risk, as well as a specific plan for our smaller members providing housing and supports in communities throughout Ireland."

The ICSH also welcomed the recommendation for targeted funding to upgrade properties delivered under the Capital Assistance Scheme, according to McManus, given the inadequate current revenue funding available to maintain these properties, many of which are in the ownership of very small AHBs with limited development capacity.

ABOUT THE HOUSING COMMISSION: The Housing Commission was established in December 2021 as an independent body to examine Ireland's housing system and make recommendations to shape long-term policy.

During the first year of the 'Housing for All' strategy in 2022, after the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage Darragh O'Brien TD established the Commission, more than 29,000 homes were completed overall. This saw the greatest number of social homes in 50 years and the first affordable homes in a decade.

"That was made possible through unprecedented Government funding made available on a multi-annual basis for the 'Housing for All' plan. It allowed us to take ambitious decisions such as establishing the First Home Scheme, which is proving highly popular with First-Time Buyers," Minister O'Brien noted.

"Not everything released in the report is accepted or agreed and a full analysis will be required before actions are taken. Having said that, 65 of the 83 actions (78% of the recommendations) are already implemented, underway or partially underway."

*To download an outline of the recommendations, visit <https://bit.ly/45onvcf>