

PROBLEMS IN PROVISION OF SOCIAL HOUSING

It has the highest political profile in years, there's more money than ever in the history of the State available for the provision of social housing and yet there is the greatest level of dissatisfaction and lowest level of provision over the last decade! John Hannigan, CEO of the Circle Voluntary Housing Association, asks why.

At the height of the boom in the early 2000s we were able to produce 90,000 homes a year, but people forget that it took a decade to get to that number. It took a lot of persuasion to encourage developers and builders to invest, recruit and pay their employees what was needed to attract significant numbers of people from other states to come to Ireland to build.

Within a decade most of those developers, builders and their employees no longer exist or have been so badly financially damaged that they do not have the capacity to deliver now. It is not really a surprise that we have so few active builders/developers at present; tough lessons were learned from 2008 to 2012 and we are only beginning to see an emergence of confidence in the building industry.

We are struggling to hit 25,000 homes a year, albeit 35,000 a year are predicted by The Housing Agency as needed to meet the steady state demand, let alone the potential increase in our population over the coming decade.

ROOM TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

So, what can we do? Firstly, the Government is embarking on the right approach by encouraging all forms of delivery with all partners who can deliver. There is room for the private sector (in the guise of organisations like Glenveigh, Hinds, Cairn Homes and others) not to mention the private build-to-rent models being developed, as well as Approved Housing Bodies, and Local Authorities (in the charitable and State provision area) to work in partnership.

What Government and other Political Parties need to do is stop looking at the short term – it takes 26 to 52 weeks to build



a house, therefore it is going to take time to get to the levels of production that are required, give time for some of the policies, such as Enhanced Leasing Scheme, the Standard Leasing Scheme and other funding mechanism and taxation encouragements to settle and to work.

The new Regeneration and Land Development Agency may help reduce the competition between private, social and State sectors, but it is likely to take time for it to become operational.

Significant lessons from Irish Water need to be learned in terms of its set up and its powers. The new Agency must be more independent and more objective.

There is now a professional, not for profit sector that is expert in housing management, who have invested in their capacity and who have a proven track record of excellent outcomes for the people.

APPROVED HOUSING BODIES

It's the Approved Housing Body sector (Housing Associations). As well as being community focused and in many cases, community created, they understand the potential and the assets within the community that make for better and more sustainable housing management.

They are well governed, usually by voluntary board members (who have the same liability as other company directors, but are not paid!), regulated by at least three if not more regulators (AHB Regulator, Charity Regulator, Residential Tenancies Board, HIQA, etc) and who do it for one purpose – to help people in housing need.

Over the last decade we have invested in our people, our systems and our tenants. We have made the provision of social housing a career for many providing employment for many thousands of people and housing more than 32,000 families across our nation.

Along with the State, AHBs are the only sector looking to tackle the issue of affordability for renters and house purchasers, without a profit motive. We need all our partners (private, social and State) to make it work.