

COMMISSION RECOMMENDS OVERALL REVIEW OF HOUSING IN IRELAND

An overall review of Ireland's housing system in addition to a proposed referendum on housing are just two of a raft of recommendations contained within the Report of the Housing Commission. A radical shift is now underway, with many of the recommendations at varying stages of implementation under the Government's 'Housing for All' plan.



More than 110,000 homes have been delivered since 2020, revealing 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 the hypothetical scenarios set out in the Housing Commission's report regarding housing demand to 2050. The Report of the Housing Commission includes 83 recommendations together with hundreds of suggested actions, based on over two years of deliberation by the Commission.

This report will 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 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 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 is to be convened to develop the 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.

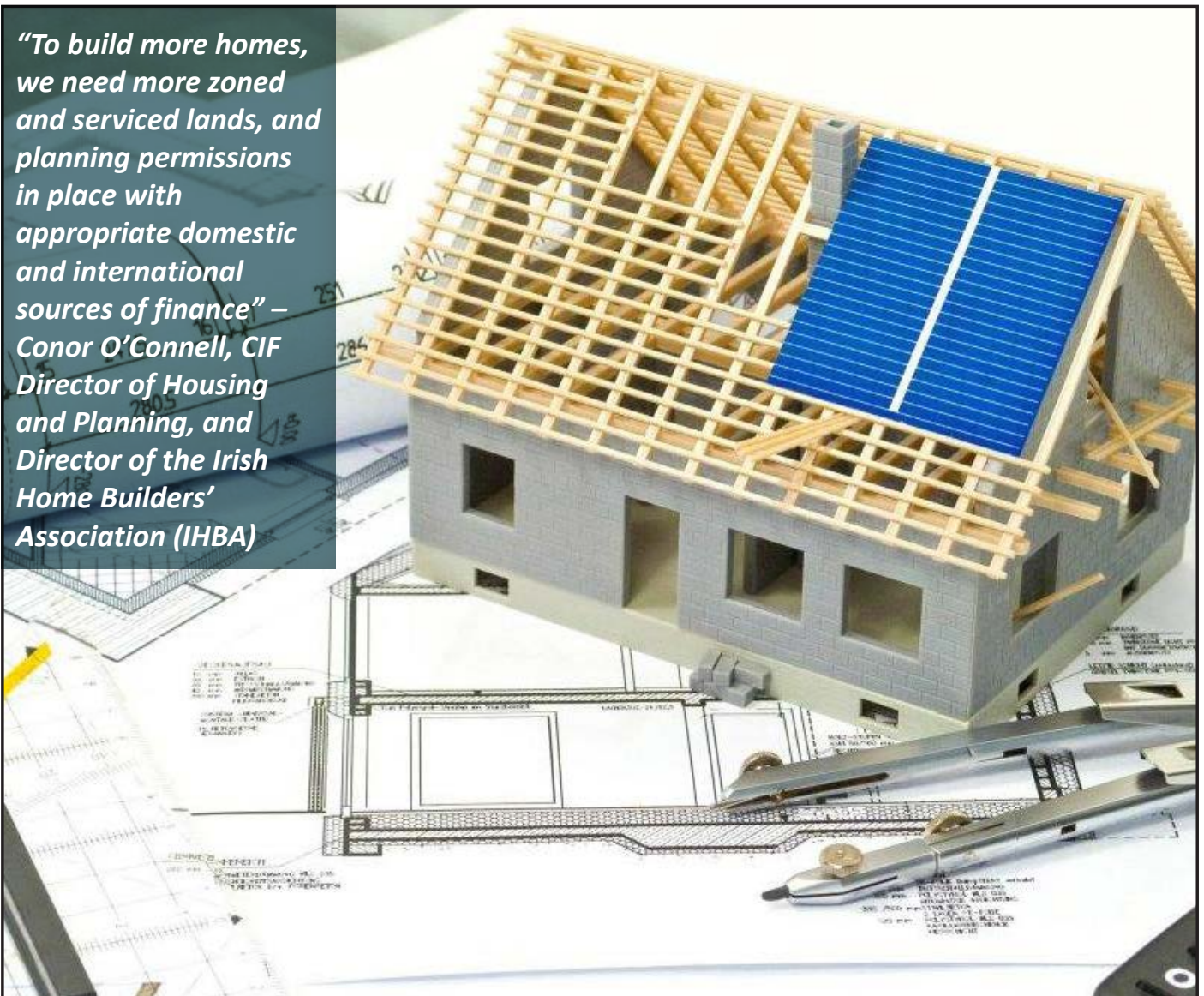
"In addition, one of the significant proposals is that new social housing in future would be financed and provided on a cost recovery basis to ensure the management and maintenance of social housing is kept to a high standard over its lifetime."

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.

MORE CENTRAL ROLE FOR AHB SECTOR

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

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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 Schem, 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.

INCREASED SOCIAL HOUSING TARGETS

The Housing Alliance, the collaboration of seven of Ireland's largest Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) has welcomed the publication of the Housing Commission's report. John Hannigan, Chair of the Alliance, and CEO of Circle VHA, said that they particularly welcomed the recommendations on increased social housing targets, the encouragement of the growth of larger AHBs and the provision of adequate delivery and funding structures to support this.

"Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) delivered 47% of all long-term social housing in 2023 and have a proven track record of efficiently delivering high-quality social and cost rental homes housing at scale and supporting tenants and residents in their communities through effective tenancy management and engagement programmes.



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“The Housing Alliance is highly motivated and ambitious in our efforts to tackle the housing crisis. With additional funding and land, we are ready and willing to deliver thousands more homes across the country.

“The Housing Alliance’s purpose is to work with government and local authorities to promote the delivery of high quality social and affordable homes, address barriers to delivery and strongly advocate for responsible, professional housing management,” he noted.

NEED FOR MORE ZONED LANDS

The Construction Industry Federation (CIF) also welcomed the Housing Commission’s report and called for expansion of housing and infrastructure targets in line with the report.

The report recommended various measures including concentration on infrastructure delivery and the concept of a Housing Delivery Executive. The acknowledgment of the backlog and the scale of housing supply needed is “a welcome statement of intent”, according to the CIF

Conor O’Connell, CIF’s Director of Housing and Planning, and Director of the Irish Home Builders’ Association (IHBA) said: “We will thoroughly assess the report’s contents and recommendations and need to be more expansive in our housing targets and the provision of infrastructure to accelerate housing delivery.

“To build more homes, we need more zoned and serviced lands, and planning permissions in place with appropriate domestic and international sources of finance. While many reforms in planning are underway, alongside schemes introduced to aid affordability and viability, we need to expand our ambition to build more homes.”

THE HOUSING COMMISSION was established by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage Darragh O’Brien in December 2021 as an independent body to examine Ireland’s housing system and to make recommendations to shape long-term policy. During the first year of the Government’s ‘Housing for All’ strategy in 2022, 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.

For more information visit [gov](http://gov.ie) - Report of The Housing Commission (www.gov.ie)



TOP TEN KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN HOUSING COMMISSION’S REPORT

A preliminary review of the report’s recommendations suggests that 65 are already advanced or at varying stages of implementation, while comprehensive consideration will be given to those remaining to be implemented.

1. Recognise and prioritise Ireland’s housing deficiency and address it through emergency action.
2. Base housing policy on an assessment of the housing required for a well-functioning society. This should not be conflated with market demand or construction sector capacity.
3. Align housing provision and economic development in the National Planning Framework to ensure sufficient housing supply to meet the needs of the population in all parts of the country, including the Dublin region.
4. Account must be taken in housing policy of the full economic and social costs associated with not meeting Ireland’s housing requirements.
5. Ensure that housing policy makes adequate provision for a range of housing and accommodation types to meet the specific needs of identifiable groups.
6. Develop and maintain the use of high-quality data resources covering all areas of the housing system.
7. Establish a Housing Delivery Oversight Executive in legislation as a decision-making body responsible for co-ordinating the delivery of housing. This body should be time limited. It should identify and address blockages to housing delivery and oversee and drive investment in public utilities on land zoned for housing.
8. Establish high-yielding Housing Delivery Zones at agreed strategic locations, where housing can be delivered in the short to medium term and at scale.
9. Enhance the powers and resources of local authorities so that they can support and enable the delivery of a sustainable level of private, affordable, social and cost-rental housing.
10. Assess all policy measures and interventions against their impact on housing supply. Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) should be performed on all such interventions.