



An Ghníomhaireacht
Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

Housing Practitioners' Conference May 26th- 27th 2022 Summary Report

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Programme

The Housing Practitioners' Conference took place at the Grand Hotel Malahide on the 26th and 27th May 2022 and was jointly hosted by The Housing Agency and the Institute of Public Administration. The conference was officially opened by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD, and Michael Carey, Chairman of The Housing Agency. The conference took place as an in-person event for the first time since 2019, which involved a day and a half of expert speakers and workshops discussing best practice and policy on housing, under the theme of **Housing for All: Supply, Sustainability and Capacity**.

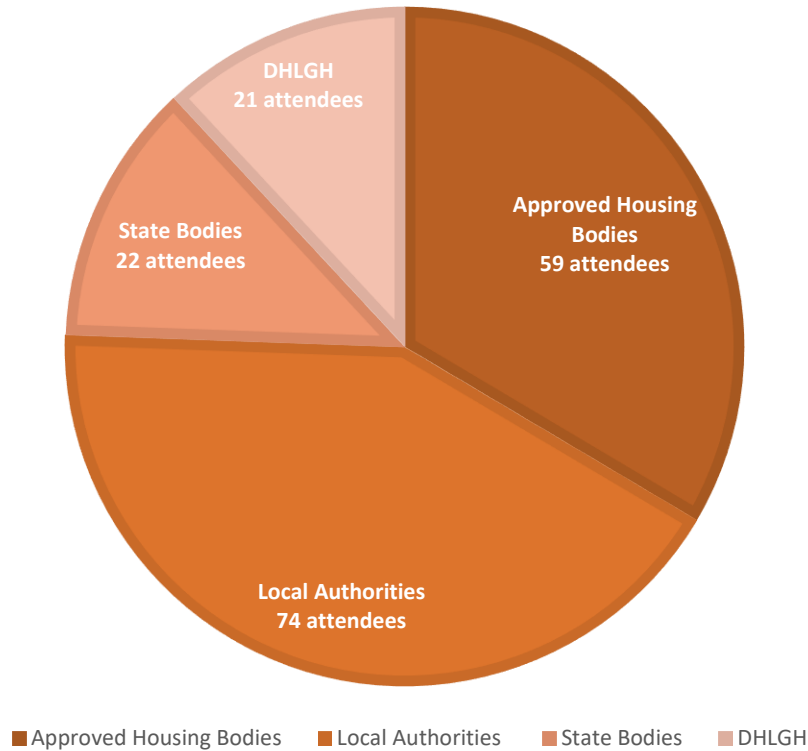
The full conference brochure is available [here](#).



Bob Jordan (CEO of the Housing Agency), Roslyn Molloy (Head of Policy and Practice, The Housing Agency), Darragh O'Brien T.D, Michael Carey (Chairman of the Housing Agency), and Cian Rohan (Assistant Local Government Specialist, Institute of Public Administration).

Over **170 delegates** attended the 2-day gathering in Malahide, including representatives from Approved housing bodies, local authorities, statutory agencies and government departments. Throughout the conference, attendees could ask questions through Slido, an audience interaction tool, which was an innovative way to capture expertise and gauge sentiment during the sessions.

Conference Attendees



Representatives from Local Authorities accounted for over a third of attendees. There were 59 attendees from Approved Housing Bodies, 22 attendees from State Bodies and 21 attendees from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The conference also hosted members from various organisations as exhibitors. Exhibitors included representatives from the Residential Tenancies Board, The Institute of Public Administration, The Housing Agency, The National Office for Housing First, the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority and The Irish Council for Social Housing. The exhibitors provided the attendees an opportunity to learn about their organisations and their recent publications and projects.

Speaker Presentations – Thursday 26th May

Session 1: Progress in Delivering Housing for All

- Bob Jordan, CEO, The Housing Agency
- Áine Stapleton, Assistant Secretary, DHLGH
- Frank Curran, CEO, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
Donal McManus, CEO, Irish Council for Social Housing



Members of The Housing Agency Board: Fiona Lawless, Frank Curran, Donal McManus, Michael Carey, Áine Stapleton and Bob Jordan pictured with Darragh O'Brien T.D

Following the opening address from the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien, the opening session focused on progress in delivering Housing for All. Speakers included representatives from The Housing Agency, the Irish Council for Social Housing, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

A key theme emerging from this session was the importance of collaboration between key stakeholders to progress Housing for All. Bob Jordan, CEO of the Housing Agency, urged attendees to remember that **'collaboration is the solution to complex problems'**. Speakers highlighted the importance of embedding affordability within the housing sector. Speakers also noted that, ultimately, delivery is crucial to meeting the targets set out in Housing for All.

Session 2: Workshops

Workshops were held on the first day of the conference, and attendees had six different workshop themes to choose from. The practical format of the workshops offered a participative experience for attendees of the event. The workshops provided some key thoughts and recommendations relating to relevant housing topics.



Social Housing in Multi-Unit Developments

The workshop was chaired by David Rouse (The Housing Agency), where speakers included Jennie Bray (Clúid Housing) and Anita Neville (Fingal County Council). Recommendations emerging from the workshop related to education and training, which are required to bridge the gap between knowledge and understanding among sector participants.

Other key thoughts included the regulation of OMCs to improve governance and standards.

Housing and Disability Steering Groups

Robert Murtagh from The Housing Agency led this workshop, which explored the Housing and Disability Steering Groups and their role in the implementation of the National Housing strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027. Speakers included Sinead Shannon (The Housing Agency), Barry Lynch (Meath County Council), Claire Kenny (Independent Living Movement Ireland) and Bridget Boyle (Cavan Disability Network). Training was highlighted as a fundamental aspect of the steering groups and speakers also noted that input should come from all levels to represent those who are not on the strategy designing level.

Tenant Engagement

Alex Dowdall, Senior Staff Officer at the Housing Agency, led this workshop which included Padraic Kenna, NUIG, and Liz Clarke from Circle VHA. Throughout the workshop, it was clear that culture and resourcing are vital within Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities for effective tenant engagement. Speakers recommended a bottom-up approach to tenant engagement as a means of ensuring the tenant's lived experience is included in overall housing management, policy, and practice.

Collaboration in the AHB Sector

This workshop was led by Alan Byrne (DHLGH) and attendees heard from Sean Gallagher (VHSS) and Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh and Kevin Ryan (ICSH). This workshop heard about the costs facing the Approved Housing Bodies and how time consuming it can be to get an arrangement. Speakers also recommended that it can be beneficial for Local Authorities to deal with a unified voice for the AHB sector in their area.

Bringing Vacant Properties Back Into Use

Lisa Ledwidge (The Housing Agency) chaired this workshop which heard from speakers Paul Johnston (Waterford City & County Council), Rosemarie Carr (Property Registration Authority) and Pat Davitt (IPAV). This workshop session focused on vacancy within the housing sector and how to effectively manage vacant properties to bring them back into residential use. Speakers noted that Ireland has the 10th highest rate of vacant homes in the world, and just 3.2% of empty homes could be used to house Ireland's homeless population. Recommendations arising from this workshop include removing Capital Gains Tax or reducing it to 10%, to encourage sale and purchase of vacant homes.

Energy Upgrades to the Housing Stock

Norman Jackson (The Housing Agency) chaired this workshop, with speakers including Noel Halvey (DHLGH), Eamonn Gillen (Donegal County Council), Stephen Farrell (SEAI) and Jo Whittal (Clúid Housing). This workshop engaged with the topic of energy efficiency and upgrades to the housing stock. Presenters provided an overview of the National Retrofitting Plan. Speakers noted retrofitting remains a key objective for Government and there is significant funding available to reach targets. Retrofitting experiences from Local Authorities and AHBs highlight the importance of engaging with tenants, setting clear timelines, and having a clear understanding of the claims process.



Bob Jordan (CEO of the Housing Agency), Darragh O'Brien TD, Dr. Philip Byrne (Senior Local Government Specialist, IPA), Michael Carey (Chairman of the Housing Agency).

Session 3: Homes are the Heart of Communities

- Rob Lowth, National Director of Housing First
- Catherine McGuigan, Chief Officer of Age Friendly Ireland
- Tanya Ward, Chief Executive of Children's Rights Alliance

The second session focused on homes as the heart of our communities. Rob Lowth, National Director of Housing First, noted the element of choice within Housing First as being vital to its success. Tanya Ward, Chief Executive of Children's Rights Alliance, raised the issue of Direct provision and increasing future refugee movements, along with the need to plan for these movements in the future and the positive benefits of integrating new communities into our society. Catherine McGuigan, Chief Officer of Age Friendly Ireland discussed demographics outlined by the WHO, which illustrate an ageing population and the need to plan for the future. She also outlined progress made in Ireland in recent years in delivering housing options for older people. Grainia Long, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, was also due to speak at this session but could not attend.

Session 4: Ensuring Affordability

- Caroline Timmons, Acting Assistant Secretary DHLGH
- Barry O'Leary, CEO, Housing Finance Agency
- Catriona Lawlor, Administrative Officer, The Housing Agency
- Gwen Perry, Senior Executive Officer, The Housing Agency
- Fiona Cormican, Director of New Business, Clúid



The session concentrated on ensuring affordability within the housing sector. Caroline Timmons examined the affordability measures and schemes contained in Housing for All, such as cost rental and affordable purchase. Catriona Lawlor discussed the role of Part V and how this mechanism can contribute to affordable housing. Barry O'Leary explained the role of the Housing Finance Agency in delivering affordable housing and emphasised the Agency's focus on growth for the future. Gwen Perry noted the importance of adopting a long-term approach to housing through schemes such as cost-rental, which will be the key to success in delivering Housing for All. Fiona Cormican offered an insightful case study of a cost rental project in Taylor Hill, Balbriggan, where Clúid were able to achieve affordable rents and achieve targets.

Session 5: Housing Unlocked

- Nathalie Weadick, Director of the Irish Architectural Foundation

Housing
Unlocked

Housing Unlocked is a joint initiative of The Housing Agency and the Irish Architectural Foundation: an open call for ideas to maximise housing potential in our towns and cities, by inviting architects and their collaborators to question the status quo and propose new ways of doing things. This session outlined some of the winners of the competition, which included projects addressing vacancy and dereliction, modular living concepts and transforming vacant commercial properties into places to live. Winners of the competition can be accessed [here](#).



Bob Jordan (CEO of the Housing Agency) and Nathalie Weadick (Director of the Irish Architectural Foundation) at the launch of Housing Unlocked

Speaker Presentations - Friday 27th May

Following a Gala Dinner on Thursday evening, which was addressed by AnnMarie Farrelly (Chief Executive of Fingal County Council), attendees returned to the Grand Hotel Malahide for the second day of the Housing Practitioners' Conference. Three sessions took place on the day, examining increasing supply, assisted decision-making, and building capacity.

Session 6: Increasing Supply

- David Kelly, Principal Officer, DHLGH
- Robert Burns, Director of Housing, Fingal County Council
- Eoin Carroll, Policy and Communications Manager, Co-operative Housing Ireland
- Niall Byrne, Director of the Residential Tenancies Board

The opening session on the second day of the conference focused on increasing supply, and speakers such as David Kelly discussed various challenges including rising construction costs and the war in Ukraine. Viability of projects was examined as a crucial aspect of increasing supply. The importance of addressing vacancy through asset management was highlighted by Robert Burns, who outlined how Fingal County Council are tackling the issue. Eoin Carroll provided an overview of the activities of Co-operative Housing Ireland, as well as their recent growth and possible challenges to increasing supply. Niall Byrne offered a valuable perspective into how regulation can provide improvements relating to affordability within the private rental sector.

Legislation Update

Session 7: Assisted decision-making

- Claire Feeney, SEO, The Housing Agency

This session provided an update on legislation related to Assisted Decision-Making (ADM). The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 is an important piece of legislation which replaces the wards of the court system and repeals the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871. The system has been changed to a flexible functional approach, where capacity is assessed on an issue and time-specific basis. The Act relates to housing as it applies to two types of decisions: personal welfare and property and affairs. Decisions relating to social housing will fall under personal welfare, whereas purchase or sale of properties will come under property and affairs.

The session offered a comprehensive overview of ADM and how it relates to housing and housing practitioners. Information and guidance were offered throughout the session on how housing practitioners can make a decision-making capacity assessment.

Session 8: Building Capacity

- Maria Graham, Assistant Secretary, DHLGH
- Niall Cussen, Chief Executive, Office of the Planning Regulator
- John O'Connor, Chair of the Housing Commission
- Alex Dowdall, Senior Staff Officer, The Housing Agency
- Susanna Lyons, CEO, AHBRA

The final session of the conference concentrated on building capacity within the housing sector. Speakers reviewed the topic under the context of Housing for All and discussed best practice on building capacity.

Maria Graham advocated for clearer planning legislation and an emphasis on the plan-making stage of developments. Niall Cussen strongly advocated for **policy-led, evidence-based planning** along with high levels of training for Local Authorities and cooperation between planners and housing practitioners. John O'Connor focused on sustainability relating to building capacity and the housing system in Ireland. He used the analogy of the 'Grey rhino event': a highly probably event with a great deal of impact which is dismissed or overlooked. O'Connor used this to emphasise the need for adequate housing and to plan for the future. Alex Dowdall discussed professionalising the housing sector through measures including a housing apprenticeship, which would help to build capacity through education rather than training. Susanna Lyons noted the importance of **collaboration** between AHBs and their stakeholders such as Local Authorities and the Government, as well as focusing on sustainability through effective regulation.

Key Takeaways

Following a day and a half of expert speakers, attendees came away with numerous insights relating to best practice and policy on housing. Several themes were emphasised by speakers across the conference:

1. **Collaboration** between key stakeholders to progress Housing for All.
2. Working to ensure we have a well-planned, **evidence-based** and policy-led housing system.
3. Addressing **viability issues** relating to inflation within the housing sector.
4. **Long-term approach** in planning for future demographic needs relating to an ageing population and significant migrant and refugee movements.
5. The practical measures that can be taken to ensure we meet the **delivery** targets in Housing for All.

Conference Close

The conference was closed by Bob Jordan, CEO of the Housing Agency, who celebrated the opportunity to have an in-person conference and highlighted the benefits of meeting with colleagues and fellow housing practitioners face-to-face. He encouraged attendees of the conference to apply the knowledge they gained from the event in their own organisations. He also noted some standout messages from speakers, such as the passion to deliver within the sector, commitment to social inclusion, honesty, and the desire for collaboration between practitioners. Thanking all of those involved in the organisation of the event, he finally emphasised the interdependent nature of the housing sector and its organisations, advocating for **collaboration within the sector**.



Bob Jordan, CEO of the Housing Agency