



An Ghníomhaireacht
Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

Housing Practitioners' Conference

25th & 26th April 2024

Summary Report

Programme

The Housing Practitioners' Conference took place at the Mullingar Park Hotel on the 25th and 26th April 2024 and was jointly hosted by The Housing Agency and the Institute of Public Administration. The conference involved a day and a half of expert speakers and workshops discussing best practice and policy on housing, under the theme of **Opportunities for Sustainable Housing**.

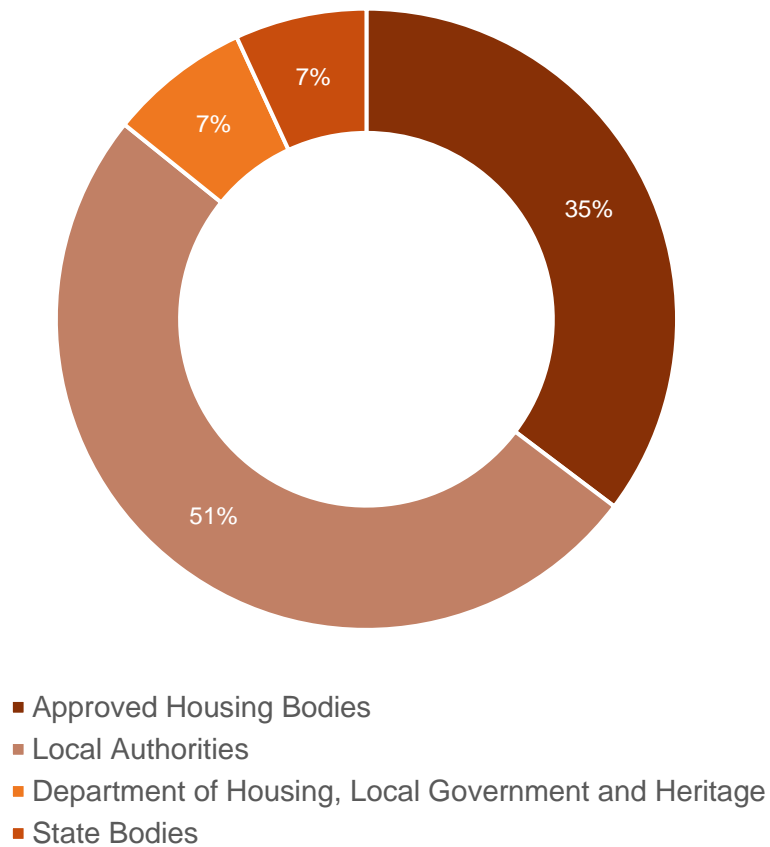
The full conference brochure is available [here](#).



Michael Carey, Eileen Dunne, Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien and Bob Jordan

Over **340 people** attended the 2-day gathering in Mullingar, including representatives from Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's), local authorities, statutory agencies and government departments.

Conference Attendees



The conference also hosted members from various organisations as exhibitors. Exhibitors included representatives from *The Housing Agency*, *The National Office for Housing First*, the *Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority*, the *Land Development Agency (LDA)*, and the *Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)*. The exhibitors provided the attendees with the opportunity to learn about their organisations and their recent publications and projects.

Day 1 – Thursday 26th May

Opening Address

Following a welcome by Michael Carey, Chairman of The Housing Agency, the conference was officially opened by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD.

Both Michael Carey and Minister O'Brien reflected on the word crisis, and the meanings it contains in the Chinese language: danger and opportunity. Both highlighted the importance of recognising the dangers inherent in the housing crisis but emphasised that it was also essential to identify and pursue the opportunities that it presents.

Michael Carey highlighted that delivery was the primary focus of The Housing Agency and that sustainability, both environmental and social, was the secondary issue. The Housing Agency is currently drafting a new strategy, which this will take into account evolving and changing opportunities, enabling the organisation to make a positive impact on housing challenges.



Michael Carey, Chairman of The Housing Agency

Minister O'Brien drew attention to the positive, problem-solving attitudes of Housing Agency staff. He acknowledged the complex context that all stakeholders are currently working in, recognising the existing challenges but encouraging all attendees to celebrate the positive impact they are having across the housing sector.



Darragh O'Brien, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Q&A Session with the Minister for Housing

The Minister's opening address was followed by a Q&A session between the Minister and Eileen Dunne, the former RTÉ newsreader. Eileen Dunne referenced the progress that is being made and the positivity she encountered amongst attendees. Issues around planning, funding, and homelessness were discussed, with Minister O'Brien stating that the latter is the single biggest concern for the Department. He respected that not everyone was feeling the progress that is being made, and that behind every figure was a family. The session concluded with Minister O'Brien asserting that the biggest focus for the government is on increasing supply and building a sustainable housing sector.



Darragh O'Brien and Eileen Dunne

Session 1: Progress, Delivery & Future Opportunities

Chaired by Eileen Dunne

- Bob Jordan – CEO, The Housing Agency
- Áine Stapleton – Assistant Secretary, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Ruth Hurley – Project Manager, LGMA
- Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh – Director of Development Operations, Irish Council for Social Housing



Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh, Ruth Hurley, Áine Stapleton, Bob Jordan and Eileen Dunne

Following the opening address from the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien, the first plenary session focused on progress in delivering housing and future opportunities. Speakers included representatives from The Housing Agency, the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA).

Key themes arising from the speaker presentations were coordination and communication, and thinking strategically about how to deliver **inclusive, integrated, sustainable communities**.

Bob Jordan, Chief Executive Officer of the Housing Agency, urged stakeholders not just to satisfy funding spreadsheets and targets, but to use the opportunity to think about what sustainable communities will look like for households. He highlighted the need to document and listen to people's experiences. Speakers mentioned additionality in delivering housing, and the importance of supported housing keeping pace with general needs



Bob Jordan (The Housing Agency)

housing. Speakers also noted the requirement to review existing delivery methods and plan to improve future delivery around the diverse needs of a growing population.



Áine Stapleton (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage)

Áine Stapleton spoke about delivery and looked back at *Housing for All* and the policy context. She discussed what reaching our potential for social housing delivery would look like and explained the various levers available to help deliver housing. She spoke about the impact of delivering social housing, with 21,600 social homes delivered through Build, Acquisition and Leasing (BAL) from 2022 to 2023 and 19,500 social homes delivered through HAP and RAS in the

same period. She then discussed the delivery targets for 2024 and noted it is critical to exceed last year's output.

Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh discussed how to build inclusive communities. She spoke about the growth of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in 2023, who delivered 47% of all long-term social housing in 2023 and 30% of cost rental housing in 2023, with 286 cost rental homes. AHB delivery is through three primary streams; build, acquisition and leasing. AHB's avail of funding from the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme



Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh (Irish Council for Social Housing)

(SHCEP), Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) and Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL). Éadaoin concluded by noting that in the year of strategic thinking, opportunities are abound.

Ruth Hurley spoke about becoming more agile in the delivery of housing and expanding options using Design & Build. She discussed the “Accelerated Delivery Programme” using Design & Build and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and provided some examples of developments being delivered through this programme. Ruth explained some of the advantages associated with Design & Build, such as improved productivity,



Ruth Hurley (LGMA)

innovation, speed of delivery, sustainability and costs. She also spoke about using frameworks as a way to delivery more effectively and provided an overview of the various supports and resources available.

Eileen Dunne led a panel discussion following speaker presentations. This included discussions on delivery, vacancy, and planning. The importance of managing existing stock together with planning ahead was also central to the conversation, with the cost of retrofitting raised by attendees. Bob Jordan cited the Housing Agency's [National Study of Housing Experiences, Attitudes and Aspirations in Ireland - Residential Satisfaction Report 2023](#) which detailed that some apartment residents felt less connected to their neighbourhoods and highlighted the importance of incorporating communal facilities into future developments. Speakers addressed a question around the tenant

purchase scheme, emphasizing the importance of increasing social housing stock. The themes of **collaboration and effective communication** were consistently raised. Speakers also addressed a question about social inclusion in building regulations and delivery. Bob Jordan acknowledged a need for **integrated housing plans** that take account of all people's needs.

Morning Workshop Sessions

Workshops were held on the first day of the conference, and attendees had six different workshop themes to choose from in the morning session. 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.

Multi-Unit Developments: Stakeholder Experiences and Feedback

The workshop was chaired by David Rouse (The Housing Agency), where speakers included Kathleen Cottier (CEO, Fold Housing) and Pat Davitt (CEO, IPAV). This workshop provided an update on current issues for MUDs and OMCs, a brief on The Housing Agency's sector actions and supports since the Housing Practitioners Conference in 2023 and heard from stakeholders' experiences and good practice.



David Rouse (The Housing Agency)

Affordable Purchase Scheme: Lessons and Learnings from Providers

Gwen Perry from The Housing Agency led this workshop, where speakers included Niamh Redmond (South Dublin County Council) and Seamus De Faoite (Cork County Council). This workshop had two presentations from current providers of the Affordable Purchase Scheme with a focus on the challenges faced, lessons learned and advice for local authorities setting up schemes of their own.

Top Tips for Communicating in the Housing Sector

Martina Quinn (Alice Public Relations) and Eileen Dunne (former RTÉ journalist) provided a masterclass in communications. The session focused on how to effectively communicate your message in the housing sector including communicating with confidence in any setting and preparing for media interviews.



Eileen Dunne and Martina Quinn (Alice Public Relations)



Gary Kelly (Sligo County Council)

Traveller-Specific Accommodation

Karen Murphy (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) chaired this workshop and was joined by Elaine Leech (South Dublin County Council), Gary Kelly (Sligo County Council) and Martin Collins (Pavee Point). Good practice was exchanged throughout this workshop in the delivery and provision of Traveller-specific accommodation.

Careers in Housing

Caroline Moloney (CIH) chaired this workshop and speakers included Lorcan Sirr (TUD), Dave O'Neill (North & East Housing Association) and Claire Hartley (Waterford City and County Council). This workshop discussed the different opportunities in housing careers in both local government and the Approved Housing Body section as well as education and training opportunities.



*Claire Hartley (Waterford City and County Council)
and Dave O'Neill (North & East Housing Association)*

Age Friendly Homes – Exploring Housing Options and Supports for our Ageing Population



Mark Harrington (Age Friendly Ireland)

Mark Harrington and Declan Gaffney (Age Friendly Ireland) chaired this session and heard from Olivia Goff, Jessica Lange (Dublin City Council) and Emma Power (Waterford City and County Council). This workshop explored the different age friendly housing options and healthcare supports available for our ageing population.

Re-engineering the Workplace to Facilitate Sustainable High Performance

- John Ryan – Author, Founder & CEO, Healthy Place to Work

John Ryan (Healthy Place to Work) led an engaging session on the definition of resilience in the context of working in the housing sector. He reminded attendees that their most important job is to stay healthy, as this is central to managing the stresses of life and work. John acknowledged the “wicked problems” that exist in the multi-symptom, multi-solution housing sector. The theme of **collaboration** was raised again, with resilience described as a network of support. John encouraged attendees to think of their organisations as structures and to consider how work is distributed across their staff. “Everything fails at its weakest point.” John emphasised the need to have support in the right place and suggested resilience was a verb that allows organisation to anticipate and respond to challenges.



John Ryan (Healthy Place to Work)

Session 2: Vacant Homes: Opportunities for Collaboration

Chaired by Claire Feeney – The Housing Agency

- Caroline Timmons – Assistant Secretary, Housing Affordability, Inclusion and Homelessness, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Brigid Deenihan – Vacant Homes Officer, Carlow County Council
- Alison O'Rourke – Director of Services Housing Delivery, Cork City Council
- Claire O'Sullivan – Manager, Tinteán
- Walter Holden – Senior Architect, Waterford City and County Council

Caroline Timmons, Assistant Secretary, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, discussed the impactful collaboration that has developed across government departments and between local authorities, AHBs, and state agencies, forming networks that provide solutions to vacancy. Caroline referenced a multitude of ways to address vacancy, noting that funding and policy development support this work. She introduced two documents, the [Vacant Homes Action Plan Progress Report](#) and the [Bringing Back Homes Manual](#).



Caroline Timmons (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage)

Brigid Deenihan, Vacant Homes Officer at Carlow County Council, spoke about the effective collaboration happening between her office and Carlow's Town Regeneration Officer (TRO). She shared the positive impact of their work together, stressing that a unified approach is needed to meet end goals.



Brigid Deenihan (Carlow County Council)

Alison O'Rourke, Director of Service, Housing Delivery & Regeneration in Cork City Council, talked about Cork City Council's recent successes working with the Peter McVerry Trust. She reiterated that collaboration isn't just a nice concept but is essential to delivering at the scale and pace needed in the housing sector. Alison explained that some of the narrative around vacancy indicates that it is easy to return vacant properties to use, but it is never simple. Strong partnerships where the focus is on problem solving rather than problem finding are vital for providing innovation and additionality.



Alison O'Rourke (Cork City Council)



Walter Holden (Waterford City and County Council)

Walter Holden, Senior Architect at Waterford City and County Council, presented on the collaborative work that has been done to address vacancy in Waterford. His presentation outlined the various stakeholders and schemes needed to make projects work throughout the county and across tenures.

Claire O' Sullivan, Manager of Tinteán Housing Association, discussed vacancy from the perspective of a small AHB. She shared their experiences of transforming derelict properties into vibrant, safe homes for their clients. Claire again stressed the importance of being able to rely on partner agencies and praised the Housing Agency and the Department of Housing for their willingness to listen and provide guidance at every stage.



Claire O'Sullivan (Tinteán Housing)

Claire Feeney led a panel discussion following speaker presentations. There were questions around resistance to social housing developments, and the importance of community engagement was reinforced. There were also queries about the cost of renovation and the level of support available to local authorities when delivering new schemes. Issues around planning were also a theme throughout the presentations and panel discussions. The overall message was that there is always a solution that can be found, with engagement and partnerships key to any success stories.

Afternoon Workshop Sessions

Apartment and Duplex Defects Remediation

Martin J. Hernon (The Housing Agency) led this session and was joined by Christopher Duffy (Omega Surveying Services). The workshop covered the Interim Remediation Scheme for Fire Safety Defects in Apartments and Duplexes, showcased collaborative efforts to drive its implementation and provided valuable insights into fire safety defects encountered during Fire Safety Risk Assessments.



Martin J. Hernon (The Housing Agency)

Regulation for a Sustainable Rental Sector



Dr. Aideen Hayden (Housing Policy Analyst)

Dr. Aideen Hayden, Housing Policy Analyst, chaired this session, which included speakers Aoife Lawler (Fingal County Council), Ann-Marie O'Reilly (Threshold), Kathleen Cottier (Fold Housing), Lucia Crimin and Louise Loughlin (RTB). The workshop discussed the implementation, enforcement, and effectiveness of regulation of Standards in Rented Houses, short term lets and the broader Residential Tenancies Act.

Addressing Urban Vacancy

Paul Hogan (The Housing Agency) led this workshop and was joined by Donal O'Murchadha (LGMA), Noelle Sweeney (The Housing Agency) and Lorraine Middleton (Westmeath County Council). The workshop discussed how to provide homes in an urban setting while retaining a vibrant town centre



*Lorraine Middleton (Westmeath County Council),
Noelle Sweeney (The Housing Agency) and Donal
O'Murchadha (LGMA)*

and respecting heritage. It also covered the use of strategies and initiatives to incentivize town centre living.

Connecting with the HSE Community Care Networks under the new Slainte Care Model

Grainne Johnston (The Housing Agency) led this workshop and heard from Alice McGinley (HSE). The workshop provided an introduction into population health and an insight into the Irish healthcare model and how it has developed into Slaintecare. It also provided an insight into the Community Care Networks system and shared examples of positive working models between the HSE and local authorities.



Gráinne Johnston (The Housing Agency)

Supporting Staff Wellbeing and Resilience for Housing Professionals

Rob Lowth (Housing First) coordinated this workshop and heard from John Ryan (Healthy Place to Work) and Gerard Spillane (Focus Ireland). The workshop discussed how resilience building in the workplace can be beneficial to employees working in a complex housing section. It provided insight into the Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) in Focus Ireland and it can improve staff wellbeing and customer understanding.



Gerard Spillane (Focus Ireland)

Cost Rental: Lessons and Learnings from Providers

Rob Murtagh (The Housing Agency) led this workshop and heard from Aileen Gallagher (Tuath Housing) and Elaine Leech (South Dublin County Council). The workshop provided attendees with an insight into delivering cost rental homes, including setting up cost rental, managing and maintaining homes. It also covered some of the challenges encountered and lessons learned.



Elaine Leech (South Dublin County Council)

Day 2 – Friday 26th April

Following a Dinner on Thursday evening, which was addressed by Jackie Finney, Acting Director of Services for Housing, Community Development, Corporate Performance at Westmeath County Council, attendees returned to the Mullingar Park Hotel for the second day of the Housing Practitioners' Conference. Two sessions took place on the day, examining funding opportunities and opportunities for a sustainable future.

Session 3: Funding Opportunities

Chaired by Dave Dinnigan

- Martin Colreavy – Head of Strategic Delivery and Urban Advisory Unit, Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage
- Laura Behan – Affordable Housing Capital Funding and Schemes Unit, Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage
- James O'Halloran – Head of New Business, Clúid Housing
- Michelle Robinson – Director of Services Housing Operation and Community Services, Dublin City Council

The opening session on the second day of the conference focused on funding opportunities. Martin Colreavy provided an overview of Project Ireland 2040 as well as the high-level priorities under the National Planning Framework. He discussed the policy context relating to Housing for All, how to



Martin Colreavy (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage)

achieve strategic delivery and implementation, and discussed the various affordable housing schemes currently in the pipeline.

Laura Behan discussed delivery of affordable housing and cost rental housing by local authorities. She discussed the mechanics of using the Affordable Housing Fund to fund the delivery of affordable housing and how it operates. Laura also explained how the Affordable Housing Fund can be utilised in conjunction with the Land Acquisition Fund.



Laura Behan (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage)



James O'Halloran (Clúid)

James O'Halloran provided a background to Clúid Housing and explained how they fund the delivery of new homes through CAS, CALF, CREL and private finance. He highlighted the benefits of funding opportunities to help meet specific housing need, reduce delivery costs and deliver at scale. He discussed the management and maintenance of homes by Clúid and provided examples of affordable housing schemes delivered through developer design and build and Clúid design and build.

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Michelle Robinson discussed how to optimise opportunities to deliver affordable housing. She noted the complex, challenging and time-consuming environment in which many housing practitioners operate. She also emphasized the importance of local authorities taking a leadership role when it comes to delivering affordable housing and gave an overview of the affordable housing delivery pipeline for Dublin City Council.



Michelle Robinson (Dublin City Council)

Session 4: Opportunities for a Sustainable Future

Chaired by David Silke – Director of Insights and Operation, The Housing Agency

- John-Mark McCafferty – CEO, Threshold
- Ciarán Hayes – Principal, Ciarán Hayes Consultancy LTD
- Lynn McMahon – Sustainable Design Co-Ordinator, LDA

The final session of the second day was chaired by David Silke and focused on the topic “Opportunities for A Sustainable Future”.

John-Mark McCafferty spoke about the idea of sustainability and the challenges of arriving at a shared understanding of sustainability. He discussed tenure mix and considered what an optimal tenure mix looks like, as well as what an optimal private sector looks like. He spoke about energy poverty and retrofitting of housing stock. John-Mark also considered the regulation of local authority and approved housing body housing.



John-Mark McCafferty (Threshold)



Ciarán Hayes

Ciarán Hayes discussed the theme of sustainability through the lens of leadership. He considered the policy context relating to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), EU Green Deal, and national and local policy. He discussed the issues and challenges associated with regeneration projects in relation to retrofitting, funding and behavioural change.

Lynn McMahon provided attendees with an overview of the Land Development Agency's Sustainable Development Strategy and discussed compact growth in relation to sustainability targets. Lynn spoke about some examples of sustainable developments which the LDA has been involved with, in Shanganagh, Dublin and Arthur's Wood, Wicklow.



Lynn McMahon (LDA) and Ciarán Hayes

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 is key to progressing Housing for All.
2. **Maximising the opportunities to deliver housing** under the Housing for All plan.
3. Addressing **homelessness** and **vacancy** is a significant challenge for the housing sector.
4. Considering **sustainability** and **the role of sustainable communities** will be critical in future housing developments.
5. Working to ensure we have a well-planned, **evidence-based** and policy-led housing system.

Conference Close

The conference was closed by Bob Jordan, CEO of the Housing Agency. He thanked delegates for their participation throughout the conference, highlighting the number of new staff in the housing sector. He reflected on the topics covered during the sessions and noted the talent within the sector in Approved Housing Bodies, local authorities, and the private sector. He noted some standout messages from speakers, such as the commitment, confidence and passion within teams who are working with tenants on a day-to-day basis. Mr. Jordan stated that **collaboration is a solution to complex problems**. He discussed cost rental as a new tenure and the various opportunities to deliver it at scale. He concluded by thanking all of those involved in the organisation of the conference, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Eileen Dunne, and all the speakers who participated in plenary sessions and workshops over the day and a half conference.



Bob Jordan (The Housing Agency)

Acknowledgments

The event was organised by the Policy & Practice team in The Housing Agency: David Silke, Roslyn Molloy, Sarah Walsh, Graeme Fryer, Breda Heffernan, Jessica Hannon, Johanna Wiedermann, Nicola Turley, Vivienne Pringle, and Sorcha McMahon.



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