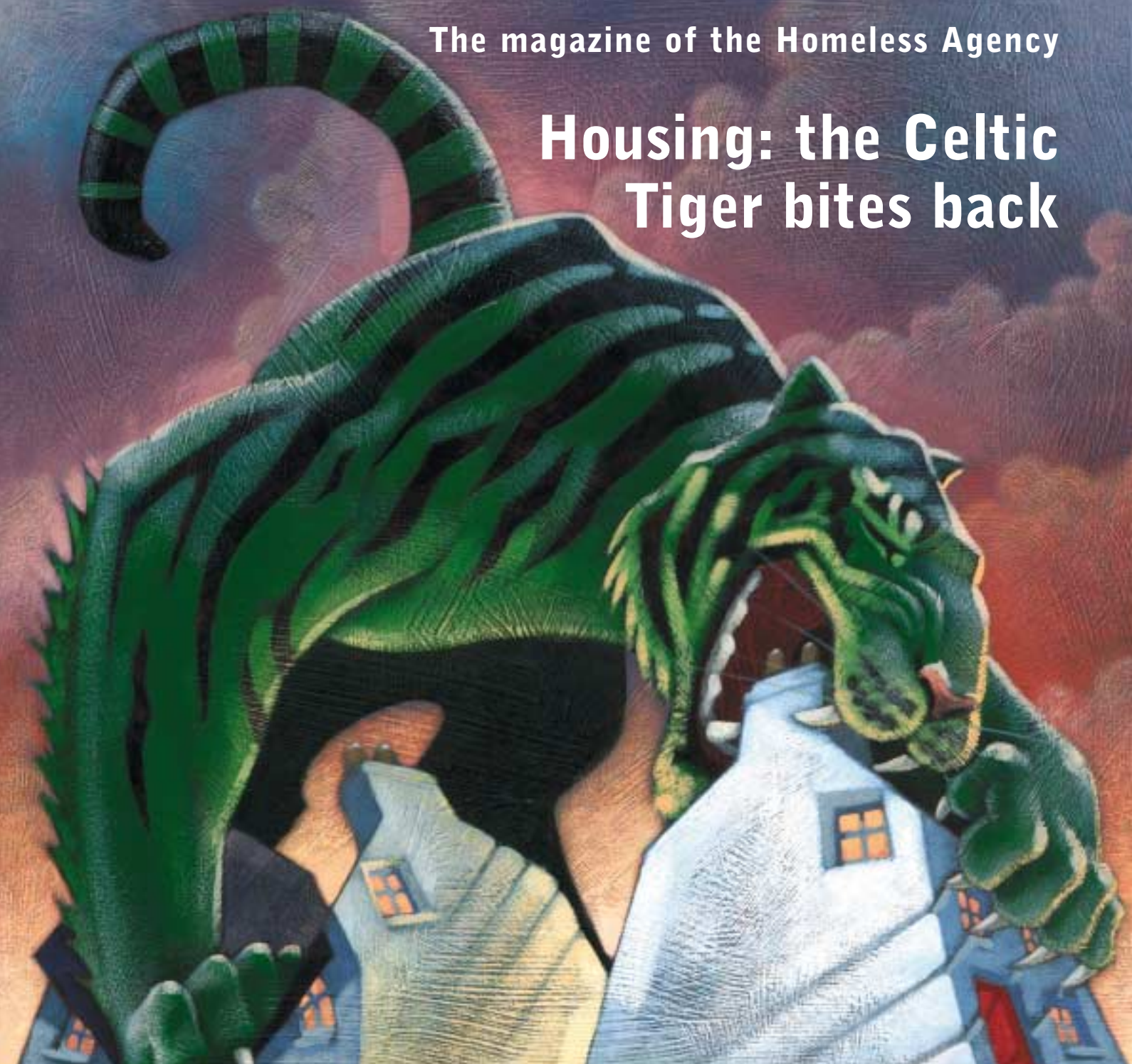


CornerStone

ISSUE NO.15 APRIL 2003

The magazine of the Homeless Agency

Housing: the Celtic Tiger bites back



**Old Part V and
new Part V**

**Who does Dublin City
Council house?**

**Which way for
public housing?**

The Homeless Agency is a governmental body launched in May 2001 which is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and delivery of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area. The staff team, led by director Mary Higgins, is advised by a consultative forum, and reports to a board of management which comprises representatives from both the statutory and voluntary sector.

The agency brings together a range of voluntary and statutory agencies that are working in partnership to implement agreed plans on the delivery of services to people who are homeless, assisting them to move rapidly to appropriate long term housing and independence. A major task is the implementation of the three year plan **Shaping the Future** produced on foot of the government report, **Homelessness — An Integrated Strategy**.

The Homeless Agency co-ordinates all homeless services in the Dublin area; delivers some direct services; provides training and other supports; monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of services; carries out research; and administers funding to homeless services.

The logo for the Homeless Agency, featuring the words "HOME", "LESS", and "agency" stacked vertically in a bold, sans-serif font. "HOME" and "LESS" are in a larger font size than "agency".

Publications referred to in this issue of CornerStone:

Draft Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

This can be found at www.dsdni.gov.uk/publications/documents/HousingBill.pdf

Local Authority Assessments of Social Housing Needs

This is contained in Housing Statistics Bulletin, September Quarter 2002 published by The Stationery Office and available from Government Publications, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2; or by mail order from Government Publications, Mail Order Section, Tel 01 647 6000 Fax 01 747 6843. Price €2.79. Unlike the previous assessment, this one is not available on the Internet

Planning and Development Act 2000

Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002

Both are at www.irlgov.ie/oireachtas/frame.htm

Profile of Households Accommodated by Dublin City Council: Analysis of Socio-Demographic, Income and Spatial Patterns, 2001

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The views expressed in CornerStone do not necessarily represent the views of the Homeless Agency, its management board, or consultative forum.

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Housing need

During the last ten years there has been a huge increase in the number of people unable to afford their existing rents, and major changes in the types of households in housing need. This was revealed with publication of the triennial 2002 Local Authority Assessments of Social Housing Need towards the end of last year. It comprises information collected from each of the 90 housing authorities in the country.

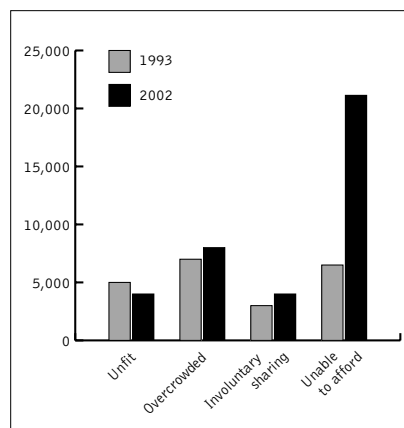
A total of 48,413 households were assessed as being in housing need and suitable for social rented housing (i.e. local authorities or housing associations). But this isn't the full extent of people in need of housing, since it doesn't include households 'suited to Supplementary Welfare Allowance', or people living in unfit, overcrowded or materially unsuitable local authority housing, or people whose needs can best be met by 'other social housing measures'. These total 7720 households, so the total number of households in housing need is at least 56,000.

The 'suited to Supplementary Welfare Allowance' category is particularly unsatisfactory. It used to be a euphemism for 'single people or childless couples' whose housing needs were not seen to be the responsibility of local authorities. Fortunately this has changed in recent years, and some local authorities, including all the Dublin authorities, entered zero in this category. There are a total of 2899 households living in unfit or overcrowded local authority housing. Dublin City Council accounts for 85% of these, which suggests perhaps a greater level of knowledge of its own stock than some other authorities. Also, Dublin has more housing in apartments than other authorities, which unlike houses, has not been sold to tenants.

Overall, the number of households in housing need assessed as suitable for social housing has increased by 70% in the last six years.

For the first time information has been gathered on housing applicants from outside the EU. They were placed in one of three categories: 'refugee status', 'permission to remain in the state', and 'work permits'. There are 135 households in the 'work permits' category, which is a bit odd since people with work permits are not entitled to local authority housing! The other two categories account for just over 2500 households.

Among those who are assessed as suitable for social housing the great majority are either living in unfit or materially unsuitable accommodation; living in overcrowded accommodation; involuntarily sharing with others; or unable to afford their present housing. The changes since the assessment of ten years ago in 1993 are striking, as the table shows.

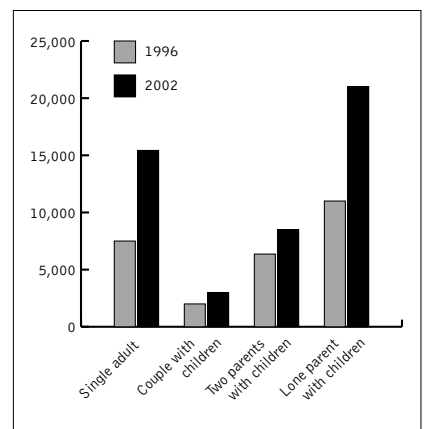


Categories of housing need in 1993 and 2002

In the last decade, unfitness has reduced in line with a general improvement in the physical state of the housing stock; and overcrowding and involuntarily sharing have increased very modestly (far less than the total increase in need). The number of households unable to afford

their current housing has increased by nearly 3½ times; a consequence of rising property prices and their impact on private rented sector rents.

Household structure has changed pretty dramatically too as the table shows. Figures for lone parent households were not available in 1993, so this comparison is with 1996.



Household structure in 1996 and 2002

Overall, the number of households in housing need assessed as suitable for social housing has increased by 70% in the last six years. But some household types grew much more than others. The relatively small number of couples without children increased by a modest 56% and the number of two parents families increased by only a third. However, the number of single adult households doubled and lone parent households increased by 85%.

The increase in the number of single person households may not mean that their numbers in housing need have doubled; rather that single people are now more likely to register with local authorities, and local authorities are more likely to accept them on the housing list.

Both of these have significant implications for providers of social housing. Single people now make up a third of housing lists, but the great

majority of the social housing stock is family housing, so if local authorities and housing associations are going to house more single people they will have to build more units for single people, which is of course per capita more expensive than providing family housing.

The growing number of lone parent households also presents challenges for local authorities, in particular emphasising the importance of their role in anti-

poverty work (see *Dublin City Council tenants: a profile* on page 10).

There are other questions, perhaps more fundamental that need answers. To what extent is the existing triennial assessment a useful measure of housing need? Are groups or categories included that should not be? Are groups of categories excluded that should be included? Is a person who is unable to afford their housing, in greater or less

housing need than someone who is living in an overcrowded house with their parents? Is a lone parent with children living in unfit housing, in greater or less housing need than a person with a disability living in physically sound but completely inappropriate housing?

In other words, is the assessment as it currently stands, a useful and appropriate tool with which to drive social housing policy? ■

Irish soothsayers subdued...

This is the time of year when goats and sheep are rounded up and dragged off to be sacrificed in return for hot tips about house prices in the year ahead. But are the hot tips any good? Let's have a look at how they did last year. Don't forget that in 2001, house prices actually fell, consequently in early 2002, commentators were uncharacteristically downbeat. '...any increase this year should be modest,' said Sherry Fitzgerald; '...real house prices rising by about 4 per cent,' predicted the Bank of Ireland; '3 to 5 per cent' said Douglas Newman Good; '...many commentators predicted that growth would be no higher than the 4.4% recorded in 2001' commented permanent tsb.

So, a remarkable degree of agreement. But what actually happened?

That of course depends on who you ask. Even predicting the past is not an exact science, so whereas permanent tsb, which maintains that prices rose nationally by 13.3%, agrees with the Bank of Ireland who put it at 14%; Sherry Fitzgerald claims that the real increase was half as much again at 20%.

(The Department of the Environment and Local Government's figures aren't out yet.)

Not many marks for accuracy there then. Generally they were out by a factor of between three and four.

This year, the soothsayers are still predicting a slow down in house price inflation, this time on the basis that supply and demand are

beginning to match. So, Gunne states, '3%-5% nationally,' a figure similar to the Bank of Ireland which predicts 5% increases in second hand houses and no increase at all in new house prices. The IAVI (Irish Auctioneers and Valuers Institute) forecasts an increase of, 'a more

modest 6%', and Sherry Fitzgerald, optimistic as ever, prophesise '...a more desirable double digit level.'

Perhaps we should leave the last word with Ken MacDonald, managing director of Hooke and MacDonald. He said in early 2002

Don't forget that in 2001, house prices actually fell, consequently in early 2002, commentators were uncharacteristically downbeat.

that he felt house price surveys 'are for the birds' and don't reflect what is happening in the marketplace. ■

English soothsayers scared

House prices in England are set to slump by more than 30 per cent over the next three years, according to experts. 'The whole of modern history tells us the prices are bound to fall', said Andrew Oswald, professor of economics at Warwick University. His views are shared by a number of building societies and estate agents.

Professor Oswald points out that people treat a house as both a place to sleep and a place in which to put their savings. 'Yet they would never dream of expecting red wine and coffee to come out of the same glass.'

He claims that a number of aspects of the private market have the effect of forcing prices up, and he calls for action on five fronts:

1. Houses should be subject to the same rate of capital gains tax as other assets;
 2. Private renting should be revived;
 3. Variable rate mortgages should be abolished;
 4. Stamp duty on houses should go;
 5. England should follow the Scottish system in which an agreement to buy a house is contractually binding.
- Some ideas there for us perhaps? ■

McMugabe?

Depending on where you stood, 'Scotland's feudal system of land ownership was swept away' or it was a 'Mugabe-style land grab'.

The Land Reform Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament at the end of January with 101 MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) from Labour, Liberal Democrat and Scottish Nationalist Party voting in favour, and 19 Tories voting against.

The bill grants the public unprecedented access to almost all private land, and will also allow communities first refusal on land when it comes up for sale. Furthermore it gives crofters a controversial new right to force landowners to sell their land, even if they do not want to.

The land question in Scotland has of course many parallels with battles fought over a century ago in Ireland although it has taken a rather different course. Currently only 343 people or bodies own more than half of all private rural land,



and when the Scottish parliament was formed in 1999, ministers made it clear that land reform would be a priority.

Tory MSP Bill Aitken claimed the bill was revenge for the Highland clearances when thousands of Scots were thrown off the land to make way for sheep. 'This bill has nothing to do with land reform and everything to do with

the other parties in this parliament being obsessed by replaying the class wars of 200 years ago,' he said.

But Lib Dem MSP George Lyon said, 'We seek to empower the many ordinary people who live and work in Scotland — you seek to support the many absentee landlords who see land as a tax shelter and an investment vehicle.' ■

Contrasts

In 2002:

- over two dozen Dublin homes were sold for more than €2 million.
- an entire derelict Co Monaghan village with 23 houses, dance hall and old mill, once home to over 150 people, was sold for a little over €600,000.

Hounding the homeless

In the last few months there have been reports of crack downs on homeless people in a number of cities:

- In France, the Sarkozy law, named after the Interior Minister, criminalises begging with fines of up to €45,000 for people convicted of enlisting others to engage in organised begging;
- In Santa Monica, California, it is illegal to sit or lie in city doorways overnight;

- City officials in San Francisco have launched advertising campaigns urging citizens to ignore panhandlers' (beggars) requests;
- The London Borough of Westminster plans to fine people up to €750 for sleeping rough in parts of central London;
- In Cambridge, England, Police launched an operation to clean the

streets of beggars using the Vagrancy Act of 1824;

- An ordinance in Los Angeles prohibits sitting, lying or sleeping on any public sidewalk, street alley or other public way at any time anywhere in the city. This is part of Police Chief William J. Bratton's 'broken windows' theory, which holds that cracking down on low-level offences prevents more serious crimes.

Campaigners have expressed concern. A spokesperson for the British charity Crisis, said there was a 'worrying trend' to criminalise homeless people. Carol Sobel, a private lawyer working with the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) which has filed a federal law suit in a bid to stop the Police ticketing and arresting homeless people in Los Angeles, claims the policy is designed to drive homeless

people out of skid row at a time when property values in the area are rising.

As CornerStone went to press the British government announced that begging is to be outlawed. People convicted of begging will be given a criminal record and after three convictions courts will be able to impose a 'community penalty' such as drug treatment or work in the community.

The report which led to these proposals claims 'There is no need for anyone to beg in this country', and says homeless people are entitled to benefits and '...the majority of people who beg are doing so to sustain a drug habit and giving them money on the street does not serve to help them deal with their problems' It is likely that campaigners will oppose these measures vigorously. ■

Wide-ranging housing laws in Northern Ireland

A Housing Bill that had reached Committee Stage when the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended has now become the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, after being passed by the Houses of Commons and Lords at Westminster.

The legislation, which is the first primary legislation on social housing in Northern Ireland for more than a decade, covers:

- Anti-social behaviour on housing estates
- Introductory tenancies
- Grants to improve the standard of private sector housing
- The provision of caravan sites for Travellers
- A registration scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation

Interestingly, the government statement accompanying the new legislation forgets

to mention the 'introductory' tenancies. This is not a special offer of a tenancy at half price, but a special offer of a year long probationary tenancy with no

security of tenure.

During this period, the landlord (Northern Ireland Housing Executive or a housing association) can get a court order to evict the tenant and as long as the

correct procedure has been followed, the court has to make the order.

Once a tenant becomes a secure tenant, following a successful stint as an introductory tenant, s/he can only be evicted if the proper procedure is followed, *and* only for reasons prescribed in legislation.

The registration scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation provides the outline of a potentially powerful regulatory mechanism for much of the private rented sector. It gives the executive wide discretion in the operation

of a registration scheme, including the information to be inserted in the register; the properties that are included in the scheme; and the fee to be charged.

Furthermore, it allows for control conditions, that is, preventing multiple occupation of a house unless it is registered and the number of households is no greater than the number registered for it. Registration may be refused or revoked where the house is unsuitable for multiple occupation and incapable of being made suitable; or the person having control of the house is not a fit and proper person. Registration can require that works necessary to make the house suitable are carried out, and can impose conditions relating to the management of the house.

Commenting on the Order, Des Browne MP, the Minister with responsibility for Social Development said: 'This wide-ranging Order will strengthen the current legislation and provide powers to deal more effectively with issues that have been causing concern for some time.' ■

...s/he can only be evicted if the proper procedure is followed...

Right to buy restrictions in England

British deputy prime minister John Prescott, has announced plans to more than halve tenant purchase discounts in 42 councils in London and the south east. The aim is to protect dwindling supplies of affordable housing in high stress areas, and the local authorities will have the option of reducing the maximum discount from about €57,000 to €24,000.

The move has been criticised by campaigners for not going far enough and by the Tory party, which would like to extend tenant purchase to all housing association tenants, for going too far.

The move also aims to reduce exploitation of the generosity of the scheme by private companies. Evidence has emerged of a scam

involving luring tenants into buying their homes with the offer of a large cash lump sum. In return the tenants agree to move out as soon as the home is purchased so that the companies can let out the homes at market rents. The tenant purchasers then wait three years before selling off the home so that they don't have to pay back the discount. ■

The days of unprecedented economic growth are over and we now face serious economic problems.

Jim Power argues that housing is one of the biggest of these.

Housing: a major casualty of the Celtic Tiger



Whether one is prepared to accept it or not, the era of the Celtic Tiger has ended. Since the middle of 2001 the economy has slowed sharply due to a combination of factors, including the meltdown of the global IT sector and the subsequent US recession, the Foot and Mouth scare and of course the horrific events of September 11th 2001. It is also true to say that after a period of such unplanned and unprecedented growth, it was inevitable that the economy would eventually run out of capacity and slow of its own volition. The Celtic Tiger era really spanned the years from 1995 to 2001.

Between those two years, economic growth measured in GDP terms (which includes the profits earned by multinationals but not yet repatriated) expanded at an annual average rate of 8.1 % per annum, while in GNP terms (which excludes those repatriated profits and is thus a better measure of the health of the domestic economy), it expanded at an annual average rate of 7.4%. Growth rates of these magnitudes are unprecedented in a modern developed economy and represent a phenomenon, which on the surface at least, we should be justifiably proud of. On the back of this growth, the unemployment rate fell to 3.6 % of the labour force in 2001, a rate that would have been

totally unimaginable a decade earlier when the rate it stood at 15 %. The public finances also improved considerably, facilitating a generous reduction in the tax burden and strong growth in public spending. In terms of GDP per capita, Ireland moved up through the EU average, and if this is taken as a gauge of wealth, well then Ireland did truly transform itself from a poor relation in the EU to a first world wealthy economy.

These statistics represent one definition of success, but not everybody's. After a decade of strong growth during which the state coffers generated considerable wealth, it is questionable if we are much better off in real terms. Despite the growth, or perhaps because of it, Ireland is now left with serious problems. Inflation is running at more than twice the EU average, the physical infrastructure is of third world quality, public transport is seriously inefficient, and traffic congestion has become a nasty fact of life. Education facilities and class size are not of a quality that we should be proud of, and as we were reminded once again in the early days of 2003, that the health service is a shambles. We may be growth rich, but the quality of life has arguably deteriorated for many over the past decade. Government policy has been driven by the simple maxim that high GDP growth is good and low GDP growth is bad. The net result of this approach is that growth in the economy was pushed to levels in excess of its potential and the result was leading to an overheated economy with serious congestion, rampant asset price and other inflation, and a general deterioration in the quality of life as defined in broader terms than purely economics.

After a decade of strong growth ...it is questionable if we are much better off in real terms.

Price'. I suppose in one sense this title is accurate, based on the premise that house prices have continued to rise sharply in the interim period. However, I would contend that house prices back in 2000 were obscenely expensive and today are even more so. The reality of the situation is that many young people and not so young people have been priced out of the market or are being forced to take on board mortgages that will act as a millstone around their necks for the rest of their lives. This then necessitates two parents both parties in the couple being forced to work and pay exorbitant childminding fees for the privilege of being able to do so. Furthermore, the social consequences of having both parents working

outside the home have yet to be seen and may not be positive in terms of social stability. For those not interested in acquiring such millstones, the option is to either rent, get their parents to re-mortgage their own home, or to buy miles out of town and spend half their life commuting.

The renting option is an obvious one, but is not to everybody's liking. Ireland has one of the highest levels of home ownership in the developed world. The first thing most Irish people want to do when they get a job is to purchase their own home. Why this is such a strong part of the Irish psyche is hard to say, but probably dates back to the famine period when owning property was seen as a form of security in a very insecure world. However, this psyche may have to change and the renting option may be the only one available. But here again the cost of renting has increased sharply over the past decade and for many it represents dead money. Perhaps if one is given tax relief for mortgage payments, then one should be given appropriate tax relief for rent paid. The other option of course would be to impose rent controls.

At the end of the day, the dramatic increase in house prices over the past decade has not been economically positive and in fact can increase the vulnerability of the economy. The only ones to really benefit are investors, and while they do satisfy a rental demand, it adds very little real economic value. Rather, housing has become an unaffordable luxury for many people and has created debt levels that could leave individual borrowers and the economy in general in a very vulnerable situation in the event of some external shock. Some economists argue on the basis of historically low mortgage rates, that housing affordability is not a problem,; but at the end of the day it doesn't matter where interest rates are, if one loses one job, due for example to a decision taken by a CEO in California or a terrorist in Afghanistan, it doesn't matter whether interest rates are high or low. With the average mortgage having increased so much, mortgage holders and indeed the whole economy are very vulnerable to such a shock and is a huge potential source of instability going forward.

It is all very well to say that with housing supply in the aggregate now matching demand that house price inflation should level off, but the reality is that the supply rarely coincides with the demand in a locational sense, and in established areas with limited supply, prices can continue to rise strongly. It is in the far out suburbs where lots of development land is available that supply will outstrip demand and push down prices, creating its own problems. If we think those in the private sector have difficulties, problems, spare a thought for those on public sector waiting lists. At the end of the day, housing will represent one of the biggest challenges for future governments for years to come, and any intervention by Government needs to be prudent, unlike much of the intervention seen over the past decade. ■

If we think those in the private sector have difficulties, problems, spare a thought for those on public sector waiting lists.

In my view however, the most negative legacy of the Celtic Tiger era is the housing market. Back in 2000, a stock broking firm based in Dublin issued a report on the housing market with the distasteful title, of 'Housing in Ireland: Cheap at the



DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL

...the most innovative aspect of the study is the data it utilises.

The latest edition in the Housing Unit research series was published in November 2002. The study, which was carried out by the Housing Unit in conjunction with Dublin City Council's Social Inclusion Unit, presents a socio-demographic, spatial and income profile of the 24,073 households and 67,956 individuals accommodated by the Council in 2001. This article explains the objectives of the study; summarises its findings in relation to the characteristics of the households accommodated by Dublin City Council; suggests reasons for the findings and identifies their implications for housing and social inclusion policy making.

Why do the study?

The primary objective of the study is to inform the development of plans to improve the quality of local authority housing and estate management and to combat social exclusion within the City Council's

operational area. Secondly, it is envisaged that this report will assist service planning by the other community and statutory agencies which provide services to Dublin City Council tenants.

The third objective of the research is to contribute to our knowledge of local authority tenants and of poverty and housing tenure in Ireland. The available evidence indicates that local authority tenants have high rates of poverty, particularly in urban areas. Research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that 49.8% of local authority tenant households had incomes below 50% of average in 1994 as compared to just 18.8% of the population as a whole¹, and also in that year 50.9% of urban local authority tenants had incomes below 50% of average as compared to 47.5% of their rural counterparts². According to the ESRI the high levels of poverty among local authority tenants can be explained by their socio-demographic characteristics — the characteristics associated with poverty such as lone

¹ Nolan, B, Whelan, C and Williams, J, (1998), *Where are Poor Households? The Spatial Distribution of Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland*, Dublin, Oak Tree Press.

² Nolan, B and Whelan, C (1999), *Loading the Dice? A Study of Cumulative Disadvantage*, Dublin, Oak Tree Press.



Research published recently by the Housing Unit paints a detailed picture of Dublin City Council tenants.



Michelle Norris

summarises the findings and their implications for housing and social exclusion policy.

TENANTS : A PROFILE



parenthood, long term unemployment and low levels of education are more common among local authority tenants than the rest of the population. However, they found the higher levels of poverty among urban local authority tenants more difficult to explain because their socio-demographic characteristics are practically identical to their rural counterparts.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the study is the data it utilises. Local authorities countrywide collect detailed information on incomes of tenant households in order to determine their rents, which are related to income. As far as I am aware this is the first time that information of this type has been re-used for planning and service development purposes, so the study also demonstrates the potential use of administrative data for wider purposes.

Different household types compared with general population

Dublin City Council's housing stock consists of three types of dwelling: standard houses which account for 42.6% of total stock; flats (44.3% of stock), and dwellings designated specifically for senior citizens (13.1% of stock). This stock is divided into nine

geographical areas for administrative purposes and the predominant type of dwelling varies between these areas. Flats are the predominant type of dwelling in Ballymun in the north of the city and in the Southeast and the South inner city areas, whilst houses dominate Finglas, Ballyfermot and the North Central areas.

Our research confirms that the composition of Dublin City Council tenant households varies significantly from the general Irish population in a number of important respects. Amongst tenant households the proportion of children aged under 14 years is higher than in the national population. The proportion of the city council tenant population aged 65 years and over is lower than in the Irish population as a whole, but on the other hand at 58.6%, the number of female-headed tenant households is higher than the national average. The City Council tenant population also contains a much higher proportion of single person and lone parent households than the general Irish population.

...all types of tenant households are poorer than their counterparts in the general Irish population

More unemployment among tenants

The sources and levels of income and levels of employment among Dublin City Council tenant households also differ from the general Irish population. The average income of a tenant households was €313.24 per week in 2001 — this is less than half of the national average weekly household income for the 1999/2000 period which stood at €666.96. The average incomes of female members of City Council tenant households, is consistently lower than men across all age groups. Average incomes of single adult and lone parent tenant households are lower than all other types of household accommodated by Dublin City Council.

The low level of income of city council tenants is obviously related to their sources of income. Only 28.3% of adults had income from employment, while 17% were dependant on Unemployment Assistance and 2.5% claimed Unemployment Benefit. This level of unemployment is very high compared to the general Irish population — the national unemployment rate was only 4% in 2001. In addition, Unemployment Benefit can only be claimed for the first 65 weeks of unemployment, which indicates that the unemployment among tenants is long term in nature. Interestingly heads of households are less likely to be employed than other household members. One Parent Family Payment is also a common source of income for city council tenants — 20% of which claimed this benefit in 2001, while 14.4% of adults claimed an old age pension of some type and 10.1% claimed disability benefit.

Tenants poorer than general population

The data examined for this study, illustrated in Figure 1, shows that all types of tenant households are poorer than their counterparts in the general Irish population. This applies both to lone parent households which have a high level of poverty countrywide, and to two parent households which have a low level of poverty countrywide.

Figure 1 also shows that the majority — nearly two thirds — of local authority tenant households in all parts of Dublin City have incomes below 50% of the national average. However, as Figure 2 shows, levels of income poverty vary geographically.

In 2001 Ballyfermot accommodated the highest proportion of tenant households with incomes below 50% of average, and the Southeast City the lowest.

Widening poverty gap between tenants and general population

The data examined for this study indicates high levels of income poverty among households accommodated by Dublin City Council compared to the general Irish population, and a widening gap between the income poverty levels of these two groups. These can be accounted for by three factors.

- Firstly, fewer Dublin City Council tenants have escaped from income poverty by seeing their income rise since the mid 1990s compared with the general population; and a higher proportion of households have seen their income poverty deepen, compared with the general population.
- Secondly, household types with high levels of poverty countrywide are not only more numerous among the city council tenant population; they are also significantly poorer than their counterparts in the general population. This is because they often possess several characteristics associated with poverty; in other words, they are multiply disadvantaged. For instance, only 26.6% of the lone parent tenants had income from employment in 2001, as compared to 45.5% of all Irish lone parents.
- Thirdly, household types which are associated with low levels of poverty in the general Irish population, such as two parent households, tend to suffer much high poverty levels if accommodated by Dublin City Council, mainly because of their much higher rate of unemployment.

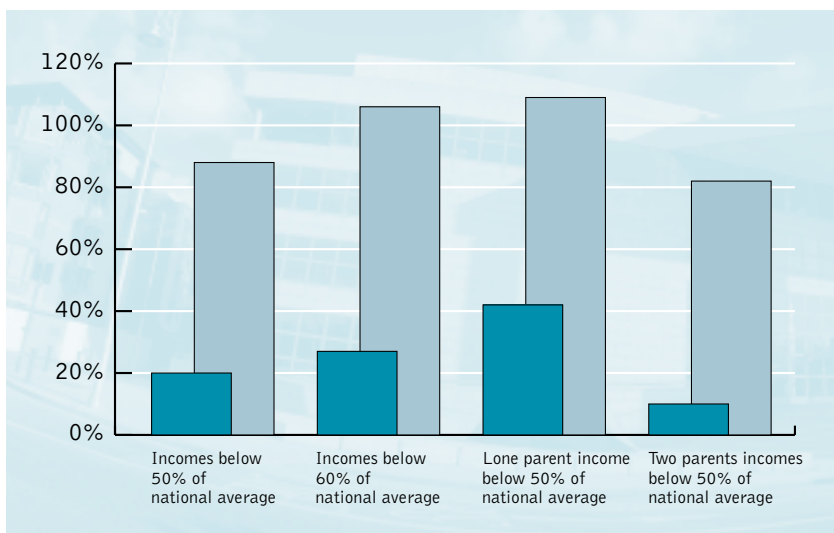


Figure 1: Incomes of Dublin City Council tenants and general population (Note: all percentages are from 2001 except lone parent and two parent incomes for general population, which are from 1998)

Legend:
■ General population
■ Dublin City Council tenants

These last two factors may account for the higher than expected proportion of low-income households in local authority dwellings in cities in Ireland as compared to rural areas highlighted earlier in this article.

The varying levels of income poverty among tenants living in different parts of the City are also the result of a number of factors. For instance it is related to the fact that the predominant household composition varies between different parts of the City, and as was mentioned above different household types have different levels of poverty. However, it appears that the most significant influence on these geographical variations in income poverty levels is employment. The tenant population in the South East City area includes both the lowest percentage of households with incomes below 50% of average and the highest percentage of individuals aged between 18 and 65 with income from employment. The tenant population in Ballyfermot, on the other hand, includes the lowest proportion of individuals of working age in employment (12.7%) and the highest proportion of households with incomes below 50% of average.

Local authorities' key role in anti-poverty work

The *Review of the Poverty Proofing Process* which was recently published by the National Economic and Social Council (2001) identifies lack of detailed data in relation to poverty and social inclusion in Ireland as a key barrier to the effective design of new policies and programmes to address these issues and to the assessment of the anti-poverty measures in existence. This report highlights a potential role for administrative data in filling this information gap, particularly in providing detailed local level data, which has not been available to date. Since the completion of this report the Housing Unit and Dublin City Council's Social Inclusion Unit have made contact with the other local authority social inclusion units around the country with a view to assisting them to carry out a similar exercise. In addition, it is envisaged that this project will be replicated on a regular basis by Dublin City Council, which will enable the council to monitor changes among its tenant population that may have implications for resource allocation and service provision. The Housing Unit has also made detailed recommendations to the council on record keeping. During the process of compiling this report it emerged that, with some minor reform of collection, storage and recording methods, other administrative data relating to the housing service such as waiting lists and information on the allocation of dwellings could be used to paint an even more detailed picture of the needs of tenants and to plan appropriate policies and services. Each of these follow-on projects will adhere

...in future local authorities will play a more central role in anti-poverty work

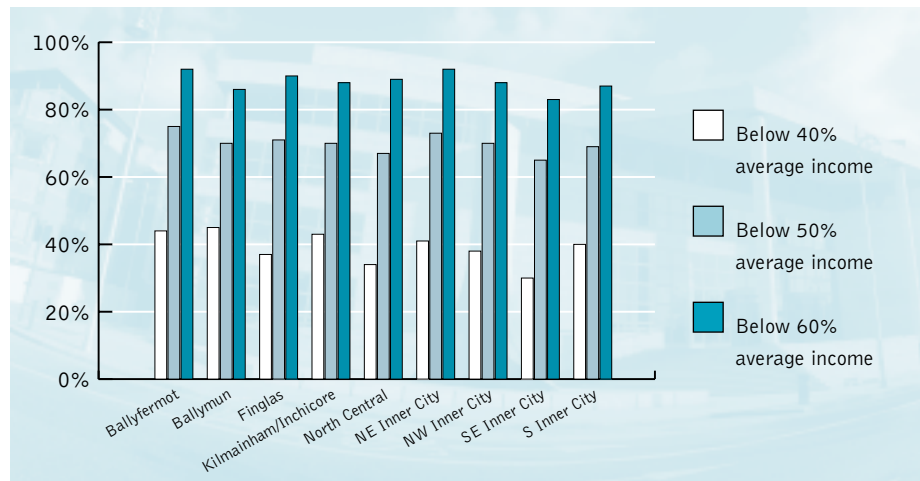


Figure 2: Level of poverty among Dublin City Council tenant households by district, 2001

to the protocols, which were developed and followed during this project, with regard to the use of local authority administrative data for planning and research.

This research project has revealed very high levels of income poverty among Dublin City Council tenant households, however it also important to take account of the fact that these households spend significantly less on accommodation than homeowners with a mortgage and private renting tenants. On average, city council tenants paid €32.06 per week in rent in 2001, about 11% of weekly incomes. For a significant number this payment also includes heating. This highlights the important role that the local authority housing service, and especially the system of low, income related rents that is used in this sector, plays in combating poverty in Ireland.

The research identified a number of reforms to the system for calculating the rents of Dublin City Council tenant households which would help to combat income poverty, however in addition to this, additional targeted programmes and measures are also required. Over the past two decades a number of anti-poverty programmes have been established in Ireland, many of which target specific geographical areas with particularly high levels of poverty and social exclusion. Until recently, the majority of these area-based anti-poverty measures have been developed outside the local government system. The recent establishment by the Department of the Environment and Local Government of social inclusion units in seven local authorities indicates that in future local authorities will play a more central role in anti-poverty work, and in view of the fact that they provide housing for such a large proportion of income poor households in Ireland, it is logical that this should be the case, however it is also vital that they receive adequate funding to carry out this work. ■

This highlights the important role that the local authority housing service, and especially the system of low, income related rents plays in combating poverty in Ireland.

'Part V' has been much discussed and much misunderstood. Now there's a new 'Part V'. What's it all about? **Declan Redmond** explains.

defeat for tenure mix



There has been a long campaign of attrition against Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and this article is something of a belated counterblast to the many critics of Part V.

The merits of the original Part V legislation are essentially twofold. For the first time, it attempted to do something about the land question. There is a growing consensus, even in government, that land prices are out of control and have been responsible for driving up house prices, and that policy intervention is necessary to curb land costs. Part V, imperfect though it was, enabled local authorities to access land for social and affordable housing at what is termed 'use value', or a fraction of the market value. Local authorities and other social housing

providers have had serious problems accessing land in urban areas, especially in competition with private developers. So, Part V gave them the ability to access land at way below market prices and to build much needed social and affordable housing. Local authorities could take 20% of the land, or 20% of the completed dwellings or 20% of serviced sites for the development of social and affordable housing.

The second merit of Part V is that this land was to be accessed on sites that would be developed by private developers so the social and affordable housing would be built alongside the private housing. The essential strength of mixing private owner occupiers with social housing tenants was not some naïve notion that everybody would mix socially, but the more fundamental premise that households should not be

disadvantaged regarding access to services and facilities because of their housing tenure. The large scale social housing estates built in the past have clearly suffered from a lack of public and private services because of their low economic base. Moreover, the evidence suggests that such areas have, because of their social and geographic segregation, lacked the formal and informal ties into labour markets and wider social networks. Given the history of market dominance in housing provision, and the extraordinary spatial segregation of housing tenure in Ireland, this legislation represented a welcome and radical intervention. The legislation opened up the possibility of the creation of long-term imaginative solutions to integrated housing schemes. These two mechanisms of planning gain and tenure mix, or something like them, are available in other EU countries and there has not been a collapse in society, housing markets or anything like it.

A government review of Part V in autumn 2002 led to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002. The main changes to Part V that are enshrined in this legislation have been the abolition of the withering rule and changes to the 20% rule. According to some estimates, up to 70,000 planning permissions which were not subject to Part V requirements, and where the development was not started or not sufficiently advanced, would have expired, (withered) by the end of this year and would need to be renegotiated. The need to renegotiate these permissions, and the consequent delays, was seen as a major barrier to

housing supply. While there would be some administrative burden on planning authorities in making these permissions live again, we were not heading towards a catastrophic collapse in supply. This situation was foreseen by government and could have been dealt with if there was a will to do so. The old Part V required developers to transfer either the land, completed dwellings, or sites to the local authority as part of a planning permission. The change in the Act allows developers to offer the local authority land elsewhere or the financial equivalent of the value of the land transfer. It seems inevitable that most developers will seek to offer either land elsewhere, a financial contribution to the authority or a combination of the two. However, in urban areas, accessing land or completed dwellings is probably the preferred option of many local authorities. Over the next few years we will begin to see who wins in this battle.

These are not innocuous changes; they will fundamentally alter the potential long-term impact of the legislation. These recent changes have been

portrayed by government and the development industry, as a necessary intervention to help the first-time buyer. Old Part V has been claimed to be unworkable. Given the serious problems of housing affordability, not to mention the crisis of housing need, who can be against such a seemingly laudable change? However, while there may be some merit in the argument that Part V needed to be altered, in my view the case is slim at best. The crisis of need and affordability existed long before this legislation and has deeper and wider causes than Part V. So the provisions of the Act have been, to an extent, a convenient scapegoat and distraction to more fundamental and underlying problems in the operation of the housing system in Ireland.

Make no mistake, the changes to the Act are a defeat for social housing specifically, and more generally, a defeat for a progressive piece of legislation that aimed to create a form of social inclusion. From its inception Part V has had many detractors and enemies, and they have won a significant victory. The economic arguments against the legislation from the development industry are obvious enough. However, I think that the more insidious argument has centred on the belief that the mixing of tenures and hence of social classes, was bound to be a failure. Sometimes explicit, but more often than not implied, there was a tremendous resistance to the idea of tenure and social mix. The deeply ingrained

prejudices and intolerances contained in this idea would take a book to elaborate on, but the idea that owner occupiers and social housing tenants are worlds apart, was a motivating factor behind the resistance. The motivation was, in other words, to keep them worlds apart.

We have overturned key elements of economically and socially progressive legislation which had the potential to reduce significantly the segregation in our housing system. The worst indictment is that this legislation has been eviscerated and judged unworkable when it has barely even been tested. While there is a view that local authorities can still operate the old Part V and seek to achieve tenure mix, the alternative view, that the balance has been tipped in favour of the developer is equally persuasive. Will local authorities be able to insist on accessing land on private sites or will we see another battle about the unworkable nature of Part V? These changes are a testament to sectional interests, short sightedness, a segregationist mentality and an extremely narrow interpretation of the common good. ■



...this legislation has been eviscerated and judged unworkable when it has barely even been tested.

Which way for public housing?

Despite recent increases, public sector housing output is still a far smaller proportion of total housing output than it was a quarter of a century ago. **Joe Finnerty** argues that both another public house-building drive and a review of tenant purchase are required.



The two immediate determinants of trends in the size of public housing (or ‘local authority’) stock are levels of new build and levels of transfer of stock out of the tenure (privatisation). A major background determinant is the level of policy commitment to the tenure. In spite of two major building drives in the latter half of the twentieth century, public housing faces into a new century as a peripheral housing tenure in terms of half-hearted expansion, continued privatisation and lack of political commitment to its future.

Boosting the sector: public housing drives 1945–2001

The first house-building drive (1947–56)

In 1946, approximately one in six Irish households lived in public sector housing, with much of this stock built during a major house building drive of the 1930s. Although post-war shortages resulted in only 1,500 new dwellings being built in 1945–6, public housing accounted for 70 per cent of this total. Even when the wartime shortages had eased, public housing remained in the forefront of new construction, only once dipping below 50 per cent of total housing output in the following eight years (see Chart 2). This output was also considerable in absolute terms, with public housing construction between 1949–50 and 1954–5 considerably exceeding current output (see Chart 1).

The existence of a political consensus on the importance of public housing was illustrated in the adoption by the new coalition government of the outgoing Fianna Fáil administration’s Housing Amendment Act (1948) as the basis for the major public house-building drive of the next nine years. Under the first inter-party government of 1948–51, an ambitious programme saw public new build increase tenfold from approximately 730 dwellings in 1947 to 7,500 dwellings in 1952, representing 55 per cent of total housing output in that year.

Despite pressures on public finances associated with the economic consequences of the Korean war, severe cutbacks in public house construction did not occur until 1958–9, when output returned to 1948 levels.

The second house-building drive (1966–87)

Although Whittaker’s *Economic Development* had envisaged a predominantly private market solution to housing needs, and a shift from ‘social’ to ‘productive’ public spending, economic growth in the 1960s led, via population expansion, to increased — and politically articulated — pressures for public housing.

These pressures culminated in the Housing Act, 1966 which provided the legislative and financial framework for a twenty-year expansion of public housing output. Only once (in 1981) would public housing output dip below one-fifth of total residential new build, and the cycle would not draw to a close until the mid-1980s (see Chart 2).



This housing-building drive received a further boost when the left of centre coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour took office in 1973. Despite the OPEC-influenced 1973 recession, total new build increased from 14,000 dwellings in 1970 to approximately 25,000 dwellings by 1975, with public output comprising one third of this total. Public housing output of this magnitude — some 8,800 new dwellings in 1975 — is a post-war record and has yet to be surpassed. This building programme was maintained, albeit at a more modest rate, by the succession of governments of varied political hues that held power until the mid-1980s.

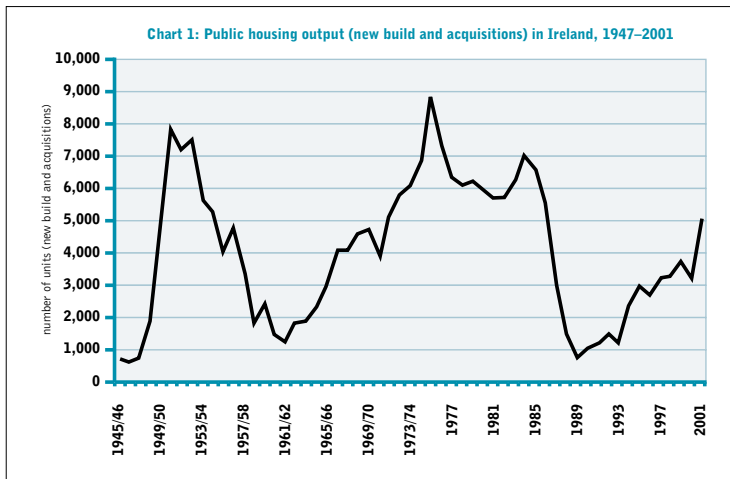
A third public housing drive (1994 to the present)?

In the latter half of the 1980s, against a backdrop of (partly domestically generated) fiscal crisis, high levels of unemployment and emigration and a resultant surplus of public housing in some local authority areas, successive administrations presided

over a decline in public housing output. Public housing output dipped to 770 dwellings in 1989, just above the absolute level of output in the years of scarcity after 1945, and this represented a mere 4.3 per cent of total house-building in that year, a post-war low.

In 1994, with a recovery in the public finances, the coalition government of Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left promised to increase substantially 'social housing' (comprising traditional public housing and housing associations) output. However, these targets were not met. Although public housing output did expand, this increase came from a very low base, so that the outturn in 1995 of approximately 3,000 dwellings represented less than 10 per cent of total housing output in that year. (Housing association output also failed to register significant gains, reaching 3 per cent of total output in 1995 and 1996 and between 1 and 2 per cent of total new build in the period 1997–2001.)

Irish privatisation was accomplished not by any sudden swing to neo-liberal policies but by a process of politically uncontroversial housing privatisation



Despite unprecedented levels of economic growth and of budget surpluses, public housing output as a percentage of total new construction averaged 8 per cent between 1992 and 2001, which is between one quarter and one-third of the levels attained in the 1966–86 house-building drive. Relative to total new build, public housing output is currently running at one-third of the levels achieved throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

Bleeding the sector: privatisation of public housing, 1945–2001

As noted above, trends in public housing size are determined by the net result of new construction (addition to stock) and of privatisation (subtraction of stock). By contrast with the UK experience, Irish privatisation was accomplished not by any sudden swing to neo-liberal policies but by a process of politically uncontroversial housing privatisation extended over many decades. (Two separate pieces of legislation governed the earlier sales: public housing in urban areas was sold under section 11 of the Housing (Ireland) Act, 1919, while rural dwellings were sold under the Labourers Act, 1936. Section 90 of the 1966 Housing Act established unitary legislation for the sale of urban and rural public housing.) The pre-war policy of selling public housing to sitting tenants at discount prices has been maintained by successive administrations to this day.

While the 1947–56 drive impacted positively on tenure share (additions to stock outweighing subtractions), increasing public new build during the second drive was not matched by a corresponding increase: there was no change in the size of public housing stock over the period of the 1966–87 drive, additions to public housing stock being balanced by losses under tenant purchase schemes.

The selling off of public housing continued throughout the years of subsequent contraction through to the third and current ‘drive’. For example, in the period 1995–2001, around 21,000 local authority houses were built or acquired, around 11,500 were sold to sitting tenants, leaving a net addition to the public housing stock of approximately 9,500 houses.

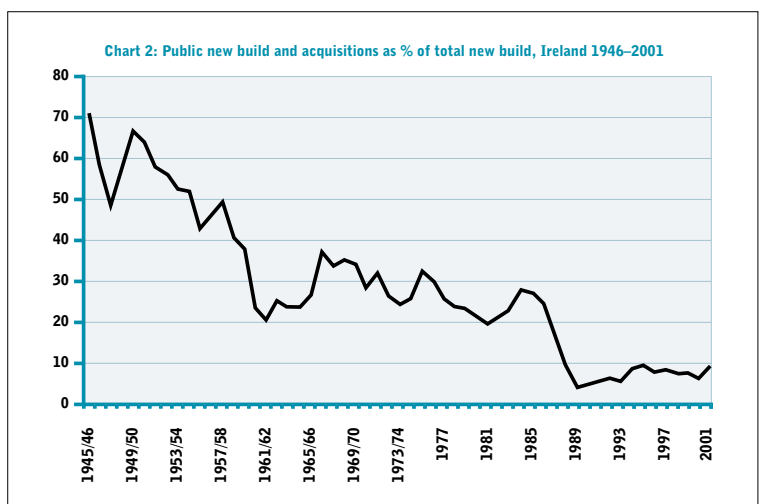
Public housing as a peripheral tenure

Throughout the 1990s, new construction outweighed sales to allow a modest expansion of public housing stock to just below 100,000 units in 2001. This modest increase during the 1990s masks a continuing decline in the relative tenure share of public housing, since it occurred at a time of record levels of private housing construction (see Chart 2). Over the period as a whole, and expressed in these relative terms, one in six Irish households were renting publicly in 1946, whereas by 2001, approximately one in thirteen households did so.

With housing requirements forecast at 40,000 new dwellings annually, Tony Fahey has pointed out that public housing output would need to double from the 5,000 units achieved in 2001 to meet its traditional role in housing between one-quarter and one-third of newly forming households. However, current targets in the National Development Plan envisage public housing output averaging only 6,000 new units over the period 2000–6.

Strengthening public housing either by staunching the flow of stock from the sector or by launching a full-blooded housing drive is not high on the political agenda. However, neither rent-supplemented private tenants, nor ‘affordable’ home ownership, nor housing associations can substitute for an expanded and well-managed public rented sector. In the context of growing — albeit politically unarticulated — demand for public housing, and a budgetary outlook once again darkened by global economic and political uncertainty, it remains to be seen whether a review of the privatisation policy will occur, in tandem with a substantial public house-building drive comparable to the two post-war drives of 1947–56 and 1966–87. ■

Strengthening public housing either by staunching the flow of stock from the sector or by launching a full-blooded housing drive is not high on the political agenda.



PACE



Priorswood House, PACE's residential project for ex-offenders was officially re-opened at the end of February, following major refurbishment after over thirty years of use. **Simon Brooke** spoke to PACE's director **Lisa Cuthbert** about Priorswood House and other PACE projects.

Priorswood House was PACE's first project, and when it was given to PACE by Dublin Corporation in 1969 it was an old farmhouse surrounded by fields. Now it is a beautifully renovated residence surrounded by housing estates. Until it closed for the renovations, Priorswood was an emergency residential project for ex-prisoners. In the 1970s a training project was opened on the site, which stayed until 1985 when it moved elsewhere, leaving Priorswood to concentrate on residential provision.

PACE is the only voluntary organisation in Ireland providing training and accommodation exclusively for offenders and ex-offenders, and it believes that breaking the cycle of re-offending is possible if people have a plan to meet their training, education, employment and housing needs. PACE currently runs Priorswood House, and a Training for

Employment project; and it is developing residential projects for women. I met PACE's director, Lisa Cuthbert in it's offices in Leeson Street.

Priorswood House's refurbishment, which was funded by the Capital Assistance Scheme, provided 14 single rooms in the main house (they were previously shared), which are classified as high support, with 24 hour staffing. 'We also have 8 apartments at the back of the house,' said Lisa. 'The idea behind these is that they are a step-down for people who have come through the high support programme in the house. They can access staff support as and when they need it, and the apartments give them a taste of independent living and managing their own bills, food, rent before they move out into the wider community. Some people with fewer needs can move straight from prison into the apartments and from there into their own accommodation.'

'It means that people know they'll have somewhere to go when they leave prison and it takes away uncertainty...'

PACE was very conscious of its relationship with the local community when planning the refurbishment. 'We made sure that the apartments were at the back and kept the façade unchanged because a lot of local people would be very attached to it, even though we'd probably have been better off knocking it down.'

'Also, Priorswood is used as a community resource; the local residents association meets there, the local AA meets there, and the football club meets there. So when we put in a separate external entrance so they didn't have to come through the house, and we installed a kitchenette in the meeting room.'

'Since we re-opened, we no longer take people on an emergency basis,' said Lisa. 'We found that it wasn't the best way of working with people. They didn't necessarily know what they were coming to, they just needed a bed, that was their motivation for being there. We found that the more we worked with people on a one-to-one basis before they came out of prison, the more success they had when they came to the house.'

'We have a more detailed assessment process now than we would have had previously, and we ask probation officers to make referrals at least 3 to 6 months before a person is going to be released. It means that people know they'll have somewhere to go when they leave prison and it takes away uncertainty, particularly for people who've been in for a long time. It gives them an extra incentive and motivation for them to address their problems, particularly around addiction. We have found that a lot of men and women would make good use of their time if they're given the opportunity, but if they're coming out to nothing, everything can be undone very quickly.'

The initial referral is made by a probation officer who fills in the referral form with their client, rather than on their behalf; this means that they understand from the beginning what Priorswood House is all about. The next stage is an interview with PACE staff, which may take up to two hours, and they are seen on at least two occasions after that before they leave prison. The great majority of people referred to Priorswood have an addiction

Problems with planning permission

PACE will be known by many for difficulties over planning permission for a housing project in the north inner city; an experience that raises important issues for many similar projects.

PACE planned to run a house for four women and two staff which would take residents for between 6 and 8 months, operating on a similar model to Priorswood House, but on a much smaller scale. 'We were advised by Dublin Corporation and an independent planning consultant that we didn't need planning permission because it came within an exempted category. But some residents disagreed – although many supported us – and appealed to An Bord Pleanála.' An Bord Pleanála decided that PACE's proposals for the house constituted a material change of use that was not an exempted development and PACE is now considering the best use for the house.

However, another house run by PACE in the inner city that houses nine women with resident staff received planning permission without a single objection.

So what lessons have PACE learnt from this?

Firstly, that you can never be sure that you won't get local opposition. 'In this instance,' said Lisa referring to the first house, 'We were very unfortunate, and I don't think there's anything we could have done differently.'

But although you can't eliminate the possibility of local opposition, you can minimise it. Lisa explained what they did in relation to the successful project. 'We went into the area long before we'd identified particular premises and spoke to community

groups and individuals, and it got to the stage where they were actually inviting us to come in.'

'So when we did eventually find a suitable property, we met the residents association of flats nearby and they were very honest and said they didn't really want us near them, but at the end of the day they didn't object when we applied for planning permission.'

'It's also sensible to try and find out if problems have arisen in the area with other projects. One of the things we had thrown at us was examples of other projects where there were problems.'

'Overall you're far more likely to be successful where you're already known, where you've already got contacts with local individuals, community and voluntary organisations. So that when you go to a residents association to talk about a particular property someone there will know you and trust you.'

Lisa emphasised the positive aspects. 'My experience of social housing is that if social housing projects are well run they are the quietest houses on the street. You'd never know they existed, and it's always our intention with any of our projects that we don't want them to be a visible presence.'

'It's not in our interest to undermine the area that we have a project in. It's not in any social housing group's interest to do that. And people are being released from prison and going into those areas everyday anyway and they're going to cause more difficulties if they're not supported and not given a chance.'

problem and where necessary PACE, the probation officer and the client work together to put in place a programme to address their needs.

People in the last year of a long sentence might be released one night a week or a month to stay in Priorswood House as they prepare for full term release, when they will move in full-time.

‘We don’t put a strict time limit on people’s stay,’ said Lisa. ‘But at the same time we don’t want people to get institutionalised. We look at an average stay of 6 to 8 months in the house and if appropriate another 3 months or so in the apartments. We have a very intensive one-to-one key working system in the house which is very much based on trust.’ PACE is well aware of the pressure some residents are under, especially if they have an addiction problem. ‘We have relapse management policies in place because we acknowledge that we’re expecting a lot from the people coming to the house, and no matter how well motivated they are, they may have a crisis.

‘We’re also looking at doing more family work, which is something we didn’t do previously. A lot of the men would have broken contact with families, and we’re looking at how you can re-establish that in a safe environment. We’ll be looking for funding for a family support worker. We’re also trying to get funding for a resettlement worker, and we’re

working with residents to find out what kind of supports they want when they move into their own accommodation.’

When they leave Priorswood, people mainly move into private rented housing although some go back to families in local authority housing. People are less likely to re-offend if they have family support. Some, who have been very institutionalised and may have other long-term problems may not be able to live independently and would move into sheltered housing.

‘With homeless people there’s always a sympathy vote but with prisoners there is a sense from some people, “well they committed crimes, they’re not the one’s who deserve the most sympathy in society”’.

Priorswood is funded mainly by the Probation and Welfare Service. ‘We’re not a popular cause for fund raising. There’d be very few people putting euro in our boxes if we were rattling them on the street. With homeless people there’s always a sympathy vote but with prisoners there is a sense from some people, “well they committed crimes, they’re not the one’s who deserve the most sympathy in society”’.

Training for employment

The training for Employment Project is based in north Dublin. ‘We offer up to 30 different courses including woodwork, metalwork, junior cert, leaving cert, and through PACE’s Open Learning Centre there are various computer courses, and there’s also art and drama. In the last year we’ve been looking more to the personal and social development side of it and we’ve developed programmes focused on working with long-term offenders on coping with life after prison, and doing one-to-one work as well as group work on the issues they face.’

People coming out of prison face a very confusing world, especially if they’ve been in prison for a long time. ‘People feel a lot of disorientation from bigger

spaces and tall buildings.’ Money of course is a huge issue; they have the euro to contend with, just as the rest of us are beginning to get used to it. And surprising enough walking presents problems too: ‘In prison they do what they call the Mountjoy walk — walking round and round the yard. And the thing about the yard is that it’s flat and level. But outside there are hills and uneven paths, so very often they have pains in their legs for some time after release as they get used to using muscles they didn’t use in prison.

‘There’s also a lot of tiredness. Prison life is very monotonous, so they sleep a lot. Often they would go to bed in the afternoon. So they come to us and by the end of the day they’re shattered.’

Refusing to leave prison...

‘We know women who had got clean whilst they were in prison and had begun to go to school or get work or training — they’d begun to deal with things. Then suddenly their time was up and they were being offered temporary

release, which meant that they could leave even though they still had a portion of the sentence to serve, and they were refusing because they had nowhere to go and they knew that if they went out to nothing they’d be straight back to square one.’ ■



FROM THE DÁIL

In December last year, **Michael Ring** (FG) asked about the changes to rent allowances. **Mary Coughlan** (FF), Minister for Social and Family Affairs responded. ... *I have decided to maintain, at their current levels, the maximum rent levels set by the health boards. ... I decided to do this because rent levels have been stable for some time and, accordingly, there is no need for health boards to set higher levels of maximum rents for the purposes of the supplementary welfare allowance rent supplement scheme. ... Second, I have decided to increase the minimum contribution that each person is required to pay towards his or her accommodation costs. The minimum contribution is currently €7.62 per week and has not been increased since 1994. ... As I announced recently, I intend to restore the minimum contribution to approximately 10% of the minimum personal social welfare rate.*

This was not good enough for Michael Ring. *Does the Minister think it is fair to introduce these changes at a time when thousands depend on rent subsidy and there is a housing crisis? The spending of over €300 million per year on rent subsidy represents mismanagement by the Government. If it put that money into providing social or affordable housing, we would not have half the problems we have...*

The minister rejoined, *I appreciate and agree that in the context of housing difficulties many constituents are looking for houses and would like to be facilitated. The scheme available supports those on low incomes, who are under pressure. As the Deputy is aware, community welfare officers are more than flexible in supporting those in greatest need and I am sure they will continue that ethos.*

But Michael Ring was not to be bought off so easily and responded with gusto. ... *Why is the Government targeting*

those on low incomes and not taking on those who charge high rents? This is a sovereign country. There is a shortage of housing. Why is the Government not doing something to address the problem? It should not be attacking those who are trying to provide homes for their families in difficult circumstances due to the shortage of accommodation. It must assist those on low incomes. If such people find it difficult to cope, the Government must instruct the health boards to deal with them in a reasonable way.

But the minister had the last word. *I am sure Deputies will agree that one of the problems is that landlords are increasing rents to the level of the maximum rent supplement available from the health boards under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. ... The supplementary welfare allowance rent subsidy scheme is in place to support those who are less well off. The take up of the scheme reflects the fact that we are supportive of those in most need. ■*

HOMELESS AGENCY UPDATE

New staff

The following staff have now taken up posts in the Agency:

Elaine Bradley

Head of Training and Development

Elaine will be responsible for developing and evaluating training for homeless service providers and mainstream services and for the development of accreditation for training. She will also be responsible for implementation and development of quality standards across the sector and for the development of human resource policies in the sector. Elaine has

extensive experience in the area of training and evaluation. Most recently she has worked as training manager with Focus Ireland and was previously responsible for their volunteer training programme.

Kathleen Murray

Service Analyst

Kathleen will be responsible for working with services and monitoring their expenditure

and activities, against the service agreements and the needs of people who are homeless. Kathleen's background is in research and programme evaluation. Most recently she has worked for the Housing Unit on a joint project with Dublin City Council examining the income and poverty levels of the council's tenants (see page 8). She has extensive experience in working with voluntary and community organisations.

New staff continued...

Albha Bowe and
Niamh Ní Cholmain
Integrated Service Advocates

Albha and Niamh will be responsible for working with service providers to systematically identify blocks to the effective settlement of people who are homeless and proposing how these blocks can be

removed, as appropriate as service delivery or policy level.

Niamh has most recently worked as a settlement officer with Dublin City Council. She has extensive experience in homeless services having most recently established the Dublin Simon transitional housing project. Formerly a psychiatric nurse, she has a

particular interest in the issue of mental health.

Albha has recently returned from Uganda where she was working for the United Nations Development Programme as a gender specialist. She has extensive experience in the area of policy development and analysis. ■

Action Plan progress and service developments

Copies of the Homeless Agency **Operational Plan for 2003**, with revised priorities are now available, free of charge from the Agency. The plan concentrates on measures which will assist people to move out of homelessness and prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place. In the revised plan, there is no provision for additional emergency accommodation in the city. Instead the emphasis is on ensuring more effective interventions through local area responses, early interventions, case management and settlement, the provision of long term housing, with support as necessary. The Homeless Agency **web site** is expected to be in place by the end of May. The site aims to provide material to anyone looking for information on homelessness or homeless services in Dublin, easy access to Agency publications, information on volunteering and job opportunities in the sector, and links to other sites. The first **satisfaction survey** of homeless services users will be conducted by the Agency in March. Using a representative sample of three hundred people, the survey

will seek to establish their experience of services and to examine how those services relate to their needs and expectations. A report on the results of the survey will be available at the end of May and will be used to inform the development and improvement of services. A follow up to the **public attitudes survey** carried out in December 2001 is currently being undertaken by the TNS MRBI for the Homeless Agency. This survey will indicate general public opinion on why people become homeless, what is being done for them and will inform the development of a public education programme by the Agency. A report, comparing the results of the two surveys, is expected to be published at the end of April. Protocols for homeless services in dealing with **sex offenders** are being developed by a working group of homeless service providers and Probation and Welfare Services. Work is continuing on the development of **common needs assessments, referral procedures** and **case management**, in order to improve the effectiveness of services.

The **LINK** system which will support the case management approach, has gone through its final refinement and is due to be implemented in all emergency and settlement services in the course of this year. The system will allow for information on individuals to be shared by services. It will also provide information on an ongoing basis on the number of people who are homeless, and which services they are using and other information. A one night **count of people sleeping rough** in Dublin will be carried out in the early morning of 26th March as a follow up to a similar count held last year. The count will rely on support from volunteers and the Gardai and will aim to cover areas where people are known to, or are likely to, sleep rough. Needless to say, this is not a comprehensive assessment of rough sleepers. It will provide a snapshot of visible rough sleepers only but it will enable us to say whether there are more or less of them than this time last year. Proposals for the **phasing out of the use of bed and breakfast** accommodation are in the process of being developed. ■

FROM THE Roof Tops

A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

Freek Spinnewijn

Director of FEANTSA, the European Federation
of National Organisations Working with the Homeless

What role for the European Union in the fight against homelessness?

The nature and
scope of
homelessness is
quite similar across
the EU area;
however the
policies addressing
homelessness differ
greatly between
Member States.

Most people who are involved in the fight against homelessness will argue that the EU does not (and should not) play any role in the fight against homelessness.

It is true that the EU does not have the necessary jurisdiction to address homelessness effectively. For instance the EU is not able to pursue policies in important areas such as housing or social welfare.

Does this mean that the EU cannot contribute at all to the fight against homelessness? Certainly not!

The leaders of the EU Member States — including the Irish Prime Minister — decided in March 2000 to launch an EU strategy against poverty and social exclusion. Nine months later they agreed on the objectives of this strategy, of which two are of particular relevance: to guarantee decent and sanitary housing for all, and to prevent homelessness. The Member States thus agreed to develop their anti-poverty policies in a EU framework and at the same time decided not to transfer any new powers related to poverty to the EU.

So what is the added value of a EU framework, which does not give any real authority to the EU as the main actor? The answer is transnational comparisons.

As part of the EU strategy, Member States are obliged to produce National Action Plans — Social Inclusion (NAPsIncl) in which they translate the European objectives into concrete policy measures.

The fight against homelessness must be an important element of these NAPsIncl.

The nature and scope of homelessness is quite similar across the EU area; however the policies addressing homelessness differ greatly between Member States. These differences are a valuable source of new ideas for all actors involved in the fight against homelessness. The EU strategy provides an official framework to develop and extend this source.

The variety of policies addressing homelessness is also an important political tool. It allows us to evaluate the policies of our own government in comparison to the policies of other governments. 'Naming and shaming' is a soft but very effective method of policy influencing.

It is ignorant to assume that one country is ahead of other countries in the fight against homelessness. Homelessness is still a serious problem in all Member States. The solution to homelessness is yet to be found. All strategies and other policy initiatives against homelessness have strengths and weaknesses. Transnational comparisons can help to overcome the weaknesses. Do you think that the legally enforceable right to housing is an illusion? Do you think that free health insurance is not realistic? Do you think that the private housing market is inaccessible to the homeless? You are wrong. Look at other countries and you will be surprised.

Transnational comparisons in the area of homelessness is only possible if the Member States fully integrate the fight against homelessness in their NAPsIncl. Therefore FEANTSA is calling on all relevant actors to make sure that homelessness is in the next NAPsIncl (July 2003–July 2005) for their country. ■