



Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation: Building the Future

Forum Report No. 18

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Foreword

One of the most serious economic and social policy issues now facing Irish society is the escalating crisis in social and affordable housing and accommodation. The scale of housing shortages across all tenures (private, rented, local authority, voluntary sector), and the associated unsustainable increases in prices, has the potential to put at risk our new-found levels of prosperity, employment and social achievements over the last decade.

The ever-widening increase in income inequalities and resources is nowhere more evident to-day than in the case of housing. Ireland's population is now more divided than ever between those who can afford to buy expensive private housing and a growing minority who are finding it increasingly difficult to access secure, good quality and affordable accommodation. The housing crisis has now put home ownership beyond the reach of most people on average incomes. This in turn is adding to the pressures of an already over-stretched social housing sector.

The Government has introduced a number of policy initiatives and measures in recent times to tackle the crisis. These are beginning to have some positive effects in terms of increasing the supply of housing as well as somewhat moderating the rate of increase in house prices. These were further added to with the Government's latest decisions, on the basis of the third Bacon Report, to increase the supply of social and affordable housing, help the position of first-time buyers and control speculative demand.

The planned increase in social housing output, if realised, should make significant inroads on the current housing lists. But the scale of this will not be enough to address the expected continuing increase in demand. The Government's policy responses must, therefore, be further strengthened and co-ordinated more effectively across all tenure types, especially for the most vulnerable groups in our society. As recent experience shows, market forces have impacted most adversely on these groups. This was acknowledged by the Government in the National Development Plan 2000-2006, which accepted the "*need for additional social housing programmes, targeted at less well-off households*". This is of critical importance not only for social inclusion purposes but also for its impact on potential economic growth and national competitiveness.

It is against this background and its particular remit on social inclusion and equality issues, as given to it by the Government, that the Forum established a Project Team on Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation in June of last year. That

Team's Report, which is now attached, was prepared on the basis of a very extensive process of consultation with a wide range of housing interest groups, at both national and local levels, as well as with experts in the field.

Subject to a number of comments, which are now incorporated in the text, the Report was fully endorsed by the Forum at its Plenary Session in Dublin Castle on 28th June last.

For ease of reference, a summary of the main recommendations is given in Section I of the Report.

Key over-arching recommendations are:

- a target should be set for the elimination of all Local Authority housing waiting lists;
- the establishment of a National Housing Authority;
- radical improvements to the management and delivery of public housing services; and
- barriers to the supply of building land, including the unsustainable increase in land prices, have to be tackled.

Finally, the Forum draws attention to its own 1994 Report No. 4 on *Ending Long-term Unemployment* and what can be achieved, if ambitious targets are set. The elimination of long-term unemployment as advocated in that Report was seen in some quarters at the time as unrealistic and unattainable. Yet once this goal came to be accepted, once agreement was reached on the main substantive policy measures needed and once all the main actors were mobilised into supportive action, remarkable progress was made on this front.

We should all take encouragement from this and now seek to achieve similar results on a social partnership basis in the case of social and affordable housing and accommodation.

Section I

Introduction and Overview

Introduction and Overview

Outline of Section I

1.1 This Section is divided into four main parts:

- Project Team,
- Consultation and information collection,
- Summary of recommendations,
- Acknowledgements.

Project Team

1.2 In concluding the debate on its future Work Programme, the Forum decided at its Plenary Session on 22nd June 1999 to set up a Project Team on Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation.¹ It was considered opportune to examine how the capacity of the voluntary and local authority sectors could be enhanced in the provision and management of public housing, in the context of continued increases in house prices and in local authority waiting lists. Attention was also drawn to issues in relation to rural social housing at the Plenary. In maintaining a focus on the disadvantaged and those experiencing social exclusion, it was also considered necessary to include aspects of the private rented sector in the Team's deliberations.

1.3 The consensus reached at the Plenary Session was that the focus of the Team's deliberation would be broad. Moreover, it should concentrate on all those who are socially and economically disadvantaged in relation to their housing situation, rather than focusing on any one specific tenure or group.

1.4 The membership of the Project Team was as follows:

Ursula Barry, National Women's Council of Ireland

Úna Ní Chuinn, Irish Rural Link

Senator Joe Costello, Labour

Senator Margaret Cox, Fianna Fáil

Constance Hanniffy, General Council of County Councils

Blair Horan, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Jacqueline Kenny, The Construction Industry Federation

Andrew Logue, Disability Federation of Ireland

John Murphy, Department of the Environment and Local Government²

¹ Hereafter referred to as the Project Team or the Team.

² Hereafter referred to as the Department.

Tess Murphy, Irish Countrywomen's Association
Thomás Ó Ceallaigh, Independent
Senator Therese Ridge, Fine Gael

In attendance: Brian O'Raghallaigh, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs

Forum Secretariat: David Silke

A copy of the Team's terms-of-reference is attached as Annex II.

- 1.5 The Project Team set itself the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of current housing policy for those who are socially and economically excluded. The central aim was to identify ways to improve housing policy and practice, particularly for those who are socially and economically excluded. The Team focused on how best social and affordable housing can contribute to an overall integrated housing policy in a manner that will promote social inclusion.
- 1.6 In the course of its work, the Team identified the following themes for consideration:
- the delivery of housing as a public service;
 - increasing the availability of affordable housing;
 - recognising the social aspects of housing provision; and
 - promoting integration and reducing social segregation.
- 1.7 The Team met on a regular basis between July 1999 and June 2000. It also conducted a wide series of consultations, local hearings and commissioned research, as detailed below.

Consultation and Information Collection

- 1.8 The Team consulted with a number of different stakeholders and gathered a considerable amount of information from the following sources:
- The Team advertised for written submissions in the main national papers and on the Departments of the Environment and Local Government and Social, Community and Family Affairs Web Sites. A total of 40 written submissions were received, details of which can be found in Annex III.
 - The Team met with representatives from the Irish Council for Social Housing, groups involved in the private rented sector, Local Authority and Health Board officials, Traveller organisations and senior staff from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

- Local hearings were undertaken in Galway, Cork, Longford, Mayo and Castletcomer, Kilkenny. Interviews were held with both the providers and users of housing services, including local authority officials, estate management and other community organisations, voluntary housing associations, Local Area Partnership officials, tenants, those on local authority waiting lists and those living in the lower-cost private rented sector. In addition, specific focus groups were held with a group of older people living in a voluntary housing project and a group of people who had moved under the Rural Resettlement Scheme.
- A briefing paper on *Social Housing* was prepared for the Team by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. The Team also commissioned Dr Tony Fahey of the Economic and Social Research Institute to prepare a paper on *Key Issues in Social Housing Policy* to help inform its work.
- In response to issues which were raised during the Team's consultations with Local Authority stakeholders, Dr Cathal O'Connell and Ms Michelle Norris of University College Cork were commissioned to prepare a paper on *Public Housing Management in Ireland: Framework for Research on Good Practice*.
- This was followed-up with some primary research on Local Authority housing management, which was undertaken on behalf of the Team by a research team headed by personnel in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
- A video production company, Agtel Communications, was also commissioned to produce a video to complement the Team's Report.

1.9 In addition to meeting regularly in plenary session, the Team worked in sub-groups to address specific themes. A research sub-group was established to oversee the collection of primary data on Local Authority housing management and a second sub-group was established to advise on the production of the video.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

1.10 The problems that many people face in gaining access to affordable home ownership are well known. Problems of affordability are also increasing in the private rented residential sector. The need for local authority housing has increased by 43 per cent in the last three years, while output remains unacceptably low in both the public and voluntary sectors. These developments have economic consequences and also a very human dimension. Access to adequate shelter is one of the most basic needs and is a fundamental human and social right. Individuals, families, communities and economies cannot be sustained without adequate accommodation.

1.11 The Team’s main priority recommendations are:

- A National Housing Authority should be established;
- Good quality, secure and affordable housing is a social right and should be given statutory backing;
- Social housing provision should be substantially increased, with the aim of setting a timetable for the elimination of housing waiting lists;
- Public housing management systems should be radically reformed and modernised; and
- Priority should be given to those most excluded from good quality, secure and affordable accommodation, particularly those with:
 - low incomes; and
 - specific housing needs, such as older people, people with disabilities, single people, the homeless, Travellers, some people in rural areas and those needing crisis accommodation.

1.12 A summary list of the Team’s main recommendations follows in Box 1.

Box 1

Summary List of the Project Team’s Recommendations
(The number references are to corresponding paragraphs in the Report)

The Delivery of Housing as a Public Service

3.15/3.16/2.16

A National Housing Authority should be established to provide strategic policy advice and support to the Minister, Local Authorities and other housing providers. Its functions would include policy research, monitoring and evaluation. Its members would be appointed by Government and it would have its own independent support staff.

3.53 Local Authority housing management and maintenance systems should be radically reformed and modernised with a central emphasis on the delivery of a quality service, including the development of:

- performance indicators;
- information technology, data-gathering, staff training; and
- tenant participation mechanisms.

/ ...

2.26/2.27/2.28

- The local authority housing needs assessment process should continue to be subject to periodic review;
- these reviews should include key issues such as data disaggregation, severity of housing need, use of information technology; and
- Local Authorities should state clearly in their Housing Strategies how they define, measure and prioritise housing need, based on a critical review of current procedures.

Increasing the Availability of Affordable Accommodation

4.7 All major policy initiatives to increase the availability of affordable accommodation should be policy proofed to assess their effects on the most disadvantaged (including the environment) and details of these exercises should be made publicly available.

4.17 A package of measures should be introduced to increase the supply of affordable building land; this should include:

- increased resources to tackle delays in the planning system;
- barriers to the supply of building land should be identified and addressed; and
- further measures (including taxation) to control house prices and the implementation of increased residential densities by Local Authorities should be kept under review.

4.26 The Department of the Environment and Local Government should:

- promote more effectively the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes;
- keep under review the income thresholds and eligibility criteria for these Schemes; and
- examine how the regional variation in house prices could be reflected in both these Schemes.

4.27 ● The effect of the increased output of social housing on the housing waiting lists should be published and subject to periodic review; and

- every Local Authority should set as an immediate target, that 70 per cent of households assessed as being in need of accommodation, are

/...

provided with suitable and adequate accommodation within two years of their acceptance on to the waiting list; that this target be raised to 80 per cent of households in the medium-term; and a longer-term target should be fixed for the elimination of all waiting lists, within a reasonable timeframe.

4.29 Local Authorities should be more innovative in meeting social and affordable accommodation needs through, for example: partnership arrangements with trade unions, churches, pension funds, voluntary housing associations and private landlords and builders.

4.34 In relation to the private rented residential sector, specific measures are needed in relation to:

- security of tenure;
- affordable rents;
- quality control; and
- protection against discrimination for vulnerable groups, for example lone parents, ethnic minorities and those on rent assistance.

4.35 Longer-term accommodation needs (for example, of pensioners and those on a disability payment) would be better met by increasing the provision of public and voluntary housing, rather than through the private rented sector.

4.37 Voluntary housing providers and other stakeholders should:

- devise a strategic framework over the next twelve months; and
- develop training and maintenance assistance for the sector.

Recognising the Social Aspects of Housing Provision

5.11 Local Authorities and other stakeholders (voluntary sector, builders, developers and tenants) should actively develop the concept of social partnership, including drawing on the successful estate management pilot initiatives under the EU Local Development Programme.

5.16 Local Authority tenants should be encouraged to become more involved in the running of their estates through a variety of approaches, such as: learning from other successful estates, attending training courses, the production of newsletters and the development of consumer panels.

5.32 The new Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees should actively promote participation and input from the different housing stakeholders, including the sharing of experiences and dissemination of best practice.

/...

Promoting Integration and Reducing Social Segregation

6.10/6.12

- Social housing provision should, as a general principle, promote social inclusion, including the special needs of particular groups; and
- A Cross-Departmental Team should be established to develop, implement and monitor integrated responses for special needs groups.

6.26 Clear linkages between service providers and policy makers should be developed to tackle homelessness.

6.36 Local Authorities should, in their Housing Strategies, actively develop and focus on how the needs of those most at risk of social exclusion will be met, in consultation with these groups on a social partnership basis.

- 6.40**
- The front-loading of the social housing building programme should be monitored and kept under review; and
 - housing waiting lists should be eliminated within a reasonable timeframe.

6.46 Negative attitudes to public housing should be tackled by the Department and the Local Authorities through a variety of means, for example: innovation in design and layout, improvements to housing stock and management systems and enforcement of tenancy agreements.

Other Issues

5.18 A number of Departmental Schemes (for example, Grants for the Housing Management Initiative) should be evaluated, taking care to incorporate the views of service users in these evaluations.

2.47 The *National Spatial Strategy* should:

- be designed with equality and social inclusion measures to the fore;
- ensure that new housing developments are linked to and planned in parallel with infrastructural investments such as transport, sanitary services, schools; and
- include an in-built review mechanism at regular intervals, in consultation with the Social Partners.

2.51 The Housing Forum (established under *the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*) should include representatives of local authority officials.

Acknowledgements

- 1.13 The Project Team would like to thank all those, too numerous to mention individually, who assisted in its work. The Team is very grateful to those who made written submissions, who gave of their time to meet with it, or who provided valuable data to help in its analysis. Particular thanks are also due to Dr Tony Fahey, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dr Cathal O’Connell and Ms Michelle Norris, University College Cork, Mr Paddy McIntyre, Mr Colm McCaughley, Ms Lorraine Campbell and other colleagues in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Ms Dolores Halloran, Casey Halloran Associates and Mr Eamon Drea and Mr Paul O’Doherty of Hay Management Consultants, whose advice and expertise facilitated the work of the Team.
- 1.14 The Department of the Environment and Local Government provided helpful information and assistance to the Team throughout. The Secretariat was also helped by Sinead Quill, a post-graduate student on a work experience placement from Trinity College, Dublin.

Section II

Setting the Context

Setting the Context

Outline of Section II

2.1 This Section is divided into four main parts:

- Defining concepts,
- Housing statistics,
- Overview of current policy issues,
- Priority issues.

Defining Concepts

Social Housing

2.2 Social housing is commonly understood to be accommodation provided through State subsidy to meet the needs of people who cannot afford to provide adequate housing from their own resources. In some respects, it could be argued that all housing in Ireland is subsidised by the State – for example, through mortgage interest relief for those who are buying their own home, or by the absence of a property tax for those who own their home outright. Fahey (1999a) notes that social housing is, for the most part, rental in nature, involves some State subsidy, is linked to social need and the landlord is usually non-profit.

2.3 The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (1999) note that:

Social housing ... is met by local authority housing, voluntary housing, other complementary local authority social housing schemes including improvements and extensions in lieu of housing but also, to an increasing extent for certain categories of need, by private rental housing.

2.4 The private rented sector is not usually considered as a social housing provider (as landlords are profit-makers, for example). However, the Team felt that the exclusion of the lower-cost end of this sector from its deliberations would not be in the best interest of many low-income families, which are the Forum's primary concern. Furthermore, their inclusion in the Team's deliberations was felt to be consistent with the recent Government decision to introduce a new local authority rent assistance scheme to replace, in the main, the current arrangements for rent supplementation (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999a). The strategic objective of these new proposals is to make available to Local Authorities a more comprehensive range of options to meet social housing needs, including direct provision of accommodation and

rent assistance based on appropriate criteria. The Team welcomes this move to the provision of social housing needs, which brings with it an opportunity to develop greater coherence and a more integrated and quality service.

Affordability

2.5 Affordability is a relative term and is difficult to define. MacJennan and Williams (1990) provide a useful introduction to the concept when they write:

'Affordability' is concerned with securing some given standard of housing (or different standards) at a price or rent which does not impose, in the eyes of some third party (usually the government) an unreasonable burden on household income. A number of judgements and assumptions are made in putting the concept into practice, and, in broad terms, affordability is assessed by the ratio of a chosen definition of housing costs to a selected measure of household income in some given time period.

They are pragmatic in their conclusions and argue that the focus of debate should not be on what constitutes an agreed measure of affordability. Rather, they believe, the focus of attention should be on approaches to the efficient structuring and targeting of housing subsidies, the planning of towns and the provision of land, and the competitive structuring of finance markets and loan instruments. They feel that actions in these areas are most likely to impact upon the housing costs confronted by lower income households.

2.6 In relation to the affordability of home ownership, the NES (1999) argue that the ratio of house prices to average disposable income is a reasonable indication of housing affordability, although they point out that such a measure does not incorporate the impact of all relevant variables such as changing interest rates and tax deductions. More recent analysis carried out by ABN AMRO (2000) included the production of an affordability index, which was derived by calculating the interest cost of the average mortgage and then expressing the payment in relation to average income. Its analysis concluded that housing in Ireland remains affordable when account is taken of relatively low interest rates as well as income tax reductions.

2.7 However, the price of new and second hand houses bought by first-time buyers in 1999 averaged £99,600 and £102,700 respectively, nationally and £126,400 and £130,000 in Dublin.³ This equates to about six to eight times the average industrial wage. In this context, affordability in terms of eligibility for mortgages and the ability to service loans over time are important issues of concern. Many first-time buyers now need additional finance from their families to buy a house, which may contribute to inflation levels at the lower-cost end of

³ Department of the Environment and Local Government Press Statement (2000a) 10/5/00

the market. On a related note, another issue of concern is where some local people cannot afford to build or buy a house, especially in scenic rural areas.

- 2.8 Amendments to the Planning and Development Bill (1999) reflect the above shift in thinking regarding affordability. In this Bill, eligibility for affordable housing was originally defined as a person who could not obtain a sufficient mortgage to purchase a house (calculated as 2.5 times the principal income and one times the secondary income). This has now been amended to people whose mortgage repayments would exceed 35 per cent of income net of income tax and PRSI. In the case of a two-income household one half of the second net income would be taken into account for the purpose of determining eligibility.
- 2.9 The Project Team, however, consider that these proposed new thresholds would exclude a significant proportion of average income employees who are now caught in a trap between not meeting the income eligibility criteria specified by the lending institutions and not qualifying for assistance under the amended Planning Bill. Official figures on the range of incomes of those who had loan approvals set out in the Annual Housing Statistical Bulletin of the Department (2000b) show clearly a trend in recent years towards the exclusion of lower and middle income groups from the housing market.
- 2.10 The issue of affordability is also important in relation to other tenures. In the Local Authority sector, affordability is governed by the differential rent scheme (income-related), which was devolved to Local Authorities in 1986. Rents, however, are calculated on the basis of household income and not on the basis of the market value or outstanding debt of the dwelling. Given the low incomes in this sector, rents levels tend to be low relative to the size and quality of the housing (Fahey, 1999a). In 1998 the average weekly rent was £15.48. However, a study based on data from six Local Authorities found that, at the end of 1994, just over half (51 per cent) of tenants were in rent arrears, with a 13 per cent revenue loss from arrears (Department of the Environment, 1996).
- 2.11 Less attention has been given to the issue of affordability in the Irish private rented residential sector. Downey (1998) indicates that affordability is becoming an increasing issue of concern in this sector, particularly for lower incomes groups who were spending between a quarter (25 per cent) to over two-fifths (42 per cent) of their gross income on rent. McCashin (2000: 20-24), drawing on a number of data sources, confirms an upward trend in the cost of private rented accommodation, particularly in the lower end of the market, and also draws attention to the lack of data needed to fully explain this trend:

There may be a crisis in rented 'affordability' to match that of the affordability crisis in owner occupation. It is simply not possible to say with the data available how much of the rise in rents can be ascribed to changes in the overall quality of rented

accommodation, nor is it possible to analyse the patterns of rent increase by locality, quality of accommodation, or income of tenants.

2.12 We discuss the issue of affordability in more detail in Section IV of the Report.

Housing and Accommodation

2.13 The Team has made a distinction between home ownership and other tenure options and housing and accommodation in recognition that not everybody in society may wish to live in ‘standard housing’. For example, some people may have particular needs due to, for instance, a disability, while others may prefer to live a more nomadic lifestyle. This should not, however, prejudice their entitlement to good quality accommodation.

Housing Statistics

2.14 The main source of regular statistical data on housing is the Quarterly and Annual Housing Statistical Bulletins produced by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. These publications provide a regular source of information on: housing trends in relation to house completions, loans approved, profile of borrowers, house prices, local authority and other aspects of social housing, Traveller accommodation, housing grants, registration and enforcement of statutory requirements in relation to rented housing and capital investment in housing. Results from the assessment of housing need carried out by the Local Authorities are also published in these bulletins. Information in relation to housing is also collected on a less regular basis in the Census of Population, the Household Budget Survey and the Labour Force Surveys.

2.15 There are some areas, however, where the data gathered is inadequate. This in turn has adverse implications for the analysis and development of policy. For example, the national survey of housing conditions is only carried out every ten years (see Finn, 1992). We also lack detailed information on the private rented sector – particularly recent national trends in relation to the size, location and nature of the sector, rents and quality of accommodation (McCashin, *op cit*). At a broader level, we lack a body of on-going and systematic housing policy research and evaluation, at both national and local levels, to inform policy development. Fahey (1999b) notes:

The continuing lack of a rigorous, evidence-based approach to social housing policy and management ... is a cause for concern, as it raises questions about the seriousness of purpose with which the goals of rational policy making and effective management in social housing is being pursued. Can managers and policy makers seriously claim to be concerned about what works and what does not if little effort is made to generate systematic data and analysis on inputs and outcomes?

- 2.16 **The Team recommends that the National Housing Authority (see Recommendation 3.15) should include a dedicated Housing Research Unit. This Unit should, *inter alia*,**
- **undertake a policy research and information needs assessment, in consultation with other housing interests; and**
 - **adopt a programme for monitoring and evaluation purposes, to better inform the future development of housing policy.**

Statutory Assessment of Housing Need

- 2.17 Each Housing Authority is required under Section 9 of the Housing Act, 1988 to carry out periodic assessments of people who are in need of accommodation, unable to provide it from their own resources and require accommodation from the Authority. The assessments cover the need for local authority housing in each local authority area, what can be met by other social housing options, the need for caravan sites for Travellers and the number of homeless persons. The Department provides detailed guidelines to Local Authorities on how a comprehensive assessment should be undertaken (for example, Circular N 8/98).
- 2.18 Table 1 below reports the results of the assessments of housing need carried out in 1996 and 1999. As can be seen, the 1999 assessment found 39,176 households in need of local authority housing, compared with 27,427 in 1996 – a 43 per cent increase.
- 2.19 Above average increases in need were found between 1996-1999 among the homeless (+126.7 per cent) and Traveller households (+87.7 per cent). Some of this change, however, can be accounted for by a broadening of the definition of homelessness in 1999 and an increase in Traveller preference for housing as opposed to permanent sites (there was a 15 per cent drop in the number of Traveller households requiring permanent halting sites over the 1996 – 1999 period). The increase in the proportion of households unable to afford their existing accommodation (+74 per cent) is alarming.
- 2.20 The main categories of need in 1999 related to households unable to afford their existing accommodation (34 per cent); living in overcrowded accommodation (21.3 per cent); living in unfit accommodation (12.2 per cent) and involuntary sharing accommodation (10.4 per cent).
- 2.21 Lone parents account for 43% of net need for local authority accommodation, two-thirds (67%) of these households include one child only. A second large category of need is single person households, which account for 29% of net need. Two-thirds of households assessed as in need of local authority housing have been on the local authority waiting list for less than two years. The

**Table 1: Local Authority Assessments of Social Housing Needs
1996 and 1999 (households)**

Category of housing need	1996 (% of yearly total)	1999 (% of yearly total)	% change 1996-1999
Unable to afford	7,659 (27.9)	13,328 (34)	+74
Overcrowded	5,912 (21.6)	8,328 (21.3)	+40.9
Unfit or materially unsuitable	4,799 (17.5)	4,796 (12.2)	-0.6
Involuntary sharing	3,120 (11.4)	4,086 (10.4)	+31
Elderly	2,140 (7.8)	2,363 (6)	+10.4
Medical/compassionate grounds	1,762 (6.4)	2,347 (6)	+33.2
Homeless	979 (3.6)	2,219 (5.7)	+126.7 ⁴
Traveller	749 (2.7)	1,406 (3.6)	+87.7 ⁵
Disabled	241 (.9)	236 (.6)	-2.1
Young person leaving care	66 (.2)	67 (.2)	+1.5
TOTAL	27,427 (100)	39,176 (100)	+43

Source: Housing Statistics Bulletin: Department of the Environment and Local Government.

majority of households recorded as in need of social housing had low incomes – 88 per cent had an average gross income of less than £10,000 per annum, two-thirds of whom had gross households incomes of less than £6,000 per annum. Ensuring that the housing needs of those with such limited resources are met in a socially inclusive manner is a core focus of this Report.

2.22 In making an assessment of housing need, Local Authorities are asked to consider the most appropriate manner in which the needs of individual applicants included in the assessment can be met, taking account of the range of social housing options available to meet housing needs. In the 1999 assessment, 6,402 households⁶ were considered suitable by Local Authorities for other social housing measures and a further 2,477 applicants were found to be resident in overcrowded/materially unsuitable local authority housing. This gives a total of some 48,055 households identified by the assessment procedure as in need of some form of social housing or to be living in unsuitable/overcrowded accommodation.

⁴ The definition of homeless was broadened in 1999 and now includes those who have no accommodation, those in hostels and in Health Board accommodation. Accordingly the 1996 and 1999 assessments were not made on the same basis and are, therefore, not directly comparable.

⁵ Overall, there was a 37 per cent increase in the number of Traveller households assessed as in housing need. While there was an 88 per cent increase in the numbers seeking local authority housing, there was a 15 per cent decrease in the numbers in need of permanent halting sites over the 1996–1999 period.

⁶ 3,493 households were considered by Local Authorities to be suited for social housing, 2,287 were considered suitable for supplementary welfare allowance and 622 were Travellers suited for caravan parks.

- 2.23 Under current arrangements, Local Authorities return the information collected from their local assessments by completing eleven tables. Each table requires aggregated data, for example in relation to the number of households in each category of need or the gross household income of those assessed as in housing need. However, the format in which the data is returned does not allow detailed analysis of the data. For example, the production of cross-tabulations from the returns on the categories of need by gender, gross household income or by length of time accepted for local authority housing (i.e. on the waiting list) is not possible under the current system. More detailed disaggregation of data of social housing need is required, in relation to gender, age, income levels, severity of need, etc (see Recommendation 2.26).
- 2.24 Housing Authorities are advised by the Department, where feasible, to set up a computer system to manage the information supplied by housing applicants. The development of database systems to manage this information is a positive development, particularly for larger authorities, as it allows for easier information management and profiling of local housing need. It also allows for a more dynamic record of housing need, as it is on-going, and can be used to provide information to applicants on their relative position on the current waiting list. This latter feature is in keeping with the Forum's Report Number 6 *Quality Delivery of Social Services* (1995: 85), which recommended that each Local Authority should have information readily available regarding an applicant's position on the housing waiting list. In this context, it is noteworthy that the Ombudsman upheld a complaint against a County Council last year because it was not in a position to advise an applicant of her relative position on the housing list. The Council subsequently agreed to introduce such a system (Ombudsman, 2000).
- 2.25 The Planning and Development Bill, 1999 will if enacted, require Planning Authorities to ensure that the housing needs of **all sectors** of the population are addressed through the preparation and implementation of Housing Strategies. The first step in developing these Strategies will be to assess housing needs. The Department has asked Local Authorities to start the preparatory work so that the Strategies can be completed as soon as possible, and in any event within the statutory period set out in the Planning and Development Bill, 1999. The preparation of a model housing strategy for Local Authorities, which the Department is currently arranging, provides an avenue for re-evaluating the assessment procedures followed by Local Authorities.
- 2.26 A comprehensive analysis of social housing need was undertaken by the ESRI (Fahey and Watson, 1995). As a result of the recommendations made in that report, the methodologies employed in the 1996 and 1999 local authority assessments of need were expanded to capture broader social housing needs. **The Team recommends that the housing needs assessment process should**

Box 2

Consultation on Assessment of Housing Needs

As part of the Team’s consultation process (see paragraph 1.8), interested parties were asked to comment on the current assessment of housing need and to identify areas for improvement. Respondents perceived positive aspects of the current statutory needs assessment to be the regulatory nature of the assessment and the consultations involved in the process.

The method of assessment was, however, perceived to have weaknesses. In particular, that the assessments result in an underestimation of ‘housing need’. For example, people in mobile homes/demountables in rural areas may not be included. It was also unclear how these fed into Departmental allocations to Local Authorities or how they could be used to measure management performance. The lack of voluntary sector involvement in the assessment procedures was felt to be another weakness.

The main improvements suggested included:

- more transparency and standardisation of methods and criteria of assessment;
- more liaison with other service providers/voluntary sector involvement;
- a broadening of categories and criteria so that all of those ‘in need’ have a realistic chance and equal opportunity to secure tenure; and
- more Local Authority staff training.

continue to be subject to periodic review to ensure that the full range of evolving social housing needs are covered and to make any necessary improvements to give a more accurate and detailed breakdown of the extent and nature of housing need.

2.27 It would be important that any such review would include a number of key issues such as:

- *the coverage, consistency and timeliness of the assessments;*
- *the feasibility of moving towards yearly assessments;*
- *data disaggregation, for example in relation to gender;*
- *linkages of the assessments for policy and planning purposes;*
- *how severity of housing need might be measured and used in planning;*
- *appropriate consultation mechanisms;*

- *human resource implications; and*
- *the use of Information Technology.*

2.28 Local Authorities should state clearly in their Housing Strategies how they define, measure and prioritise housing need, based on a critical review of current procedures.

Overview of Current Policy Issues

2.29 The Department of the Environment and Local Government (1997:30) states that the objective of Irish housing policy is:

To enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice.

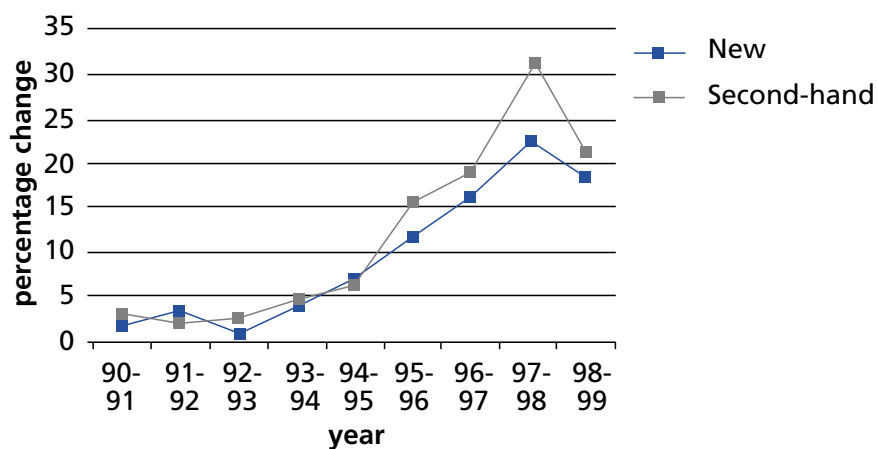
2.30 The NES's recent review of economic and social strategies (1999) argues that, in the current context of an overall shortage of accommodation, the overarching objective of housing policy should be to increase housing supply. This objective should be underpinned by three intermediate policy objectives of broadly equal importance. These are: an adequate increase in the provision of social housing; measures to substantially expand the rental sector and a sustainable level of private home ownership. The Council identifies improvements in the planning and administrative systems as they relate to housing, amendments to the legal framework and an expanded infrastructure as important elements in the achievement of these objectives.

2.31 The general trend in Irish housing policy has been a bias in favour of home ownership (one of the most pronounced in the EU), and currently 80 per cent of all housing in Ireland is in this category (see Fahey and Watson, 1995: 20-23, for discussion). The current situation has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages are that owner-occupation is perceived to be the preferred tenure in Ireland, it is associated with stable communities and is also seen as a good investment option for owners. However, there are also disadvantages to the dominance of home-ownership. Most noticeably, it limits people's access to other housing options; biases public policy in favour of that tenure; leads to social segregation; and reduces labour force mobility.

2.32 The recent surge in the demand for housing has also seen the price of home ownership increase dramatically in both the new and second-hand markets (see Figure 1 below), leading to problems of affordability and access, particularly for first time buyers. There is now evidence, however, that the *rate of increase* of house prices has begun to slow. Between 1998 and 1999, the average price of

new and second-hand houses (for which loans were approved) increased by 18.5 per cent and 21.4 per cent respectively. The latest figures indicate that in the last three months to the end of March, the average price of new and second-hand houses in Dublin fell by 1.1 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively. Nationally, the cost of second-hand houses dropped by 0.3 per cent and the average price of a new house rose by 1.6 per cent in the same period. However, it is too early to be complacent about the figures. Annual increases in house prices of the order of 20 per cent, while incomes are rising in the order of 5 per cent per annum, are unsustainable.

Figure 1: Annual Change in New and Second-hand House Prices, 1990-1999



Source: Department of the Environment and Local Government *Annual Housing Statistics*, various years.

2.33 The main reasons for this unprecedented rate of increase in house prices include:

- demographic and household formation changes;
- economic growth with particular impact on employment growth;
- increased disposable income and lower direct taxes;
- low mortgage interest rates;
- a shortage of serviced development land;
- increases in the price of development land;
- labour shortages;⁷
- investor and general speculative activity; and
- immigration.

⁷ For example, Bacon (2000) found that in March 2000 vacancies existed for 100 permanent and 7 temporary professional planners in local authorities. The Forum has established a Project Team on Labour Market Shortages, which is scheduled to report later this year.

- 2.34 It is estimated by Government that over 500,000 houses will be needed over the next ten years to meet demand arising from the increased proportion of the population in household formation age, falling household sizes, immigration and obsolescence. Ireland's housing stock is the lowest in the European Union at 327 units per thousand population as compared to 435 per thousand in the United Kingdom and the European average in the region of 450 per thousand. It is estimated that the construction of 500,000 dwellings over the next ten years would bring our housing stock to about 395-400 units per thousand population (Government of Ireland, 1999: 69). So while house price increases have begun to slow down, affordability will remain a pressing issue for the next few years at least as attempts to boost output to meet demand work their way through the system.
- 2.35 A number of steps have been taken to address this affordability problem, particularly for first time buyers. Following publication of the first Bacon Report, *An Assessment of Recent House Price Developments*, the Government introduced a number of policy changes in April 1998, including:
- measures to improve the availability of serviced land;
 - a temporary reduction in the rate of Capital Gains tax of 20% to encourage the faster release of land for residential development;
 - measures to improve the position of owner-occupiers *vis-a-vis* investors by imposing stamp duty on investors buying new houses, curtailing Section 23 tax relief and abolishing deductibility of interest on borrowings for investors buying residential property;
 - reductions in Stamp Duty on second-hand houses;
 - revisions to the Shared Ownership Scheme to increase the income eligibility thresholds and reduce the rent charged on the Local Authority Share of the house; and
 - planning guidelines on increased housing densities were published.
- 2.36 In response to the second Bacon Report, *The Housing Market: An Economic Review and Assessment*, the Government introduced in March 1999 *further measures to maximise and expedite housing supply, secure house price stabilisation, address affordability issues and ensure balanced growth of the market in the future* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999b). For the most part, these measures developed on the earlier ones introduced on foot of the first report (see above). However, the possible role of other housing stakeholders, such as the voluntary sector and the private rented residential sector, was given more recognition.
- 2.37 In response to the recent third Bacon Review *The Housing Market in Ireland: an Economic Evaluation of Trends and Prospects*, the Government has now announced

a range of further measures, the more notable of which directly relevant to the present Report are:

- **Measures to increase housing supply**, such as the use of Strategic Developments Zones (SDZs) to ensure the early development of large-scale residential developments, a levy on land owners who do not develop land within SDZs, removal of infrastructural constraints, improved deployment and increased resources in the planning system and raising residential densities;
- **Measures to address the demand side**, including changes to stamp duties for residential property and an annual 2 per cent anti-speculative property tax; and
- **Measures on Social and Affordable Housing**, including 1,000 extra housing starts per annum in the local authority housing programme between now and 2006, improved site subsidy arrangements for local authority and voluntary housing bodies and improvements to the Affordable Housing and Shared Ownership Schemes.

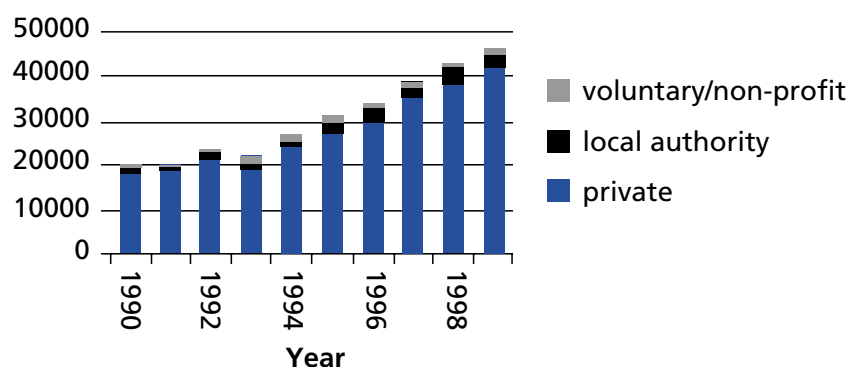
Finally the scope for and implications of further tax measures designed to bring serviced zoned residential land into development is to be examined by the Tax Strategy Group. Any proposals arising from this examination are to be considered in the context of Budget 2001 (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000c).

2.38 The Affordable Housing Scheme was launched in March 1999 to help lower income households to purchase their own homes. Under this Scheme, Local Authorities provide additional new houses on land available to them in or near urban centres where house prices have created an affordability gap for lower income house purchasers. These houses are offered for sale to eligible purchasers at cost price and, accordingly, at a significant discount from the market value of comparable houses in the area. Purchasers are offered mortgage finance at favourable interest rates and a subsidy will reduce further mortgage repayments for households with incomes of up to £25,000.⁸ A significant feature of the Scheme is that a new housing unit is constructed in each case. Consequently, it does not contribute to house price inflation as would be the case with financial measures not linked to additional supply. Forty houses were completed under the Scheme in 1999. There were a further 124 houses under construction and some 1,800 at various stages of planning (figures provided by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, 30 May 2000).

⁸ The income eligibility threshold for the Shared Ownership Scheme was increased to £25,000 as part of the package of measures introduced by the Government following publication of the Third Bacon Report (2000).

- 2.39 Figure 2 shows the continued increase in housing output during the 1990s, with output more than doubling over the decade (from 19,539 in 1990 to 46,512 in 1999). Expansion was limited during the first four years of the decade, but from 1994 increased steadily. Relative to population levels, housing output in this country is now the highest in Europe at 13 units per 1,000 population in 1999 (the comparative figure for most European countries is an output figure of between 3 and 5 units per 1,000 population).
- 2.40 Throughout the period the private sector accounted for the majority of new completions, accounting for over 90 per cent of all new completions in the last three years. Local authority house completions, on the other hand, have not increased proportionately to private sector output, and have remained fairly stable over the last five years, within the range 2,632 – 2,960 units per year. This is low by historical standards. The decline in voluntary sector output (to a low of 485 units in 1998) is also noteworthy, although output increased to 579 units in 1999.⁹ In relative terms, new social housing today (including voluntary housing) accounts for only 8 per cent of total output, which is by far the lowest share for any period in this century (Fahey, 1999b: 2).

Figure 2: House Completions 1990 – 1999



Source: Department of the Environment and Local Government *Annual Housing Statistics*, various years.

- 2.41 Government initiatives, including the Affordable Housing Scheme, to increase the supply of accommodation to low income groups, need to be carefully implemented, monitored and evaluated. It is also important to appreciate the inter-related nature of housing tenures. Policies to address the affordability issue should not have a detrimental effect on the housing conditions of those in other tenure groups. For example, policies to control price increases in the owner-occupied sector should be tested prior to implementation and subsequently monitored to ensure that they do not have unintended negative

⁹ Substantial increases to the Capital Assistance and Capital Loan and Rental Subsidy Schemes were introduced in October 1999 to assist the sector. A Voluntary and Cooperative Housing Unit in the Department has also been established to deal with all aspects of non-profit, voluntary and co-operative housing.

consequences for those in other sectors, such as the private rented residential sector.

- 2.42 In August 1999 the Department published the Planning and Development Bill 1999. The Bill has been passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas and was referred by the President to the Supreme Court in July to check the constitutionality of Section V of the Bill. This Section relates to Housing Supply and is of particular interest to the work of the Project Team.
- 2.43 Under the proposed legislation, a Planning Authority will be required to draw up a housing strategy as part of its Development Plans (see paragraph 2.25 above). In addition, the Bill makes communities' needs for social and affordable housing an important planning consideration which must be taken account of in formulating development plans, preparing a housing strategy and deciding on planning applications or appeals. In addition, the Bill will enable Local Authorities to attach a condition to a planning permission requiring that up to 20 per cent of residential zoned land be made available at existing use value (or cost price if purchased before publication of the Bill) for the purposes of providing social and affordable housing based on identified need. It is proposed that the Local Authority will be able to enter an agreement whereby the developer will provide the Authority or a voluntary housing association with a given number of finished houses or developed sites within the development at a price to be agreed and which would reflect the existing use value of the land and would allow the developer building/development costs (including a reasonable profit on these costs).
- 2.44 The Team agrees with the general objectives underpinning this legislation, in that it aims to develop Local Authority strategic planning, reduce social segregation and increase the supply of social and affordable housing. These issues are discussed in more detail in Sections III, IV and VI of the Report.
- 2.45 The marked deterioration in the affordability ratio created by the sharp increase in house prices over the last four years has led to increased pressure for a greatly expanded social housing programme. Indeed, the Team welcomes the inclusion of housing for the first time in the *National Development Plan* with the commitment to provide £6 billion for social and affordable housing over the period 2000-2006. The priorities for investment in housing under the Plan are:
- to provide the necessary infrastructural investment to facilitate the overall level of housing output required to meet the current and anticipated levels of demand in a planned and coherent fashion;
 - to increase social housing output to meet rising needs; and
 - to continue the drive to improve the physical conditions of our social housing stock.

2.46 In relation to the Private Rented Residential Sector, a Commission was established in 1999 by the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, Mr. Robert Molloy, T.D. The Commission was asked to examine the working of the landlord and tenant relationship in respect of residential tenancies in the private rented sector and to make such recommendations, including changes to the law, as the Commission considers proper, equitable and feasible with a view to:

- improving the security of tenure of tenants in the occupation of their dwellings;
- maintaining a fair and reasonable balance between the respective rights and obligations of landlords and existing and future tenants; and
- increasing investment in, and the supply of, residential accommodation for renting, including the removal of any identified constraints to the development of the sector.

2.47 Under the *National Development Plan*, the Government also mandated the Department to prepare a *National Spatial Strategy* within two years as part of its regional development policy. Views have now been sought on a Consultation Paper drafted by the Department. The Team welcomes this initiative and the emphasis it places on housing and other infrastructural investments as well as the reduction of disparities between and within regions. **The Team recommends that the *National Spatial Strategy* should:**

- **be designed with equality and social inclusions measures to the fore;**
- **ensure that new housing developments are linked to and planned in parallel with infrastructural investments such as transport, sanitary services, schools; and**
- **include an in-built review mechanism at regular intervals, in consultation with the Social Partners.**

2.48 The Team also notes that the Equal Status Act, 2000 was signed into law on 26 April 2000. The Act provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Travelling Community and gives those who are discriminated against a statutory means of redress. Section 6 of the Act prohibits discrimination in the disposal of premises and provision of accommodation, subject to certain exemptions. Since the Act has not yet been brought into operation, it is not clear what impact it will have. The Forum is currently preparing an Opinion on Equality Issues, which will be published later this year.

2.49 Access to quality housing is very unequally distributed in Irish society in terms of gender, age, social class and geographical region. Women, for example, have traditionally lacked independent access to economic resources due to a variety of factors:

- low rates of participation in paid work;
- dependent status within welfare systems;
- male-to-male transfer of land and property in agriculture and other sectors; and
- concentration in low paid jobs.

Women also make up the majority of older people and lone parents who constitute the social groups at greatest risk of poverty (Nolan and Watson, 1999). The gender dimension of both housing need and housing provision should be recognised and addressed in the development and implementation of housing policy and the provision of housing services. In this regard, particular recognition needs to be given also to women as primary carers and to issues of safety and vulnerability in both urban and rural areas.

2.50 The Team also took into account the inclusion of housing issues in the new national agreement *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF) (2000), which reaffirms many of the housing proposals set out in the National Development Plan. Actions are outlined in relation to, for example, housing supply, planning and development, integrated area plans, rural housing, the private rented sector, homelessness, home improvement measures, student accommodation, Traveller accommodation, housing estate management, building regulations, anti-discrimination policy and housing information and advice. Specific measures in the PPF include:

- expansion of Local Authority schemes to build 22,000 Local Authority homes in the next four years;¹⁰
- widening the definition of voluntary housing;
- increasing Voluntary housing output to deliver a total of 5,400 additional dwelling units over the period 2000-2003;
- 1,000 units per annum will be provided under the Local Authority Shared Ownership Scheme and the same amount will be provided under the Affordable Housing Scheme;
- the Tenant Purchase and Shared Ownership Schemes will be kept under review;

¹⁰ The figure was increased to 25,000 in June 2000, following the publication of *Action on Social Housing*.

- enactment of the Planning and Development Bill to remove obstacles and delays to housing development;
- continued investment in improvements to Local Authority houses and inner city flat complexes; and
- establishment of a Housing Forum, including representatives of social partner and relevant Government Departments.

2.51 The Team welcomes the proposed establishment of a Housing Forum by the Department of the Environment and Local Government to monitor developments in relation to the supply of affordable housing and, more specifically, the implementation of the housing objectives and actions set out in the Programme. **The Team recommends that the Housing Forum's membership should include representation of Local Authority officials charged with the implementation of many of the housing policies outlined in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.**¹¹

2.52 The Team notes that under the PPF considerable emphasis has been placed on modernisation in the local government sector. The framework for development in this area is based on the core principles of better customer service and enhanced local democracy. It (2000: 35) states that:

To meet these principles, local authorities are bringing their services closer to the customer; strengthening management and staff structures, providing higher levels of staff development and training and eliminating obstacles to flexibility and efficiency...

2.53 The PPF highlights that Local Authorities are now developing ways to measure customer satisfaction and levels of performance. The Team welcomes these developments, which are in line with the comprehensive set of recommendations set out in the Forum's own Report No 6 *Quality Delivery of Social Services* (February 1995) and represent an important step in the delivery of a quality public housing service (see Section III of this Report).

2.54 The PPF also points to the role that Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) will have in developing and overseeing implementation of local government policies and in strengthening the principles of customer service and local democracy. The Local Government Bill, 2000 specifies the establishment of SPCs, consisting of elected councillors and representatives from relevant

¹¹ The National Local Authority Housing Practitioners Forum established by the Housing Unit in the Institute of Public Administration in co-operation with the Department of the Environment and Local Government and the County and City Managers Association would be a possible source for this representation.

sectoral and community interests, to advise the local councils on policy matters. County/City Development Boards have also been established to develop, and oversee the implementation of a County/City Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development. Directors of Community and Enterprise are being recruited by Local Authorities to develop and implement these strategies.¹²

- 2.55 Indeed, in the context of an increasing role for social and affordable housing and accommodation, with an expanding stock and more diverse customers and providers, the modernisation of the delivery of that service is crucial if the overall objectives of housing policy are to be achieved. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1992 required Authorities to prepare and adopt a written statement of their policy on the management and maintenance of their housing, which is a positive development in this context. A Memorandum prepared by the Department of the Environment (1993: 7) spelt out the issues involved:

Overall, there are indications that resources are not being put to best use in the management of local authority housing, the stock is not being adequately managed, tenants are often dissatisfied and alienated, dwellings are being allowed to become rundown through poor maintenance, and demands are growing for Exchequer funding for the refurbishment of rundown and problem estates. Tenants, elected representatives and the public generally are frequently critical of the standards of many local authority housing estates and there is now a widespread view that action is urgently required to improve the position. To this end, housing authorities need to identify the deficiencies in their management systems, to develop objectives and strategies for improvement of these systems and to decide on specific proposals for providing services in an effective, efficient and economical way.

- 2.56 Progress has been made, but this is such a key strategic area that the Team returns to some of the underlying issues involved in the next Section of the Report.
- 2.57 Figure 3 below shows how the Team has conceptualised the problems facing Irish housing policy for those who are socially and economically excluded and the policy framework that needs to be considered in the context of further actions to improve housing policy and practice for this group. The Figure serves as a graphical summary to this subsection of the Report and also as a backdrop to the next subsection, which names the four priority issues that the Team feels need to be addressed in dealing with the range of housing issues arising in a comprehensive and integrated fashion.

¹² For further discussion see Forum Opinion No. 7 *Local Development Issues* (September 1999).

Figure 3: Irish Housing Policy: Contextual Framework

Policy Issues

Lack of serviced development land
Demand for home ownership outstrips supply
Increased waiting lists for Local Authority housing
Negative image of Local Authority housing
Poor terms and conditions in private rented sector
Low voluntary sector output
Social segregation and a lack of social mix

Policy Framework

Strategic Management Initiative
National Development Plan
Planning and Development Bill, 1999
Programme for Prosperity and Fairness

Priority Issues

The delivery of housing as a public service
The availability of affordable housing
Community building
Increasing social integration

Priority Issues

2.58 Through its work, and its consultation processes, the Team has identified key policy issues that are crucial if the objectives of housing policy are to be achieved, particularly for the most vulnerable groups in our society. In the Team's view, policy priorities in this regard should be to:

- improve the delivery of housing as a public service;
- increase the availability of affordable housing;
- recognise the social aspects of housing provision; and
- increase social integration.

2.59 Achieving the Government’s stated objectives of housing policy is challenging, but if realised will have a significantly positive impact on everyone’s quality of life. There are sufficient financial resources at the Government’s disposal to make decisive progress towards these objectives, but consideration needs to be given, not just to bricks and mortar issues, but also to the social aspects of building and sustaining a better society for all. Housing has a critically important role to play in promoting community development, in advancing social inclusion and in underpinning the successful pursuit of spatial development strategies.

Section III

**The Delivery of
Housing as a
Public Service**

The Delivery of Housing as a Public Service

Outline of Section III

3.1 This Section is divided into three main parts:

- The policy context,
- Current management processes,
- Conclusions and recommendations.

The Policy Context

3.2 The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF), the new social partnership agreement, outlines commitments in relation to modernisation in the local government sector (Government of Ireland: 31):

The Local Authorities are committed to the implementation of the Government's policy for a strengthened and reinvigorated local government system which will be at the centre of the provision of a wide range of services to the community at the level of the county and city.... The core principles of this policy are to serve the customer better and to enhance local democracy.

It is this first core principle, to serve the customer better, which is a key interest in this Section of the Team's Report. In this respect, the critical issues are:

- the capacity of Local Authorities and other housing agencies to achieve the challenging objectives set out in the PPF (see Section II); and
- the resources required to address the critical issues which arise.

The overall objective, as set out in the above Programme, is (*op cit*: 63):

To ensure a sustainable pattern of social housing provision which will facilitate the development of socially integrated communities.

3.3 The achievement of this objective will require significant resources to increase the supply of social and affordable housing and accommodation and continue to improve the quality of the existing stock. A vital ingredient for success or failure in this area, and one which has not received sufficient attention, is that of the management and professional skills which are needed by social housing providers to deliver and sustain a quality housing service.

3.4 There is a serious lack of empirical data and policy analysis on public housing management in this country. The following three pieces of work were commissioned during the course of the Team’s deliberations:

- a policy paper by Dr Tony Fahey of the Economic and Social Research Institute;
- a research framework document by Dr Cathal O’Connell and Michelle Norris¹³ of University College Cork, which examined public housing management and highlighted gaps in our current knowledge; and
- six cases studies of housing providers around the country – Dublin Corporation, Kilkenny County Council, Cork Corporation, Limerick Corporation, Sligo Corporation and Sligo County Council. This research was undertaken by a research team, which was headed by personnel in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive with a particular training in quality management and included members of the Forum Secretariat and Dr Cathal O’Connell and Ms Michelle Norris. The Executive has almost thirty years’ experience of providing and managing social housing in Northern Ireland. Details of its structure and working arrangements are provided as Annex IV of the Report.

Current Housing Management Processes

3.5 There has been a lack of research and policy debate on local authority housing management in Ireland. Generally speaking, little evaluative work has been undertaken on local authority housing management systems. Although some Local Authorities have commissioned or carried out individual research this, however, has tended to be limited to evaluating their own management systems and, therefore, lacks a comparative perspective. O’Connell and Norris (2000) identified the following four problems:

- i) a lack of empirical research;
- ii) a sketchy knowledge of current housing management practice in Local Authorities;
- iii) a lack of knowledge on the underlying causes of the problems – which relate to the organisation and funding of Local Authorities – the improvements needed and how these are to be implemented; and
- iv) a tendency for the failings of local authority housing management to be listed without providing solutions to these problems.

13 Ms Norris subsequently became Director of the Housing Unit at the Institute of Public Administration.

3.6 The following paragraphs outline the issues identified on the basis of the information collected by the Project Team. These results are covered in the following sequence:

- organisational structures;
- human resource issues;
- strategic planning;
- performance management; and
- tenant relations.

3.7 The Team's focus is on policy implementation, and here the links between policy-making, implementation and monitoring are examined. In effect, this centres on the links between the policy-making institution (i.e. the Department) and the implementation organisations (i.e. the Local Authorities). In this context, the following are some of the key questions to be addressed:

- Does the Department give sufficient policy focus to social housing?
- Do Local Authorities give sufficient implementation focus to social housing at a local level?
- What is the nature of the relationship between the Department and Local Authorities?

Organisational Structures

i) Role of the Department

3.8 The Department of the Environment and Local Government is responsible for housing at Government level. The Department's housing function includes the formulation of policy, the preparation of legislation, the planning of national social housing programmes, the provision and disbursement of the necessary capital funding for these programmes and overseeing the implementation of policies by the Local Authorities. The Department has a fundamental role to play in enabling Local Authorities to achieve their targets.

ii) Role of the Local Authorities

3.9 The Local Authorities, of which for housing purposes there are effectively 88, are responsible for the delivery of the great majority of housing services at local level. They determine local housing needs. They plan the local housing and voluntary programmes and deliver a wide range of social housing measures. In law, each Authority is independent in the performance of its functions.

3.10 The Authorities vary greatly in size – Dublin Corporation has a population of over 500,000 whereas Athy District Council has 2,500. The Local Authority

housing stock includes over 99,000 dwellings. Only nine of the Authorities have more than 2,000 occupied dwellings, while twenty-five have housing stocks of less than 200 dwellings (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000b).

- 3.11 The typical organisational structure in Local Authorities is a split between the administrative and technical aspects of housing. The administrative unit carry out the core functions of property and tenant management, while the technical unit, which consists of architects, engineers, etc., contribute to new build schemes and remedial work contracts. In addition, rent collectors tend to be part of the finance function of Local Authorities, while maintenance work is carried out by a separate unit within the Authority or by contract labour. Proposals are now being finalised for the creation of strengthened local authority management structures to meet the demands of the introduction of a programme-based system of administration and the abolition of the dual staffing structure.
- 3.12 *Better Local Government* (1996:56) commented, in relation to the Local Authority personnel system generally, that:

The multiplicity of clerical and administrative grades, the separate professional and administrative structures, and the separation of officer and non-officer streams create rigidities and a tendency towards hierarchical management practices.

- 3.13 The present case studies undertaken for the Project Team found that the working relationships between different housing-related sectors within the Local Authority organisational structure tended to be good. However, this could be dependent on particular personalities working well with each other, rather than a tradition of good cross-sectional working. The studies also found that the small scale of some of the Authorities did tend to limit their housing activities. This may mean that they will require extra help and advice on the development of their strategic plans, including the formulation and monitoring of performance indicators. Three of the Authorities covered in the study were in the process of restructuring. In each case, this was in recognition of the pressures in meeting the targets that the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* will place on them.

iii) *Recommendations*

- 3.14 A stronger social housing policy and implementation focus is required (the Team's consultations as well as the experience of its Members confirms this) to tackle the challenges which now arise, for example:
- the supply of affordable housing continues to be problematic;

- the dramatic increase in Local Authority housing waiting lists;
- voluntary sector housing output declined from over 1,000 in 1995 to fewer than 500 in 1998, and yet this does not seem to have been a major policy concern. A Voluntary Housing Unit has now been established in the Department and funding has been increased to the sector, but a strategic policy statement on its role is lacking (see Section IV);
- there is a serious lack of officially-sponsored, systematic and timely research, and of necessary evaluation and monitoring at both local and national levels to better inform social housing policy and practice; and
- the mechanisms for Local Authorities to feed into national policy-making need to be strengthened.

3.15 A clear priority is to develop stronger and more effective links between housing policy design and its implementation. **The Team recommends that a National Housing Authority should be established to provide strategic policy advice and support to the Minister, Local Authorities and the other housing providers.**

3.16 The Authority, which would be an independent statutory body, would be analogous to, for example, Forfás in relation to industrial development. It would be essential to avoid duplication and ensure that the Authority would link in with and complement the respective roles of related bodies such as the new Housing Forum, the National Building Agency, the County Enterprise Boards, the Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees, including Special Housing Committees where these exist. Among the specific functions of the National Housing Authority would be to:

- *advise the Minister on all matters relating to the development of housing policy;*
- *plan and keep under review a multi-annual plan for all housing needs, in line with commitments in relevant social partnership agreements and with particular emphasis on social housing;*
- *evaluate and co-ordinate examination of policy issues across all housing tenures;*
- *advise on the allocation of funding to local authorities and non-profit housing organisations;*
- *provide technical advice and support to local authority and voluntary housing bodies;*
- *facilitate the development of best practice in relation to social housing provision and maintenance;*
- *promote housing choice through sustainable home ownership and a diverse and well-managed private rented sector;*
- *promote social integration;*

- *support and co-ordinate programmes to improve housing conditions in all tenures;*
- *promote energy efficiency and good housing design;*
- *undertake and commission housing research and evaluation; and*
- *develop a housing information service.*

The Authority should consist of Members appointed by Government, including elected representatives of Local Authorities and representatives of the Social Partners. It should have its own independent support staff.

- 3.17 The Department of the Environment and Local Government considers that the above recommendation requires further examination to ensure, in particular, that the terms of reference of the proposed Authority are consistent with and support the role of the Department, as well as the role and development of Local Authorities in the housing area and the voluntary and co-operative housing sectors.

Human Resource Issues

- 3.18 The current staffing structure of housing departments is integrated with the broader administrative system of the Local Authorities and other public service bodies such as the Health Boards. This allows officers to move around the public service, build up experience and expertise of procedures, legislative provisions and services and offers wider promotional opportunities. The disadvantage of this system, however, from the point of view of the delivery of a good quality housing service, is that it poses difficulties for staff to build up expertise, experience and continuity in this increasingly complex area and it perpetuates a largely desk-bound culture. O'Connell and Norris (2000) note:

Despite some localised innovations, very little is known about the current deployment of local authority housing staff. Little is known about the efficiency of current staffing arrangements, procedural efficiency or the extent of effective communications between different administrative, technical and professional staff. In the absence of such basic knowledge little can be done to suggest how the staff complement can make a greater contribution to improving the housing service.

- 3.19 There is some evidence that awareness of this structural limitation is growing and it is being addressed by local innovations in staff recruitment in an effort by some housing departments to move towards a more estate-based/decentralised service. For example, Dublin Corporation has decentralised housing management in large estates such as Ballymun, while other Authorities have appointed Tenant/Community Liaison Officers to area offices and have plans to devolve greater responsibility to area managers.

- 3.20 These moves are in keeping with a growing recognition that services need to be brought closer to those they serve. These innovations, however, seem to be occurring largely in an ad hoc localised manner as opposed to representing a new departure in policy at a national level and in the absence of a structural move away from the established administrative structure. However, these new developments need to be closely monitored and evaluated to ensure that their implementation is as intended and that they are having a positive impact on tenants' quality of service. An impediment to their proper implementation would be if they are not part of an overall restructuring of housing departments, entailing a shift away from the traditional bureaucracy towards a new management perspective.
- 3.21 The new front-line staff will have to be given the powers necessary to deal with problems on an estate (e.g. emergency repairs, vandalism and casual vacancies), otherwise they will lose their credibility with tenants. There is also an important issue concerning the staff support and training needed to undertake this type of estate work successfully, particularly in the areas of communications and customer care skills, and indeed the wider career promotion prospects of decentralised staff. In some parts of the country Tenant Liaison Officers are recruited by Local Area Partnerships, giving the post a more clear-cut community development identity. However, these recruits face similar challenges, with their credibility being linked to their ability to solve tenants' problems.
- 3.22 *Better Local Government* (*op cit* 62) refers to the gender imbalance in the management levels in the local authority service. This imbalance is still evident in the housing management side as less than one in five of Housing Officers or equivalents in County Councils, County Boroughs and Borough Corporations are women. In Urban District Councils the gender balance is more equal, with a little under half of those responsible for the housing service being women. An Equality Action Programme for the local authorities service has now been introduced to counteract gender imbalance and to provide equal opportunities in recruitment and promotion.
- 3.23 The development and implementation of a quality housing service, particularly in larger and more complex Authorities, requires knowledge of certain procedures, policies and management systems. This is particularly so if Housing Officers are expected to develop housing strategies, allocation policies, anti-social behaviour policies, and homeless policies. Mechanisms need to be developed to share knowledge across the country. The Housing Unit at the Institute of Public Administration should play a key role in this regard. The development of professional accreditation standards in housing management is also to be explored, under a commitment in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

- 3.24 It is notable that none of the Local Authorities included in the case studies used a staff or performance appraisal system.¹⁴ Such systems are crucial in identifying training needs, as well as acting as an environment for performance feedback and priority setting.
- 3.25 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive provides a useful example of how these issues can be addressed. In the Executive, staffing needs are developed from each Department's Business Plan and agreed within the corporate framework. Formal Training Plans are drawn up each year and individual and unit training needs are identified. The training approaches are varied and include on the job training, secondments and further education sponsorship – see Annex IV.

Strategic Planning

- 3.26 The publication of the Department of the Environment's *Memorandum on the Preparation of a Statement of Policy on Housing Management* in 1993 was the first indication that strategic management would become a concern within local authority housing departments. That Memorandum provided guidelines to Local Authorities on the preparation of statements of policy on housing management, which they are obliged to produce under the terms of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1992 (see Section II above). Under the terms of the Act, Local Authorities were obliged to produce detailed policy statements to include:
- a description of the Authority's rented stock;
 - an outline of objectives for the management of their stock;
 - details of the general strategies and specific measures to be employed in the attainment of the objectives and aims; and
 - arrangements for the monitoring and assessment of performance against targets set as an essential part of the management of the programme.
- 3.27 Redmond and Walker's (1995) analysis of the subsequent policy statements prepared by the Local Authorities concluded that these statements failed to meet the aims and objectives demanded of them. The statements were found to be lacking in detail generally, but also demonstrated a lack of understanding of what tenant involvement entails and data and information system requirements.
- 3.28 The two reports of the Housing Management Group (1996, 1998) outline the key steps which need to be implemented to improve the practical aspects of housing management. These include:

¹⁴ The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, sets out an action programme on Human Resource Management Strategies and related issues as a priority.

- better co-ordination of the different housing management functions;
- a stronger estate focus;
- better implementation of tenancy agreements;
- better defined maintenance service;
- better monitoring of rent collections, especially arrears;
- better communication with tenants; and
- more training and professional development of staff.

Box 3

Strategic Planning – Case Study Findings

Authorities:

- tended to have a ‘strategy’, but it was often not comprehensive or written down;
- lacked linkages between future levels of provision, current waiting lists and anticipated population growth;
- lacked a comprehensive overview of the housing market in their area;
- lacked knowledge on the condition of their stock;
- lacked planned maintenance and improvement schemes; and
- lacked strategic targets.

3.29 The data collected from the six case studies for the Project Team indicate that there has been some movement towards a more strategically planned housing service, particularly among the larger housing providers. At an operational level the case studies found that the Authorities tended to have ‘a strategy’. However, in a number of cases these were not written down nor were they comprehensive. Where Authorities covered in the case studies did have written strategies, there tended to be considerable gaps between future levels of provision, current waiting lists and anticipated population growth, with the demand for social housing having increased considerably in the last three years. In Sligo Corporation, for example, the waiting list was virtually zero four years ago, with some housing stock difficult to let. The current waiting list is now 500 compared to a total stock of only 800.

3.30 The process of developing strategic plans in line with the Planning and Development Bill will require sensitive management. Authorities, particularly the smaller ones, will require assistance to properly engage with the process. It

can be expected that the needs identified by the appropriate strategic assessment will be in excess of what is already planned. Some of the larger Authorities may need to develop sites in adjoining areas to meet demand. This process will not only impact on the housing sections of Local Authorities, but across the whole spectrum of services from infrastructure to schools, transport systems, retail development and recreational amenities.

- 3.31 It was also noteworthy in this context that Authorities lacked a comprehensive overview of the housing market in their area. Some have employed consultants and commissioned research in order to identify how management practices can be improved, or have implemented projects to improve specific aspects of their housing management performance, such as computerising their maintenance service or introducing initiatives to address anti-social behaviour.
- 3.32 The case studies found that housing stock improvement, which is one of the key issues raised under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, was one area in which a more strategic approach could be developed among some Authorities. There has been a history of under-development in this area. However, in more recent times the volume of investment in remedial contracts, comprehensive renewal and environmental improvements have increased and successful schemes have been completed. Nevertheless, the planning and strategic base for this type of investment is poor, with Local Authorities often having a poor knowledge base of the condition of their existing stock, lacking planned maintenance and improvement schemes and not having strategic targets set.
- 3.33 In the Northern Ireland Housing Executive the framework for strategic planning is the Corporate Plan, which covers a three-year period and is supported by an annual Business Plan. The Corporate Plan sets out the Executive's main strategic objectives – such as “*to ensure that social housing programmes are targeted to those in greatest need, on the basis of objective assessment of housing requirements*”.

Measuring Performance

- 3.34 In relation to measuring performance, there are very marked contrasts between the systems in evidence in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic. The Housing Executive has a highly developed, largely computer-based performance management process for all its key activities. Performance targets are set and formally monitored with action plans to address deviations (Annex IV provides more information about the Executive).

3.35 The pattern with the Authorities in the South is of a much less developed system. O'Connell and Norris (2000) noted that:

Virtually no Local Authority collects basic management information in a systematic and strategic sense for the purposes of evaluating and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of services to tenants.

3.36 However, the development and use of performance indicators are now considered as an important and key element of strategic planning. In a review of performance indicators undertaken by the Value for Money Unit in the Department of the Environment and Local Government (1998c), consideration was given to the problems and benefits involved. The problems were seen to relate mainly to the capacity and willingness of Authorities to collect the necessary information. The main benefits were that of facilitating better budgeting and use of resources, improving the quality of management and promoting accountability and transparency. Performance indicators can also be used to demonstrate customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

3.37 Following consultations with the Local Authorities, the Department issued a set of Service Indicators in May 2000 which Authorities are now expected to operate. Local councils will now begin to measure their own performances against these indicators and, after the end of each year, will publish the results in their annual reports. The Department (2000c) stated that:

Local Authorities are now engaged in preparing their next corporate plans and their strategic planning process should be used to embed target setting and measurement.

3.38 Service Indicators have now been set by the Department in relation to a wide range of Local Authority functions. Indicators which have a bearing on the housing service provided by Local Authorities cover the following areas:

a) *Housing*

- The percentage of dwellings that are empty
- Average time taken to re-let dwellings available for letting or awaiting minor repairs

b) *Planning*

- Time taken in the planning process for different planning applications

c) *Revenue Collection*

- House rents
 - Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due

- Percentage of arrears
- House repayments
 - Amount collected at year end as a percentage of amount due
 - Percentage of arrears

3.39 The Team notes that Service Indicators in relation to homelessness and in relation to customer satisfaction are omitted from the Initiative. It is also notable that the indicators were designed in consultation with Local Authorities themselves, but did not involve consultation with service users, although the Department's document on Service Indicators stresses that:

... each organisation in the public service must strive for continuous improvement, in consultation with those it serves.

There is also a lack of explicit appreciation of the information technology systems and databases and management systems required to collect and collate the necessary data to develop quality performance indicators and benchmarking.

3.40 Combating anti-social behaviour is central to good practice in housing management in some areas. Strategies in this area need to be wide ranging, including increased Garda presence on some estates, the appointment of designated anti-social behaviour officers in some cases, the enforcement of tenancy agreements, the development of preventative measures such as youth clubs and, if need be, the eviction of offenders. Such performance is difficult to measure using standard performance indicators, but is crucial in strategies to tackle the negative image associated with some public housing. The Team addresses this issue in more detail in Section VI of the Report.

3.41 As already mentioned, the Planning and Development Bill, 1999 will require Local Authorities to produce Housing Strategies for future housing provision. Consultants have been commissioned by the Department to produce a model housing strategy, which is currently being drafted. However, it is likely that Local Authorities, particularly those with a small stock and non-housing specialists in the housing department, will require additional support and advice in preparing, implementing and monitoring their Housing Strategies. Increased emphasis will also have to be put on the development of more comprehensive service indicators and management information systems so that Local Authority performance in delivering a quality housing service can be measured on an on-going basis.

Box 4
Managing Performance – Case Study Findings

- **Performance indicators are under-developed and not comprehensive;**
- **There is a lack of consultation with service users on performance measures;**
- **The data collection requirements to monitor performance need further consideration; and**
- **Some Authorities may require additional support and advice in preparing, implementing and monitoring their Housing Strategies.**

Tenant Relations

3.42 Traditionally most Local Authorities have managed their dwellings in a centralised and frequently paternalistic manner. Housing services have been based in authority headquarters, ongoing contact with tenants has been confined to rent collection and maintenance and management decision have been made by officials with little effort to consult or establish the opinions of clients. However, it should also be noted that in the past there was little obvious demand to change this system.

3.43 In more recent years, this situation has changed and the issue of tenant participation in housing management has been pushed to the forefront of the debate on public housing management. This increased emphasis on tenant participation reflects, on the one hand, the growth in community activity in Ireland generally and, on the other, an increased recognition of the importance of client consultation in social service management. In urban areas, the demands for tenant participation in housing management are also related to concerns around drug dealing and anti-social behaviour on public housing estates and flat complexes.

3.44 Considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of tenant participation in *A Plan for Social Housing* (1991: 13):

Good management practice encourages tenant involvement and helps counteract tenant alienation.

The voluntary sector has also played an important role here in the provision of tenant participation training, and a range of tenant participation projects have been grant aided under the Department's Scheme of Grants for Housing Management Initiatives, established in 1995. The Department also now requires Local Authorities to engage in consultation with tenants as a condition of some

funding, for instance, for refurbishment projects under the Remedial Works Scheme (see Section V for further discussion).

- 3.45 In the cases studies, tenant involvement was generally poorly developed, although some Authorities had placed greater emphasis on this area. However, formal standards of tenant involvement and tenant participation were absent. Some efforts were being made to determine tenant and customer satisfaction, but these tended to be once-off and limited in nature. Rising expectations on the part of tenants were seen as a pressure that would have to be addressed in the future. Authorities, such as Limerick Corporation, which have put a lot of emphasis on estate and community development, highlighted the need to support tenants and residents groups to engage with the Authority. However, it was also highlighted that funding for this type of work is piecemeal.
- 3.46 The Team's wider consultations also found that tenants may wish to participate at different levels in the management of their housing – some may opt for a high level of input while others may be satisfied with meaningful consultation with key staff on issues like allocations, refurbishment, maintenance and landscape management. This means that different participation mechanisms are needed to give customers real choice and a proper voice in the management of their housing service.
- 3.47 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a highly developed structure for tenant participation, which has four tiers – local, district, area and central. At a local level, tenants are consulted about plans for their estates. At district level consumer panels are involved in performance review and in deciding on priorities for the district. At area level, representatives from district panels compare best practice. At central level, area representatives can influence the development of policy – see Annex IV.
- 3.48 Another issue that emerged during the Team's consultation was the lack of family support and preventative work offered by housing welfare officers employed by Local Authorities. This function has now evolved almost exclusively under the remit of Health Boards and the voluntary sector. In practice, however, Health Boards offer very little family support work due to their concentration on implementing child protection legislation, so voluntary bodies such as Barnardo's, and small community-based family support projects are in effect the only providers of professional family support services (see also Section V under *Estate Management*).¹⁵

15 The Department of Health and Children introduced the Springboard Initiative in 1998. To-date, fifteen Family Support Projects have been established around the country to work with children, mainly in the 7-12 year age group who are at risk of going into care or getting into trouble, and their families.

Box 5
Tenant Participation – Findings

- **Tenant involvement was poorly developed;**
- **Funding for tenant involvement work is piecemeal; and**
- **Different participation mechanisms are needed to give tenants real choice.**

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 3.49 Social and affordable housing and accommodation needs to be given more strategic profile by the Government and the Local Authorities. The best way to achieve this would be to establish a dedicated National Housing Authority to provide strategic advice and support to the Department and the Local Authorities.
- 3.50 Local Authorities are developing their delivery of housing as a public service, but that there is room for considerable development in this area. Increased financial resources are being provided to boost social housing output to meet increased demand. The legislative framework is developing, particularly in Section V of the Planning and Development Bill, 1999, which will require Local Authorities to prepare housing strategies.
- 3.51 The research undertaken as part of the Project Team’s deliberations indicates that developing Local Authorities’ housing management capacity is key to delivering on the targets set in the *National Development Plan* and the *Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness*. This will require a redoubling of effort across the board – from Government, to the Department and to the Local Authorities themselves.
- 3.52 In this Section of the Report the Team makes the following recommendations for change. They are grouped here to signify that they should be seen as a package of changes required to achieve a better quality public service. If implemented, they would have a substantial impact on wider issues such as affordability, building communities and reducing social segregation which are covered in subsequent Sections of this Report.
- 3.53 **The Team recommends that:**
Local Authorities should
- **be required to specifically address how they plan to develop their housing management practice as part of their Housing Strategies;**

- develop their data-gathering and analytical roles – for example, by carrying out condition surveys of existing local authority stock and measuring tenant satisfaction on an on-going basis;
- develop their information technology and database capacities to support good housing management practice;
- develop their service indicators over a four-year period, e.g. indicators in relation to customer satisfaction and homelessness;
- establish rolling planned maintenance and improvement programmes;
- undertake a training and skills needs assessment for housing staff; and
- develop a range of tenant participation mechanisms.

The Department of the Environment and Local Government should:

- ensure that Local Authorities are given sufficient guidance to prepare their strategic plans;
- ensure that Local Authorities are provided with standardised Information Technology software packages;
- encourage the development of cross-authority planning, training and sharing of good practice;
- ensure that Housing Officers have sufficient training opportunities to develop good housing management practice;
- consider the introduction of benchmarking and league tables;
- ensure that there is effective synergy between the Local Authority Housing Strategies and the Department's national housing policy; and
- ensure that the Housing Forum, established under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, considers how housing management practices can be developed further within the Local Authorities.

Section IV

Increasing the Availability of Affordable Accommodation

Increasing the Availability of Affordable Accommodation

Outline of Section IV

4.1 This Section is divided into three main parts:

- The policy context,
- Policy responses
 - the supply of affordable land
 - access to affordable home ownership for low-income families
 - the role of the private rented residential sector
 - the capacity of the voluntary sector,
- Conclusions

The Policy Context

4.2 The cost of accommodation, particularly in the owner-occupied and private rented residential sectors, has now become a critically important policy issue. Section II of the Report highlighted current trends and policy responses in this area. In summary, the sharp rise in accommodation costs in the private rented and owner-occupation sectors reflects the failure of housing supply to keep pace with the explosion of demand. The Government's policy response has focused, by-and-large, on increasing the supply of housing, particularly for home ownership. Policy initiatives have been introduced on foot of the Bacon Reports (1998, 1999, 2000) to increase the supply of serviced land, reduce excessive investor demand and assist lower income house purchasers. A co-ordinating Housing Supply Unit was established in November 1999, in the Department of the Environment and Local Government, to monitor and assess adequacy of private housing output and to ensure urgent and effective delivery of the Government's housing supply measures. In addition, Part V of the Planning and Development Bill, 1999 aims to increase the supply of social and affordable housing in each planning authority area based on identified need.

4.3 The National Competitiveness Council (2000: 16), in a recent commentary, identifies the housing market as a critical competitiveness issue, stating:

According to official figures, house prices are estimated to have doubled since 1994. The increase in the Dublin area was even greater. There is, as yet, no conclusive

sign of a return to more normal rates of increase. Sustained high house price inflation has made private house purchase very difficult for many people on low-to-middle incomes, leading to burgeoning local authority housing lists. The knock-on effect on the private rented sector has led to large increases in rents. Competitiveness is being damaged: immigration and internal labour mobility are being discouraged at the very time that severe labour/skill shortages are putting upward pressure on wage costs in the economy which, in turn, are subject to upward pressure due to rising housing costs.

- 4.4 Because of the complexity and linkages across the housing spectrum, and particularly the inter-connected nature of the various tenures, policy responses need to take greater account of this dynamic. Access to housing should be considered a basic need and a human right. The Team recognises that accommodation costs are having a detrimental impact on the national economy, both in economic and social terms. A continuing escalation in the cost of housing will undermine competitiveness and social cohesion and will have very serious consequences for those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.
- 4.5 Particular care is needed to ensure that the needs of those who are currently most disadvantaged are given greater priority of access in policy measures to increase the supply of affordable accommodation. Following a Government decision in July 1998, poverty proofing¹⁶ has been included as a requirement in the Cabinet Handbook, which means in practice that major economic or social policy proposals have now to be assessed for their effects on poverty (see Johnston and O'Brien, 2000). It is envisaged that poverty proofing will be extended to Local Authorities and Health Boards. The Forum is currently preparing an Opinion on the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which, *inter alia*, will include a discussion of poverty proofing.
- 4.6 Procedures for rural proofing are also in place and will be supported by detailed guidelines for Government Departments under a commitment in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.¹⁷ Equality proofing is also being developed under the *Programme*, commencing with a 'learning phase' during the period 2000-2003, to involve assessing the impact of policy on the nine categories identified in equality legislation, i.e. gender, race, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, religion, disability and membership of the Traveller

16 Poverty proofing is defined as "the process by which government departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and inequality which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction" (for discussion, see Johnston and O'Brien, 2000: 63-69).

17 The Forum's Report Number 12 on *Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion* (March 1997) made recommendations on improvements to rural housing.

Community. Furthermore, gender equality issues are to be mainstreamed across all Operational Programmes under the *National Development Plan*.

4.7 The Team recommends that all major policy initiatives to increase the availability of affordable accommodation should be:

- **policy proofed – to include poverty, rural, equality and gender dimensions;**
- **sustainability and eco-proofed; and**
- **details of these proofing exercises should be made publicly available.**

Policy Responses

4.8 The Team now deals with four issues that it considers are central to addressing the current problems in relation to the availability of affordable accommodation. These are:

- the supply of affordable land for building;
- access to affordable home ownership for low income families;
- the role of the private rented residential sector; and
- the capacity of the voluntary sector.

The Supply of Affordable Land

4.9 The supply of affordable building land (which is zoned and serviced) is a key starting point if the supply of affordable housing is to improve (Drudy, 1999). Record prices have been paid for building land, particularly if it has residential planning permission. In a recent report, the National Competitiveness Council (2000) concluded that:

Land is not intrinsically a scarce resource in Dublin, where the problem is most pronounced but industry opinion suggests that it now accounts for up to 50 per cent of average house prices.

4.10 The Government has introduced measures to try to increase the supply (and thereby stabilise the price) of building land – such as the Serviced Land Initiative¹⁸ and the reduction in Capital Gains Tax for those who sell land. Further measures were introduced recently on foot of the third Bacon Report (see Section II). In addition, the objectives of Section V of the Planning and Development Bill, 1999 also reflects the Government’s concern to ensure the availability of sufficient zoned land and the supply of housing for all income categories.

¹⁸ The Serviced Land Initiative was introduced in 1997 to accelerate the provision of water and sewerage schemes to open up land for residential development.

4.11 The Government’s response to Bacon (1999), *Action on the Housing Market* (1999b: 4) estimated that the Serviced Land Initiative would yield 100,000¹⁹ housing sites nationally in 1999-2000 and stated that :

Schemes providing 24,000 serviced sites are due to start in the Dublin Region (Dublin Local Authorities, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow) alone in 1999, with an estimated 8,200 of these to reach completion this year.

Table 2 below details progress to June 2000 in relation this Initiative. The Department estimates that by the end of 2000, 71,558 sites will be developed under the Initiatives, 29,676 of which will be in the Greater Dublin Area. However, as the Table shows, by June 2000 only 944 sites had been completed in the Greater Dublin Area, which is considerably below the original targets. Delays in getting some of the larger schemes underway account for some of this shortfall. However, concern about the Initiative’s ability to deliver sufficient additional serviced sites to meet demand is justified.

Area	Completed	Under construction	To start in 2000	To start in 2001	Total
Dublin Region*	944	12,536	32,540	6,506	52,526
Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford	5,203	3,204	18,654	1,403	28,464
Other areas	2,859	1,770	26,386	3,770	34,785
Total	9,006	17,510	77,580	11,679	115,775

*Includes Dublin Local Authorities, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow.
Source: Department of the Environment and Local Government, June 2000

4.12 The Department recently published (June 2000) the results of a national inventory of zoned serviced land. This established that there is sufficient zoned and serviced land to build 223,625 houses immediately. In Dublin, for example, the survey found that the supply of serviced land was over 1,000 hectares – enough to build over 40,000 housing units or four times last year’s output in the area. The survey concluded that there would be enough zoned and serviced land to build 427,765 houses by 2005. Housing development can also take place on un-zoned land in rural areas, adding to the total output. The survey did not specify how much of this land is owned by private developers and how much is owned by Local Authorities.

¹⁹ Proposals with potential to release an additional 41,500 sites are under examination in the Department.

- 4.13 In Section II of the Report, the Team outlined recent trends in the increased price of housing. O’Connell and Quinn (1999) argued that recent house price increases far exceed the increases in building costs, including labour and that builders’ profits have increased substantially during the current house price boom. The increasing cost of building land is also contributing to price inflation in this area, as mentioned above.
- 4.14 This raises an important question as to what should be considered a reasonable profit for those involved in the construction industry. In a *laissez faire* society a reasonable profit is that which the buyer is willing and able to pay over and above the costs incurred by the builder. However, because adequate housing is a basic necessity and a key element for economic and social development, there is an argument for State intervention to regulate the market in the common interest. This is not a new idea. For instance, the Commission on the Price of Building Land (Kenny, 1973) recommended that Local Authorities should be able to acquire potential development land designated by the High Court at ‘existing use value’ plus 25 per cent. House Price Controls for new houses – through the issuing of “*Certificates of Reasonable Value*” – were used in the 1970s and early 1980s, but were found to be difficult to administer.
- 4.15 Currently the Government is focusing, *inter alia*, on increasing the supply of housing as one of the main measures to tackle the current affordability problems. Supply has dramatically increased, almost doubling over the last five years (see Section II). However, over 90 per cent of house completions in 1999 were private houses, including both owner-occupiers and investors. It is difficult to be exact about the breakdown between these two categories; however, Bacon (1999: 23) estimated that between one in five and one in four loans are being approved in respect of investors.
- 4.16 One of the major issues of concern is the escalation in land prices. Over the last ten years, the price of new private houses has more than doubled, while house-building costs and consumer prices have increased by 30 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.
- 4.17 **The Team recommends that the Government should introduce the following measures to increase the supply of affordable building land:**
- **ensure that Local Authorities have sufficient trained planning staff and other resources to facilitate the efficient and effective processing of planning applications to minimise delays;**
 - **monitor closely the Serviced Land Initiative to ensure that it is meeting its objective to increase the supply of building land in areas of greatest need; any blockages to the expeditious supply of serviced land should be identified and solutions brought forward;**

- **the scope for and implications of further tax measures (such as a windfall profits tax and incentives), should be examined by the Government for the purposes of ensuring that sufficient land is made available within reasonable time-scales, at reasonable cost and also as a means to part-fund the provision of social and affordable housing;**
- **the desirability and likely effectiveness of the introduction of possible measures to control prices be kept under review;**
- **that the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Bill 1999, which will permit local authorities to secure land at existing use value from developers to meet assessed needs, be kept under review particularly from the point of view of monitoring their adequacy in meeting social and affordable housing needs, and the impact of this initiative on housing supply generally;**
- **the social and affordable proposals in Part V of the Planning and Development Bill, 1999 should not have a detrimental impact on those with incomes so low that they will not be able to afford to buy their own home or have incomes just above the income eligibility limits set; and**
- **the implementation of increased residential densities by Local Authorities should be kept under review.**

4.18 It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that concentrating solely on housing supply is not sufficient to deal with the problems currently facing those wishing to gain access to the housing market. The proposed *National Spatial Strategy* should also pay particular attention to how current housing demand, with services and amenities, could be redistributed on a more sustainable basis and more evenly around the country. It is also important that any future incentives are better and more equitably targeted to those most in need.

Box 6

Consultation on Rural Resettlement

The potential of the Rural Resettlement Scheme should be highlighted in the context of redistributing housing demand. The Team's consultations with those who participated in the Scheme highlighted the importance of linking housing resettlement to the wider social dimension, so that those who resettle are provided with training and employment opportunities and well-integrated social service supports.

Area Development Management, Ltd. has undertaken a pilot resettlement initiative in nine areas, an evaluation of which will be published shortly.

Access to Affordable Home Ownership for Low-Income Families

- 4.19 The Local Authorities now operate two schemes aimed at assisting people on low incomes to purchase houses, the Shared Ownership Scheme (introduced in the early 1990s) and the Affordable Housing Scheme which was introduced last year. Both Schemes are available to those whose income in a single income household does not exceed £25,000 per annum or for a two-income household, two and a half times the principal income, plus one times the secondary income must not exceed £62,500 per annum.²⁰
- 4.20 In the case of the Shared Ownership Scheme, the Local Authority purchases the house and the applicant must then acquire a minimum of 40 per cent of the cost, usually taking out a mortgage from the Local Authority. The remaining share is rented from the Local Authority and the shared owner must undertake to buy out the remaining equity by lump sum payments or by additional loans within 25 years. However, the equity can be bought in stages, thereby facilitating the eventual full ownership. The cost of purchasing additional equity is by reference to the purchase price adjusted in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Box 7

Consultation on the Shared Ownership Scheme

Our consultations highlighted issues of concern in relation to this Scheme; for example:

- the time taken to process sales under the Scheme can be lengthy, deterring some vendors' involvement;
- recent increases in house prices were having a detrimental effect on the viability of the Scheme for many low-income families;
- Local Authority mortgage rates offered to those taking up the Scheme have not kept pace with current market rates;
- those with income levels just above the eligibility threshold can face particular difficulties in gaining access to home ownership; and
- it is unclear how the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes relate to each other.

- 4.21 As already outlined above (Section 2.38) the Affordable Housing Scheme was launched in March 1999 to help lower income households to purchase their own homes.

²⁰ These income eligibility limits were increased as part of the package of measures introduced by the Government on foot of the Bacon Report (2000) – see Section II.

4.22 Although the Shared Ownership Scheme was introduced in 1991, it has not been subjected to any policy evaluation so that it is impossible for the Team to give any detailed indication here of its impact (other than to record that over 8,400 households have availed of it). Regular policy evaluations should be undertaken of Departmental schemes (see paragraph 5.18).

4.23 Table 3 gives examples of how the income test for the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes applies in different circumstances. It can be seen from the Table that those who are not eligible for the Schemes, because they are just above the income criteria, are very disadvantaged in securing a mortgage sufficient to buy a house in the current market.

Table 3: Impact of the Shared Ownership/Affordable Housing Schemes Income Test on Different Households

Gross annual household income	Qualified for Schemes	Maximum mortgage allowance
Single income £25,000	Yes 2.5 times income is not over £62,500	Not applicable
Single income £27,000	No 2.5 times income is over £62,500	£81,000 (3 times gross income)
Double income £19,000 and £15,000	Yes 2.5 times principal income and once secondary income is not over £62,500	Not applicable
Double income £21,000 and £16,000	No 2.5 times principal income and once secondary income is over £62,500	£79,000 (three times principal income and once secondary income)

4.24 As stated above (Section II), the price of a new houses bought by first-time buyers in 1999 averaged £99,600 nationally and £126,400 in Dublin.^{21, 22}

²¹ Department of the Environment and Local Government Press Statement 10/5/00.

²² The cost of housing in scenic rural areas has also increased dramatically with the result that some local people in these areas are finding it impossible to compete on the market.

Applying these figures to the two examples given in Table 3 of households not eligible for the Shared Ownership or Affordable Schemes, gives the following results:

- a single person on a gross income of £27,000 and a calculated mortgage of £81,000 would be over £18,000 short of the asking price for a new house (over £45,000 short in Dublin); and
- a double income household with a £79,000 mortgage would be over £20,000 short of the asking price for a new house (over £47,000 short in Dublin).

Analysis of housing loans undertaken by the Department of the Environment and Local Government (2000b: 42-43) shows that about 6 per cent of new houses in the Dublin area were priced below £80,000 in 1999 (8 per cent of second-hand houses). The corresponding figures for the whole country were 30 per cent and 29 per cent respectively.

4.25 This analysis suggests that some households are being squeezed out of the housing market because they fall outside the income eligibility criteria for the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes, but do not have incomes sufficient to secure an adequate mortgage to acquire a home of their own. As discussed in Section II of the Report, affordability has been defined in the Planning and Development Bill 1999 as a percentage of income net of income tax and PRSI. However, special measures are needed to ensure that people just outside these eligibility criteria are facilitated. As part of the review of the terms and conditions of the two Schemes currently underway in the Department, the problems associated with non-tapered schemes based on income eligibility should be considered.

4.26 **The Team recommends that the Department of the Environment and Local Government should:**

- **promote more effectively the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes;**
- **keep under review the income thresholds and eligibility criteria for these Schemes; and**
- **examine how the regional variation in house prices could be reflected in both these Schemes.**

Furthermore, Local Authorities should give fuller and more in-depth consideration to the definition and implementation of 'affordability' in their Housing Strategies, taking into account all relevant factors, not only income and taxation, but also interest rates and various subsidies.

Box 8

Consultation on the Social Housing Building Programme

There was general agreement that the Local Authority housing programme was not keeping pace with the increased demand for social housing. The main reasons put forward for this shortfall were:

- lack of planning;
- capacity constraints in the building industry;
- the cost of building land; and
- local opposition to Local Authority building programmes.

The impact of the Tenant Sales Scheme was also thought to have diminished the availability of housing for rent by the Local Authorities²³, although the point was also made that the Scheme helped to 'settle estates'.

4.27 The Government's latest commitment to build 25,000 new local authority homes over the next four years (*Action on Housing*) is a step in the right direction. **The Team recommends that:**

- **the effect of increased output of social housing on the housing waiting lists should be published and subject to periodic review;**
- **that every Local Authority should set an immediate target that 70 per cent of households assessed as being in need of accommodation be provided with suitable and adequate accommodation within two years of their acceptance on to the waiting list;**
- **a medium-term objective should be that 80 per cent of households are provided with suitable and adequate accommodation within two years of their acceptance on to the waiting list; and**
- **a longer-term target should be fixed for the elimination of all waiting lists, within a reasonable timeframe.**

4.28 The shortfall in Local Authority provision has contributed to a situation where only the very disadvantaged reach the top of the waiting list and are offered public housing. This has led to Local Authority estates housing mainly those who are extremely disadvantaged, leading in turn to a lack of social mix and considerable social segregation, particularly in larger estates (see Section VI).

²³ For example, in 1999 Local Authorities added 3,713 units to their stock (2,909 new builds and 804 acquisitions), while 2,256 were sold to tenants.

This is undesirable, both for those living in these estates and for society as a whole, and exacerbates the problems that these areas experience.

4.29 The Team concluded that Local Authorities should continue to have the main responsibility for the accommodation needs of low-income families. The development of Local Area Committees, Strategic Planning Committees, the requirement that Local Authorities prepare Housing Strategies and the move, under the *National Development Plan*, to notify Authorities of their building programme for the following four years are important and encouraging developments in this regard. Given the country's changing population structure and evolving housing needs, **the Team recommends that Local Authorities be encouraged to be more innovative in meeting the social and affordable accommodation needs in their areas. Packages could include, for instance, a mixture of:**

- **direct provision/building;**
- **partnership arrangements (e.g. between a Local Authority, trade union, churches etc.);**
- **support for voluntary housing associations;**
- **public-private partnerships (use of pension funds, etc.); and**
- **entering arrangements with private landlords and builders.**

Guidelines and advice should be provided to the Authorities by the Department of the Environment and Local Government and agreed targets should be set and monitored on an annual basis.

The Role of the Private Rented Residential Sector

4.30 The Team received considerable comment on the role of the private rented residential sector from interested bodies. Serious doubts were raised as to whether this sector can provide a substantial amount of safe affordable housing for people on low incomes in any case. For example, Fahey (1999b:5) noted in relation to rent supplements under the Supplementary Welfare Scheme:

... there are limits to its likely future expansion, first in that the scheme is largely confined to those who depend on social welfare income and so is of little or no relevance to other low or modest income households; second because the supply of private rented accommodation is now becoming scarce; and third because structural flaws in the regulatory framework for private accommodation – especially insecurity of tenure and the unpredictability of rent increases – mean that its potential for providing long-term family accommodation is limited.

However, in a situation where the serious imbalance between demand and supply for social housing is expected to continue, it is likely that the private

rented sector will continue to play a role in housing low-income families for the foreseeable future.²⁴

- 4.31 There are also categories of people on low income for whom local authority or voluntary housing would not be appropriate. For example, those requiring help with their housing on a short-term or transitional basis prior to moving to more long-term and secure accommodation. The private rented sector can provide the necessary flexibility in meeting these housing needs but reforms are long overdue, in the interest of both landlord and tenant.
- 4.32 The Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector, which was established in June 1999, is in the process of completing its Report and is expected to address many of the points which were raised in the Team's consultations (see Box 9).
- 4.33 The Team does not, therefore, propose to make detailed comments in this area, except to say that it is important to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords are balanced and that the private rented sector can provide secure, affordable and good quality accommodation to vulnerable groups. An appropriate regulatory framework which would protect the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, particularly vulnerable tenants, provide for a speedy and effective resolution mechanism and a greater degree of certainty for potential investors is needed. Policy changes, however, should be monitored to ensure that actions taken to enforce quality do not lead to increased homelessness. Greater private investment should also be encouraged through the development of 'social landlords'. This could be done on a pilot basis in Local Authority areas with above average demand for low-cost private rented accommodation.
- 4.34 **The Team recommends that increasing the supply of good quality, affordable and secure rented accommodation for low-income households with short-term housing needs should be given greater priority by Government. Furthermore, the Team recommends that:**
- **specific measures are needed to establish security of tenure;**
 - **specific measures in relation to fair and appropriate rent increases should be developed;**
 - **accommodation for which rent assistance is paid should be subject to quality control; and**
 - **measures should be put in place to ensure that non-discriminatory practices operate in the private sector to protect, for example, lone**

²⁴ The Team notes the Government decision (August, 1999) to introduce, in principle a new Local Authority Rent Assistance Scheme to replace, in the main, the current arrangements for rent supplementation under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

parents, households with children, refugees and asylum seekers, those on rent assistance and ethnic minorities.

Box 9

Consultation on the Role of the Private Rented Sector

The following priorities were identified:

- greater clarity on the role of the private rented sector in the housing system;
- enhanced protections for tenants including better security of tenure, some form of rent increase control, anti-discrimination protection and the establishment of a Housing Court or Rental Board to resolve tenancy disputes;
- better financial arrangements (rationalisation of Supplementary Welfare Allowance supports, Local Authorities to enter into arrangements with landlords, etc);
- specialist units should be established by Local Authorities with substantial private rented sectors in their areas;
- greater enforcement of health and safety regulations and landlord registration;
- the introduction of tax incentives for landlords to improve the quality of their accommodation, to offer incentives to them to rent to Local Authority tenants and to encourage partnerships between the private and voluntary sectors; and
- information and advice to tenants and landlords should be increased.

A warning was sounded that in introducing changes affecting the lower-cost end of the market, care must be taken to avoid a reduction in the overall supply of private rented accommodation, as this could lead to an increase in homelessness.

4.35 There are currently about 7,000 recipients of Supplementary Welfare Allowance Rent Supplementation who are either pensioners or in receipt of a disability payment.²⁵ It is unlikely that these recipients have short-term social

²⁵ In 1999, expenditure on Supplementary Welfare Allowance Rent and Mortgage Supplementation was just over £100 million, half of which was spent in the Eastern Regional Health Authority area. There were 41,873 supplementation recipients in 1999. Over half were in receipt of an unemployment or back-to-work type payment (59 per cent), one-fifth were in receipt of a One-Parent Family Payment (20 per cent), and a little less were in receipt of a pension or disability payment (17 per cent). One-fifth of recipients were in the 25-29 age group – indeed over half of all recipients were aged under 35 years. Less than one-in-ten of recipients was aged over 60 years. There were slightly more female than male recipients (51 compared to 49 per cent) (statistics provided by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs).

housing needs, and might be better catered for through public or voluntary housing schemes. **The Team recommends that the longer-term accommodation needs (for example, of pensioners and those on a disability payment) would be better met by increasing the provision of public and voluntary housing, rather than through the private rented sector.**

The Capacity of the Voluntary Sector

4.36 As outlined in Section II above, voluntary sector output has declined during much of the 1990s, but is currently recovering. Government supports, both policy and financial in nature, have assisted in this development. The inclusion of targets in relation to voluntary sector output in the *National Development Plan*, the establishment of a Voluntary Housing Unit in the Department of the Environment and Local Government and the increases in grants available to the voluntary housing sector are examples of this support.

Box 10

Consultation on the Voluntary Sector

The following points were raised:

- the sector lacks a strategic framework;
- funding schemes are complex and restrictive, limiting development;
- maintenance costs are proving to be a substantial draw on resources and greater help is needed from the Department in this regard;
- greater powers should be devolved to voluntary bodies – for example, to purchase land, explore the possibility of making a profit to fund their activities and to have direct access to the Housing Finance Agency;²⁶
- the voluntary sector should play a major role in the provision of a wider range of housing needs;
- a Housing Authority to finance, promote, regulate, evaluate and support training and education in the sector should be established; and
- funding for development workers, communal facilities, supported transitional accommodation and better management structures should be increased.

4.37 During its consultation phase, the Team received a considerable amount of advice on enhancing the role of the voluntary housing sector. Some

²⁶ The Government has agreed to increase funding for site acquisitions and to introduce legislation to enable the Housing Finance Agency to lend directly to approved voluntary housing bodies as part of the package of measures introduced on foot of the third Bacon Report (2000).

commentators felt that the sector currently lacks a strategic policy framework and that greater promotion of the sector as a viable housing option was needed. **The Team recommends that voluntary housing providers and other stakeholders, in conjunction with the Voluntary Housing Unit in the Department of the Environment and Local Government, should:**

- **devise a strategic framework over the next twelve months, including business plans for the long-term development of the sector; and**
- **develop a system of supports and assistance for the training and development needs of those in the voluntary sector as well as maintenance costs.**

4.38 In considering the future capacity of the voluntary sector to address the needs of low-income households, it is useful to divide the sector into three separate sub-divisions. The first, larger voluntary housing organisations (such as Respond! and St. Pancras Housing Association) have a valuable role to play in increasing the volume of output by the sector and also in developing good quality management systems and training. The second, smaller voluntary associations have a more pivotal role to play in developing smaller schemes responding to local needs, often on a once-off basis. The third group is housing co-operatives, where members are involved in the provision and management of their own dwellings for community benefit.

4.39 It is important that all of these different types of voluntary provision are encouraged and developed to their full potential. It may be necessary for this purpose to consider putting different financial and other supports in place to help develop these diverging sub-sectors within the voluntary sector. Larger voluntary organisations, for example, might be able to increase their effectiveness if they could acquire land banks in strategic locations, as is the case with Local Authorities. They may also be more interested in entering into strategic agreements with Local Authorities around the provision and management of accommodation for a wider variety of low-income households, or to develop capacity in relation to providing accommodation for particular groups such as homeless people, members of the Traveller Community or those seeking emergency accommodation. One suggestion that was raised in our consultations was that the voluntary sector should expand to meet general housing needs, thereby increasing choice, quality and conditions. Such a proposal would be in keeping with Section V of the Planning and Development Bill, 1999 in relation to social and affordable housing.

4.40 Smaller organisations in particular may require additional support with set-up costs and the planning process. The availability of good quality information is crucial if the sector is to develop. Currently the Irish Council for Social

Housing offers development advice to voluntary housing associations, and funding has been provided by the Department for the Council's recruitment of additional development workers.

- 4.41 The ongoing development of training is a key issue for all housing providers. This is particularly the case for the voluntary sector, which has pioneered the provision of innovative training and development initiatives. Another issue here is the ability of the voluntary sector to feed into policy-making. The new Voluntary Unit in the Department should be useful in this regard, but it is also important that the voluntary sector is directly represented on the Housing Forum to be established under *Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness*.
- 4.42 It is also important that there is equality of treatment between different providers of affordable housing for low-income households in similar circumstances – in terms of the overall financial support available, additional supports for the development of communal facilities and ongoing maintenance and supplementation of rents. The current system is overly complex and has the potential to be divisive as different sectors may feel that others are treated more favourably. This has the potential to hinder integrated ways of working and cross-sectoral co-operation. All housing providers who are addressing the accommodation needs of low-income households, be they voluntary, private or statutory, should receive equality of treatment ('level playing field') in the provision of State supports.

Conclusions

- 4.43 The Team concludes that affordability remains a very important key issue to be addressed, particularly in relation to home ownership and the private rented sectors. The focus of the discussion about affordability needs now to be redirected more to those who are most marginalised from good quality and secure accommodation.
- 4.44 The Team recommends that all major policy initiatives to increase the availability of affordable accommodation should be policy-proofed and that the results should be made publicly available. Strategies to increase the supply of affordable building land and the supply of social and affordable housing are key recommendations made by the Project Team. In relation to the private rented sector, fairness, quality and security are also key and the Department and the Local Authorities should design and implement policies to ensure modern standards of acceptable accommodation are provided for tenants. The capacity of the voluntary sector will need to be developed and further strengthened if it is to meet the ambitious output targets set out in the *National Development Plan*.

Section V

**Recognising
the Social
Aspects of
Housing
Provision**

Recognising the Social Aspects of Housing Provision

Outline of Section V

5.1 This Section is divided into three main parts:

- The policy context,
- Policy responses,
 - estate management
 - tenant participation
 - training and education initiatives
 - learning from best practice,
- Conclusions.

The Policy Context

5.2 While the issue of supply is crucial, the social aspect of housing provision is increasingly important also, as it has a fundamental impact on residents' quality of life. Indeed, the Memorandum on Housing Management (1993:19) prepared by the Department of the Environment following the 1992 Housing Act (which obliged Local Authorities to prepare statements of policy on management of their housing stock) stated:

It is evident that the simple provision of housing to good physical and space standards is insufficient to ensure that neighbourhoods and communities thrive as they should. Effective management of housing estates – to ensure that tenants' views are reflected, repairs are done, rents are collected, tenancy problems are dealt with, open spaces are kept clean and attractive etc. – is just as important as the standard to which the housing is built.

5.3 However, public housing in Ireland has, on the whole, a poor public image. It is associated in the public mind with anti-social behaviour, poor management, a high turn over of tenants, a high proportion of vulnerable households, a lack of facilities and a poor quality of life for tenants (Fahey, 1999a). Furthermore, areas with a high proportion of local authority housing find it hard to attract and retain investment in their areas, reinforcing this disadvantage. Nolan and Whelan (1999) found that local authority tenants in urban and rural areas were at particularly high risk of poverty and urban tenants were at particular risk of cumulative disadvantage.²⁷ These problems are not unique to Ireland.

²⁷ Cumulative disadvantage is the existence of a combination of disadvantages such as childhood poverty, lack of educational qualifications and experiences of unemployment that create a situation of poverty and exclusion more extreme than that produced by one disadvantage on its own.

- 5.4 The negative image of public housing provision is not confined to the estates that are experiencing the difficulties outlined above, but is of a more extensive nature. Indeed, Fahey (1999a) notes that in responding to the problems of local authority estates, the first concern should be to avoid overstating the nature and extent of their difficulties and thus avoid unwarranted damage to the underlying idea and image of social housing. While there is a lack of national data in this area, the indications are that social housing is, on the whole, very successful. Serious problems are **not** widespread in the sector, but may often be confined to small areas of particular estates or even to particular families or individuals.
- 5.5 These factors in turn have impeded the ability of public housing to meet the stated objectives of housing policy, particularly that of reducing the extent and effects of social segregation in housing provision (Department of the Environment, 1995).
- 5.6 The Team tried to identify the main causes of the above problems. The large-scale provision of public housing as an emergency response to escalating housing demand in the 1960s/70s, with insufficient attention given to design or the social needs of estates, was identified as the main source of many current problems. Weaknesses have also been identified in relation to the management and maintenance of local authority housing (see Section III). The lack of a tradition of good estate management practices also exacerbates these problems.

Policy Responses

- 5.7 The Team feels that there is considerable work to be undertaken in this area, if social housing is to improve its standing as a housing option for those who are unable to afford their own accommodation. The underlying focus must be to change the current negative perception of public housing²⁸ (see Section VI) and to develop and delivery a more socially integrated and customer-orientated housing service. The following four themes are central to addressing this latter issue, and will be examined in turn:
- estate management;
 - tenant participation;
 - training and education initiatives; and
 - learning from best practice.

²⁸ The public perception of sheltered housing for older people, which is generally positive, might be an exception to this trend.

Estate Management

5.8 In a housing context, estate management is concerned with the relationship between the statutory agencies and the community, between service providers and service users. It can be about the efficient and effective delivery of services to tenants and residents or about identifying and solving community problems, for instance. Estate management can be reactive to problems or it can be more proactive in facilitating and resourcing local communities to take responsibility for the social and physical developments of their locality. It can focus on issues such as maintenance and the appearance of an estate or include wider development issues such as the development of services and facilities. Estate management can vary from a bureaucratic approach to a community development one. There is no standard model of estate management, but the development of an environment where all interested parties can participate fully is central to its success. Very different approaches may be needed in settled compared to new estates, larger compared to small estates, inner-city compared to small town estates, estates experiencing particular problems compared to those relatively trouble-free, for example (see Housing Management Group, 1998).

Box 11

Consultation on Estate Management

The following points emerged:

- the impact that the personalities of key players, both in statutory agencies and at a community level, had on the nature of local relationships is considerable. On some visits, for example, we heard very different accounts of the same set of local events from different stakeholders. Some Local Authorities said that they had elaborate tenant participation mechanisms, but tenants had a very different perception;
- the development of estate management initiatives and housing staff decentralisation often lead to increased customer service expectations and the creation of more data (for example, concerning maintenance requests) than can be acted upon within the confines of current resource levels; and
- it can be difficult to encourage tenants to get and stay involved in estate management-type activities, particularly in estates with a high turn-over of tenants.

5.9 The Team's consideration of each of the points listed above are now outlined briefly.

5.10 In relation to the importance of the personalities of key players in the development of estate management initiatives and approaches, it is important that mutually productive relationships, based on a partnership approach are developed as a priority. This might involve putting more emphasis on communication skills, power-sharing, consultation, mechanisms to deal with conflict and cross-sectoral team-working.

5.11 **The key point here is that Local Authorities and other relevant local stakeholders (voluntary sector, builders, developers, tenants) should:**

- **embrace and develop the concept of social partnership if they are to deliver a modern and customer-centred housing service; and**
- **consider the possibility of building on successful estate management pilot initiatives within the EU Local Development Programme.²⁹**

5.12 The second point raised in our consultations concerned the implications of increased customer service expectations. Estate management initiatives may have important implications regarding the staffing levels needed to meet residents' expectations, and indeed the types of skills that such additional staff may require. This is particularly the case in relation to estate management dealing with anti-social behaviour (Memery and Kerrins, 2000).

5.13 This raises a wider issue about the complement of housing staff required to deliver a good quality and modern housing services in the first place. Who should be centralised/who should be localised? Who should employ housing personnel (Local Authorities, Local Area Partnerships or voluntary and community organisations, for example) and what should their job descriptions include so that they successfully link together to provide a good quality housing service, with clear lines of responsibility and strong linkages between 'on the ground experience' and 'central policy formation'? Each Local Authority will need to give on-going individual attention to this issue, reflecting on their local situation and consulting with their local stakeholders. The Team has already made recommendations on this issue in Section III of the Report.

5.14 The third issue raised in the Team's consultations was that of tenant participation in estate management. The Department of the Environment's *Memorandum on the Preparation of A Statement on Policy on Housing Management* (1993: 12) stated that:

Greater involvement of tenants in the running of the estates is essential to ensure the delivery of the type and quality of housing services which tenants want. Tenants know better than anybody else, the strengths, weaknesses and problems of

²⁹ For example, Bray Partnership, Cork City Partnership and the Canal Communities Partnership.

their estates. The involvement of tenants can lead to improvements in the standard of an estate, can help to prevent the deterioration of an estate into a problem one, and can assist in “turning around” a problem estate.

Watt (1998: 3) points out that tenant participation in estate management can range from the absence of any form of consultation, to information provision and informal relationships between tenants and local authorities, to the more formal, resourced and structured participation of tenants, including participation in overall policy-making.

5.15 However, the point was made during our consultations that it can be difficult to encourage tenants to get and stay involved in estate management-type activities, particularly in estates with a high turn-over of tenants. Tenant involvement should be organic and may vary for different situations. Residents’ participation cannot be taken for granted. They may require additional supports to facilitate their involvement in estate management initiatives.

5.16 **The Team recommends that a variety of approaches and supports should be considered by the Local Authorities with a view to encouraging the participation of as wide a variety of tenants as possible in the running of their own estates.** These could include, for example;

- Statutory Agencies funding local voluntary and community organisations to undertake work in this area;
- greater opportunities for those involved in tenant participation to visit and learn from other estates and to attend training courses, as they find useful, to develop good practice in this area;
- the production of a regular newsletter;
- conducting annual customer satisfaction surveys; and
- the development of consumer panels.

5.17 Two additional issues are also worth flagging here. The first is that in an estate with a mixture of tenures, local authority tenants, those buying under the Shared Ownership Scheme, those renting from a voluntary association and those who have bought outright, for example, it may be difficult to develop an inclusive estate management approach. It is very important that participative structures are developed that reflect the more recent policy emphasis on increasing social mix and reducing social segregation. The second issue is the degree to which ‘estate management’ principles can be used to enhance the housing service provided to those living in non-clustered settings, such as in rural areas, or to particular tenants with special needs, such as older people, those with a disability, Travellers, the homelessness or those in crisis accommodation.

- 5.18 The Department currently operates a Scheme of Grants for Housing Management Initiatives. The main objective of this Scheme, which was initiated in 1995 and has a current budget of £200,000 (1999), is to provide assistance to Local Authorities for practical pilot projects which would enable them to better their housing management performance, improve the quality of the service being delivered and assist in the development of tenant participation in estate management. The terms of the Scheme provide that up to 50% of the expenditure incurred by Authorities on approved projects can be recouped by the Department. Activities under the Scheme include tenant training and the establishment of estate management organisations, information provision, research, recruitment of co-ordinators/liason officers and estate tidy-up initiatives. A total of twenty-two projects was funded in 1999. The Scheme has not yet been the subject of an official evaluation. **The Team recommends that the Scheme of Grants for the Housing Management Initiative should now be the subject of an independent evaluation with a view to its possible enhancement and extension.**
- 5.19 As already mentioned, the Team concluded that a partnership approach is needed if estate management is to develop successfully. This is needed at both national and local levels. The Housing Management Group (1998) recommended a strategic approach to estate management based on the establishment of Estate Management Task Forces to include all relevant stakeholders – the Local Authority, Statutory Agencies, voluntary/community groups, etc. This offers a flexible model for implementation. However, a clear policy statement is needed on participants' roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to allocations and dealing with anti-social behaviour.
- 5.20 In relation to allocations, the participation of tenants needs to be balanced with the rights of those on the waiting list for accommodation. A wide variety of measures should be explored to address anti-social behaviour, including a greater emphasis on preventative measures. In this regard, a review of the implementation of the excluding orders aspect of the Housing (Miscellaneous) Act 1997 to deal with anti-social behaviour in local authority estates is needed.
- 5.21 Secure long-term funding is also needed at a local level to support estate management initiatives and to fund on-going training and guidance for staff, tenants and public representatives. The Project Team strongly supports the provision in the Local Government Bill, 2000 enabling Local Authorities to establish community funds to carry out special projects of benefit to the community, including community development (see Section II). Estate management work in both public and voluntary housing schemes should be an integral part of local development.

- 5.22 These measures at a local level should also be mirrored at a national level to better focus available resources. Advances have been made in this area, particularly under the institutional mechanisms of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy – the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion. The Integrated Services Process, a Government funded project operating in four urban disadvantaged areas to promote the integration of State agency services in consultation with local communities is also relevant in this context.³⁰ The Combat Poverty Agency has also undertaken a Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage, the focus of which is on the development of an integrated approach to tackling educational disadvantage. This Programme has raised useful insights concerning the value of an integrated approach and also the challenges to its development (Rourke, 1999).
- 5.23 A key challenge now is the application of the ideas and lessons emerging from these initiatives to the development of a more integrated housing service that is based on a partnership model of service design and delivery.

Box 12

Consultation on Integrated Approaches*

The policy differences between the Local Authorities and Health Boards was perceived to be problematic. Health Boards have a ‘care in the community remit’, while the Local Authorities have a housing function. At the same time, Local Authorities were not geared to provide family supports for tenants. A lack of clarity about what the Authorities’ responsibilities were made this particularly problematic.

Some Local Authority officials felt that pilot schemes can build up people’s expectations, but that there are often not enough suitable people and resources to mainstream. The current policy of knocking down high-rise blocks to build low-rise housing was given as an example here. It was felt that more high-rise units (which are more practical given current space limits) could be built if proper management structures were in place.

* See also Section III under *Tenant Relations*

³⁰ The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000: 89) states that measures to improve the management of Local Authority housing estates/flat complexes, including more effect participation by tenants, will be kept under review and that an inter-agency approach will be adopted, building on the experience of the Integrated Services Process.

Tenant Participation

5.24 Traditionally, most Local Authorities have managed their dwellings in a centralised manner, with housing services based in authority headquarters and on-going contact with tenants confined to rent collection and maintenance. In this system, officials made management decisions, with little or no client consultation. In more recent years, greater priority has been put on the need for client consultation and participation in the planning and delivery of social services, including housing. Tenant participation training has been undertaken around the country and Local Authorities are now required to consult with tenants as a condition for certain funding. Consultation activities include the production of information leaflets, the provision of pre-tenancy information sessions and some authorities have undertaken customer satisfaction surveys. More in-depth consultation mechanisms have also been established in some areas to consult with resident associations and tenants, complemented by the decentralisation of housing staff to local area sub-offices.

5.25 Guidelines recently produced by the Department of the Environment and Local Government on Social Housing Design (1999c: 2) state that:

... there is now greater recognition that the success of social housing is, to a large degree, dependent on correct decisions on the location and size of developments and on the quality of design input both at the level of the overall scheme and the individual dwelling units.

The guidelines recommend that a design brief be produced for all social housing schemes, which should clearly identify their requirements. One of the key criteria identified in the general design approach is *ensuring that the scheme creates a pleasant living environment which will meet the needs and preferences of the residents (op cit: 8)*. The guidelines specify that a key design aim should be to ensure that each housing scheme is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and that this is in part facilitated by *the provision of a pleasant living environment which meets the needs, and, as far as possible, the preferences of the residents and fosters the development of the community (op cit: 11)*.

5.26 While these are very welcome developments, the guidelines could have given more attention as to how consultation with residents could be more integrated into the design phase of social housing schemes, and how their more active participation in the planning and design stage could be facilitated. This might involve the selection of future residents at an earlier stage of the building process or the establishment of a consultation panel, for example. The Ballymun Regeneration Project is one example where tenant involvement was an integral element in the redevelopment of the area. The guidelines specify that in cases where a community building is required, this should be based on

the needs identified in consultation with the residents (op cit: 17). This is a positive step, but such consultation should be an integral part in all stages of the design process.

- 5.27 Turning now to tenant consultation and participation in the on-going running of housing estates, progress has been made in this area on foot of various supportive policy statements. However, the Irish Council for Social Housing (1996: 3) points out that:

Real progress towards genuine and widespread tenant participation requires significant adjustments in the culture and structure of those landlord bodies – local housing authorities and housing associations – which seek to introduce and to sustain this approach, where possible, in the management of housing estates.

The Council argued that changes in the housing management and administrative framework were required to facilitate the building of communities in which there were representation and decision-making structures for tenants/residents. It put forward four models of tenant participation in housing management, as outlined in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Models of Tenant/Resident Participation in Housing Management

Model of tenant participation	Key features
Consultation	Providing information and facilitating dialogue in which the tenants/residents, or their representatives, can influence decision-making.
Local Management Committee	Adjustment of existing housing management structures, or the introduction of new structures, to allow for more localised and shared decision-making about the management and upkeep of an estate/area.
Estate Management Organisation	Making organisational arrangements for the local management of agreed aspects of the running of an estate with a <i>joint management board</i> representing the tenant/residents and the landlord housing body (local authority or housing association).
Tenant Management Organisation/s	Making arrangements for the transfer of agreed housing management and maintenance functions to a tenant/resident controlled or managed organisation.

Source: Irish Council for Social Housing (1996)

- 5.28 The successful implementation of these models of participation will require the on-going training and development of staff to undertake this new role of facilitator/enabler. It will also depend on the on-going support of residents to engage in the process, which in turn may well depend on the degree to which they can see tangible positive results from their involvement.
- 5.29 A related point here is that during our consultations we found that some Local Authority staff felt that Central Government did not consult sufficiently with them, particularly in relation to policy issues. The establishment of the Housing Unit by the Department is a welcome step in this context, but this could be complemented by a clearer Government policy statement concerning the value of consultation with relevant local agencies and an examination of the most appropriate mechanisms to ensure meaningful on-going consultation with service providers and users. The inclusion of Local Authority officials in the Housing Forum to be established under *Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness* would be a further positive step (see Section II). The establishment of a National Housing Authority, as recommended in Section III above, would also strengthen the links between local authorities and the national policy-making arena.

Training and Education Initiatives

- 5.30 The Team notes the increased emphasis put on the need for training and education initiatives, both for housing providers and customers. In Section III of the Report, the Team stressed the importance of good management practices and the training and development of staff to deliver a quality housing service.
- 5.31 Giving greater recognition to the social aspect of housing provision has clear implications for staff training and development. All personnel working in the provision of publicly-funded housing should have appropriate training for this work. Ideally, everybody should have an agreed personal development plan which defines their tasks within the organisation they work for and outlines how their skills will be developed over the coming twelve months to help deliver a high quality service. The Housing Unit in the IPA has now carried out an assessment of training needs of housing providers and has prepared a useful inventory of suitable courses available to meet these needs. Staff secondment between the Department, Local Authorities and other social housing providers should also be encouraged as a way of widening and sharing experience of housing policy and practices.
- 5.32 There is a need for further documentation of this work, and increased empirical evaluation of its value. **The Team recommends that the new Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees should actively promote participation and input from the different housing stakeholders, including the sharing of experiences and dissemination of best practice on an on-going basis.**

Box 13

Consultation on Training and Education Initiatives

Pre-tenancy courses, for those about to take up local authority or voluntary accommodation or courses run in conjunction with refurbishment or rebuilding programmes, were generally considered useful by those to whom we spoke.

Innovative programmes, working with disadvantaged young people in troubled estates and involving the establishment of youth clubs and other facilities for young people, emphasised the value of such approaches in helping to reduce or prevent anti-social behaviour.

Learning from Best Practice

- 5.33 It is now widely recognised and accepted that mistakes have been made in the delivery of social housing, and that this has had a detrimental effect on the perceived potential of this sector to contribute to meeting the objectives of housing policy, and at the same time improving the quality of life of residents. However, there is also recognition that there has been a lot of success stories in this sector, but these have not received sufficient attention. Similarly, innovative responses have been developed, but have not been rigorously documented (in the case, for example, of some estate management initiatives) or evaluated (the Scheme for Grants for Housing Management Initiatives is one such example).
- 5.34 As recommended above (see Section II under *Housing Statistics*), there is an urgent need within the housing services to give greater recognition to the value of collecting relevant information for policy analysis and ongoing evaluation of programmes.
- 5.35 The Community Workers Co-operative (1998) identified elements of good practice in strategies to encourage tenant participation, which are listed in Annex V. Implementing good practice would be assisted by a strengthened commitment to estate management at national level and the provision of long-term funding to assist all housing providers to develop and sustain initiatives in their own estates. Greater documentation and analysis of initiatives and a forum to share information on the value of different approaches would be valuable ways of trying to identify constraints to the implementation of good practice and ways of overcoming these barriers.

Conclusions

5.36 The Team concludes that the social aspect of housing provision has received insufficient priority in the past. Considerable emphasis has been placed on the achievement of higher levels of social housing output, but not enough attention has been given to the implications this will have for the social supports which communities and tenants may need. If we are to avoid these mistakes of the past, this policy gap must be rectified. The Second Report of the Housing Management Group (1998) provided useful direction, but implementation of its recommendations has been slow.

Section VI

**Promoting
Integration
and Reducing
Social
Segregation**

Promoting Integration and Reducing Social Segregation

Outline of Section VI

6.1 This Section is divided into three main parts:

- The policy context,
- Policy responses
 - responding to the special needs of particular groups
 - increasing the supply of social housing
 - dealing with the negative image of social housing,
- Conclusions.

The Policy Context

6.2 The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS, 1997: 3), a Government initiative to tackle poverty and social exclusion by targeting areas for co-ordinated action by Government Departments and State Agencies at national, regional and local level, defines poverty as:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participation in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.

This definition of poverty acknowledges that to be poor is more than just to lack income, although this is an important component of poverty, but involves exclusion from the ordinary life of society due to a lack of resources. Housing quality and facilities is an important dimension in this measure.

6.3 The NAPS (1997: 5) named the following groups as at particular risk of poverty:

- the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed;
- children, particularly those living in large families;
- single adult households and households headed by someone working in the home;
- lone parents;

- people with disabilities;
- the Traveller Community; and
- people out of home.

There is, of course, a good deal of overlap between these groups. For example, research has found that the majority of those at risk of, and living in, poverty are women and that poverty levels have increased for this group (Nolan and Watson, 1999). In this Section the Team examines the role that housing/accommodation can play in promoting integration and reducing social segregation, while acknowledging that this is only one aspect to tackling social exclusion.

- 6.4 To begin with we look at the degree to which the type of tenure is a good predictor of the likelihood of being poor or not. The most up-to-date figures, based on research carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute has found high risks of poverty are associated with being a local authority tenant and that the level of risk for such households increased significantly between 1987 and 1994 (Nolan *et al.*, 1998). In 1994, three-quarters (74.6 per cent) of those in this tenure had incomes below 60 per cent of the mean and over half (52 per cent) were below that income level and experienced an enforced lack of socially-defined necessities (referred to as consistent poverty). The research found that local authority tenants had, by any standard, the highest risk of poverty, followed by local authority purchasers and then by those in private-rented accommodation, while home owners and, in particular, mortgage holders, recorded the lowest rates.
- 6.5 Households in Local Authority housing in urban areas were particularly at risk of poverty. Half of those living in poverty were living in Local Authority housing, making them 3.3 times more likely to be poor compared to other households^{31,32} (Nolan, *et al.* 1998: 25-26). This research concluded that housing tenure is a more significant factor in explaining the distribution of poverty risks and the concentration of poverty than location *per se* (Nolan *et al.*, 1998: 19-27).
- 6.6 The results from the more recent housing needs assessment, as reported in Section II above, would indicate a continuation of this trend, in that a large proportion of households assessed as being in need of Local Authority housing reported very low incomes. Over half (59 per cent) of those assessed had gross household incomes of less than £6,000 per annum and the majority (88 per cent) had an average gross income of less than £10,000.³³ Furthermore almost

³¹ Risk of poverty based on the 60 per cent income line and experiencing basic deprivation.

³² See also, Forum Report No. 13 on *Unemployment Statistics* (May 1997) and Forum Opinion No 7 *Local Development Issues* (September 1999).

³³ Fahey and Watson (1995: 52), using a random sample of applicants for the 1993 Assessment of Housing Needs, found that 82 per cent were welfare dependent (figures not available for 1999 as this information is not collected as part of the assessment procedure).

three-quarters (72 per cent) of those assessed are concentrated in two particular groups, lone parents and single-person households.

- 6.7 Those assessed as in need are, therefore, predominantly from very disadvantaged situations. This is to be expected, in that Local Authority housing is targeted at those who cannot provide for their own housing needs. However, it is important that the volume of social housing is significantly increased, not only to cater more adequately for needs, but also to ensure a wider and more balanced social mix. There is also a gender dimension to this situation, with many women, for instance, facing accommodation difficulties due to low pay.
- 6.8 Research also confirms that the depletion of the Local Authority stock, due to the Tenant Purchase Scheme, can also contribute to this process of residualisation. Fahey and Watson (1995) argue that such residualisation is particularly evident in the blocks of Local Authority flats in the larger urban areas. These have remained outside the tenant purchase schemes, resulting in a high risk of poverty associated with living in some public sector housing. This has also led to a deterioration in the quality of life of tenants, particularly in urban settings.

Policy Responses

- 6.9 In this Section of the Report, we begin by examining responses to the special needs of particular groups and then move on to comment on the inadequate supply of social housing for these groups.³⁴ One of the blockages to expanding social housing, which has been identified in research, is the poor public image such housing has and the Team examine how this might be tackled.
- 6.10 At the outset, **the Project Team strongly recommends that social housing provision should, as a general principle, promote social inclusion incorporating the special needs of particular groups.**

Responding to the Special Needs of Particular Groups

- 6.11 Below, the Team makes specific comments in relation to the social housing and accommodation needs of groups in our society who are particularly prone to experiencing social segregation. These groupings are not exclusive, in that an older person, for example can also have a disability and experience homelessness. They are treated separately here for discussion purposes only, while recognising that housing service responses should be focused on the whole person and not on a particular characteristic or difficulty that they may experience. Adequate housing accommodation alone will not meet all the

³⁴ There is a commitment in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* to further develop the range of targeted home improvement measures, such as those for people with disabilities and the elderly.

needs of these people – well integrated and co-ordinated support services involving a continuum of responses ranging from independent housing through to institutional care are essential in underpinning social integration for these groups.

- 6.12 **In this respect, the Team recommends that a Cross-Departmental Team should be established (comprising representatives of the Departments of the Environment and Local Government, Social, Community and Family Affairs and Health and Children as well as the voluntary and community sector) to develop, implement and monitor integrated responses for special needs groups.**

Older People

- 6.13 Research commissioned by the National Council for Ageing and Older People found that, while elderly households have a similar risk of poverty as non-elderly households, their household income tended to be relatively low and the proportion of the elderly who live in housing with substantial physical defects (dampness, wood rot, poor heating) is larger than for the rest of the population (Layte, *et al.*, 1999). Older, mostly single, female-headed elderly households, and particularly those living in rural areas, were identified as at particular risk of poverty.

- 6.14 In response to its advertised call for written submissions, the Project Team received a very helpful submission from the National Council for Ageing and Older People, drawing from their considerable research and policy experience in this area. In that regard, the Council noted a 10 per cent increase in the number of households headed by an older person identified as in need of Local Authority housing between 1996 and 1999. Its main concerns were:

- the lack of provision of social housing for older people;
- the lack of support services for older residents of social housing; and
- the lack of attention to design features which are necessary as a result of the mobility problems some older people experience.

- 6.15 The Council also drew attention to problems in relation to the variation in support services available to older people and argued that these issues were symptomatic of the lack of co-ordination between relevant Government Departments. The lack of support given to voluntary organisations to assist with costs incurred in providing additional support services and in the management and administration of these services, was highlighted by the Council as in need of particular attention. The Council put considerable emphasis in their submission on the need for greater planning of housing services for older people, at both Local Authority and national levels.

6.16 The measures announced by Government in *Action on Housing* in June 2000 in this regard are welcomed. These measures include smaller dwellings in appropriate locations for elderly people, a review of the disincentive effect on the loss of medical card eligibility should they decide to sell their home and increased exemptions in means assessment for non-contributory pensions. Also, the National Building Agency is to pilot a home ownership sheltered housing development for elderly private home owners wishing to purchase housing more suitable to their needs within their community.

Box 14

Sheltered Housing for Older People³⁵

As part of the Team's local hearings, a visit to a voluntary sheltered housing scheme for older people in Claremorris, County Mayo was undertaken. This Scheme had only recently been completed and residents had just begun to move in. Their excitement and enthusiasm regarding their new accommodation was, however, palpable.

Residents appreciated the security of tenure in the project, which they felt was not available in the local private rented sector, and that the rent charged was more affordable. Some had moved from isolated rural areas, because of lack of public transport, to be closer to the facilities a village offers.

Their new housing provided them with independence, while also offering security and communal facilities such as a meeting room and a large kitchen. Residents hoped to gradually play a greater role in the management of the Scheme.

People with a Disability

6.17 The 1997 Living in Ireland Survey found that between 1994 and 1997 there was a significant reduction in levels of deprivation and a slight increase in the proportion of households headed by a person with an illness or disability over that period. In 1994, 14.9 per cent of households were below 60 per cent of average income and experiencing the enforced basic deprivation, while in 1997 this had reduced to 9.9 per cent. Over the same period and using the same measure, the proportion of households headed by a person with an illness or disability rose slightly from 10.1 per cent to 10.6 per cent (Callan, *et al.*, 1999: 40-41).

³⁵ This is not a universal solution, as some older people do not always want to move to such accommodation.

6.18 The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996: 187-194) stressed the importance of housing as a base from which people participate in society and argued that the concept of Independent Living should underpin policy on housing. The Team welcomes proposals by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government to make new houses visitable by people with disabilities. The main features of these proposals are:

- a level, gently sloped or ramped approach access to the dwelling from the entrance point to the site or from a suitable parking spot;
- level access at entry door;
- front door and living room door wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair;
- circulation space for wheel chair at entry level; and
- ground floor toilet located so as to be usable by wheelchair users and other people with disabilities.

The Team welcomes the principle of ‘visitability’, but acknowledges that there may be difficulties in implementing all of the features of this proposal, in particular the provision of a fully accessible ground floor toilet in new homes. However, barriers to access are obviously barriers to the promotion of integration and making new homes ‘visitable’ is, therefore, a significant development. Achieving ‘visitability’ is an important first step towards Lifetime Adaptable Housing, which involves both accessibility and adaptability.

6.19 The Team received a number of written submissions from organisations representing the interests of people with disabilities. In relation to the promotion of social integration, a point was raised in these submissions that special needs accommodation should be more integrated and that ideally people with disabilities should have the same options as to where to live as other groups in society. These concerns reinforce the significance, particularly for those with physical disabilities, of successfully implementing proposals in relation to ‘visitability’, as outlined above.

Single People

6.20 The 1999 assessment of housing need found that 29 per cent of households identified as in housing need were single person households. It is estimated that about two-thirds of those receiving Supplementary Welfare Allowance rent supplementation are single people. While there is overlap between these two groups – not all of this latter group may require social housing in the long-run – it is clear that the housing needs of some single people are not being adequately addressed at present. Moreover, it is very difficult for them to work their way up waiting lists.

6.21 In our consultations, the Team's attention was also drawn to the impact that rising trends in marital/co-habitation breakdown are likely to have on people's housing needs. This is particularly the case where children are involved. In the case where one parent moves from the family home, securing good quality accommodation is imperative if children are to maintain appropriate relations with that parent. Currently, single person households have low priority for Local Authority housing and the quality of accommodation available to them in the private rented residential sector can be poor, particularly in bedsits (Guerin, 1999: 67-74). Policies should be brought forward to deal with this situation, for example, through increasing Local Authority and voluntary sector output to cater for this group and seeking to improve the quality of accommodation in the private rented sector (see Section IV).

The Homeless

6.22 The Team notes, with serious concern, the alarming increase in homelessness identified in the most recent assessment of housing needs, albeit a wider definition of homeless was used in the last assessment to include those who have no accommodation, those in hostels and in Health Board accommodation (see Table 1 in Section II). There were 5,234 people categorised as homeless in 1999 compared with 2,501 in 1996 and 2,667 in 1993. Half of those categorised as homeless in 1999 are adult male, a little over a quarter are adult female and the remainder are children. About one-third of those homeless in 1999 were living in hostels, a little under a third had no accommodation they could reasonably occupy and the remainder were living in Health Board accommodation.

6.23 Almost three-quarters of homeless adults can be found in the Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow region. In this context, the Team welcomes the work of *The Homeless Initiative*, which operates under the joint direction of Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Health Board. This *Initiative* is a partnership of voluntary and statutory agencies in the area and aims to make services to homeless people more effective, particularly by improving their co-ordination and planning. The *Initiative* has identified the following policy issues:

- shortage of hostel places for women, families, young people, people with alcohol, drug or behavioural problems;
- shortage of housing options;
- increase in young homeless and rough sleeping;
- significant number of homeless people with mental-ill health;
- revolving door between prison, hospital and hostels; and
- people staying long-term in hostels.

6.24 A Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness was established under the auspices of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion *to develop an integrated response to the many issues which affect homeless people including emergency, transitional and long-term responses as well as issues relating to health, education, employment and home-making* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000d: 3). The Strategy, as recommended by the above Team, which was approved and adopted by Government in May 2000, acknowledges the need for a comprehensive approach involving both shelter and support to enable homeless people to re-integrate into society. The main elements of the Strategy are:

- Local Authorities and Health Boards will draw up action plans on a county by county basis to provide a more coherent and integrated delivery of services for the homeless;
- homeless fora will be set up in every county, under the auspices of the Local Authority Housing Strategic Policy Committee;
- Local Authorities will be responsible for the provision of accommodation and Health Boards will be responsible for the provision of their in-house care and health needs;
- more accommodation of a suitable type and of a greater variety is to be provided;
- settlement and outreach programmes will be set up to help homeless people back into independent living;
- additional capital and current funding will be made available and funding mechanisms will be reviewed in light of the action plans;
- prevention strategies will be developed and implemented; and
- the Cross-Departmental Team will monitor and report on the implementation of the Strategy.

6.25 The Cross-Departmental Team did not consider the issue of youth homelessness in depth as a Government Strategy on Youth Homelessness is currently being developed. The Forum on Youth Homelessness was established by the Eastern Health Board in conjunction with *The Homeless Initiative* to draw up a plan to improve and develop services for young homeless people, aged between twelve and twenty, in the Eastern Regional Health Authority area. This Forum recommended the designation of one authority with statutory responsibility for the delivery of services to young people who are out of home (Forum on Youth Homelessness, 2000: 86).

6.26 The Team welcomes these policy initiatives to tackle the problem of homelessness. The homeless fora proposed by the Cross-Departmental Team are a good case in point. They bring key players together at a county level, but

they could also act as a bridge between policy-making, implementation and monitoring. This would be in keeping with the approach recommended by the Forum in *A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Partnership – Forum Report No. 16* (December 1997). **The Team recommends that in implementing new structures and working arrangements to tackle homelessness, clear communication links between service providers and policy makers should be developed.** In this regard, the Team notes that the Cross-Departmental Team is to remain in existence to monitor the implementation process of the Strategies and to provide a link between homeless fora and central Government Departments and Agencies.

The Traveller Community

- 6.27 There are approximately 26,000 Travellers in Ireland, a quarter of whom are living in unserviced sites or by the side of the road (i.e. they lack access to regular refuse collection, running water, toilets, baths and showers, access to electricity and fire precautions).
- 6.28 The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995: 95-131) argued that accommodation provided for Traveller families should be appropriate to their needs and be met through the provision of a range of accommodation types. It estimated that 3,100 additional accommodation units (including 1,000 transient units) were required in the period 1995-2000. A Committee to monitor and co-ordinate the implementation of the recommendation of the Task Force on the Travelling Community was established in 1998. This Committee is chaired by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and includes representatives of Traveller interests, social partners and relevant Government Departments. A progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force will be submitted to Government this year.
- 6.29 Some 2,028 Traveller families are in need of accommodation according to the most recent assessment of need carried out in March 1999, an increase of 37 per cent since the 1996 assessment. The main increase was in the number of Traveller families seeking houses, up 88 per cent since 1996 to 1,406 households. This represents 70 per cent of the total Traveller need. Some 622 Traveller households were assessed as being suited to accommodation in permanent residential caravan parks in the 1999 assessment – a decrease of 15 per cent on the 1996 position.
- 6.30 The enactment and implementation of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 is an important step in addressing the accommodation needs of the Traveller Community. This Act required that by the end of March 2000 all Housing Authorities should provide a planned, integrated and comprehensive response to the accommodation needs of Travellers. The legislation clarifies

and strengthens the powers and responsibilities of Housing Authorities in relation to Travellers. It requires Local Authorities, in consultation with Travellers and/or Traveller organisations, to prepare and adopt five-year programmes to meet the existing and projected accommodation needs in their areas.

6.31 These programmes are to include Traveller-specific accommodation (including serviced halting sites, group housing schemes and transient sites) as well as standard Local Authority housing for Travellers for whom this is their preferred option. The first five-year programme will run from 2000-2004. It also provides for public input to this process. New powers have also been given to Local Authorities to control unauthorised encampments and to deal with anti-social behaviour on caravan sites. The Act also provides for the establishment of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and the establishment of Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees to facilitate consultation with Travellers.

6.32 It is important that each local area Traveller Accommodation Programme set clear targets and that these are monitored and reported on in the annual report on the implementation of the programme required by the legislation. In this respect, the Team supports the commitments in this area under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. The development and dissemination of good practice in relation to the management and maintenance of Traveller accommodation remains a key issue, as does encouraging a more active role by the voluntary sector in the provision of Traveller accommodation. Improving the standard and safety of Traveller accommodation and also initiatives to improve the relations between the Travelling and the settled communities are also priorities.³⁶

Crisis Accommodation

6.33 People who suddenly find themselves 'out of home' require some form of crisis accommodation until their housing needs are met through the provision of more permanent accommodation. Those who require such temporary accommodation include women and children displaced due to domestic violence, asylum seekers, ex-prisoners released and psychiatric patients discharged from institutions, young people affected by family breakdown (e.g. teenage pregnancy) and those suddenly made homeless due to alcohol or other forms of drug abuse. There is a general consensus that crisis accommodation

³⁶ In 1999, the Government allocated a sum of £900,000 to fund a Traveller Communication Programme over a three-year period 1999 to 2001. The objective of the Programme is to address the underlying causes of mistrust between Travellers and the settled community and to promote a greater understanding between both communities. The Programme aims to inform, to share experience, to educate and to build bridges between the two communities.

should be a preventative measure and short-term in nature providing necessary supports and information to ensure that homelessness is a transitory phenomenon.

Box 15

Consultation on Crisis Accommodation

There is a shortage in the supply of crisis accommodation. This is caused by the provision of only a limited number of emergency spaces in hostels and refuges which, in the main, are occupied on a long-term basis due to the lack of suitable move-on or permanent accommodation.

Increased provision of move-on accommodation, such as transitional or sheltered housing, was identified as a priority. This would free up hostel accommodation for emergency purposes and help to avoid bottlenecks developing.

The lack of emergency accommodation forces increased use of bed and breakfasts for crisis accommodation. These do not have the necessary supports and information services required to facilitate independent living or to provide those who are not capable of living independently with the care that they need.

- 6.34 In relation to the specific case of women and children who are forced to leave the family home due to domestic violence, it has been estimated that approximately 800 women were turned away from refuges in Dublin last year alone due to lack of space to accommodate them. Many of these women were seeking refuge for the fifth or sixth time. There is widespread agreement that the frequency of presentations to refuges is directly related to the lack of emergency accommodation with relevant supports initially but ultimately due to inadequate permanent housing provision. Indeed it should be appreciated that women's experiences of homelessness differ from men's, and the responses required need to be tailored to their needs, such as 'second stage' or move-on housing.
- 6.35 In relation to asylum seekers who are entitled to emergency accommodation while awaiting a decision on their status, it has been the practice of Health Boards to meet their immediate accommodation needs through bed and breakfasts, tourist accommodation and reception centres. While the availability of bed and breakfasts and similar accommodation is under increasing strain, there is a danger that reception centres will become long-term and inflexible rather than a short-term solution to accommodation needs.

6.36 Some groups face particular risk of exclusion from adequate housing or accommodation because of a particular or special need that they have. **The Team recommends that:**

- **Local Authorities should, in their Housing Strategies, actively develop and focus on how the needs of those most at risk of social exclusion will be met; for example, older people, people with disabilities, single people, the homeless, Travellers, those in rural areas and those needing crisis accommodation; and**
- **the Strategies should be designed in consultation with these groups on a social partnership basis.**

Increasing the Supply of Social Housing

6.37 In setting the policy context in the introduction to this Section of the Report, groups were identified with a high risk of experiencing poverty. Some of these groups are more likely to have particular accommodation needs, as discussed above. Others, such as the long-term unemployed and children in larger families, are more likely to have general accommodation needs. It is this latter group to which we refer here.

6.38 As already mentioned in Section V, the commitments in the *National Development Plan* and in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* to expand the social housing building programme are steps in the right direction. An average 7,850 additional social housing units per annum is proposed under these commitments.³⁷ This represents an increase of 75 per cent on 1999 provision in these areas.³⁸ The Department of the Environment and Local Government estimate that, including vacancies occurring in the existing stock, the housing needs of up to 11,000 households will be catered for in 2000 and that the needs of over 52,000 households will be met over the next four years.

6.39 This level of provision is, however, still inadequate in the context of existing housing needs (not allowing for increases), which, as we have already seen, is currently four to six times greater than the projected needs being catered for in 2000 alone.

6.40 **In the circumstances, the Team recommends that:**

- **the front-loading of the social housing building programme should be monitored and kept under review; and**

³⁷ The number of Local Authority housing starts will increase by 1,000 extra per year from 2001 to 2006 as part of a package of measures introduced by Government on foot of the latest Bacon Report (2000) – see Section II.

³⁸ Social housing completion figures for 1999 are as follows: Local Authority 3,713 (2,909 new builds and 804 acquisitions), voluntary/non-profit 579, shared ownership 1,314 (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000b).

- **housing waiting lists should be eliminated within a reasonable timeframe (see Recommendation 4.27)**

Dealing with the Negative Image of Social Housing

6.41 In a recent study of Local Authority housing in Ireland, Fahey (1999a: 55-56) writes:

The vast majority of local authority housing provided since the foundation of the state has merged seamlessly into the mainstream housing system. Even today, local authority housing in deprived urban areas often achieves a considerable degree of success in meeting housing need and in generating reasonable levels of satisfaction among its residents. Rents are low, security of tenure is high, the build quality of housing is often reasonably good (though sometimes it is poor or is marred by poor maintenance), and many estates have reasonably good (and in many cases very good) locations. Problems and defects are present as well, and some individual estates show high levels of housing failure, to the extent that many clients for social housing are reluctant to live in them. Some estates are peripheral, badly serviced, badly maintained and suffer from high levels of antisocial behaviour. However, the more extreme instances of this kind of failure are everywhere in the minority and do not represent the broader reality of local authority housing. They nevertheless amount to a key concern, partly because they create such distress among the residents directly affected by them, but also because they have a broad negative impact on the reputation of local authority housing.

6.42 Fahey (*op. cit.*: 267-268) goes on to conclude that:

*In the view of many residents in local authority estates, the most oppressive form of social segregation they experienced took the form of stigma and prejudice towards themselves and their neighbourhoods, which they experienced in the wider community. Stigma and prejudice in turn related to the social order aspects of life in their estates, i.e. to the wider view of estates as rough, disorderly and dangerous places. **Efforts to reduce segregation in local authority housing should take account of the role of stigma and prejudice in creating divisions and should take measures to deal with these problems. These measures should address both the real negative features of local authority estates and the distorted imagery that often inflates the extent and nature of those features to the wider public** (author's emphasis).*

6.43 In Section III of our Report we highlighted the management initiatives that are necessary to improve the delivery of housing as a public service. These changes, if implemented, will help address what Fahey refers to as *the 'real negative features of local authority estates'*. Tackling the broader issues of the high risk of poverty associated with living in Local Authority accommodation is also important in

this context. Considerable resources have been invested in improving the quality of the public housing stock. Particular attention is also needed to ensure the provision and maintenance of good quality accommodation for groups such as the Traveller Community.

6.44 Design features are also important in dealing with the negative image of social housing. The Department of the Environment and Local Government has published new guidelines on social housing design (1999c) which are intended to be of assistance to Local Authorities in housing design which provides a good living environment and contributes to the integrated development of local areas. These guidelines emphasise the importance of ensuring that individual housing schemes are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. It is acknowledged that the availability of adequate community facilities is an important contributor to the success of any new housing development. However, while funding is generally not available from the Department for this work, assistance to community groups is provided by other Government Departments. In this context, the proposals in the Local Government Bill, 2000 to enable Local Authorities to provide community funds to carry out special projects of benefit to the community, is welcome (see Section II).

6.45 Addressing what Fahey refers to as the *'distorted imagery that often inflates the extent and nature of those features to the wider public'* will require additional strategies, such as public education, media campaigns, etc. to reflect the many positive experiences of public housing. A first step, however, should be to quantify and explore public perceptions of social housing provision, empirical information on which is currently lacking.

6.46 **The Team recommends that negative attitudes to public housing should be tackled by the Department and the Local Authorities through a variety of means, including:**

- **encouraging greater innovation in design and layout;**
- **continuing to improve the quality of stock;**
- **improving management systems;**
- **enforcing tenancy agreements;**
- **addressing negative public attitudes to public housing; and**
- **raising greater awareness of the positive contribution of this sector.**

Conclusions

6.47 Housing has an important role to play in increasing integration and reducing social segregation. The fact that a person's housing tenure is a good indicator

of their likely risk of poverty is testament to this. How then can social segregation be tackled and social integration be promoted through housing policy? Research conducted in Britain (Jupp, 1999) suggests that this is a difficult task, but it can be eased by fostering community social networks (for example through community centres). This research also puts considerable emphasis on the importance of community workers like neighbourhood wardens, who combine authority with a very detailed knowledge of an area, and work with residents' co-operation and trust.

- 6.48 This is already beginning to happen also in the Irish situation. We need to build on the momentum that is now evident in reforming local government, provide a better quality housing service to the public and seek to ensure that the anti-poverty policy focus which is now articulated at Government level under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy is embedded in local authority actions, policies and initiatives.

Annexes

Annex I

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Project Team on Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation

Terms of Reference

The Project Team on Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation will evaluate the effectiveness of current housing policy for those who are socially and economically excluded and will make recommendations for any necessary improvements to ineffective policy. The central aim of the Team will be to identify ways to improve housing policy and practice, particularly for those who are socially and economically excluded. The Team will examine how best social and affordable housing³⁹ can contribute to an overall integrated housing policy in a manner that will promote social inclusion. The Team will adopt a problem-solving approach and will aim to ensure that policy makers and participants in the policy-analysis debate are better informed. More specifically the Project Team will:

- consider how the supply of social and affordable housing can be increased to meet demand in such a way that prevents and reduces the social and economic exclusion of low income households and disadvantaged groups by, for example
 - examining the effectiveness of current statutory housing needs assessment and making recommendations for any necessary changes
 - considering ways to increase the availability of local authority housing (new builds, acquisitions and filling existing vacancies)
 - examining ways to ensure that the housing requirements of special needs groups are met (for example, older people, those who are homeless, people with a disability and Travellers)
 - examining appropriate ways to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing in urban and rural areas
- assess how the potential of the voluntary housing sector can be maximised by, for example
 - examining ways to improve the framework of support available to this sector

³⁹ By 'social housing' we mean housing provided to low-income households by local authorities, the voluntary sector or with a rent allowance in the private rented residential sector. By 'affordable housing' we mean the provision of housing for purchase or rental by people on low incomes.

- considering how the constraints experienced by housing associations can be overcome
- considering how the capacity of the voluntary sector can be enhanced to meet the special needs groups
- examine how the private rented sector's role could be enhanced to meet social housing needs
- provide examples of good practice and management where communities, groups and families have been able to develop innovative responses to their housing needs or where a partnership approach has proved successful
- provide prioritised recommendations (costed where possible) for recommended policy changes.

It is envisaged that the Project Team will take up to 6 months to complete its work and will have a final report completed by mid-February 2000.

Annex III

Summary of Written Submissions

In November 1999, the Project Team invited written submissions in the main national papers and on the Departments of the Environment and Local Government and Social, Community and Family Affairs Web Sites.

In total, 40 submissions were received, of which a little over half were from voluntary organisations and a quarter were from statutory bodies. The remainder were from individuals/academics and surveyors. A list of those who made submissions can be found at the end of this Annex.

The following is a brief summary of the main points raised in these submissions.

Assessment of Housing Need

Some positive aspects of the current statutory housing need assessment procedure were highlighted. These mainly related to the fact that the assessment was a statutory requirement, carried out regularly and that resources are explicitly allocated as part of the annual budgetary mechanism.

However, respondents also identified weaknesses. For example, submissions drew attention to the complexity and resulting confusion surrounding the assessments, the lack of information and limited coverage of those in 'housing need', the lack of transparency and that the criteria used were too narrow (including income levels), which resulted in an underestimation of need. It was also felt that the assessments were not helped by the lack of voluntary sector involvement in their completion, while local authorities were under-staffed to undertake the work involved. The lack of a clear link between the results of assessments and provision of housing was emphasised.

The main improvements suggested included: more objective, transparent and standardised assessment procedures, the need to broaden categories and criteria to ensure that all of those 'in need' have a realistic and equal opportunity to secure tenure, more training for local authority staff while more effective liaison with other service providers was vital. It was also felt that the assessments should measure the severity of need.

Availability of Local Authority Housing

There was a general consensus that the stock of local authority housing was insufficient to meet current needs and that it was not keeping pace with demand. Problems identified with the current provision of local authority housing included:

inadequate range in types and sizes of accommodation to cater for all needs and life stages, poor standards due to the continued application of least cost principles in construction and the location of local authority housing away from vital services. Reference was made to the clustering of certain groups (e.g. lone parents) in estates on the urban fringe resulting in marginalisation and isolation. It was felt that the lack of consultation with tenants and voluntary bodies reduced the sense of community within some local authority areas and led to a failure in the provision of housing for those with particular needs.

Measures in Part V of the Planning and Development Bill were generally welcomed. More liaison with voluntary bodies, private developers and tenants was considered necessary to ensure an increase in mixed developments, closer proximity to services to cater for a variety of needs (e.g. elderly, lone parents, disabled) and alleviate problems of ghettoisation. It was also proposed that more use should be made of in-fill sites, church and State land, landbanks, incentives to encourage the more efficient use of the existing housing stock (e.g. initiatives regarding 'empty nests') and incentives to move away from large urban areas. Some submissions referred to the need for more trained staff and principles of good management to be adopted by the local authorities while others suggested the establishment of a specialist unit to deal with local authority housing. The establishment of a national social housing research and training unit was also proposed as was a revamping of the Tenant Sales Scheme, a moratorium on the sale of local authority stock and an increase in the income thresholds under the Shared Ownership Scheme.

Social Housing for People with Special Needs

Many submissions referred to inadequacies in catering for particular needs housing with those most likely to be affected being: older people, disabled, homeless, psychiatric patients, ex-prisoners, former or current drug addicts, lone parents and Travellers to name a few. While problems were identified in relation to supply, size, mix, and location of particular needs housing, submissions drew attention to the support and care elements that were seriously lacking (bed and breakfasts and private rented sector housing were not considered to be appropriate accommodation for those with special needs).

It was felt that all housing projects should include particular needs accommodation to cater for those most at risk. It was suggested that this would require active involvement and co-operation between government departments, health boards, local authorities, voluntary bodies and tenants to ensure that adequate size, mix, location, services and supports were put in place. Submissions also referred to the need for a clearly defined line of funding for particular needs accommodation which would entail a rationalisation of the two capital funding schemes and an increase in the grants available for voluntary housing associations.

The Supply of Affordable Accommodation

Suggestions here included: making better use of development land/new building materials, increasing the supply of accommodation available to low income groups, the drawing up of special arrangements with private landlords, expanding the Rural Resettlement Programme, promoting the 20 per cent affordable housing measure in the Planning and Development Bill, increased financial supports for first time buyers, changes to the Shared Ownership and Sale Schemes and regeneration of rundown estates/repair vacant houses in rural areas.

Statutory Support for Voluntary Social Housing

A vast majority of the submissions referred to the ineffectiveness of statutory supports which in some cases were considered to be too complex to be implemented by local authorities. In many cases where coverage of capital costs was adequate, maintenance costs proved to be a drain on resources. The absence of a scheme to assist sheltered housing and the inadequate funding for those associations that cater for particular needs was also considered to be a constraint. The definition for voluntary housing associations was too narrow, thus limiting the availability of statutory supports.

Submissions suggested that while the two capital funding schemes should be rationalised and that at least 95 per cent funding provided, voluntary housing associations should not rely solely on government supports. It was also proposed that greater responsibility should be placed on the local authorities to co-operate with the voluntary housing associations and that a single agency should be made responsible at a local level to promote social housing. Funding for support services was needed, and in particular, for development workers to facilitate a more integrated community development approach. There was a call for a Special Housing Needs Management Grant and Fund to be established, the creation of Housing Co-ordinating Committees and a Task Force on Housing for those with particular needs to be set up. It was felt that all of the above would be facilitated by a streamlining of the administrative system and again would be assisted by increased staff training.

Constraints on the Voluntary Housing Associations

The absence of a strategic policy for the development of voluntary housing associations was identified as a constraint as were the many restrictions under which the associations had to operate (for example, 75 per cent of tenants from local authority lists, rental income is marginal, absence of tenure neutral housing benefit). The level of funding (lack of initial seed capital and core funding), given today's property prices, and the degree of complexity of the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Rental Subsidy Scheme also acted as constraints. It was reported that there was also a lack of funding for suitable support staff which contributed to a lengthening of the time scale for project management and this was further exacerbated by the perceived reluctance of local authorities to work with voluntary housing associations.

It was suggested that some of these constraints could be overcome through the establishment of a Housing Authority to finance, promote, regulate, evaluate and support training and education in the voluntary housing sector. It was also proposed that increased availability of designated serviced land and sites and properties for refurbishment would alleviate some problems facing these associations. Many of those who made submissions highlighted the need to devolve greater power to these voluntary bodies (e.g. allow them to purchase their own land, explore the concept of making profit on their activities, give them direct access to the Housing Finance Scheme and provide a legislative package for the expansion of the voluntary sector).

The Voluntary Sector and Special Housing Needs

In addition to calling for more land to be made available at affordable prices, many submissions suggested that the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Rental Subsidy Scheme should be streamlined, simplified and provide 100 per cent funding. However, again it was proposed that provisions should be made for voluntary housing associations to locate funding elsewhere.

It was felt that it would be useful to target increased funding for employment of development workers, communal facilities, supported/transitional accommodation and better management structures, for example. The importance of community building that involved the co-operation of key players (voluntary housing associations, local authorities, private developers, and tenants) was also stressed. In addition, it was felt that the voluntary sector could play a major role in the provision of general needs housing in order to facilitate better choice, quality and conditions. Another suggestion was that categories should be broadened to include the widest range of groups eligible for funding while increased registration and inspection of all voluntary sector housing must be made a priority. It was felt that these elements coupled with the rigorous implementation of building regulations would ensure the provision of high quality accommodation.

The Private Rented Residential Sector's Role in Meeting Social Housing Needs

The private rented sector can bring advantages (e.g. flexibility, choice of location and house type, reduced risk of residualisation). However, many referred to the need for guidelines relating to the rights and responsibilities of both landlord and tenant. Priorities for policy included: security of tenure, control of rent increases, legislation to improve sub-standard accommodation (enforce health and safety regulations), anti-discrimination protection, enforce landlord registration and leasing, tenant subvention, landlord subvention and the establishment of a Housing Court to mediate between landlord and tenant. The establishment of an inspectorate to ensure the enforcing of existing legislation was also suggested.

It was felt that the prevailing situation which links social welfare allowances to employment status facilitated the creation of poverty traps for low-income families

and individuals and contributed to a continued drain on State resources. Submissions also suggested that there should be more co-operation between local authorities and the private rented sector to ensure that any changes at the bottom end of the market do not result in the displacement of the most vulnerable, causing increased homelessness. It was proposed, therefore, that better financial arrangements should be made with landlords. To this end, it was suggested that tax incentives should be created to attract quality landlords, to encourage partnerships between private investors and voluntary housing associations and to encourage landlords to rent to lower income tenants.

Some submissions also made reference to the need for the establishment of a Housing Executive to provide housing grants and incentives to the private sector. In addition, it was suggested that a network of Independent Advice Centres should be set up. The establishment of Private Rented Sector Units was also flagged, especially within local authority areas with substantial rented sectors.

Priorities for Change

The priorities put forward in the written submissions included:

- the establishment of new bodies (e.g. a national housing and community development organisation) with overarching responsibilities;
- additional resources (staff, training etc.) for the Local Authorities to implement current plans and to develop housing management as a profession;
- the creation of a Constitutional right to housing;
- more supported accommodation for those with particular needs;
- more support for voluntary housing associations;
- more consultation with relevant stakeholders in the provision of social and affordable housing;
- a better mix of housing (e.g. co-housing) in order to avoid segregation and ghettoisation;
- reform of local authority assessment procedures and priority schemes;
- enforce Part V of the Planning and Development Bill 1999;
- a review of supports to the voluntary sector;
- tax incentives to improve the quality of accommodation in the lower-cost private rented sector; and
- subsidy increases and higher grants for site purchases.

List of those who made a written submission

Aviation Co-Operative Society
Cavan Monaghan Community Services, North Eastern Health Board
Centre for Voluntary Action Studies, University of Ulster
Combat Poverty Agency
Community Welfare Service, North Eastern Health Board
Community Welfare Service, Western Health Board
Department of the Taoiseach
Dublin Co-Housing
Dublin Docklands Development Authority
Dymphna Headen, Irish Embassy (Netherlands)
Focus Ireland
Franciscan Social Justice Initiatives, Dublin
Galway Simon Community
Hail – Housing Association for Integrated Living, Dublin
Irish Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus, Dublin
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Irish Wheelchair Association
Jeanne Meldon, Planning Consultant
K.A.R.E.- Kildare Association of Parents and Friends of Handicapped People
Katherine Howard Foundation
Marie O'Donohue, Dublin
Margaret Lynch, Co.Wicklow
Medical Social Work Department, The Rotunda Hospital, Dublin
Mid-Western Health Board
MS Care Centre, Rathgar, Dublin
National Association of Building Co-Operatives
National Council for Ageing and Older People
National Youth Council of Ireland
Newgrove Housing Association, Dublin
North Western Health Board
Not Stated (anonymous)
Povall, Flood and Wilson, Property and Construction Consultants
Ringsend Action Project, Dublin
Schizophrenia Ireland
Sean Boner, Co.Donegal
Social Workers in Psychiatry
Sonas Housing Association Ltd., Dublin 7
The Consumer's Association of Ireland
The Galway Association
Threshold

Annex IV

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive

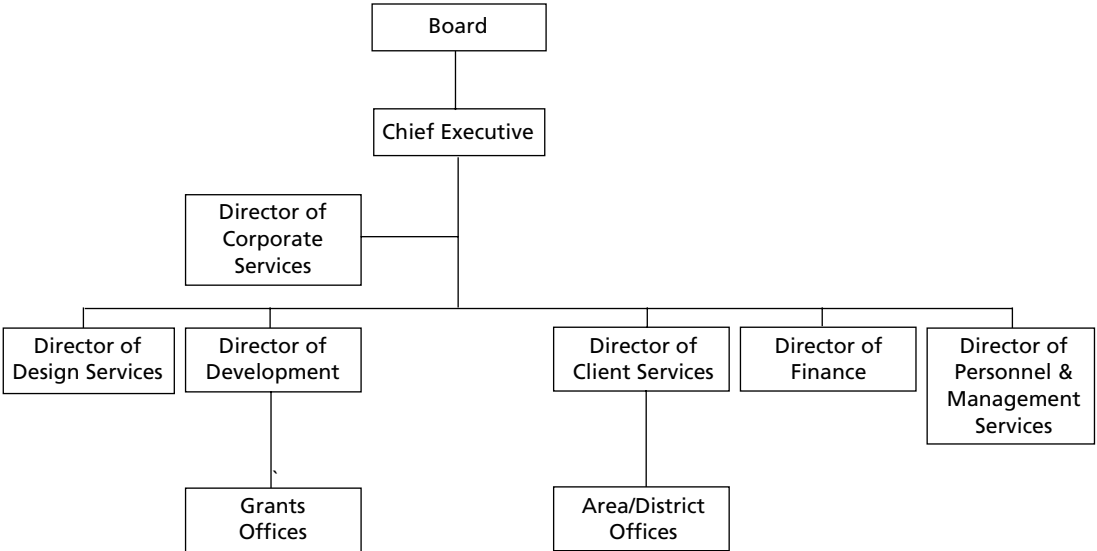
Context

The Housing Executive as the regional housing authority for Northern Ireland derives its functions from legislation (principally the Housing (NI) Order 1981) and the Housing Policy Review (1995).

It is a non departmental public body operating through :

- a Board, which is responsible to the Minister;
- a Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer;
- scrutiny by the Local Government Auditor and the Northern Ireland Audit Office;
- consultation with the Housing Council and in the case of Housing Plans with District Councils.

Structure



Functions

The Housing Executive’s functions are to:

- regularly examine housing conditions and housing requirements;

- draw up wide ranging programmes to meet those needs (including through other providers);
- formulate housing plans;
- improve housing conditions in the private sector through:
 - provision of grant aid;
 - urban renewal programmes;
 - closure, demolition of unfit housing;
- manage and maintain its own stock and commercial portfolio;
- assess entitlement and pay housing benefit;
- acquire and dispose of land and other assets;
- establish housing information and advisory services;
- promote energy efficiency in the residential sector (N.I. Home Energy Conservation Authority);
- assist in area regeneration and community development;
- regulate houses in multiple occupation;
- regulate and promote housing associations (transfer arrangements of this function from the Department of Social Development are being developed); and
- regulate the private rented sector.

Housing Policy Review

The Housing Executive's role was defined by the Housing Policy Review (1995) as:

- strategic planning and development in the context of a wider regeneration agenda;
- key provider and landlord with an emphasis on community involvement and an equitable allocation policy; and
- an increasing facilitator/enabler to assist and help other bodies and agencies to deliver broader government objectives including care in the community, energy conservation, environmental improvement and social inclusion.

The Housing Associations' role was defined as:

- provision of new homes, including specialist or supported accommodation; and
- the management of stock in their ownership.

Strategic Planning Process

The overarching framework for the development of strategy and policy in the Housing Executive is the Corporate Plan. This document (updated annually) covers a three-year strategic planning period and is supported by an annual business plan.

Each year as part of the preparation of the updated Corporate/Business Plan, the Housing Executive publishes its analysis of the housing market which is based on its research programme findings, including data from periodic province-wide house condition surveys. It outlines the likely activity levels in the private sector and contributions required from the voluntary sector and the Housing Executive itself. It also sets out its bid for funding the activities it has identified.

The Corporate Plan sets out the main strategic objectives for the three-year period. Each objective has plans and programmes developed to meet it. These are set out in the Business Plan together with key performance indicators by which performance can be measured.

The current objectives are:

Objective 1

To ensure that social housing programmes are targeted to those in greatest need, on the basis of objective assessment of housing requirements.

Objective 2

To reduce unfitness and improve housing conditions in all tenures in Northern Ireland.

Objective 3

To facilitate housing choice by promoting sustainable home ownership and a diverse and well-managed private rented sector.

Objective 4

To deliver a high quality housing service in accord with the Government's principles of 'Best Value'.

Objective 5

To maximise the leverage of private funding into housing in Northern Ireland while maintaining an affordable housing system.

Objective 6

To promote enhanced energy efficiency, flexible design, and improved physical access in the dwelling stock as a whole.

Objective 7

To tackle environmental, social and economic problems by working with other agencies in a co-ordinated programme of urban and rural regeneration and community development.

Objective 8

To shape and influence the development of housing policy through research, and through information and advice services.

Performance Management

The Corporate Plan is issued to all those who have a stakeholding interest in the Housing Executive. It is a yardstick against which the Executive and its stakeholders can gauge whether it is 'doing the right things and doing things right'. It is also a key management document distributed to all managers for their information and discussion with staff. Individual and team objectives are directly cascaded from the key strategic objectives in the annual business plan. Each individual unit produces its own business plan setting out its team objectives, which support the Corporate Plan. Each unit has a series of key performance indicators and performance is monitored on a monthly basis and discussed at individual team, area and divisional levels. Performance is reported to the Board on an exception basis.

The organisation's performance is benchmarked against other providers. The Audit Commission provides comparative data on the management arrangements, processes and performance delivery of public services. Data such as 'cost per dwelling managed,' rent arrears and housing benefit is used for comparative purposes. The Executive also participates in a benchmarking/best practice project with the Chartered Institute of Housing and Arthur Andersen, consultants, to compare costs and practices with other housing authorities.

Individual members of staff are made aware of their personal contribution to performance through the staff appraisal process. Individual objectives are related to the team objective with personal performance indicators to measure performance.

Human Resource Policies

The Housing Executive has a workforce of 2,700 salaried and manual employees. It operates within local government terms and conditions of employment, which are regulated at UK level. Staffing needs are developed from individual department business plans and agreed within the corporate framework. The Executive's in house Efficiency Unit carries out department and staff reviews which balance workloads and responsibilities at department and job level, using benchmark data from both internal and external sources to give recommendations on grading for posts. In addition a series of staffing models have been developed which cover some 60 per

cent of posts and provide a framework for defining appropriate numbers and grades of staff, given defined levels of workload.

Grades 1-4 cover clerical/administrative roles, grades 5-8 cover professional /managerial positions and grades above these levels form the Directorate band.

The majority of posts are designated as generalist, that is, once appointed to a grade, staff may move between different departments. Other posts, for example in the technical professions, are classified as specialist and require post-based recruitment using individual job descriptions. Generalist posts are supported by a range of grading guidances which set out the broad types of duty and level of responsibility at each grade.

The Appointments and Promotions procedure outlines the composition of recruitment boards and panels, detailing the composition of the board/panel for each post. All staff involved undertake recruitment and selection training, covering both professional interviewing skills and issues such as equality of opportunity.

A formal Training Plan is drawn up at the beginning of each new financial year by each of the divisions which has a delegated budget to address formal training requirements. People skills are identified at four levels within the Housing Executive:

- business needs are assessed in conjunction with the annual corporate planning process through strategic analysis of future changes;
- specialist needs based upon functional requirements arise from organisational changes in policies and procedures;
- competency-based NVQ programmes serve as an additional mechanism for identifying and validating organisational training needs; and
- the business planning and appraisal process at unit and individual level highlight further individual and team development needs.

Each year some 1,000 formal events take place off the job through a mixture of internal and external training. In addition to the £650,000 direct training budget spent annually, a further £1.5m will be spent on manpower time both in attending and delivering courses. Various approaches are deployed:

- on the job training, half day closing for training, staff briefing;
- secondments and project work;
- in-house training courses; and
- further education sponsorship.

Tenant Relations

The Housing Executive has a network of 37 District Offices providing a local housing management service to its 130,000 tenants.

Customer Research

The Executive has a tradition of customer focused housing delivery and attaches considerable importance up to its customer research programme:

- the continuous tenant omnibus survey (CTOS) is a means of gathering extensive and up-to-date information on the Executive's tenants and their views on a wide range of services and policy issues. One hundred interviews are completed in each of the 37 housing management districts over the year;
- exit polls are carried out to examine levels of customer satisfaction with the District Office service from visitors to the office, questions relate mainly to services and facilities; and
- estate surveys involve other agencies and views are sought on environmental issues, facilities and services as well as housing specific issues relating to design and layout. The findings help formulate inter-agency estate improvement strategies.

Tenant Involvement

The Housing Executive has always been keen to involve tenants and their local community associations in discussing and developing local services and addressing housing issues through community involvement and decision making. A four tier tenant involvement framework is in place which comprises over 600 community groups at estate level, 36 consumer panels at district level, 5 area community advisory groups and a central community advisory group.

At a community level, tenants are consulted about plans for their estates; at consumer panel level tenant representatives are involved in performance review and in deciding priorities for the district; at area level representatives from the district panels compare best practices; and at central level, area representatives can influence the development of policy.

Housing Executive Achievements

The main achievements of the Housing Executive have been:

- reducing unfitness from 20 per cent (1974) to 7 per cent (1996);

- the construction of 79,000 new homes;
- the sale of 80,000 homes;
- a reputation for fairness and equity;
- a track record in consulting with and working with communities and their political representatives;
- efficiency in the delivery of housing services; and
- recognition of its quality in design and services (through Charter Marks, Investors in People and other awards).

Annex V

Strategies to Encourage Tenant Participation – Elements of Good Practice

A. Community Organisations

- Implementation of a community development methodology for tenant participation and estate management.
- Framing tenant participation in terms of future development and empowerment rather than a containment or complaint mechanism.
- Addressing social exclusion in relation to housing and housing related issues.
- Inclusion of marginalised communities, both geographic and communities of interest, in decision making process.
- Promotion of common good and consensus in decision making.
- Promotion of a partnership approach with Local Authority, whilst maintaining independent, critical voice.
- Ensure tenant participation structures and processes are accessible, participative and include feedback mechanisms.
- Implementation of short, medium and long-term work plans and appropriate review mechanisms.
- Promotion of a range of consultation mechanisms, thematic workshops, newsletters and neighbourhood planning exercises.
- Undertake estate management and tenant participation training.
- Development of linkages with local Partnership and other area-based development initiatives.
- Contribution to, and participation in, local, regional and national policy making.
- Pursuit of equality objectives ensuring tenants are not discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, membership of the Traveller Community, sexual orientation, skin colour, parental status or having a disability.

B. Local Development Institutions

- Integrating area based local development, tenant participation and estate management strategies with other area based initiatives such as those focusing on drugs, health issues and environmental concerns.

- Linkage of environmental, accommodation and community development actions.
- Enhance linkages with local authority through membership on subcommittees, joint funding of projects and shared training initiatives for staff and estate management groups.
- Designated resources and staff support for tenant participation and estate management activities.
- Designated education and training resources for tenant participation and estate management actions.
- Facilitate learning, networking and exchange of information between local tenant organisations in disadvantaged areas.
- Pursuit of equality objectives ensuring tenants are not discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, membership of the Travelling community, sexual orientation, skin colour, parental status or having a disability.

C. Local Authority and Policy Making Bodies

- Development of appropriate policy, resource and support structures at both national and local level for tenant participation, neighbourhood planning and estate management.
- Resource and facilitate consultation with, and participation of, tenants in estate management, neighbourhood planning and development strategies.
- Provision of resources, staff and education supports for tenant participation, estate management and neighbourhood planning initiatives.
- Development of medium and long-term strategies based on an integrated approach to the social, physical, environmental and economic development of local communities.
- Decentralised and efficient delivery of housing services including the appointment of estate managers.
- Establishment of Traveller Accommodation Committees and Traveller accommodation strategies with appropriate Traveller participation, resources and education supports.
- Development of written, agreed and resourced tenant participation policies, consultation frameworks and performance indicators in consultation with local tenants, residents and community organisations.
- Development of more efficient models for the collection, monitoring and analysis of baseline data.

- Use of tenant satisfaction surveys, tenant charters and feedback mechanisms along with agreed annual objectives and targets.
- Ensuring tenant organisations and community groups can maintain their independent voices and continue to lobby and campaign for improvements.
- Pursuit of equality objectives ensuring tenants are not discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, membership of the Travelling community, sexual orientation, skin colour, parental status or having a disability.

Source: Community Workers Co-operative (1998) *Strategies to Encourage Tenant Participation*. Galway, Community Workers Co-operative, pp 60-61.

Terms of Reference & Constitution of the Forum

1. The main task of the Forum will be:-
 - to monitor and analyse the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion;
 - to do so through consideration of reports prepared by teams comprising the social partners, with appropriate expertise and representatives of relevant Departments and agencies and its own Secretariat;
 - with reports to be published by the Forum with such comments as may be considered appropriate; and
 - to ensure that the teams compiling such reports take account of the experience of implementing bodies and customers/clients, including regional variations in such experience.
2. The Forum may consider such policy issues on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.
3. Membership of the Forum will comprise representatives from the following four strands:
 - the Oireachtas;
 - employer, trade union and farm organisations;
 - the voluntary and community sector; and
 - central government, local government and independents.
4. The terms of office of members will be for an initial period of at least two years during which alternates may be nominated. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. Retiring members will be eligible for re-appointment.
5. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Forum will be appointed by the Government.
6. The Forum will decide on its own internal structures and working arrangements.

7. The Forum will be under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and funded through a Grant-in-Aid which will be part of the overall Estimate for that Department. The annual accounts of the Forum will be submitted for audit to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

8. Finally, the staffing and conditions of employment of the Forum's Secretariat will be subject to the approval of the Department of the Taoiseach.

Membership of the Forum

Independent Chairperson: Maureen Gaffney

Deputy Chairperson: Dermot McCarthy

(i) Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil:

Noel Ahern T.D.
Seán Haughey T.D.
Beverley Cooper-Flynn T.D.
Michael Kitt T.D.
Senator Margaret Cox
Senator Paschal Mooney

Fine Gael:

Gerry Reynolds T.D.
Paul McGrath T.D.
Bill Timmins T.D.
Senator Mary Jackman
Senator Therese Ridge

Labour:

Derek McDowell T.D.
Senator Joe Costello

Progressive Democrats:

Vacancy

Independents:

Michael Lowry T.D.

(ii) Employer, Trade Union and Farm Organisations

(a) Employer/Business Organisations:

IBEC:

Brendan Butler
Aileen O'Donoghue

Small Firms Association:

Lilian O'Carroll

Construction Industry Federation:

Mirette Corboy

Chambers of Commerce/Tourist

Industry/Exporters Association:

Carmel Mulroy

- (b) **Trade Unions:** Eamonn Devoy
Blair Horan
Jerry Shanahan
Manus O’Riordan
Joan Carmichael
- (c) **Agricultural/Farming Organisations:**
Irish Farmers Association: John Dillon
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association: Pat O’Rourke
Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society: Vacancy
Macra na Feirme: Eileen Doyle
Irish Country Womens Association: Eva Coyle
- (iii) **Community and Voluntary Sector**
Womens Organisations: Ursula Barry
Gráinne Healy
Susan McNaughton
- Unemployed:* Camille Loftus
Joan Condon
Mary Murphy
- Disadvantaged:* Joe Gallagher
Chris McInerney
Janice Ransom
- Youth:* Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl
- Older People:* Paddy Donegan
- Disability:* John Dolan
- Environment:* Jeanne Meldon
- Others:* Fr. Seán Healy
Mary Murphy
- (iv) **Central Government, Local Government and Independents**
- (a) **Central Government**
Secretary-General, Department of Finance
Secretary-General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Secretary-General, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
Secretary-General, Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation
Secretary-General, Department of the Environment and Local Government

(b) Local Government

<i>General Council of County Councils:</i>	Councillor Constance Hanniffy Councillor Tom Kelleher Councillor Enda Nolan
<i>Association of Municipal Authorities:</i>	Councillor Tadhg Curtis
<i>County and City Managers Association:</i>	Donal O'Donoghue

(c) Independents

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, National University of Ireland, Galway
Ms. Marian Vickers, Northside Partnership
Ms. Helen Johnston, Surg Equipment Ltd.
Mr. Niall Fitzduff, Rural Communities Network
Ms. Noreen Kearney, Trinity College, Dublin

Secretariat

<i>Director:</i>	Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh
<i>Policy Analysts:</i>	Laurence Bond Sarah Craig David Silke
<i>Executive Secretary:</i>	Michelle Ryan

Forum Publications

(i) Forum Reports

Report No	Title	Date
1.	<i>Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP</i>	November 1993
2.	<i>National Development Plan 1994 – 1999</i>	November 1993
3.	<i>Commission on Social Welfare –Outstanding recommendations</i>	January 1994
4.	<i>Ending Long-term Unemployment</i>	June 1994
5.	<i>Income Maintenance Strategies</i>	July 1994
6.	<i>Quality Delivery of Social Services</i>	February 1995
7.	<i>Jobs Potential of Services Sector</i>	January 1996
8.	<i>First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	June 1995
9.	<i>Jobs Potential of Work Sharing</i>	January 1996
10.	<i>Equality Proofing Issues</i>	February 1996
11.	<i>Early School Leavers and Youth Employment</i>	January 1997
12.	<i>Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion</i>	March 1997
13.	<i>Unemployment Statistics</i>	May 1997
14.	<i>Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion</i>	October 1997
15.	<i>Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	November 1997
16.	<i>A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation</i>	December 1997

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 17. | <i>Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service</i> | March 2000 |
| 18. | <i>Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation: Building the Future</i> | September 2000 |

(ii) Forum Opinions

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment</i>	March 1995
2.	<i>National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	January 1996
3.	<i>Long-term Unemployment Initiatives</i>	April 1996
4.	<i>Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?</i>	August 1996
5.	<i>Employment Equality Bill</i>	December 1996
6.	<i>Pensions Policy Issues</i>	October 1997
7.	<i>Local Development Issues</i>	October 1999
8.	<i>The National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	August 2000

(iii) Forum Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of Partnership 2000

Opinion No	Title	Date
1.	<i>Development of the Equality Provisions</i>	November 1997
2.	<i>Targeted Employment and Training Measures</i>	November 1997