

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Communities

ANNOUNCEMENT OF LAUNCH OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT HOUSING SUPPLY STRATEGY

Published at 10.30 am on Wednesday 8 December 2021.

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities):

This Statement announces the launch of the public consultation on the draft Housing Supply Strategy as well as publication of the Strategy and related Call for Evidence Report, following engagement with Executive Colleagues and Committee for Communities.

I am pleased to announce that I will be launching a public consultation on a draft Housing Supply Strategy on 8 December 2021. The consultation will last 9 weeks.

The draft Strategy articulates my aims and objectives for housing supply and sets out a 15 year delivery pathway.

My aim is to create a housing system that can deliver 100,000 plus homes over its 15 year lifetime. I want at least a third of these homes to be social homes.

Importantly these homes will be high quality and deliver for a wider range of needs, including the needs of our ageing population, those with disabilities and our children and young people

We all want a housing system which provides high quality homes in places where people want to live. **We must do this within the context of a climate emergency and our commitment to improve the energy efficiency of our homes. This will require a collective effort right across this Executive, local government, the voluntary and community sector and the private sector.**

Access to a safe and secure home is a basic human right – essential to our health and well-being. But, as evidenced by the 45,000 households on the Social Housing Waiting list, over 31,000 of whom are in housing stress, too many of our citizens are being denied this basic right. These numbers continue to increase.

Crucially, behind these statistics are individuals and families, many of whom have consistently told us that the current system is not working.

Last year Minister Ní Chuilín launched the most ambitious, radical shake up and transformation of the local housing system in over 50 years. I am committed to making that change happen and I have already made a significant progress towards this. For instance I have:

- Secured more funding for social and intermediate housing;
- Advanced legislation to improve the safety and security of the Private Rented Sector; and
- Moved ahead with work to deliver on the Housing Executive's investment challenge.

Another key part of my housing transformation programme is delivery of a Housing Supply Strategy. This Strategy is targeted at identifying and addressing those 'whole system' issues which impact on housing supply. This 'whole system' approach clearly identifies that there is not one single overarching challenge affecting housing supply here. Instead, housing supply is impacted by a number of challenges and the result is that we are not able to provide the right volume or types of homes in the right locations to meet the needs of our citizens.

These challenges include both drivers for demand, such as, demographic, social, economic and climate change and levers for supply, such as, access to land, finance, infrastructure and skills.

Crucially these issues are common across all tenures and failure to respond will increase pressures across the entire housing system, and negatively affect my housing programme. This includes my work to Revitalise the Housing Executive, increase the number of new social homes and improve the Private Rented Sector. That is why it is critical to have a Housing Supply Strategy that looks across the whole system.

Responsibility for housing rests in many places and, therefore, the solutions are something we must design and tackle together. Transforming housing supply will require not only a collective response from the Executive but real collaboration that includes local government, community groups, construction industry and financial bodies.

It must major on engaging with those people who are most in housing need. This approach is built on the principle that those who are most affected by poor housing are best placed to help design or redesign our housing system.

My Call for Evidence was the first stage in this process of a partnership approach to the transformation of our housing supply. In the past year, my officials and I have listened to and engaged with our stakeholders as part of the Call for Evidence-

The stark reality as emphasised by responses is that we need to change how we do things. We must acknowledge that unless we do, many individuals and families will remain homeless or live in homes that don't meet their needs. Many will lose hope that their circumstances will change for the better.

Waiting lists and housing stress continue to rise, and there are issues facing renters; issues that have been amplified throughout the pandemic. Our current housing stock does not reflect the changing needs of our population.

I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge and success will require the maturity to take difficult decisions. But, as confirmed in the Call for Evidence, there is a growing demand for this change from a large and diverse range of stakeholders.

Many of these stakeholders emphasised that a key support for the partnership work needed to transform housing supply is the delivery of the commitment to have a standalone Housing Outcome. I am on record as stating that a Housing Outcome is essential and I will continue to press for this commitment to be fulfilled.

Moreover the Strategy vision that - *"Everybody has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for their needs and is located within a thriving and inclusive community"* - is reflective of the focus of a Housing Outcome, as envisaged within New Decade, New Approach.

It is proposed that the achievement of this vision will be underpinned by five objectives, which are to:

- Increase housing supply and affordable options across all tenures to meet housing need and demand;
- Prevent homelessness, reduce housing stress and improve and prioritise housing solutions for those who are most in need;
- Improve housing quality;
- Ensure the provision of housing options that contribute to the building and maintenance of thriving, inclusive communities and places; and
- Reduce whole-life carbon emissions from both new homes and existing homes and support a 'just transition' to carbon neutrality.

I take great pride in saying that this draft Strategy has been the outcome of an extensive partnering and engagement process and has been underpinned by a full Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

The vision and objectives have been refined through this process. It has also allowed the development of 15 high level policy interventions. These provide a clear direction travel for the collaborative work needed across central and local government, the private and community and voluntary sectors to tackle the big issues for housing supply.

These include:

- Addressing land availability;
- Supporting upskilling and reskilling;
- Responding to housing inequalities;
- Recognising the importance of place-shaping; and
- Optimising existing supply.

The Strategy also sets out a range of shorter term actions to deliver real change. This includes some of the work that I have already mentioned but also encompasses my work to:

- Develop new affordable housing products;
- Ensure rents across all sectors are fair; and
- Ensure an effective and fair social housing allocations system.

And, the work of my Executive colleagues to:

- Deliver the Green Growth and Energy Strategies,
- Establish an Infrastructure Commission; and
- Uplift building regulations.

Implementing the Strategy will need a robust and transparent governance framework. This must allow stakeholders and delivery partners to hold us to account and, in turn, be held to account if we are not delivering the homes we need or doing what we said we would.

I have been clear since the beginning of this work, that I will need the collective will and support of the Executive for the Strategy to succeed.

I would like to thank my Executive colleagues to date for their support including the nomination of senior officials to sit on the Project Board and Housing Panel, both of which have helped shape the focus of the draft Strategy.

Following this consultation period, I am committed to bringing the final Strategy to the Executive table for discussion and consideration. Subject to Executive approval, I will publish the Strategy by the end of March 2022.

I would like to thank you all for your continued support and I would urge you to take this further opportunity to shape the development of the final Strategy. I would also encourage you to bring the consultation to all those you know who have an interest in housing supply.

DEIRDRE HARGEY MLA
Minister for Communities