



John O'Connor  
Chief executive, Housing Agency

## Tackling Ireland's housing challenges

There are three major challenges impacting on social housing demand in Ireland. First, there is a shortage of availability of private rental accommodation coupled with high rental costs in many areas. Second, there remains a significant number of households in long-term mortgage arrears. Third, there is a continued high level of homeless presentations.

In particular, the number of homeless families presenting to local authorities has increased greatly in the past six years. How are these challenges being addressed?

### Social housing boost

The provision and management of social housing in Ireland is undertaken by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs, also known as housing associations).

Policy, funding and oversight of social housing delivery is delivered by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. Government agencies such as the Housing Agency, Housing Finance Agency and the Residential Tenancies Board are playing an increasingly more prominent role

### Welcome to the second issue of CT Brief: Ireland!

Campbell Tickell is a multi-disciplinary management consultancy, focusing primarily on the statutory and non-profit sectors. We have worked in Northern Ireland since 2011 and in the Republic since 2013. In the south, we have worked with the Housing Agency and its Regulation Office, and the Housing Alliance. In the north, we have worked with the Department for Communities, and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. We have supported most of the larger housing associations and AHBs, as well as many medium-sized and smaller organisations. We have also worked with care and support providers, and with councils in the south. We have a locally based team of specialist consultants bringing a wide range of expertise.

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A primary goal of Ireland's National Planning Framework is to achieve compact growth and sufficient housing density (photo: Dublin) in supporting delivery, providing services and regulation of the sector. 'Rebuilding Ireland: an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness' was launched by the government in July 2016. Among other actions, this five-year plan sets out targets

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CT Brief - Health, Care and Support edition

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Tackling the housing challenges in Ireland

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for the delivery of 138,000 social homes by various means (see table, below). These include construction and acquisition, combined with an element of private sector leasing and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) – a tenancy arrangement with private landlords. Significant progress is being made on delivering on these targets. However, there are several challenges faced by local authorities and AHBs.

First, there is a shortage of building capacity and the skills needed to deliver after several preceding years of low housing delivery due to economic circumstances. Second, due to concerns about over-concentration of social housing, developments

*“A steady and enduring increase in the supply of affordable and cost rental housing can help ease demand for social housing”*

are built on a smaller scale than previously. Typically, developments comprise 100 homes or fewer, which is a significant barrier to delivering on the necessary scale.

On a separate matter, one major change to social housing support provision was the introduction of the Housing Assistant Payment (HAP) in 2014. HAP provides support for households with a long-term housing need, to rent in the private sector. This is replacing Rent Supplement (similar to UK Housing Benefit), which will only remain in place for households with a short-term need. This is an area that AHBs should consider; by 2021 there will be nearly twice as many households in receipt of HAP than are housed in AHB-owned homes.

**New approaches**

Cost rental housing is when a housing provider builds a property and charges rent sufficient to cover its costs and nothing more. It has been in place for many years in mainland Europe but is new to Ireland. A major advantage of cost rental is that it can help households to avoid exposure to rising market rents. In addition, a steady and enduring increase in the supply of affordable and cost rental housing can help ease demand for social housing. ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ sets an objective to develop cost rental housing in Ireland. Again, both

AHBs and local authorities should consider the provision of cost rental housing on a large scale to meet the needs of households on moderate incomes and reduce the demand for social housing.

In conclusion, to address the capacity and skills gap, local authorities could create delivery teams of a sufficient size and with the necessary skills to deliver on the scale now required. AHBs could pool skilled staff or develop joint procurement or joint delivery approaches.

A primary goal of Ireland’s National Planning Framework is to achieve compact growth and sufficient housing density to support communities. We must take a serious look at how to achieve sustainable development and give much greater attention to the climate change agenda. Energy conservation and the efficiency of individual homes is only one part of the solution.

The location of homes, the correct mix of home sizes, greater housing and population densities and sustainable communities have a huge role to play in tackling climate change.

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**Rebuilding Ireland Targets**

Category	Overall Target 2016–2021
Build	33,617
Acquisition	6,830
Lease	10,036
Subtotal	50,483
Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)	3,800
Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	83,760
Subtotal	87,560
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>138,043</b>

THE DIARY

**NIFHA Annual Conference**  
3-4 October | Derry

The conference is an opportunity to learn from experts in social and affordable housing across the UK, make new contacts and build relationships across the sector. CT are lunch sponsors, and Ceri Victory-Rowe, senior consultant at Campbell Tickell, will be speaking at the conference in the session on “How effective is your board?” This will take place on Day 1 at 4.40pm-5.20pm.

**ICSH Biennial National Social Housing Conference**  
10-11 October | Wexford

Since 2017, there have been significant changes in the delivery of social housing. This conference – focusing on innovation, delivery and sustainability – will explore initiatives that have been successful, how they can be replicated and mainstreamed as well as other measures and solutions. CT are sponsoring the drinks reception. Say hello to our colleagues.

**CT20 Futures Event**  
28 October | London

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Paul Price *director of social housing policy and oversight* & David Polley *acting director of housing supply policy, Department for Communities*

## The view from Northern Ireland



The Programme for Government of the Northern Ireland Executive commits officials in the NI Department for Communities and partner organisations to progress two indicators. These are to increase overall housing supply, and to reduce the numbers of households in ‘housing stress’ – a term used to describe those most in need on the social housing waiting list. While this remains a draft document because of the current political situation, it provides the context for Housing Policy work. So, what is happening at present?

### Government funding

There are currently 790,000 homes in NI. Overall in the past ten years the supply of homes has increased by 10%, and we are currently delivering 7,000 to 8,000 new houses each year, meeting our Housing Growth Indicator target. Of these 790,000 homes, 127,400 are social homes and 8,000 are affordable homes.

These figures reflect a significant capital commitment to social new build by the Department for Communities through its Social Housing Development Programme. Between April 2013 and March 2019 this programme invested £618 million and started just over 9,500 social homes. The figures on affordable homes reflect a significant commitment of loan finance through NI’s Co-ownership Scheme, which has helped over 28,000 people into home-ownership.

### Housing stress

Meanwhile, as at March 2019 the number of households in Housing Stress was 26,387 – up from 24,148 in March 2018. Current increases in housing supply overall, while welcome, are not significant enough to close NI’s supply gap at the rate required (given housing supply has



been at a greatly reduced level for most of a decade before that). The demand for more housing, driven by demographic and economic factors, outstrips what the government can currently do to meet it. A step-change will require significant policy interventions over the next few years, in two broad respects.

First, there are actions that are needed now, or very soon, in order to avert the danger of a severe deterioration in the current position. Legislation is needed to change the relationship between the Department for Communities and Registered Housing Associations (RHAs). This change is needed in to enable the Office for National Statistics to no longer classify these organisations as part of the public sector. Such a change is essential to maintain both the current rates of new social housing development and our Co-ownership Scheme. Draft legislation is ready to go and simply awaits the opportunity to pass it.

### Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Urgent action is also needed to keep NI’s existing social homes. Two-thirds of these are provided by the NI Housing Executive (NIHE). The NIHE is one of the UK’s largest social housing providers. Since the early 1970s it has been providing social housing services to the people

### In numbers

- 790,000 homes
- 127,400 social homes
- 8,000 affordable homes
- 7,000-8,000 new homes each year
- £618m invested in 9,500 social homes since 2013
- 28,000 co-ownership homes
- 26,387 households in ‘housing stress’ (up from 24,148 in March 2018)

**“If the additional investment is not found, then the NIHE faces a reduction in its portfolio of around 50%”**

of NI often in the most challenging circumstances imaginable. If it is to maintain its stock of approximately 85,000 social homes for future generations, the NIHE needs to source a very significant injection of investment. The challenge will require big decisions from NI ministers and officials have options ready. If the additional investment is not found, then the NIHE faces a reduction in its portfolio of around 50%.

The successful negotiation of these challenges is essentially preventative. It will not deliver actual improvement. This will require policy innovation, in particular innovation that goes beyond social housing.

### Need for innovation

Second, we must start doing more than just ‘more of the same’. We will need to develop a range of new innovations to ensure that we have a fit-for-purpose housing supply, addressing the issues within our

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Nicola McCrudden  
Senior associate, Campbell Tickell

## Close to the edge: Northern Ireland's welfare reforms

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Measures in Northern Ireland designed to absorb some of the impact of the UK-wide changes to the benefits system are due to expire in March 2020.

The £500-million mitigations package was agreed as part of the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015, bringing an end to political deadlock over welfare reform. Ironically, the lack of a Stormont Executive today is threatening the continuation of these measures, including financial support for those impacted by the bedroom tax.

Social landlords, advice services and support groups alike are calling on the UK government to extend the supports in place. They have formed a coalition of around 100 members and have brilliantly stepped up campaigning activity in recent months, mainly through social media [@CliffEdgeNI](#).

With the pause button on Stormont, the supplementary mitigation payments could simply stop, plunging thousands into hardship, arrears and homelessness.

### Size matters

Figures collated by the NI Housing Executive show that roughly 30% of its tenants and 25% of housing association tenants will be affected – around 34,000 people. For some

social housing tenants, financial support has already ended because of ‘under-occupying’ – they have moved to a property of the same size or larger. It may be a small number of cases, but landlords are already reporting significant increases in rent arrears.

Just like elsewhere, NI doesn't have the right stock to meet the social sector size criteria. For example, less than one-fifth (18%) of stock has one bedroom, but just under half of the waiting list comprises single people of working age. Even if the right-sized housing was available, in the right places, it wouldn't be feasible to move everyone in time anyway.

### Need for an extension

Any extension of the mitigation scheme from April 2020 onwards would require the sign-off of ministers, and therein lies the problem. There is currently no appetite from either of the two main political parties in NI to restore the Assembly anytime soon. Tracy Meharg, permanent secretary at the Department for Communities, told a House of Commons Committee recently that a roll-over of the mitigation scheme would require legislation passed by either Stormont or the

House of Commons. Worryingly, she also reported that research by her department suggests around 70% of those receiving the supplementary payments are not aware it is part of a mitigation package, and could end. The resulting [joint report](#) from the NI Affairs and Work and Pensions Committees, published early this month, urges Westminster to extend the mitigation package beyond March 2020 for a further four years.

“Supplementary mitigation payments could just simply stop, plunging thousands into hardship, arrears and homelessness”

### Cliff edge

So, we are close to the edge. It is unimaginable to think there won't be an intervention to stop us going over. But then we are in uncharted waters and Brexit is dominating the political agenda. There is a real possibility that legislation necessary to continue the mitigation measures simply won't happen.

Of course, we hope contingency plans are not required and that a way forward will be found soon. However, social landlords need to be prepared, if they are not already, for the worst-case scenario.

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### The view from Northern Ireland

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whole housing system which are driving the increases in housing stress. Given the rapid increase in the size of the private rented sector, this will have to include reviewing our PRS regulation.

This is to ensure it strikes a fair balance between tenants and landlords and to find ways to help renters move into a sector that better suits their needs.

We would also like to develop

our Co-ownership Shared Housing Scheme – which last year helped 1,200 people buy homes. There is scope to develop other types of rental products in addition to social housing, such as discounted rented housing, with secure tenancies.

Of course, we also need to make sure private sector supply is building the houses we need for our increasingly older population and meet the challenge of becoming carbon-neutral.

While much is being done, there is a demanding work programme for the Department for Communities to make the improvement demanded by the Programme for Government, and plenty waiting in the in-tray for an incoming housing minister to consider.

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Rosalind Carroll  
Director, Residential Tenancies Board

## Fifteen years of the Residential Tenancies Board – a changing role



It is 15 years since the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) first opened its doors for business in September 2004. The rental sector has changed considerably since then and the role of the RTB has also become much more important. Given the very real and far-reaching effects of the Irish housing and rental crisis over recent years, the focus has been on solving this crisis and the role of the RTB in this, without much reflection to see what has changed. Here are my thoughts to hopefully stimulate some discussion.

### A regulatory framework

The introduction of the RTB (formerly the PRTB) and the accompanying regulatory framework was hugely significant at the time for the private rental sector in Ireland. An agency dedicated to regulating the rental sector and resolving landlord and tenant disputes was quite revolutionary, and today there are still very few international examples of such a structure.

The principle aims of the legislation underpinning the RTB were to:

- 1 Provide increased security to tenants;
- 2 Require all private landlords to register with the RTB, and;
- 3 To provide a dispute resolution service through the RTB for tenant and landlord disputes as a cost-effective and quicker alternative to the courts.

### Hard times

Prior to the RTB coming into existence, if a landlord or tenant had an issue it took years to take a

case through the courts. It also cost thousands of euros. The result was that it became commonplace for people to take the law into their own hands. Illegal evictions, where locks were changed and tenants' belongings were put on the street, were a regular feature of the rental market. Despite this there was a real fear that the introduction of the Residential Tenancies Act, the RTB, and the associated new rights and obligations for parties would have a negative impact on supply and access to accommodation.

*“While much has changed for the better, society has changed and how the rental sector is used has changed with it”*

### Changes to the private rented sector

15 years on, and while there remains much to

address in the rental sector, much has changed. In 2005 there were 84,000 registered tenancies with the RTB; today we have 313,000 registered private tenancies and 29,000 tenancies from the

Approved Housing Body sector. Illegal evictions do still occur, but they are not commonplace. The cost to take a dispute to the RTB, for landlords or tenants, is €15-25 depending on whether you submit online or not, and a free telephone mediation service is available. The time from dispute application to receiving a legally binding order for our adjudication service is 13 weeks; for our mediation service it is nine weeks.

While much has changed for the better, society has changed and how the rental sector is used has changed with it. Renting is much more mainstream now, used for longer periods. While we have had very restricted housing supply, the issues of affordability and security of tenure

have become the key focus in terms of regulating the rental market. They have also driven the focus of regulatory change with the introduction of rent pressure zones and changes to termination notice periods and requirements. The latest set of legislative reforms have introduced the

most fundamental changes to role of the RTB.

We now have a role in monitoring the market, investigating potential breaches of the law and sanctioning where such breaches are found.



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**Fifteen years of the Residential Tenancies Board – a changing role**  
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This moves us away from just providing a dispute resolution service between parties, to being a proactive regulator.

**What about the next 15 years?**

For many reasons – societal changes, changes to employment patterns, demographics, housing finance issues – we are unlikely to return to the days of 80% of the population owning their own home. The focus on security of tenure and affordability in the rental sector is unlikely to change, as many households will now rely on the rental sector as their long-term home. This will undoubtedly lead to further regulatory changes over time to fit with these needs.

However, regulation is not the only solution and it is important that the market is not over-regulated to the detriment of supply. Where further regulatory reform is required, we

should consider what compromises are made elsewhere to compensate. A functioning rental market requires both landlords and tenants to be satisfied in their relationship.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that the rental market is not homogenous but diverse, it will grow and change. Alternative rental models such as co-living will continue to develop, as will models of affordable renting. We will need to think carefully about regulatory frameworks for new models that respect the individual and unique attributes of different models.

Safe to say, for the rental sector as whole, the next 15 years is likely to see the RTB continuing to have a key role to play.

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**Irish housing market:**

2004	2019
<b>€1,100</b> average monthly private rent	<b>€1,366</b> average monthly private rent
<b>84,000</b> registered private landlords	<b>313,000</b> registered private tenancies
<b>6,117</b> new social homes provided in 2004	<b>27,103</b> new social homes provided in 2018
<b>13.2%</b> annual house price inflation (Jan 2006)	<b>2.3%</b> annual house price inflation (Jul 2019)
<b>4.04m</b> population 2004	<b>4.83m</b> population 2018

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Greg Campbell  
Partner, Campbell Tickell

## Housing regulation: Ireland's journey

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Ireland has a major housing crisis, in terms of both supply and affordability. Some 9,000 people across the country are homeless, with nearly 100,000 on waiting lists. There has been a significant increase in the number of families becoming homeless, and repossessions have been rising. Children comprise more than one-third of those in emergency accommodation. Meanwhile, housing costs, especially in the private rented sector, have been increasing, and the Dublin area in particular has become increasingly unaffordable, especially for people looking to move there from outside, such as to access employment opportunities. In proportion to its population, Ireland has a worse housing crisis than the UK.

The government has various funding programmes in place to increase supply (see for instance the articles from John O'Connor and Kathleen McKillion, on pages one and 10 respectively), and much is channelled in low-cost loans from the Housing Finance Agency. But it remains a significant challenge to meet the expectations of the Rebuilding Ireland action plan (see David D'Arcy's article on page 14).

### Why AHB regulation is needed

In this context, finding new routes for approved housing bodies (AHBs) to fund more social housing is critical. Regulation of the AHB sector is part of the answer – ensuring that housing associations are well-governed, financially viable and well managed, providing homes and services that meet the needs and reasonable expectations of present and future tenants and local authority partners.

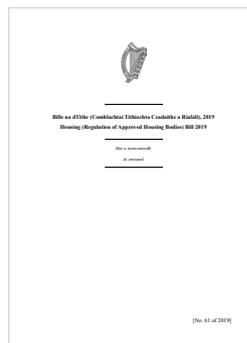
Organisations that are sufficiently robust and well organised will be in a far stronger position to be able to access commercial loans, alongside government funding, in order to



drive up the supply of high-quality, affordable housing. The UK experience has been that regulation has been worth around 50 basis points in lower borrowing costs for housing development.

The [Voluntary Regulation Code](#) was launched in 2013 by the then housing minister Jan O'Sullivan. While it is voluntary for AHBs to sign up, in practice it is a requirement in order to qualify for relevant government funding programmes. Naturally enough, all of the larger and medium-sized AHBs have signed up to the code, together with a considerable number of smaller AHBs.

In total, 275 of Ireland's 520 AHBs have signed up thus far, including



Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill 2019

all 19 of the Tier 3 (over 300 homes) organisations, 54 at Tier 2 (51-300 homes), and 202 at Tier 1 (up to 50 homes).

While the code sets general principles in relation to governance, financial management, property asset management and tenant services, the detail in these areas has been developed over the past five years by the Housing Agency's Regulation Office – which is accountable to the Interim Regulatory Committee, pending voluntary regulation becoming a statutory regime.

So in 2015, the [Financial Standard](#) was launched, followed in 2017 by the [Governance Standard](#) and, late last year, by the [Performance](#)

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## Housing regulation: Ireland's journey

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**Standard.** Campbell Tickell has worked with the Regulation Office to develop all three standards, each of which involved consultation with the Irish Council for Social Housing as the AHBs' trade body, as well as with AHBs themselves at board and executive levels.

### The new Bill

Now that this 'package' is complete, legislation is due to follow, to give regulation statutory force. In late July this year, the [Housing \(Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies\) Bill 2019](#) was published. It contains provisions for establishing the Approved Housing Bodies Regulator as a new standalone body, reporting to a committee whose members are appointed by the minister. Existing Housing Agency Regulation Office staff will transfer to the new regulator, whose principal functions will be to:

- Maintain a register of AHBs;
- Register new AHBs;
- Prepare regulatory standards for approval by the minister;
- Monitor and assess compliance by AHBs with the standards;
- Carry out investigations into AHBs;
- Intervene in the functioning and management of AHBs, and potentially cancel their registration;
- Encourage and facilitate better governance, administration and management;
- Publish information concerning AHBs.

*“Organisations that are sufficiently robust and well organised will be in a far stronger position”*

### The key provisions in the Bill include:

- AHBs already registered when the Act comes into force will continue as such, but will be required to apply to be retained on the AHB register on a phased basis (Tier-3 organisations within one year, Tier 2 within two years and Tier 1 within three years);
- The regulator will co-operate with other relevant regulators, such as the Charities Regulatory Authority – enabling formal Memoranda of Understanding between regulators, and hence joint working between all bodies that have a regulatory locus over the AHB sector;
- “Where the regulator considers that it is necessary to do so for the purpose of the protection of tenants of dwellings”, the regulator has the ultimate power to require the transfer of an AHB's dwellings to another AHB or other appropriate body;
- The regulator will be able to apply to the High Court to enforce its actions in respect of an AHB, including removal of a director or staff member, transferring property, or preventing sale of its properties;
- An independent Appeals Panel will be established, from which Appeals Boards will be drawn to hear appeals against decisions of the regulator;
- The regulator will be funded by government grants and fees that it will set for AHBs;
- The minister is to review the operation of the Act within five years of implementation.

This is an important milestone on the journey to enabling AHBs to step up and meet the challenges of housing supply and quality in the numbers required. Also, it will give the regulator new powers to take

action in instances of poor practice, which have in individual cases damaged the reputation of the wider charitable and non-profit sector.

The Bill is now being debated in the Dáil and the government seems keen for it to be approved by the end of the year for potential implementation in 2020.

### Reclassification of AHBs as 'public sector' bodies

One aspect lurks in the background to regulation, which is the reclassification of most Tier-3 AHBs as public sector bodies subject to state control. If not reversed, this will have a significant impact on the existence of an independent AHB sector and on its ability to meet the expectations of Rebuilding Ireland.

### UK experience

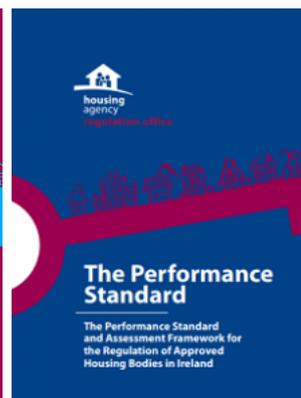
Where a similar reclassification took place in each of the UK jurisdictions, it was based on the powers of the respective housing regulators and their positioning within government. The solutions involved essentially reducing those regulatory powers, in order to justify returning housing associations to their previous classification as private sector bodies. In Ireland, however, given that regulation has been formally voluntary, the reclassification has been on the basis of (a) the proportion of the funding of the largest AHBs that comes from the state, and (b) the weak link between social rent levels and economic or market rents.

### Next steps

It appears that the proposed regulatory regime in the Bill is likely to avoid a new public sector classification being based on the regulatory powers link to government (and no doubt the government has obtained legal advice on this question). It still does not get around the existing public sector classification based on both funding and rent-setting, which remains to be addressed another day (see Kathleen McKillion's article), and is an area on which Campbell Tickell has been advising a number of the larger AHBs.

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**Kathleen McKillion**  
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## Five key challenges: how AHBs are stepping up

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### 1 Regulation

The Regulation Office has now published all three Standards: [Financial](#), [Governance](#) and recently, the [Performance Standard](#), with assistance from Campbell Tickell. These will form part of statutory regulation for housing associations, which we understand is imminent following the [Housing \(Regulation of Approved Bodies\) Bill being published on 26 July](#). The Dáil is now debating this Bill.

How will Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) fare? The largest Tier 3s are expected to be compliant with the Standards by the end of 2019, with a further year for Tier 2s and a further year for the smaller Tier 1s.

It is important to have this independent regulation providing accountability to key stakeholders, including funders. However, it is equally important that regulation does not stifle innovation and it serves to stimulate increased housing delivery – which in our experience the sector is excelling in.

### 2 Reclassification

State control was a key factor in the reclassification of a number of Tier 3 bodies to ‘public bodies’ in [2017](#) and there seems to be no sign of this being reversed anytime soon – unlike in England and Scotland. Instead the net is widening with some Tier 2 bodies now under the same spotlight.

The reclassification matters as it seems likely it will affect funding and also risk appetite, leading to



fewer homes being built. The Rebuilding Ireland delivery targets may well be impacted as a result. The sooner this decision is reversed the better.

### 3 Funding

Another key challenge for AHBs is the budgetary system in Ireland. Decisions often come late in the year and make planning and budgeting difficult. This uncertainty is exacerbated by the annual nature of revenue funding and also of project-based funding for housing support. This adversely affects how housing associations can maximise efforts to provide housing and support for formerly homeless, older people and those with disabilities.

As well as this unpredictable funding, the capital funding stream under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) would benefit from being further streamlined.

The more recent Capital Advance and Leasing Facility (CALF) and Payment and Availability (P&A) Agreement can deliver in weeks, when the circumstances are right. This model, which Campbell Tickell helped review earlier in the year, provides greater flexibility and certainty. CALF delivers in the main towns and cities of Ireland where higher market rental yield makes it financially viable.

However, it doesn't yet deliver throughout Ireland. For instance, it can be used in Cork city but not in many parts of Cork county.



### 4 Training and Recruitment

There is a growing need for bespoke training for housing staff and for housing

associations to develop their own staff for management development and succession planning purposes. Regrettably the Ulster University Housing Honours degree course that I and many other colleagues graduated from, ended.

In response to this demand, in June 2019 Campbell Tickell held two Risk and Assurance Masterclasses in Dublin and Belfast. Feedback has been positive and it was suggested that we should run more

masterclasses – we will respond to that request.

Campbell Tickell has a strong recruitment track record in the UK and has been successful in a small number of key appointments now in Ireland also, starting with the chief executive officer of The Iveagh Trust.



### 5 Homes for housing staff

Lastly, an idea. On occasion, we have seen well-qualified and suitable job candidates citing the accommodation shortage and expense in Dublin as reason not to relocate. I didn't have this issue after graduation, when I went to Scotland to work in the Housing Department of the New Town Development Corporation in Irvine. I was classed as an incoming key worker to which a number of allocations were made.

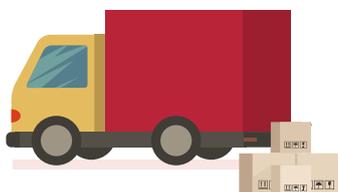
Is this something for housing associations in Ireland to consider, alongside their local authority colleagues? We have acknowledged the need for affordable homes

and rents for nurses, garda, etc. Why not housing workers too?



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Sharon Cosgrove  
CEO, Oaklee Housing

## How Oaklee is developing in and around Dublin



The number of homeless people in Ireland now exceeds 10,000 and the national social housing waiting list is more than 70,000. The challenges in satisfying this demand, not just for Oaklee Housing but for all Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in Ireland, has never been greater. How are we responding?

In Dublin there is a marked lack of available greenfield sites. Due to private Build-To-Rent operators entering the market, competition for sites is stiff. This inflates the cost of land and so affects the viability of sites for social housing.

While there is low availability of privately owned sites, there is significant state-owned land being targeted by the Land Development Agency and local authorities. We are working with local authorities in Dublin City and across the country to acquire these sites to develop into high-quality social housing schemes. We also brief local agents to identify privately owned, off-market sites across Dublin with the potential for future development. The purchasing of completed units from developers and acquiring properties as part of the Part V planning agreements has also been successful in delivering substantial numbers of new homes.

### Ghost estates

But building homes from the ground up isn't the only way that Oaklee addresses the challenge of social housing provision. From procuring distressed portfolios of vacant units to purchasing 'ghost' and unfinished estates across the country, we acquire, refurbish and complete these properties that will become homes to local authority nominees on housing waiting lists.

These abandoned units and estates, while helping to alleviate the housing crisis, come with



their own suite of challenges. None is more significant than the potential expense of completing someone else's work. Unknown components such as quality of design, workmanship and damage as a result of over-exposure to the elements are risks that can make projects such as these extremely costly and, as such, less commercially viable than the construction of homes from scratch.

### Project Acorn

Delivering these great projects costs money. Initially Oaklee and other AHBs relied on funding and preferential rates provided by the Housing Finance Agency to deliver projects. But as confidence in the sector has grown, national and international banks are now willing to offer favourable rates over longer periods. This has changed the way projects can be delivered.

Project Acorn is an excellent demonstration of the changing face of financing for social housing projects. It is a competitive initiative for the provision of fixed-rate, long-term finance that Oaklee launched in 2018. Through this mechanism we have funded 128 units to date, comprising a mix of individual homes as well as scheme developments. Over the next 12 months we expect the project will deliver a further 120 units.

Projects that have benefited from Project Acorn are a refurbished authority scheme at Mountrath, Co. Laois (above left), and a brand new scheme at Stormanstown (above right)

### Ageing population

Another less-discussed challenge facing communities across Ireland is the lack of appropriate housing for our ageing population. The need for smaller, low-maintenance homes is growing to accommodate the downsizers and the elderly. In the absence of land availability, higher densities in the form of apartment blocks are being considered. Yet as apartments are deemed more expensive to build, affordability becomes an obstacle.

Ultimately, once homes have been built, bought or refurbished, the challenge truly begins in creating a community. Dealing with a dispersed portfolio of properties, anti-social behaviour, cultural integration, the fear of the unknown and nimbysism make it all the more difficult to achieve.

But through innovative thinking, proactive management, engagement with established communities, the provision of a quality maintenance programme and collaborative inter-agency working, our teams strive to deliver a best-in-class, customer focused housing and support service.

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## Optimising Health, Care & Support Services

Ensuring your offer meets client needs can mean rethinking your service model and business growth strategy. Your Board must also understand the risks you face and have assurance that you meet regulatory requirements on rent-setting and fire safety.

We also support commissioners to develop new social impact models, homelessness strategies, and supported housing needs assessments, as well as commissioning plans.

“CT reviewed Southwark’s homeless hostels sensitively and professionally, giving us detailed options for improving pathways for homeless people. By understanding the range of our stakeholder requirements, CT delivered a firstclass report and platform for going forward.”

*Paul Langford, Director  
of Resident Services,  
Southwark Council*

**FIND OUT HOW WE CAN HELP:**

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**Ricky Rowledge**  
*Associate consultant, Campbell Tickell and former CEO of Council for the Homeless N.I.*

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## Will a new strategy tackle homelessness in Northern Ireland?

Since 2002, Northern Ireland has been in the unique position within the UK of having three sequential homelessness strategies.

In addition, the welfare reform programme was implemented later than in other devolved administrations and substantial mitigation measures were put in place until 2020 (see page eight).

Yet, in a population of just 1.8 million, the urgent housing waiting list has stagnated at around 40,000 households and in 2017/18, 19,378 households presented as homeless. This figure has also remained static for more than 12 years.

So why, with such a policy focus and hundreds of millions of pounds' investment, has Northern Ireland been unable to successfully tackle the human cost of homelessness, and is the 2017-2020 strategy likely to prove more effective?

### Audit Commission role

The first Homelessness Strategy, driven by an Audit Commission report, demanded that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) tackle what was referred to as a 'breakdown in competence' in dealing with homelessness, since the introduction of its legislative duty in the Housing (NI) Order 1988, including a high dependency on bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Within one year no homeless families were placed in B&Bs. Then the introduction of the Supporting People (SP) programme – through the Housing Support Services (NI) Order in 2002 – allowed substantial capital and revenue investment in excellent temporary accommodation facilities and the provision of specialist support.

However, it was reactionary and gave little thought to the structural or individual reasons for homelessness.



iStock

### NIHE homelessness strategy

The next strategy did not appear until 2012, by which time the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 had placed a duty on the NIHE to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy.

An extensive range of agencies were obliged to take homelessness into account in the exercise of their own functions. It was now acknowledged that not one organisation or agency could address the issue in isolation.

Yet, despite comprehensive support of its objectives, the 2012-2017 strategy suffered from poor implementation and the level of inter-departmental buy-in and focus on prevention was weak. Methods that were successfully reducing homelessness in Scotland and Wales, primarily Housing Options, were not introduced during the lifetime of the strategy.

The current 2017-2022 strategy overtly acknowledges the weaknesses of the previous approach and has a greater commitment to prevention and ensuring the structures for delivery and outcome measurement are in place. These include an Inter-Departmental Action Plan and a dedicated Chronic Homelessness

**Northern Ireland faces severe restrictions on progress to tackle homelessness**

Strategy. Its objectives are fluid and less specific.

### Stormont impact

So, is success in sight? Sadly a number of new challenges face us and realistically it is hard to see how homelessness figures can even remain static.

Lack of a functioning government severely restricts progress. This situation means an inability to increase dedicated funding, introduce an overarching Homelessness Bill or pool departmental finance in recognition that homeless prevention starts upstream in health, criminal justice and education. Crucially, the opportunity for evidence-based advocacy has gone.

In addition, inadequate housing supply, reliance on the capacity and willingness of the private rented sector to house homeless people and the looming loss of welfare reform mitigation measures is likely to drive homelessness up. Significant reductions in funding for the SP programme (a 5% reduction in 2019/20 and no inflationary uplift since 2008), the uncertainty of the impact of Brexit and reduced choice due to the religious separation of housing mean little hope of immediate improvement.

Even with acknowledged commitment across all agencies and sectors, it will be an immense task to reduce homelessness in the current environment. Our best hope is to maintain and increase the effort to help households to maintain their homes, and for agencies outside housing to recognise the part they can and must play. Prevention, they say, is better than cure.

**"In a population of just 1.8 million, the urgent housing waiting list has stagnated at around 40,000"**

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David D'Arcy  
Associate consultant, Campbell Tickell

## Rebuilding Ireland: three years on

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**R**ebuilding Ireland, the government's action plan to deliver 50,000 new social homes, is now three years in operation. It is envisaged that Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) deliver at least 20,000 of this total, alongside new local authority development. This is a significant figure for AHBs, given that the total number of homes in management across the sector is currently around 36,000. Ireland's 31 local authorities manage approximately 145,000 social housing tenancies. So, how is the sector delivering?

### Increased development

Following on from producing 2,300 new homes in 2017, AHBs brought an additional 3,219 new properties into management in 2018, and these are set to increase further in 2019.

Most of this new AHB provision is being delivered by a core group of the country's largest AHBs through a mix of acquisition and construction projects. Earlier this year Ireland's six largest AHBs formally launched [The Housing Alliance](#), to highlight and promote their activities as social housing providers of scale (see box, above). Collectively, Alliance members own and manage over 20,000 social homes nationwide, representing two-thirds of the total AHB housing stock. There are at least 20 other AHBs which are also upskilling and beginning to increase their development activities, and their progress is to be welcomed.

### Growing pains

This period of intense growth for the sector also brings with it many challenges. Managing debt profiles and acquiring treasury management expertise, together with embedding enhanced asset management strategies are areas that AHBs have had to deal with efficiently and relatively quickly.



Under the close supervision of the Housing Regulator, AHBs will need to ensure the other core areas of their businesses are maintained to existing high standards, namely housing management and property services. Among smaller organisations an option could be closer working relationships to realise economies of scale, particularly regarding governance.

### Older persons' housing

This year, the government launched a policy brief, [Housing Options for our Ageing Population](#). Changing demographics and the housing needs of an ageing populace will require solutions for older residents to either remain in their homes or move to more suitable accommodation. Ireland does not have sufficient accommodation for older people prevalent in the UK, but AHBs and local authorities have produced a small number of innovative projects.

One example is [Clúid](#), which has been a significant developer of older persons' housing, rebranding its Older Persons' Team this year as 'Clann' to recognise the strategic importance of this area to the organisation. That momentum now needs to be built upon.

### Funding approvals

I have been working outside the sector in recent months, sitting

**Clúid Housing has been a significant developer of older people's housing**

### The Housing Alliance Members

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- Circle Voluntary Housing
- Clúid Housing
- Co-operative Housing Ireland
- Oaklee Housing
- Respond
- Túath Housing

between AHBs and a range of developers. It is still frustrating that the funding approvals process for the sector remains based on a scheme-by-scheme basis, regardless of the size of the proposed project. There should be consideration now for the largest AHBs to move to a programme-based funding model rather than individual scheme-specific allocations. This would allow AHBs to spend time business-planning too – an essential requirement for those with large, diverse development programmes.

Ireland's first-ever [Public Private Partnerships \(PPP\) contract](#) to deliver new social housing units was recently awarded to the Comhar consortium. This group includes Oaklee Housing, which will provide tenancy management services for the partnership. The contract will produce 534 new homes across six locations. A second contract is now at the preferred tender stage, to the Torc partnership, where Túath Housing will manage the tenancies of 465 new homes.

This is evidence of the sector's ability, and confidence from the state, to continue to be at the forefront of future larger-scale social housing delivery.

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Mark Glinwood  
Associate recruitment consultant, Campbell Tickell

## How to ensure you wear the recruitment crown

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Remember the time when employers were king – enacting their recruitment processes in a way that did little more than showcase a sense of presumption in terms of who needed who? Things have moved on now, and the labour market is becoming increasingly starved of the volume of talent needed to drive organisational growth and long-term sustainability.

So, how do we ensure that our organisational mindset recognises this situation and that our processes are designed accordingly?

Recruitment is a strategic act that should showcase every aspect of our organisational offer. In this competitive world organisations need to attract and engage the best talent around. Talent is like a magnet, drawn to employer brand, culture, autonomy and alignment with a compatible set of values.

The *Irish Independent* recently published a [survey](#) of HR managers revealing that 79% said investment in employer branding drastically reduces hiring costs, while 75% said that the quality of candidates has improved since investing in their employer brand. The article predicts that we will see more companies utilise videos, articles and social media to reach new talent – a trend that we at Campbell Tickell recognise and promote.

In Northern Ireland in particular, the historic dominance of public sector employment is ending. A more commercial focus is becoming the norm within the social housing sector, driven by outcomes, as



**The key to successful recruitment is to move with the times – it is now a two-way process where employers are no longer king**

opposed to a mindset of ‘this is how we do things around here’, which stifles innovation. It is probably no coincidence that the two biggest housing associations in the North have CEOs with significant commercial experience. Social housing providers in the North are competing with highly commercial organisations, particularly in finance, property and development, for the best talent. It is likely that this trend will gather pace in the South too over the next couple of years. So, what does this all mean if we want to compete for high-performing talent?

First, a root-and-branch review of resourcing strategy is required – facilitated, but not decided by, HR professionals. This is a strategic business activity that must involve all executive leaders to ensure it fully supports the business ethos and strategy. This article signposts the traits of success and the approach that is likely to make you stand out from the myriad of opportunities that are open to the best talent. To whet your appetite, here are a few points that may reassure or disrupt your system:

- 1 Shape the core requirements of the role in line with the future direction of the organisation, and not the comfort of the past.
- 2 Position opportunities around the mutual interests of candidate and organisation – why should they choose you?
- 3 Adopt a minimalist, flexible recruitment process tailored to testing future potential.
- 4 Consider whether competency-based interviewing is dead – or should you focus more on ‘strengths-based’ interviewing techniques?
- 5 Consider how you can showcase everything about the role and not just confine the focus to the role profile.
- 6 Co-produce role profiles with the candidates: i.e. stipulate the absolute core and shape the rest via the recruitment process, thereby increasing buy-in from the outset.

We acknowledge that the housing sector across the island of Ireland is at different stages of evolution, and therefore some of the resourcing challenges are different. But many are the same, so there is real scope for collaboration, sharing and quality of learning across North and South. However, in this changing world, the best people need a good reason to join your organisation – and a good reason to stay – who is recruiting who?

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## Strategy and Transformation

Campbell Tickell is a multi-disciplinary management consultancy specialising in housing. We work on governance, business planning, transformation, executive and non-executive recruitment, HR, mergers and growth.

We have worked with the housing regulators for Northern Ireland and the Republic, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Housing Agency, and most large and many medium-sized housing associations across the whole of Ireland.

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