



Ireland's Housing emergency is a blight on our country. At the last count, **8,587 people were in emergency accommodation. 3,079** of these were children.

A **quarter of a million people** are on the official housing list and many thousands more - in desperate need of housing - are not even counted.

House prices continue to rise - **up 11.6% in the past year.**

Rents are at record levels, with the **average rent now at €1,056**. The average rent in Dublin is now €1,518. In the past year, rents have risen by 21% in Limerick, 14% in Waterford, 13% in Westmeath and 11% in Cork. Overall, rents have increased by 9.5% in the past year and are at the heart of the surge in homelessness.

We are in a dreadful negative spiral.

The Department of Housing can't even say how many social homes were built in 2017 but the final figure is likely to be around a mere 2,000. At that rate of building, it will take almost 50 years to clear waiting lists.

The Government's failure to deal with this emergency is down to three key factors:

- **Firstly**, it continues to see housing as a commodity and not a home and as a result has yielded far too much to vested interests.
- **Secondly**, its strategy is far too reliant on private sector delivery, including the delivery of social housing.
- **Thirdly**, it is not maximising the use of available land – both public and private.

We believe there has to be a far more aggressive approach to tackling the problem. **The Social Democrats are calling for the following measures:**

Prioritisation of Public Land Banks

The private market is not delivering. The only certain way to deliver housing faster is through the development of public land banks. There are over 700 local authority and Housing Agency owned sites (1,700 hectares), and 30 sites (200 hectares) owned by State or Semi-State Bodies.

This land should be brought into use immediately to deliver homes with good social and tenure mix.

Improve funding for direct builds

Far more housing supply could be delivered by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies and we would boost funding to these. In particular, we would build up the capacity of the voluntary housing sector so that it can deliver housing in far greater numbers.

Affordable Housing

Amazingly, there is still no affordable housing scheme available for first-time buyers. The Social Democrats believe that public land-banks should be used to deliver social housing, affordable rental and affordable purchase housing with good social and tenure mix.

In addition, we would reactivate Part V of the Planning Acts but apply a higher percentage for affordable housing so that new developments would be a mixture of 70% for purchase, 20% affordable and 10% social.

We would update legislation and Ministerial guidelines to ensure that the hand of Local Authorities is strengthened in negotiations on the cost of Part V housing (both social and affordable) by providing that where developers are stalling in negotiations the local authority will acquire land from within that development from the developer within a specified time period.

We would promote much better competition in the mortgage market so that Ireland's very high variable rate mortgages are significantly reduced and it is far easier for consumers to switch. We would improve supports to those in difficulty with their mortgage.

Severe Penalties against Land Hoarders

There is strong evidence that we have a growing problem with land-hoarding. We would:

- **Legislate for much stronger anti-hoarding measures.** We have already published a Bill which would counter land-hoarding by applying a larger vacant site levy the longer a site remains vacant and by eradicating some of the many loopholes in the original legislation that allowed owners to avoid the levy.
- **Legislate for a price and ownership register** for all land so that the extent of land oligopolies can be properly tracked and responded to.
- **Introduce a Land-Hoarding Tax.** This would be a Land Value Tax on serviced land that is zoned for residential development as a primary or secondary use. It would be applied at a rate higher than the

current rate of land price inflation and rise the longer the site is not activated.

- As above, we want **an aggressive approach by local authorities to take land from developers for Part V agreements** rather than pay rip-off prices for new homes.
- Amend Part V to provide for **10% social and 20% affordable housing** – a measure that would encourage those sitting on land now to activate their sites as soon as possible.

A new Housing Delivery Agency

There is no single Government Agency that has explicit responsibility for housing supply.

The delivery unit in the Department of Housing does not have enough staff to cope with the scale of the problem. The Social Democrats would establish a new delivery agency with housing supply as its primary responsibility. It would play a key role in project managing the delivery of new homes. It would be responsible for ensuring the acquisition and development of public land-banks to build homes with good social and tenure mix while achieving economies of scale across sites.

Scrap the Help to Buy Scheme

This scheme has simply added to price inflation in the housing market and has been counter to the interests of first-time buyers and all home purchasers. The estimated cost of this scheme is €40m and we would use this money instead to fund the reintroduction of a new affordable housing scheme.

Challenge EU Fiscal rules as they apply to Capital Expenditure

The costs of projects should be spread out over their life-span rather than just the four years dictated by the EU rules. In addition, the new housing delivery agency must be able to operate on a not-for-profit basis so that it can deliver housing at affordable prices in well-planned communities with good social and tenure mix.

To do this, it must initially be able to borrow substantial funds to invest in housing.

A proper rents cap and rent regulation

Current rent certainty measures are completely inadequate. They don't apply to the whole country and apply too high a cap. Rents are at record levels and still growing – at 9.5%. This is what is driving families into homelessness. The Social Democrats want to see rent caps tied to the general rate of inflation and applied across the whole country.

In addition, we would significantly strengthen the Residential Tenancies Board so that it is in a much better position to regulate the sector. We need far better enforcement of the law in relation to rents and security of tenure, better information for both tenants and landlords, and a far more efficient dispute resolution process.

New rights for tenants

We would legislate to provide for indefinite tenancies so that tenancies can't simply be ended at the end of each 6 year cycle. We would introduce the Deposit Protection Scheme and a new legal definition of deposit to mean one month's rent. We would remove the sale of property as a grounds for terminating a tenancy by amending Section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Acts and update legislation to ensure that tenants of Buy-to-Let properties in receivership are transferred to the receiver and then on to a new landlord. We would very significantly increase penalties for rogue landlords. We would end the ridiculous stamp duty that applies to people sharing a house where the total rent is above €2,500.

Constitutional Reform

We are committed to a referendum to reform Article 43 of the Constitution to better reflect the common good so that issues in relation to both private rented accommodation and upward only rent reviews on commercial property can be addressed.

Prevent Homelessness

Allow greater discretion to front-line workers in terms of rental support where there is a risk of homelessness/eviction, by extending Homeless HAP to the whole country and by ensuring the HAP scheme can provide discretionary uplifts. Local Authorities should be given formal responsibility of finding alternative housing for people who have had their HAP tenancy terminated. We recently published legislation, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2018, to ensure that landlords give tenants far longer notice periods when they are terminating a tenancy so that tenants and support services have enough time to source alternative accommodation.

Measures to free up under-used stock

We would:

- fund a vacant homes officer in each local authority where there is a housing shortage to work with home-owners to get vacant stock back into use as quickly as possible;
- introduce a vacant housing levy for vacant homes (duration to be set by each local authority) and apply a higher levy the longer the home remains vacant;
- reform the Fair Deal Scheme to remove financial barriers to letting a vacant home;
- provide extra funding to ensure quicker turnaround of local authority voids and progress refurbishments quickly;
- activate and extend the Financial Contribution Scheme for Older Persons so that older people who want step-down housing in a sheltered housing setting can avail of this option – currently several hundred people are on a waiting list for such a scheme in Dublin.
- reform planning law to ensure that older persons housing is provided as part of every new development and improve the supply of privately built step-down housing.