

**Opening Statement by Minister Kieran O'Donnell, T.D., Minister of State for
Planning and Local Government at the Department of Housing, Local Government
and Heritage**

Appearance at the Joint Committee on Disability Matters

20 March 2024

Cathaoirleach, members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to be here this evening to update members in this important area.

My Department's policy in respect of housing for disabled people is underpinned by a dedicated joint Strategy between my Department and the Department of Health since 2011. The most recent successor, the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027, continues the joint cooperation now in particular with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Along with my colleague Minister Rabbitte, I launched the Implementation Plan for the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 in June of last year. The Strategy and Implementation Plan sets out the vision for the cooperation and collaboration of Government Departments, state agencies, including local authorities, and others in delivering housing and related supports for disabled people over the next number of years.

The Strategy operates within the framework of *Housing for All*, which is committed to ensuring that affordable, quality housing with an appropriate mix of housing design types provided within social housing is available to everyone in Irish society, including those with disabilities. The plan sets out, over four pathways, a broad suite of measures to achieve its policy objectives together with a financial commitment of in excess of €4 billion per annum.

The Strategy and Implementation Plan were developed following extensive consultation with disabled people. I am firmly of the opinion that the influence of the lived experience of disabled people, which is reflected in the actions, will be key to the success of the Strategy and its Implementation Plan as it progresses.

The Housing Agency plays a key role as the independent chair of a National Implementation Steering Group which is actively advancing implementation of the Strategy and the delivery of the actions in the Implementation Plan. The Agency, together with all of the Departments and Agencies involved, are advancing a comprehensive suite of actions involving all stakeholders to ensure the delivery of the high level objectives.

Among the objectives of the Strategy is to meet our commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to facilitate disabled people to live independently and as part of the community. Consequently, the overall vision of the Strategy is 'to facilitate disabled people to live independently with the appropriate choices and control over where, how and with whom they live, promoting their inclusion in the community'. The Strategy aims to ensure that disabled people have equal access to housing and clearer pathways to accessing support services, promoting their inclusion in the community from a housing perspective. I am working collaboratively with my Government colleagues and delivery partners across the sector in delivering on the actions in this Implementation Plan to ensure we deliver on the vision set out in the Strategy.

My Department is collaborating very closely under the Strategy with colleagues in the Department of Health, and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and as well as local authorities and the HSE to drive its delivery to meet the needs of disabled people. Collaboration and communication are key to successful housing outcomes, particularly for disabled people. As part of this collaboration, my Department along with the HSE, jointly fund Mental Health

Tenancy Sustainment Officers who support people with mental health difficulties to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.

Housing and Disability Steering Groups, which were established by local authorities under the previous Strategy, are reaffirmed under the new Strategy as the most effective forum for delivery of the outcomes of the Strategy at the local level. I want to acknowledge the positive feedback provided by the CCMA Representatives and colleagues on this Committee in relation to these Groups at previous engagement on this topic. These Steering Groups bring together the key stakeholders at the local level ranging from the disabled persons organisations, disabled people themselves, the HSE and local authorities to drive delivery of positive outcomes for disabled people.

My Department delivers on housing for disabled people by both stimulating supply in the private sector and directly funding social housing. Local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies are key partners in this regard. Housing for disabled people is funded from the mainstream capital programmes for social housing in local authorities, as well as the Capital Assistance Scheme. CAS is a longstanding funding programme used by AHBs for specialised housing with in excess of €220million of capital funding available in 2023 for the provision of housing for particular categories of housing need, including disabled people.

Returns from local authorities indicate an increase year-on-year in allocations of social housing to households with disability as a primary basis of need. While the 2023 data is not readily available at this point, in 2022 allocations to disabled people represented 15% of total allocations or over 2,400 households with disability as a primary basis of need.

The Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for People with a Disability and Older People, the Mobility Aids Grants Scheme and the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme

continue to support disabled people to remain living in private housing and to make adaptations and improvements to their homes to enable them to go on living there in comfort.

Funding of over €93 million is available to local authorities for these grant schemes in 2024 ensuring a continuation of the year-on-year increases in the grants since 2014. This funding allocation is expected to result in over 13,000 grants for older people and disabled people, to facilitate those people living independently in their own homes. Work on the review is at an advanced stage and I will be focused on bringing it to a conclusion shortly in order to bring forward revised regulations governing the schemes.

In conclusion, I and my Department are firmly committed to the strategic framework in place to deliver housing and related supports for disabled people to live independently and will continue to collaborate with other relevant Departments and agencies. At the same time, working collaboratively together with the disability sector is critical to achieving the common objective of the delivery of housing for disabled people through mainstream housing policy in a supported environment.

I am happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

Thank you.