



Minutes of the 415th NESC Council Meeting, 21st November 2014

The meeting took place in The Clock Tower, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough St, at 10 am.

Attendance: Martin Fraser (Chair), Michael Ewing, Theresa Carter, David Hegarty, Edgar Morgenroth, Gavan O'Leary, Seán Healy, Karen Murphy, Mary Daly, Mary Walsh, Edmond Connolly, Mike O'Sullivan, Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Tony Donohoe, Ian Talbot, Shay Cody, and David Begg.

Secretariat: Rory O'Donnell, Helen Johnston, Anne-Marie McGauran, Noel Cahill, Richard Holland and Philip Lawton.

Apologies: Seán Ó Riain, Seámus O'Donoghue, Brid O'Brien, Pat Smith, Anna Davies, James Doorley, Karin Dubsy, Niamh O'Donoghue, Sally Anne Kinahan, John McCarthy, John Murphy, Frank Allen and Oisín Coghlan.

1. **Minutes of the Meeting of October 2014** were approved.
2. **The Private Rental Sector: An Initial Discussion of Perspectives and Issues:** Dr Rory O'Donnell introduced the paper on the private rental sector. Bairbre Nic Aongusa, Assistant Secretary in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government's placed the NESC work in the context of Construction 2020 and, in particular, the Social Housing Strategy. She emphasised the importance of taking a 'whole of government' approach and working towards sustainable communities.

In discussion, members welcomed the Secretariat paper and acknowledged the complexity of the issues. Comments included emphasis on the critical issue of the supply of private rented housing, both to meet current demand but also to deal with a projected increase in future relating to demographic changes and affordability of housing in general. There was much discussion on the issue of security of tenure in the private rented sector, with debate on the role of rent regulation and the need for longer term leases. In relation to these issues members discussed the need for investment, possibly through institutional investors and tax incentives. Some members many warned of the possibility of unintended consequences of tax measures. A number of members referred to cultural issues, which in Ireland create a strong preference to own housing rather than renting. Reference was made to the German and Finnish housing models and system of regulation of the private rental sector, with a number of limitations highlighted. Some members also suggested a life cycle model for housing, citing different needs at different ages. A number of members noted the implications for pensions if people were to rent throughout the life cycle. Members stressed the need to ensure quality in private rented accommodation. It was suggested that rapid provision of student accommodation would free up the private rented market for others. In general, there was a recognised need to improve the information available on private rental accommodation. At a strategic level, the need to consider housing policy in conjunction with other policy areas, such as the labour market, was emphasised.

Drawing the discussion to a conclusion, the Chairman informed members that the Cabinet Committee on Construction 2020 is actively discussing these and other issues. Many actions were needed as there were no simple solutions. He suggested that we return to discuss these issues at the next meeting, with a presentation from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government on the new Social Housing Strategy and ongoing work under Construction 2020.

3. **Other Business:** In response to a request from members it was proposed that (a) a draft work programme for the first half of 2015 would be presented to the Council at its December meeting; and (b) the environmental projects would be presented to the Council and discussed in the new year. The Chairman informed members that the Department of the Taoiseach is preparing its strategy for 2015 to 2017, which will be of relevance to NESC.

The next meeting was set for: **Friday, 19th December**, Clock Tower, 10.00 a.m.