



# Irish Council for Social Housing

National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland  
2019-2022

**Draft for Public Consultation**

## Introduction

The ICSH welcome the concerted efforts to create an enabling policy environment, in which Irish social enterprises can thrive and maximise their impact.

Over many decades, the Approved Housing Body sector, comprising hundreds of social enterprises (not for profit organisations that have a social mission and purpose) have been acquiring financing, procuring, delivering and managing social housing in Ireland, with the purpose of addressing housing need and providing social housing.

In communities throughout Ireland, AHB's have created additional services and fostered the development of new social enterprises, with the intention of delivering wider community benefit including job creation and improved service delivery

## Social and Economic Activity of Housing Associations in Ireland

Housing associations, (also known as approved housing bodies) are non-profit organisations whose purpose is the provision and management of housing for households in housing need. They provide good quality housing at affordable rents, primarily for households on local authority waiting lists. Housing Associations have a 150-year history dating back to when a number of philanthropic housing efforts were initiated by housing trusts. However, a significant part of the sector has developed since the 1980s. One of the earliest housing associations from the 1890's, and still active is the Iveagh Trust based in Dublin who manage over 1,500 homes with currently a significant delivery programme of new homes.

Housing Associations are governed by management boards comprising board members with various skills and expertise who act in a voluntary capacity and unpaid. The size and spread of not-for-profit housing associations differs significantly, with a small number of larger associations managing several thousand homes to number of community-based housing associations who manage less than 50 homes primarily for specialist groups (see appendix 1). Many of the community-based housing associations emerged out of local social service actives in their area i.e. care of the aged, parents and friends of people with disabilities and rural community development organisations.

In addition to the provision of a housing service, AHBs also provide other social services including social services to local communities etc...

- Approved Housing Bodies/Housing Associations are by most definitions (including the working definition in the consultation draft) social enterprises.
- Approved Housing Bodies as "businesses" that use state funding to deliver housing options for vulnerable groups within society, charge tenants an income related rent

or economical rent, and re-invests any surpluses to deliver additional services and/or maintain its properties and in the case of larger associations to continue to expand their housing services, fully meet the criteria defined in the consultation draft.

- AHB's in Ireland have also taken steps to foster social enterprises in their communities. AHBs deliver or support a range of additional social enterprises within local communities. In Britain for example 1,700 registered Housing Associations with a combined annual spend of 13bn have increased their investment in and use of social enterprises in their communities. (2013, Green Light Report, NHF)

This demonstrates the significant potential housing bodies have, as social enterprises to support the further development of the sector. The social motivation of National Housing Federation members for the increased use of social enterprises included the creation of jobs for their tenants, the delivery of wider community benefits and to improve service delivery for their tenants.

- In Ireland, housing associations who provide homes for the elderly or people with disabilities often provide additional services to tenants and to the wider community. The services are key to maintaining an individual with special needs in the community. A sample list of services includes;
  - Laundry
  - Meals
  - Carers
  - Social activities
  - Visiting services such as chiropody
  - Gardening and light physical activities
  - Transport
  - Tenant liaison staff.

Local community-based housing associations have close links with their tenants and provide an essential service to their tenants through these additional activities and services.

## Staffing and Volunteers in Approved Housing Bodies

The following table depicts the number of staff and volunteers active within AHBs. There are larger numbers of staff and volunteers active across Tier 1 and Tier 2 AHBs as these organisations are offering both care and housing services to people with disabilities and older people. In some cases, the care services are providing full time care support to people with multiple disabilities.

The sector is diverse and strongly rooted in local communities as is demonstrated by the large number of volunteers active. Often local AHBs are providing a service which would not be available in that village or town if a housing association had not been established by the people involved. The ICSH are working closely with our members to assist them to continue in their vital role or providing housing and services.

### ICSH Member Data 2019

	Number of units	Number of staff	Number of volunteers
<b>Tier 1</b>	4769	1948	1651
<b>Tier 2</b>	4556	1895	3021
<b>Tier 3</b>	20478	757	1250
<b>Total</b>	<b>29803</b>	<b>4600</b>	<b>5922</b>

## 1. Building Awareness of Social Enterprises

- The ICSH welcomes the policy objectives on Building Awareness of Social enterprises.
- In endeavouring to build an enabling policy framework, the co-construction approach of government and stakeholders is welcome.
- We agree that a policy framework must be underpinned by a sound understanding of the of the features mission and needs of social enterprises (Boosting SE Development OECD/EU 2017)
- In Ireland and elsewhere there may still be limited understanding and indeed some misunderstanding of the specific features and role of social enterprise. The lack of data in relation to the social enterprise sector may have been hampered by the absence of a universal definition (Forfas 2013)
- It is welcome to see a working definition for the sector included in the paper.
- European case studies in Boosting Social enterprise development reveal interesting findings in relation to visibility and institutional frameworks

“Legal and institutional frameworks bring clarity by defining the nature, mission and activities of social enterprises. By granting to social enterprises recognition and visibility through the creation of framework laws or the implementation of national strategies, they help policy makers to more effectively target their support.” ( Boosting SE Development OECD/EU2017)

## 2. Growing and Strengthening of Social Enterprises.

- The ICSH acknowledges that capacity building, good governance, access to finance etc are all critical to growing and strengthening the Social Enterprise sector; building the sector’s capacity to upscale and grow.
- AHBs work hand in hand with the private sector and local authorities in delivery of housing as well as management and maintenance. In some cases the AHB provides a

housing management service to the entire development. In addition AHBs have developed skills and capacity in raising finance from private institutions.

- Awareness of international models in boosting social enterprise development; early-stage business support structure, Socially Responsible Public Procurement and Partnerships for Supporting the Social Enterprise Strategy (OECD/EU20017) will greatly assist this development process
- In this regard it may be useful for **capacity** itself to be defined with relevance to the current policy and practice context
- It may also be useful to view capacity in its broadest sense. An approach to understanding capacity in the affordable housing industry in Australia considered a multidimensional understanding. Glickman and Servon (1998) had developed a model to look at a comparable industry in the US

**Through these five dimensions,**

- **The resources** available to the sector to provide and expand
- The quality and extent of the **organisational capabilities** of all institutions
- The level and quality of **industry-specific skillsets**
- The **networks** through which industry entities interrelate to enhance their effective operation.
- The **political capacity** of the industry to represent its interests, influence key stakeholders and shape government policy.

Given the diverse nature of the sector and the immaturity of the policy and institutional frameworks, this approach could be considered.

### 3. Achieving Better Policy Alignment

- In Ireland and elsewhere there may still be limited understanding and indeed some misunderstanding of the specific features and role of social enterprise. The lack of data in relation to the social enterprise sector may have been hampered by the absence of a universal definition (Forfas 2013)
- The development of a national volunteering strategy alongside a social enterprise strategy is welcome. As volunteers populate the boards of many social enterprises, including AHB's, a strategy that responds to their development and renewal needs will contribute to the resilience of organisations and communities throughout the country.
- Local volunteerism is a fundamental resilience strategy and a property of resilient communities. (United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme 2018)
- The ICSH welcomes the commitment in the draft for data collection relating to the extent of social enterprise in Ireland and the development of mechanisms to measure the social and economic impact of social enterprises across the full spectrum of social enterprise.
- Approved Housing bodies through the Irish Council for Social Housing has developed HAPM - the Housing Association Performance Management framework is a standardised tool developed, in consultation with members for measuring housing association performance. The aim of HAPM is to promote good housing

management practice in the voluntary housing association sector and demonstrate the excellent levels of service tenants receive.

<https://www.icshe.ie/content/article/hapm>

## References

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