



respond
building homes,
improving lives

Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023





Respond complies with The Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charitable Sector in Ireland and the Voluntary Regulation Code for Approved Housing Bodies.

Contents

1

Introduction

1	Introduction	6
1.1	Respond	8
1.2	Context for Strategic Plan	10
1.3	Methodology for production of 2019-2023 Strategic Plan	11

2

History and Development of Respond, 1982-2017

2.1	Provision of Social Housing	14
2.2	Homelessness Services and Initiatives	15
2.3	Governance and Organisational Development	16
2.4	Community Development and Community Services	17
2.5	Development of Sustainable Communities	17
2.6	High Levels of Innovation and Creativity	18
2.7	Provision of Services for Older People and for People with Special Needs	19

3

Social Housing and Homelessness in Ireland - Current Situation

3.1.1	Background	22
3.1.2	Advent of Housing Associations	22
3.1.3	The 1990S and The Economic Crash	23
3.1.4	Current Tenure in Ireland	24
3.1.5	Social Housing Policy	26
3.1.6	Homelessness	26
3.2	How we can Overcome Challenges for the Sector	27
3.2.1	Problems with Housing Assistance Payment	27
3.2.2	Speed Up Social Housing Delivery	28
3.2.3	Availability of Alternative Means of Financing Social Housing Building	30
3.2.4	Value For Money and Tenant Participation	31

4

Key Issues and Challenges – Arising from this Review

4.1	Main Roles and Functions of Respond	34
4.2	Older People, Vulnerable People and People With Special Needs	34
4.3	Young People	36
4.4.	Relationships with Tenants	36
4.5	Housing Maintenance and Estate Management	36
4.6	Community Development and use of Community Facilities	37
4.7	Potential New Projects and Initiatives	37
4.8	Concluding Comments	38

5

Strategic Direction for Respond 2019-2023

5.1	Introduction	42
5.2	Vision Statement	42
5.3	Mission Statement	42
5.4	Strategic Goals	44
5.4.1	Goal 1	44
5.4.2	Goal 2	46
5.4.3	Goal 3	48
5.4.4	Goal 4	50
5.4.5	Goal 5	52
5.4.6	Goal 6	54
5.4.7	Goal 7	56

6

Guiding Principles and Core Values

6.1	60
6.2	60

building homes, improving lives

Preface

Since its establishment in 1982 by Fr. Pat Cogan ofm and other concerned citizens in Waterford City, Respond has achieved a great deal in the provision of social housing in Ireland and more recently in the development of homelessness services. Housing and decent accommodation in the areas in which people want to live are key and basic factors in improving people's lives and in enhancing the overall health and well-being of society. On every level the lack of housing or very insecure accommodation can have a very detrimental and devastating impact on people. In this context Respond is proud to be of service to many thousands of people in 2019 through providing some 4,502 houses and apartments, which are rented to people on low/modest incomes, presently accommodating over 8,965 people, and through the Family Hubs which provide transitional short-term accommodation for families and individuals as they await more secure long-term accommodation.

Respond has been a pioneer of social housing development in Ireland, often putting emphasis on certain categories of acute need and always with support for tenants to lead fruitful lives in vibrant communities. In addition to housing and related work we currently provide quality Day Care services for older people, Early Education, Childcare, Family Support and Resettlement services through Respond Support.

More generally in advanced democracies, non-government not-for-profit housing bodies are now the main providers of social and affordable housing. With appropriate support and cooperation from central and local Government, housing associations motivated by social equality, can set good housing standards, achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction, deliver professional standards of housing management (including rent collection) and sustain a valuable social asset.

In considering the next five years from 2019 to 2023 it is clear that there are significant challenges both in relation to housing and homelessness in Ireland and in the ways that Respond might make its most effective contribution towards alleviating the current housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland. The nature of this crisis has been well-documented and is reflected in the ways the numbers of people in social housing need have increased considerably over recent years. It is also reflected in the shortage of housing supply, the sharp decline in the number of rental properties and the escalating rents being charged to tenants in the private rental sector. Respond's primary challenge over the next five years will be to increase its social housing stock by over 50% and to provide more homelessness services (primarily through setting up more Family Hubs) whilst, at the same time, maintaining its existing housing stock.

While general social housing needs will continue to be our main focus during the period of this strategic plan, we think that the provision of housing for the population requires a holistic approach. There is a tendency to view housing in an overly segmented way when in reality it is a continuum. What happens in one segment of the market usually affects the market as a whole and has implications for other segments. In our view the concept of affordability is central and we are anxious to work with Government and other bodies to devise a methodology for, and pilot the provision of, affordable housing.

Over the course of the last 36 years, Respond has always risen to the challenges which have presented themselves at the national level and within various cities, towns and local communities in Ireland. It has made a major contribution towards the provision of social housing in Ireland and has always been to the fore amongst Approved Housing Bodies.

This Strategic Plan spells out how Respond sees its role over the next 5 years. We see Respond as a body focussed on finding practical solutions, delivering more homes for people that need them and maintaining comfortable homes for our existing tenants. We currently provide quality Day Care services for older people, Early Education, Childcare, Family Support and Resettlement services. Hence, the title of this document: 'Building Homes Improving Lives'. This is also the motto on our new logo – a house within a stylized thumbprint – which represents each person's need for a home and for pathways to the wider community.

In the current housing and homelessness crisis Respond will 'step up to the mark' once again through providing up to 2,500 new social housing units over

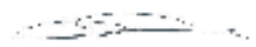
the next 5 years, by setting up at least 3 more Family Hubs, by displaying innovation and imagination through devising new models and new arrangements to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis and through partnering and collaborating, in a practical and meaningful way, with Government Departments, local authorities, other Approved Housing Bodies, builders and developers.

Respond is convinced that the current housing and homelessness problems can be overcome. We intend to play a significant role in ensuring that very substantial progress will have been made in reducing housing lists and in providing decent housing and accommodation for many thousands of people by the time that this Strategic Plan concludes in 2023.

We wish to thank the Directors of the company, the management and staff and tenants throughout the organisation for their considerable work they have put into reviewing the present situation and the preparation of this strategic plan. We would like to thank all of the stakeholders who met with the Board and Stephen Rourke and contributed their views to the development of this strategy; the Department of Housing, Community and Local Government, the Housing Agency, Local Authorities, the Housing Finance Agency, the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive (DRHE) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) for their continued support in achieving our targets for delivery of additional social housing and providing homeless services. We would like to thank Stephen Rourke who conducted most of the consultations with staff, tenants and other stakeholders and prepared textual material. Also Rita Burtenshaw for her input and ongoing work with the resident support team and finally Red Dog for designing our new corporate identity logo.



John O'Connor
Chairperson



Declan Dunne
Chief Executive Officer

February 2019

Introduction

1





1.1. Respond

Respond, one of Ireland's leading Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), was formed in 1982 in Waterford by Fr. Pat Cogan ofm and others who were very concerned about the lack of suitable housing in Waterford City, especially for young families and older people living in the city. Respond's first housing project was located in Larchville in Waterford City on land provided by Waterford City Council – this housing project was called Francis Court, it contained 15 houses for older people along with a community space and it was officially opened on 4th October 1983.

Since the time of its first housing project in Francis Court, Respond has developed into a major provider of social housing in Ireland. For a large number of years, Respond was the largest Housing Association (also known as Approved Housing Bodies) in Ireland, as reflected in the number of housing estates and housing units under its ownership and/or management. We are still amongst the three foremost Approved Housing Bodies in Ireland. At the start of 2019 there are a total of 4,502 owned and/or managed by Respond and we have homes and estates in every county in the Republic of Ireland.

Respond has made enormous strides in the period from 1982 to 2019, evolving from a locally based Housing Association responding to housing needs in Waterford City to a significant provider of social housing across Ireland. It has been a noteworthy and remarkable journey for Respond and as well as the provision of housing it is also important to note that the Respond model of supports for people in social housing also takes account of the fact that tenants may have non-housing needs and requirements in their lives. We have tried to assist people to access

appropriate services and, where necessary, provided these services through Respond Support e.g. childcare, elder care, education.

Respond has aimed to be as relevant as possible in relation to the provision of housing, accommodation and related services. In a similar way to getting directly involved in building and managing 15 houses in Francis Court, Waterford City in 1982-83 for older people in need of suitable housing. We have also been directly involved in providing accommodation and support services for people who are homeless who have been deeply affected by the housing and homelessness crisis which has engulfed Ireland in recent years. In addition to a significant ramping-up and acceleration of work on new social housing projects/units in a range of locations across Ireland, Respond has opened up Family Hubs which provide transitional accommodation for families who are homeless. The Family Hubs are a further reflection of the caring and compassionate nature of Respond which, from its establishment, has always tried to provide positive and practical responses to the needs of people affected by the lack of suitable housing and accommodation.



We will strive to contribute to an Ireland where everyone can have a home to call their own and where individuals, families and communities are empowered to reach their full potential.

Our Mission

Street party to celebrate the official opening of 14 new social housing developments in Moyglas, Lucan.

1.2. Context for Strategic Plan

Under its current Board of Directors Respond aims to build upon the work which has taken place between 1982 and 2018 and has developed a Strategic Plan which will guide and direct the work of the organisation between 2019 and 2023. This Strategic Plan will be complemented by annual business plans and/or implementation programmes – these plans will provide the detail and the implementation mechanisms which will be necessary to progress the ambitious goals and strategic objectives set out in this 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan for Respond. The Strategic Plan provides the vision and the framework within which Respond will operate over the next five years and it will be a touchstone and a yardstick/benchmark against which progress can be assessed on a regular and ongoing basis by the Board and management of Respond.

Respond believes that it is a particularly important time to produce this Strategic Plan. There are major problems in Ireland in relation to the supply of housing. It is estimated that at least 10,000 new social housing units per year are needed, with approximately 100,000 people in need of social housing and 10,264 people in emergency accommodation as of February 2019, including 6,480 adults and 3,784 children. It is also important to provide tailored support services for children, families and older people. It is clear that there are huge challenges for organisations in the statutory, private, community/voluntary and Approved Housing Bodies sectors concerning the building of new houses, supports for people who are homeless and enabling people living in transitional and precarious accommodation to access more permanent accommodation.

There are many Government Departments, agencies and organisations involved in tackling the current housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland. In this context Respond wants to be sure that it is not duplicating existing services and that it is also complementing the work of other organisations/agencies whilst at the same time making its own important and unique contributions to issues around housing and homelessness in Ireland. There have been a number of important organisational developments within Respond in 2016 and 2019 (e.g. six new Directors on the Respond Board, a new Chief Executive Officer and other new senior managers) and there was a strong consensus about the need for a Strategic Plan which would help to guide and direct the work and activities of Respond over the next five years. Respond Support providing special and community services, will manage our activities in relation to Day Care services for older people, Early Education, Childcare, and Resettlement services.

38

A total of 38 strategic review and planning meetings took place in Waterford, Dublin, Limerick and Galway.



Richard Vaughan Architect and Paschal Halley Architectural Technician, two members of the Respond Property and Development Team

1.3. Methodology for Production of the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan

The strategic planning process for the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan for Respond commenced in June 2017.

- Consultations with Respond tenants. Consultation meetings took place in 10 Respond housing estates across Ireland and these were attended by 130 tenants who gave their views about current Respond services and ways in which Respond might improve and enhance its work and its services into the future. A total of 190 tenants from these 10 estates also completed a questionnaire concerning Respond services and supports
- Consultations with Respond staff. Meetings took place with 102 staff members (out of a total staffing level of 130 people at the time). These meetings took place on a group level and on an individual 1-to-1 level. A total of 38 strategic review and planning meetings took place in Waterford, Dublin, Limerick and Galway. Staff were also consulted and asked for their views/opinions about Respond through a Survey Monkey questionnaire. This questionnaire was fully completed by 92 staff (i.e. 72% of all employees)
- Strategic review and planning activities involving the Board and senior management team in Respond. A number of special Board meetings have taken place to consider various aspects of the Strategic Plan and a 2-day strategic review and planning workshop took place at which experts in housing policy and social housing made presentations to the Board. Board members participated in the study visits which were organised to contribute towards the production of the Strategic Plan.
- Interviews and consultations with external stakeholders with well informed and relevant views and perspectives about issues concerning housing and homelessness in Ireland. A total of 22 external stakeholders were interviewed and these included senior officials in Government Departments; Chief Executives and Directors of Services in local authorities; Chief Executives and senior managers in agencies such as the Housing Agency, Housing Finance Agency (HFA) Dublin Regional Homeless Executive and the National Economic and Social Council; and Chief Executives in other significant Approved Housing Bodies.
- Study visits. The purpose of these visits was to learn from models of good practice in other places and to use this learning to inform the compilation of the new Strategic Plan. Through this process, Respond has brought learning from other jurisdictions into the efforts to increase housing supply and tackle homelessness within Ireland. A total of four study visits took place: to London; to Belfast and Derry; to Scotland; and to Denmark.
- Desk research. This looked at models of good practice and new or innovative approaches that have been developed in relation to the issues of social housing and homelessness in Ireland and in other countries around the world. Respond used its national and international linkages to identify relevant models of good practice and to carry out a literature review of articles and other documents relating to the provision of social housing.

“The Strategic Plan provides the vision and the framework within which Respond will operate over the next five years and it will be a touchstone and a yardstick/benchmark against which progress can be assessed on a regular and ongoing basis by the Board and management of Respond.”

History and Development of Respond, 1982-2019

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2.1. Provision of Social Housing

Since its establishment in 1982, the main role and function of Respond has been to provide housing for low income families and individuals who, in the absence of rental housing being provided by Respond, would have difficulty in accessing suitable accommodation for themselves and their families. Characteristics of the housing provided by Respond are that it is relatively affordable; it involves long-term tenure (generally for the lifetime of the tenant if the tenant decides to remain in their Respond house/apartment); and Respond housing developments tend to be centrally located and accessible to facilities and amenities such as healthcare centres, schools, shops etc.

Feedback from Respond tenants who participated in the strategic planning consultations would indicate that 92% of these tenants like living in their Respond housing estates. This would suggest that Respond has done a good job in selecting the right locations for their estates, in allocating houses/apartments within their estates and in maintaining and looking after their estates.

Respond has a housing presence within the 26 counties throughout the Republic of Ireland. Respond owns and manages 4,502 housing units in 156 estates and developments within these counties; and the 4,502 housing units provide accommodation for 8,965 people. It is evident that Respond has a noticeable presence across the Republic of Ireland and this augurs well for future developments since Respond has built up relationships and contacts within every region in the Republic of Ireland (with local authorities, developers, builders, maintenance contractors and other service providers etc.). These are relationships which can be developed and strengthened during the course of the 2019-23 Strategic Plan as Respond strives to significantly increase its housing stock.

Tenant Relations Officers and Technical Service Officers manage Respond estates. This ensures that the estates are well maintained and that support and advice is

provided to tenants who may have concerns about their tenancy and/or repairs and maintenance to their house or apartment. In addition, and differently to most other housing estates in Ireland, Respond housing estates generally tend to have a community building within which services such as childcare, youth work and education may be provided and within which local residents of these estates may organise their own community events and activities. There are a total of 86 community buildings and facilities within Respond housing estates.

Whilst the majority of the housing provided by Respond is for families living in houses, Respond has also had a focus since its establishment on the housing needs of older people who often require smaller and more manageable accommodation than a 3-4 bedroomed family home. From its establishment in 1982, Respond has played a major role in the provision of accommodation for older people, involving some relatively small developments to much larger projects e.g. the recently opened housing development at Johns College in Waterford City which involves the provision of 57 apartments for older people. At the end of 2017 a total of 1,664 people over the age of 55 were being accommodated by Respond using the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) funding mechanism.

2.2. Homelessness Services and Initiatives

In addition to providing long-term secure housing, Respond has also been involved in providing shorter-term transitional housing for families who are transitioning from homelessness to more permanent housing solutions. Respond was involved in setting up two projects which provided emergency, temporary accommodation for women and their children. In 2002, Respond set up Suaimhneas in Limerick City which provides accommodation and a range of support services to 6 mothers and their children who were experiencing homelessness. In 2012, as part of an integrated development in Springfield, Tallaght, Respond opened up a facility named Cuan Álainn which provides accommodation for 9 families in a communal residential building and self-contained apartments.

Respond has been an active partner in initiating and managing a number of Family Hubs in the Dublin region. The aims of the Family Hubs are to support families to move out of homelessness quickly and to reduce the number of homeless families living in hotels and bed-and-breakfasts by providing transitional accommodation which include support, play areas and services for children, communal meeting places for residents, cooking facilities for the resident families and assistance in securing longer-term accommodation. Our experience to date indicates that families in Family Hubs have needed ongoing support in relation to access to housing, mental health and a range of other issues. Respond is one of the largest providers of Family Hubs in Ireland. It currently operates five Hubs accommodating and supporting 52 families.

High Park, Dublin.



2.3. Governance and Organisational Development

Respond is a professional and well-regulated organisation which strives to achieve the highest levels and standards of corporate governance and organisational effectiveness and efficiency. At the governance level, the Board of Directors for Respond is comprised of people with a wide range of skills and knowledge in relation to key relevant disciplines such as planning and development, banking and financial services, architecture, legal affairs, community development and social studies. The Respond Board normally meets a minimum of 10 times a year. The work of the Board is supported by four sub committees of the Board some of which contain members who are not Directors. The Finance, Risk and Audit Committee reviews financial performance, financial strategy, audit/risk policies and makes recommendations to the Respond Board around these matters. The other committees deal with Development; Remuneration, Succession and Nominations; and a new committee focussing on research, evaluation of service delivery, innovation and advocacy.

In 2016 the Board of Directors of Respond and Respond Support companies undertook a joint review of operations between the two companies with the assistance of an independent consultant. In accordance with the outcome of this review both Boards have decided that our common purpose would be best served by one organisation made up of two companies under a single Board of Directors and Chief Executive. It is considered that a unified structure will enable us to provide a more coherent, holistic and efficient service and result in synergies while reducing operational costs.

Respond is fully compliant with the Governance Code for community, voluntary and charitable organisations in Ireland, and with the Voluntary Regulation Code for Approved Housing Bodies in Ireland. Respond also has

the necessary policies and procedures in place which are required when employing 155 people and when directly delivering services to families with young children e.g. through the Family Hubs. In addition, there are 117 staff in Respond Support. Respond has good practices and procedures for work which takes place with children and vulnerable adults and the care and safety of the individual and of the family is always at the core of the ways in which Respond and its staff go about their work.

At the executive management level, Respond is led by a CEO (Declan Dunne) who has a significant set of experiences in the private sector, in the local development sector and in the social housing sector. Within the staff team, Respond is one of the few Approved Housing Bodies in Ireland with its own in-house design team which enables Respond to develop new housing projects/schemes to its own requirements/standards and to look after the maintenance of existing housing stock. This work is supported by the ongoing contacts being made with Respond tenants by Tenant Relations Officers, by Technical Services Officers and by people in the centralised Customer Service Centre as well as by other employees providing essential support and administrative services.

As it progresses to the next stage of its development, Respond clearly recognises the need for optimum levels of transparency, openness and accountability both within the organisation (i.e. Board, staff, tenants, service users) and in relation to key external stakeholders (e.g. Government Departments, local authorities, regulators). Respond believes that governance changes which have taken place (e.g. new Board members, new structures, new appointments to key management positions, re-organisations at a number of different levels within the organisation) have begun to bear some fruit. It is intended that this transformative process of continual and constant improvement to governance, oversight and management arrangements within Respond will continue during the lifespan of this Strategic Plan.



Board of Directors in 2017, L-R: Joseph O'Connor, Jill Jackman (Company Secretary), Noel Kelly, Declan Dunne (CEO), Daniel Vincent McCarthy, John O'Connor (Chair), Michael Dominick Anglim, Cathleen Callanan, Brendan Cummins (Vice Chair)

2.4. Community Development and Community Services

From the time of its establishment in 1982, Respond always believed that the work of Respond should involve more than the construction and management of housing units. To a certain extent the provision of housing was a means to an end; that end being the alleviation of poverty and the creation and development of strong families and strong communities. The possibilities of creating strong families and strong communities are enormously enhanced if the people within these families and communities are living in homes which are solid, safe and in good locations surrounded by decent neighbours. Supporting communities through the provision of specific services and supports for example Day Care services for older people, Early Education, Childcare, Family Support and Resettlement services has been a key part of our work. It is in this context that Fr. Pat Cogan and others involved in Respond placed this emphasis on building housing units and housing estates. They have also, however, desired to do more in enhancing the quality of life for Respond tenants.

There are Respond community buildings in the large majority of Respond housing estates which have over 15 housing units. These community buildings have been used to deliver a range of services, courses and programmes as well as being a venue for community activities and events e.g. family fun days, bingo, and activities for children. Childcare services take place in a number of the community buildings accessible for the Respond tenants who avail of these childcare services. It means that parents can drop off their own children in their own estates as they participate in employment, education and training.

These represent the ways in which the work of Respond has not just been about the provision of good quality housing in decent, well-maintained, centrally

located housing estates. Rather, it has also been about providing opportunities for tenants to become more involved in the community in which they live and for tenants to participate in education courses, training programmes and social activities. Through this approach Respond aimed to provide a holistic and integrated range of supports to tenants living in Respond housing units and estates.

2.5. Development of Sustainable Communities

Respond strives to create a large number of viable and sustainable communities across Ireland. These are communities where there is a decent standard of housing and good community facilities. There is a certain quality of estate management (when dealing with issues like green/open spaces and anti-social behaviour), where there is safety and security for tenants, where there is a strong sense of neighbourliness and community spirit and support for those who need it. It is also notable that many of the Respond housing developments involve a mixture of social housing managed by Respond, local authority housing, private housing and special needs housing (e.g. for people with disabilities perhaps living in group/care homes).

There are other groups in Irish society which are susceptible to stigma and discrimination and the Respond model for integrated and inclusive living could be extended to incorporate the provision of accommodation for such groups. This model has also involved access to adjacent childcare, youth services, education and training programmes, day-care for the elderly, homework and afterschool clubs. Therefore, this model of integrated living involves both the integration of people living in different types of housing arrangements (e.g. Respond tenants, local authority tenants, owner occupiers, housing for people with disabilities) and the access to services for Respond tenants and other adjoining residents.



Annie Harte at crèche in Tallaght

2.6. High Levels of Innovation and Creativity

From its establishment in 1982, Respond has played a pioneering role in a number of initiatives and projects in which it has been the lead organisation.

- Our very first housing project, the 15 unit Francis Court development in Waterford City, was a forerunner to other housing projects for older people in that it not only included the provision of 15 housing units in a very safe and secure development but it also included a community building and supports provided by Respond volunteers in Waterford City.
- The innovation evident in the Francis Court development in 1983 has continued over the subsequent 36 years and there are numerous instances of Respond transforming previously derelict or underused buildings into fine housing projects, especially for older people.
- Shalom House in Youghal, previously a Protestant Asylum built in 1838, was renovated by Respond in 1992 as an ecumenical housing regeneration scheme for 23 older people.
- St. Francis Court in Clonmel, previously an army barracks built in 1878, was renovated by Respond in 2005 into housing for 17 older people.
- Johns College, previously a Catholic seminary built in 1807, was renovated by Respond in 2015 into housing for 57 older people.
- In relation to the issue of innovation and pioneering work, Respond piloted two of the most significant government funding schemes for social housing i.e. the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme. In more recent times the Family Hubs in Ireland were opened and are now being rolled out as a key transition strategy to move homeless people out of hotels and bed and breakfasts into more permanent accommodation.

Recognition of Respond's innovation and its pursuit of excellence is reflected in many awards which have been won by Respond over the last 36 years – these include a Saint-Gobain National Trophy in 2016 and the Irish Council for Social Housing for Best Large Project for Older People in Ireland in 2017. In 2011, Respond received an Irish Council for Social Housing award under the category 'Traveller Accommodation' for its development in Ardrew Meadows, Athy, Co Kildare.

“Over the last 36 years, Respond has built and is managing 1,091 self-contained housing units for older people with 422 older persons living in supported accommodation settings.”

2.7. Provision of Services for Older People and for People with Special Needs

Respond has always had a particular focus on the housing needs and other support needs of older people within Irish society. Their housing and support needs can often be different to the housing needs of the general population – they will often be seeking smaller accommodation; they will be seeking energy efficient accommodation; they will be seeking safe and secure accommodation; and they often welcome the opportunity to be in a complex where they can meet with other older people. Over the last 36 years, Respond has built and is managing 1,091 self-contained housing units for older people with 422 older persons living in supported accommodation settings. The need for this type of housing is going to increase as the population of older people aged 65 and over increases. For example, according to CSO data in 2016, the population aged 65 years and over increased by 102,174 to 637,567 (19.1%) since 2011.

Respond has also facilitated the provision of accommodation for people with special needs and people with disabilities, often in communal/group care settings and in collaboration with relevant service providers. There are some very interesting

examples across Ireland of Respond housing developments where there is a combination of family homes, accommodation for older people and special needs housing.

- St. Francis Gardens in Blackpool, Cork City where Respond has partnered with Respond Support and the Cope Foundation;
- Nethercross in Finglas, Dublin City where Respond has partnered with Respond Support and the HSE to operate a Day Care Centre;
- La Verna in Baldoyle, County Dublin where Respond has partnered with Respond Support and the HSE and other service providers provide nursing care, social care and dementia care to over 100 people each week.
- Perhaps the largest single model of integrated living and integrated development is Gleann na hEorna in Tallaght, Co. Dublin, a development which comprises 204 housing units (127 homes for older people, 63 family homes, 14 local authority affordable homes) and also involves a health facility and accommodation managed in association with St. John of God Trust who provide support for people with special needs.

Eleanor Gaffney Horgan Respond Tenant Relations Officer and resident Martin Hodgers at the community allotments in Waterford



1982

Respond was
established in 1982

Social housing and homelessness in Ireland - current situation and challenges for the sector

3



3.1.1. Background

By 1940 some 41% the housing stock had been built by the State and Local Authorities, benefiting a cross-section of the population. By the 1960s the State began a policy of promoting the private market in housing with cash grant supports for mortgage lending with minimal regulatory requirements. This began a situation whereby development land saw major increases in price which has been largely unabated since.

In 1977, 70% of homes in Ireland were owner-occupied, 14% in private rental and 16% of households had a local authority tenancy. The fiscal constraints faced by governments in the 1980s led to serious cut-backs in social housing provision with new build figures falling from 7,002 units in 1984 to 768 in 1989.

3.1.2. Advent of Housing Associations

Following the well-established trend in other countries the latter part of the 20th century, partly in response to the reduction in government expenditure on social housing directly, housing associations began to appear in Ireland. Mostly they were small community-based organisations often with religious connections and provided housing to the elderly and those with special needs. By the early 1980s, approximately 75 housing associations were registered with the Department of Housing with a total rented stock of about 2,000 dwellings.

In contrast to housing associations, housing cooperatives provided more general needs housing for low-income families. The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) in 1984 was the first specific funding mechanism for housing associations which resulted in a major expansion of the activity of housing associations.

The *Plan for Social Housing (1991)* sought to diversify the provision of social housing by encouraging and facilitating housing associations. A Rental Subsidy Scheme was developed in consultation with Respond, who first piloted this scheme, which provided a 100% capital subsidy to housing associations via local authorities. This included a continuous subsidy paid for the upkeep and management of each unit. This scheme marked the beginning of housing associations taking on general needs housing.

More recent changes to the funding model included the development of a Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) in 2011. CALF was developed with the aim of ensuring greater supply of housing in changed market conditions. CALF is a facility available to assist Approved Housing Bodies fund up to 30% of the capital cost enabling the AHB to access private or Housing Finance Agency (HFA) loan finance for the purchase, and, in some cases, construction of units, that will then be made available for social housing under the leasing initiative. The Payment and Availability Agreement (PAA) is an ongoing payment to the AHB to facilitate repayment of the mortgage to the respective funder

A separate challenge has been identified by a number of the larger AHBs around the economic sustainability of social housing over the lifetime of the properties based on the current differential rent model, which is linked to tenants' income and not related to the cost of management, maintenance and long term component replacement. This is an issue that will be discussed with Local Authorities and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

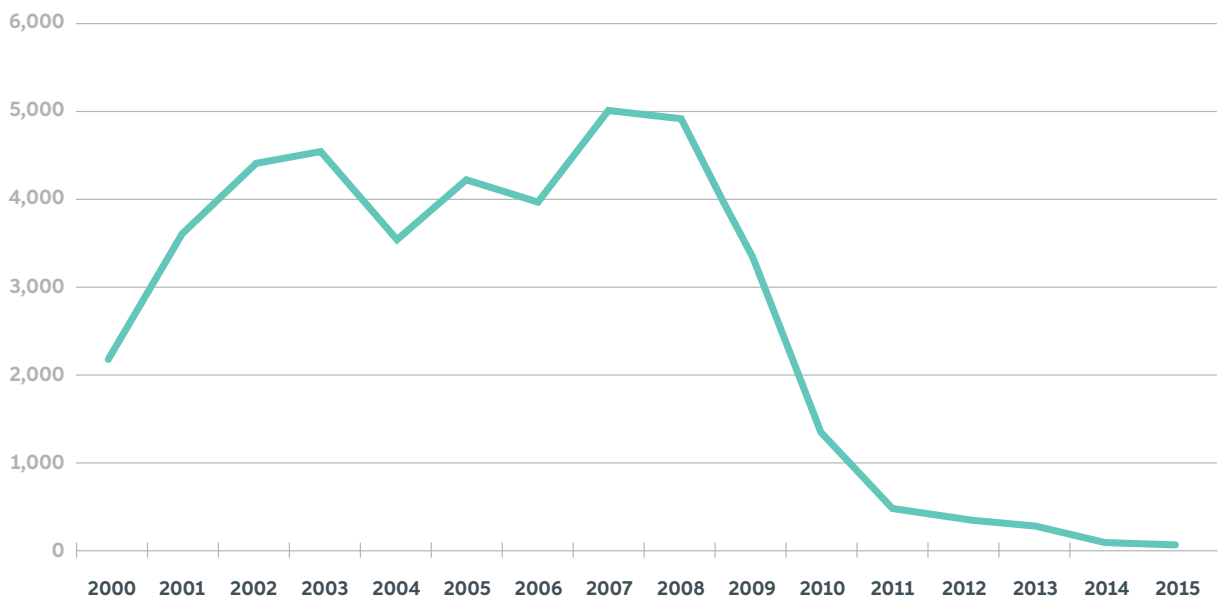
3.1.3. The 1990s and the Economic Crash

The immediate response to cuts in social housing construction was a greater shift towards housing allowances for private renters in order to accommodate those in need of social housing. Rent Supplement (RS) was first introduced in 1977 as a short-term income support administered by the Department of Social Protection. In the absence of social housing benefit it became a 'de facto' long-term housing support payment. It was long acknowledged that RS was fulfilling a function which it was never intended or designed to do, meeting long term housing needs in the absence of social housing provision, and with the restrictions on employment it was in fact causing poverty and employment traps. The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was introduced in 2004 as a way of addressing some of the issues with the RS scheme and meeting longer-term housing needs. Those who were in receipt of RS longer than 18 months qualified to receive this payment. Under RAS the Local Authority finds housing for the tenant in the private rental market and pays the landlord a lower-than-market rent in return for guaranteed tenancy. The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) was a more recent attempt to address some

of the fundamental issues with RS. It is administered by Local Authorities and does not have restrictions on employment thus removing the associated poverty and employment traps. In return, the HAP tenant pays a weekly contribution towards the rent to the local authority. This 'rent contribution' is based on the household income. It is calculated in the same way as the rent paid by a tenant of a local authority owned property. However, the designation of households in receipt of HAP as having their social housing need 'met' is problematic for a number of reasons. The combination of increasing rents and record low supply has created an expensive and competitive rental market, making it increasingly difficult for recipients of these payments to have a fair chance of securing and retaining a home. In addition, in the absence of security of tenure tenants in receipt of HAP are subject to the same volatility as every other private rental sector tenant.

The early 2000s saw a marked increase in social housing construction though still relatively less than before the 1980s. The economic crash of 2008 meant social house building in Ireland essentially 'fell off a cliff', reaching its nadir in 2015, and is only beginning to increase in very recent times.

Number of Social Housing Units Completed in Ireland 2000-2015



Source: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

3.1.4. Current Tenure In Ireland

In total in 2016, approximately half a million households were renting in Ireland. Renting from a local authority was up 11% from 129,033 in 2011 to 143,178 in 2016. The number of households which were rented either from a private landlord or voluntary body rose by 2% from 320,319 in 2011 to 326,493 in 2016. The number of owner occupied households fell slightly between 2011 and 2016 (from 1,149,924 to 1,147,552) which, allied to continued growth in rented accommodation, has caused the overall home ownership rate to drop from 69.7% to 67.6%. Approved Housing Bodies account for more than 30,000 homes across Ireland. In total, approximately 173,000 households are either in local authority or AHB-owned housing units. The number of households on the Social Housing Waiting Lists were at 91,600, 85,799, and 71,858 for 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. This fall in 2018 is mainly attributable to families being taken off the waiting list once they receive housing subsidies such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Questions need to be asked about the security and sustainability of such housing

options. The Housing Agency reports that 21% of those on the Social Housing Waiting List are on it for over 7 years and 47% are on the list for over 5 years. This does however vary from region to region.

Figures from the most recent Social Housing Needs Assessment (2018) show that of the 71,858 households assessed as qualifying for housing support as of 11 June 2018 and that the four Dublin Authorities (Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin) account for 43.4% of the national total. The majority (54.2%) of those who qualify for social housing are unemployed and in receipt of social welfare payments/assistance, down 10,370 (-21%) since the previous assessment. Twenty-four percent are in employment either full-time, part-time or self-employed, an increase of almost 8% since 2017. Single person households are the predominant household grouping in need of social housing. Just under 60% of households qualifying for social housing are currently in the private rental sector and over a quarter of all households qualifying for support are waiting more than seven years for a social housing.

71,858

households on the social housing waiting list

21%

7+ years

47%

5+ years



Homelessness in Ireland became a major crisis in 2014 as the reduction in social house building and the rapid rise in rents, particularly in urban areas, began to take its toll.



Ellen and Sydney playing hola hoop at Killure's Sport's Day, Waterford

3.1.5. Social Housing Policies

Rebuilding Ireland – the Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness was published in July of 2016 promising to provide 47,000 new social homes by 2021. This figure was later revised upwards to 50,000 homes. There is also a target to deliver 84,000 Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancies. Part of the approach of *Rebuilding Ireland* includes the proposal to have 125,000 people in HAP tenancies. This costs approximately €301m a year and by 2021, will cost the State €1 billion a year. Providing tenancies through HAP will cost €32.9 billion over 30 years at current prices.

3.1.6. Homelessness

Homelessness in Ireland became a major crisis in 2014 as the reduction in social house building and the rapid rise in rents, particularly in urban areas, began to take its toll. Nationally, rents have increased by an average of 75% since 2012. These massive increases are effectively pricing many low and middle-income families and individuals out of the market. The most

recent figures, as of February 2018, show a total of 10,264 people homeless in Ireland. Nationally, there are now 6,480 adults and 3,784 children in emergency homeless accommodation, meaning more than one third of people experiencing homelessness in Ireland are children. An analysis of the figures in November 2018 indicated that the percentage increase in individual homelessness from January 2015 was 159%; the increase in child homelessness in this less than a four year period is 340%. Sixty-five percent of families who are homeless are headed by one parent. These homelessness figures do not include an estimated 5,500 of the Traveller population in need of adequate accommodation, the over 5,138 refugees and asylum seekers in Direct Provision centres, and the many thousands of 'hidden homeless', some of whom are in domestic violence situations, in overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation with no other choice. The rising problem of mortgage arrears has also led to fears that our homelessness figures are only set to rise. Nearly 30,000 households are in arrears of 2 years or more and there is a risk that a large number of these households could be rendered homeless due to evictions.

3.2. How We Can Overcome Challenges for the Sector

3.2.1. Problems with Housing Assistance Payment

Reliance on the private rental sector for social housing using the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is problematic. As mentioned, HAP tenancies are by their very nature insecure due to the limited security of tenure in the private rental sector. Some families who were homeless or in emergency accommodation report tenancies of 4 or 5 years but the vast majority are 2 year leases. Sixty percent of households on the Social Housing Waiting List are living in the private rental sector. The combination of increasing rents and record low supply has created an expensive and competitive rental market, making it increasingly difficult for recipients of these payments to have a fair chance of securing and retaining a home. There is the real danger that when these tenancies end that families could find themselves presenting as homeless and back in emergency accommodation

again. The Family Hub model, developed by Respond, is predicated on the availability of HAP properties which Hub managers and residents of Hubs report are extremely hard to come by. Landlords by and large prefer private tenants to HAP tenants making suitable accommodation in some ways out of reach of families in emergency accommodation. In addition, after the significant expenditure by the State on HAP properties the State has no right to that property; HAP properties do not add to the national social or affordable housing stock.

HAP is expensive, insecure for families, brings little long-term benefit to the State which is paying the very high market rents for the property and cannot be classed as social housing in any meaningful sense. Families are looking to settle down, put down roots in a community and have a sense of continuity especially for their children. It is clear that the Irish taxpayer is not getting value for money with this scheme and it is equally clear that HAP does not represent a long-term solution to those families who need secure housing.

College Mews which is part of Respond's development of John's College in Waterford is specially designed housing for older people or people with specific health requirements



It is Respond's view the State should begin to wean itself off the reliance on the HAP system. Social housing that offers lifetime tenancies or 'forever homes' at a much more reasonable cost is the sustainable solution to the housing and homelessness crisis. A vast reduction in the use of HAP properties would bring significant savings to the State which should be ring-fenced for social housing delivery.

3.2.2. Speed up Social Housing Delivery

A number of measures could assist AHBs such as Respond to build at greater scale:

- If state-owned land or serviced sites from Local Authorities were provided to AHBs this would reduce the overall build cost enabling AHBs to significantly increase their social house-building pipelines and plans.
- Restore Part V to its original 20%, it was reduced to 10% for social housing in 2015. This would mean that all new private developments would have to have at least 20% social or affordable homes as part of the mix, subject to the need for same being established by Local Authorities. There should be no option for developers to buy-out or in any other way secure a derogation from this obligation. Restoration to at least 20% social or affordable provision on developed sites would also have a positive impact on tenure mix, which is the stated policy of the

Government as per *Rebuilding Ireland*.

- Securing the removal of the AHB sector from the Government balance sheet as measured by Eurostat which is likely to prove a major constraint to investment into the future.
- Encourage and incentivise Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) which would bring in AHBs as direct partners with private developers.
- The rate of land price increases is still outstripping the Vacant Site Levy, which if increased further would be a definite financial incentive for landowners sitting on residentially zoned land to either develop the lands themselves or to sell to those, such as AHBs, who would develop on the land.
- Greater use of compulsory purchase powers by the State, as was done in the past, could mean that sites that are particularly well positioned for residential development could be built upon in this time of emergency need.
- The development of a national affordable rental housing scheme for AHBs and local authorities working in concert.

Dolores O'Brien, mother of 5, celebrates her new home in Chanel Manor, Coolock, Co. Dublin





**We need a national
affordable rental
housing scheme
for AHBs and
local authorities
working in concert.**

The new National Development Plan Ireland 2040 projects an increase in Ireland’s population by 1 million in the next 20 years. Given our ageing population and smaller family sizes, the Government estimates that Ireland will need 500,000 new homes over this period to effectively house our people. This has clear knock-on implications for the figures for social housing new build and we can see that the necessity for social and affordable housing is only set to increase year on year. The future scenario also has implications for a new type of housing for older people; sometimes called ‘retirement villages’ the Government is aware and drawing up plans for fully-serviced accommodation for older people who can downsize from larger properties as they grow older but still stay in their communities. Elucidation of a scheme to incentivise downsizing and plans in large-scale developments for serviced ‘independent living’ communities would assist the ageing population we currently have and that which we are expecting.

Ireland 2040 also stipulates that 40% of new housing should be built in the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages, on infill or brownfield sites. Respond supports this target as well as policy that new developments should not be overly concentrated in the Dublin area. Services and infrastructure will be key in any new developments to ensure social cohesiveness and community success. Respond will continue to highlight these issues and others in annual policy papers and submissions.

Craig O’Rafferty pictured at a celebration of diversity and remembrance located at Gleann na hEorna estate



3.2.3. Availability of Alternative Means of Financing for Social Housing Building

The single greatest threat to AHB building programmes is the recent recommendation to Eurostat by the Central Statistics Office that housing associations should be classified as ‘on balance sheet’ thereby jeopardising the current funding model. While Government has promised that they will continue to support AHB ambitions in relation to house-building, a fundamental shift to the funding model could represent a new and existential risk to all Approved Housing Bodies.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government have recently announced a review of the current model of AHB funding which comprises of a 30% CALF loan to be repaid, with the balance in loans from the Housing Finance Agency at currently very attractive rates and a Payment and Availability Agreement to maintain the property. This is the financial model underpinning AHBs business plans into the next 30 years. Any changes to this model that would reduce payment to AHBs could pose a serious threat to all AHBs in Ireland.

AHBs currently part-finance housing delivery via the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) who offer loans at extremely competitive rates. However, these low interest rate levels are not set to stay into perpetuity and Respond is aware of the need to develop other funding

500,000

The new National Development Plan Ireland 2040 projects an increase in Ireland’s population by 1 million in the next 20 years. Given our ageing population and smaller family sizes, the Government estimates that Ireland will need 500,000 new homes over this period to effectively house our people

“We are conscious at all times that tenants’ rental income needs to be managed in a way that provides clear benefit to the tenant and demonstrates transparently how their money is being spent.”

arrangements with pension funds, commercial banks and other financial vehicles to ensure that development plans can be reliably financed into the future.

The Irish League of Credit Unions has been arguing in recent times for authorities to allow the billions they have on deposit to be used to loan to the voluntary and cooperative housing bodies in order to alleviate the housing and homelessness crisis. The Central Bank has recently published regulations which would allow for Credit Union funding of social housing, which we welcome. It remains to be seen how this will work in practice and what amounts can be invested. Respond is strongly of the view that there should be no changes to the AHB funding model without stress testing the impact of any changes in consultation with the sector to ensure there is no disruption in the supply of acutely needed housing.

3.2.4. Value for Money and Tenant Participation

Respond is acutely aware of the necessity to provide clear Value for Money to our funders but also and no less importantly to our residents. We are conscious at all times that tenants’ rental income needs to be managed in a way that provides clear benefit to the tenant and demonstrates transparently how their money is being spent. Alongside this is the clear decision as taken by the Respond Board that tenants and service users should have the right and ability to be involved in decisions that affect them including and up to participation at the highest levels of decision-making.

As part of the planning for the Strategic Review, Board and staff members of Respond, visited Scotland where tenant participation is the law. The Housing (Scotland) Act of 2001 created a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation. All Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and local authorities in Scotland must have a tenant participation strategy which will enable ‘continuous improvement in landlords’ performance in supporting and enabling tenants to participate’.

Tenant scrutiny is an important part of meeting the expectation to continuously improve landlord participation performance. This involves adopting a tenant-centred approach to landlord activities, which delivers benefits to tenants, landlords and communities alike. A tenant scrutiny practice guide for landlords and tenants has been produced to help develop effective tenant scrutiny, and a tenant scrutiny training to understand the such activities linked to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and related regulatory framework.

Aside from promoting good practice, the attendant transparency in relation to costs in particular is meant to lead to greater value for money for the tenant and the Scottish government and provide comfort for funders. Adopting this practice, on a staged basis, in the Irish context would be a major step forward for AHBs like Respond.

Key issues and challenges – arising from this review

4



4.1. Main Roles and Functions of Respond

The large majority of Respond tenants are independent individuals and families who, apart from the provision of housing management/maintenance and estate management services, do not require many other supports and services from Respond.

It is clear that people are getting on with their lives and view Respond as their landlord who should be looking after their house/apartment and the upkeep and maintenance of their estates. Most tenants said that what they want from Respond is to be able to live in solid, safe and well maintained houses within well-kept estates which have some sense of community spirit and pride.

It also needs to be recognised, however, that Respond works from an ethos of care and compassion for its tenants. This is reflected in the ways in which Respond staff are available to tenants to talk about issues which may be of some concern and worry to tenants. In addition, staff are also in a position to engage with people who are perhaps lonely or isolated and who really appreciate the human contact provided. This type of relationship between Respond and its tenants will continue to be our aim. The key challenge is to get the balance right between being available and caring/compassionate on the one hand with being a professional and efficient housing manager and estate manager on the other hand.

4.2. Older People, Vulnerable People and People with Special Needs

In addition to general needs housing provision Respond will maintain a special regard for older people, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in society e.g. Travellers, migrants leaving Direct Provision Centres or coming into Ireland for the first time. Respond has an impressive track record of care and compassion towards people who may be older or more vulnerable and this will be continued into the future. However, Respond's main role will relate to accommodation and meeting housing needs. In appreciating the fact that these needs do exist it will involve Respond partnering with relevant agencies who can provide these specialist non-housing supports.

A number of the Respond housing estates would have a strong concentration of older people. A large number of these older people are living independent lives. They appreciate Respond workers calling around to check in and the contacts they have with these workers and they often have support provided by family members and/or by Public Health Nurses, Home Helps etc.



**Respond
is committed
to fostering
environments where
young people can live
happy and healthy
lives where they
can develop and
grow achieving
their potential.**

4.3. Young People

As the number of young people in our estates increases Respond is committed to fostering environments where young people can live happy and healthy lives where they can develop and grow achieving their potential.

We recognise the positive benefits of children's participation in the running of their housing estate which impacts on their living conditions, environmental surroundings, and their sense of safety, belonging, place, identity and community. We will seek to work with young people to encourage their input into our estates so they can make a meaningful contribution, develop participation skills and enhance the environment in which they live.

4.4. Relationships with Tenants

In communicating information to its tenants Respond recognises that some information has to be directly conveyed from the centre/headquarters of the organisation to all of its tenants - through the postal system, by text and/or by email. In the past it seems that a lot of information was routed through regional and local workers/structures - in future, all important pieces of information flow between Respond and its tenants will be sent to all tenants.

Regular meetings will take place between tenants of Respond and relevant staff members. Respond will meet with its tenants on a regular basis within Respond housing estates and collective meetings will take place regularly.

Respond will be clear and unambiguous about what it can do and what it cannot do for its tenants. There were issues mentioned in the consultations with tenants around matters such as replacement of doors and windows, new heating systems, transfer of Respond tenancy to son/daughter, opening up of community buildings to a greater extent than is currently the case. A son/daughter who is on the local authority housing list and meets their housing requirements can be allocated a tenancy in their parents' home after their parent has passed on. Community buildings will be made available to tenants as much as possible.

4.5. Housing Maintenance and Estate Management

Respond will be explicit around planned and cyclical programmes of repairs and maintenance within its estates. These generally involve estate-wide programmes of work which might involve wholesale replacement of windows, doors and/or back boilers and would take place when these features of their house have come to the end of their natural life. Since the main criteria used by the SEAI relates to fuel poverty, it is evident that some Respond housing estates will not be eligible for such planned programmes of repair regardless of the age/condition of the houses within these estates. Other methods of funding including possible joint funding by tenants and Respond will be explored.

Respond will continue to carry out Stock Condition Surveys of its housing stock and of the general conditions which pertain within its housing estates. It is only through carrying out these types of surveys that we will get a real picture and analysis of the condition of its housing stock and the associated remedial works. Stock Condition Surveys are especially necessary within Respond housing estates as 70% of Respond's housing stock was built prior to 2006. Significant work has taken place in recent years in surveying housing stock and the investment in energy efficient upgrade work in the 5 years 2014-19 will cost approximately €24m for 2,017 homes. Stock condition surveys will continue to take place on a programmed basis annually.

65

The need for housing for older people is going to increase as the population of older people aged 65 and over increases.

“Respond’s future work and activities will be informed by demographic and housing trends within Ireland and by the housing problems being experienced by particular groups within Irish society.”

4.6. Community Development and Use of Community Facilities

Any new strategy on community development or re-iterations of previous strategies will involve partnerships and alliances with organisations and groups at the national level e.g. Community Work Ireland, Irish Rural Link and at the area/local level e.g. Local Development Companies, Family Resource Centres. Respond will seek to attract additional support and financial assistance into Respond estates from relevant agencies and organisations – therefore in addition to Respond services, we will also facilitate the provision and delivery of supports and services from other organisations.

Respond will support the establishment and development of residents’ groups/associations within its estates. At the consultation meetings, there was a level of interest in trying to set up residents groups. This process will be supported by Respond through the provision of training (in committee structures, organisation of meetings etc.) and through the provision of small sums of financial support. The use of Community buildings on Respond housing estates will be optimised. The existence of these community buildings sets Respond housing estates apart from other residential housing estates. Tenants will be provided with opportunities to organise what they would like to take place in their community building. Respond community buildings will also be made available to other charities working in the locality.

4.7. Potential New Projects and Initiatives

Respond’s future work and activities will be informed by demographic and housing trends within Ireland and by the housing problems being experienced by particular groups within Irish society. While our focus remains on general needs housing, Respond will give active consideration to the provision of housing and accommodation for the following groups:

- **Older people:** The need for housing for older people is going to increase as the population of older people aged 65 and over increases. Many older people would prefer to live in the type of safe, secure and cost-efficient accommodation which is provided by Respond in its housing estates across Ireland. Many would also like to live in a communal setting with other older people within the same development
- **People with disabilities:** Housing for people with disabilities has been identified by disability organisations as an issue of major concern, as more people with disabilities are leaving congregated settings to live within local communities. This transition will be difficult and Respond, together with relevant healthcare and disability organisations, will make a contribution through providing specialist housing for people with disabilities which may need to be adapted to take account of particular medical conditions and/or disabilities.

- **Travellers:** There have been many reports about the very poor and unsafe nature of Traveller accommodation. Although local authorities do draw up Traveller Accommodation Plans, slow progress has been made on the provision of quality housing for Travellers and money allocated to local authorities for Traveller accommodation is often returned to central government. Respond will seek to play its part in supporting the provision of appropriate housing for members of the Traveller community.
- **Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers:** The acquisition of suitable and affordable housing is the largest single problem facing people leaving Direct Provision Centres and people who have arrived in Ireland as part of various EU integration and resettlement programmes. Respond will seek to play its role in developing accommodation options and opportunities for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
- **People who are homeless:** Traditionally, Respond has not had a major involvement in providing transitional accommodation for homeless people. This situation changed quite significantly in 2002 and 2012, when Respond was involved in setting up two projects which provided emergency, temporary accommodation for women and their children, supporting them to transition from homelessness to more permanent housing solutions. Late in 2016 Respond opened up the first two Family Hubs in Ireland in Tallaght and Drumcondra. In relation to future Family Hubs there is a view that Respond might be able to utilise its relationships with religious congregations/dioceses to secure disused/vacant buildings for Family Hubs that had previously been used for religious purposes (such as the Family Hub in Drumcondra).

4.8. Concluding Comments

Most tenants like living in their Respond housing estate (i.e. 92%) and most Respond employees like working for Respond (i.e. 87%). There is a great deal of positivity and goodwill upon which to build and develop into the future. The various consultation processes have clearly served to demonstrate those areas within Respond's work which could be improved over the next 5-year period. In considering these areas for improvement, there are no tasks which are not achievable or challenges which it will not be possible to overcome.

There is a positive and supportive attitude towards Respond from virtually all of the external stakeholders consulted during the strategic planning process. External stakeholder interviewees included senior managers from Government Departments, from local authorities, from other statutory agencies and from other Approved Housing Bodies as well as academics, politicians and other commentators. A significant majority of these people know that Respond has been undergoing a period of major change and transition (i.e. new CEO, wholesale changes within the composition of the Respond Board). People are also aware that Respond has greatly strengthened its pipeline of new build and acquisitions and that it is playing a leadership role around initiatives such as Family Hubs.

2016

Late in 2016 Respond opened up the first two Family Hubs in Ireland in Tallaght and Drumcondra



92% of tenants like living in their Respond housing estate. There is a great deal of positivity and goodwill upon which to build and develop into the future.

Strategic Direction for Respond, 2019 – 2023

5

For the period from 2019 to 2023 Respond's priorities will be informed by the national need to increase housing supply, by the need to provide transitional accommodation for homeless individuals and families, and by the need to maintain the properties of Respond tenants and the estates in which they live. At the same time, Respond from an organisational and sustainability perspective will have to ensure that it is a viable organisation, that it is prudent and accountable in the ways in which it organises its financial affairs, that it is a good employer and that it is transparent and accountable in all of its relationships – with tenants and service users, with staff, with funders, with regulators.

These aims and intentions will be reflected in the Vision Statement, in the Mission Statement, in the Strategic Goals and in the associated strategies and indicative actions set out in this section of the Strategic Plan.

Our Vision

That every family and individual in Ireland will have high-quality housing as part of a vibrant and caring community.

Our Mission

Respond will play an enhanced role in effectively addressing the specific housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland by expanding and improving the housing services we provide.

We will significantly increase our housing stock, all the while seeking to maintain our focus on the alleviation of poverty. Respond estates will be well-designed, vibrant communities with new developments prioritising mixed tenure to ensure true social integration and inclusion.

We will strive to contribute to an Ireland where everyone can have a home to call their own and where individuals, families and communities are empowered to reach their full potential.



**Respond
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inclusion.**

5.4.1 Goal 1

Respond, with Government support, will, through a programme of multi-faceted delivery, have increased the number of social homes in Ireland by at least 2,500 over the lifetime of the Strategic Plan.

Rationale

The provision of adequate and appropriate housing for people living in Ireland will be a national priority for the next 10 year period. Various commentators and analysts have estimated that there is a need to build between 10,000 and 50,000 housing units each year to deal with the families and individuals currently in need of adequate housing and to cope with the projected increase in population in Ireland over the next 10 years. In relation to social housing,

the *Rebuilding Ireland* policy framework of the Irish Government has set a target of 47,000 new social housing units between 2016 and 2020 (this target has subsequently been increased to 50,000 housing units). It is projected that one third of these housing units will be provided by Approved Housing Bodies and Respond intends to play a significant role in meeting the targets set for the Approved Housing Body sector.

Strategies

- To increase the number of new housing units which are owned and managed by Respond by at least 2,500 between 2019 and 2023.
- To provide and develop new social housing in Ireland through a combination of new build, acquisition, lease and refurbishment.
- To access government schemes and programmes which have been set up to increase the supply of new housing in Ireland.
- To continue to develop effective and meaningful relationships with the Department of Housing, Local Authorities, developers landowners and stakeholders.
- To place emphasis on the provision of housing for groups which have particular difficulties in accessing housing and/or who have special housing needs.
- To maintain relationships with religious congregations and other landowners who are in possession of significant buildings that could be developed into social housing units.



Actions

- Growing our pipeline of projects through social housing building; public private partnerships; rapid build projects with local authorities; low cost delivery models; and other methods.
- Seeking the allocation of land owned by the State and its agencies for Respond and AHBs to provide housing.
- Assigning targets to the newly formed five Development/Property Teams within Respond with delivery of housing targets to be co-ordinated by the Executive Development Committee and overseen by the Board of Directors and the Development Sub-Committee of the Board.
- Placing a particular emphasis on the renovation of existing buildings and the use of brownfield sites for social housing.
- Continuing to explore the potential of housing developments for older people in order to assist older people who wish to downsize and to live independently in supported, communal accommodation.



5.4.2. Goal 2

In seeking to improve lives, Respond will place our tenants, residents in emergency accommodation and service users at the centre of our work and we will focus on positive outcomes and satisfaction for tenants and service users.

Rationale

In relation to our stock of social housing, there are currently 8,965 people living in 4,502 housing units which are owned and managed by Respond. The number of Respond residents is expected to increase during the lifespan of the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan. The key requirements for tenants from Respond are to maintain the house/property in which they live, to look after the estate in which their property is located, to help ensure that their estate is safe and secure, and to develop a sense of community spirit and community pride. The main priority for the large majority of our tenants is for Respond to be an efficient and professional and caring landlord who will take good care of their property and the area/estate in which they live.

Strategies

- To respond in a prompt and efficient manner to requests and concerns raised by tenants in relation to issues concerning their housing units and/or estates.
- To carry out planned and mandatory remedial and upgrading improvement work in line with statutory standards and available resources.
- To develop and create a sense of community and neighbourliness in Respond housing estates through community events and optimum utilisation of community buildings.
- To proactively promote the well-being of tenants and facilitate access to support services.
- To liaise regularly with tenants on an individual and collective basis so as to get a sense of their concerns and their assessment of the services they receive from Respond.
- To ensure that clarity and common understanding exists in relation to the relative roles and responsibilities of Respond and of the tenants on issues concerning maintenance of properties and upkeep of estates.
- To support the concept and practice of tenant participation in decision-making in relation to policies, individual estates, and the development of every day procedures.



Actions

- Within available resources, investing in adequate annual resources to sustain a professional and cost effective asset management and maintenance programme.
- Preparing the multi-annual maintenance programmes for cyclical maintenance work (e.g. boilers serviced, alarms checked) in Respond estates and communicating the details of these programmes to tenants and details of when cyclical maintenance works can take place.
- Implementing a National Tenant Management Structure to ensure consistency of delivery of Respond services and supports.
- Developing a model of tenant participation which supports and facilitates tenant participation in the work of Respond, leading over time up to and including membership of the Respond Board of Directors.
- Supporting the establishment and development of tenants/residents groups and ensuring that opportunities exist for residents to meet collectively on a regular basis with relevant Respond staff members to share and discuss issues and concerns.
- Communicating with our tenants at least twice a year in the form of a tenant's newsletter to appraise tenants of the organisations activities and innovations and to encourage free flow of information.
- Conducting Tenant Satisfaction Surveys annually within Respond housing estates and developments.
- Reviewing usage, impact and effectiveness of community buildings located within Respond housing estates and developments.
- Conducting research into tenant and community welfare with the guidance of our new committee of the Board of Directors focussing on research, evaluation of service delivery, innovation and advocacy.
- Cooperating with others in the provision of supports and services for our tenants and the communities they live in.
- In the interest of the tenants concerned, cooperating with other Approved Housing Bodies in relation to mergers and stock transfers while carefully assessing the immediate and contingent liabilities involved.
- Reintegration of community support services within a singular organisational structure.
- Establishing a new subcommittee of the board focussing on research, evaluation of service delivery, innovation and advocacy.

5.4.3. Goal 3

To support households and individuals experiencing homelessness on their journey back to independent living, Respond will provide safe and secure housing in the short-term in the form of supported temporary emergency accommodation.

Rationale

There is an unprecedented homelessness crisis in Ireland. This is reflected in the numbers on local authority housing lists and the numbers accessing emergency homelessness services. In 2016, Respond decided that, in addition to the provision of long-term social housing, it should also be doing all that it could to alleviate the homelessness crisis through the delivery of short-term, transitional emergency accommodation for homeless families and individuals. This decision led to the

development of the five Family Hubs which provide transitional accommodation for families and individuals. On the assumption that the homelessness crisis will remain a national priority during the lifetime of the 2019 - 2023 Strategic Plan, Respond will continue to proactively develop projects and initiatives which will provide transitional, safe and well supported housing services to families and individuals as they make the journey from homelessness to long-term secure homes.

Strategies

- To continue to manage Family Hubs in an efficient, professional and person-centred manner.
- To develop a number of additional Family Hubs between 2019 and 2023 with a particular focus on urban centres.
- To strive towards ensuring that families and individuals stay in Respond Family Hubs and other Respond emergency accommodation projects/centres for the shortest possible period of time prior to moving on to more long term secure homes.
- To develop wrap-around and progressive supports which will involve a holistic and integrated range of supports for people living in Family Hubs and other emergency accommodation projects and which will also seek to involve residents progressing from Respond Family Hubs to Respond long-term housing schemes.
- To collaborate and work with other Approved Housing Bodies and homelessness organisations to co-ordinate activities and projects in the best interests of homeless families and individuals.
- In addition to Family Hubs, Respond will also seek to identify other ways in which it might support people to move out of homelessness and into more permanent and secure accommodation e.g. Housing First.
- To promote means of avoiding the repossession of homes due to mortgage default.



Actions

- Seeking to develop a continuum of support which will involve tenants living in Respond Family Hubs moving into accommodation in Respond social housing homes.
- Expanding our network of emergency homelessness accommodation through initially identifying properties which could be utilised and re-developed for emergency accommodation.
- Continuing to place a particular emphasis on the accommodation needs of homeless families with children.
- Developing an expertise around the linked and complementary areas of health, housing and homelessness.
- Identifying and developing new models of emergency accommodation which provide an effective response to the needs and circumstances of people who are homeless.
- Cooperating with public and other voluntary initiatives in preventing and dealing with repossession of homes e.g. involvement with the ICare project.

5.4.4. Goal 4

We will seek to develop an expertise in and deliver affordable housing for those for whom the market rates are too high.

Rationale

There are a very large number of people in Ireland who are in employment but who cannot afford the rents which are being charged in the locations where they work. This often results in situations where people undertake long commutes, from their more affordable home to their unaffordable place of work, where people are paying an excessive amount of their income on housing costs, where people are remaining in overcrowded and sometimes unsuitable family situations (often with

parents) and where, on occasions, people end up homeless and accessing emergency homelessness services. The Government has already identified that there is a significant gap in provision and support for people who are earning incomes but cannot afford to rent or buy a property which is suitable for their needs and their location. Respond will do all that it can to support and pilot new initiatives and new approaches towards affordable housing on a financially sustainable basis.

Strategies

- To research and identify viable models of affordable housing.
- To co-operate and collaborate with other Approved Housing Bodies in devising schemes for affordable housing which have the potential to be effective and successful.
- To pilot models for the provision of affordable housing and, if successful, to roll out these models to various locations.
- To seek to put in place housing schemes and projects which have an integrated mix of social housing, affordable rental and cost rental housing and private housing.
- To assist in the development of a financial model for affordable housing.



Actions

- Working with Local Authorities to develop a mix of social and affordable housing.
- Collaborating in a practical and creative way, in schemes or programmes for affordable housing which may be developed by Government and relevant statutory agencies.
- Working with Local Authorities and State Agencies to identify suitable low cost sites for the delivery of low cost affordable housing.
- Developing models of affordable housing, on a pilot basis with relevant statutory and private interests/partners, which have the potential to be rolled out to other locations in Ireland.
- Seeking the full restoration of the Part V provision (from 10% back to the original 20% of housing units within individual developments) and for affordable housing to be considered eligible within Part V of the Planning and Development Act (2000) and the subsequent Urban Regeneration and Housing Act (2015).



5.4.5. Goal 5

Respond will maintain a strong and prudent financial foundation underpinned by a risk-conscious approach to our business.

Rationale

Respond has looked after its financial affairs in a very judicious, balanced and professional manner since its establishment in 1982. It has worked well in its financial dealings with Government Departments, local authorities and developers and has negotiated financial arrangements which are in the best interests of the organisation and ultimately of the tenants who live in Respond housing estates on a long-term permanent basis and the

residents who live in the Respond Family Hubs on a more transitional, short-term basis. For the period of the Strategic Plan (2019 - 2023) there will be a number of competing financial challenges as Respond strives to raise the money to increase its housing stock by 50% whilst, at the same time, investing adequate funds into managing, maintaining and upgrading its existing stock of houses and apartments.

Strategies

- To carry out due diligence and comprehensive, systematic assessments on any new developments which are being explored by Respond or being presented to Respond by local authorities and developers.
- To make adequate provision within annual budgets for costs relating to asset management and to the maintenance and upgrading of current housing stock.
- To collaborate and maintain excellent relationships with the HFA and other private funders to ensure optimum terms and conditions for funding facilities are available to achieve the goals set by this strategic plan.
- To explore new funding options and opportunities (especially in relation to private finance) and, in conjunction with other relevant Approved Housing Bodies, to develop new funding models which might involve a multiplicity of different funders.
- To continue to operate a risk management framework and risk register as part of Respond's process for the identification, evaluation, mitigation and management of risk.
- To comply fully with financial requirements set out by the Housing Regulator and other regulatory and auditing authorities.
- To be open and transparent in the ways in which Respond presents and shares information and analyses concerning its financial performance.



Actions

- Adequately resourcing our internal financial team in line with emerging requirements.
- Operating a comprehensive system of internal financial controls which will be reviewed annually.
- Deploying state of the art financial and housing management systems and technologies to meet financial and housing objectives in an efficient and effective manner.
- Key focus on increasing housing delivery and rental income thereby enabling Respond to make sufficient provision for asset management and cyclical maintenance programmes.
- Continuing to put in place robust financial assessment and financial risk mechanisms to determine the viability and sustainability of taking on new potential housing development and/or stock transfers from other Approved Housing Bodies.
- Detailing oversight provided by the Finance Risk and Audit Committee, a committee of the Board of Respond.
- Phasing implementation of the PQASSO Quality System to support Respond Quality and Operating Standards.
- Establishing and resourcing the Quality and Compliance team consistent with Respond requirements and the increase in regulatory requirements.

5.4.6. Goal 6

In pursuit of social justice Respond will be a high-performing, results-driven, accountable organisation which values our staff and those we work with.

Rationale

The staff team within Respond are the largest single resource available to Respond and these staff members will be of critical importance to Respond over the next five years as it embarks upon its ambitious growth trajectory. It is encouraging that an employee survey carried out concluded that 87% of employees like working for Respond and it will be a key priority to make the organisation a better place to work for employees and

people on shorter term contracts. Respond will also endeavour to ensure that it has the right people with the right skills-sets to take on the significant challenges/targets which Respond has set for itself between 2019 and 2023, and this will involve the recruitment of new staff for particular roles/tasks as well as the effective deployment and utilisation of the existing skilled staff team within Respond.

Strategies

- To continuously work towards improving and enhancing communications and information flows within the staff team in Respond.
- Respond will encourage and develop leaders at every level in the organisation.
- Respond will work to maintain quality in our services and systems.
- To develop a strong sense of organisational camaraderie and organisational spirit/pride within the staff team in Respond.
- To put in place performance management and appraisal systems which are appropriate to an organisation the size of Respond and to the types of work being undertaken by Respond.
- To operate best practice employment policies and procedures for staff members and operate a pay/salary system which is fair, objective and transparent.
- To attract and retain high quality employees which will enable Respond to achieve the ambitious targets which it has set for itself in the period from 2019 to 2023.
- To ensure that Respond is fully compliant at governance and operational levels with the guidelines and requirements of various regulatory bodies (e.g. Housing Regulator, Charities Regulatory Authority, Data Protection Commissioner) and with good practice codes/guidelines such as the Governance Code and the Voluntary Regulation Code for Approved Housing Bodies.



Actions

- Providing best practice talent management and development systems and procedures.
- Working actively to develop leaders in each team.
- Developing appropriate systems of quality to deliver our services.
- Operating a detailed Training and Development Framework.
- Operating performance review and appraisal systems and processes which are fair and equitable and which represent best practice in relation to employment of staff.
- Enhancing internal communications within Respond so as to ensure that employees feel a strong sense of connection to the organisation.
- Detailed oversight by the Remuneration, Succession and Nominations Committee, a committee of the Board.
- Appointing a Compliance Manager and operate systems to ensure full compliance with various regulatory requirements.
- Maintaining best practise human resource management and supports by the Human Resources Manager.
- Developing greater clarity about roles and responsibilities within staff team and of more effective reporting relationships between members of the staff team.
- Reviewing and restructuring the organisation to ensure that all departments are deployed to deliver on the aims and objectives of the Strategic Plan as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- Strengthening our internal legal team consistent with emerging requirements and to identify legislative changes/enactments that relate to Respond as an approved housing body, charity and a company.

5.4.7. Goal 7

Respond will be an effective voice with and for people in need of housing, homelessness and support services in order to effect positive change in their lives and will be respected and trusted by our partners.

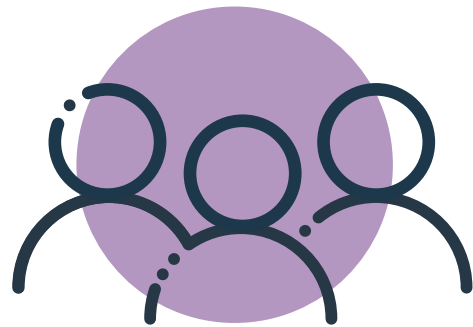
Rationale

Respond recognises the need to empower and give voice to people who have been affected by homelessness and housing issues and problems. As well as working to improve the lives of individual tenants of Respond housing estates, residents of Respond Family Hubs and other service users, Respond also believes that it has a responsibility to influence and inform national policies around issues concerning housing and homelessness. We believe we are in a good position to

make reasonable and appropriate policy recommendations to relevant bodies e.g. Government Departments, local authorities, Construction Industry Federation, political parties etc. Respond will endeavour to utilise the lived experiences of its tenants, residents and services users to positively influence national policies in relation to housing and homelessness in the period from 2019 to 2023.

Strategies

- To work with relevant umbrella organisations in the sector to bring about positive change in relation to issues concerning housing and homelessness.
- To develop relationships with key influencers and decision makers around the issues of housing and homelessness.
- To research and analyse causal factors, options and opportunities for supporting people to move out of homelessness and inadequate accommodation.
- To contribute towards assessing and analysing the impact and importance of social housing in Ireland and ways in which social housing might be enhanced into the future.
- To play a strong role in lobbying and advocating for the provision of adequate housing, accommodation and supports for vulnerable and/or marginalised groups.
- To provide thought leadership and contribute to discussions and debates which are taking place at the national and local levels in relation to issues concerning housing and homelessness.



Actions

- Commissioning research from experts in the areas of housing, homelessness and social inclusion so as to contribute to the national discussion on social housing and the alleviation of homelessness.
- Producing relevant data which can assist the social housing sector and Respond in demonstrating the impact of, and ongoing necessity for, the building of social and affordable houses in Ireland.
- Encouraging and facilitating the Resident Support Services team to identify and feed-back issues that have a more general application.
- Producing Pre-budget submissions and other submissions and proposals for the attention of Government and relevant statutory agencies.
- Working closely with relevant stakeholders (State, private sector, NGOs), in order to secure public policy changes and additional services for social housing residents.
- Continuing to advocate on behalf of families and individuals living in Respond homes around issues such as social welfare benefits, access to healthcare and education services, provision of supports for groups such as older people, people with disabilities and Traveller families.

Guiding Principles and Core Values

6



In pursuing the foregoing strategies and in all of our work Respond is informed and inspired by the following guiding principles and core values:

6.1 Guiding Principles

A Human Right to Housing:

Respond believes that every human being is equal in rights and dignity and has the right to a secure, affordable home which meets their needs throughout their lifetime. Respond will strive to ensure that the services we provide are inclusive, empowering and value the human rights of the people we work with and support.

Social Justice:

All our initiatives will focus on creating a more just and equal society. We will seek to identify the root cause of social problems and, where we can, seek to address these through the deployment of our resources, expertise and energies. As a not-for-profit organisation, Respond will be measured by the positive impact we have on the lives of the individuals, families and communities we serve and our wider contribution to the well-being of Irish society.

6.2. Core Values

Listening:

We will consult with and listen to our tenants, service users and staff. We will reflect their opinions in the planning, design and delivery of housing and housing support services.

Empathy:

In all our work we will try to see the situation from the point of view of the tenant or the community with which we are engaging; we will be non-judgemental, regardless of past or current difficulties, we will listen to and value their stories and experiences and endeavour to have a positive influence on their lives.

Integrity:

Honesty, truthfulness and transparency of purpose and method will be our constant watchwords.

Trust:

We will aim to be a trusted and reliable social landlord to our tenants and service users, a trusted partner for those with whom we collaborate and a trustworthy employer for Respond employees.

Sustainability:

All our developments will endeavour to enhance the natural world around us and not adversely impact the environment without redress. Through the design of our housing and communities we will be mindful of our ethical obligations to pursue national goals of sustainable development through energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon emissions.

Quality design:

All our developments will be based on principles of place-making and creating sustainable and safe living environments. We will seek to follow best practice to deliver integrated housing developments designed to high quality standards capable of being used by all including those with specific needs.

Value for Money:

Conscious at all times that we utilise state-backed loans and tenants' rental income to finance our building and service-delivery programme, we will ensure that all our expenditure and investment provides clear value for money with evidence-based, testable outcomes.

Respond will conduct annual reviews of its performance in delivering the plan and reflecting on emerging factors and changes in the external environment and make adjustments as required.



As a not-for-profit organisation, Respond will be measured by the positive impact we have on the lives of the individuals, families and communities we serve.

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