

“That Cork County Council would carry out an assessment of sheltered housing for the elderly, both public and private, currently available in each town in the county and that, arising from this assessment, Cork County Council would adopt the following policies:

- 1. It will be a specific objective of the County Development Plan to provide for sheltered housing for the elderly in every town in the county.**
- 2. The range of sheltered housing to be provided will allow for both independent and supported living.**
- 3. The sheltered housing will be provided close to the town centre and/or services and amenities.**
- 4. The number of sheltered housing units to be provided will be an appropriate proportion of the population of each town.**
- 5. The Local Area Plan for each Municipal District will identify areas in each town appropriate for the provision of sheltered housing for the elderly.”**

The age profile of the Irish population is increasing. The last Census (2016) saw an increase of over 19% in people aged over 65. There was also a 15.6% increase in the number of people aged over 85. This is a huge success story in terms of lifestyle and health but our national and local policies must recognise the implications of this demographic shift and start planning for it now so that we can as a nation embrace rather than fear growing older.

Research carried out by the charity, Alone found that 49% of people aged 60 live alone, more than half in private homes. Of those, almost 59% live in a house with five rooms or more.

At the same time there are almost 23,000 people in nursing homes. That is 3.7% of the over 65 population and that percentage continues to increase. In research undertaken in 2017, some of those living in nursing home facilities reported that they moved there because they were alone and could not or did not want to manage their own home any longer. Despite this, 80% of older adults are negative towards moving into a nursing home (Age Friendly Ireland, 2016). It is estimated that the cost to the Fair Deal scheme will increase by an additional €729 million annually by 2031 as a result of demographic changes (Alone).

Older people want to age in place but without a choice of appropriate housing, many cannot. That housing needs to be offered across a spectrum, open to all older people, regardless of whether they qualify for social housing or whether they can avail of private options. It needs to include both purpose-built homes, dispersed in the community and dedicated sheltered housing in shared and supported schemes.

Community-based supports are critical for all of us but even more important for older people who need to live in close proximity to their family, their social networks, to public transport and other essential public services and to recreation opportunities. Research indicates that 15% of those aged 65 or over would move to a different home within their community if they had the opportunity to do so. In the UK, this is called right-sizing.

Nobody is better placed to provide for appropriate opportunities for right-sizing to either independent or sheltered living than local authorities. It takes foresight and planning to ensure that housing for older people is located close to their current homes so that they are not displaced from their communities and social networks. Our opportunities to do this are at policy level in the County Development Plan and at a practical level in our Municipal Area Plans.

The Joint Housing Strategy requires our Development Plans at either County or Municipal level to include specific policies to secure a housing mix which considers the needs of special groups such as the elderly. I am glad to hear that this is going to be developed further in the forthcoming review of the County Development Plan. I would like to see us developing right-sizing policies for our social housing stock. But what I am urgently seeking support for through this motion is for us as a local authority to ensure that each town has ample provision of a range of houses appropriate for aging. To actively identify in our Local Area Plans town centre or close to town centre sites that are best placed to develop sheltered housing for the elderly. I want this process to start now, not in 2024 when the next Local Area Plans are due. I thank Maurice for his report and for his Department's efforts. It is very welcome that houses for older people are being provided through the Capital Assistance Scheme. But as an example, there are 817 people over 65 in Bandon. If, as research shows, 15% of these were willing to right-size, that is a requirement for 122 age-appropriate units. If even half of that requirement were available in the community, the 9 house-scheme currently under construction through the Capital Assistance Scheme is a long way off what is necessary. And in many cases it does not have to be the local authority or an approved housing body who provides the shortfall but it is necessary that the local authority would provide for them by ensuring appropriate lands in or adjacent to the town centre are identified and available. If we don't do this now, we won't be able to do it. Those valuable sites will be gone.