**For Immediate Release**

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**No Excuse for Letting Substandard Property**

The private rental market is currently providing 20% of all housing, with around 260,000 tenancies registered with the PRTB.  This accommodation for the most part is good quality, and maintained in good order with prompt repairs by landlords and good housekeeping by tenants.  It is a partnership that works when both parties comply with their obligations.  However, there are some properties that are not of a good standard which is not acceptable. This can be as a result of landlords, or tenants, not complying with their obligations.

Local Authorities are being paid by landlords to inspect all properties but are not carrying out an adequate number of inspections on a yearly basis.  The solution is easy: ensure that all Local Authorities inspect a certain quota of properties on a yearly basis.  The pass/fail criteria also needs addressing - if there is a minor fault, it should be viewed as such and not failed for it, the matter should be raised, and the landlord/tenant should address the matter depending on whose responsibility it is.  Then a Certificate of Compliance should be issued, valid for a period of 3-5 years.  Looking for another system is ridiculous and yet another cost – perfect the situation in place; there is nobody in the country more qualified to inspect properties than the Local Authorities.

Tenants in financial difficulties have been unable to keep adequate heating in properties, and often block ventilation which results in damage to properties through mould and condensation issues.  Oil is expensive and frequently, tenants are not in a position to keep adequate supplies in tanks resulting in oil fired systems not working when they do put more oil in. A similar situation applies to gas and electricity where costs are an issue. The problem is all too common, and then contractors have to be brought in to rectify matters, which is costly for landlords and has been caused by the users of these systems. These issues need to be addressed in a fair manner.  There needs to be understanding that problems in properties can be, and are also, caused by tenants.

Standards have increased in the rental market, and there is no excuse for sub-standard property. The abolition of the traditional bedsit has resulted in less available accommodation and ultimately, more homelessness and increased market rent.  In theory, it is good idea to remove bedsits, but in practice, it has led to an impossible situation.  Slowly but surely, people who have resided in this type of affordable accommodation in central locations have to move out, and the supply of  upgraded properties is dwindling as a result of planning issues and the costs associated with refurbishment; it is not possible to convert a number of these accommodations into self- contained units.  It means that tenants have to pay more.

A simple solution would be to limit the number of bedsits that can share a bathroom to two.  This would be workable and help keep people in homes and ensure buildings in central locations are occupied.  It would also protect people happily residing in this type of accommodation.  Local Authorities have recently requested help in sourcing houses for temporary accommodation that may not comply with the housing standards.  Landlords are being forced to close down houses that have not got units with self-contained bathrooms, but these may be used for temporary accommodation.

Deposits are important to both landlords and tenants, but there is no need for a deposit protection scheme.  The PRTB in 2012 were asked to enforce orders in 123 cases where after the dispute resolution process, the deposit was not paid back.  It is unacceptable that the deposit was not paid back, but rather than bring in a cumbersome Deposit Protection Scheme where forms have to be filled, money lodged, and the associated delays for both tenants and landlords where it is refunded, a simple compensation fund should be put in place.  The Irish Property Owners Association submitted a proposal to Minister O’Sullivan which would ensure that deposits were refunded where an order from the PRTB is in place and the landlord did not comply. €5 should be added to the existing registration fee which could be ring-fenced to pay out in a situation where a landlord fails to refund the deposit. The landlord can then be followed up through the courts.   This is so simple and effective, and would protect tenants where a Deposit Protection Scheme only protects those tenants whose landlords are compliant and have used it.  The Indecon report stated: *“0.31% of tenancies result in disputes concerning deposit retention coming to the PRTB.  An alternative approach to enhance tenant protection would be to provide a fund to ensure tenants are not left at loss if landlords fail to comply.”*

The private rented sector is currently in financial crisis, with unfair taxation, certain expenses not allowed, reduction in mortgage interest allowable, banking difficulties, and rising costs as a result of increased standards, BER requirements, Local Property Tax and the now abolished Non-Principal Private Residence.  The whole sector needs an overhaul by Government to make it more effective for the 21st century.  Amendments tabled to the Residential Tenancies Act need to ensure that landlords are not being forced to house non-paying tenants, Rent Supplement needs to be market rent and paid directly to the landlord, and refurbishment to make a property more energy efficient should be an allowable expense in the tax year that is carried out.

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