



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

# Home at Last

Life In Dublin's Rapid Build Housing



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# Home at Last

**Life In Dublin's Rapid Build Housing**

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# Foreword

**This publication marks the first in a forthcoming series of original research investigations focused on housing policy and practice issues in Dublin city. This work will be delivered by the newly established Dublin Housing Observatory (DHO) whose mission statement is ‘to make Dublin city an affordable and sustainable place to live by ensuring its housing and urban development strategy, policy and practice is underpinned by robust evidence’.**

The Dublin Housing Observatory is a new initiative in Dublin City Council’s ongoing development of its overall competencies in housing, planning, economic development, inclusion and integration. It has four primary objectives. These are to:

1. Enable and support Dublin City Council’s provision of high quality social and affordable homes and sustainable communities;
2. Be a knowledge-exchange hub for policy design, analysis and implementation on housing and urban development;
3. Provide research and analysis to support evidence-informed decision-making in housing and related fields of planning, economic development, inclusion and integration; and,
4. Be a data navigator and objective source of information on the dynamics of Dublin’s housing system and market for all Dublin City Council’s stakeholders, the public and elected representatives.

The Dublin Housing Observatory brings a focus on all aspects of Dublin’s overall housing supply needs and changes in demand. It is working from 2018 to support Dublin City Council’s provision of high quality, affordable homes and sustainable communities and, within the context of the Dublin City Development Plan (2016–2022), will help drive Dublin’s overall housing strategy and planning for new housing development and supply, including area-renewal and urban regeneration.

**Brendan Kenny**  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Dublin City Council  
July 2018



Dublin is in the midst of a chronic housing crisis. A limited supply and high house prices have contributed to rising levels of homelessness in the city. In 2016 the Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government launched 'Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'. The plan includes commitments to increased building by local authorities and approved housing bodies, including the expansion of the Rapid Build Programme. The programme utilises modular housebuilding technology to expand council housebuilding at faster rates and lower costs than traditional bricks and mortar building, with an emphasis on long-term housing for families in Dublin.



# Executive Summary

Whilst Dublin's Rapid Build Housing Programme as a housing strategy has received high levels of public scrutiny, to date there has been no research that focuses on the experiences of Rapid Build residents themselves. This report seeks to remedy this omission. Based on in-depth interviews conducted in autumn 2017 with residents of the first two Rapid Build developments in the north of the city – Ballymun and Finglas – our research explores both residents' experiences of homelessness, and the impact that being housed in Rapid Builds has had on their lives. All of the 22 Ballymun and 29 out of a total 39 Finglas residents were homeless prior to being offered Rapid Build housing (the remaining 10 Finglas residents were allocated from the DCC housing waiting list).

Central to this report is the importance of feeling 'at home'. This research explores the ways in which the loss of home and the experience of precarious housing situations impacts on peoples' sense of security, their self-worth, and their perceived ability to function in society.

## Headline Findings

1. High-quality, secure and permanent social housing provided through the Rapid Build scheme is an unequivocal and fundamental solution to Dublin's housing crisis for many homeless families. This could be extended to many more families through the up-scaling of delivery, the political will, committed investment, and a more responsive planning system to achieve this.
2. Solving Dublin's housing crisis cannot be fully realised without acknowledging the private rented sector as a major route into homelessness. The majority of people who present as homeless do so due to eviction from private rented housing. This is compounded by the stigmatisation of people in receipt of social welfare often making landlords reluctant to engage with Rent Supplement (RS) and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). It will remain extremely difficult to reduce rates of homelessness in Dublin without serious reform to the private rented sector. Increased and persistent lobbying of central government is therefore vital in pushing for fundamental change in this sector.
3. While we acknowledge that there is a clear need to improve suitability and standards of emergency accommodation, levels of homelessness are unlikely to reduce if the insecurity of the private rented sector is not tackled and the quantity of permanent social housing solutions is not urgently addressed.
4. The report highlights the importance of 'user-led' approaches to research and policymaking. Residents of Rapid Build, or any other form of social housing, are ultimately best-placed to inform policymakers, architects, and other professional stakeholders about their needs and experiences. They should be treated as central agents in decision-making processes around housing provision and support. Indeed, focus group participants suggested that they should be involved in consulting and advising on future Rapid Build projects, and meeting with future residents to share their stories and reflections. This is something that DCC should consider seriously as a means of providing better lines of communication between service providers and residents.

5. Residents want and deserve a stronger presence and voice in the media to address and challenge stigma and negative tropes of homelessness. We recommend a community-led programme of events and research that fosters dialogue between residents, policymakers, the media, and the wider public.

## Homeless journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

- In conjunction with previous reports conducted by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and Focus Ireland in 2017, our research found that residents tended to enter homelessness as a consequence of eviction from the private rented sector, family breakdown, or a combination of both.
- In line with existing research, residents believe that life in emergency accommodation (hotels, B&Bs, homeless Family Hubs) has had a detrimental effect on physical and mental wellbeing<sup>1</sup>. Several report that their young children have failed to reach expected development targets such as learning to crawl or speak as a result. Residents also recount experiencing anxiety, depression and shame during their time in emergency accommodation.
- Some hotels treated residents poorly, in some instances insisting that homeless families use separate entrances to other guests.
- Related to this, residents reported experiencing stigma because of their homeless status. Residents have been accused of ‘cheating the system’ and wrongly claiming they are homeless in order to access council housing. They are also assumed to have substance misuse issues or are somehow to blame for their homelessness. Residents often coped with this by avoiding social contact as much as possible, becoming isolated as a consequence.

## New-builds, new neighbourhoods: resident expectations of life in Rapid Build Housing

- Housing terminology and building aesthetics are crucial in helping residents feel at home in Rapid Builds. ‘Modular’ housing brought with it historical connotations of poor quality post-war ‘prefab’ housing, whilst the term ‘Rapid Build’ appeared to sidestep this lineage. Residents of the Finglas Rapid Builds in particular were pleased with the ‘bricks and mortar’ external aesthetic of the houses. The design made them feel as though they blended into the existing community, rather than standing out as ‘housing for the homeless’. This was vital in helping residents to feel a sense of dignity and of being at home.
- There was trepidation from some residents regarding moving to an area they were not familiar with, which heightened their sense of insecurity. However, for some the opportunity to start again in a new part of the city was seen as positive.

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<sup>1</sup> Stamp, S. (2017) *The Experience of Newly Homeless Families Accommodated by Dublin's Homeless Services in August 2015*. Dublin: Dublin Region Homeless Executive.



### Life in Rapid Build Housing

- Residents were overall very positive about their Rapid Build homes. This was particularly true for Finglas residents. Residents were especially impressed with the size, layout and energy efficiency of the houses. Most importantly, residents were relieved at the prospect of having a long-term home after many years of uncertainty and temporary accommodation.
- There were however some concerns around the quality of the Rapid Builds in the long-term, with reports of hollow and cracked walls, and ongoing issues with the boiler systems.
- Residents in Ballymun, all of whom initially signed temporary tenancy agreements, but have since been offered permanent tenancies, reported feeling pressured into accepting them as permanent houses. Eight out of 22 families have not signed a permanent contract, for a range of reasons, including overcrowding and not feeling safe in the local area. Residents have reported they were told that if they did not sign permanent tenancies they would have to move back into emergency accommodation (this warning does not appear to have been followed through on so far).
- Many residents continue to feel insecure, both in terms of their safety in the local area, and in their struggles to process now living in permanent accommodation. This highlights the ongoing trauma of homelessness.

### Part 4: The future of Rapid Build: conclusions and recommendations

- Current Rapid Builds: resident experiences show that Rapid Build housing has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to tackling Dublin's housing crisis. An acknowledgement of the ongoing trauma of homelessness after the event, and a commitment to providing ongoing support, be that through continuing key worker contact, or the establishment of resident support groups, would be beneficial in ensuring that residents feel at home in the long-term.
- Future Rapid Build developments: ensure that future research is undertaken in order to assess building quality and resident experiences over time. Continue to prioritise Rapid Build housing for those in most need, and focus on the provision of permanent tenancies.



# Section 1

# Introduction



## Section 1: Introduction

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*“The clue is in the name. If you want to end homelessness, you have to give people homes.”*

*Special Adviser to Minister for Environment, Fine Gael and Labour coalition government, 2012-2016<sup>2</sup>*

Since its announcement in 2015, Rapid Build housing has been a widely debated and somewhat controversial housing strategy in Dublin, with concerns raised in both national and local media regarding their quality, cost and completion delays.<sup>3</sup> Early on in its development, the Rapid Build scheme became mired in negative media representations, both due to connotations of ‘modular’ with the poor-quality prefabricated housing of Ireland’s past, and assumptions that ‘housing for the homeless’ would be socially detrimental to the neighbourhoods they were built in.

Local residents, as well as the media, voiced concern at the arrival of developments in their neighbourhoods, with particular fears regarding assumptions that they would bring antisocial behaviour. Protests at the Ballymun site in particular led to delays in completion. The contractor lost one week of building time due to protests (amounting to 25per cent of the works programme), and another 3 to 4 days due to poor weather conditions affecting the progress of ground works<sup>4</sup>.

There was an acknowledgement among some stakeholders that the completion rate had not been as rapid as the name might suggest. As a former policy adviser to the government noted:

*“I guess it’s not as rapid as people thought, because you still have to put some kind of structure down, you’ve got to get some kind of concrete pad down, you’ve still got some site preparation to do...”*

(Special Adviser to Minister for Housing, Fine Gael-led minority coalition government, 2016 to 2017<sup>5</sup>)

The stakeholder meeting also identified the length of the tender and procurement process as a contributory factor to the longer than envisaged time taken.

Despite such intense levels of scrutiny and public attention, to date there has been little commentary from residents of Rapid Build housing *themselves* regarding the successes of the developments, and what could be improved. This report therefore explores what life in Rapid Build housing is like, how it has impacted residents’ lives, what works, and what doesn’t, in order to understand what constitutes best practice in Rapid Build housing.

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<sup>2</sup> Minister Jan O Sullivan TD and then Minister Alan Kelly TD (both Labour Party).

<sup>3</sup> See for example <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/rapid-build-housing-plan-will-not-meet-coveney-s-deadline-1.3016457>

<sup>4</sup> See for example <http://www.dublincity.ie/provision-22-modular-homes-baile-na-laochra-poppintree-ballymun-0>

<sup>5</sup> Minister Simon Coveney TD (Fine Gael Party).

## 1.1 Contextual overview: family homelessness in Dublin

Homelessness, and particularly familial homelessness, has become a chronic and ever-growing concern in Dublin. According to DRHE data, there were 4,098 adults accommodated in emergency accommodation during the last quarter of 2016. Of these, 14 per cent (567) were presenting as homeless for the first time. The remaining 86 per cent (3,531) were repeat or existing service users. At the end of the quarter, a total of 1,028 families, comprising 1,382 adults with 2,096 dependent children, were residing in emergency accommodation<sup>6</sup>. In the first half of 2017, there was an 8 per cent net increase in families accessing emergency accommodation, a total of 1,115 families by June 2017, rising to 1,138 by the end of September 2017<sup>7</sup>. 450 of these families were accessing homelessness services for the first time<sup>8</sup>, highlighting the growing number of Dublin families vulnerable to homelessness.

Whilst the reasons for families becoming homeless are often complex, research conducted by both the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and Focus Ireland and in 2017 highlight two predominant reasons: first, leaving private rented accommodation (PRS) on foot of a Notice to Quit (NTQ); and second, leaving family or friend's accommodation due to relationship breakdown or overcrowding.<sup>9</sup>

The PRS is a core component of peoples' experiences of housing precarity and journeys into homelessness. Evictions by landlords selling or moving back into properties, and a reluctance to rent properties to tenants in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) means that PRS accommodation is both difficult to secure in the first instance, and maintain in the long-term. Indeed, data collected in March 2017 revealed that 37 per cent of homeless families surveyed reported that they had been made homeless due to their landlord either selling or taking the property out of the market<sup>10</sup>.

In response to this rapidly accelerating crisis, in 2016 the Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government launched 'Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'<sup>11</sup>. At the core of the plan is a commitment to address homelessness by providing early housing solutions. This includes increasing social housing provision, expanding HAP Homeless Tenancies, and The Housing Agency purchasing and repurposing vacant properties to provide permanent housing for homeless families. One of the key elements of the Rebuilding Ireland plan is the accelerated provision of the Rapid Build housing programme.

The programme, of which Ballymun and Finglas are the first and second iterations respectively, constructs high-quality pre-fabricated modular housing at faster and less costly rates than traditional 'bricks and mortar' dwellings. The Ballymun site provided 22 homes for families in emergency accommodation. Tenants moved in to the houses in summer 2016 and were initially given temporary tenancies. However, a year later all families were offered the Rapid Builds on a permanent basis. The Finglas development opened in summer 2017, providing 39 Rapid Build homes in total, 29 of which were allocated to families in emergency accommodation, and 10 of which were allocated to families on the DCC housing waiting list. All residents were offered permanent tenancies from the outset.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/homeless-statistics>

<sup>7</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. 2017. *Homelessness Report September 2017*.

<sup>8</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive. 2017. *Reported Reasons for Family Homelessness in the Dublin Region: January to June 2017*.

<sup>9</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive. 2017. *Reported Reasons for Family Homelessness in the Dublin Region: January to June 2017*.

<sup>10</sup> Focus Ireland. 2017. *Survey of the families that became homeless during March 2017. Insights into Family Homelessness No. 10*.

<sup>11</sup> Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. 2017. *Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*.

# Section 1: Introduction

## 1.2 Responding to homelessness: 'Hidden Rooms' and the origins of Dublin's Rapid Build Housing Programme

The origins of Dublin City's Rapid Build housing programme can be traced to a PIVOT Dublin (Dublin City Council) *Future Thinking* project in 2014. Participants were asked to collaborate in order to find thoughtful, creative ways of developing a more sustainable, fairer, and connected city. The project took the form of a two-day conference that took place in 16 surprise locations, termed 'hidden rooms' across Dublin. Each room hosted a workshop that focused on a particular set of urban problems. The purpose of the conference was to produce credible solutions to identified problems that could be actioned by DCC and partners from 2015.

One of the workshops, 'The Sheltering City', focused on Dublin's housing crisis, asking how modular housebuilding can be used to provide a housing-led solution to homelessness and chronic housing shortages, whilst remaining appealing to policymakers and the public. Envisaging DCC Housing and Community Department in the role of 'the client', the core question for the project design brief asked:

*"How can modular build public housing be made acceptable to users and local residents? What could be piloted in 2015?"<sup>12</sup>*

Of all the 16 *Hidden Rooms* workshops, 'The Sheltering City' workshop comprised a somewhat unique group of participants. Elected representatives (including Dublin's Lord Mayor) were included as well as DCC policymakers, housing and homeless services, planners and architects alongside academics, designers, artists, community activists on housing and private sector practitioners and architects with experience in social housing.

The workshop responded with a proposal to design 16 different housing typologies for public housing that deployed offsite, modular housing construction methods that would speed up the production and delivery of new, design-led housing that was appealing to live in. This new housing would specifically provide for the growing number of homeless families in emergency accommodation in Dublin. However, rather than simply becoming 'housing for the homeless' these new housing types would lead innovation in Irish housing production by being capable of meeting the challenges of delivering higher densities on greenfield and brownfield sites across inner-urban and suburban locations, including 'pocket' infill developments.

Aware of the need to challenge national conceptions of prefabricated housing that connects it to poor quality and a limited shelf-life, workshop participants emphasised the need to design quality, adaptable dwellings with high space standards constructed using renewable building materials. Dwellings would have to deliver high thermal efficiency and support energy transition to low carbon and renewable energy sources. Dwellings would also be capable of being scaled up and made 'volumetric' in terms of output and production.

Upon its presentation at the *Hidden Rooms* conference plenary, the proposal attracted immediate media coverage<sup>13</sup>. Yet, notwithstanding the efforts of workshop participants, the proposal fell short of what was required to garner public and political support. Negative initial reactions, including some from within the social

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<sup>12</sup> Dublin City Council (2014) *Hidden Rooms: Collaborate to Innovate*.

<sup>13</sup> See here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/plan-for-200-houses-for-dublin-homeless-by-end-of-2016-1.2016399>



housing and homeless sectors, combined with media headlines about the use of ‘prefabs’ to house homeless households. This led to the details of the proposal being generally misconstrued while also introducing concerns over where the new housing developments were to be located. Under more immediate demands of expanding emergency accommodation provision for rough sleepers and the increased number of homeless households in Dublin, attention and support for the proposal soon dissipated<sup>14</sup>.

Nonetheless, Dublin City Council did not abandon the proposal. Instead, working through its shared services units on homelessness for the Dublin region (the Dublin Region Homeless Executive), it continued to examine the proposal’s feasibility in terms of planning and procurement. Significantly, DCC undertook to develop and curate a Modular Housing Demonstration project in 2015. Construction companies and interests in Ireland were invited to provide examples of the types of modular dwellings that were available on the market and to erect these on a dedicated serviced site in Dublin city.

Six companies were selected to construct and display their ‘modular home’ on the site for a period of three weeks in autumn 2015. A large programme of visits to the site was delivered for industry professionals, senior housing practitioners, public policy decision makers, Dublin’s local and national elected representatives and the Irish and international media. Importantly, homeless service users were also included as guests and their opinions, reactions and preferences were collated. The ‘mini-expo’ culminated in visits from the then Minister for Environment Alan Kelly TD and other senior national politicians.

Alongside this demonstration project, and again working through the DRHE, Dublin City Council also began to search internationally for examples of modular dwellings in use as housing-led solutions appropriate to the needs of homeless households, especially families with dependent children. This led to the identification of a unique modular housing scheme called PLACE/Ladywell being developed in Lewisham, south east London for just such purposes. Following a series of study visits and exchanges, Dublin City Council hosted a high level knowledge exchange conference and meeting where senior representatives of all the PLACE/Ladywell stakeholders presented on the project to members of Dublin’s four local authorities and central government departments<sup>15</sup>.

Shortly after, modular house building would be confirmed as a key component in tackling Dublin’s housing crisis by a government decision to agree to the development of 500 units of housing targeted at meeting the needs of homeless households. The first phase of development got underway with government’s backing to construct 22 new dwellings on publicly owned land in Ballymun.

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<sup>14</sup> In early December 2014, the death of a rough sleeper nearby to the Irish parliament in Leinster House led to a public outcry and returned the immediate focus onto the insufficiencies of emergency accommodation provision in Dublin. See here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/plan-for-prefabricated-homes-for-dublin-homeless-shelved-1.2041560>

<sup>15</sup> This included representatives of Lewisham LBC Senior Management, Lewisham Homes (the council’s ALMO for housing development and delivery) and the project engineers (AECOM); construction partners (SIG Group) and architects (Rogers Harbour Stirk and Partners). See here: <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/lewisham-borough-council-rapid-build-family-housing-scheme>



## Section 1: Introduction

By summer 2016 a newly forged coalition of market actors, public housing practitioners, homeless service providers and elected representatives had evolved and ‘modular housing’ was moving back up the policy agenda again. This time the coherency required among stakeholders was much more evident. Debate moved quickly across issues of the scale of procurement, the distribution and location of the new housing and the need to ensure speedy delivery<sup>16</sup>. To maintain the emphasis on the core issue of ensuring a speedier production of new housing to meet acute housing need, the moniker of ‘rapid build’ housing was adopted to distinguish and identify the programme<sup>17</sup>. Almost simultaneously, public concerns and objections over the proposed locations for the new housing emerged. So too did objections from construction interests engaged in the delivery of more traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ housing<sup>18</sup>. Highly contested issues of site selection and good planning practice, funding and importantly whom the housing was for and its role in delivering sustainable communities would begin to dominate. Misinformed statements by government members on when the initial 22 units would be completed and occupied introduced unrealistic expectations that could not be met<sup>19</sup>.

Under the drag weight of these issues the term ‘rapid build’ became increasingly problematic to public understanding, especially as compliance with Irish planning and EU procurement requirements led to additional delays in decision-making. Despite this, by May 2016 the initial 22 units were being completed and allocated to homeless families while construction of a second phase of 130 units was getting underway<sup>20</sup>.

An Irish general election was held in February 2016. The results were inconclusive and led to a hung parliament. By the summer, a new incoming minority coalition government led by the previous Taoiseach, but with a new programme for government that reflected the imperative to tackle the housing crisis in Ireland, had been agreed. Shortly after, in June government launched its action plan on housing and homelessness called *Rebuilding Ireland*. It contains a number of actions on homelessness. Primary among them is the commitment to expand the Rapid Build Housing Programme in Dublin to build at least 1,500 housing units by end of 2018.

The Rapid Build Housing Programme is now an established pillar of Irish housing and homeless policy. Determining if and how the policy gets successfully implemented remains a challenge. Also whether or not the programme will achieve the ambitions first articulated by the original *Sheltering City* workshop participants remains unclear. Yet the programme has and is yielding new public housing provision. This report is the first analysis of the successes of the programme and areas for improvement as told by the residents themselves.

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<sup>16</sup> See here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/search-for-sites-for-modular-homes-begins-in-dublin-1.2370208>

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that the term ‘modular’ became somewhat elastic in terms of its meaning. It was being used to describe what, in effect, was the procurement of alternative forms of constructing traditional style two-storey semi-detached dwellings that allowed for quicker construction but did not necessarily introduce alternative design and build housing models that used fully prefabricated building materials and construction methods. Notably, the Department of Environment did not establish a procurement framework for modular apartment construction – only for houses. This further compounded the matter (as apartments are the mainstay produce of modular construction in the EU), leading to considerable debate on the accurate use of the term ‘modular’ among construction professionals. In turn, this would prompt recognition by policy makers that a change in terminology was required.

<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the capacity of the Irish construction sector to deliver was not yet evident. See here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/dublin-council-cancels-20m-tender-for-modular-housing-1.2556153>

<sup>19</sup> See here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/modular-houses-may-not-be-in-place-for-christmas-1.2410771>

<sup>20</sup> See here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/dublin-modular-homes-where-will-they-be-1.2410809>

### 1.3 Methodology and resident demographics

The report findings are based on in-depth interviews with residents of both the Ballymun and Finglas Rapid Build developments in October 2017, focus group discussion with residents about the research findings, and a meeting with key stakeholders from DCC, DRHE and related bodies in December 2017. A total of 21 residents from the two DCC Rapid Build housing estates completed to date were interviewed: 8 in Ballymun and 13 in Finglas. Further interviews were conducted with a member of the Finglas Housing Area team, and with two former special advisers to the government.<sup>21</sup> The focus group discussion included four residents (three from Finglas, one from Ballymun). A stakeholder meeting was also held with 12 key informants including those who have been involved in the policy design, certification, design and development of the Rapid Builds, and those working in homelessness and related services. The following section briefly describes some key demographic features of this sample of residents.

As previously stated, all 22 of the Ballymun households had previously been living in homeless emergency accommodation (either in hotels, B&Bs or hostels). These households were initially allocated to Rapid Build housing as a more appropriate form of emergency accommodation. This means that all households signed a temporary licence agreement. Following the reclassification of Rapid Build housing from an alternative emergency provision for homeless families to permanent housing, these households were offered a permanent tenancy in Ballymun as of Spring 2017. To date, of the 22 households in Ballymun, the majority (14) have accepted a permanent tenancy. The remaining 8 have chosen not to sign a permanent tenancy, and remain classified as living in temporary accommodation while they wait for an offer of alternative permanent housing.

In Finglas, 29 of the total 39 households had been living in emergency accommodation, and 10 were allocated from the DCC housing wait list. As the classification of Rapid Build housing had shifted to a form of permanent housing by the time the estate in Finglas was completed, all 39 households have signed permanent tenancy agreements.

Therefore all respondents in the research sample from Ballymun had previously been in homeless emergency accommodation, while in Finglas, 8 of the 12 households who were interviewed had lived in emergency accommodation.

The majority (15 out of 20) of participants were the head of a single adult household. Of these, the majority had 1-3 children; only 3 single adult households had more than three children. All of the single parents interviewed were women.

The majority of respondents (14) in the sample were Irish nationals. The remaining 6 participants had emigrated to Ireland from a range of, predominately African, countries.

Data from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) PASS client management database for homeless services shows that for all participants, this had been their first episode of homelessness: that is, they had never experienced being homeless before. Two families were accommodated in the one hotel for their entire duration in homeless services. Six families were accommodated in two different hotels and four families had stays in 3 different hotels over the course of their duration in homelessness services. Only two families moved to five or more hotels.

The following section outlines the conceptual context of the report. It considers the ways in which understanding the life experiences and impacts of homelessness are best understood through a focus on the significance of home and ontological security, and the devastating personal impacts that occur when these are lost through the precarity of the private rental sector.

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<sup>21</sup> The Irish government until the 2016 general election was a Fine Gael–Labour Party coalition led by Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD and Tánaiste Joan Burton TD. Subsequent to the general election, the Irish government was a minority coalition led by Fine Gael with Enda Kenny TD as Taoiseach. Subsequent to Mr Kenny's resignation as Fine Gael party leader, the new Fine Gael leader Mr Leo Varadkar TD was elected Taoiseach.

# Section 1: Introduction

## 1.4 Understanding the life impacts of homelessness: the importance of a secure home

This section provides an overview of two linked concepts that are the focus of this report: ‘home’ and ‘ontological security’. These terms are useful in understanding the ways in which the loss of home and the experience of precarious housing conditions impacts peoples’ sense of security, their self-worth, and their ability to function in society.

### 1.4.1 Bringing ‘home’ into the housing crisis

Central to this report is highlighting, through Rapid Build resident stories, the importance of securing and maintaining a home, to personal wellbeing. Feeling ‘at home’ enables people who have experienced homelessness to regain dignity and a sense of self no longer defined by their homeless status.

Although very much interconnected terms, we wish to be clear in highlighting the ways in which *home* differs from *housing*, and why home is the appropriate term when seeking to understand the impacts of homelessness. *Housing* refers to the material dwelling, with housing studies traditionally concerned with the economics of housing markets. *Home*, however, relates to a much more expansive, more emotive set of ideas. Home can vary drastically in scale, from a dwelling to nation, and beyond. It can refer to both the material house itself, or the feeling of security and familiarity that the house might bring. Although widely understood as an inherently positive space, the home can equally be imbued with precarity<sup>22</sup>, violence, and loss. For many Rapid Build residents, their long-term experiences of home have been complicated, painful, and anxiety-inducing. Many participants of this study had felt a sense of not being ‘at home’ within their prior homes due to precarious tenancies, family tensions, experiences of domestic violence, and so on.

It is the feeling of being ‘at home’ that this report is largely concerned with. Do Rapid Build residents feel at home in their new dwellings? How has having security of tenure and a place to call their own altered their sense of security, of self-worth, their hopes and plans for the future? How impactful have their prior experiences of precarious housing been in terms of their ability to feel at home in their new surroundings? What does ‘home’ mean to residents, and what do they need from it? Has Rapid Build housing met those needs?

### 1.4.2 Ontological security and housing precarity

Ontological security is a concept that refers to a sense of order and continuity regarding an individual’s experiences. Sociologist Anthony Giddens defines ontological security as ‘the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments. A sense of reliability of persons and things [...] is basic to feelings of ontological security’.<sup>23</sup> He argues that when these conditions are breached anxiety comes ‘flooding in’ and this threatens an individual’s identity and their sense of ontological security.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In *Precarious Life, the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, New York), the philosopher and feminist theorist Judith Butler (2004) posits that whilst *precariousness* is an inherent human condition, whereby we all rely on, and therefore are vulnerable to, one another, *precarity* is a politically-induced state. Political and social power imbalances mean that some people are more likely to experience precarious conditions (in terms of housing, employment, health, and so on) than others, and that the most powerful in society often benefit from these unequal conditions.

<sup>23</sup> Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity. pp. 92

<sup>24</sup> Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.



A central factor that determines ontological security is undoubtedly peoples' relationship with housing and home<sup>25</sup>. As this study highlights, housing security is fundamental to people conducting their lives with dignity and to have a sense of worth. Without safe, secure and high-quality housing, other crucial aspects of day-to-day life, including mental and physical health, familial relations, education and employment prospects, inevitably suffer. Precarious housing conditions therefore undermine ontological security in a wide variety of ways. Participants regularly spoke of the varied ways in which experiences of homelessness induced physical and mental trauma, such as negative effects on child development, shame and a lack of self-worth, and struggles with anxiety. Such traumas are in large part a consequence of existing in a perpetual state of temporariness in often poor quality and unsuitable accommodation, both before and during homelessness.

The remainder of the report explores resident experiences of homelessness and the impact of Rapid Build housing on their lives, and is divided into four sections. Section 2 explores participants' homeless journeys: how they became homeless, and their experiences of homelessness. Section 3 focuses on resident expectations of Rapid Build housing, with a particular focus on resident concerns regarding modular housing, and the importance of terminology and building aesthetic in combatting these concerns. This section also highlights residents' concerns regarding moving to areas of Dublin that they were not familiar with, and how in some cases this turned out to be a positive experience. Section 4 examines life in Rapid Build housing from residents' perspectives, in terms of both physical attributes and issues with the houses, and the impact they have had on residents' sense of security and self-esteem. Section 5 provides conclusions and recommendations for future Rapid Build developments.

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<sup>25</sup> Colic-Peisker, V., Ong, & Wood, G. 2015. Asset poverty, precarious housing and ontological security in older age: an Australian case study, *International journal of housing policy*, Vol.15(2), p.167-186; Hiscock, R; Kearns, A; MacIntyre, S and Ellaway, A. 2001. Ontological security and the psycho-social benefits from the home: Qualitative evidence on issues of tenure. *Housing, Theory and Society*. 18(1-2): 50-66.



# Section 2

## Homeless Journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

## Section 2: Homeless Journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

### 2.1 Paths to homelessness: the private rented sector and family breakdown

Of the 16 homeless families interviewed in this study, 11 had been evicted from private rented accommodation prior to presenting as homeless, either because the landlord told them they were selling the property, or because they had raised the rents to an unaffordable level. For 6 participants, domestic violence and/or family breakdown had contributed to their presenting as homeless. This reflects city-wide trends in family homelessness, which also identify eviction from the private rented sector and family breakdown as the predominant causes<sup>26</sup>.

Data produced by the DRHE identifies 976 new families who accessed emergency accommodation in the 12-month period from January to December 2017. Of the 976 families, data was available for 925. An analysis of these household's circumstances at presentation to the four local authorities in the Dublin Region reveals that:

- 48 per cent of families (n=446) stated that the primary reason for their experience of homelessness related to a loss or inability to secure private rented accommodation.
- 49 per cent of families (n=449) stated the primary reason for their homelessness was due to family circumstances including: overcrowding living situations; relationship breakdown; and general family circumstances.
- 3 per cent of families (n=30) left their accommodation for other reasons including no income source, victim of anti-social behaviour, etc.

This data is based on information recorded during the initial assessment process which seeks to identify the primary triggers acting as single reasons for homelessness. Previous research commissioned by the DRHE concluded that the number of people leaving private rented accommodation is likely to be understated. In some cases families leaving private rented accommodation returned to family and friends before accessing homeless accommodation as they believed it would be a temporary move while they continued to try to source alternative accommodation in the private rental sector. Unable to do so they consequently presented to their relevant local authority seeking emergency accommodation<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive. 2017. *Reported Reasons for Family Homelessness in the Dublin Region: January to June 2017*.

<sup>27</sup> Stamp, S. 2017. *The Experience of Newly Homeless Families Accommodated by Dublin's Homeless Services in August 2015*, DRHE.



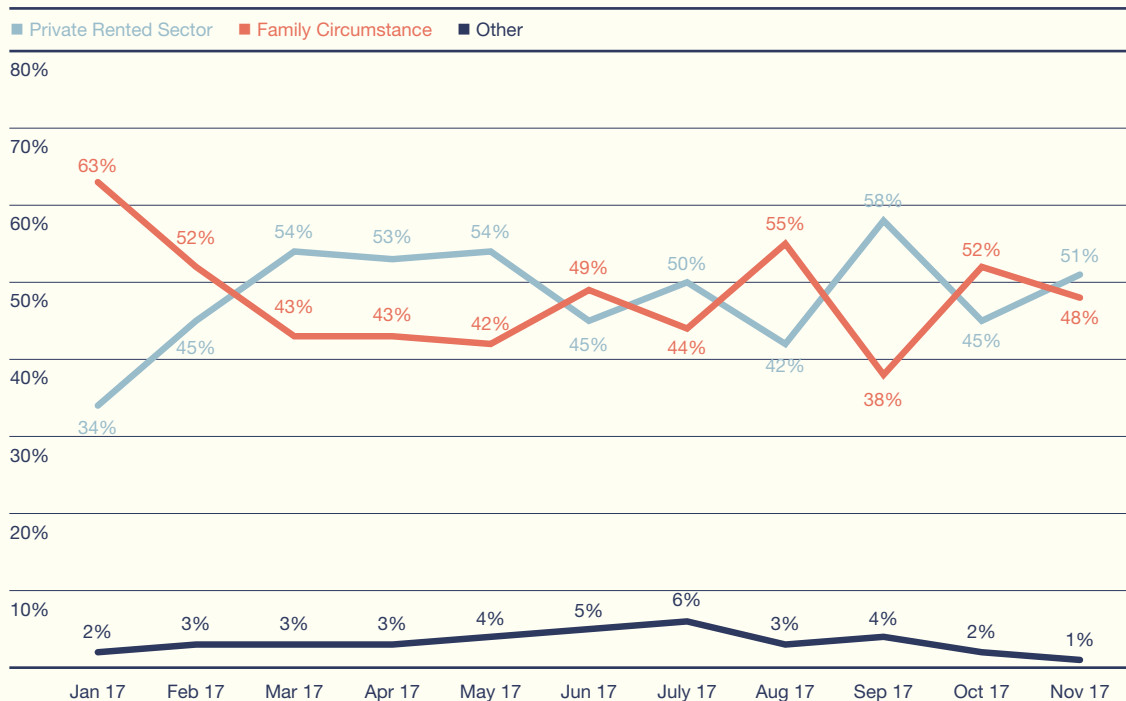


Figure 1 Newly presenting families' reasons for homelessness in the Dublin Region in 2017<sup>28</sup>

Residents often spoke of the poor treatment they received from private landlords, with many not returning tenants' deposits, refusing to repair poor quality properties, and having little empathy or flexibility, despite the fact that their raising the rent would almost inevitably lead to their tenants becoming homeless. Megan<sup>29</sup> recounted being told by her landlady that her already high rent was being raised to an unaffordable level. At the time Megan had a three-month old baby. Despite knowing that she and her baby would likely become homeless as a result, the landlady nonetheless refused to negotiate and Megan was forced to leave:

*"We were renting a house, we were there for a year and we were paying like a lot of money, and it was only after having the baby and she came, the landlord came in and she was like 'Oh, I have bad news for you... I have to put the rent up'... he [her son] was only three months told."*

Áoife's landlord had evicted her supposedly because he was selling the property, only for her to find it being advertised for rent at a higher rate than she had been paying. Alongside this sudden eviction, the house was in a poor condition, and her landlord had consistently refused to make acceptable or safe repairs:

*"There was a hole in the floor... I was heavily pregnant with Emma... there was obviously a leak or something from the washing machine and the whole floor went through... I was in a hole up to my knees and I was pregnant out to here [gesturing]... I rang the landlord... he came down and he put a piece of plywood, like just ripped up the lino, put plywood down, and he glued the lino back together. Now this kitchen is the smallest kitchen in history, it would've cost a fiver to get the thing, new lino, but no, he came out and glued it... the leak was never fixed so eventually the thing gave way again."*

Such stories highlight a clear power imbalance between private landlords and tenants. Private tenants, particularly those on low incomes, have little choice but to live in a state of perpetual housing precarity, with the threat of eviction a looming presence.

<sup>28</sup> DRHE. 2018. January 2018 Dublin City Council Strategic Policy Committee Report.

<sup>29</sup> Residents' names have been changed to preserve anonymity

## Section 2: Homeless Journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

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*“And the other thing about the HAP is, right, say you get a year lease, in a year if he [the landlord] doesn’t want to keep you on, what are you going to do? Go back to homeless accommodation? It’s never secure.”*

*Chloe, Resident*

The linkages between the private rented sector and housing precarity are furthered by a seeming reluctance on the part of landlords to accept tenants who are on social welfare. This made finding a property via HAP extremely difficult. When residing in emergency hotel accommodation with her daughter, Mary visited 57 properties within a 12-month period:

*“You’d go to visit a place and the price would be right and HAP [Dublin City Council Placefinder Service] were willing to help you with that and guarantee paying up front for a year and all that. But the landlords are going to see three professionals come into a house, nurses, solicitors, whatever they are, right, they’re going to take precedence over me... And I never knew people to gazump each other on the rental market, but they did.”*

Chloe, who had been living in a homeless Family Hub prior to moving to her Finglas home, also expressed concern regarding HAP, commenting that there appeared to be a consensus among friends she had made in the Family Hub that finding a HAP property was extremely difficult:

*“That hub I was in, that was all about HAP the whole time I was there. Like we were ringing round for HAP, all the girls there, and they’re still there. There’s girls there longer than me and still hadn’t found a HAP place.”*

Despite the security of income that HAP ensures landlords, the prevailing stigmatisation of people in receipt of social welfare inhibits the ability of those such as Mary and Chloe to secure a private rental property in the first instance. Such tenant profiling by landlords therefore compounds people’s housing precarity on either end of the private tenancy. The private rented sector is difficult to access for those in receipt of welfare: these same people are most likely to become homeless due to landlords raising rents or selling properties. HAP also ultimately does little to provide security of tenure, or remove the prospect of homelessness in the future. As Chloe commented:

*“And the other thing about the HAP is, right, say you get a year lease, in a year if he [the landlord] doesn’t want to keep you on, what are you going to do? Go back to homeless accommodation? It’s never secure.”*

Ultimately, reliance on the private sector, a form of tenure that is inherently limiting in terms of tenure security and tenant rights, risks leaving people vulnerable to re-entering the same cycle of eviction and subsequent homelessness.

Familial breakdown was also a key factor in residents’ journeys into homelessness. This included leaving home in order to escape physically and emotionally abusive relationships with parents or partners. In some instances, housing precarity within the private rented sector and familial breakdown were linked, with the former leading to the latter. Cliona and her husband Kieran had been evicted from their private rented accommodation due to the landlord selling the house. With nowhere else to go, they moved in with Cliona’s mother, where they lived for two years. During this time, tensions built up in the overcrowded house, leading to Cliona and Kieran being forced to move out and couch surf on friend’s sofas before eventually presenting as homeless when this too stopped being an option:



*“The only place we had to go was my Ma’s... So we stayed there ‘til April 2015 and basically we’d been so many years there everything just blew up into a huge argument. I didn’t talk to my Ma for nearly a year when I moved out like, and it wasn’t a choice. I was told ‘Pack your bags. Be gone by the time I get home.’ And it was a serious type of thing, you know? So it was unforgivable what happened, but that’s how we ended up having to go homeless.”*

After years of regular moves between private rented houses, due to landlords selling properties or raising rents, Amy accepted her mother-in-law’s offer for her and her small children to move into her council home with her. Amy saw this as her best opportunity to provide some sense of security and a long-term home for herself and her family:

*“So I moved in thinking that, look, this is probably my only chance of getting a stable home for my children. I moved eight times in seven years on the rent allowance... Eight times!”*

However, tensions began to flare in the household. Amy attributed this to her having suggested building a separate entranceway to the part of the house used most by her mother-in-law, in order to establish some privacy between them:

*“Then I said I wanted to build just a fence around so she could have her... because she used the side entrance. So I was like, ‘So you can have your privacy’... Well that was literally... so then I got told by the kids’ dad that she put a roof over my head and how dare me try and isolate her... One thing led to another and he literally put me out... physically put me out of the house. Everything... all my savings I had, everything I had I put into the house... The house was in bits. I’d done it up, bought all the furniture, the whole lot. He literally just put me out on the street.”*

Amy had felt that her best, perhaps only, option considering the precarity and temporariness of the private rented sector, was to move into what she realised would be a tension-fraught domestic situation. Moving in with her mother-in-law was a risk worth taking for Amy, who felt she could not continue moving her children from house to house in the private rented sector. Cliona and Amy’s experiences highlight the pressures that housing precarity inflicts, not only on tenants themselves, but on their familial networks and bonds. Avenues of support can morph into catalysts of homelessness.

## Section 2: Homeless Journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

Even where families are supportive and provide housing solutions for their relatives, this is ultimately often a short-term form of support. When Maya and her family moved to Dublin from Romania, they initially moved in with her husband's brother and extended family, leading to their living in overcrowded conditions. When the landlord discovered this, he gave the family notice to quit the premises, which meant that they had little choice but to present as homeless to DCC, and were subsequently moved into a hotel for several months. Maya's experience therefore highlights that the private rented sector and a reliance of familial housing support are not enough to ensure housing security and the prevention of homelessness. For migrant families, the relationship between familial breakdown and the city's precarious housing system can prove particularly stark. Irene and her family had migrated to Ireland from her home country in the mid 2000s due to her husband's work. When she decided to leave the abusive relationship, she was unable to find any private rental accommodation that would accept her and her children. Her lack of a deposit and low income severely limited her options. She subsequently had no choice but to stay in hotel and B&B accommodation. As her immigration status had for many years been connected to her husband's, she was not recognised as being eligible for social housing or social welfare, and therefore could not present as homeless to DCC.<sup>30</sup> This meant that she was both paying for the hotel accommodation herself, which on her low healthcare assistant salary meant that she began to accrue high levels of debt, and that she was forced to move from hotel to hotel depending on their availability, rather than be given a relatively long-term slot in a room. This continued for around 8 months, until the Mercy Law Resource Centre – a free legal support service - helped her to appeal her case and she was subsequently recognised as homeless by DCC<sup>31</sup>. Irene's situation was undoubtedly exacerbated by her migrant status, not only legally in terms of DCC's lack of duty to house her, but also emotionally as she had no family networks or support in Ireland:

*“And that's when I saw that family is very important because if I was back in my country... I would live with aunts, sisters, brothers helping. Here on my own was very tough.”*

Irene's story highlights that the more precarious a person's situation, the more likely this is to spiral into other areas of their lives. For Irene, precarity was compounded through various aspects of her life: through her immigrant status, her relationship with her husband, her inability to access housing, all leading to her becoming homeless, with local government having no clear responsibility to house her and her children. The legal assistance she received, including advice to write to local TDs and the Office of the Ombudsman, were pivotal in enabling her access to homeless services.

Family homelessness in Dublin is largely a consequence of the precarity embedded within the private rented sector and/or familial breakdown. These are often interconnected issues, with eviction or the inability to secure private accommodation leading to overcrowding or the exacerbation of pre-existing tensions in family homes. Such issues easily pile on top of each other, and as we have found among our study participants, often leave single mothers in particular with few other avenues but to present as homeless.

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<sup>30</sup> See also Downey, D. 2016. *Action for Inclusion in Europe City Working Groups: Homelessness and Destitution Amongst Excluded Migrants. Audit, Awareness and Activation of Multiple Exclusion Homeless (MEH) Migrants in Dublin.* COMPAS.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.mercylaw.ie>

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*“She never ate sweets or anything until she lived in the hotel... it was a way of filling her up as well like... It’s horrible to say like I had to fill my child up on sweets, like literally that’s what I had to do”*

Jess, Resident

## 2.2 The ‘hotel-isation’ of the housing crisis: life in hotels, B&Bs and homeless Family Hubs

All of the formerly homeless residents who participated in this study had spent months, and in many cases years, living in hotels, B&Bs or homeless Family Hubs<sup>32</sup> (or a mix) while waiting to be housed. Such accommodation usually consists of families living in one or two rooms (depending on the number of children), unable to cook, wash their clothes or have personal privacy. Some residents found that living in this way had extremely detrimental impacts on their children’s mental and physical health and behaviour<sup>33</sup>.

Jess’ daughter had developed stomach problems and rotting teeth during the two years they spent living in a hotel room. Jess associates her daughter’s poor health with the fact that she was predominately eating unhealthy food. Cooking facilities were not provided, and this inevitably meant eating takeaways:

*“She never ate sweets or anything until she lived in the hotel... it was a way of filling her up as well like... It’s horrible to say like I had to fill my child up on sweets, like literally that’s what I had to do.”*

Jess also felt that her daughter’s behaviour had been affected by the two years they had spent living in a hotel. She had become anxious and overly attached to Jess, unwilling to leave her side even in their new, spacious home:

*“She’s more like, you notice with the kids like they’re glued to you, I mean glued to you... they don’t leave you alone... Like it’s because she was in a room with me for two years... she doesn’t know anything else but being with me... It ruins them like, and she won’t go up to the room on her own or anything.”*

Cliona and Áoife both had toddlers when living in hotels. In both cases, their children struggled to develop speech at the expected age, and Cliona’s child had not learned to crawl. Both Cliona and Áoife have since been told by medical professionals - including an early intervention team and behavioural specialist respectively - that this could be a consequence of the trauma of homelessness limiting their ability to hit the usual development targets.

*“Her health struggled big time. She’s only starting to speak, now she’s three at the end of next month... She hit all her milestones, doing fine, a healthy baby, perfect. Then in February we moved into the hotel and about a month later I realised Emma hadn’t spoke.” (Áoife)*

*“He has to see the early intervention team, because he can’t climb or walk stairs and he was kind of a rigid baby. We found out that he has PVL<sup>34</sup>... It’s a very rare condition... But they’re convinced now that it’s down to where we lived, because he hadn’t got access to like move around, to crawl, he never crawled... he had no space at all like.” (Cliona)*

These early experiences of homelessness clearly have long-term implications for young children, whose physical and emotional development are at risk of being stunted due to inadequate living environments.

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<sup>32</sup> Homeless Family Hubs are supported family accommodation built in re-purposed buildings as an alternative to emergency accommodation in hotels and B&Bs. For more information, see: <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/supported-family-accommodation-hubs>

<sup>33</sup> Other studies of homelessness in Dublin have noted similar findings. For example, see: Stamp, S. 2017. *The Experience of Newly Homeless Families Accommodated by Dublin’s Homeless Services in August 2015*, DRHE. Walsh, K and Harvey, B. 2017. *Finding a Home: Families’ Journeys out of Homelessness*. Focus Ireland; Hearne, R and Murphy, M. 2017. *Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPs and Hubs*, Maynooth University; Share, M. & Hennessy, M. 2017. *Food Access and Nutritional Health among Families in Emergency Homeless Accommodation*. Dublin. Focus Ireland; Walsh, K and Harvey, B. 2015. *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness: The Families’ Perspective*. Housing Agency.

<sup>34</sup> Periventricular leukomalacia, or PVL, is a type of brain damage that involves the periventricular white matter of the brain, usually leading to intellectual impairment. For more information, see: <http://www.cerebralpalsy.org/about-cerebral-palsy/cause/periventricular-leukomalacia>



Residents also tended to find that life in hotel and other emergency accommodation restricted their privacy. The majority were not allowed to have visitors in their accommodation, and some, particularly those living in homeless Family Hubs, were subject to regular (in some instances three times a day) inspections of their rooms. Struggling in the B&B accommodation she had been allocated, Kate asked DCC if she could be moved to alternative emergency accommodation. She was then placed in a homeless Family Hub. Whilst this was an improvement in some respects, as she had access to a private kitchen and bathroom, she also found herself under greater surveillance from staff:

*"... They do three checks a day, so ten o'clock in the morning they're knocking at your door, three o'clock they're ringing the little phone that you have in the house, and at eight o'clock they're checking you again... There'd be days that the baby would be sleeping over at ten, and they'd be knocking at me door waking the baby up."*

Residents living in hotels were also subject to restrictions that made it difficult to construct any semblance of feeling 'at home'<sup>35</sup>. This was a particular struggle for those with young children. Áoife has two young children, one of whom was falling behind in her speech development and therefore struggling to communicate. When she was first moved into hotel accommodation, Áoife would take her breakfast upstairs to her room so that she and her children would be more comfortable and relaxed. However, after a while she was told she could no longer do this:

*"I suffer from anxiety and depression just over the last few years and I can't be in like rooms full of people and I feel, like I will literally start to sweat."*

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<sup>35</sup> See also Hearne, R and Murphy, M. 2017. *Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPs and Hubs*, Maynooth University; Walsh, K and Harvey, B. 2015. *Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness: The Families' Perspective*. Housing Agency.

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She recounted a time where, having been told to stop taking her breakfast to her room, she had sat down to eat with her youngest daughter, playing a TV show on her phone to occupy her. The dining room was filled with professionals having meetings, and Aoife was told by another guest to stop playing the programme as it was distracting their meeting. She described feeling 'like a nuisance', and that this incident exacerbated the feeling that she did not belong in the hotel or with the people using the dining room, who she perceived to be judging her. This furthered both her anxiety and inability to feel relaxed in her environment, and the shame that she felt at living in a hotel and feeling that her homeless status was obvious to other guests.

These restrictions also manifested in children not being allowed to socialise or play in hotel hallways, which caused frustration and tension for families:

*"And you feel sorry for the kids with families that are in hotels that have four and five kids, they have nowhere to go, they've nobody." (Anna)*

*"You can't really roar and shout in hotel rooms, because people complain about you then. Then you're given your chances and then if you do get kicked out, the kids are blaming themselves..." (Shaun)*

Shaun felt that the poor treatment he and his family had received while staying in a well-known hotel had been wholly down to their being homeless. This went as far as them having to use a separate door from other guests:

*"We weren't even allowed to use the main door. There was an old door, the old door that everyone used to go in years ago, it's a big huge black door, that's the door we had to go in. Yeah, how degrading was that? Yeah, the homeless door, that's what it was, the homeless door."*

'Poor doors' have been documented in mixed-tenure residential developments<sup>36</sup>, whereby social tenants' entrances to the building are separated from private tenants and owner-occupiers. This appears to show the adoption of similar segregation techniques within the hotel industry. Such actions inevitably contribute to homeless families' sense of shame, further instilling the idea that they are a 'nuisance' better off away from public sight.

However, this did not appear to be true of all hotels. Some residents recounted positive experiences, where they had been treated humanely and with kindness and respect from hotel staff, and built a sense of comradery with other homeless families staying in the hotels<sup>37</sup>. Others, determined to make the best of their situation, did their utmost to make their hotel rooms as homely as possible:

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<sup>36</sup> See for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jul/25/poor-doors-segregation-london-flats>

<sup>37</sup> In a study for Focus Ireland, Walsh and Harvey found similar distinctions among Dublin hotels in terms of how well or poorly homeless families were treated. See Walsh, K and Harvey, B. 2017. *Finding a Home: Families' Journeys out of Homelessness*. Focus Ireland.

## Section 2: Homeless Journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

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*“All homeless people aren’t alcoholics and junkies and everything else. But that’s what people think when they think of homelessness, that we’re all the same.”*

Chloe, Resident

*“You make it your own like we had our room like I had my double bed, she had a single bed. So we had our own duvet covers, pillows... we had everything the way we wanted it... it was actually like a bedroom because you were allowed visitors at some stage... and when my friends used to come up they were like ‘Oh my God, this looks like a bedroom, it doesn’t look like a hotel room’... it makes you feel like you’re more comfortable, you’re more relaxed.” (Jess)*

As will be discussed in more detail in Part 3, material objects, in this case personalised duvets and pillow cases, are a vital element in the construction of home, even in a temporary environment that is not designed to be a family home. A small act of kindness from hotel staff who allowed Jess to partially customise her room had a huge impact on her sense of freedom, and her ability to feel somewhat at home. This highlights that understanding and compassion on the part of hotel staff and management can have a large impact on homeless families’ experience of life in emergency accommodation.

### 2.3 The stigma of homelessness

*“You have the name, it sticks, you know, the name homeless.” (Maggie)*

A key element of residents’ experience of homelessness lay in the ways in which they felt stigmatised as a consequence of their housing situations. There is a continued perception in public understandings that homelessness refers to street homeless, usually single men with substance misuse issues. Many residents felt that others assumed that their homeless status was something that they had ‘brought on themselves’:

*“There is a stigma around it, a lot of people haven’t a clue and they think ‘Oh well, she must be a drug user, she must have been an alcoholic, she must have been this or she must have been that... Come here, I was the very same, a little man with a beard and a hat and a big coat and that was a homeless person to me, it wasn’t me certainly, do you know what I mean.” (Áoife)*

*“All homeless people aren’t alcoholics and junkies and everything else. But that’s what people think when they think of homelessness, that we’re all the same.” (Chloe)*

*“It’s just a label. I’m a person, I’m not a label.” (Irene)*

There is a particular perception regarding young single mothers as purposefully ‘choosing’<sup>38</sup> to become homeless in order to become prioritised on the social housing waiting list. This was an assumption that some residents felt extremely frustrated by, and that further established a sense of shame in being homeless:

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<sup>38</sup> See also Hearne, R and Murphy, M. 2017. *Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPs and Hubs*, Maynooth University.



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*“[What] annoys me is people talking about us... like ‘They’re doing this and they’re doing that just to get a house’. It’s not like that. Some of us have got real good personal reasons why we’re homeless.”*

*Jess, Resident*

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*“I do think it’s wrong that some of the people are walking into the hotels and they’re getting pregnant, two, three kids while they’re in the hotels and no-one sees there’s anything wrong with that, you know what I mean?”*

*Siobhan, Resident*

*“Someone actually turned around to me one time and said, ‘So when did you make yourself homeless?’... it’s kind of like ‘Ah, like you’re making yourself homeless to get a house off the Corporation’. You know what I mean like? That, literally, I’m like ‘I didn’t make myself homeless. I was made homeless.’” (Amy)*

*“[What] annoys me is people talking about us... like ‘They’re doing this and they’re doing that just to get a house’. It’s not like that. Some of us have got real good personal reasons why we’re homeless.” (Jess)*

Such prejudice was expressed by one of the Rapid Build residents who had not formerly been homeless:

*“I do think it’s wrong that some of the people are walking into the hotels and they’re getting pregnant, two, three kids while they’re in the hotels and no-one sees there’s anything wrong with that, you know what I mean?... Don’t go into the hotel, pretend you’re homeless, your fella owns a house, you’re getting pregnant and then the next thing he’s moving in with you.” (Siobhan)*

Chloe, herself a formerly homeless single mother, espoused similar tropes:

*“There is girls out there, right? There is people out there that like are, probably 18, having babies and going... ‘homeless’ to get a house... not that they don’t deserve a house, but there’s other people on the list an awful long time.”*

However, rather than blaming the apparent emergence of such a culture on the young women themselves, Chloe’s frustration lay more with the allocation system itself. She felt that the ever-growing council housing list meant that people were side-stepping it by joining the homelessness list in order to stand a realistic chance of being housed:

*“The two girls in my place that I used to live in [meaning the homeless hub she had lived in prior to moving to the Finglas Rapid Build development]. They had a family home that wasn’t overcrowded or anything, but they’re doing it to get they’re own little family home. Now fair enough, they need it for their family... The way they’re thinking of it is if they stay on the normal housing list, they’re never going to be housed. That’s why they’re doing it. It’s a no-win situation.”*

Here, Chloe highlights one of the consequences of chronic shortages in social housing, suggesting that some people are approaching homelessness tactically in order to combat the near-impossibility of securing a secure home for themselves and their families by any other means.

There was also an acknowledgement among other residents that the pervasiveness of the young single mother trope was a product of wider frustrations having to wait for years, sometimes decades, on the social housing waiting list. As Katarina and Irene noted:

*Katarina: “I know... there is some people who were saying in the B&B where I was staying, they’d been there longer than me, like families had been there longer than me and when I got, when I was told...”*

*Irene: “Yeah, you got it yeah, the jealousy comes in you see.”*

Ultimately, such prejudices are a consequence of disillusionment with the housing system in Dublin, envy borne out of a desperation to be housed after long periods of limbo.

## Section 2: Homeless Journeys: the path to Rapid Build Housing

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*“I used to be mortified, I deleted my Facebook page when I was made homeless because I was just so ashamed and so, like I still haven’t gone back on Facebook, people don’t know me anymore, my friends, I don’t socialise with anybody anymore.”*

*Áoife, Resident*

### 2.4 Shame and stigma

‘Shame’ was a recurrent word used by formerly homeless residents. When she became homeless, Áoife lost touch with many friends and removed herself from social media, as she did not want people to find out that she was homeless. She would lie to people at her exercise class about where she lived, and did her best to conceal her situation from those around her:

*“I used to be mortified, I deleted my Facebook page when I was made homeless because I was just so ashamed and so, like I still haven’t gone back on Facebook, people don’t know me anymore, my friends, I don’t socialise with anybody anymore.”*

*“Nobody in my pole class knew I was homeless, nobody knew anything. They knew I had a few kids and that was it like, and they’d be like ‘Where are you from’ and I’d be kind of like ‘What do I say this week’, you know, I’d be like ‘What did I tell them last week, did I say Sutton, did I say Castleknock, did I just say Coolock or Donaghmede.”*

Áoife’s withdrawal from her social circle, and her finding it necessary to lie to anyone she saw on a regular basis highlights the ways in which homeless people internalise the stigmatising language and assumptions made regarding homelessness. Interestingly, the experience of homelessness also encouraged some to be more compassionate towards other homeless people, and rethink their prior attitudes to the reasons behind homelessness. Mary’s experience helped her to challenge her own prejudices. As a consequence, she decided to help at a soup kitchen whilst she herself was living in a hotel with her daughter:

*“I think maybe at some stages in my life I would have reflected on people as being lazy and just not finding their way but then... not everybody has got the best start in life. Not everybody has even got a basic education... I did help – it’s gas – I was homeless, but I did help the homeless in town, through two friends of mine and they didn’t know I was homeless.”*

Both Amy and Áoife saw them and their children’s unexpected journey into homelessness as a potentially positive event in establishing empathy in their children:

*“And then my kids, although it was very traumatic and all, it actually turned out to be, you know the experience for them... it opened their eyes and hopefully in time it’ll make them have more empathy for people who find themselves in that situation, because we never thought we’d find ourselves in that situation. So I think going forward they will realise that the stigma out there is kind of that everyone that’s homeless is either on drugs or that... but sometimes there can be reasons that are out of your control.” (Amy)*

Áoife recounted a time when her son had seen a homeless man on the street and felt compelled to offer him his pocket money, despite the fact they were also homeless at the time:

*“I brought them into town and we were living in the hotel at the time and we were going down the road and there’s a man in a box and Tim [her son] would be like ‘Mammy, give him some money’, like he’s homeless you know, and I hadn’t the heart to turn around and go ‘Yeah Tim, so are we.’”*

Homeless families are not only having to cope with the trauma of losing their homes and entering a period of extreme uncertainty in often unsuitable accommodation. They are also having to negotiate a newfound life as a stigmatised social group, internalising the simplistic assumptions that are often made around homeless people because of perceived personal failings. This position fails to recognise the absence of a real choice of affordable, secure and quality housing in Ireland today.





# Section 3

# New-Builds, New Neighbourhoods: resident expectations of life in Rapid Build Housing



## Section 3: New-Builds, New Neighbourhoods: resident expectations of life in Rapid Build Housing

### 3.1 What's in a name? The role of terminology and materiality in 'architectural stigma'



Figure 1. Finglas Rapid Build exterior

The developments' modular construction proved central in resident expectations and perceptions of life in Rapid Build housing prior to moving. Some residents had concerns regarding the structural soundness and quality of the buildings, with such fears often connected to historical connotations of post-war prefabricated ('prefab') housing in Ireland, and assumptions that they would be living in containers or mobile homes:

*"It is like really the Nissen huts<sup>39</sup> coming up really from the 1920s, the pre-war things, you're kind of going, 'Oh God, this isn't going to be good'... you know, cardboard homes." (Maggie)*

*"You hear about them coming in flat packs so again you think they're going to be pre-fabby. You know what I mean?" (Mary)*

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<sup>39</sup> Nissen huts were prefabricated, tunnel-shaped buildings originally used to house troops in World War I. They were later often repurposed as temporary housing.



Figure 2. Ballymun Rapid Build exterior

*“First time they were telling me it’s a modular house, and it’s not permanent... I think about something [like a] container. Or, you know something like the mobile house, removable.” (Abshir)*

*“It was all over the news that these were going to be modular for the homeless and all that, but when you say to somebody ‘a modular house’, you expect a portacabin nearby.” (Amy)*

The negative discourse surrounding the term prefab was also acknowledged by policymakers. As a former policy adviser to the government noted:

*“Initially there was a lot of resistance because the word prefab was in the offing and we knew it was going to be a very politically problematic issue... we would have been very concerned about the narrative around prefabs. The word prefab has connotations most people know from school, you know, poor quality, cold, drafty accommodation. I think it’ll always been seen as second rate.”*

For many residents, the term ‘modular’ also evoked imagery of emergency accommodation bearing no or little resemblance to traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ housing. This not only raised concerns regarding the quality of the Rapid Builds, but also highlighted the importance of housing terminology and aesthetics in the reproduction of social stigma. For Rapid Build residents, this centred on the idea that housing developments that are both termed and look ‘modular’ (in that they are made from non-conventional house building materials) stand out as housing for social tenants and the homeless, thus marginalising them. These connotations were prominent in the media in the run-up to the completion of the Poppintree (Ballymun) development. Both the former policy advisers to government interviewed acknowledged this problematic relationship between modular house building methods and social stigma:

*“There’s a stigma associated with social housing and there’s a further stigma that’s associated with homelessness, and when you do something different in terms of how you build... unfortunately it just added to the stigmatisation that was already there. Completely unjustified in terms of the building technology, but because you’re doing something different, it just adds again to the level of stigmatisation, and that’s very hard to overcome.”*

## Section 3: New-Builds, New Neighbourhoods: resident expectations of life in Rapid Build Housing

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*“From day one there was protests on the site... protesters who objected to what they seen as pre-fab houses, they wanted bricks and mortar... There was also a protest from local residents again because the perception was we were building pre-fabs and putting homeless people into them.”*

*Housing Supply Manager at  
Ballymun Rapid Builds*

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*“Just these look more modern and more... Where the ones in Ballymun are just... you’d know they were built for the homeless.”*

*Kate, Finglas Resident*

*“In the context of social housing, as you know there’s always a perception that the quality of what’s being built for poorer people is not all that it might be elsewhere, and the history of prefabricated building in terms of tower blocks, here and in the UK leads to this thing that, you know, all this new-fangled stuff doesn’t end well for the residents.”*

This was also true of the preconceptions held by existing locals worried about the introduction of the nearby modular housing. A housing supply manager who had been involved in developing the Ballymun Rapid Builds commented that:

*“From day one there was protests on the site... protesters who objected to what they seen as pre-fab houses, they wanted bricks and mortar... There was also a protest from local residents again because the perception was we were building pre-fabs and putting homeless people into them.”*

This highlights that ‘modular’ as a term evokes connotations of poorly-built housing, and connects to stigma around the homeless: that the architecture of the Ballymun houses would reflect the potentially troublesome residents housed within them.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in this context, language use and terminology were important to residents when describing their new homes, and there was a clear distinction in terminology use between Ballymun and Finglas residents. Finglas residents, unlike their Ballymun counterparts, tended to frame their homes as separate from the lineage of modular and prefabricated housing, referring to their houses as ‘Rapid Build’, and the Ballymun development as ‘modular’, and therefore distinct. This is despite both developments being constructed and assembled largely offsite: a method commonly described as modular construction.

Finglas residents framed their distinctiveness from the Ballymun development in two key ways. Firstly, the greater brick coverage on the Finglas Rapid Builds appeared to assure Finglas residents that their houses were of a higher quality. Secondly, there was discussion of stigma attached to the Ballymun development as ‘modular housing for the homeless’, a label Finglas residents felt they had side-stepped. Terming the Ballymun development ‘modular’, compared to the Finglas ‘Rapid Builds’ appeared to be a large contributing factor in how residents construed difference between the two.

*“Just these look more modern and more... Where the ones in Ballymun are just... you’d know they were built for the homeless.” (Kate, Finglas resident)*

*“You’ve obviously seen the Ballymun modular houses? They don’t look like these. These look like a proper house. Where I think they should all look like this. Because the modular houses do look half... I know it’s not plastic but...” (Chloe, Finglas resident)*

*“It’s the brick thing... If you could get that brick and stick it onto the Ballymun houses... if you could just put another sheet of bricks and just see the difference it makes.” (Maggie, Finglas resident)*



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*“You know, from outside you can see probably... when you compare to other private houses, you know, they look different. And you know, in the kids view as well... now when they heard, you know, modular homes I don't know what's going on in their minds... they're afraid... hearing that... it doesn't make them feel good, you know, it would make them feel different from other kids.”*

*Viktor and Katarina,  
Ballymun Residents*

Ballymun residents, too, at times expressed concern regarding their ‘modular’ houses. For example, Viktor and Katarina worried that their children felt afraid and singled out living in non-normative housing:

*“You know, from outside you can see probably... when you compare to other private houses, you know, they look different. And you know, in the kids view as well... now when they heard, you know, modular homes I don't know what's going on in their minds... they're afraid... hearing that... it doesn't make them feel good, you know, it would make them feel different from other kids.”*

Amy, another Ballymun resident, felt that the best way to counteract these negative assumptions was to actively encourage a change in terminology:

*“So I was only saying to the girl up there, I was saying ‘maybe stop saying that’. Why don't you just say ‘Baile Na Laochra’, the new houses at the top of Poppintree?’ Why keep saying ‘the modular houses’?”*

Indeed, the differing perceptions of Ballymun as ‘modular’ and Finglas as ‘Rapid Build’ is arguably in part the consequence of a shift in language by DCC.<sup>40</sup> Initially referred to as modular housing in planning and early development stages, since the launch of the Ballymun development, the terminology of ‘Rapid Build’ has been more vigorously promoted. Whilst Ballymun had already been marred by its association with modular housing and its connotations with post-war prefabs, by the time of the Finglas launch, ‘Rapid Build’ had become better established as the formal terminology. Finglas residents subsequently categorised their development as inherently different from the Ballymun houses, which continues to carry a stigma of ‘housing for the homeless’.

The ways in which Rapid Build developments are branded and discussed in policy and media therefore have clear implications for the ways in which their residents, and Dubliners more widely, understand the social function of the developments. ‘modular’ as a term has othering and marginalising implications that suggest lower quality housing and anti-social residents, whilst ‘Rapid Build’ arguably steers discussion from the material construction of the building to more temporal elements of the housing crisis. The need to build ‘rapidly’ in Dublin is difficult to argue with: therefore ‘Rapid Build’ as a term brings with it less controversial and historically loaded implications.

### 3.2 The importance of ‘bricks and mortar’

The desire of residents to differentiate their homes from the socially, culturally and politically loaded ‘modular’ terminology was also reflected in the importance of traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ aesthetics. For example, Anna felt that the bright colours, container-like shapes, and lack of brickwork often associated with modular housing draws attention to the fact that their residents are social tenants. This angered Anna who felt that it furthered the marginalisation of social tenants, and particularly formerly homeless people, framing them as ‘other’, separate from mainstream housing and, by proxy, mainstream society. Such housing, she argued, acts as a means of putting the poor ‘in their place’, a constant reminder of their difference:

*“The way they kind of put things like that together for social housing, it makes you feel that, ‘Oh well you're not private, so we're letting you know that you are in social housing, these are not yours’... We have stigmas all through our lives anyway, so why put it on your house?”*

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<sup>40</sup> This in turn arises from the successful formalisation of the policy commitment to deliver new housing targeted at acute and priority housing need (DHPCLG (2017). Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

## Section 3: New-Builds, New Neighbourhoods: resident expectations of life in Rapid Build Housing

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*“They said they were putting me forward for this house and I was like ‘Oh Finglas like’, I was worried... because I’m from Ballymun I was a bit like... I don’t know where I am, I’ll be lost, and her school and stuff.”*

*Jess, Finglas Resident*

Anna’s concerns highlight the importance of tenure-blindness in housing design as a means of reducing the prevalent social stigma attached to social tenants, and particularly homeless people. This was a subject that residents raised consistently when discussing the aesthetics of the developments. Residents of the Finglas Rapid Builds were particularly pleased with their ‘bricks and mortar’ external skin, seeing it as a means of blending the development into the neighbourhood:

*“These look like normal houses, they just look like a new estate... When people said they were built for the homeless, at least with these, people don’t even know what these houses are for, they just think it’s a new housing estate.” (Kate)*

*“They really did go in and they really done this to the highest standard, and to look at it from the outside, it’d be like walking into a home that you’d bought yourself basically.” (Anna)*

*“I think they don’t stand out as council housing... the brickwork on the front makes them compete with other purchased houses.” (Mary)*

*“[I was worried that] people would be like ‘Ah, they’re houses for the homeless’. But I’ve never heard it about mine... They look like a real house... My neighbour was like ‘Don’t tell anybody’ [that they’re for homeless people] [Laughs]” (Chloe)*

It was of upmost importance to residents that their living circumstances no longer marked them out as different. As Chloe remarked, *“I wouldn’t even call my house a Rapid Build or modular”*. Having a home with a ‘bricks and mortar’ aesthetic forms an integral part of the process of moving on from the trauma of lives previously defined by homelessness. Architectural aesthetics and language use that reflect traditional housing materials (even if they are not predominately made with them) enable people whose lives are continually marred by such stigma to re-establish dignity and self-worth. Particularly for residents who are formerly homeless, being able to live in housing that does not immediately demarcate them to others in the local area as ‘homeless’ is integral in constructing a secure and positive sense of home after, in many cases, years of stigma, shame and social marginalisation.

Architects in the stakeholder meeting noted the value of learning from residents about the material and emotional significance of aesthetic and design decisions which they take in their professional practice. An architect who had specialised in social housing for three decades was particularly cognisant of the need to build ‘ordinary house’:

*“You know I don’t know how many times I’ve had that, where the architect designed social housing scheme is this Legoland colour-DIY scheme down at the end of the town that everybody knows about.”*

The architect continued to explain that the best compliment he could receive is that the homes looked and felt like ‘real houses’ to residents. In respect to Ballymun there was according to one stakeholder ‘an overwhelming sense of disappointment on the part of the media, on the part of those who were trying to paint it as being something unusual’. As a result, some of the negative press arose from ‘the fact that we had nothing to show in Ballymun’ that ‘created a certain buzz about it’. What matters to residents and the architects of Rapid Build homes clearly sits in contrast with the media’s quest for notoriety and infamy to drive public interest and sales.

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*“Finglas!’ I said. ‘No way!’... Oh I was crying on the phone. I didn’t know what to do, right? So I refused it. I rang her back then and I was like, ‘Is there any chance I could have a bit of time to think about it?’ So she gave me, I think it was two days. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat. I kept crying, every time I talked about it, every time my Ma talked about it to me I’d just cry. I didn’t know what to do.”*

*Chloe, Residents*

### 3.3 “I’m not from here”: concerns around moving into new neighbourhoods

Some residents also expressed concern regarding moving to Finglas or Ballymun. Such concerns can be broadly separated into two categories, although these were often linked. Firstly, there are residents who were raised in other parts of the city, and were reticent to leave behind their familial and other social networks. Secondly, there are those who were concerned by the poor reputation of the neighbourhoods, particularly in relation to crime and antisocial behaviour.

*“They said they were putting me forward for this house and I was like ‘Oh Finglas like’, I was worried... because I’m from Ballymun I was a bit like... I don’t know where I am, I’ll be lost, and her school and stuff.” (Jess, Finglas resident)*

*“I remember my friend saying Finglas is not a good area... it’s an area we’ve heard a lot about in the media.” (Irene, Finglas resident)*

Chloe recalled feeling high levels of anxiety and fear when she was first offered a Finglas Rapid Build. She didn’t know anyone in the area, and the perceived pressure she felt to accept a permanent home at the expense of living somewhere unknown left her feeling insecure:

*“Finglas!’ I said. ‘No way!’... Oh I was crying on the phone [to DCC]. I didn’t know what to do, right? So I refused it. I rang her back then and I was like, ‘Is there any chance I could have a bit of time to think about it?’ So she gave me, I think it was two days. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat. I kept crying, every time I talked about it, every time my Ma talked about it to me I’d just cry. I didn’t know what to do”.* (Chloe)

For some, the prospect of being uprooted from their childhood neighbourhoods and into areas with negative reputations did little to allay their sense of insecurity, despite the knowledge that they would be moving into more appropriate and secure housing. This highlights the importance of belonging and sense of place in re-establishing ontological security after the trauma of protracted precarious housing. However, although for some these concerns had certainly not vanished in their entirety, for many residents, these fears were in part allayed by the size and quality of the houses, as the findings in Part 3 attest to. For others, the prospect of moving away from the neighbourhoods they heralded from was in and of itself a positive element of their new homes. Shaun, a Ballymun resident, was glad to be removed from the ‘bad crowd’ he had been involved in the area he had grown up in, whilst Róisín was relieved to be away from the centre of the city where she had grown up, an area she saw as infinitely more violent and antisocial than her new local area:

*“Like people say Ballymun’s a rough area. I have never seen a fight, I’ve never seen a robbed car, I’ve never seen... I mean I’m from a rough area in city centre. Believe me, you’d see a robbed car every 10 minutes. I was used to that, to people selling on corners” (Róisín, Ballymun resident)*

For some residents, therefore, the opportunity for a new start in an area that does not carry with it the baggage of past negative experiences of home, was a source of contentment, rather than insecurity.

# Section 4

## Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing



## Section 4: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing

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*“The day I moved in here was the best day of my life. I swear to God. The best day of my life, I swear... This is our first proper home, you know?”*

*Cliona, Resident*

### 4.1 “Like winning the Lotto”: housing and support

*“The day I moved in here [getting upset] was the best day of my life. I swear to God. The best day of my life, I swear... This is our first proper home, you know?” (Cliona)*

Overall, residents were extremely satisfied with the size, quality and affordability of their new homes. For Finglas residents, and Ballymun residents who had signed a permanent contract, finally having a permanent place to call home proved hugely beneficial in their ability to regain a sense of security and stability for themselves and their children. Many residents described their newfound circumstances as feeling like ‘winning the lotto’, at once highlighting both the joy and disbelief in their altered circumstances.

Indeed, there have been rumours circulating among residents that they had been chosen to live in the Rapid Builds at random:

*Maggie: “I heard that we were picked and it was a draw, a raffle.”*

*Irene: “Really, was it? I’ve never been that lucky.”*

*Katarina: “Is that how they did it? It really was a lotto wasn’t it.”*

The rumour appeared to stem from a local church newsletter that had mentioned a ‘draw’ taking place for the Finglas Rapid Builds, although this is in all likelihood a misinterpretation of the newsletter’s content. However, the residents’ assumptions that their being housed was based on luck and chance highlights a wider attitude to social housing provision in Dublin that is indeed akin to playing the lotto: that they had for so long been hoping for something that they never truly believed they would attain.

Relatedly, the consensus among residents was one of overwhelming gratitude. In Ballymun, residents were particularly grateful for the houses being fully furnished, and essential groceries such as milk, cereal and bread, being provided when they first moved in. Residents felt that this was a caring and considered response from DCC, a display of compassion and understanding that residents were often entering life in the Ballymun Rapid Builds with very little income<sup>41</sup>:

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<sup>41</sup> Walsh and Harvey note in their research the impact that moving into unfurnished homes can have on increasing family debt: Walsh, K and Harvey, B. 2017. *Finding a Home: Families’ Journeys out of Homelessness*. Focus Ireland.

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<sup>42</sup> See Beatty, T.K., Blow, L. and Crossley, T., 2009. Heat or Eat?: An empirical analysis of UK cold weather income support. *AGRIS: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*.

<sup>43</sup> The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) operating under DCC, adopts a shared service approach across South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council and Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown County Council. It is the lead statutory authority in the Dublin region and co-ordinates responses to homelessness including the disbursement of Section 10 funding for homeless services. From 2009, the DRHE implemented the *Pathway to Home* model, a housing-led approach to homeless services which emphasises the provision of housing with supports and services that prevent homelessness. The Support to Live Independently (SLI) scheme, a visiting housing support initiative, is part of the *Pathway to Home* model. The service is operated by three Section 10 funded voluntary organisations in the region and provides households that have progressed to independent living with regular supports for a period of six months. The visiting support service is voluntary and households may end their involvement before the six months conclude or, depending on need, may have supports extended beyond six months.. The householder is also given option for continued or future engagement with the service provider for support if required (Homeless Agency (2009). *Pathway to Home*. Dublin: Homeless Agency).

*"It was furnished and also it was... the day we came here, they put cornflakes and bread and milk and... All beds is ready. They got the bedsheets and everything, you know... And I was really thankful for that, appreciate that because I don't have money at the time and I can't do anything."* (Abshir)

*"It's everything. I mean, when I went to the homeless I had not a thing, all I had was clothes and the kids, so when I moved here we had literally knives, forks, spoons, plates, everything, not just the basics. We literally had the beds made, we had towels, we had everything. So we literally got a good start."* (Róisín)

The design and energy efficiency of the Rapid Builds also impressed residents of both developments. Positive feedback focused on the downstairs toilets and utility rooms as 'luxury' additions to the houses' design. Residents were pleased with the A-3 energy rating of their homes, often noting that their ability to retain heat meant that utility bills will be lower than in older properties. This is a particularly helpful design feature for families on low incomes, removing 'heat or eat' decision-making all-too common in the housing experiences of people on low incomes<sup>42</sup>.

*"To be honest with you all I could do was cry when I moved in here because everything was immaculate, everything... And it's very economical. I don't have to put the heating on. Even first thing in the morning, it's not cold."* (Mary, Finglas resident)

As well as praising the Rapid Build design, residents in Finglas also commented on the ongoing support they received, both from the DCC Housing Area team, and from Focus Ireland keyworkers.<sup>43</sup> They were grateful for the receipt of ongoing support as they adjust to their new homes, rather than being left to their own devices as soon as they moved in. Particularly for residents who had spent many years in emergency accommodation, or who had young children whose development had suffered as a consequence of homelessness, these continuing relationships make them feel cared for and reduces their anxiety. Many Rapid Build residents have also lost familial and other social support networks along their journeys through homelessness: to feel as though they are not alone has therefore proven to be invaluable in moving into the next stage in their lives.

*"[referring to the DCC Area Housing team] She couldn't have done enough for us... I do believe that Dublin Corporation... did deserve kind of to be put out there for the hard work that they done to help us, and to keep us calm."* (Anna)

*"[referring to DCC] They've tried to support us like trying to... make us fit in properly. They didn't dump us like, they are kind of looking after us, weaning us slowly but in a good way."* (Irene)

## Section 4: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing

The importance of continual support was also made clear by some Ballymun residents showing concern that they no longer receive keyworker visits: this appeared to be the case for both permanent and temporary residents.<sup>44</sup> Whilst this was certainly not an issue for all, some felt a sense of insecurity after their keyworker had left her job, with little information as to whether another member of staff would be replacing her:

*"[talking about not having information regarding bin collection] They don't give you an answer, they don't give you nothing, you know. And now the caseworker left I think and we don't anymore have a caseworker."* (Viktor)

For some, having security of tenure in a house equipped for their needs has enabled them to make plans for the future, something their prior precarious housing circumstances had prevented them from doing. For example, Áoife and Mary had both once been successful businesswomen. The aftermath of recession, coupled with family breakdown and illness (both physical and mental), had damaged their confidence and left them with little energy to envisage the prospect of future employment. Now, a renewed sense of security in their domestic lives has provided them with the time and emotional energy to consider their next steps. For Áoife, this has meant pursuing her longstanding passion for cars, and Mary has plans to volunteer at a cancer services centre and consider starting a new business venture.

Áoife and Mary's hopes for the future further highlight the ways in which feeling a sense of security in the home enables people to reconnect with other aspects of their lives when their everyday lived experiences are no longer defined by being homeless. This returns to discussions earlier in the report about the integral relationship between home and ontological security. Without a safe and secure home environment, other important elements of life, such as employment and social connections, become more difficult to secure.

### 4.2 Making it home: furnishing, fittings and belonging

The role of material objects in establishing a sense of home is of particular significance for many who have been living in precarious housing circumstances for many years. Mary had had her belongings in storage in a British city for years, having moved back to Dublin, been diagnosed with a serious illness, and been thrown out of the family home due to a tumultuous relationship with a family member. A large musical instrument took pride of place in her new Rapid Build home: being reunited with this and other objects from her past home proved hugely important in reminding her that her life had not always been dominated by ill health and homelessness:

*"... It's like when your stuff comes out of storage and looking at pictures, and I got really emotional because it just hit me, like 'oh my God I had a life before this'. It's not just me kind of telling people."* (Mary)

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<sup>44</sup> SLI support is offered for 6 months but families may receive continued support beyond this period (subject to approval of the local authority). For example, in an evaluation of SLI by Focus Ireland and PMVT in 2014 the maximum duration of support received by any of the 39 clients interviewed was 14 months (see TSA Consultancy (2014). Support to Live Independently (SLI) Evaluation. Dublin: PMVT and Focus Ireland). In addition, families can avail of other supports such as the social work service and the mediation service provided by DCC's housing welfare support service and other social, community and voluntary support services directly or indirectly funded through DCC.



For Mary, being able to fill her home with relics of her past life helped to re-establish her sense of self, that there are many elements to who she is beyond precarious and traumatic life experiences. This proved equally true of her changing relationship with objects that she had used to make her and her daughter's life in the hotel more homely:

*"Although there was another bed in the Travelodge, we tried to make it homely and we put a throw over it, and that's one of the throws there actually, we let the dog have it now. Because it's those things you don't want to see anymore, if you know what I mean."*



Figure 3. Mary's sofa throw-turned-dog bed

The throw represents a period in her life that Mary does not wish to be reminded of, the objects altered use from sofa throw to dog bed symbolising her desire to detach her past experiences of home as a hotel from her new, permanent home.

Maggie, too, was excited at the prospect of making her new house home through material objects, choosing an electric fireplace as a centrepiece for her living room, and pointing out the stylish chrome lighting fixtures that had come with the house:

*"... Then there was another guy commented over the fixtures, the silver chrome fixtures... he [her brother] was going, 'Oh my God, I couldn't even afford chrome fixtures when I was getting the [his] house.'"*

*"[referring to her fireplace] ... I got it for the ambience. You know, kind of to have a feature."*



Figure 4. Maggie's electric fireplace

Maggie also enthusiastically discussed future decorating plans with her neighbour, Irene. Both residents were excited at the prospect of painting their homes, with Irene cheerfully lamenting chastising her grandson for leaving dirt marks on the white hallway walls:

*"I never thought I'd be that type of person, 'Oh, my walls!'"*

For Mary, Maggie and Irene, being able to furnish their homes to their tastes acted as an important therapeutic re-instatement of their personalities into their domestic lives. Home decoration, often taken for granted and clearly inhibited when living in emergency accommodation (Mary and Irene) or with relatives (Maggie) for many years, is a vital means of constructing home, and ones' sense of self within it.

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*"I never thought I'd be that type of person, 'Oh, my walls!'"*

*Maggie, Resident*

### 4.3 Settling in: cracks, creaks and concerns

Whilst residents were generally positive about their houses, there were common concerns regarding structure and longevity. Whilst there was certainly a strong sense of relief among residents that they had finally procured a long-term home, this was in some cases coupled with anxiety regarding the quality of the Rapid Builds and whether they would stand the test of time. The most frequently raised concerns were:

#### **Across both developments:**

- In some Finglas houses, the heating and hot water were still not working, or were intermittent. Across both developments, many residents remained unsure of how to use their boilers.
- The out-of-bounds nature of the attics. Residents raised the point that the size of the attics means that there is room for potential house expansion, so long as solar panel fixtures are safely covered. This would be particularly useful for families who remain living in overcrowded conditions, or those who plan to have more children in the future.

## Section 4: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing

- Some of the Ballymun, houses remain without front gates. This is of particular concern for parents with young children, who feel it is unsafe to let their children play outside, particularly as the majority of the Ballymun Rapid Builds face onto a main road.
- Some residents wanted more information on the possibility of purchasing their homes in the future, and were concerned regarding the likelihood of securing a mortgage for a non-conventional house.

### Specific to Ballymun:

- Wall quality. Many residents highlighted cracks in the plastering, and although some had been told that this was due to the plaster 'settling', they remained unsure as to what this meant. There were also complaints that it is not possible to hang anything substantial from the walls without them falling off. This was often attributed to the walls being hollow and perceived to be poor quality.<sup>45</sup>
- Some residents, of the Balbutcher Lane-facing houses specifically, complained of an ongoing smell of sewerage in their downstairs toilets.

### 4.4 Perception and acceptance: community and neighbourhood relations

As previously mentioned, existing local residents near both the Ballymun and Finglas sites had protested against the Rapid Builds. Locals appeared to be particularly concerned by the fact that the Rapid Build tenants would consist of homeless families. As discussed in Part 1, there is a pervasive stigma regarding homelessness in Dublin, the word 'homeless' often connoting drug and alcohol misuse, anti-social behaviour, and 'cheating the system' (usually in reference to single mothers 'pretending' to be homeless in order to jump to the top of the social housing waiting list).

These local tensions appear to have reduced in Finglas. Rapid Build residents felt that, although they had heard other locals making derogatory comments about the development, there seemed to be an acknowledgement that there had been no issues regarding antisocial and other assumed behaviours. Sarah, a member of the DCC Housing Area team, felt that this was in some part due to an interview process conducted by DCC with potential residents, and their lobbying to include a range of (non) homeless families from the waiting list. She felt that this, along with the fact that the Finglas Rapid Builds were providing permanent tenancies rather than emergency accommodation, appeased existing local residents:

*"So they were all originally meant to be homeless, thirty-nine, so we negotiated... we did a bit of a mix. So we ended up housing eleven from the housing list and the rest were homeless... And what we did then was we Garda checked everyone and interviewed some that stuff came back on them. And some we said, 'we'll house you, but not down there', because we're trying to... because we had so much trouble with the neighbours, we were, you know, we were trying to keep it as... I don't know what you'd say, anything with anything antisocial, we were trying to keep it out."*

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<sup>45</sup> It is usual for plaster to take up to 12 months to settle, however the walls are not suitable for hanging pictures without the use of a wall brace

## Section 4: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing

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*“They need to build a community. The one at Ballymun would have been just plonked, whereas they moved on then to Finglas to be more of a kind of a residential area that was mature, beside a church or beside a school.”*

*Maggie, Resident*

The Housing Area team felt that a mixed approach to housing allocations would reduce some of the local opposition to the Finglas Rapid Build development. Rather than be understood solely as ‘housing for the homeless’, it was felt that a socially mixed development would reduce resistance. Although this arguably feeds into public conceptions of homeless people as inherently antisocial, Finglas residents, too, appreciated this decision, and felt that a mixed community encouraged a less biased understanding of the development. This also relates to earlier discussions in Part 2, whereby Finglas residents, far more than their Ballymun counterparts, felt that the Rapid Build development ‘blended in’ to the surrounding community and did not pinpoint them as formerly homeless families or social tenants.

Contrastingly, Ballymun residents expressed concern about the behaviour of some of their neighbours. Indeed, Megan in part made the decision not to accept the offer of a permanent tenancy because of fears that her children were being exposed to antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood:

*“I didn’t like what was on the road, the people that lived on the road. Before we moved up here like my child never knew about drugs and when we moved up here like it was constantly like they were all out smoking their joints of weed in the gardens and standing there in their pyjamas and like, and then he was like ‘Oh, the smell of them drugs and all’, you know?... They were all out screaming and shouting on the road... I would have visitors here like and the screaming and shouting that would be going on, on the road like, it was embarrassing.”*

It can be argued that the decision to mix the Finglas development in part encouraged the dilution, if not complete removal, of such negative stereotypes that connect homeless people with antisocial behaviour. This enabled residents to be understood by the local community as new residents, rather than as ‘homeless’ families who might be considered socially troublesome.

Indeed, for many residents, the word ‘blended’ was commonly used to differentiate the Finglas and Ballymun Rapid Builds. Some residents felt that one of the key differences between the two sites lay in how the developments fitted in to the existing neighbourhood. Maggie saw this as key to ensuring the success of both existing and future Rapid Build developments in the long-term:

*“[Talking about future Rapid Build sites] They need... to build a community, and it’s not just plonked, you know. The one at Ballymun would have been just... plonked... whereas they moved on then to Finglas to be more of a kind of a residential area that was mature, you know, beside a church or beside a school, you know.”*

Clearly, planning regarding the relationship between the Rapid Build developments and the existing neighbourhoods and communities into which they are introduced is important to residents. This is in terms of both their ability to feel at home and accepted by existing residents, and as a means of escaping the stigma of being labelled as ‘homeless’.

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*“I was delighted when we got it, a lovely house, but it is not a home. I am not from Ballymun, so that was one of the reasons why I didn’t want to stay... I just didn’t feel it, homely... you need to have that feeling, like that homely feel. Like my son didn’t want to move... because of all his little friends.”*

*Megan, Resident*

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*“My kids are very scared to play outside, when they come back from school they are always in here. There is something like, they will break your car.”*

*Constance, Resident*

#### 4.5 Managing the shift from temporary to permanent residency in Ballymun

A year after they had first moved in, Ballymun residents were offered permanent tenancies. Whilst many had been hoping for this outcome, and saw the prospect of remaining in their houses in the long-term as a positive outcome, this was not the case for all. At the time of writing, 6 of the 22 households remain on a temporary contract. The reasons behind this vary depending on personal circumstances. One resident remains living in overcrowded conditions (living with her 5 children in a 3-bed house). Another does not want to live far from their family and social networks on a long-term basis. Others had experienced abusive, potentially racially-motivated, behaviour from neighbours, and did not feel safe in the local area as a consequence:

*“I was delighted when we got it, a lovely house, but it is not a home. I am not from Ballymun, so that was one of the reasons why I didn’t want to stay... I just didn’t feel it, homely... you need to have that feeling, like that homely feel. Like my son didn’t want to move... because of all his little friends.” (Megan)*

*“My kids are very scared to play outside, when they come back from school they are always in here. There is something like, they will break your car.” (Constance)*

*“... You are asking me to stay in three bed, which is... I’m entitled to four. You know I have a big family. Why is it like that? Don’t know why they do that to me.” (Constance)*

*“If you are a foreigner... You will be afraid, you know, to leave [your] kids and for ourselves as well, you know. Because one day a small boy said to my husband “I’m going to kill you one day... That’s kids you know, but kids, they’re growing up, and OK now they can’t harm us or they can’t do any bad thing to us, you know, but when they grow up, you know, in a few years...” (Katarina)*

These residents had moved into the Ballymun Rapid Builds under the assumption that they would be there until they were able to access a permanent council home that suited their needs. According to two families who do not wish to stay, they have been told verbally by a DCC staff member that if they do not sign permanent contracts they will have to return to living in hotels or B&B. Although this does not appear to have happened, it nonetheless left some residents feeling pressured into accepting houses they had always understood to be temporary accommodation. This is problematic if Rapid Build housing is to be understood as a means of alleviating stress and trauma related to experiences of homelessness. Such responses dismiss the importance of choice and freedom to make long-term decisions regarding housing and home. This is particularly vital for families who have been living in housing precarity for many years. To deny them the right to choose where they call home in the long-term, so close to the end of their homeless journey, threatens to further perpetuate residents’ sense of fear, uncertainty, and lack of worth in relation to their housing circumstances.

## Section 4: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing



### 4.6 Continuing resident insecurities and trauma

Residents were by-and-large extremely satisfied with their new Rapid Build homes, praising their newfound permanent tenures as integral in establishing a sense of security and hope for the future not felt for many years. However, for some residents there remained a profound sense of insecurity. For Jess, signing a permanent contract had not yet alleviated for her an ongoing sense that the security of her new housing would be taken away from her:

*"I'm still waiting for someone to knock at the door and say, 'You have to move again'... it's like I'm here for life now but I'm still like, I'm still mentally broken... even though we're here it's like it's still not... for me it's still not happening."*

After a childhood spent in an abusive home environment, followed by two years living with her daughter in a hotel, the provision of secure, long-term housing does not yet feel real for Jess. Many other residents also commented that they couldn't believe that they finally had a permanent home.

*"I wouldn't believe it until I signed the document [permanent contract]. I wouldn't... because they could take it off you any time, you know?" (Cliona)*

*"I have to be honest, for the first two weeks, every morning I woke up, I was still kind of like 'Oh God, it is real, it did happen.'" (Mary)*

Indeed, the regularly used phrase that being offered a Rapid Build house had felt like 'winning the lotto' highlights that, for those who have been living in precarious housing for many years, the promise of a long-term home, something that many who have not experienced such housing hardship take for granted, does not automatically ensure an instantaneous sense of security. Siobhan explained that a neighbour of hers had installed a security camera that looked directly into her daughter's bedroom:



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*“As soon as I moved in all the alarms went up. And your man keeps knocking and saying to me, which is quite a bit of a bully your man, ‘Ah you need the alarm’, and I said, ‘No I don’t need an alarm’.”*

*Siobhan, Resident*

*“... The camera is pointing straight into her [her daughter’s] bedroom... I think it should be a case of they’re getting the alarms and stuff like that the council should check and see to make sure... they’re not invading people’s privacy... As soon as I moved in all the alarms went up. And your man keeps knocking and saying to me, which is quite a bit of a bully your man, ‘Ah you need the alarm’, and I said, ‘No I don’t need an alarm’.”*

Siobhan was frustrated by the seeming paranoia of her neighbours, who were inadvertently disrupting her own privacy in their attempts to make themselves feel more secure. She, and several other Finglas residents, had mentioned that a salesman had been door-knocking on the estate selling expensive alarm systems. This is potentially both financially and emotionally exploitative, persuading residents that such alarm systems are necessary, and encouraging them to spend money that they may not have.

Indeed Lauren, another Finglas resident, had spent a significant amount of money on an alarm system installed by a door-to-door salesman, only to be told by a council employee that the system had not been installed properly. Clearly, security was a priority for residents, leading to some making choices to rush into installing unsuitable alarm systems as soon as they moved in. Such insecurity is in some cases related to residents being fearful of living in an area they are not familiar with.

*“Like I’m still going to bed and I do be like ‘Oh, what’s that noise?’ Because as I said coming to a new area, if I had been in my own area I don’t think I’d be afraid as much because you know everyone around. I don’t know anybody... The other night I brought my Hoover pole to bed with me... I just left it at the end of my bed just in case. I couldn’t set my alarm, it wouldn’t work for me.” (Chloe).*

## Section 4: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing

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*“My younger daughter, she was, she would bottle it in, but one day she burst, she slapped me. She’s the one person I never expected, you know. But simply because I’m in this field [mental health nursing] I could tell that this person has been bottling it in, and now is the time to just burst, you know... it’s like a time bomb waiting to explode.”*

*Irene, Resident*

For Chloe, housing insecurity had been replaced with a sense of insecurity regarding her new local area. Although she was hopeful that she would begin to feel safer once she had gotten accustomed to the local area and met more of her neighbours, her fears highlight that, particularly in the aftermath of traumatic housing experiences, establishing a sense of long-term security is clearly contingent on more than permanent housing tenure.

This prevailing sense of insecurity among residents manifested in other ways. Prior to being made homeless, Shaun and his family had a dog. They had been forced to give her away when they moved into hotels due to their strict no-pets policy. He recounted how devastated he and the family had been, but that, despite their now having a permanent home, he would not consider getting another dog:

*“Now that we have a home here I don’t think I would. I know we have a back garden and all like for the dog, but I don’t think I would get a dog again.*

How come? Is it that she’s irreplaceable?

*“No, it’s not that she’s irreplaceable. It’s just the kids, they just got so attached to the dog and every day they were crying... So I don’t think I’d like to go through that again.”*

Shaun’s response highlights that despite knowing they now have a permanent home that would be suitable for a pet, a continued sense of insecurity prevails, as Shaun cannot believe that he will not be put in the same situation in the future.

Irene highlighted the ongoing effect of homelessness on her children’s mental health, recounting a time when her daughter uncharacteristically lashed out at her:

*“My younger daughter, she was, she would bottle it in, but one day she burst, she slapped me. She’s the one person I never expected, you know. But simply because I’m in this field [mental health nursing] I could tell that this person has been bottling it in, and now is the time to just burst, you know... it’s like a time bomb waiting to explode.”*

Although now in secure and permanent housing, Irene’s daughter continues to experience deep-seated trauma, again highlighting the long-term consequences of homelessness.

Such stories bring to light something of a time-lag when it comes to residents’ ability to re-establish a sense of ontological security: to understand their new housing circumstances as genuinely permanent and secure. This alludes to the long-term implications of homelessness as a condition that continues to shape and define peoples’ experiences of home and security even once they are no longer homeless. Permanent tenancies, although clearly integral, are therefore one element of the support needed for the formerly homeless, whereby more long-term emotional and psychological support may prove vital for the re-installation of ontological security and a positive sense of home.







# Section 5

# The future of Rapid Build Housing: conclusions and recommendations

## Section 5: The future of Rapid Build Housing: conclusions and recommendations

This final section of the report provides conclusions and recommendations based on resident experiences. The first section outlines three headline conclusions. The second provides recommendations regarding both the current Rapid Build developments in Ballymun and Finglas, and future Rapid Build schemes.

### 5.1 Headline findings

1. High-quality, secure and permanent social housing provided through the Rapid Build scheme is an unequivocal and fundamental solution to Dublin's housing crisis for many homeless families. This could be extended to many more families through the up-scaling of delivery, the political will, committed investment, and a more responsive planning system to achieve this.
2. Solving Dublin's housing crisis cannot be fully realised without acknowledging the private rented sector as a major route into homelessness. The majority of people who present as homeless do so due to eviction from private rented housing. This is compounded by the stigmatisation of people in receipt of social welfare often making landlords reluctant to engage with HAP. It will remain extremely difficult to reduce rates of homelessness in Dublin without serious reform to the private rented sector. Increased and persistent lobbying of central government is therefore vital in pushing for fundamental change in this sector.
3. While we acknowledge that there is a clear need to improve suitability and standards in interim and emergency accommodation, levels of homelessness are unlikely to reduce if the insecurity of the private rented sector is not tackled and the quantity of permanent social housing solutions is not urgently addressed.
4. The report highlights the importance of 'user-led' approaches to research and policymaking. Residents of Rapid Build, or any other form of social housing, are ultimately best-placed to inform policymakers, architects, and other professional stakeholders about their needs and experiences. They should be treated as central agents in decision-making processes around housing provision and support. Indeed, focus group participants suggested that they should be involved in consulting and advising on future Rapid Build projects, and meeting with future residents to share their stories and reflections. This is something that DCC should consider seriously as a means of providing better lines of communication between service providers and residents.
5. Residents want and deserve a stronger presence and voice in the media to address and challenge stigma and negative tropes of homelessness. We recommend a community-led programme of events and research that fosters dialogue between residents, policymakers, the media, and the wider public.

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*“I suppose the issue is that if the technology hasn’t been tested properly, as with some of the 60s technology then you end up with a very significant problem because you’ve replicated the same mistake.”*

*Former policy adviser to the government*

## 5.2 Recommendations for Rapid Build

There are strong concerns among residents regarding the longevity of Rapid Build housing. It has been widely cited that the developments have a lifespan of approximately 60 years. Although this is not necessarily a cause for concern in and of itself, there is some concern that the rapid roll-out of non-traditional housebuilding technologies may become structurally and socially problematic in the future, as has been the case with the concrete tower blocks of the 1960s and 70s. As a former policy adviser to the government noted:

*“I suppose the issue is that if the technology hasn’t been tested properly, as with some of the 60s technology then you end up with a very significant problem because you’ve replicated the same mistake.”*

In order to avoid falling into historical traps of short-sighted housebuilding, as in the post-war eras of prefabricated and precast reinforced concrete building systems, DCC should ensure that they have well-planned refurbishment strategies in place over the coming decades.

Connected to this, residents’ knowledge of Rapid Build housing, in terms of the construction process, lifespan and potential to buy their property in the future, was often limited. It would therefore be useful to hold a meeting with future prospective Rapid Build residents to fully explain how they are constructed, and how they differ from more traditional houses. This could prove doubly useful as a ‘myth-busting’ exercise regarding the terms ‘modular’ and ‘Rapid Build’. The handbook provided to residents when they first move in could include this information. For example, it was confirmed in the stakeholder meeting by architects that the stated 60-year lifespan of Rapid Build houses is not any shorter than a standard build: ‘they are permanent houses in whatever form... 60 years is the highest level of guarantee that you can receive on a structure... for any house’. Such information would be invaluable if shared with residents from the outset.

Many Rapid Build residents continued to experience some form of trauma or insecurity related to their homeless experience. Whilst DRHE currently provide invaluable ongoing support for formerly homeless families, assurances that funding commitments will continue to prioritise and extend such support are needed. On the local level, it could also be beneficial for DCC to initiate resident meetings and offer psychological and other wellbeing support services.

The importance placed by residents on the external appearances of their new homes should not be considered banal, or dismissed, in policy discussions given their significance for shaping tenants’ sense of place – and their right to home – in the wider world. While the emergence of Rapid Builds reflects the welcomed move towards a wider set of housing typologies than just ‘bricks and mortar’, future planning for new developments, especially those at high density, must be cognisant of how much the appearance of social housing matters to residents. Bricks and mortar are not the ‘silver bullet’ to resolve lived experiences of homelessness and housing exclusion, but nor should policy makers underestimate or discount the emotional resonance they have to groups who have experienced stigma and shame through ‘housing for the homeless’-style designs that marks them out as different (e.g. concrete and bright-coloured cladding).

We encourage investment in a longitudinal research approach. This is something that residents have also indicated they are keen to collaborate on. Over the coming years, it will be important to understand how resident experiences change over time. What issues are resolved? Which currently undetected issues will emerge, both in terms of the houses themselves, and the lives led within them?

# Annex 1:

# The design and development costs of Dublin's Rapid Build Housing Programme 2016/2017



## Rapid Build: Baile na Laochra, Ballymun

### Floor Areas



3 Bedrooms



5 People



22 Units



97.7m<sup>2</sup>

### Details on Building Materials

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Superstructure                   | <p>Timber-frame factory-built volumetric construction for inner leaf and internal walls.</p> <p>External walls are cavity construction with brick to ground floor outer leaf and fibre cement board cladding to first floor outer leaf</p>   |
| Sustainability                   | <p>A3 BER rating</p> <p>Photovoltaic panels on the roofs provide electricity to each dwelling</p> <p>Air tightness and thermal insulation control the loss of heat through the building fabric</p> <p>Thermally broken triple-glazed windows have been installed</p> <p>Low energy LED lightbulbs are installed throughout the buildings</p> <p>A 3-zone control system for heating and domestic hot water is designed to reduce energy consumption by allowing timed zone control for separate floors and DHW and individual control of heating to all rooms</p> <p>A Demand Controlled Ventilation (DCV) system with a humidity sensitive strip measures the air quality and adjusts the rate of air exchange constantly</p> |
| Cladding (incl. fire resistance) | <p>External ground floor walls are cavity construction with brick outer leaf, which is considered Class A1 non combustible materials</p> <p>Fire stopping and cavity barriers are used throughout as required by Part B of the Irish Building Regulations, including at party walls (cavity wall and at roof level), at eaves level and around opes</p>  |
| Thermal Insulation               | <p>Insulation is a combination of PIR rigid insulation and mineral wool insulation</p> <p>The buildings were designed to achieve the following U-values* to achieve the Domestic BER Rating of A3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Floors: 0.12 W/m<sup>2</sup>K</li> <li>Roofs: 0.12 W/m<sup>2</sup>K</li> <li>External Walls: 0.15 W/m<sup>2</sup>K</li> <li>Glazing: 0.8 W/m<sup>2</sup>K</li> <li>Doors: 1.2 W/m<sup>2</sup>K</li> </ul> <p>*as noted in the Contractor's Tender submission</p>   |
| Heating System                   | High efficiency gas-fired heating system   |



## Rapid Build: St Helena's Drive, Finglas

### Floor Areas



2 Bedrooms



4 People



27 Units



Approx 87m<sup>2</sup>



3 Bedrooms



5 People



12 Units



Approx 98m<sup>2</sup>

### Details on Building Materials

#### Superstructure

Light Gauge Steel Frame (LGSF) system for inner leaf and internal walls

External walls are cavity construction with brick and rendered blockwork outer leaf

#### Sustainability

A3 BER rating

Photovoltaic panels on the roofs provide electricity to each dwelling

Air tightness and thermal insulation control the loss of heat through the building fabric

Thermally broken triple glazed windows installed

Low energy LED lightbulbs are installed throughout the buildings

A 3-zone control system for heating and domestic hot water is designed to reduce energy consumption by allowing timed zone control for separate floors and DHW and individual control of heating to all rooms

#### Cladding (incl. fire resistance)

External walls are cavity construction with brick and rendered blockwork outer leaf, which are considered Class A1 non combustible materials

Fire stopping and cavity barriers are used throughout as required by Part B of the Irish Building Regulations, including at party walls (cavity wall and at roof level), at eaves level and around opes

#### Thermal Insulation

Insulation is a combination of PIR rigid insulation, foam insulation and mineral wool insulation

The buildings were designed to achieve the following U-values\* to achieve the Domestic BER Rating of A3:

- Floors: 0.12 W/m<sup>2</sup>K
- Roofs: 0.11 W/m<sup>2</sup>K
- External Walls: 0.12 W/m<sup>2</sup>K
- Glazing: 0.9 W/m<sup>2</sup>K

\*as noted in the Contractor's Tender submission

#### Heating System

High efficiency gas-fired heating system

## Development costs: Baile na Laochra, Ballymun

### Introduction and timeline:

Baile na Laochra was a brownfield site and overall duration on site was 107 site working days from 24th November 2016 to 30th May 2017.

### Cost Summary:

| Element/ Works Section  | €                 |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. Substructure (foundations)   | 198,000.00        |
| 2. Superstructure (walls, floors, roof etc)                               | 3,190,000         |
| 3. Site development works (groundworks, drainage, esb etc)                | 322,000           |
| 4. Preliminaries (contractor's staff, welfare facilities, insurances etc) | 550,000           |
| 5. Professional fees (included for in preliminaries)                      | -                 |
| 6. Variations (Contractors claims + and Employers claims)                 | 300,000           |
| <b>Cost of Works (excl VAT)</b>   | <b>€3,960,000</b> |

### Schedule of Accommodation Cost Analysis:

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| Total number of units constructed                        | 22              |
| Net floor area in square meters                          | 2024            |
| Average floor area per unit in square meters             | 92              |
| Total number of bedspaces                                | 110             |
| Total costs per square meter of floor area excluding VAT | €1,956.52       |
| Superstructure cost per square meter excluding VAT       | €1,576.09       |
| Average cost per bedspace excluding VAT                  | €36,000         |
| <b>Average cost per unit excluding VAT</b>               | <b>€180,000</b> |

## Development costs: St Helena's Court, Finglas

### Introduction and timeline:

This site was also a brownfield site. It was initially tendered as a 40 unit development. However due to issues with the location of some of the units to a neighbouring housing estate the drawings were revised to allow for the installation of 39 units. Before the main contract works took place an enabling works contractor was engaged by DCC to carry out some enabling works. The enabling works consisted of the installation of main utilities to the site and also the installation of an access roadway and kerbing. In October 2016 the main contractor commenced work on the construction of the housing units and in October 2017 substantial completion was reached for 39 units. The overall duration on site was 243 site working days between 17th of October 2016 and 3rd of October 2017.

### Cost Summary:

| Element/ Works Section   | €                 |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Substructure (foundations)  | 633,920           |
| 2. Superstructure (walls, floors, roof etc)  | 4,363,197         |
| 3. Site development works (groundworks, drainage, esb etc) (note some enabling works had to be redone) | 1,719,013         |
| 4. Preliminaries (contractor's staff, welfare facilities, insurances etc)                              | 817,019.19        |
| 5. Professional fees (included for in preliminaries)   | 463,850           |
| 6. Variations (Contractors claims + and Employers claims)  | 379,000           |
| <b>Cost of Works (excl VAT)</b>  | <b>€8,376,000</b> |

### Schedule of Accommodation Cost Analysis:

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Total number of units constructed                        | 39                 |
| Net floor area in square meters                          | 3509               |
| Average floor area per unit in square meters             | 90                 |
| Total number of bedspaces                                | 168                |
| Total costs per square meter of floor area excluding VAT | €2,387             |
| Superstructure cost per square meter excluding VAT       | €1,243.43          |
| Average cost per bedspace excluding VAT                  | €49,857.14         |
| <b>Average cost per unit excluding VAT</b>               | <b>€220,421.05</b> |



Comhairle Cathrach  
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Dublin City Council