



Simon Coveney TD

Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

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RENT PRESSURE ZONES EXTENDED IN CORK

I have made no secret of the fact that I believe the rental sector in Ireland is currently broken. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that at no stage has it been the sort of attractive and stable tenure choice we would like it to be.

The unsustainable situation we now face in terms of affordability and rental inflation in some parts of Cork is down to a lack of supply, the same core issue behind almost all of the pressures throughout the housing market. Ultimately, the most effective way to reduce and stabilise rents in the medium to long term, with benefits for the entire sector, is to increase supply and accelerate delivery of housing for the private and social rental sectors.

However, it will take some time for supply and demand to reach equilibrium. In the meantime, it is essential that measures are taken to address unsustainable rental inflation in a way that does not jeopardise supply.

Our Strategy for the Rental Sector puts forward an integrated range of complementary measures across the areas of security, supply, standards and services, the Rent Pressure Zone system is a critical intervention to alleviate conditions in areas where market failure is particularly acute.

In consultation with Cork County Council, the Housing Agency looked at rental markets in local electoral areas in Cork County to identify whether they should be considered for designation as rent

pressure zones. They used data from the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and from commercial residential property letting websites for this first analysis.

On the basis of this analysis, the Housing Agency recommended that a number of local electoral areas in Cork County be considered for designation by the RTB.

I signed Orders designating Ballincollig, Carrigaline, Douglas and Passage West as Rent Pressure Zones. As has been the case with Cork City, the new Orders mean that rent increases in these local electoral areas will be limited to a maximum of 4% per annum for a three-year period.

The new rent pressure zones were designated because they meet the criteria which are that rents are above the national average and that rent price inflation has been 7% or above in four of the last six quarters.

While we have made very significant progress in a short space of time to have this new system in place and to ensure that we can properly target this intervention towards those areas facing the most severe pressures. Over the medium term though, additional supply is the right way to address rental pressures.



IRELAND 2040 – OUR PLAN

I recently launched a major national consultation for the preparation of a strategic planning and development framework for Ireland between now and 2040. This is the first of two public consultation exercises and a series of regional and stakeholder events in preparing Ireland 2040 – Our Plan.

I am leading a high-level cross-Departmental team in developing the Ireland 2040 Plan. We are

now seeking the public's views on what the issues are and how we can – together – address sprawl and lop-sided development, better utilisation of the potential of both urban and rural areas, and avoid congestion and adverse impacts on people's lives and the environment.

While we face many challenges presently, we know we need to think ahead for a radically different Ireland of 2040.



We want you to tell us what Ireland should look like in 2040 – we want your thoughts. Full details are available on www.Ireland2040.ie. The public are invited to contribute initial views by March 16th next.

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LOCAL NEWS

Rural Economic Development Zone

Communities in Cork will benefit from a €5 million initiative to support Rural Economic Development, which is part of a new phase of the Rural Economic Development Zones. The initiative is aimed at stimulating economic development in rural towns and surrounding areas, and builds on the success of the previous pilot scheme, which saw €3.8 million being provided to projects across Ireland.

New funding for Garda Text Alerts in Cork

New Government funding for Garda Text Alert Groups will help support crime prevention in Cork. The funding for the Community Alert Programme has been doubled to €350,000 and now incorporates a new €100,000 rebate scheme for local groups registered under the Garda Text Alert Scheme.

Reduction in burglaries and theft in Cork

The latest CSO crime figures show a significant reduction in burglaries and theft in the Cork Garda Region. The Gardaí's Operation Thor is helping to protect communities across Cork with figures showing a reduction in burglary and other offences by 22%, while theft and other offences have reduced by 6%. The accelerated Garda recruitment campaign is on track to increase the strength of An Garda Síochána to 15,000 members, this will provide a modern police service which can continue to tackle crime effectively and efficiently.

Plan published to improve Motor Insurance provision

The Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in Ireland has been published and approved by Government. The Working Group Report covers six main themes which influence the cost of motor insurance, and makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out. The publication and implementation of this Report is the first step towards greater stability in the pricing of motor insurance in Ireland, and will help prevent the volatility that we have seen in the market in the past. The Working Group, chaired by Minister Eoghan Murphy will continue to meet in 2017 as the project enters its implementation phase.

Working Lone Parents to Benefit From New Measure

Lone parents can now earn more while retaining their full One-Parent Family or Jobseeker's Transitional payment. The income disregards for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional Payment is increased by €20, from €90 to €110 per week. In doing so it ensures that Jobseeker's Transitional Payment recipients who are working will gain more income at the end of each week. The measure applies to existing and new lone parents. The increase to the One-Parent Family Payment disregard will benefit approximately 12,800 One-Parent Family Payment recipients.

Unemployment dropped by 2,500 people every month since January 2016

The latest CSO figures show that the number of people unemployed is dropping on average by 2,500 every month, showing a fall in unemployment to 7.1% this January, down from 8.5% at 12 months ago. In the last 12 months the number of people out of work fell by 29,800, from 184,600 in January 2016 to 154,800 this month, a reduction of 16%.

Dads already benefiting from new paid paternity benefit

Dads are already benefiting from the Government's new paid paternity benefit scheme, which became available at the beginning of September 2016 at a rate of €230 a week for two weeks. This gives new fathers, both employees and the self-employed, the opportunity to be more involved at the earliest stages of a child's development, which is important for the whole family. It is great to hear that there has been good take up of the scheme so far, with over 5,500 paternity benefits being awarded since the scheme came in on the 1st September 2016.

Realising Cork's Rural Potential

The Government has launched its Action Plan for Rural Ireland and it will bring tangible benefits to people and communities in Cork. The plan contains innovative measures to support the revitalisation of rural towns and villages across Cork County, with an aim to improve both the social and economic fabric of rural communities through a number of actions.



SPOTLIGHT ON BLACROCK

Páirc Uí Chaoimh

The team behind the redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh have released a short video giving viewers a virtual tour of the inside of the new stadium when it is completed. The video is very impressive and gives a look into the new stadium will look like when it opens in June with an increased capacity of 45,000.



Blackrock Regeneration

Phase one of the Blackrock Village redevelopment is now complete. The million-euro project commenced in early 2016, upon completion Blackrock Harbour will have a large, paved plaza, new trees, street lamps and benches. The area's historic tramlines are also set to be included as part of the redevelopment.



SPOTLIGHT ON CARRIGALINE

Men's Shed in Carrigaline

I turned the sod at the planned new Men's Shed in Carrigaline. The new premises, at Waterpark in Carrigaline, will be rolled out in phases over the coming years. The first phase will cost in the region of €30,000 and Carrigaline Men's Shed have put forward €15,000 of its own funds. Cork County Council has matched that €15,000, with funds from my department.

Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage Project

The project continues to make significant progress and is important in terms of protecting the environment, facilitating economic development and in providing for a growing population in the Cork Lower harbour towns. Operations commenced at the new Shanbally wastewater treatment plant at the end of December 2016, providing full treatment of all wastewater from houses and businesses in Carrigaline, Crosshaven and Shanbally.

New running track for Carrigaline

A new 2km long running track will be constructed around the perimeter of Carrigaline park – construction of the track is scheduled to begin this summer.



LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWS

- A detailed design is being undertaken at Ferney Road in Carrigaline which will include land acquisition and accommodation works, footpaths, public lighting, storm water network as well as full road reconstruction.
- A study is underway re traffic movements in Carrigaline in general. Traffic movements at this junction will be monitored as part of this study



EDUCATION

€900,000 CAPITAL GRANT FOR CIT

Cork Institute of Technology will receive €900,000 from Government to address their most critical health and safety, infrastructure and ICT needs. The grant will ensure that the Institute can fund a range of small-scale building works, refurbishment of existing facilities or upgrade of equipment. This funding is being made to the institutes by the Department of Education and Skills through the Higher Education Authority.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHING RESOURCES

The Department of Education announced a new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools. The new model will be a fairer and better way to allocate resources to support children with Special Educational Needs. An additional 900 teaching posts will be provided to support the introduction of this new allocation model. The changes will be introduced from September 2017.

OVER 120 APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINEESHIP SCHEMES BY 2020

Government's Plan to expand apprenticeships and traineeships in Ireland plans to deliver 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship registrations by 2020. The Plan is a key commitment in the Action Plan for Education, which aims to make the Irish education and training system the best in Europe within a decade. There are currently 27 apprenticeships in Ireland, in areas such as construction, engineering and the motor sector. Higher education institutions alone will supply a portion of our skills needs, but there is a need for stronger alternative routes and alternative sources of the different types of skills that a growing economy requires.

€15M CARRIGALINE EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS

Planning permission for the new educational campus at Ballinrea, Carrigaline has been granted by An Bord Pleanála. However, to comply with recent changes to the Public Works Contract, Cork Educational and Training Board have requested that the Design Team attached to the project assess the additional work that needs to be carried out to bring the project to tender ready stage. This is expected to be completed shortly, as soon as contractors are pre-qualified and tender documents completed, the project will then be considered for progression to tender and construction. The final report is expected shortly and I have been told that as soon as contractors are pre-qualified and tender documents completed, the project will then be considered for progression to tender and construction.



TRAINING

END TO JOBBRIDGE

The Department for Social Protection announced the closure of JobBridge in 2016. A review by consultants Indecon into the programme found that JobBridge has served its purpose and should be replaced with a new programme with a stronger focus on skills, paying at least the minimum wage, and focusing on those unemployed for at least six months. The Department has launched a consultation process with unions, employers and other stakeholders to design a new, more targeted work experience programme.

GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FINE GAEL TEAM



Simon Coveney TD

Main Street,
Carrigaline,
Co. Cork.
021 4374200
simon.coveney@oir.ie
t: @simoncoveney f: /simoncoveney



Senator Jerry Buttimer
Senator Tim Lombard
Deirdre Clune MEP
Sean Kelly MEP

021 4840652
086 8329119
1890 989 533
087 6906000

jerry.buttimer@oireachtas.ie
tim.lombard@oir.ie
deirdre.clune@europarl.europa.eu
sean.kellymep@gmail.com

CORK COUNTY COUNCIL

Cllr. John Collins
Cllr. Deirdre Forde
Cllr. Aidan Lombard

086 2386692
087 9161952
086 3620047

jacwps@eircom.net
deirdreforde@eircom.net
aidanlombard80@gmail.com

CORK CITY COUNCIL

Cllr. John Buttimer
Cllr. Des Cahill
Cllr. Laura McGonigle
Cllr. P.J. Hourican

087 6384381
087 2801490
086 0829371
087 256 5481

john_buttimer@corkcity.ie
descahill30@gmail.com
lauramcgonigle@gmail.com
hourican.pj@gmail.com



FINE GAEL