

Two into one Programme

In 2008 a policy decision was taken to suspend the refurbishment of zero-bed units (usually 26 square meters) as they were considered to be low demand both due to their size and the anti social behaviour that resulted on the ground floor in some complexes. The intention, at the time, was to embark on a programme of amalgamating the two zero-bed units into one one-bed units, on a phased basis. The programme was based on the premise that a critical mass of empty units would be required to allow for the logistics of de-tenanting half empty blocks so that the works could take place with the least amount of disruption to the remaining tenants.

On February 27th 2014, the policy of not re-letting these units was rescinded and the City Councillors agreed that empty zero-bed units were to be reintroduced to the housing stock, refurbished and re-let, according to demand.

However it was also agreed at that time that we would proceed with a more limited programme of amalgamations and so the current amalgamation programme began in late 2014. To date this programme has focused in general on elderly residents, addressing a lack of space and comfort in the bedsits normally let to older people. The scheme enables residents to remain in their neighbourhood but in more appropriate accommodation. The works consist of combining existing bedsit units to form one or two bed apartments. The alterations provide improved space standards, which is important to residents who can spend a lot of time indoors. This demographic is particularly susceptible to fuel poverty and the works include upgrades of the building fabric which improves energy efficiency, reduces costs for residents and improves comfort. Re-using unsuitable bedsit units improves the efficiency and extends the life of the flat blocks they are located in. The improvements also result in accessible units at ground floor. We have also carried out a limited number of amalgamations in some general flat complexes.

We have completed a total of 72 amalgamations and refurbishments so far between 2015 and 2016 Citywide, with a further 123 amalgamations either on site or with planning permission in place. In total works are either complete, on site or planned at 17 different locations.

The programme's holistic approach which takes in energy efficiency, sustainable use of housing stock, the residents' place within their communities and quality of interior design to make enjoyable homes makes these projects an example of best practice. Feedback from residents following the projects has been overwhelmingly positive.

An acknowledgement of this success was the inclusion of the amalgamated units in Tom Clarke House in the recent **Nearly Zero Energy Buildings Open Doors Ireland** (NZEB) Open Day. This was the fourth annual NZEB Open Day . The open doors Ireland is very similar to Open House Dublin event, though with a focus purely on very low energy buildings. The aim of the Nearly Zero Energy Buildings Open Doors is to enable people visit really good examples of low energy new build and retrofit projects in order to inspire them to aim for similar standards for future projects. There were over 25 buildings participating nationwide and it is recognition of the progressive energy improvements in the Council stock as a result of this and other works that our scheme was included in this event.

It is of course recognised that the net effect of amalgamating “two into one” is to half this type of accommodation. In view of this we have commissioned a feasibility study at 4 locations to consider strategies for offsetting the reduction in numbers, for improving the sites to include treatment of public, private and semi private space amenities and to advise on possible strategies for using underutilised space.

We would hope to use the results of this feasibility study to inform potential in other complexes and thus not only provide greatly improved living environments for existing residents but provide new energy efficient, accessible, spacious homes for new residents on our waiting lists and to facilitate financial contributions where possible.