



THE IRISH TIMES

Apartments 'too small for wheelchairs'

Council architect unable to design
apartments within size restrictions

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Minimum apartment sizes, introduced a year ago by former minister for the environment Alan Kelly, are too small to be wheelchair accessible, according to Dublin City Council's architects' division.

The council had set the minimum size of public or private one-bed apartments at 55sq m (592sq ft), two-bed apartments at 90sq m (969sq ft) and three-bed apartments at 100sq m (1,076sq ft).

Mr Kelly had blamed excessive size standards for deterring construction and in December 2015 set new standards which set one-bed apartments at 45sq m (484sq ft), two-bed apartments at 73sq m (786sq ft) and three-bed apartments at 90sq m (969sq ft).

Deputy city architect Brian Swan said he has attempted to design accessible apartments within the minimum size restrictions, but has been unable to do so.

"If you widen a corridor or you make a bathroom bigger, it comes out of one of the other rooms and then they drop below standard because everything is operating at the minimum," he said.

"Where under the previous standards the scale was sufficient that that impact was acceptable, when you are building to the minimums your envelope is already set."

Undermined

The chairman of the council's housing committee, Sinn Féin councillor Daithí Doolan, said the council's ability to provide accessible homes had been undermined.

"The problem Dublin City Council finds itself in is a direct result of former minister Alan Kelly's botched proposal to reduce sizes for apartments." He said he would be seeking an urgent meeting with Minister for Housing Simon Coveney on the matter.

"We now need a speedy response from Minister Coveney. In Dublin a majority of future housing will be apartments. We don't want to have to have a battle over funding for every development to make apartments bigger."

The reality that most housing in the city would in future be in apartment blocks raised issues not just with accommodating the needs of disabled people now, but would re-emerge when architects were trying to adapt homes in the future, Mr Swan said.

"Disability and age are very correlated issues. When you move from the idea of mainly building housing schemes to building apartments the opportunity isn't there for coming along and building extensions, you have to put things in at the start."

The reduction of the minimum size of apartments that

could be built in Dublin and elsewhere raised concerns at the time because it was not coupled with a reduction of the minimum size of rooms within the apartment.

The Royal **Institute of the Architects** of Ireland has said this would make the apartments impossible to design.

Mr Kelly said at the time that the architects' claims were not true.

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