

Address by Minister for Justice and Equality Charlie Flanagan TD

**- Launch of Annual Report 2016 of the Property Services
Regulatory Authority at the National Ploughing Championships on
20 September at 12.30pm**

Thank you for the introduction. I want to express my appreciation to Geraldine Clarke, the Chairperson, and Maeve Hogan the Chief Executive of the Property Services Regulatory Authority for inviting me to launch the Authority's Annual Report 2016 today. It is a privilege to be here with you this afternoon in the National Property and Land Information Centre at the National Ploughing Championships.

I understand that this is a particularly special venue as it brings together representatives from the entire property sector, both public and private, under one roof for the first time. In that regard, I would like to acknowledge the presence here today of the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA), the Property Registration Authority (PRA), Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI), Valuation Office, (all public bodies which come under the aegis of my own Department) along with the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV), the Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCSI) and Myhome.ie. I am impressed by the itinerary of guest speakers and the broad range of property-related topics to be discussed over the next few days, and commend you all for your spirit of collaboration and co-operation which no doubt has made this all possible.

Meeting the rising demands for housing provision is a challenge for all involved in the property sector. The Government's "Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness" launched in July 2016, and the associated "Strategy for the Rental Sector" which followed last December, sets out an ambitious, action-oriented and well-resourced framework of some 113 actions for accelerating the supply of housing to meet the needs of individuals and families across all housing tenures – social, private and rental.

The overarching objective is to ensure that the overall housing output increases progressively towards 25,000 homes per year.

Just over one year into the implementation of "Rebuilding Ireland", all key indicators of construction activity – planning permissions, commencement notices and ESB

connections to the grid – show that residential construction is ramping up considerably. The recent ESRI Summer Quarterly Economic Commentary published in June 2017 has forecast that house completions will reach 18,500 this year and 23,500 in 2018: this would suggest that the overarching “Rebuilding Ireland” target of 25,000 homes per year by 2020, will be met and quite likely exceeded.

This demonstrates the Government’s commitment to addressing the demand for housing and I am confident that the property sector will work with Government as a whole to positively address this challenge.

I am particularly delighted to be here today as the Minister for Justice and Equality, at an event such as the National Ploughing Championships which showcases and celebrates the strength and depth of not only rural Ireland, but the country as a whole. Everyone here today will be very conscious of the important role that the Property Services Regulatory Authority has played in developing and supporting property service professionals since its establishment in 2012. The PSRA’s introduction of regulation, licensing and standards has helped to promote professionalism, enhance service provision and increase protection for consumers of property services.

This reform and modernisation of the regulatory regime for the property services sector benefits the sector as a whole; encouraging accountability and trust while protecting the interests of consumers. That’s why I’m very pleased to be here today to launch the PSRA’s Annual Report for 2016 – a year which was evidently a productive one for the Authority.

Online Licence Renewal

One of the highlights of 2016 for the Authority was the implementation of an online licence renewal and payment facility for approximately 6,000 licensees. This process required extensive engagement with the sector and the smooth transition to the online system was ensured in no small part by the collaborative spirit of the two sectoral representative bodies, both of which are here today - the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV) and the Society for Chartered Surveyors of Ireland (SCSI)- who engaged and led their members through the period of change. The new

online facility has not only improved the user experience of the license renewal process, it has also increased the Authority's efficiency in the processing of renewal applications. Licensees are to be highly commended for their level of engagement with the new facility and for making it the success that it was in delivering sector efficiencies.

The maintenance of standards is an integral part of a robust regulatory system and as such, is one of the Authority's key objectives. In 2016, the Authority outsourced to a company with the necessary investigative skills the work of conducting compliance audits and complaint investigations. As a result, by the end of the year some 400 audits of licensees were completed across all counties and all licence types. These audits have been largely welcomed by the sector as a means of achieving the standards required in the delivery of a professional service to customers. I am heartened by the outcomes from the compliance audits which indicate a high level of compliance within the property services sector. This is testament to the professional and ethical standards upheld by licensees in the sector.

I have been advised by the Authority, that where breaches of the Act were identified, such breaches related to minor matters, which licensees addressed as part of their audit report. It is also worth noting that the additional investigative resources have also assisted the Authority in addressing complaint arrears.

CPD

In order to ensure the property services sector continues to thrive, it is crucial that a culture of lifelong learning is nurtured. In 2016, the members of the Authority agreed to the development and introduction of a scheme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for the sector. This CPD scheme will offer a means of continuously improving, updating and developing professional knowledge and skills to ensure a consistently high quality of service is provided by property services licensees. I am advised that the development of the CPD scheme is currently at an advanced stage. It is expected that the scheme will commence early in 2018 and as well as being delivered regionally, will be at least partly available online. This is a very encouraging development and augurs well for the future.

Competent Authority for Money Laundering

Another notable event in 2016 was when the then Minister for Justice and Equality prescribed the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) as the State competent authority for property service providers for the purposes of Part 4 of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010. This bestowed a number of important responsibilities upon the Authority including the monitoring of property service providers who are described as “designated persons” and taking measures that are reasonably necessary for securing compliance by property service providers with the 2010 Act. As the competent authority, the Authority in the latter part of the year commenced audits of licensees’ compliance with the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010.

Residential Property Price Register

It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the critical role that the Authority’s ‘Residential Property Price Register’ plays in encouraging transparency and strengthening the accountability of the sector. The Register informs the consumer of important information on national residential sales by location. The relevance of this facility is reflected in its popularity, with approximately 1.6 million visits in 2016.

New Members of the Board of the Authority

I would like to express my appreciation to the members of the Authority not only for their work and achievements in 2016 but for their ongoing commitment to the regulation of the property services sector. I would like to personally congratulate Ms. Geraldine Clarke [Chairperson – present], Mr Edward Carey and Mr Pat Davitt on their recent re-appointments. I would also like to welcome the appointments of Ms Hilary Griffey [present], Dr Aideen Hayden and Dr Muiris O Ceidigh to the Authority. I know that some of you are here today and I wish you all well for your terms as members of the Board. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the significant work and dedication of the three outgoing members of the Authority, Mr Myles O’Reilly, Mr James Doorley and Ms Carol Boate who together provided immeasurable support to the Authority with their wide level of expertise and experience.

Conclusion

I think it's also important to acknowledge the hard work and determination of the staff of the Authority who have made such positive strides in regulating the sector - I compliment them on their dedication and focus. Of course, thanks must also go to all the organisations here in this Centre for your commitment to ensuring a bright future for the property sector. I would like to wish all of you here today every success over the coming days and look forward to meeting you again soon.

Finally, I would like to thank the PSRA for inviting me here today and to congratulate the organisers of the National Ploughing Championships for hosting a spectacular event.

The success of "the Ploughing" as the biggest outdoor agricultural show in Europe is due in no small part to Anna May McHugh, "Queen of the Ploughing." Anna May is with us here today and it gives me great pleasure to present her with this bouquet in recognition of the wonderful contribution she has made to the outstanding success of this annual event.