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My father's cruel jibes at my weight aged seven drove me to anorexia

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DAMNING LETTER ON HOUSING TARGETS

Former minister O'Brien continued to claim goal of 40,000 new houses was achievable

THE coalition leaders in the last government were 'misguided' by former housing minister Darragh O'Brien - who told them 40,000 new homes would be built in 2024.

EXCLUSIVE
By Craig Hughes
Political Editor

The promise to ramp up home building to 40,000 new units came crashing down last week when the Central Statistics Office revealed just 30,330 new homes were built in 2024.

Mr O'Brien's predictions unravelled further yesterday when housing experts said this year's output could be as low as 32,000 units.

In a letter, seen by the Irish Daily Mail, sent by Mr O'Brien to the then coalition leaders on August 21, he forecast home building would reach the highest levels since 2008. He wrote: 'Estimates

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J-Lo brings glamour back to fire-ravaged LA

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The government must have known figures 'were bogus'

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from independent analysts show we are on track to exceed our housing targets for 2024 and I estimate we will approach 40,000 units in 2024.

'This will be the highest level of overall completions since 2008.'

This assertion of ramping up housing was repeatedly used by Mr O'Brien, as well as Fine Gael leader Simon Harris and Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin, in the general election campaign.

At the Fine Gael manifesto launch on November 17, Mr Harris said 'we have gotten to a point now where we're heading towards 40,000 homes a year'.

Then on October 23, Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin said in an interview on Virgin Media's The Group Chat that 'we've now got to about 40,000 [new builds]'.

The Department of Housing did not reply to this newspaper when asked if the 40,000 figure was provided to Mr O'Brien by his officials or whether it was his own belief.

A report by Deutsche Numis Research, the research arm of Deutsche Bank, published days before Mr O'Brien's letter, said they thought housing completions last year will be 'well in excess of 40,000 units'.

However, this was an outlier

'All but guaranteed it in his letter'

among housing analysts. The Central Bank revised its forecast for housing output to around 32,000 in September, along with several independent economists and officials in the Department of Finance.

However, Mr O'Brien's expectations did not diminish.

Several senior Cabinet sources told the Irish Daily Mail that the figure was reiterated by Mr O'Brien and was the figure they were provided with going into the general election.

Senior Government sources told the Irish Daily Mail that there was significant anger at Mr O'Brien who they believe misguided the coalition leaders on the issue.

'He [Mr O'Brien] all but guaranteed 40,000 homes would be delivered in his letter,' the source said.

A separate source said that Mr O'Brien 'always used language to suggest slightly below 40,000 as the estimate heading into the election'.

Mr O'Brien told the Mail on November 13 that 'we will exceed the housing target we set for this year, and we will exceed it substantially across all our tenures'.

When pressed previously on the ability to meet his housing promises in the face of worrying data and concerns being flagged, Mr O'Brien bullishly told the Mail: 'I'm very confident of our completions for this year and indeed for next year, because we built a really strong pipeline.'

The then coalition leaders Mr Martin, Mr Harris and Green Party leader Roderic O'Gorman did not reply to a request for

THE MINISTER'S RATHER OPTIMISTIC HOMES VOW

NOW-FORMER housing minister Darragh O'Brien stuck to his script that we'd hit 40,000 homes built last year – but the reality fell well short. He introduced the 40,000 figure last April and, in a letter to party leaders in August, insisted that close to 40,000 new homes would be built – exceeding the official housing target of 34,000 (but even that target wasn't reached). Here's what was said and how 'misguided' party leaders relayed his message to the public...

DEC 29, 2023

Then-tánaiste Micheál Martin says it will be 'a number of years' before 40,000 new homes per annum can be delivered.

APRIL 13, 2024

Then-housing minister Darragh O'Brien, when asked about the level of new homes that would be built in 2024, at the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, says the government 'is going to get up towards 40 [thousand], the high 30s this year'.

AUGUST 21

Minister O'Brien writes to the three coalition leaders stating: 'Estimates from independent analysts show we are on track to exceed our housing targets for 2024 and I estimate we will approach 40,000 units in 2024.'

AUGUST 25

Then-taoiseach Simon Harris gives a speech at the annual Béal na Bláth Commemoration in Co. Cork, four days after receiving the letter from Mr O'Brien. Mr Harris says: 'This year, we will

exceed our housing targets, with almost 40,000 homes built.'

SEPTEMBER 18

Exactly four weeks after the housing minister's letter, the Central Bank revises its housing forecast for the year down to 32,500.

SEPTEMBER 19

In a response to a Dáil question, Mr O'Brien says: 'As a result, the medium-to-long-term outlook is very positive, with the significant uplift in supply in 2022 and 2023 expected to be maintained this year and between 33,000 and 40,000 new homes completed.'

OCTOBER 10

In a social media video after the passage of the

Planning and Development Bill, Mr Martin says the country is 'coming close to 40,000 being built a year'.

OCTOBER 23

In an interview on Virgin Media's The Group Chat, Mr Martin says that 'we've now got to about 40,000 [new builds]'.

OCTOBER 26

Mr Harris says that the total new homes figure will be 'well upwards towards 40,000'. Pressed on the basis for this figure, he remarks: 'The 40,000 figure came from a letter I received from the minister for housing that went to other party leaders, saying that a figure of 40,000 homes was quite possible this year.'

NOVEMBER 12

At the Green Party's general election manifesto launch, leader Roderic O'Gorman is asked if he believes that 40,000 new homes would be built in 2024, and he replies: 'I think we'll build close to that.'



Off the mark: Former housing minister Darragh O'Brien and, left, Micheál Martin and Roderic O'Gorman

NOVEMBER 13

In response to a question from the Irish Daily Mail on the campaign trail, Mr O'Brien says: 'We will exceed the housing target we set for this year, and we will exceed it substantially across all our tenures.'

NOVEMBER 17

At the Fine Gael general election manifesto launch, then-taoiseach Mr Harris comments: 'We have gotten to a point now where we're heading towards 40,000 homes a year.'

comment. Last year's actual housing figures fell short of the Government's Housing for All target of just under 34,000 homes, but crucially were almost 10,000 homes short of the 40,000 new homes Mr O'Brien repeatedly claimed would be built.

Hours after the publication of the housing figures by the CSO last week, newly elected Taoiseach Micheál Martin unveiled his Cabinet with Mr O'Brien moved to the Department of Transport.

One Fianna Fáil TD told the Mail: 'We're left wondering what was actually achieved by his housing plan that wouldn't have happened without him being there.'

In the letter, Mr O'Brien cited Sinn Féin's housing proposals as 'one of the key risks' to progress in housing. He wrote: 'One of the key risks to this progress is the

uncertainty caused by Sinn Féin's plans to scrap Help to Buy, First Home and Vacancy Grant home ownership supports.'

Mr O'Brien wrote that Sinn Féin's Home Leasing scheme, where the State would retain ownership of the land the affordable home is built on, 'is deeply problematic for mortgage lending

'Must have known figure was bogus'

and further underlines the uncertainty and risk that Sinn Féin's anti-ownership plans present.'

The letter does not outline any other risks to housing other than Sinn Féin's proposals.

Sinn Féin previously said that they would phase out several

Government schemes that they believe inflate house prices and not helping to increase housing output.

They include the Help to Buy scheme, which provides a tax rebate of up to €30,000 for first-time buyers, and the Shared Equity scheme which provides a bridging loan of up to 30% of the property's purchase price for first-time buyers to bridge the gap in exchange for an equity stake in the home.

However, Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald this week said the party's views on certain housing schemes would 'evolve'.

Asked about the party's position on Help to Buy, she said: 'Everything that we look at, we will modernise and update. By the way, inflationary schemes are inflationary, like, that's it. There's

no way of dressing that up.'

Sinn Féin's housing spokesman Eoin Ó Broin said he could not understand why 'bogus' figures were being repeated by Mr O'Brien and the leaders.

He added: 'Given the high profile of that alternative assessment as well as regular challenges from Opposition it is hard to believe why Taoiseach, Tánaiste, and Green Party leader continued to tout that 40,000 figure right up until polling day.'

Mr Ó Broin said senior figures in Government 'must have known that the figure was bogus' and said he believes they were 'deliberately misleading the public and have now been found out'.

Mr O'Brien was replaced as Housing Minister by his party colleague James Browne.

craig.hughes@daily mail.ie