

Housing & Homelessness

Submission to the Committee on Housing & Homelessness

from the

Dublin Homeless Network

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Dublin Homeless Network comprises 16 organisations that provide services for homeless and socially excluded households and communities within Dublin and in some cases nationally. The Network meets to share information and to assist in the coordination and delivery of services and policy responses. Its members play a vital part in Dublin and nationally in supporting some of the most marginalised households by providing a full spectrum of services in the prevention of homelessness, providing supported temporary and emergency accommodation and providing long term supported housing. The Dublin Homeless Network nominate onto the governance structures of the DRHE.

The Network is a voice for voluntary homeless organisations in Dublin which;

- (a) Informs national and local government policy and strategies on homelessness.
- (b) Proactively engages with other stakeholders including statutory bodies to work towards eliminating homelessness and improve policy and services.
- (c) Provides an accountable and democratic structure to nominate representatives from the sector.

This paper will focus primarily on the theme of homelessness and will cover 4 main areas

- Ceasing the flow into homelessness
- Emergency accommodation
- Access to housing
- Keeping people who move out of homelessness in housing

2.0 CEASING THE FLOW INTO HOMELESSNESS (PREVENTION)

2.1 Introduction

The network considers that robust preventive measures tackling root causes of why households enter homelessness are key to stemming the flow. Services need to be enhanced and promoted for 'pre-crisis' intervention and early intervention must be proactively supported. All relevant State agencies and NGO's should have a consideration of how their policies and strategies impact upon the cause or alleviation of homelessness. Consideration must also to be given how other institutionalised settings and financial and economic policies impact upon homelessness.

2.2 Systems

- Publish, implement and resource discharges protocols for those leaving state care or residential institutions (e.g. Hospital/Prison/ Care system).
- Implement registration and response system e.g. RTB and Local Authorities for 'At risk' tenancies or those who have received Notice to Quit (NTQ) from private rented.

- There can be a lack of transparency in the process of assessing and responding to cases presenting in crisis to local authorities. Local authorities should provide written requests for information and explanations of the status and/or decisions should always be in writing citing reasons where service/eligibility is declined.
- There is a need to develop links between IPS, Probation, CPS and local authorities to identify people returning to homelessness from prison. Such a return increases the likelihood of recidivism.
- Discharging people from hospitals and into homelessness has always been an issue. Acute mental health unit in Tallaght hospital reported that there was a discharge into homeless services every 9.4 days (39 in total over 12 months). Their need to be an acknowledgement that people who end up in hospital due to complex health issues may not be best suited to return to homeless accommodation and without long-term supports for the maintenance of their health issues their health will diminish. With this in mind their needs to be alternatives to the current homeless accommodation for people leaving hospital so they do not return in particular to the one night only system.

2.3 Definitions:

- 'At risk' households are frequently not identified as such. Awareness and appropriate training should be provided for all relevant State and NGO workers in order to enhance the likelihood of early identification and engagement of preventative actions. In addition, there are limited and varying responses to 'at risk' households presenting to local authorities. All local authorities should publish and implement an 'At Risk' procedure for staff to follow.
- Lack of Capacity for NGO'S tasked with providing services to homeless/at risk families to respond in a timely, adequate and tailored fashion to those presenting in crisis. Targeted outcome focused funding for services should be released to allow for increased supports.
- The definition of homelessness should be updated to include those at risk of homelessness – this would ensure that families and individuals are never told to 'come back when you're homeless'.
- Section 10 preventative funding is only available to those who have experienced homelessness. This should be amended to support those who are at risk of homelessness to sustain tenancies.
- Housing advice and advocacy are identified in both The Government's Homelessness Policy Statement (2013) and The Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness (2014) policies as having a key role in preventing homelessness among vulnerable and at-risk households. However, there is currently no strategic framework

for the planning, organisation, monitoring and funding of housing information, advice and advocacy services in Ireland.

- The Tenancy Protection Service (TPS) in Dublin & Cork has shown that the most effective way to prevent homelessness is to ensure that families can remain in their rented home. This service has helped 4,845 households at risk of homelessness & prevented 8,550 people (including 4,483 children) from becoming homeless to the end of 2015. The TPS works by arranging for a fast-tracked 'enhanced' rent supplement payment to be paid to households facing a rent increase or advocating on behalf of tenants facing a tenancy termination. As the housing & homelessness crisis is a nationwide crisis, the TPS should be extended nationwide.

2.4 Assessment Processes:

The network considers that there should be an overall review of the local authority assessment process for those presenting as homeless. Some issues that are pertinent are as follows;

- Those who are on the housing list, are being accommodated in homeless accommodation but are not recorded as having homeless priority. Any household being provided with homeless accommodation must by circumstance be counted as homeless with 'homeless priority'.
- Some households may not be counted as homeless subject to assessment. Any household meeting the definition under Section 2 of the 1988 Housing Act should be seen and counted as homeless.
- Those presenting who are unable to complete or advised not to submit an application for social housing so are therefore not properly assessed and no proper decision issued. A 'Section 2' assessment procedure should be implemented by local authorities. No household should be sent away without a written note of the outcome of their visit.

2.5 Private rented:

- To support earlier intervention, by law, landlords to be required to register Notice of Terminations with the RTB & local authority in order for it to be legally valid so measures could be put in place to prevent and/or support tenant.
- Evictions from the private rented sector are contributing to the homeless crisis. The sector has identified many non-essential evictions resulting in homelessness. The Rented Tenancy Act should be amended to suspend sales and/or surrender or repossession of property as a result of debt where tenants are in situ. The penalties contained in the RTB relating to breaches should be enforced and monitored. Legislation needs to be reviewed and amended to provide rent certainty and security of tenure.

- Tenancy security in Part IV should be extended from 4 years to 6 years to protect tenants' security of home.
- Social Leasing schemes, where Support agencies act a liaison and guarantor, between landlord and tenant should be established.

2.6 Community:

- Multidisciplinary and mental health funding is vital to provide wrap-around support to individuals experiencing housing instability as well as a dual diagnosis.
- We should look to develop and more joined up approach between Drug and Alcohol services and housing and homelessness. Day services on the front line in working with those with complex need such as community addiction teams should have a wider acknowledged remit to support those with complex need to access housing services and also to help those in accommodation with complex needs sustain such accommodation.

3.0 EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

3.1 Introduction

Access to emergency accommodation of an adequate standard should be a basic human right. There is a need in the current crisis to ensure that nobody has to ever to sleep rough, however the network believe that the provision of purely hostel accommodation is not an answer to homelessness and that a housing led approach and the provision of housing is ultimately the solution to homelessness. 1,290 individuals were in emergency accommodation for longer than 6 months. Hotel expenditure by DRHE in 2015 equated to €16.5m. However emergency accommodation plays a crucial role in the overall provision of services and must be attended to with regards to its quantum, appropriateness and standard. The network would wish to make the following points:

- Efforts must be made to avoid Families being placed in unsustainable or inappropriate temporary accommodation. B&B's, hotels and hostels. Families being separated and children going into care due to a lack of family emergency accommodation must be avoided. In as far as possible, families should be placed in emergency accommodation which is located close to their area of interest, so that they can continue to access local community and education supports.
- Inconsistency in standards and supports from service providers. The National Quality standards for emergency accommodation and attached services must be enforced.
- There needs to be an acknowledgement that there are couples in the system with no children and very few options for them. It is of particular importance for couples with significant support needs these couple are ending up in one night only accommodation.

- When looking at the current provision of accommodation there is a significant level of one night only units there should be a move to rationalise some of these units into STA and cognizance given to the number of people who will end up in the ono system who cannot access any other services such as migrants and couples who don't have tenure as a recognised couple.
- 'Self-accommodation' should cease as a procedure. Families who are recognised as being homeless sent away to 'self-accommodate' i.e. find a hotel or B&B that will take them and agree to be contacted by local authority with credit card number. Families are left unsupported and vulnerable in a crisis.
- More dedicated female / family emergency accommodation should be provided where targeted support and early intervention resources could be targeted in particular for vulnerable women.
- Emergency bed accommodation for singles and couples is 'capped by capacity' by the DRHE¹ and Local Authorities. 2015 saw a 7 % increase in these emergency beds where as 100% increase in families and children is uncapped and requires continuous allocation.
- There is a need to review the DRHE 2016 plan to target an additional '100 beds' and '800 rooms' for families considering latest figures and trends.
- HSE Residential Treatment and Rehabilitation working group estimate a deficit of 356 residential treatment beds. There is a need to address this shortfall.
- There is a significant level of focus on families currently in relation to the rapid build units. There needs to be an increase on the rapid build units beyond the 500 projected units currently being worked on.

3.2 Assessment:

- There is a need to address the inappropriate placement and referral into emergency accommodation that are made through Hospital Discharges, Mental Health, and prison release.
- Placements must, within a minimum period after emergency presentation (i.e. a number of days), be appropriate to the housing need of the household and with nominated and assigned required supports.
- While improvements have been noted of late, Homeless Return to Ireland (RTI's) (including deportees) are often unable to access emergency homeless accommodation beyond ONO basis. Returning Irish emigrants and their families including Irish citizens fleeing conflict areas on foot of advice from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.
- Refugees or 'leave to remain' households can be trapped in Direct Provision accommodation. Such households should be recognised as homeless and given homeless priority with the attendant access to supports.

¹ DRHE End of Year 2015 Performance Report.

- Reunited refugee families who are at risk of homelessness. Such households should have their housing need recognised in advance of family member arrival so that the risk of homelessness can be recognised and prevented where possible.

3.3 Support:

- Homeless migrants can be placed in PEA with no supports. Efforts should be made to increase the amount of support offered.
- Inadequate supports are available to families in hotels and B&B's. Homeless Actions Teams do not exist in many areas and where they do they have huge waiting lists. Families can remain for months without any effective supports. This results in lack of 'move-on'. It increases problems / risks around sustainable exits from homelessness.
- While noting actions underway as regards 'embedded' PEA supports, appropriate services and integrated supports / case management for families, migrants and other vulnerable households must be proactively available in placements.
- Rate of support planning in Private Emergency Accommodation (primarily families) with no – onsite service provider is only at 29%.
- HSE budgets require to be restored and increased to improve Mental Health and General Health supports currently working with and within accommodation services.
- While emergency beds are a necessity, increasing hostel provision does not tackle long-term homelessness. Housing First programmes and the need to access housing are a priority. Attempts to increase housing stock must include provision for single people as well as families.

4.0 ACCESS TO HOUSING

4.1 Introduction

The Lack of Housing (rented & social Housing) is the major cause of the present homelessness crisis. Therefore, the implementation of a national housing strategy in conjunction with a housing and health strategy is the only way in which a medium and long term solution can be found to this present crisis.

Current commitments in relation to general housing provision are overly reliant on the private development sector. The following is pertinent:

- 80,368 homes are required nationally. 35,433 homes required in Dublin area.
- 65,584 principal dwelling mortgages in arrears more than 90 days. 24,890 buy to let mortgages in arrears of over 90 days (81% of accounts).
- 90,000 people on the housing waiting list. 44% of these are single person households while 30% of households were single adults with a child or children.

- Funding for social housing delivery decreased from € 1.7 billion in 2007 to € 807 million in 2011.² 2016 Housing budget will amount to €933 million.
- 13,141 social housing units were delivered in 2015. RAS delivered 1,823 units short of its 2,000 units.

In relation to the Private rented sector,

- 5,680 households were on HAP in 2015, 29% below the 2015 Social Housing Target of 8,000. Target for 2016 is 13,000. Concerned about the capacity of the private rented sector to deliver on targets as supply of rental homes are at the lowest point in a decade and RS limits are below market price i.e.
- 95% of rental properties available to rent nationally are beyond the reach of those in receipt of RS/HAP.³
- There were fewer than 1,400 properties to rent in Dublin area on the 1st Feb 2016 compared to 1,800 one year previously; a 22% decrease in a year.⁴
- Rent supplement limits remain unchanged since June 2013, yet rents in Dublin city centre increased by 46% since 2010. In Kildare and Meath rents increased by 10.2% and 13.9% respectively in the last year.⁵
- Rent Supplement to be available to those working fulltime – calculations of rent support levels should be standardised and consistent with HAP.

4.2 Social Housing:

- There is Confusion over what is 'modular' and what is 'rapid housing build'. The status of tenure of a resident in modular home requires to be clarified.
- The State should promote innovative ways for Approved Housing Bodies ('AHB's) to bring developments to the market quickly in terms of risk sharing and progressing community development housing as 'strategic infrastructure'.
- The Social Housing Strategy 2020 commits to providing 18,000 new social homes by the end of 2018, with a further 17,000 homes by the end of 2020. The provision of affordably priced socially rented housing is critical. This commitment must be linked with improved infrastructure in order to build vibrant communities.

4.3 Accessibility / Affordability:

- A Review of eligibility for Migrants to access HAP and social housing is required.
- Single, independent persons under 25 have the same housing needs as over 25s. Full rate social welfare payment should be restored to under 25's.
- Deposits continue to be at risk and exposed to loss. The Deposit Protection Scheme should be implemented under the PRTA Act and administered by the PRTB. This should include HAP deposits.

² Norris, Michelle, 2011 article in Eolas Magazine.

³ SCI (Jan 2016) 'Locked out of the Market III. 'Gap between Rent supplement/Hap limits and market Rents'.

⁴ Daft.ie

⁵ Daft.ie Q4 2015 Report.

- Application of Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 to all cases i.e. the definition of homelessness should be the determinant of assessments.
- Under current policies, a large cohort of the migrant community may never be eligible for the housing list and so ineligible for HAP. Housing need and capacity to resource accommodation should be the determining factors for entry onto the housing list.
- Increasing rents in the private sector are impacting on people at all income levels. This trend affects the economy as a whole and is particularly disastrous for those on low incomes residing in unstable accommodation. Rent regulation already exists in Ireland, but has been too limited to significantly improve the sector. It is strongly recommended that the Government introduce measures to link rent increases to CPI.
- The gap between available rental subsidies and market rent is forcing people to illegally top-up their payments. In order for rent subsidies to fulfil their purpose they must keep pace with market rents. Proposals to increase rent subsidy rates must be accompanied by rent certainty measures.
- Lack of landlord incentives & supports to accept tenants on HAP/RA. 'Public' tenants should be made equally attractive to landlords as those not needing support through 'sunset cloused' special incentives if necessary.
- There should be a review of the social housing allocations policy of local authorities in respect of;
 - Estate Management Checks & Local Estate Management Checks (2 levels of checks).
 - The treatment of Local authority arrears
 - Local Authorities refusing to accept housing applications and issuing verbal refusals.
 - Refused access to the housing list if not able to prove address in the Dublin area for the past 12 months.
 - Allocations policies of AHBs.

5.0 KEEPING PEOPLE WHO MOVE OUT OF HOMELESSNESS IN HOUSING

5.1 Introduction

Many of the recommendations relating to keeping people out of homelessness mirror preventative programmes as outlined earlier. However, care and support, types of tenure, community cohesion are all factors to ensure that those who leave homelessness can remain in the community.

5.2 Housing First / Housing Led

- Continued and on-going visiting support for those identified as requiring support should be provided for those placed in housing first or independent tenancies. Housing First programmes, which have proven successful in tackling long-term

homelessness, require both available housing and wrap-around support services. There is a need for increased investment in these programmes, particularly in the area of youth homelessness.

- Continued and on-going visiting support for those identified as requiring support should be provided for those placed in housing first or independent tenancies. Housing First programmes, which have proven successful in tackling long-term homelessness, require both available housing and wrap-around support services. There is a need for increased investment in these programmes, particularly in the area of youth homelessness.
- There should be an increase in resources for adequate visiting support for those with physical & mental health needs. Funding for such programmes needs to be provided on a multi-annual basis: 'Vision for Change' highlights the absence of tenancy sustainment supports, ring fenced housing and crisis support. There are also difficulties in accessing mental health services for individuals who also have addiction issues.
- HSE is the second largest state funder of homeless service provision and provides an essential budget. The HSE was cut by in some cases over 20% since 2010. Drugs Initiative Budget has seen cuts of up to 37% over the past six years which has resulted in a dramatic fall in supporting those coming out of homelessness. A full restoration is required of cuts since 2010.
- There need to be consideration given to the long term care needs of people with complex health issues. As those living in the Long Term Accommodation units continue to age their needs to be consideration given to how to continue to support them as their health diminishes. There requires to be an increase of such provision and an increase in the health provision provided for such units.
- SLI type supports need to be tailored and extended to need and linked to Tenancy Sustainment services in a continuum within the community.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

CEASING THE FLOW INTO HOMELESSNESS (PREVENTION)

- Rent Supplement and HAP limits must be brought into line with real market rents and reviewed annually.
- Further Rent Certainty measures (initial measures introduced in Nov 2015) can be introduced by making amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 2014:
 - Rents set a market value
 - Full rent certainty with rent aligned to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) required.
- The Homeless Specific HAP pilot must be extended nationally. Currently, limits can increase by 50% in Dublin and up to 20% in commuter counties under the pilot.
- Funding must be made available under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 to provide additional resources for Prevention and Early Intervention services. Such

existing support services provide 85% support to those in moving into independent living.

- *'Information and advice services'* must be resourced to provide much needed advice to households, this was an action item in *'Implementation Plan on States Response to Homeless'* due to start in Q4 2014 but has yet to commence.
- National Hospital Discharge protocol for homeless persons must be fast-tracked and implemented in all hospitals including monitoring and reporting.
- Need to ensure access to necessary supports housing support, clinical support and supports towards community reintegration.
- Strategy for the Private Rented sector is required.

EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

- Emergency accommodation should only ever be used in the short term.
- Full implementation of the Housing First approach must happen as a matter of urgency.
- Short and long term investment in Housing First solutions are needed to ensure the necessary housing and supports are in place before any funding is withdrawn from emergency accommodation, which is currently a vital measure in place to address homelessness
- Strategy in place to reduce and minimize hotel usage over a fixed period of time, ensuring more adequate secure accommodation is in place.
- Review requirement for an annual cold weather initiative and ensure structure in place that reviews trends in demand for emergency accommodation and projects demand.
- Defined strategy in place to move single homeless individuals into single unit accommodation. Particular attention should focus on those who are in emergency accommodation longer than 6 months.
- Funding should be ring fenced and redirected to specialist voluntary services such as Homeless Action Teams to ensure appropriate visiting and on-site support is provided to those in private emergency accommodation.

Modular Housing/Rapid Housing Build

- Ensure the delivery of *'modular housing'* within time scales and ensure clarification from DoE on associated costs, timeframe for implementation, and the long term use in the wider housing sector and Social Housing Strategy.

ACCESS TO HOUSING

- People who are homeless must be prioritised as having the greatest form of social housing need and priority given to long term homeless. Adequate supply of units to accommodate different household type's especially single person units.
- Increase housing supply across all tenures. Commitment in Social Housing Strategy 2020 must remain on target and immediate review is required
- Ministerial direction of 50% of allocations must continue and allocations policies must actively prioritise homeless.
- Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) must be resourced and protected as an available method of delivering units on an open rolling basis for social housing. Mechanisms must be explored to improve access to finance (CALF) and more financially viable to

- remove barriers to accessing finance through the HFA.
- Full implementation of Deposit Protection Scheme via Residential Tenancies Act.
- Favourable tax treatment for landlords with tenants in receipt of Rent Supplement and HAP.
- Expansion of the NAMA Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) and revise up to 25% target on properties for vulnerable groups.
- Explore mixed funding models including private finance, state funding and AHB's working in partnership.
- Local Authority responsibility and accountability should extend to include:
- Use of land for development by Approved Housing Bodies promoted.
- Restoration of 20% to delivery of Part V is required including protocol on implementation with AHB's support on delivery of these units.
- The issue of workers in low paid employment at risk of homelessness needs to be addressed. Nearly half (47%, n=522) of the tenants who were at risk of homelessness that were supported by the Cork TPS, were in paid employment of over 30 hours & not entitled to access to HAP.

- Immediately set-up a Statutory Commission on the PRS to make recommendations within 6 months on how to:
 - Address legacy issues in PRS such as buy-to-let arrears
 - Address the level of PRS units held by non-bank entities
 - Ensure long term security of tenure
 - Ensure long term affordability (Rent Certainty)
 - Ensure Landlords receive appropriate support
 - Ensure minimum standards in PRS
 - Ensure public housing subsidies are effectively used within the PRS to deliver positive social outcomes and value for money.

- As part of the *Planning No 1 Bill* it is proposed that Local Authorities will be able to apply a levy on property developers who leave their sites vacant or under utilised and a 'use it or lose it' system of planning permission to be implemented.

KEEPING PEOPLE WHO MOVE OUT OF HOMELESSNESS IN HOUSING

- Basic welfare payments need to be increased in line with the cost of living increases. Supplementary Welfare Allowance must be realigned to basic Social Welfare payments.
- Change the law to ensure that both receivers appointed to mortgaged properties and lenders who have initiated repossession proceedings are regarded as the landlord.
- Funding must be allocated to support work with vulnerable households once they have moved into housing. Requires expansion of Support to Live Independently (SLI) and intensive case management associated with Housing First initiatives.
- Resources required to ensure implementation of '*Vision for Change*'.
- Alcohol and drug services must be tailored and targeted to the needs of people who are homeless and settled in their home. This should include access to substitution treatment, detoxification, rehabilitation and aftercare services. The provision of a dedicated Community Mental Health Nurse in each Integrated Service Area must be implemented as actioned in '*The Implementation plan on the State's Response to Homelessness*' commitment.

- Harm reduction and recovery approaches must be an integral part of Housing First models.
- The Social Protection System must make sure supports for people exiting homelessness include measures aimed at assisting them to access education, employment and training opportunities.
- Engagement in employment, education and training offers people a means of generating independent income, opportunities for developing social networks and a way to enhance skills and self-esteem.
- HSE funding must be restored and ring fenced in line with projected demand for services to which HSE directly support.