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**Tithe an Oireachtais**

**An Comhchoiste um Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige**

**Tuarascáil maidir le Tionchar na hEaspa Dídine ar Leanaí**

**Samhain 2019**

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**Houses of the Oireachtas**

**Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs**

**Report on the Impact of Homelessness on Children**

**November 2019**

**32 CYA 012**





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**Alan Farrell T.D.**

The issue of homelessness is one of the most complex and important issues facing legislators, policy makers and wider society at present, and its impact on families and children cannot be underestimated. It remains a stain on our society that we, collectively, must resolve to remedy as quickly as possible.

We have a responsibility to act in the long-term interests of children and young people, ensuring they can grow in homes which are suitable to their needs. This must always be of the utmost priority to legislators.

Given the significance of the impact of homelessness on children, the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs undertook as part of its work programme for 2019 to consider this matter and to produce recommendations that would, first, highlight the issue and, second, aid the Oireachtas and other bodies in their attempts to tackle it.

The Joint Committee met with and received submissions from numerous stakeholders, all of whom agreed that the impact of homelessness on children can be devastating in every facet of their young lives. Simple things like having a secure place to live, share meals with their families, do their homework, and have friends around to play are out of the reach of the thousands of children currently experiencing homelessness. This cannot be allowed to continue and we as a society must act to prevent long-term social and emotional damage to children as a result of homelessness

The Joint Committee has formulated 20 recommendations – from recommending that the best interests of the child are always taken into account by local authorities when providing homeless supports to measures that call for reform of how and where we house homeless families and children, and advocating for an end to practices such as placing children in hotel and B&B accommodation or overcrowded facilities.

This report calls for a national family homelessness strategy with the interests of the child as a fundamental principle to ensure that families and children across the State have access to an equal level of services and supports.

The Joint Committee also examined the impact homelessness has on the health, education and well-being of homeless children and young people and recommends a number of reforms to improve the well-being of homeless children and to tackle the traumatic impact homelessness can have on the lives of these children not only now, but in the future, as they grow. These reforms include further supports for schools, the provision of wrap-around services such as child support workers and the provision of year-round Leap cards for homeless children.

The Joint Committee notes that several Government Departments are involved in tackling child homelessness and its effects, notably, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Transport, Tourism and Sport, Education and Skills, Children and Youth Affairs, and Health, and all must play their part in ameliorating the impact of homelessness on children to prevent long-term consequences.

I wish to thank the Members of the Joint Committee for their input and also all the individuals and organisations who made presentations and submissions to the Joint Committee on this issue. Their insight and advice was invaluable in the preparation of this report. I would also like to thank the staff of the Committee Secretariat for their work in producing the report.

Homelessness is the major issue facing Ireland today and its impact on children is one of the most difficult areas to tackle. The Joint Committee requests that the Oireachtas acts to address this issue without delay to reduce the impact on children and ensure their long-term development and lives are not blighted into the future.



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**Alan Farrell T.D.**

**Chairman**

*November 2019*

**MEMBERSHIP – JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS**

**Deputies**



**Lisa Chambers T.D.  
(FF)**



**Alan Farrell T.D.  
(FG) Chair**



**Kathleen Funchion  
T.D. (SF)**



**Denise Mitchell  
T.D. (SF)**



**Tom Neville T.D.  
(FG)**



**Anne Rabbitte  
T.D. (FF)**



**Seán Sherlock T.D.  
(Lab)**

**Senators**



**Lorraine  
Clifford-Lee (FF)**



**Fintan Warfield  
(SF)**



**Joan Freeman  
(Ind)**



**Catherine Noone  
(FG)**

## 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation 1

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should examine the issue of enumerating the right to housing in the Constitution and that full scrutiny be given to the issue as a matter of priority. This would be best achieved by consideration by an Oireachtas Committee.**

### Recommendation 2

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government fully uphold its obligations under international law when it comes to protecting the rights of the child.**

### Recommendation 3

**The Joint Committee recommends that the best interests of the child are taken into account by local authorities when providing homeless supports and that this be set out, as a matter of urgency, in revised guidelines from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to local authorities on implementing the Housing Act. The Joint Committee also notes that the voice of the child should be considered by local authorities as part of this process, and that appropriate training be provided to staff.**

### Recommendation 4

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should instruct local authorities to end self-accommodation by families and restrict the practice of one-night-only accommodation for families with children so that it cannot be used on more than two consecutive nights. The Joint Committee also recommends that the Government should bring in timelines to end the provision of emergency accommodation to families through the use of hotels and B&Bs and ensure adequate supports are in place to assist families to exit emergency accommodation.**

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should commission an independent evaluation into the overall effectiveness of the response to family homelessness, including the suitability of family hubs, and the growth of family homelessness outside Dublin.**

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should support the establishment of an independent inspectorate of homelessness services to ensure appropriate monitoring of standards.**

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should further investigate the issue of regional family homeless through a regional discovery exercise which is data-informed. The Joint Committee further recommends that the Government should improve data collection practices to include a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and publication of information in order to prepare a policy response to the increasing number of families affected.**

#### **Recommendation 8**

**The Joint Committee recommends that a national family homelessness strategy be drawn up, with the interests of the child as a fundamental principle, ensuring that families across the State have access to an equal level of services and supports, with the objective of progressively reducing the level of family homelessness.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government ensure that local authorities fully utilise budgets for funding for accommodation for Traveller families.**

#### **Recommendation 10**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should end the practice of accommodating homeless families in hotels and B&Bs on the basis that living in cramped living conditions has a destructive impact on the health of children. This practice should be phased out over time with a view to placing families in own-door accommodation as soon as possible.**

#### **Recommendation 11**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should ensure that the particular needs of sick children in emergency accommodation are identified and their access to healthcare is guaranteed. The role of public health nurses is of particular importance in this regard. Homeless children living outside Dublin should have support with transport to a hospital appointment and all-year Leap cards should be provided to children and their parents in Dublin to ensure, among other objectives, transport to medical appointments and hospitals.**

**The Joint Committee further recommends that the Government should provide year-round free transport for homeless children and their parents to ensure equivalent transport support for homeless children in rural areas. The administration of Leap cards to homeless families should be made as simple as possible.**

**Recommendation 12**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should fund further wrap-around services such as qualified child support workers or additional family support workers. A child support worker should be available for every child who is assessed as requiring such support. The Joint Committee further recommends that a 'whole family' approach be used, from the moment any family becomes homeless, to tackle the long-term trauma of homelessness.**

**Recommendation 13**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government, in conjunction with housing authorities and organisations dealing with homeless families, practise trauma informed care to protect the dignity of homeless families and to reduce stigma.**

**Recommendation 14**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should provide extra supports to all schools attended by children in homeless families to ensure that schools have a budget to buy a meal or provide other supports required to allow homeless children to participate fully in their education.**

**Recommendation 15**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should provide homeless children with free access to OPW sites during the school holidays.**

**Recommendation 16**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should reduce the reliance on the private rental market for housing provision for homeless families on a phased basis. The Joint Committee recommends that the Government explore innovative mechanisms to give greater security to tenants in the private rental sector where the landlord is considering evicting the tenant to sell the property.**

**Recommendation 17**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should accelerate the provision of social and affordable housing to homeless families over the next two years in order to combat the rising numbers of homeless children. The Joint Committee further recommends that the Government should explore ways in which the allocation of social housing can be reformed to give greater priority to families which are particularly vulnerable or are unlikely to obtain a secure tenancy in the private rented sector.**

**Recommendation 18**

**The Joint Committee recommends that measures need to be taken to ensure that new housing supply facilitates family-appropriate accommodation and that family-appropriate accommodation be made available across the country and not limited to certain areas.**

**Recommendation 19**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should conduct a mapping exercise of homeless supports and services and make this available to schools and other groups who would be dealing with homeless children and families.**

**Recommendation 20**

**The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should recognise that children and their parents from families where parents are under 25 years of age need additional supports as they transition into adult services.**

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs (The Joint Committee) undertook as part of its work programme for 2019 to examine the issue of the impact of homelessness on children.

The Joint Committee held three meetings in relation to this matter and met with a wide range of individuals and groups with an interest in the issue, from a range of perspectives.

The Joint Committee also received written submissions from academics, organisations and groups working with children and families during its examination of the issue.

During its meetings and from an examination of the submissions received by it, the Joint Committee heard evidence which illustrates the scale of this issue in Ireland, while it also heard evidence in relation to the measures which could be undertaken to ensure that we reduce the numbers of children impacted by homelessness.

### 2.1 PREVAILING TRENDS

Over the course of its engagements, and through an analysis of the submissions received by it, the Joint Committee has become aware of several prevailing trends in the context of the impact of homelessness on children.

According to the Homelessness Report of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (May 2019)<sup>1</sup>:

- 1,275 families were homeless in the Dublin region
- 1,700 families were homeless across Ireland
- There were 988 homeless single parent families nationally
- 3,749 dependants were homeless

These figures do not account for homeless families who are self-accommodating or doubling up with family and friends, as they are not accessing emergency accommodation funded under section 10 of the Housing Act.

It is clear that while the majority of homeless families are located in the Dublin region, homelessness is now impacting on children across Ireland, including rural areas.

There has been some research in recent years in Ireland into the impact that homelessness has had on children in the areas of health, welfare and education.

A study commissioned by the Children's Rights Alliance notes that homeless children experienced frequent school absences which were attributed to poor diet, inadequate rest,

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government [Homelessness Report](#) May 2019.

and poor living conditions.<sup>2</sup> Parents noted how infections were common and difficult to treat and manage while living in overcrowded accommodation. Parents and teachers identified a lack of healthy diet as a factor impacting on children's school attendance. Children often had to have long journeys to school and suffered from fatigue. Such factors were seen to lead to reduced engagement and participation in school life.

The impact of homelessness on the health of children has also been documented. Temple Street Children's University Hospital noted that 842 homeless children attended the hospital in 2018, an increase of 29% on 2017.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these children (85%) presented with medical complaints including abdominal pain, high temperatures, chest infections, asthma, seizures, and vomiting, but 23% presented with trauma including hand and arm injuries, head lacerations, burns and self-harm. The report noted that while the nature of presentations was varied and complex, "the majority of presentations stem from the fact that these children are living in completely unsuitable, cramped and temporary accommodation".

Further studies on the impact of homelessness on the mental health of children have also indicated that homelessness can be a traumatic experience for both children and parents. A 2018 study conducted with young adult parents revealed parents and their children are experiencing unacceptably high levels of stress with consequences for their well-being and development.<sup>4</sup> Children were noted to have gradual and significant changes in behaviour due to environmental stressors associated with homelessness.

A year-long study into the effects of homelessness and life in emergency accommodation, undertaken in 2017 and 2018, found that placing homeless families in hotel rooms was having a "destructive" impact on children and significantly affected mental health and physical development.<sup>5</sup> Some parents who were living in hotel accommodation noted developmental delays in their children, including delayed speech and stunted development, as they had not learned to crawl or walk due to a lack of space.

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<sup>2</sup> Children's Rights Alliance. [Home Works: A Study on the Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation](#) July 2018

<sup>3</sup> Children's Health Ireland. [Report on Children who are homeless attending the Emergency Department](#), January 2019

<sup>4</sup> Lambert, O' Callaghan and Jump. [Young Families in the Homeless Crisis: Challenges and Solutions](#). Focus Ireland 2018

<sup>5</sup> Nowicki, M., Brickell K., and Harris, E.. [The hotelisation of the housing crisis: Experiences of family homelessness in Dublin hotels](#). *The Geographical Journal*. 2019

A report commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Food Access and Nutritional Health among Families in Emergency Homeless Accommodation* by Michelle Share and Marita Hennessy<sup>6</sup> found that:

*the evidence suggests that being placed in emergency homeless accommodation such as B&Bs, hostels and hotels causes food poverty. Children do not have access to appropriate developmental space and experience poor nutrition, and for babies and toddlers weaning may be compromised. Children's positive food socialisation is limited by their living circumstances as they are positioned to eat in socially unacceptable circumstances, dining on the bed, the floor, in a row and/or under surveillance, without dignity.*

A report published by the Ombudsman for Children's Office outlined the experiences of 80 children living in family hubs across the country.<sup>7</sup> Privacy, not being able to have visitors and feelings of shame and embarrassment were some of the complaints raised by homeless children living in family hubs. While most children did not directly speak about their mental health during the consultation, they expressed feelings of sadness, confusion and anger.

Ultimately, the Joint Committee concluded, on the basis of these statistics and on the basis of all materials/submission received by it, that the topic of the impact of homelessness on children warrants in-depth scrutiny of the issues associated with it.

This report will illustrate the various viewpoints of the relevant stakeholders, after which the Joint Committee will make its recommendations.

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, [Food Access and Nutritional Health among Families in Emergency Homeless Accommodation](#) Michelle Share and Marita Hennessy (2014)

<sup>7</sup> The Ombudsman for Children's Office. [No Place like Home: Children's Views and Experiences of Living in Family Hubs](#) April 2019

### 3 CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

Since the financial crisis of 2008-09, a number of policy documents on homelessness have been published. While some of them have touched on the area of child homelessness, they have not been child-specific in nature.

An earlier policy document from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published in 2001 considered the area of youth homelessness in the context of “out of home” homelessness but clearly pre-dates the growing trend of family homelessness over the past decade.<sup>8</sup>

In 2012, a report published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs noted that Government policy had not differentiated between youth and child homelessness stating in practice:<sup>9</sup>

*A large number of the objectives and related actions set out in the strategy are concerned with preventing and responding to homelessness among children and young people under the age of 18.*

In 2008, *The Way Home – A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness 2008-2013*, was published with the aim of ending homelessness by 2016.<sup>10</sup> A national implementation plan was published in 2009 and the Programme for Government (2011) included a commitment to ending homelessness and the need to sleep rough by implementing a housing-led approach.

In February 2013, the Government issued a *Homelessness Policy Statement*. The subsequent *Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness – May 2014 to December 2016* prioritised the following:

- Accommodating rough sleepers and therefore eliminating the need to sleep rough
- Managing the escalating number of homeless families in the Dublin region
- Management and use of vacant properties
- The practical application of local authority housing allocations, and
- The timely and appropriate utilisation of NAMA units

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<sup>8</sup>Department of Health and Children. [Youth Homelessness Strategy](#) (2001)

<sup>9</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs. [Young Peoples Homeless and Housing Pathways :Key Findings from a 6 Year Qualitative Longitudinal Study](#) (2013)

<sup>10</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government [The Way Home – A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness 2008-2013](#) (2008)

The *Action Plan to Address Homelessness*, published in December 2014, followed a special summit on homelessness and listed immediate actions to address rough sleeping in Dublin, as well as further actions to tackle systemic issues, grouped under prevention, accommodation and supports.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, the Government introduced a new policy in the area of housing and ending homelessness. *Rebuilding Ireland, An action plan for housing and homelessness* was published in 2016, and comprises five pillars of actions across Government including the following:

- addressing homelessness
- accelerating social housing
- building more homes
- improving the rental sector, and
- utilising existing housing

A key priority of the plan is to address the level of homeless families and long-term homeless people in emergency accommodation by providing rapid housing delivery, alongside measures to support those at risk of losing their homes.<sup>12</sup> The plan notes that emergency hotel accommodation is unsuitable for families for anything other than a short period of time, with the goal that by mid- 2017 “hotels will be used for emergency accommodation in limited circumstances”.

Solutions to family and child homelessness featured in *Rebuilding Ireland* include, among others, increases in rent supplement and housing assistance payments, HAP, as well as increased social housing allocations and wider housing supply to be delivered through an expanded rapid-build housing programme and acquiring vacant units.

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Housing Planning and Local Government. [Action Plan to Address Homelessness](#) (2014)

<sup>12</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. [Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness](#) (2016)

## 4 EVIDENCE FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section of the report, there will be an analysis of the pertinent themes that arose during the Joint Committee’s engagements on this topic and there will also be a consideration of other materials of which the Joint Committee has become aware of as a result of its consideration of this topic.

Following this, the Joint Committee will provide its recommendations in this regard.

### 4.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Joint Committee held three days of hearings during the period from June 2019 to July 2019 to engage with relevant stakeholders to discuss “the impact of homelessness on children”.

Table 1 below identifies all stakeholders who made presentations to the Joint Committee, the date of their presentations and the session during which they made their presentation.

Table 2 below provides details relating to submissions that were received by the Joint Committee on this topic.

4.2.1 TABLE 1 - STAKEHOLDERS

	Session 1	Session 2
<u>11 June 2019</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland</li> <li>• Ms Niamh Lambe, Team Leader, Family Homeless Action Team, Focus Ireland</li> </ul>	
<u>19 June 2019</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children</li> <li>• Dr. Karen McAuley, Head of Policy, Office of the Ombudsman for Children</li> <li>• Dr. Carmel Corrigan, Head of Participation and Rights Education, Office of the Ombudsman for Children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Tanya Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Children’s Rights Alliance</li> <li>• Mr. Lewis Mooney, BL, Bar Council of Ireland Catherine McGuinness Fellow</li> </ul>

09 July 2019

- Ms Mary Hurley, Assistant Secretary, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
- Mr. David Kelly, Principal Officer, Housing Delivery Division, Department of Housing Planning and Local Government
- Mr. Albert O'Donoghue, Principal Officer, Alternative Care Policy, Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Mr. Jim Gibson, Chief Operations Officer, Tusla
- Mr. Cormac Quinlan, Director of Transformation and Policy, Tusla

4.2.2 TABLE 2 - SUBMISSIONS

Organisation	Title	Date Received
Focus Ireland	Focus Ireland response to Office of the Children's Ombudsman Report, 'No Place Like Home'	15 May 2019
Social Justice Ireland	Submission on Impact of Homelessness on Children	20 May 2019
Novas	Impact of Homelessness on Children- Submission	28 May 2019
Novas	Trauma Informed Care manual	28 May 2019

Barnardos	Submission to the JCCYA on impact of homelessness on children	30 May 2019
St. Vincent de Paul	Submission on Impact of Homelessness on Children	31 May 2019
Threshold	Submission on Impact of Homelessness on Children	31 May 2019
Tusla	Submission on Impact of Homelessness on Children	04 June 2019
Children's Rights Alliance	Opening Statement to the Joint Committee	07 June 2019
Ombudsman for Children	Opening Statement by the Ombudsman for Children	19 June 2019
Dr. Mel Nowicki Lecturer in Urban Geography, Oxford Brookes University	Submission on Impact of Homelessness on Children	3 July 2019
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Draft Opening statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on Homelessness	3 July 2019
Dr. Sharon Lambert School of Applied Psychology University College Cork	Submission on Impact of Homelessness on Children	5 July 2019
Dublin Region Homelessness Executive	DRHE Response to the Ombudsman	5 July 2019
Children's Health Alliance	Submission	5 July 2019
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transitional)	9 July 2019
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	Briefing Note for JCCYA Homelessness and Children	9 July 2019
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	Opening Statement	9 July 2019

### 4.3 CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Many stakeholders in their submissions argued that enumerating a right to housing in the Constitution could have a long-term benefit for children and lessen the potential impact of homelessness on children.

Stakeholders such as the Office of the Ombudsman for Children have proposed reform in this area arguing that enumerating such a right would mean that there would be a stronger obligation on the State to provide housing for families.

Some members questioned whether the Constitution was an appropriate place for such a right, arguing that placing a right to housing in the Constitution could cause financial difficulty for the State and housing providers. It was also suggested that there could be a struggle to choose between competing needs and rights. They argued that perhaps the detail should be left to legislation.

In its discussions with the Joint Committee, the Children's Rights Alliance maintained that constitutional reform in this area is vital to protect the interests of children. It also reasoned that enumerating such a right would signal a level of protection for families and children to ensure that no child would be homeless ever again.

*We have seen the benefit of constitutional change over the past number of years. Society changes and it gives our people on the ground around the country the benefit of these changes.*

It was argued by the Ombudsman that while there was constitutional protection awarded to children in 2012, the State has not followed through on protecting children sufficiently. Enumerating a right to housing would ensure that could not happen again.

The Ombudsman for Children has noted in the *No Place Like Home* report on children's experiences of family hubs that the *Eighth Report of the Constitutional Convention* needs to be examined by the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach.<sup>13</sup>

In its discussions with the Joint Committee, the Children's Rights Alliance stated that enumerating a right to housing in the Constitution need not lead to an absolute right but could be interpreted on a phased and progressive basis.

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<sup>13</sup> Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution [Economic Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2014)

It also noted that while there is currently no constitutional right to housing, Ireland is a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>14</sup>

*This gives every child the right to an adequate standard of living for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, including provision of housing. However, the Convention does not apply directly in Irish law and it is up to Courts to determine how much weight it gives international law in its decisions.*

The Joint Committee noted that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on the State to undertake measures to increase the availability of social housing and emergency housing support.

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#### 4.3.1 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee notes that the argument for enumerating economic, social and cultural rights in the Constitution has been the matter of ideological and legal debate for many years.

The Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution was published in March 2014 and identified a number of specific rights, including housing, which it recommended should be enumerated in the Constitution. This report was discussed by the Dáil on 14 January 2016, and the current Government referred the report to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, where, at the time of the publication of this report, it has recently been tabled for consideration.

The Joint Committee believes that in light of the current housing crisis and the subsequent impact on children, it is a matter of public interest for the Government to re-examine the issue of enumerating a right to housing in the Constitution.

The Joint Committee also notes that as a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government should stand by any obligations to protect children under international law.

<b>Recommendation 1</b>
The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should examine the issue of enumerating the right to housing in the Constitution and that full scrutiny be given to the issue as a matter of priority. This would be best achieved by consideration by an Oireachtas Committee.

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<sup>14</sup> [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

## Recommendation 2

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government fully uphold its obligations under international law when it comes to protecting the rights of the child.

### 4.4 LEGISLATIVE REFORM

During the course of its consideration of this issue, the Joint Committee heard evidence from numerous contributors which suggests that current housing legislation does not adequately cater for the needs of children and families.

While there is no constitutional or statutory obligation to provide housing, local authorities have general responsibility under the Housing Act 1988 for the provision of housing for adults who cannot afford to provide it for themselves.

Section 2 of the 1988 Housing Act states:

*2.—A person shall be regarded by a housing authority as being homeless for the purposes of this Act if—*

*(a) there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of, or*

*(b) he is living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a),*

*and he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources.<sup>15</sup>*

Focus Ireland, in its submission to the Joint Committee, argued that the Housing Act 1988 is a relic from an era when homelessness was seen to be problem largely faced by adult men.

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<sup>15</sup> [Housing Act, 1988](#)

*The legislation passed by the Oireachtas to guide local authorities in responding to homelessness is blind in respect of children, and that follows through in the practice and the way the interests of families, particularly children, are addressed throughout the homelessness system. Obviously, that gap or absence could be addressed by changes in practice and in regulation, but it falls primarily to the Houses of the Oireachtas which passed the original legislation that guides the homelessness services to amend that legislation, so the interests of the child can be addressed.*

Mr. Mike Allen from Focus Ireland noted that local authorities have no guidance on how services should respond to families of children with trauma.

*As far as I am aware not a single local authority in the country has given its own staff any guidelines, recommendations or training whatsoever on how their services should respond to the fact that they now have parents coming in with children who are in trauma. There is no guidance, no training, nothing. That follows through into all the systems.*

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive, in its submission to the Joint Committee, has shown support for a review of the guidelines on implementing the Housing Act, with respect to the assessment and placement of homeless persons.

The Ombudsman for Children has also recommended that existing primary legislation be amended and strengthened to make children visible and to require housing authorities to provide appropriate accommodation and supports to homeless families with children.

There was strong support for an amendment to legislation which would require local authorities to listen to the voice of children and take the best interests of children into account.

The Children's Right's Alliance stated in its submission:

*Now when local authorities decide where children will be accommodated they do not have to take their best interests into account. A change in the law would mean that decision makers have to consider what is best for each child and try to ensure that their needs are met. They would also have to consult with the child or young person on the decision*

In its discussions with the Joint Committee, the Children's Rights Alliance said that there may be some argument that Article 42A of the Constitution, which protects the rights of the child, may already mandate a best interests analysis, but that this would need to be tested in the courts.

However, the Children’s Rights Alliance argued that in the meantime that there was need for legislative reform to provide clarity on the issue:

*We are calling for a statutory obligation to be placed on the Government and local authorities to carry out a best interests analysis when placing children and families in accommodation and to ensure that the voice of the child is heard throughout that process and that children are consulted on placements.*

In the *No Place Like Home Report*, the Ombudsman for Children has called on the Houses of the Oireachtas to support a Private Members’ Bill, the Housing (Homeless Families) Bill 2017, which would mean that local authorities would have to take the best interests of the child into account when providing accommodation.

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#### 4.4.1 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee notes bodies dealing with homelessness on a daily basis, such as the Dublin Region Homelessness Executive, have recommended that the guidelines for authorities be changed and that there is widespread support for the best interests of children to be taken into account by local authorities, when assessing their needs.

It is equally important that a voice is given to children during this process to ensure dignity and respect for their own views.

<b>Recommendation 3</b>
The Joint Committee recommends that the best interests of the child are taken into account by local authorities when providing homeless supports and that this be set out, as a matter of urgency, in revised guidelines from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to local authorities on implementing the Housing Act. The Joint Committee also notes that the voice of the child should be considered by local authorities as part of this process, and that appropriate training be provided to staff.

## 4.5 ACCOMMODATION PRACTICES

The Joint Committee understands that that addressing the needs of homeless families is a public policy priority, and both local authorities and non-government agencies and charities are involved in providing temporary accommodation.

### 4.5.1 SELF-ACCOMMODATION

The Joint Committee heard that self-accommodation is still common across the country. According to St. Vincent de Paul, this further adds to the stressful experience of being homeless.

*Families that have to self-accommodate have to find their own emergency accommodations and are not able to access vital supports such as a case worker who can assist them with the daily challenges of homelessness and importantly support families to get out of emergency homeless accommodation.<sup>16</sup>*

St. Vincent de Paul noted the stress that this must cause children:

*SVP members have reported visiting a family for a couple of weeks, returning for a follow-up visit, to find they are no longer there, they would then be told by hotel staff the family have been moved to alternative homeless accommodation.*

In its submission, Barnardos also noted the impact of self-accommodation on families:

*The uncertainty of having to self-accommodate results in families having to move from hotel to hotel. Logistics can become overwhelming and we see parents who are both physically and emotionally exhausted.<sup>17</sup>*

The Ombudsman for Children in the *No Place Like Home* report also noted “deep concern” that the practice of self-accommodation was still in operation.<sup>18</sup>

### 4.5.2 HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government releases monthly figures on the number of children and families living in hotels and emergency accommodation. Charities such as Barnardos have noted, however, that many children and families are

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<sup>16</sup> St. Vincent de Paul, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, May 2019, P. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Barnardos, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs. May 2019, P 5.

<sup>18</sup> Office for Ombudsman for Children, [No Place Like Home: Children’s Views and Experiences of Living in Family Hubs](#), April 2019, P 27.

experiencing hidden homelessness, which is not documented in official homelessness statistics.

Barnardos states that hidden homelessness refers to families who are temporarily accommodated, usually with friends and family, but their living situation is precarious and unsustainable.

*Hidden homelessness is most frequently characterised by overcrowded accommodation which is unsuitable for children.<sup>19</sup>*

Barnardos argues that sharing a room with multiple siblings, parents, aunts, uncles or grandparents can hinder their emotional, social, mental and physical development. Children and parents living in overcrowded accommodation have no access or privacy or their own personal space.

*Some children share a bed with a parent while younger children are reduced to using toddler beds, despite physically growing out of them, due to lack of space. For adolescents, the lack of personal space can be particularly challenging and impact severely on their social and emotional wellbeing.*

St. Vincent de Paul also expressed deep concern about the 'thousands of children' experiencing hidden homelessness:

*Despite facing many of the same challenges faced by those living in emergency accommodation, those experiencing hidden homelessness don't qualify for support services.<sup>20</sup>*

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#### 4.5.3 EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR FAMILIES

The Joint Committee heard that the vast majority of families and children experiencing homelessness in Ireland are accommodated in temporary B&B accommodation and hotels.

Dr. Mel Nowicki, in her submission to the Joint Committee, noted 'the hotelisation of Ireland's housing crisis'.

In research conducted during 2017 and 2018, Dr. Nowicki, Professor Katherine Brickell and Dr. Ella Harris spoke to 16 formerly homeless families, all of whom had spent

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<sup>19</sup> Barnardos, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs. May 2019, P 5

<sup>20</sup> St. Vincent de Paul, Submission on impact of homelessness on children, May 2019, P. 7.

months, and in some cases several years, living in hotels and bed and breakfasts in lieu of more suitable accommodation.<sup>21</sup>

The research findings highlight the impact hotel living had on mental and physical health of children.

*Daily routines were disrupted as families were left unable to cook, do their laundry or take their children to school without expensive, time-consuming journeys across the city. Not being able to cook, in particular led to higher expenditures, reported health implications due to lack of nutrition and reduced family social time.*<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Nowicki also stated that the 'destructive' impact on children was particularly acute. Living in a hotel had an impact on the physical and mental health of the children.

*One toddler's speech hadn't developed since moving into a hotel, despite them being over two years old and previously meeting development targets. A behavioural specialist had suggested that this could be a consequence of the trauma of homelessness.*

The study also notes other impacts such as children not learning to crawl or walk due to a lack of space. Dr. Nowicki argues that these early experiences of homelessness clearly have long-term implications for young children, whose physical and emotional development are at risk of being stunted due to inadequate housing conditions.

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#### 4.5.4 FAMILY HUBS

The Joint Committee heard evidence from several contributors on the operation of family hubs, who provide emergency temporary accommodation for families.

There are currently 27 family hubs in operation nationally, providing 650 units of accommodation, while further hubs are under development.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government noted that it was working with housing authorities to minimise the use of hotels through the development of family hubs.

*Family hubs offer a more suitable form of emergency accommodation, with better facilities for families with children, including cooking and laundry facilities and more*

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Mel Nowicki, Submission to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, July 2019.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

*recreational space. Families in hubs are supported by the service provider to identify and secure an independent tenancy, including a tenancy in a local authority property, a property provided by an approved housing body or a tenancy in the private rented sector supported by the housing assistance payment. Family hubs are very much a short-term solution and not intended for long-term use.*<sup>23</sup>

In its statement to the Joint Committee, Tusla noted the value of hubs in providing stability to families, and a place to provide more co-ordinated family support:

*We are clear that hubs are a worthwhile interim measure that allow us to provide stability to families and to create the pathways to the universal services any family requires, including primary care within the HSE and co-ordinated family support services in the community*

In his submission to the Joint Committee, the Ombudsman for Children noted that family hubs emerged in 2017 as a solution to family homelessness despite any clear policy objectives or research.

*While family hubs may be preferable to hotels and B&Bs, they have developed and proliferated in the absence of an evidence base, an initial pilot phase or clear public policy objectives for their use.*

The Children's Rights Alliance also stated:

*While the hubs are more suitable, they do not represent a long term or child appropriate solution.*

Mr. Mike Allen of Focus Ireland noted:

*When one looks at what is happening in the hubs - and the Ombudsman's report is excellent on this - one finds that there is no policy and it is not clear what analysis of the homelessness problem is being put forward to which the hubs are meant to be a solution, other than that the hubs are better than hotels.*

This was a view shared by many contributors and it was felt that there was a lack of vision when it came to homeless policy more generally as it related to child homelessness.

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<sup>23</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Debate: 09 July 2019, P. 3.

Several contributors believed that hubs in themselves could lead to institutionalisation of children and that the best solution for families was access to own-door accommodation.

Mr. Mike Allen from Focus Ireland noted in his discussions with the Joint Committee:

*What we know from international experience is that putting people who are homeless into congregated or institutional settings for significant periods does them harm. It makes it harder for them to re-enter mainstream living. That is even more true of families. Any form of institutional living where 20 or, in some cases, 60 families are put in one place, even if it has wonderful facilities and so on, is not a good idea. It may be better than having them on the street but it is not a good idea.*

Much of the debate at the Joint Committee meetings focused on the proposal to impose time limits on time spent in family hubs, to ensure that hubs are not seen as a long-term solution to family homelessness.

The Ombudsman for Children noted that the average time spent in family hubs now exceeds original targets:

*Ireland has a history of creating an immediate solution that lasts for ten or 15 years. We do not want to mention examples of that again, but we need to get to a stage where we provide high-quality, short-term solutions. The target was to get people in and out of family hubs within three months.*

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government noted that families are moving on within three months, but it is on a case-by-case basis:

*We have 27 hubs in place catering for approximately 660 families. In some hubs, the move-on rate is anything between two and three months. However, some families stay a bit longer, perhaps over six months, where they are getting supports and services in the hubs and are not moving on as quickly.<sup>24</sup>*

In its submission to the Joint Committee, the Children's Rights Alliance noted that more generally that some families spend years in emergency accommodation; at the end of March 2019, some 13% of families had been there for more than two years.

Another issue concerning family hubs is the perceived lack of consistency in the standard of facilities provided to families.

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<sup>24</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Debate: 09 July 2019, p.12.

The Ombudsman undertook research on children's experiences of family hubs between October 2018 and January 2019, which formed the basis of the *No Place Like Home* report on family hubs. The Ombudsman noted that there are no typical or standard hubs - some are purposefully designed and adapted, while others are former hotels, B&Bs and residential hubs.

Speaking before the Joint Committee, the Ombudsman stated:

*A lot of these hubs have fantastic play areas nearby and within their neighbourhoods, but many do not. We have said the standard should be that we will not allow anyone to go to a hub that does not have a childcare support worker, good play facilities, a therapeutic connection and easy access to schools. Those are the sorts of things to start creating now.*

While the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has service level agreements with non-governmental organisations and agencies which operate family hubs, there remains a need for greater regulation of the sector.

Tusla, in its opening statement to the Joint Committee, argued for greater regulation of emergency accommodation models, with the development of more family centred models that are aligned with services in the community.

Tusla also recommended that there be enhanced regulation of self-accommodation and contracted accommodation providers to ensure there is a family-centred regime that promotes privacy, access to food making facilities and family areas.<sup>25</sup>

Focus Ireland, however, expressed concern at the cost of establishing an independent statutory authority in this area, arguing that an existing body such as HIQA would be better placed for such a role.

*The Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, has been proposed for this role. We are open to that. Of the existing organisations that carry out this work, HIQA is probably the best placed to do this. However, we do not think HIQA's standards should apply to this because hubs are not clinical facilities. However, it would be good to employ a body with that experience without incurring the overheads involved in setting up a new organisation.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Tusla, Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, June 2019, p. 5.

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#### 4.5.5 FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN RURAL AREAS

During the course of hearings, the emerging issue of rural homelessness was mentioned by contributors as a growing problem. Much of the effort to reduce child homelessness has been concentrated in the east and areas of larger population, due to a lack of accommodation.

As of May 2019, a total of 425 families were homeless across Ireland, outside Dublin.<sup>27</sup> This was an increase of 213 families or 99.5% since May 2017.

Novas, a charity which works with families in Tipperary, Limerick, Clare, Kerry and Dublin, noted that family homelessness was less well-documented in rural areas, and that many families tended to be hidden homeless, staying with friends or neighbours.

Novas noted that areas close to tourist attractions in Kerry and Cork have a lack of rental accommodation for families, as many properties are let for temporary use by tourists. Members of the Joint Committee also noted the scarcity of rental accommodation for families in areas such as Mayo and Galway as the demand for housing increases.

The Joint Committee noted the variances between local authorities in the range of supports given to homeless families. It was noted that while vouchers are given for accommodation by local authorities, there is a lack of a common approach between authorities.

Dr. Niall Muldoon, the Ombudsman for Children, noted the lack of standardisation which adds to the sense of shame and guilt.

While family homelessness first emerged primarily as a Dublin problem, it has gradually spread to other larger urban areas, such as Cork, Waterford, Galway and Limerick, and there is now evidence that it is emerging in small towns and rural areas. Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government figures show that while in July 2016, some 12% of homeless families were outside Dublin (137 out of 1,130) the percentage in July 2019 was 26% (456 out of 1,721).

The gradual extension of rent pressure zones across the country reflects the fact that the same pressures which drove family homelessness in Dublin (rapidly rising rental levels and lack of availability in the private rental sector) are increasingly common across the country.

Many of the responses developed in Dublin – preventative interventions by the local authorities, homeless HAP, provision of child support workers, access to free transport to

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<sup>26</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 11 June, p. 7

<sup>27</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government [Homelessness Report](#) May 2019

schools, etc. – have not been transposed to non-Dublin areas in a planned or structured way.

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#### 4.5.6 TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

The Joint Committee heard evidence that there were issues around the high proportion of families from the Traveller community who are experiencing homelessness. The Joint Committee expressed concern that funding for housing for Traveller families was not being spent by local authorities.

Officials from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government informed the Joint Committee that a report into barriers preventing the delivery of Traveller accommodation was to be presented to the Minister in July 2019.

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#### 4.5.7 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the growing evidence of the long-term impact emergency and crowded accommodation has on the physical and mental development of children, the Joint Committee believes that the timelines need to be introduced to end the practice of self-accommodation and providing emergency accommodation to families.

<b>Recommendation 4</b>
The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should instruct local authorities to end self-accommodation by families and restrict the practice of one-night-only accommodation for families with children so that it cannot be used on more than two consecutive nights. The Joint Committee also recommends that the Government should bring in timelines to end the provision of emergency accommodation to families through the use of hotels and B&Bs and ensure adequate supports are in place to assist families to exit emergency accommodation.

Furthermore, the Joint Committee acknowledges that an independent evaluation of suitability of family hubs be undertaken as a matter of priority which would precede the publication of a policy document on child homelessness, recognising the different supports required by children.

**Recommendation 5**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should commission an independent evaluation into the overall effectiveness of the response to family homelessness, including the suitability of family hubs, and the growth of family homelessness outside Dublin.

Additionally, the Joint Committee believes there should be independent statutory inspection of homelessness services, given the number of families using emergency accommodation and homelessness services. This could be carried out by an existing body, such as HIQA, to ensure appropriate monitoring and oversight.

**Recommendation 6**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should support the establishment of an independent inspectorate of homelessness services to ensure appropriate monitoring of standards.

The Joint Committee believes the area of rural family homelessness is a growing problem and that homeless families in rural areas may not have access to the adequate supports which are provided in other regions.

**Recommendation 7**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should further investigate the issue of regional family homeless through a regional discovery exercise which is data-informed. The Joint Committee further recommends that the Government should improve data collection practices to include a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and publication of information in order to prepare a policy response to the increasing number of families affected.

**Recommendation 8**

The Joint Committee recommends that a national family homelessness strategy be drawn up, with the interests of the child as a fundamental principle, ensuring that families across the State have access to an equal level of services and supports, with the objective of progressively reducing the level of family homelessness.

**Recommendation 9**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government ensure that local authorities fully utilise budgets for funding for accommodation for Traveller families.

## 4.6 SUPPORTS FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN

As a result of its consideration of this topic, the Joint Committee has become aware of several issues which impact on the health and welfare of children as well as the need for strengthened supports for children. These are discussed below.

### 4.6.1 HEALTH

The Joint Committee heard evidence from several contributors about the devastating impact homelessness has on children's health.

In its opening statement to the Joint Committee, the Children's Rights Alliance noted that living in emergency accommodation impacted on the physical and mental health of children:

*Infections, including chicken pox, ear infections and head lice, are common in overcrowded and confined accommodation.<sup>28</sup>*

Other studies confirm these findings, including a study conducted by Temple Street Children's University Hospital which showed there was an increase in the number of children presenting to the hospital from 651 children in 2017 to 842 children in 2018, an increase of 29%.

The majority of these children (85%) presented with medical complaints including abdominal pain, high temperatures, chest infections, asthma, seizures, and vomiting, but 23% presented with trauma including hand and arm injuries, head lacerations, burns and self-harm. The report noted that while the nature of presentations was varied and complex,

*the majority of presentations stem from the fact that these children are living in completely unsuitable, cramped and temporary accommodation.<sup>29</sup>*

Worryingly, this research indicated that families in emergency accommodation may have difficulties accessing health services.

According to Children's Health Ireland:

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<sup>28</sup> Dr. Geraldine Scanlon and Gráinne McKenna [Home Works: Study of Educational Needs of Children in Homelessness](#) (Children's Rights Alliance 2018)

<sup>29</sup> Children's Health Ireland, Report on Children who are homeless attending the Emergency Department, January 2019

*The presentation of these children at the Emergency Department at Temple Street highlight an unmet need among these families. Many of these presentations would usually present to GP surgeries, if these children were living within a more permanent community.*

St. Vincent de Paul referenced these findings in its submission, noting that families in hotels and B&Bs often do not have access to a fridge or a personal washing machine, which can have a significant impact on health and welfare:

*They (families) are in a confined space, with no proper facilities to wash clothes in order to limit the spread of infection to other family members.<sup>30</sup>*

Research conducted by Dr. Mel Nowicki and others on the experiences of family homelessness in Dublin hotels support such findings, noting the lack of access to kitchen facilities can lead not only to higher expenditures, but reported health implications due to lack of nutrition, as well as reduced family social time.<sup>31</sup>

This report also noted the impact that staying in hotel accommodation has on children's development, including delayed speech and walking.

One participant in Dr. Nowicki's research, describing her son stated:

*He has to see the early intervention team, because he can't climb or walk stairs and he was kind of a rigid baby. They're (the specialists) convinced now that it's down to where we lived, because he hadn't got access to move around, to crawl, he never crawled... he had no space at all.<sup>32</sup>*

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#### 4.6.2 MENTAL HEALTH

In her submission to the Joint Committee, Dr. Sharon Lambert reported on findings from research conducted by researchers in the School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork <sup>33</sup>

As part of this research, interviews were carried out with young adult parents in homelessness. The study revealed parents and their children are experiencing

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<sup>30</sup> St. Vincent de Paul page 8

<sup>31</sup> Nowicki, submission page 3

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Focus Ireland [Young Families in the Homeless Crisis: Challenges and Solutions](#), Dr Sharon Lambert, Daniel O'Callaghan, Owen Jump (2018)

unacceptably high levels of stress with consequences for their well-being and development<sup>34</sup>.

She notes that while stress is a routine aspect of life, too much stress results in a process termed allostatic load, a term used to describe cumulative physiological wear and tear that results from repeated efforts to adapt to stressors over time.

*Children without a secure home, who are likely living with a parent/s themselves experiencing high levels of stress due to their family homelessness, are exposed to what psychologists call toxic stress.*

She states that children are at a particular risk from toxic stress, as their biological systems are developing and undergoing lifelong programming and thus more vulnerable.

*The impact on the architectural development of children's brains is of particular concern as this is linked with consequential emotional and behavioural disorders.*

One of the key pieces of research to inform the Joint Committee's consideration of the impact of homelessness on children's mental health is the *No Place Like Home Report*, published by the Ombudsman for Children.

In his opening statement to the Joint Committee, the Ombudsman stated in light of the real difficulties faced by children living in family hubs:

*It is not surprising, therefore, that the children we met frequently expressed feelings of sadness confusion and anger. For example, one 10 year old girl said 'some days I didn't even want to wake up because I didn't want to face this day... I am tired in school. Some days I would just sit there and not even smile.*

The Ombudsman noted that one of the most concerning features of the perspectives shared by children is the consistency with which they referenced feeling ashamed about being homeless and living in a family hub. Exacerbating the challenging circumstances that parents and children and parents face:

*Such feelings underscore the very real corrosive impact that homelessness can have on people's sense of their own dignity and worth.*

In its submission to the Joint Committee, Focus Ireland noted that the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services waiting list for assessment of children with psychological trauma was very long and some children were unable to be seen, which

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<sup>34</sup> Dr. Sharon Lambert, Submission to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

resulted in the charity seeking donations to privately fund assessments for children who are highly traumatised.

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#### 4.6.3 EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

The Children's Rights Alliance noted the impact that homelessness has on the education of children.

A recent study conducted by the Children's Rights Alliance, the *Home Works* report, examined the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness. The report noted the positive role school can have for children in helping them maintain a sense of normality.<sup>35</sup>

In her submission to the Joint Committee, Ms Tanya Ward, CEO of the Children's Rights Alliance, noted the negative impact homelessness had on children's education. Being homeless meant that children needed to travel long distances and ended up being hungry and tired by the time they reached school.

*The flip side of that was the individual experience of children. Parents were spending long periods travelling across the city to keep their child in school. For example, there is no homeless facility in Bray at the moment so people from Bray will end up being accommodated in Dublin, maybe in Clontarf. Parents could be travelling across the city nearly two hours to get the child to school.*<sup>36</sup>

The Children's Rights Alliance noted that the high level of Government action in the area to try to alleviate the impact of homelessness. The Children's Rights Alliance noted, however, that further actions could be taken to assist teachers and schools in this matter.

*Particularly in non-DEIS schools, teachers and principals told the researchers of our report that they needed support, they needed an extra teacher or a home-school liaison officer for a temporary period to get them through this crisis. That made all the difference for them. They also talked about the need for a small budget to buy a meal for a child or to buy a bean bag if a child needed to sleep - these are some of the things they were thinking about - or a school uniform if the child arrived in dirty clothes. These are very basic things but they could make all the difference for these children.*

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<sup>35</sup> Dr. Geraldine Scanlon and Gráinne McKenna, [Home Works: Study on Educational Needs of Children in Homelessness](#) (Children's Rights Alliance 2018)

<sup>36</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 19 June 2019

Share and Hennessy point out that “no matter what improvements are made in the physical quality and access to services in emergency accommodation, living in emergency accommodation by its very nature has a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of family members”.

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#### 4.6.4 FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

The Joint Committee heard evidence from many contributors who advocated for more family key workers and wrap-around supports for families in all forms of emergency accommodation as well as the hidden homeless.

Dr. Sharon Lambert noted the importance of whole family support.

*Services that support people who are experiencing homelessness need to apply a whole family support system. For children to flourish they need to have parents who are flourishing as parents are the most vital means to stability for children with respect to secure housing, general development and overall health.*<sup>37</sup>

Barnardos, in its submission to the Joint Committee, noted the need for further family support services to help families cope with the trauma caused by homelessness. Barnardos stated that parents living in emergency accommodation need further support, as project workers can only do practical work such as help with filling in forms or budgeting.

*Delivering family support when a family is being accommodated in emergency accommodation is challenging. A pre-requisite of doing any parenting work is that basic needs have been met. For families living with homelessness, having basic needs met is a daily challenge.*<sup>38</sup>

The Ombudsman for Children also called for additional measures to combat the stigma associated with family homelessness and to support the dignity, self-worth and resilience of children and parents experiencing homelessness.

*Practical measures that need to be seriously considered in this regard include increasing the number of child support workers, therapeutic supports and family support services available to children and parents living in emergency accommodation.*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dr. Sharon Lambert, Submission to Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Page 4

<sup>38</sup> Barnardos, Submission to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, page 5

<sup>39</sup> Ombudsman for Children, Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Page 4

Focus Ireland informed the Joint Committee of its Family Homeless Action Team, which provides the support for most of the families who are homeless in hotels, B&Bs and hubs in Dublin. The key workers in the FHAT are primarily funded by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, while child support workers are funded by the HSE and Tusla.

In her submission to the Joint Committee, Ms Niamh Lambe, Project Leader in the Focus Ireland FHAT, outlined the role of a child support worker:

*Child support workers work with children on a one-to-one basis to work through with the child the trauma of homelessness and help him or her express himself or herself and understand the difficulties arising from displacement.<sup>40</sup>*

She added that while parents may be assigned case managers, it was important to have a whole-family approach to ensure better overall family outcomes.

The Joint Committee noted that the work of a child support worker differs from the work of a social worker. The Joint Committee heard that child support workers provide parenting supports to meet whatever family needs present. They sometimes work on a one-to-one basis with children, and work with children of all ages. Child support workers can make referrals for therapeutic supports, but the Joint Committee was informed that there are no specific supports such as child psychologists or therapists in place in family hubs, and outside referrals are funded by donor, not by State funds.

Mr. Mike Allen from Focus Ireland told the Joint Committee that each child support worker works with approximately 20 children.

*Some of their time is spent working one to one but, obviously, it is not one to one as such. They work with 20 or so children and they also do group work. In addition, where it is deemed appropriate, a child support worker will stay with a family for a period after the family has moved out of homelessness. It is not the case that the trauma ends with the exit from homelessness and then everyone walks away; it is extended over a longer period.<sup>41</sup>*

Ms Niamh Lambe from Focus Ireland noted also the importance of case managers when child support workers have not been allocated:

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<sup>40</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 11 June 2019, page 5

<sup>41</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 19 June 2019 p16

*Our child support workers, our team and our case managers do the best they can. The case managers do as much as possible in cases where child support workers have not been allocated. We often refer families to ensure they are liaising with the public health nurse and educational welfare officers. We hold meetings in the schools with parents and teachers. Sometimes where there is not an appropriate space in the private emergency accommodation or the hub, our child support workers will work with the children after school in a space in the school. Schools are very supportive. It is not the answer but it is what is working for us at the moment.*

Tusla, in its discussions with the Joint Committee, noted that it funded two family support worker posts through Focus Ireland. It was noted that Tusla invested in the community and voluntary sector under specific family support programmes and to provide counselling services.

Mr. Jim Gibson, speaking on behalf of Tusla, agreed that greater integration and collaboration from all organisations across social and health services was required. However, he argued the issue of engaging child support workers needed careful consideration:

*We need not run away with ourselves. We need an informed decision as to whether a raft of more family support workers are needed. I would be very happy to engage with Focus Ireland in that regard.*

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive, in its submission to the Joint Committee, welcomed recommendations for further therapeutic supports and child support workers to be made available to aid children and families in homelessness.<sup>42</sup>

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#### 4.6.5. TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

Dr. Sharon Lambert noted findings from research conducted by Lambert, O' Callaghan and Jump on the psychological impact of homeless on families which shows that not only parents and children experiencing homelessness are traumatised, but so are many workers who support them.

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<sup>42</sup> Dublin Region Homeless Executive, Submission to Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, page 5

She noted that the research found that some professionals had a very negative view of families in homelessness and at times used derogatory terms to describe clients.<sup>43</sup>

Dr. Lambert argued that there is a strong possibility that professionals have limited knowledge of the impact of stress and trauma on behaviours and they struggled to see the difference between stress responses and challenging behaviour. As a result, she argued that professionals working with homeless families need to be educated on the impact of trauma and stress on the brain.

Novas in its submission also argued that a trauma informed care approach be adopted by services working with homeless children:

*By supporting people through this approach, we are more considered in the language we use, destigmatise homelessness, treat people with dignity and recognise trauma triggers in our clients.<sup>44</sup>*

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#### 4.6.6 TRANSPORT

The Joint Committee heard evidence from a number of contributors who were concerned about the additional hardships for homeless children who have to travel long distances from emergency accommodation.

The Joint Committee was made aware of a scheme run by Government whereby Leap cards are provided to school children during term time in order to reduce this hardship.

St. Vincent de Paul in its submission recommended that Leap cards should be provided out of school term time to ensure families can spend time together away from the hotel, B&B or family hub.<sup>45</sup>

The Joint Committee agreed that providing homeless children with transport supports such as Leap cards would be a quick and effective way to support children.

Other transport supports may need to be found for children in rural areas. Novas noted the social isolation that homeless children can feel in rural areas, where existing transport links do not exist.

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<sup>43</sup>Dr. Sharon Lambert, Daniel O’Callaghan, Owen Jump Focus Ireland [Young Families in the Homeless Crisis: Challenges and Solutions](#), (2018)

<sup>44</sup> Novas, Submission to Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Page 6

<sup>45</sup> St. Vincent de Paul, Submission to Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Page 9

Children’s Health Ireland noted the importance of transport in the context of health care for children as well and recommended that homeless children be supported with transport to hospital and or Leap cards to ensure access to GP or hospital care.

During the course of its meetings, the Joint Committee wrote to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to ask that free Leap cards be made available to children not just during the summer period, as in July and August 2019, but also during the mid-term break in order to allow them to continue to participate in activities and travel to visit their friends to ensure that they would not be isolated and feel alone.

In June 2019, the Government announced that free transport on Leap cards would be made available for the month of July to all children, and this scheme was extended for the month of August 2019 for homeless children. However, the Joint Committee is still strongly of the opinion that additional supports need to exist outside of term time during the school holidays.

On a similar issue, the Joint Committee also discussed the benefits of giving homeless families free access to OPW sites during school holidays.<sup>46</sup>

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#### 4.6.7 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee noted the evidence that living in cramped conditions in emergency accommodation has a negative impact on the health of children and parents. Not having access to proper cooking and washing facilities in B&Bs and hotels means that children are more prone to sickness, while the lack of space means children have no room to move or play, hindering their development.

The Joint Committee noted that the Government is working with housing authorities to minimise the use of hotels for emergency accommodation but believes swifter action must be taken in order to end the use of hotel and B&B accommodation for housing homeless families.

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<sup>46</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 09 July 2019

**Recommendation 10**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should end the practice of accommodating homeless families in hotels and B&Bs on the basis that living in cramped living conditions has a destructive impact on the health of children. This practice should be phased out over time with a view to placing families in own-door accommodation as soon as possible.

Considering the research showing a marked increase in the number of homeless children presenting to the emergency department of Temple Street Children’s University Hospital, there is a need for improved supports be provided to families living in emergency accommodation in inner city Dublin in order to ensure access to medical care.

The Joint Committee is strongly of the belief that supports such as all-year Leap cards be provided to homeless children in order to ensure that they have access to the appropriate healthcare.

Furthermore, the Joint Committee is of the view that further research and data collection should be funded in in order to identify longer term trends in relation to the impact of homelessness on the health of children.

**Recommendation 11**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should ensure that the particular needs of sick children in emergency accommodation are identified and their access to healthcare is guaranteed. The role of public health nurses is of particular importance in this regard. Homeless children living outside Dublin should have support with transport to a hospital appointment and all-year Leap cards should be provided to children and their parents in Dublin to ensure, among other objectives, transport to medical appointments and hospitals.

The Joint Committee further recommends that the Government should provide year-round free transport for homeless children and their parents to ensure equivalent transport support for homeless children in rural areas. The administration of Leap cards to homeless families should be made as simple as possible.

The Joint Committee believes that all families should have the support of a qualified support worker, to assist them to exit homelessness as quickly as possible and to overcome the problems that occur while they are homeless. Support workers should be suitably qualified in trauma-informed practice and this approach should be reflected in the family homelessness strategy referred to in Recommendation 8.

In addition, the Joint Committee believes that a number of children in homeless families require additional support from qualified child support workers, who can help them deal with the trauma of homelessness and help them overcome some of the developmental and behavioural challenges that can arise with homelessness.

#### **Recommendation 12**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should fund further wrap-around services such as qualified child support workers or additional family support workers. A child support worker should be available for every child who is assessed as requiring such support. The Joint Committee further recommends that a 'whole family' approach be used, from the moment any family becomes homeless, to tackle the long-term trauma of homelessness.

The Joint Committee commends the work of those working with children in family hubs and in housing authorities.

The Joint Committee believes that training frontline staff to recognise trauma would reduce the stigma of homeless families and children. It believes professionals working with homeless families should be educated on the impact of trauma and stress on the brain.

The Joint Committee is of the opinion that trauma informed care and training for staff working with homeless families should be supported by the Government.

#### **Recommendation 13**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government, in conjunction with housing authorities and organisations dealing with homeless families, practise trauma informed care to protect the dignity of homeless families and to reduce stigma.

The Joint Committee notes that co-operation is ongoing between Tusla and schools to support homeless children. The Joint Committee notes that the primary mechanism for addressing disadvantage in the education system is DEIS. This programme is not an effective mechanism for responding to the needs of children in homeless families as such children are to be found in all schools, not just those designated as 'disadvantaged'.

The Joint Committee heard that the educational welfare service negotiates with schools on different starting and leaving times. Tusla accommodates parents who bring children, so they are not standing outside school gates.<sup>47</sup>

However, the Joint Committee is of the opinion that further practical supports are necessary to support schools and homeless children.

Furthermore, the Joint Committee believes that homeless children should have free transport in order to reduce social isolation and to ensure access to medical care at all times of the year.

The Joint Committee also believes measures such as providing free access to OPW sites for homeless children, would also help reduce stigma and isolation.

**Recommendation 14**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should provide extra supports to all schools attended by children in homeless families to ensure that schools have a budget to buy a meal or provide other supports required to allow homeless children to participate fully in their education.

**Recommendation 15**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should provide homeless children with free access to OPW sites during the school holidays.

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<sup>47</sup> Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 09 July Page 12

### 4.7.1 PRIVATE RENTAL SECTOR

The Joint Committee heard from a number of contributors who were concerned that an over-reliance on the private rental sector has been one of the main contributors to child homelessness.

The Children's Rights Alliance stated in its submission that it wanted to a move away from placing families in rental accommodation:

*We would hope to see a move away from a reliance on the private rented sector to provide families with suitable, adequate and affordable housing and they will have security of tenure in their home.*<sup>48</sup>

Barnardos noted that it is working with families who are living in poor standard accommodation in the private rented sector who fear the prospect of homelessness should they raise legitimate issues with their landlords.<sup>49</sup>

In its submission, Threshold noted that in 2018, over 1,400 of the families who sought assistance from Threshold were at risk of homelessness on foot of receiving a notification of termination from their landlord.<sup>50</sup>

Threshold noted research by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive that shows that approximately half of the families who registered as homeless in 2018 did so on foot of a notice of termination from a landlord with the majority of reasons being for purposes of sale, family use or renovation.

Threshold argued that looking for a new home to rent is becoming increasingly difficult as there are fewer homes available to rent. In May 2019, *Daft.ie* noted the lowest ever number of rental properties available to rent.<sup>51</sup>

In its submission to the Joint Committee, Threshold noted that to prevent child homelessness and reduce the numbers entering homelessness, long-term measures to

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<sup>48</sup> Children's Rights Alliance, Opening Statement on the Impact of Homelessness on Children

<sup>49</sup> Barnardos, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, May 2019 p.6

<sup>50</sup> Threshold, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, June 2019

<sup>51</sup> The Daft.ie Rental Report, [An Analysis of Recent Trends in the Rental Market Q1 2019](#), May 2019

increase security of tenure and access to affordable, secure and sustainable housing are required. However, it maintained that the private rental sector does not have the capacity to supply the level of housing expected of it.<sup>52</sup>

The Joint Committee noted that there have been increased Government supports for families in order to prevent families in rental accommodation from becoming homeless. Measures include family supports in the form of housing assistance payments and the rental accommodation scheme.<sup>53</sup>

The Joint Committee also heard of the provision of the HAP placefinder service, which works with families at risk of homelessness to identify solutions to ensure they will not have to enter emergency accommodation.<sup>54</sup> Some 23 local authorities now have HAP placefinders.<sup>55</sup>

The Joint Committee noted also that some reforms of the private rental sector are under way and welcomed the recent enactment of the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2019.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government also informed the Joint Committee that it was conscious of the need for inspection of rental accommodation and provision of quality accommodation through HAP. It noted that it has done some work around this with the Local Government Management Agency on the rate of inspections, and that additional resources have been provided to local authorities for the inspection regime.

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#### 4.6.2 SOCIAL HOUSING AND HOUSING REFORM

The Joint Committee heard evidence from a number of contributors who contended that the construction of social housing is one of the most effective longer-term responses to child homelessness.

In its evidence to the Joint Committee, officials from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government noted that the root cause of homelessness was the shortage of supply across the housing sector. They added that the

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11,

<sup>53</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs [Debate](#) page 7

<sup>54</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs debate [Debate](#) 09 July 2019

<sup>55</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs debate [Debate](#) 09 July 2019

*Key to resolving the issue of homelessness will be increasing the supply of social housing*

The Department noted that over the lifetime of the *Rebuilding Ireland* housing plan, 50,000 new social houses will be provided.<sup>56</sup> Officials noted that in 2018, eight times as many units were built as the year before and there was a reduction of 22% in the number on social housing lists.

In his evidence to the Joint Committee, the Ombudsman for Children underscored the importance of social housing provision:

*We have to get the State building again. We have to get control of those houses and get them built for the future so that we are working towards reducing the figure of 70,000 on the waiting list for general housing. That is a crucial part of the social good that we have to try to establish as a nation<sup>57</sup>.*

Barnardos also argued that there is a need for a housing-led approach by increasing the output of built and acquired local authority and approved housing bodies social housing units in 2020 to ensure the target of 50,000 social housing homes are delivered by 2021.

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#### 4.6.3 RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Over the course of discussion on child homelessness, contributors raised the issue of the need for improved data collection and research into the impact of homelessness on children.

It was clear that while much of the discourse on homelessness had focused on numbers, there were still some gaps in the reporting of data, when it came to numbers of children and families self-accommodating and staying with friends and family, the hidden homeless.

Novas in its submission stated there is a need for a regional discovery exercise of the numbers of families who are homeless, including those families who are hidden homeless.

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<sup>56</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 09 July 2019

<sup>57</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 19 June 2019

Focus Ireland also argued the need for improved data, in order to improve services, to include families staying in own-door accommodation:

*If, for whatever reason, the Government wants to say that people living in own-door emergency accommodation are somehow in a different category from those in a hub or hotel, that is fine. However, we call on the Government to publish the data so that we can see the patterns and who is moving where. If organisations like our own collectively agree on how to report and use the data we have, we will be in a much stronger position to solve the problem, rather than using it as a brickbat to beat each other.<sup>58</sup>*

The Children's Rights Alliance noted that there is uncertainty about the level and location of some of the supports for families.

*A mapping exercise needs to be done to ensure we know all the hubs where children are located and all the housing developments.<sup>59</sup>*

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#### 4.6.4 SUPPORTING VULNERABLE FAMILIES

The Joint Committee, through its consideration of the issue, noted that contributors expressed concern that certain cohorts of family may be more likely to experience homelessness. They have noted that additional supports or preventative measures may be needed to support more vulnerable families.

Dr. Sharon Lambert, in her submission, informed the Joint Committee:

*A recent European FEANTSA report states that Ireland's family homelessness population comprises of high levels of single mothers, high levels of hidden homelessness and young parents are disproportionately represented. There is also over-representation of female-headed single parent families according to homelessness statistics.<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>58</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 11 June 2019

<sup>59</sup> Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, [Debate](#): 19 June 2019

<sup>60</sup> Dr. Sharon Lambert, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, June 2019

Dr. Lambert noted that children and families whose parents are under 25 of age are a cohort that requires additional supports.

*It is suggested that specific developmentally appropriate services for parents who are under 25 years of age and their children should be provided. This is in line with other aspects of public services nationally and internationally where there is an increased recognition of the struggle of young people to transition into adult services.<sup>61</sup>*

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#### 4.6.5 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee recognises that finding long-term solutions to child homelessness is a complex issue requiring cross-departmental co-operation and significant investment from Government.

The Joint Committee notes the progress made under the *Rebuilding Ireland, An action plan for housing and homelessness*, under the pillars of homelessness; accelerate social housing, build more homes, improve the rental sector and utilise existing housing.

However, the Joint Committee is of the opinion that swifter action must be taken to provide secure housing for homeless families and children, and to end the trauma caused by homelessness.

<b>Recommendation 16</b>
The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should reduce the reliance on the private rental market for housing provision for homeless families on a phased basis. The Joint Committee recommends that the Government explore innovative mechanisms to give greater security to tenants in the private rental sector where the landlord is considering evicting the tenant to sell the property.

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<sup>61</sup> Dr. Sharon Lambert, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, June 2019

**Recommendation 17**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should accelerate the provision of social and affordable housing to homeless families over the next two years in order to combat the rising numbers of homeless children. The Joint Committee further recommends that the Government should explore ways in which the allocation of social housing can be reformed to give greater priority to families which are particularly vulnerable or are unlikely to obtain a secure tenancy in the private rented sector.

**Recommendation 18**

The Joint Committee recommends that measures need to be taken to ensure that new housing supply facilitates family-appropriate accommodation and that family-appropriate accommodation be made available across the country and not limited to certain areas.

The Joint Committee recognises that there have been improvements in data collection and believes that this is a positive move, given the need for evidence-based policy making. However, the JYCCA is cognisant that there are believed to be some gaps in the data as it relates to homeless families in own door accommodation, and for families reporting as hidden homeless.

**Recommendation 19**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should conduct a mapping exercise of homeless supports and services and make this available to schools and other groups who would be dealing with homeless children and families.

**Recommendation 20**

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government should recognise that children and their parents from families where parents are under 25 years of age need additional supports as they transition into adult services.

**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**a. Functions of the Committee – derived from Standing Orders [DSO 84A; SSO 70A]**

- (1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—
  - (a) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and
  - (b) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.
- (2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.
- (3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—
  - (a) Bills,
  - (b) Proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,
  - (c) Estimates for Public Services, and
  - (d) Other matters as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and
  - (e) Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and
  - (f) Such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.
- (4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:
  - (a) matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,

- (b) public affairs administered by the Department,
  - (c) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,
  - (d) Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,
  - (e) policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,
  - (f) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,
  
  - (g) any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,
  - (h) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,
  - (i) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,
  - (j) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and
  - (k) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.
- (5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—
- (a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,
  - (b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,
  - (c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and
- (6) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council

of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings. The Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee.

- (7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:
- (a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,
  - (b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and
  - (c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.

**b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]**

- (1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders.
- (2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.
- (3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—
- (a) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or
  - (b) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.

- (5) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.

### Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

#### Deputies:

Lisa Chambers (FF)  
Alan Farrell (FG) [Chairman]  
Kathleen Funchion (SF)  
Denise Mitchell (SF)  
Tom Neville (FG)  
Sean Sherlock (LAB)  
Anne Rabbitte (FF)

#### Senators:

Lorraine Clifford-Lee (FF)  
Fintan Warfield (SF)  
Joan Freeman (Ind)  
Catherine Noone (FG)

#### Notes:

1. Deputies nominated by the Dáil Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Dáil of 16 June 2016.
2. Senators nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 21 July 2016.
3. Deputy Catherine Martin discharged and Deputy Kathleen Funchion appointed to serve in her stead by the Fifth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 4 October 2016.
4. Deputy Josepha Madigan discharged and Deputy Tom Neville appointed to serve in her stead by the Sixth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann 15 November 2016.
5. Deputy Jim Daly discharged and Deputy Alan Farrell appointed to serve in his stead by the Tenth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann 11

July 2017.

6. Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire discharged and Deputy Denise Mitchell appointed by the Twelfth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann 03 October 2017.
7. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan discharged and Deputy Sean Sherlock appointed by the Twelfth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann 03 October 2017.
8. Senator Máire Devine discharged and Senator Fintan Warfield appointed by the Seventh Report of the Seanad Committee of Selection as agreed by Seanad Éireann 01 May 2018.