I’d like to take the opportunity to thank the Committee for the invitation to attend here today to discuss matters in relation to homelessness.

As Members of the Committee are aware, responsibility for addressing homelessness rests with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. That said, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as well as colleagues in Tusla and others across the wider span of Government service provision are anxious to assist in any way that we can.

The Department has taken a number of steps, working within its particular remit, to help in alleviating the difficulties experienced by children and families who are homeless. Representatives of the Department participate in the Homelessness Implementation Action Group of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government as well as attending sub-group meetings in relation to homeless children and families. In addition, through one of the sponsor’s groups under the Department’s Better Outcomes Brighter Futures we examine the overall provision of services in various Government Departments – including that of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Furthermore, the Department provides direct support in the context of a specific childcare scheme for those children experiencing homelessness. Free childcare is provided for these children, along with a daily meal for each child. 312 children have been registered for the scheme in the current programme year [CHK].

The Department, with the assistance of colleagues in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, has succeeded in having young adults leaving State care included as a distinct category for funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). This provides targeted assistance to the most vulnerable of care leavers by enabling Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to acquire residential units to accommodate them. Currently, Tusla, Local Authorities and AHBs are working in sourcing additional accommodation for this particular cohort under the CAS scheme.

As you know, Tusla is part of the aegis of the Vote of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. In order to provide a flavour of other responses to homelessness under the Vote, I’d like to reference a number of headline actions currently being advanced by Tusla – who I’m sure will provide additional detail on these during the course of our discussions. In brief, Tusla, though the family resource centres, are supporting the provision of facilities where homeless children and families can avail of a safe warm environment for homework and relaxation etc. Tusla also assists families experiencing problems with school attendance though the School Completion Programme. Tusla works closely with the Dublin Region Housing Executive with staff providing expertise in relation to child welfare and protection matters, educational welfare and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services.

While Government, Departments and Agencies work towards solutions to the current challenge of homelessness, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs along with colleagues in Tusla, will continue to offer a range of supports to assist those in coping with such difficulties.

ENDS