

**Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth
Affairs**

09 July 2019

Opening Statement

**Mary Hurley, Assistant Secretary, Housing Delivery Division,
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government**

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to attend today's meeting to discuss the impact of homelessness on children.

Today, I am accompanied by my colleague, David Kelly, Principal Officer, with responsibility for the homelessness area of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

In terms of context, I think it is important to note that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is responsible for the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness. Statutory responsibility for the provision of accommodation and related services rests with the housing authorities. Accordingly, the Department does not

fund any service directly but provides funding to housing authorities to meet up to 90% of the costs incurred by those authorities. A large proportion of the funding is provided for services provided by non-Governmental Organisations, who are contracted by the housing authorities. This includes emergency and supported accommodation arrangements, daytime services, outreach and tenancy sustainment.

The response to resolving homelessness requires a multi-agency approach. A number of other Departments and Agencies are responsible for delivering supports to families and their children that are experiencing homelessness. These include the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Tusla, the HSE, and the Department of Education and Skills.

In September 2017, Minister Murphy established the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group to ensure that services to individuals, families and their children were provided in a coherent and coordinated manner. The Group is chaired by Mr. John Murphy, former Secretary General in the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

The root cause in the increase in homelessness is the shortage of supply across the housing sector. Key to resolving homelessness will be

increasing the supply of social housing. Accordingly, Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, is designed to accelerate all types of housing supply – social, private and rental. During the lifetime of the Plan, some 50,000 new social houses will be provided, supported by Exchequer investment of over €6 billion with 87,000 other housing supports delivered over the six years 2016-2021. In addition to this, housing output generally will be progressively increased towards the target of producing 25,000 houses per year through all channels.

The Plan provides for early solutions to address the high number of households in emergency accommodation, such as the delivery of independent tenancies through the various social housing supports programmes. This will include the delivery of increased social housing supply through new-build, acquisition and refurbishment schemes but also independent tenancies will be provided for homeless households in the private rented sector through housing supports such as the enhanced Housing Assistance Payment.

Where a family requires emergency accommodation, the Department is working with the housing authorities to minimize 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 facilities, laundry facilities and more recreation place. Families in hubs are supported by the service provider to identify and secure an independent tenancy, which would include 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 are not intended for long-term use.

In April, the Office of the Children's Ombudsman published the 'No Place like Home' report on the experiences of children and the parents of young children. Minister Murphy subsequently met with the Ombudsman on the subject. The Department is examining the recommendations in the report in consultation with the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group. This examination also involves a consultation with NGO service providers who are operating the hubs.

The latest Homelessness Report published by the Department relates to May 2019. The report shows that during that month, 1,700 families and 3,749 children or other dependants of these families were accessing

emergency accommodation. I want to assure the Committee that delivering housing solutions for each of these families is an absolute priority for the Department.

We are fully committed to ensuring the appropriate policy and funding framework is in place to deliver these solutions.

In 2018, over 5,000 adults exited homelessness into an independent tenancy. Our priority and is to ensure exits to tenancies for each of the families and other households currently in emergency accommodation. Moreover, prevention initiatives such as the HAP placefinders service work with households at risk of homelessness to identify solutions to ensure that they do not have to enter emergency accommodation. For example in Dublin, approximately half of the families presenting to homeless services each month are prevented from having to enter emergency accommodation and we also seeing significant numbers exiting emergency accommodation every month. In Dublin for the first five months of the year, a total of 437 new families entered emergency accommodation for the first time. However, during this period 462 families were prevented from entering emergency accommodation, and 404 families exited emergency accommodation, through the creation of 866 new tenancies.

My colleague and I are happy to answer any questions that you have on this matter.

Thank you