



**Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas**

TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

An Comhchoiste um Thithíocht, Pleanáil agus Rialtas Áitiúil

Easpa Dídine Teaghlaigh agus Leanaí

Samhain 2019

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Joint Committee on Housing, Planning & Local Government

Family and Child Homelessness

November 2019

32/HPLG/27



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

FAMILY AND CHILD HOMELESSNESS 4

 1.1 PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE 4

 1.2 ISSUES ARISING 5

RECOMMENDATIONS..... 15

APPENDIX 1 – ORDERS OF REFERENCE 17

APPENDIX 2 – MEMBERSHIP 21

APPENDIX 3 – LIST OF WITNESSES 22

APPENDIX 4 – LINK TO MEETING TRANSCRIPT 22

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in Ireland has risen dramatically in recent years, leading it to become one of the most pressing issues facing Irish society at present. The causes of homelessness can be complex but broadly speaking, homelessness can be caused by structural factors (lack of affordable housing, unemployment, poverty, inadequate mental health services etc.) or personal factors (addiction, mental health issues, family breakdown etc.).

In September 2019 figures released by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government show the number of homeless families in the state at 1,756, with 3,873 accompanying homeless children¹.

Focus Ireland, in their opening statement, informed the Committee that the number of homeless families has increased by 400% from July 2014 to April 2019², and noted that children account for more than one in three people in emergency accommodation³. The Committee acknowledges that despite the positive work undertaken to reduce and address homelessness by the local authorities, government departments, and NGOs, the numbers of people entering homelessness continue to grow.

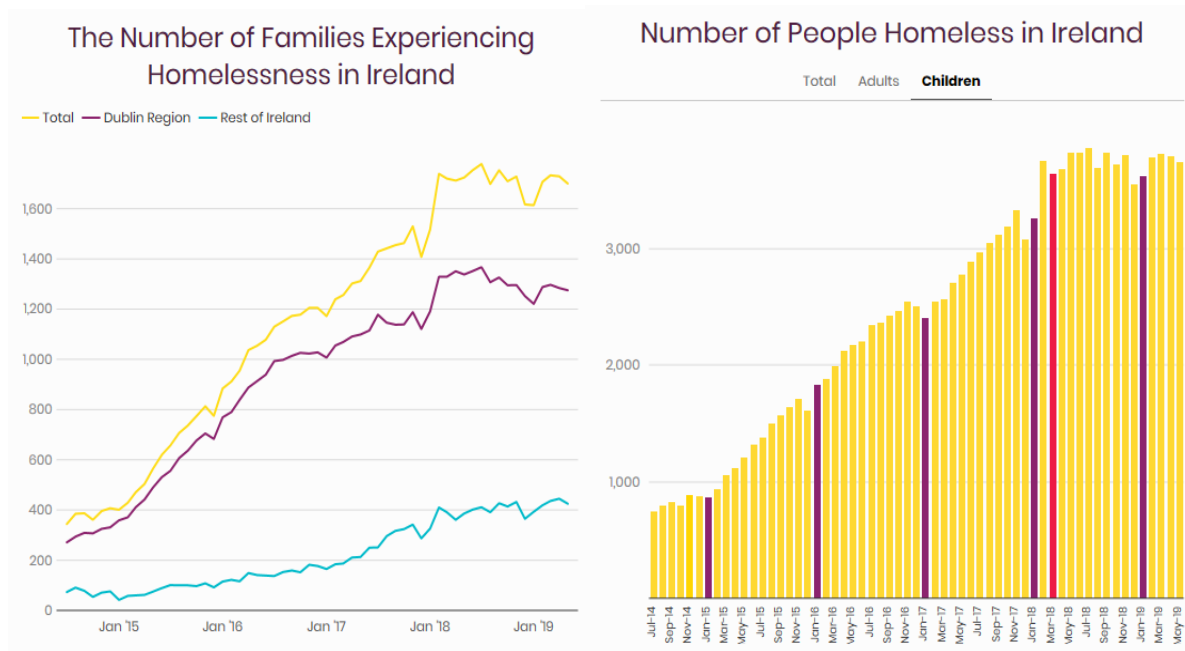


Chart: Focus Ireland • Source: [Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government](#)

¹ [Homelessness Report September 2019, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government](#)

² [Focus Ireland – Opening Statement](#)

³ [Focus Ireland – Resource Hub](#)

The Committee is aware of the numerous studies which show that living in emergency accommodation can have negative effects on children and family life⁴. One such study, carried out by the Ombudsman for Children's Office, is the 2019 Report titled '*No Place Like Home*⁵', which outlines the negative effects that living in Family Hubs has on the lives of homeless families. This study highlights the negative effects of emergency accommodation on parenting, individual and family privacy, children's ability to rest, sleep, learn and study, children's health, well-being and development, opportunities for play and recreation, freedom of movement, and children's ability to maintain relationships with family and friends. The Ombudsman for Children's Office noted –

"Compounding these challenges were the feelings of shame expressed by the children about being homeless and the feelings of failure that parents expressed about their situation".

In addition to the findings from '*No Place like Home*', the Children's Rights Alliance outlined to the Committee the findings from their 2018 Report titled '*Home Works*⁶'. This report deals with the impact of staying in emergency accommodation on the educational needs of children and it was found that, further to the negative effects of stays in emergency accommodation described above, children and young people often experience low self-esteem, anxiety, and feelings of social isolation. In their opening statement to the Committee the Children's Rights Alliance explained that scarce financial resources, long journeys to and from school, significant transport costs, a lack of appropriate facilities for food preparation and storage, and inadequate facilities for sleeping and maintaining personal hygiene can all result in irritability and exhaustion. They also noted that –

"many children are embarrassed to tell their friends about their situation so they become withdrawn and friendships break down".

While there are numerous possible causes of homelessness, much of the recent causes of homelessness in the State are thought to be as a result of an inability to secure accommodation in the private rented sector⁷. In their opening statement to the Committee, the Children's Rights Alliance stated that –

"In 2018, over half of families presenting to homeless services in Dublin cited 'a loss of or inability to secure private rented accommodation' as the reason".

⁴ ['The hotelisation of the housing crisis: Experiences of family homelessness in Dublin hotels' \(2019\)](#), and ['Trauma, Adversity and Parent- Child Relationships Among Young Children Experiencing Homelessness' Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology \(2014\)](#),

⁵ [No Place Like Home – Ombudsman for Children's Office \(2019\)](#)

⁶ [Home Works: A Study on the Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation – Children's Rights Alliance \(2018\)](#)

⁷ [Family Homelessness in Dublin: Causes, Housing Histories, and Finding a Home – Focus Ireland \(2019\)](#)

Research and analysis carried out by Focus Ireland confirms the above and shows that an overwhelming number of families becoming homeless had their last stable home in the private rented sector, and the crisis in this sector is the immediate cause of their homelessness – landlords selling up or being repossessed, shortage of properties to rent, scarcity of properties accepting rent supplement, and high rents⁸.

As well as the causes of homelessness mentioned previously, the Committee is acutely aware of the negative effects, including adverse childhood experiences, it can have on children and families which can last well into the future, and in this regard Focus Ireland advised the Committee –

“When we finally reach the end of this crisis and we have enough homes, we will then be in a situation where there will hundreds, if not thousands, of families whose capacity to operate independently has been entirely undermined by years spent living in institutions”.

In light of the lasting effects of homelessness on individuals and families, the Committee acknowledge the need to establish safeguards to prevent family homelessness in future generations and share the concerns of the Ombudsman for Children’s Office who voiced his concern that –

“we will go through this crisis and somewhere along the line there will be enough houses but we will not have changed the system. Therefore, when the next crash comes, children and families will still not be protected.”

The Committee acknowledge that the root cause of homelessness in the State is due to the shortage of social and affordable housing, and while it will take time to implement the necessary changes to the housing system, the Committee would like to see measures put in place to mitigate and reduce the effects of homelessness on families and children as best as possible, as well as implementing system change so the situation we are faced with today does not reoccur in the future.

⁸ [About Homelessness – Focus Ireland](#)

FAMILY AND CHILD HOMELESSNESS

1.1 PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE

Mr. Mike Allen and Ms. Niamh Lambe from Focus Ireland, Ms. Saoirse Brady and Ms. Edel Quinn from the Children’s Rights Alliance, Dr. Niall Muldoon and Dr. Karen McAuley from the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, and Ms. Rebecca Keating and Mr. Paul Dornan from the Mercy Law Resource Centre addressed the Committee on this topic.

At the outset the witnesses outlined the detrimental effects that stays in emergency accommodation can have on families and child development and spoke of the need to ensure that measures are put in place to limit these negative effects. Witnesses also spoke of the need to implement solutions that will reduce the likelihood and instances of families entering into homelessness in the future.

Although the witnesses spoke of the need to implement reform and change in how the State provides homeless services and interacts with homeless families, the witnesses acknowledged that progress has been made to reduce the need for homeless services by providing social housing, with a significant increase in housing delivery and ‘in pipe-line’ housing projects.

Throughout the meeting it became apparent that the majority of the witnesses shared the same views in relation to the issue of family and child homelessness and also shared similar thoughts, objectives, and recommendations as to how best to tackle the issue.

Several key concerns and issues emerged from the exchange between the witnesses and Committee members including –

- A Constitutional Right to Housing
- The need for support workers across all types of emergency accommodation
- Legislation to consider the child’s best interests
- Legislation to place upper time limits on the amount of time a family can stay in emergency accommodation.
- The ongoing practice of utilising one-night only emergency accommodation
- The absence of an independent body to conduct regular inspections of homeless services.
- Variations in standards in Family Hubs

1.2 ISSUES ARISING

Constitutional Right to Housing

The witnesses noted that there is no Constitutional right to housing, but the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland has ratified, affords children the right to an adequate standard of living, including the provision of quality housing for those children.

Despite the protections provided by the UN Convention in terms of the provision of an adequate standard of living, the witnesses noted that stays in emergency accommodation are not always deemed to be adequate, with Focus Ireland stating –

“We know the utter destruction homelessness causes to the lives of people in that family unit, which is protected in our Constitution, and especially to the children in that family, who are also protected by our Constitution. We have allowed homelessness to grow, however”.

The witnesses also remarked that in 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child examined Ireland and expressed concern at *“reports of families affected by homelessness facing significant delays in accessing social housing and frequently living in inappropriate, temporary or emergency accommodation on a long-term basis.”*⁹

The difficulties surrounding a constitutional right to housing were elaborated on by Focus Ireland and they told the Committee that they believe it is being interpreted in such a way that the individual right to property is eclipsing the desire of Committees, the Dáil, and Ministers to make changes in areas such as tenancy rights and the utilising of undeveloped, unused property. They stated that –

“The Constitution is supposed to represent our will, but if the Constitution is presenting that sort of barrier against the people’s will, then we should change it, if there are positive reasons for it.”

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children furthered this outlook by stating that –

“the issue of enumerating the right to housing in the Constitution needs to be progressed as a matter of priority”,

and,

“the long-term change is the constitutional change so that we acknowledge, as a society, that we will set a floor below which we will not allow any child to fall.”

⁹ [Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(2016\)](#)

In a similar vein to that of Focus Ireland and the Ombudsman for Children’s Office, the Mercy Law Resource Centre echoed the call for a right to housing and informed the Committee that they continue to advocate for the protection of the right to housing in the Constitution, advising that –

“it would make a meaningful difference in this time of housing crisis. Mercy Law Resource Centre views it from a future-proofing approach as well. We are trying to safeguard against a recurrence of this crisis in the future. We believe such an amendment would provide a long-standing floor of protection for homeless individuals, families facing housing difficulties and influence on a much broader scale by way of policy-making and law-making in respect of housing”.

The Committee recommends that:

- Acknowledging the long-lasting detrimental effects of homelessness on children into their adult lives, the recommendations contained in the 2014 Report of the 8th Constitutional Convention, having been referred to the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform for detailed examination and consideration, be considered by that Committee as a matter of urgency.

Need for Support Workers

In their opening statement Focus Ireland outlined the importance of including child support workers as an integral element of the supports needed by families coping with homelessness. They drew attention to their Social Impact pilot project, which was launched in 2013 in collaboration with the Homeless Agency and the Department of the Environment (now known as the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government) to support around 170 families out of homelessness and into secure homes. This model of support included case managers to work with families, child support workers to respond to the needs of children, and accommodation finders to source suitable housing. The project was an overwhelming success with all but two families making sustained exits from homelessness, and evaluations of the project highlighted the importance of child support workers in achieving that outcome.

These findings are replicated in the report by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office titled ‘*No Place like Home*’, with families highlighting the positive role support workers can play in children’s lives by providing stability, supporting children and parents, helping children to stay in education, and supporting families to make a sustainable exit from homelessness.

Focus Ireland informed the Committee that only 9% of the children who are on their caseload have a child support worker and that this is worrying. They also noted that –

“There are no child support workers, as far as I am aware, in the model that was rolled out in homeless hubs. Clearly, the families that do not have an adult key worker do not have a child support worker. For the vast majority of children, there is nothing. That really needs to be borne in mind.”

Having discussed the positive contributions made to homeless families and children by case managers and child support workers, the Ombudsman for Children’s Office stated that practical measures *“that need to be seriously considered include increasing the number of child support workers, therapeutic supports and family support services available to children and parents”*.

Focus Ireland furthered this sentiment and explained that they have *“argued consistently that there needs to be a case manager and a child support worker for every family in need of such support”*. They acknowledged that –

“Family Hubs are not the ideal, but while children are in hubs, we need to have a better support mechanism in place for them such as child support workers allocated to families”.

The Committee recommends that:

- Practical supports, such as case managers and child support workers, be made available across all types of emergency accommodation and be made available to each family and, subject to an assessment of need, child experiencing homelessness within one week of entering emergency accommodation.

Legislation to consider the child’s best interests

Under existing legislation, and specifically section 10 of the *Housing Act 1988*, it is a matter for housing authorities to determine whether a person is homeless, and once this is decided the housing authority may provide appropriate accommodation, financial assistance, or make arrangements with a body approved by the Minister to do so.

The Mercy Law Research Centre informed the Committee that at present there is no strict legal obligation on housing authorities to provide emergency accommodation, that there is discretion but no duty, and that it is their position that the wide margin of discretion afforded

to housing authorities in the current legal framework does not adequately protect homeless families with minor children. Mercy Law Research Centre advised the Committee that they would like to see a statutory obligation, as opposed to a discretion, placed on local authorities to provide emergency accommodation to homeless families and children.

The Children's Rights Alliance also noted that -

"When the existing legislation was put in place, it was to support single adult males. Nowadays, lone parent families with children make up the biggest cohort in the homeless population. It is not right that when local authorities decide where families with children will be accommodated, they do not have to take the children's best interests into account... [and] ...we are calling on the Government to put in place progressive legislation that would recognise the best interests of children and would mean that decision-makers, when deciding where those children should be placed, should take their best interests into account and ensure that their needs are met."

This sentiment was echoed by a number of the other witnesses, with the Ombudsman for Children's Office stating -

"Existing legislation needs to be amended and strengthened to make children visible and to require housing authorities to provide appropriate accommodation and supports to homeless families with children."

The influence and importance of legislation was emphasised by the Ombudsman for Children as they stated -

"As has been said many times previously, legislation creates behaviour and legislation is what local authorities must follow. If legislation does not mention children, they will not be of interest to local authorities and officials who have to make decisions in this regard."

Mercy Law Resource Centre also highlighted to the Committee that, in tandem with the concerns raised above, a common theme in their concerns was the failure of housing authorities to recognise and meet the particular needs and take account of the vulnerabilities of homeless families. They advised that to remedy this they -

"support the proposed amendment to the Housing Act to place a statutory obligation on housing authorities to regard the best interests of the child as paramount, have regard to the needs of the family unit and to make provision of suitable accommodation to that family unit to ensure its effective functioning."

The Committee recommends that:

- The Housing Act 1988 be amended to eliminate the statutory discretion afforded to housing authorities with respect of the housing assessment and to impose a statutory duty on the housing authority to provide such homeless accommodation.
- The Housing Act 1988 be amended to place a statutory duty on housing authorities to regard the best interests of the child as paramount, to have regard to the needs of the family, and to make provision of suitable accommodation to that family unit to ensure its effective functioning.

Legislation to place upper time limits on the amount of time a family can stay in emergency accommodation

The Committee heard several accounts about the effect of homelessness on families and children and are aware of the damaging effects that lengthy stays in emergency accommodation can have on families. As well as this, witnesses spoke of the risk of institutionalisation for families and emphasised the need to avoid this and the risk of normalising homelessness.

The witnesses spoke of the need for time limits to be introduced limiting the amount of time a family can spend in emergency accommodation in order to minimise this risk. The Committee were also informed that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission have previously called for time limits on how long a family should spend in emergency accommodation¹⁰.

In addition to the aforementioned recommendation to amend legislation to have regard to the best interests of the child, the Children’s Rights Alliance stated –

“Furthermore, the amended legislation should clearly time-limit the use of emergency accommodation for families with children. Some families are locked into homelessness for years, as Mr. Allen said. He gave the figure of 167, or 13%, of families who are living in homeless accommodation for more than two years. Both the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Ombudsman for Children, from whom the committee will hear this morning, have called for time limits on how long a family should spend in temporary accommodation. This is to avoid the risk of institutionalisation and the normalisation of homelessness.”

¹⁰ [Human Rights and Equality Commission Challenges Normalisation of Family Homelessness, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#)

The Committee were advised of the approaches to homelessness in Scotland and England, with Mercy Law Resource Centre explaining that one noteworthy aspect of the English model is that there is a six-week time limit on the time vulnerable categories of person, including homeless families, can spend in unsuitable temporary accommodation such as hotels and bed-and-breakfasts. They informed the Committee that in Scotland that time limit is seven days, reduced from a previous limit of fourteen days and that this is “*starkly different from the situation here for children accessing homeless services*”. They further stated that “*on the legal framework, there is a best interest consideration which is completely absent here*”.

They informed the Committee that the Scottish model is seen as one that has brought about a very different and human-rights based approach to homelessness and that they would very much welcome the adoption of that model here.

The Committee recommends that:

- The Housing Act 1988 be amended to place a limit on the amount of time that families and vulnerable individuals may spend in homeless emergency accommodation.

The ongoing practice of utilising one-night only emergency accommodation

As mentioned previously, throughout the meeting the witnesses informed the Committee of the damaging effects and distressing experiences that staying in emergency accommodation can have on homeless families. However, the Committee heard from witnesses that perhaps the most detrimental form of emergency accommodation is that of one-night-only accommodation.

The Committee heard that Mercy Law Resource Centre frequently assist families in one-night-only emergency accommodation, including those with very young children, children with special needs, pregnant women, new mothers with their new-born children, and victims of domestic violence. They informed the Committee that these families must move every day, they cannot access their accommodation until 8pm and must leave by 9:30am. This leaves them with no secure place to go during the day and they spend prolonged periods in shopping centres, in parks, on the streets or on buses. Families in these circumstances often have no access to laundry or cooking facilities, and they face difficulties when registering their children for school or accessing primary healthcare because they do not have a fixed address or stable accommodation.

Mercy Law Resource Centre advised the Committee that -

“A family in this type of accommodation cannot meet its basic needs let alone resolve its long-term housing issues. It compounds the chaos and distress of homelessness. This type of accommodation provision is not fit for purpose. MLRC believes that it may expose families and their children to inhuman and degrading treatment of such severity as to engage Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights”.

They further stated that -

“Our strong and unqualified recommendation to the committee is for a cessation of the provision of one-night-only emergency accommodation to homeless families and provision of stable placements in suitable temporary accommodation for such families.”

This recommendation was also echoed by the Children’s Rights Alliance.

The Committee recommends that:

- The provision of one-night-only emergency accommodation be ceased.

The absence of an independent body to conduct regular inspections of homeless services

The witnesses also raised the issue of the quality and standards of emergency accommodation being provided to homeless families.

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office welcomed the recent indication by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government that the implementation of the National Quality Standards Framework, NQSF, for homeless services¹¹ will be rolled out nationally over a 12-month period from the 1st July 2019.

An update provided by the Department advised that the NQSF is fully operational in the Dublin region, and implementation in other regions commenced on 1st July 2019, with the framework to be fully operational over a 12-month period. The Department stated that the implementation of the standards will involve a multi-faceted approach. They stated that there will be a continuous review of standards by services implementing the NQSF ‘Quality Assessment and Improvement Workbook¹²’ and verification of this by local authority analysis

¹¹ [Quality standards for homeless services, Dublin Regional Homeless Executive](#)

¹² [National Quality Standards Framework for Homeless Services In Ireland, Dublin Regional Homeless Executive](#)

of the service providers' Key Performance Indicators, site visits and performance reviews. The Department stated that key measures will include:

- Self-assessment - whereby service providers internally assess, monitor and improve the quality of service provision against the NQSF. The handbook prepared to support the implementation of the NQSF outlines how service providers can self-assess and develop 'Quality Improvement Plans' covering the eight themes contained in the NQSF.
- Service user participation – site visits by local authorities will include meetings with service users to obtain their perspectives.
- Local authority monitoring and assessment: Performance reviews, sites visits, and assessment of services will verify the quality of services being provided.

Witnesses, however, expressed concern that currently there is no independent body tasked with the inspection of homeless services, with the Ombudsman for Children's Office stating-

"To ensure appropriate monitoring, oversight and accountability, a mechanism for independent, statutory inspection of homelessness services needs to be put in place."

The need for an independent statutory inspection regime was echoed by all witnesses, with a number of witnesses highlighting the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, as an obvious choice. Witnesses expressed support for this choice as HIQA has a good track record in carrying out inspections and already inspects places where children live such as Oberstown Detention Centre and residential care units.

The Children's Rights Alliance advised that –

"The authority would be the most cost-effective option because a new framework would not be needed to be put in place and the public has confidence in the authority".

The Ombudsman for Children's Office echoed the above, noting –

"HIQA may be an obvious candidate for such work given its standing and experience. The authority has extensive experience of inspecting different types of accommodation for children, which are there for different purposes, and of engaging with children in the context of conducting independent statutory inspections. HIQA is a clear and obvious candidate for that work."

Both Focus Ireland and the Ombudsman for Children's Office suggested against the setting up of a new inspection body so as to avoid institutionalising the thinking around homelessness and to avoid assuming that homelessness will be a permanent feature in Irish society.

The Committee recommends that:

- Consideration be given to expanding the remit of the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, to allow it conduct independent statutory inspections and monitoring of all homeless services.

Variations in standards in Family Hubs

As mentioned above, the Committee are aware and concerned at the negative effects that prolonged stays in emergency accommodation can have on the development of, and quality of life for homeless families. Mercy Law Research Centre welcomed the acknowledgement by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government of the seriousness of the situation –

“The most distressing aspect of the challenge we face is the damage being done to people living in emergency accommodation. Damage is being done to society and individuals and their families because they have to spend time in emergency accommodation. There are too many living in emergency accommodation. It is absolutely unacceptable that people still have to go to hotels for emergency accommodation¹³.”

The Committee heard that the development of Family Hubs emerged in 2017 as an alternative to hotels and bed-and-breakfasts as regards providing for the emergency, temporary accommodation needs of homeless families. The Government describes these hubs as providing homeless families –

“with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, and appropriate family supports and surrounds¹⁴”.

Although several witnesses acknowledged that Family Hubs might be a step-up or preferable to hotels and bed-and-breakfast accommodation, they expressed concern that they have developed and proliferated in the absence of an evidence-base or an initial pilot phase, and that there are no clear public policy objectives for their use.

Focus Ireland stated –

¹³ [Seanad Éireann debate - Wednesday, 30 Jan 2019](#)

¹⁴ [Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Third Quarterly Progress Report, May 2017](#)

“The lack of clarity about what the purpose of Family Hubs means that there is no clear idea of who should be accommodated in Family Hubs, what a hub should provide, or the standards that should be adhered to by those providing Family Hubs”.

Mercy Law Resource Centre voiced their concerns over the possibility of Family Hubs normalising homelessness and advised the Committee that this may then lead to families being institutionalised, worries which are also expressed by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in their 2017 report *‘The provision of emergency accommodation to families experiencing homelessness’*¹⁵.

Concerns were also raised over the wide variation in Family Hubs with The Ombudsman for Children’s Office informing the Committee that there is no typical or standard Family Hub, with some Family Hubs purposely designed and adapted, while others are former hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, and residential homes.

Focus Ireland also noted that Hubs differ in respect of the physical facilities they provide, resulting in wide variations across Hubs. These variations can result in different types of cooking arrangements, whether or not homework and play areas are available, variations in the number of people expected to share one bedroom, and different rules in relation to visitors etc.

In terms of improvements that can be made to Family Hubs, children and parents in *‘No Place like Home’* spoke about the need to provide more and better space, better facilities, about reducing rules and restrictions, and the need to combat the stigma associated with family homelessness. However, as one parent observed –

“If you change the small things, the bigger problems are still there. This is emergency accommodation, the emergency is the problem”.

The Committee recommends that:

- An independent, formal evaluation of the suitability of all family emergency accommodation including hubs as an approach to providing emergency, temporary accommodation be undertaken as soon as is practicable.
- Robust statutory minimum standards and criteria for Family Hubs be published and implemented.

¹⁵ [The provision of emergency accommodation to families experiencing homelessness, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that –

1. Acknowledging the long-lasting detrimental effects of homelessness on children into their adult lives, the recommendations contained in the 2014 Report of the 8th Constitutional Convention, having been referred to the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform for detailed examination and consideration, be considered by that Committee as a matter of urgency.
2. Practical supports, such as case managers and child support workers, be made available across all types of emergency accommodation and be made available to each family and, subject to an assessment of need, child experiencing homelessness within one week of entering emergency accommodation.
3. The Housing Act 1988 be amended to eliminate the statutory discretion afforded to housing authorities with respect of the housing assessment and to impose a statutory duty on the housing authority to provide such homeless accommodation.
4. The Housing Act 1988 be amended to place a statutory duty on housing authorities to regard the best interests of the child as paramount, to have regard to the needs of the family, and to make provision of suitable accommodation to that family unit to ensure its effective functioning.
5. The Housing Act 1988 be amended to place a limit on the time that families and vulnerable individuals may spend in homeless emergency accommodation.
6. The provision of one-night-only emergency accommodation be ceased.
7. Consideration be given to expanding the remit of the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, to allow it conduct independent statutory inspections and monitoring of all homeless services.
8. An independent, formal evaluation of the suitability of all family emergency accommodation including hubs as an approach to providing emergency, temporary accommodation be undertaken as soon as is practicable.
9. Robust statutory minimum standards and criteria for Family Hubs be published and implemented.

- 10.** Improved practices in data collection and the disaggregation of data concerning homelessness among families and children be progressed.
- 11.** The use of self-accommodation as a mechanism for sourcing emergency accommodation be ceased.
- 12.** Capital investment in, and output of social and affordable housing be significantly increased.
- 13.** In order to reduce the flow of families into homelessness, restricting the right of landlords to issue vacant possession notices to quit when selling their property, be actively considered.
- 14.** A review of the length of time families are spending in emergency accommodation be undertaken, and that appropriate supports to ensure that families are supported to exit emergency accommodation be put in place as soon as possible.

APPENDIX 1 – ORDERS 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 mattersas 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

(d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.

- (6) 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.

APPENDIX 2 – MEMBERSHIP

Deputies: Noel Rock – Chair (FG)
Pat Casey – Vice Chair (FF)
Mick D. Barry (Solidarity-PBP)
Mattie McGrath (IND) – Rural Independent Technical Group
Darragh O’Brien (FF)
Eoin Ó Broin (SF)
Fergus O’Dowd (FG)

Senators: Victor Boyhan (IND)
Martin Conway (FG)
Jennifer Murnane O’Connor (FF)
Colette Kelleher (IND)

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. Elected Vice Chair on 24 May 2017

APPENDIX 3 – LIST OF WITNESSES

❖ **Focus Ireland**

- Mr Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy.
- Ms Niamh Lambe, Project Leader of the Family Homeless Action Team.

❖ **Ombudsman for Children’s Office**

- Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children.
- Dr Karen McAuley, Head of Policy.

❖ **Children’s Rights Alliance**

- Ms Saoirse Brady, Legal and Policy Director.
- Ms Edel Quinn, Legal Research and Public Policy Manager.

❖ **Mercy Law Resource Centre**

- Ms Rebecca Keating, Managing Solicitor.
- Mr Paul Dornan, Solicitor.

APPENDIX 4 – LINK TO MEETING TRANSCRIPT

- ❖ [Meeting of Wednesday, 12th June 2019, Committee Room 1.](#)