

‘Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPS and HUBS Report’

Submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning Community & Local Government by Dublin Regional Homeless Executive.

Wednesday 20th September 2017

INTRODUCTION

This submission outlines our response to the findings of **the Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPS and HUBS Report**.

The DRHE were invited in May 2017 to take part in a research interview with Dr Rory Hearne and Dr Mary P. Murphy in relation to their research which is investigating the ongoing experience of Irish social investment in tackling family homelessness through the Housing Assistance Payment. Their research is part of the European RE-InVEST (Rebuilding an Inclusive, Value-based Europe of Solidarity and Trust through Social Investment) research project. It is a four year (2015-2019) H2020 research project taking place in 13 sites across the EU and funded by €2.49m under H2020 Euro 3 ‘European Societies after the Crisis’. Focus Ireland is the NGO partner of the project and the methodology includes supporting Focus Ireland tenants as peer researchers on the project.

The research as advised by Drs Hearne and Murphy had two parts. The first part used a qualitative participative methodology to work with families seeking HAP funded private rental sector accommodation or who had accessed such accommodation to understand the underlying policy and implementation challenges in making HAP work as a solution for homeless families. The second part, in which the DRHE participated, involved interviews with a number of key national and local stakeholders to get different academic, policy and implementation perspectives about HAP in relation to policy and implementation. The Director of the DRHE and another Senior Official met with Drs Hearne and Murphy on the 25th May 2017 to facilitate their request and the report titled above was subsequently published on the 12th July 2017.

The DRHE will respond to the policy recommendations that it has direct responsibility for, namely, the development of family HUBS; initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness; the homeless HAP initiative; social housing allocations policy relating to homeless persons; and service user participation. However, while the issues of housing supply, housing rights and tenure security impact directly upon demand for services managed by the DRHE; these areas are outside the remit of the DRHE to direct.

Reported family homelessness in the Dublin Region

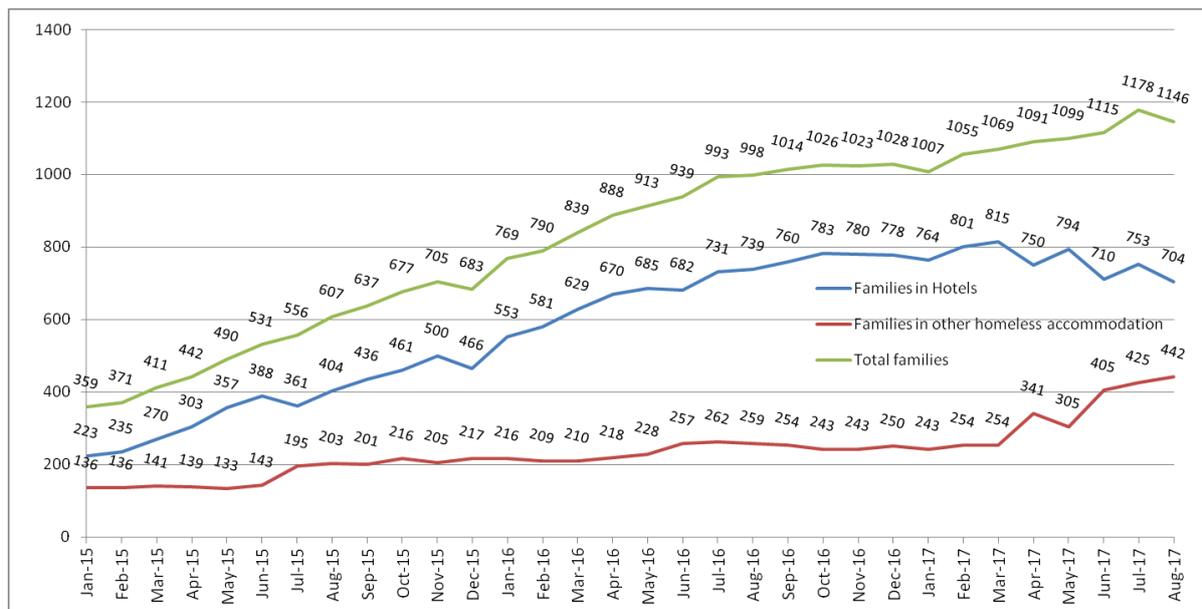
Central to the business of the DRHE is a commitment to evidence informed decision making. To this end, the DRHE has a dedicated Research Unit staffed with trained researchers who are tasked with the production of verified, quality and comprehensive research and data. This information is used to inform the development of operations and policy decisions in relation to the DRHE’s response to the

growing number of individuals experiencing homelessness. The National PASS office is managed by the DRHE’s Research Unit and has rolled out this shared services database to all nine regions nationally facilitating the production of monthly and quarterly national statistics. The Unit trains staff in Local Authorities nationally and produces guidelines for data production and data collection (i.e., rough sleeping counts) to ensure consistent accurate reporting across all regions. The research unit has also worked in partnership with the CSO in the development of the methodology for data collection for the production of the special report on homelessness and on aligning and reconciling this data to PASS data.

PASS data is the primary data source which has enabled us to track and report on the increase in family homelessness in the Dublin Region. Our research¹ supports the findings of Drs Hearne and Murphy that identify affordability and tenure security in the private rental market are key causes of increased demand for homeless services.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the number of families accessing homeless accommodation has increased from 359 in January 2015 to 1,146 in August 2017, an increase of 787 or 219% over a thirty two month period.

Figure 1: Number of homelessness families in the Dublin Region, January 2015 – August 2017



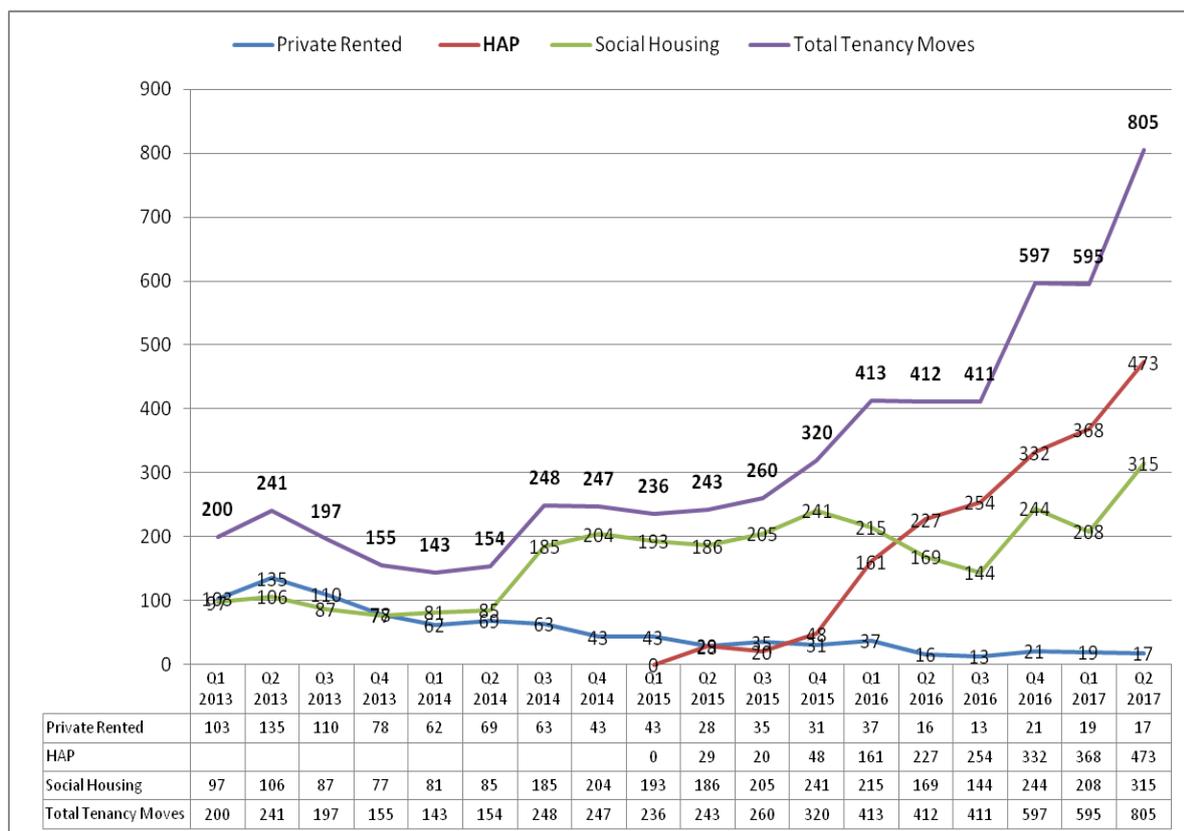
Family homelessness began to become a noticeable issue towards the end of 2014. In line with other major cities (i.e. Paris, Boston, New York, London) hotels and B&Bs were used to deal with the sudden influx of families. In response, the allocation of social housing to homeless households in the Dublin Region increased but the rate was not sufficient to reduce or stabilise the number of new presentations.

¹ Stamp, S. (pending), *Experiences of Newly Homeless Families Accommodated by Dublin’s Homeless Services in August 2015*. DRHE, Dublin.

It wasn't until the homeless HAP pilot began to take off in Q1 2016 that the numbers entering homeless services began to stabilise with homeless presentations being prevented from entering homelessness as a result of utilising homeless HAP.

The management of presentations was facilitated through a very significant increase in moves to tenancies as detailed in Figure 2 below. Despite an actual increase in the number of new families presenting each month in 2016 and 2017, the number moving to tenancies each month also increased by enough to stabilise the numbers but not enough to reduce them (with the exception of August 2017, where a small drop of 32 families was recorded).

Figure 2: Number of homeless adults moving to tenancies in the Dublin Region



Rationale for development of Family HUBS

While the development of HUBS has been unprecedented internationally, the decision to proceed was based on evidence that on-site support in temporary accommodation services was a more effective model of service delivery than emergency accommodation dispersed across the region serviced by visiting supports. Services with on-site supports have higher rates of moves to tenancies than other forms of accommodation. Table 1 below shows that more people have active support plans where all day on-site supported services are available compared with dispersed hotel and B&B rooms.

Table 1: Levels of support planning by accommodation type in Q2 2017

Accommodation Category	Percentage of Adults with a Support Plan
Supported Temporary Accommodation – on-site support	70%
Private Emergency Accommodation - visiting support	43%

In addition, research conducted by the DRHE in 2015² and presented to National Homeless Policy Implementation Team in May 2016 identified similar issues to those identified in the report produced Hearne and Murphy (2017) and Share and Hennessy (2017)³ that highlighted the need for improved physical design of spaces for families which operated to respect autonomy and facilitate moves to tenancies within the shortest time frame possible.

The DRHE began planning for development of HUBS containing a range of services that were missing from most Hotels and B&Bs including: cooking facilities; meals on site; play space; laundry facilities; communal recreation space; key-working/medical space; study space; homework clubs; Wi-Fi and computer services. In April 2017, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government issued *Guidelines for Temporary Emergency Accommodation – Single Persons & Family type Accommodation* which focused on the minimum standards for the environment. These guidelines were informed by the National Quality Standards (NQS) which are currently being piloted by the DRHE across four regions in fulfilment of the National goal “to develop and apply a national quality standards framework for homeless services, which will include arrangements for monitoring compliance”⁴. They were developed following extensive consultation with HIQA, NIHE, HSE, TUSLA, ISPC, LAs, service providers, etc., and have drawn from and been mapped onto other relevant quality frameworks. The NQS extend beyond a focus on the physical building to outline in detail how to respect and sustain the dignity of service users and ensure optimal levels of participation and consultation.

It should be noted that both the NQS and the Departmental Guidelines were developed and were being actively used to inform the development of services prior to the publication of report produced by Drs Hearne and Murphy.

There is broad recognition that HUBS are more favourable than hotels in most cases. They are an important first response for families who become homeless and who have no alternative other than commercial hotels. They are not the long term housing solution as families will move into houses and apartments that will be provided under social housing supports, once supply becomes available.

Monitoring and evaluation of HUBS

However, as Dublin is the first region to adopt HUBS as an emergency accommodation mechanism, the DRHE’s research unit will develop an evaluation methodology which uses the National Quality

² Stamp, S. (pending) *Experiences of Newly Homeless Families Accommodated by Dublin’s Homeless Services in August 2015*, DRHE.

³ Share, M. and Hennessy, M. (2017) *Food Access and Nutritional Health among Families in Emergency Accommodation*, Focus Ireland.

⁴ DEHLG (2008) *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008 – 2013*.

Standards as a reference point to monitor and inform best practice in relation to the operation of family HUBS. The objective will be to develop a comprehensive resource guide for the future developments of family HUBS.

Key Features of Family HUBS

All family accommodation services are retrofitted to adhere to current building standards and there are strict quality controls in place to ensure that all facilities are fully regulated with regard to **fire and disabled access** requirements.

There are also space standards in place that have been developed with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Accordingly, support spaces (dining, play areas, etc.) are designed in accordance with the number of occupants that will reside at the premises.

The family HUBS provide supported temporary accommodation for families and are operated by professional staff with extensive training and experience in the delivery of services to persons who are homeless. All services are operated through a Service Level Agreement with the DRHE and must adhere to the standardised model of support outlined in the DRHE's Care and Case Management Guide.

All families are referred *via* the Dublin Region Local Authority/Central Placement Service and where possible have a local connection to the area, ensuring ease of access to schools and local services. **All families retain their homeless priority on the social housing list.**

All services are subject to '**good neighbourhood policy**', '**visitor policy**' and '**child protection policy**'. In addition the DRHE has a community liaison officer in place tasked with ensuring that all persons accessing these services are linked with local community services.

All residents of Family HUBS have access to key workers to support them in moving on to more secure longterm housing appropriate to their needs along with ensuring they are linked in with any other services they require e.g., HSE, Tusla etc.

In addition, the DRHE have worked in partnership with the NTA and DCYA to deliver on actions 1.5 in *Rebuilding Ireland*:

- Assistance with travel costs is addressed through the provision of **LEAP cards**.
 - In the 2016-2017 school year there were 1,056 Leap card distributed (496 adult and 563 child cards);
 - In 2017-2018 school year there will be 4,100 Leap cards distributed (1700 adults and 2400 child cards).
- **Free childcare places** under the Community Childcare Subvention for children aged between 0-5. Currently, 207 children have availed of the scheme in 2017.

Prevention

Preventing homelessness in the first instance and supporting people to retain their homes is one of the main priorities of central government, statutory services and state-funded homeless services.

Tenancy Protection Service

The four Dublin Local Authorities and Threshold through the DRHE work in collaboration in relation to the Tenancy Protection Service (TPS) which encourages people to contact the service when their tenancy is at risk. Since the launch of the service in June 2014, a total of 3,160 households had their tenancy protected. The TPS is operating against the backdrop of a significant increase in families and individuals contacting local authorities and homeless services for emergency accommodation, primarily due to the loss of their homes in the private rented sector. And the TPS has been instrumental in preventing homelessness in the first instance and supporting people to remain in their homes. Families or individuals at risk are assessed immediately on the grounds that they have received notice of arrears, notice of termination, warning letter, letter of rent increase, or have been threatened with an illegal eviction”.

Between June 2014 and June 2017 over 11,930 households had contacted TPS. Of these, 6,198, or 52% were “at risk” of tenancy loss. The breakdown and interventions for households who were at immediate risk of losing their tenancy were as follows:

- **3,499** tenancies were protected by Department of Social Protection (DSP) uplift in payment, advocacy assistance or were re-housed in the private rented sector (*56% of tenancies protected*);
- A total of **1,010** cases were closed (no longer contactable);
- A further **516** cases involved initial intervention and **1,032** are on-going;
- **101** cases were referred to the Residential Tenancies Board;
- **40** households entered homeless services.

The Tenancy Protection Service can be contacted through **FREEPHONE 1800 454 454** in Dublin and callers receive the following prompt interventions if they are at risk of losing their home:

1. Immediate guidance about rights as tenants and landlord obligations
2. Negotiation between tenant and landlord to resolve problems and take further action if needed, including referral to the Residential Tenancies Board.
3. For rent supplement customers, an application of uplift in payment can be made to the Department of Social Protection for families/couples or individuals, who are facing a rent increase and who are at risk of becoming homeless.

DRHE Prevention Team

DRHE appointed 3 prevention officers to its operation in February 2017. This team work with families as they present to assist them to remain in their current accommodation or in moving them on to alternative appropriate accommodation as quickly as possible in cases where they have to be

accommodated in a hotel. Between February and June 2017 the team had diverted 83 families from accessing homeless accommodation.

Homeless HAP

Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing & Homelessness Pillar 1 set targets in 2016 of 550 H/Hap tenancies increasing to 1,200 in 2017. As detailed in Figure 1 above, targets for were exceeded in 2016 as 974 adults moved to HAP tenancies. For the first six months of 2017 841 individuals moved to HAP so it is expected that targets will be exceeded again.

The H/Hap initiative has been successful in providing a solution to support qualified households to find suitable tenancies thereby transitioning homeless families and individuals from emergency accommodation and in preventing families in particular from entering homelessness in the first instance. While eligible households may source accommodation themselves, a dedicated place-finder service is also in place to engage directly with property owners and support households to secure tenancies. Critically, families taking up HAP tenancies are **not** taken off the Housing Waiting list, they remain on the Transfer List. One third of HAP tenancies go to families in emergency accommodation while two thirds go to families that are deferred from entering homelessness by the prevention team or with the direct support of the DRHE HAP team.

Prevention from returning to homeless services – Tenancy Sustainment

To ensure families that take tenancies are able to sustain those tenancies and avoid returning to homeless services, a range of visiting supports are available including HAIL for persons with mental health issues or SLI which provides general support for a period of six months. Where need is high, long-term supported accommodation is provided. In 2016, 67% of adults moving to tenancies availed of some type of post-settlement support.

Conclusion

In reference to the policy recommendations made in the *Investing in the Right to a Home* report, the DRHE have been and will **continue to invest in and develop prevention services.** Over the past three years, the TPS has protected almost 3,500 tenancies; the DRHE prevention team has diverted 83 families from entering homelessness its first five months of operation; and, two thirds of all HAP tenancies go to families who are supported into tenancy without having to access emergency accommodation.

The DRHE cannot directly influence the supply of housing but it can verify that the **allocations mechanism for allocation of social housing stock is transparent.** Generally, persons accessing emergency accommodation are awarded homeless priority so are a Band One on the waiting list. If they take HAP, they revert to being Band One on the transfer list. Families prevented from entering homeless services are Band Three (unless they have a case for being on another band apart from homelessness) and are placed in Band Three of the transfer list if they take a HAP tenancy. Allocations are made based on time-on-list. Targets are set and monitored on an on-going basis to

ensure homeless families are allocated a minimum of 50% of Band One allocations, and Band One get 60% of all allocations.

While **H/HAP** has become a primary source of tenancy for many families, allocations to Local Authority or Approved Housing Bodies continue to account for significant numbers of tenancies. Last year, 772 adults moved to social housing while 523 have already secured social housing tenancies for the first six months of 2017.

It is agreed that **family HUBS** are preferable to hotel rooms for most families. Their development has been informed by research carried out by the DRHE in 2016, the experience of front line staff and the departmental *Guidelines* and *National Quality Standards* that focus on addressing the negative experiences of families in hotels and ensuring autonomy is respected and standards are maintained. The **HUBS are subject to quarterly monitoring** review meetings with the DHRE's monitoring team members **who track the rate of move to tenancy and duration in accommodation of all families**. Each SLA has a target of moving all families on within a six month period.

In addition, as the Dublin Region commits to the formal roll-out of the NQS across the full region by the end of 2017, **monitoring will extend to include a review of physical and quality of service indicators**, including a **focus on service user participation and consultation in relation to service delivery**.

Finally, an **evaluation methodology** will be developed to move beyond monitoring and look to developing a **best practice resource guide** for the future development of all HUBS detailing what has worked and what hasn't.

Overall, the infrastructure is now in place to continue to develop families HUBS but also to ensure we capture learning and feed it back so that services work as effectively as possible and minimise the trauma and disruption homelessness families can experience. We acknowledge, as does most research and commentary in relation to homelessness, that ultimately housing supply and security of tenure are the most critical issues that need to be addressed to resolve homelessness.

Thank you for your time.