



## **Report to the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage.**

**29<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – 10.00 a.m.**

We welcome the opportunity to participate in this meeting.

The issue of Homelessness in Dublin remains a major challenge and is linked directly to the scarcity of supply in the region.

However, there has been significant progress and improvement in the situation over the last two years, particularly in relation to family homelessness. This report is focussed on the situation in the Dublin Region.

### **(1) Families in Temporary Emergency Accommodation:**

At the end of December 2020, there were **755** families in emergency accommodation. **This is the lowest monthly figure since December 2015.**

The December figure represents a total decrease of 446 families since the start of 2020. (In January 2020, there were 1,201 families in emergency accommodation).

The number of children residing in emergency accommodation at the end of December 2020 was 1,864.

This figure has been reducing steadily since September 2019, when the figure was **2,872**. It also represents a decrease of **814** since the start of 2020.

### **Families in Hotels:**

At the end of 2020 there were **181** families residing in hotel facilities. This is the lowest monthly figure since September 2014. The highest figure was in March 2017 when it reached 871.

### **New Presentations to Homeless Services in the Dublin Region:**

**699** families entered emergency accommodation (EA) for the first time in 2020. This compares to 1,112 in 2018 and 1,031 in 2019. **60** new families presented and were assessed as Homeless in December 2020 down 4 from November.

### **Exits from Emergency Accommodation:**

**1,221** families exited emergency accommodation in 2020. 1,137 exited in 2019 and 780 exited in 2018.

**Summary:** *Breakdown of individuals in Emergency Accommodation in the Dublin Region – to December 2020, as published nationally:*

Month	Families	Adults in Families	Children	Singles	Total Adults	Total Individuals
Nov 2020	<b>783</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>1,914</b>	<b>3,093</b>	<b>4,243</b>	<b>6,157</b>
Oct 2020	858	1,246	2,070	3,051	4,297	6,367
Sept 2020	865	1,257	2,008	2,994	4,251	6,259
Aug 2020	856	1,242	2,023	2,962	4,204	6,227
Jul 2020	862	1,269	2,017	2,919	4,188	6,205
Jun 2020	871	1,276	1,979	2,895	4,171	6,150
May 2020	893	1,309	2,065	2,855	4,164	6,229
April 2020	974	1,412	2,232	2,854	4,266	6,498
<b>November 2019</b>	<b>1,256</b>	<b>1,822</b>	<b>2,782</b>	<b>2,687</b>	<b>4,509</b>	<b>7,291</b>

While the reduction in numbers is of course very welcome, we fully accept that there are still far too many families in emergency accommodation, including hotels, and we are very conscious of the challenge that still exists for homeless services in the Dublin area.

### **(2) Single Adults**

The situation in relation to **single persons** is more complex and progress is much slower. While the total number of single adults in emergency accommodation during 2020 increased gradually during the year, the total number has now reached **3,027**.

In collaboration with the HSE, the DRHE has strengthened supports being provided to single homeless persons in emergency accommodation and it will be enhanced further in 2021.

**1,006** single persons exited emergency accommodation in 2019 compared to 575 in 2019 - see table below for detail on where they exited to.

<b>Month</b>	<b>HAP</b>	<b>LA</b>	<b>LTA</b>	<b>AHB</b>	<b>HAA</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>RAS</b>	<b>Total Single Exits</b>
Jan-20	41	22	3	14	1	1	1	83
Feb-20	32	19	2	11	1	3	0	68
Mar-20	23	7	5	3	0	1	0	39
Apr-20	33	56	2	3	0	2	0	96
May-20	29	21	3	17	0	1	1	72
Jun-20	56	24	1	4	0	2	0	87
Jul-20	78	11	9	0	2	4	0	104
Aug-20	59	2	2	3	0	2	0	68
Sep-20	64	12	2	7	0	4	0	89
Oct-20	69	8	0	4	0	3	0	84
Nov-20	81	10	2	13	0	2	0	108
Dec-20	75	12	7	12	0	2	0	108
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1,006</b>

HAP = Housing Assistance Payment, LA = Local Authority, LTA = Long Term Accommodation

HAA = Housing Agency Acquisition, PR = Private Rented, RAS = Rental Accommodation Scheme

### **(3) Deaths of people in Homeless Services**

Sadly, in 2020, **8** people died while rough sleeping in the Dublin Region. Three of the individuals who died had recently stayed in emergency homeless accommodation and had ongoing access to such accommodation (2 died in the final few days of December 2020). Of the other five people, and no less tragic, three were not known at all to Homeless Services in Dublin, while in 2 cases it had been a number of years since there was any previous contact.

44 people died in emergency homeless accommodation during the year. These deaths occurred while they were residing in Supported Temporary Accommodation, and Private Emergency Accommodation.

27 people died in long-term supported tenancies where there is on-site medical services, (3 of these deaths resulted from Covid-19).

Overall, a total of 74 people who were connected into to Dublin Homeless Services sadly died in 2020. There was a further five deaths (rough sleeping) where the persons involved had not been connected into Homeless Services in Dublin.

The comparable number for deaths during previous years was:

2019 - 49

2018 –47

2017 - 62

It should be noted, that the recording of deaths in previous years was done differently and there was sometimes late reporting or indeed a lack of reporting where people had died from natural causes. The current Notification Practice (reviewed in 2020) is more robust and accurate. The DRHE is concerned at the significant increase of deaths in the latter months of 2020 (from July) and a comprehensive review of such deaths for the full year is underway in conjunction with the HSE. The number of single persons in hostel-type accommodation has increased by over 800 in the past two years. During most of 2020, there was excess capacity of emergency beds and during the latter months of 2020, there was a consistent and unprecedented number of unused beds available each night. The DRHE has maintained an excess supply of emergency beds into 2021.

We extend our sincere condolences to all the families and friends of the deceased during 2020. Our sympathies also to the support staff who worked closely with these individuals sometimes over a long period.

#### **(4) The ‘RTE Investigates’ Programme aired on 18<sup>th</sup> January.**

This programme placed a welcome spotlight on the complex issue of homelessness in Dublin and the task that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has in leading a multi-agency response to this issue. The experiences of the three people featured in the programme showed this complexity and it highlighted areas where we need to provide a better response.

Dublin mirrors the patterns shown in international research, where the vast majority of people will move out of homelessness never to re-enter, a smaller percentage experience recurrent episodes of homelessness and a small minority experience rough sleeping. The programme identified some of the issues behind the most vulnerable and at-risk category, rough sleepers.

### **Rough sleepers with access to beds who do not take them up:**

Over recent months there has been significant excess capacity in emergency accommodation (for the first time in years) and we do believe that standards in such facilities are reasonable with heating, showers, toilets, food and a range of social supports. While not a substitute for a home, these facilities in our view are significantly safer and more secure than sleeping on the streets or in tents, etc. However, we do appreciate that the issue is not as simple as this, and there is a small minority of the homeless population who will not take up such accommodation or will not to take it up on a regular basis for various reasons.

This can range from a person with underlying mental health issues who isolates very consciously, to the more recent phenomenon of drug-use in tents. There are also cases where an individual could have had a bad experience when residing previously in emergency accommodation.

Emergency accommodation is managed either by charities funded by the DRHE, including Peter McVerry Trust, Dublin Simon, DePaul Trust, Crosscare and the Salvation Army or by commercial operators, where in-reach teams provide supports from the DRHE, the HSE and some charities. Charity homeless service providers funded by the DRHE are subject to inspections based on the National Quality Standards. Private Emergency facilities are inspected for *physical* standards only, as the care and case management elements are provided by visiting support teams. Inspections are both proactive (planned) and reactive (based on complaints received). The growth of expenditure on emergency accommodation reflects the growth in homelessness from 2014 to 2019 in particular.

The situations depicted in the programme are difficult, but not without hope. It was by adopting a system-wide Housing First approach that Finland made such progress on ending long-term homelessness. In Dublin, with a quarter of all applicants for social housing on our list, we have well -documented challenges with regard to supply, particularly of one bedroom or studio accommodation, but good progress is being made on creating Housing First tenancies in the Dublin Region and throughout the country.

This means that many people who formerly experienced rough-sleeping or long-term homelessness are now in tenancies with wraparound supports.

The DRHE piloted the Housing First approach in Ireland and our support for housing led responses to homelessness is absolute.

The DRHE (Dublin Simon) Outreach team had prior to Monday's broadcast referred Ms Natalie Grogan for Housing First and the McVerry Trust Housing First Intake Team will be working with her over the coming weeks to allow and support her move into her own home. She has had a number of different placements and is currently residing in DRHE emergency accommodation.

### **Homeless Persons moving from another Country/Outside the Dublin Region:**

At the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the DRHE moved away from night shelters, and converted all facilities to 24-hour accommodation.

An unintended consequence was that migrants or people presenting to Dublin from other counties no longer had a place they could access directly without an assessment of their eligibility, housing need and requirement for emergency accommodation.

Each local authority is responsible for the provision of emergency accommodation within its functional area. There has been a strong emphasis on local authorities over recent years in developing responses at local level through statutory homeless action plans. Each local authority has responsibility to ensure that hospital, prison and other institutional discharges are planned and co-ordinated so that people can access homeless services in the area they originated from.

We are strongly of the view that the provision of homeless services should never be separated from access to housing services. We acknowledge too the critical role of specialist interventions from the HSE or NGOs/Approved Housing Bodies in the areas of health, social and addiction supports.

Nationally there is a strong focus on prevention through enhanced rates of HAP for persons presenting at risk of homelessness. However this is only available to households registered with a local authority for housing services, (local connection rules for housing are established in legislation).

The DRHE always strongly encourages households who present for homeless services to register for social housing.

Without access to Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or social housing, the experience of homelessness can become prolonged. Where people come to Dublin, we explain why a person has a better chance of exiting homelessness by presenting to their own local authority where they may be eligible for social housing, HAP or Housing First and where the waiting times are not as lengthy as in Dublin. We are in regular contact with other local Authorities and local agencies to facilitate situations, where for one reason or another, placement is not available locally or where the circumstances warrant discretion on humanitarian grounds.

In addition, the DRHE makes dedicated beds available to the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team for people they encounter rough-sleeping regardless of whether they are from the Dublin Region or not.

During the broadcast, Mr Joe Nolan was shown making a call to the Freephone Service and during a part of this call that was not transmitted; he was in fact advised to contact the Dublin (Outreach) Rough Sleeper Team and given a phone number in order to get a bed. However, that initial contact with our service was not good enough and we apologise for that.

With regard to his present situation, we have made contact with Carlow County Council and we have allocated emergency accommodation to him until he can, if possible, be accommodated again locally. He is currently residing in emergency accommodation in Dublin City.

This specific incident does not reflect the quality/ sensitive customer service and advice that the DRHE/Freephone Service aims for and with which a great many calls that are answered on a daily and nightly basis. With the onset of Covid-19, we have had to severely restrict counter and face-to-face interviews with customers, with the telephone becoming the main form of contact. There is an ongoing review of the Freephone Service but Covid-19 has delayed the finalisation of this.

Mr Dan Orlovs was given emergency accommodation in DRHE-funded emergency accommodation in Co Kildare back in October 2020 and he is still residing there. This facility is managed very well on behalf of the DRHE by the Peter McVerry Trust and they are supporting Dan in every possible way.

Notwithstanding any of the above, the programme showed how individuals who cannot or will not return to take up services in their own local authority are more vulnerable to rough sleeping. The DRHE fully accepts the Minister's position that there is a balance to be struck between necessary assessment and ensuring that nobody should have to sleep rough while awaiting for this assessment/eligibility to be clarified and completed.

*We accept that we did not get that balance right in a small number of cases over recent months.* We will ensure that all such people will be offered temporary emergency accommodation, if at risk of having to sleep rough, subject to availability with the necessary assessment carried out over the following few days. To this end when we have available beds, we will offer temporary accommodation until we can contact the local Authority of origin and coordinate a response.

In recent months there has been a significant increase in people presenting as homeless and seeking emergency accommodation as they arrive from other parts of the country (outside Dublin), and this increase has come despite the serious Covid-19 restrictions on travel. Over 25 such cases have presented and have been allocated temporary emergency accommodation over the past 10 days; one person has been successfully prevented from entering homelessness and has returned to his local area.

At present, we have emergency bed capacity to respond to this demand but pressure on the system is likely to increase in the months ahead, particularly if surges of the Covid-19 virus occur within Homeless Services.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the efforts of all frontline staff who work in demanding circumstances and who have kept all essential services open and safe for homeless people throughout the Pandemic.

We in the DRHE, would also like to acknowledge the continued hard work of our colleagues in the four Dublin Local Authorities, all our partners in the charity and private operator sector, all other stakeholders, and voluntary groups etc. for their continued support and collaborative efforts on a variety of responses to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

**Brendan Kenny**

Deputy Chief Executive