

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM THITHÍOCHT, PLEANÁIL AGUS RIALTAS ÁITIÚIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, PLANNING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Déardaoin, 8 Samhain 2018

Thursday, 8 November 2018

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Mick Barry,	Senator Grace O’Sullivan.
Deputy Pat Casey,	
Deputy Eoin Ó Broin,	
Deputy Fergus O’Dowd,	

In attendance: Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett.

DEPUTY MARIA BAILEY IN THE CHAIR.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: Apologies have been received from Senator Boyhan.

In accordance with standard procedures agreed to by the Committee on Procedure and Privileges for paperless committees, all documentation for the meeting has been circulated to members on the documents database. As we are not having a discussion in private session, I propose that we suspend the sitting for a few minutes to allow the delegates to take their seats. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Sitting suspended at 9.35 a.m. and resumed at 9.40 a.m.

Reports on Homelessness: Discussion

Chairman: At the request of the broadcasting and recording services, members and those in the Visitors Gallery are requested to ensure their mobile phones are switched off completely for the duration of the meeting or switched to airplane, safe or flight mode, depending on the device used. It is not sufficient to leave them in silent mode because it will maintain a level of interference with the broadcasting and recording systems.

The first item on the agenda is consideration of the reports published by the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in June this year and the categorisation of emergency accommodation in monthly homeless reports.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I welcome our guests and I call on Ms Eileen Gleeson to make her opening statement.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: I thank the committee for the invitation to discuss the report of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, DRHE, to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government of June 2018. I am here in my capacity as director of the executive, which operates a shared service on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. I am joined by my colleague, Ms Bevin Herbert, head of communications. In order to provide the joint committee with a more accurate picture of the current position, the information contained in my statement uses the most recent statistics.

It is widely accepted that homelessness in Dublin is, in part, symptomatic of inadequate housing supply. Against this backdrop, the DRHE continues to tackle homelessness and bring forward innovative solutions to help the more vulnerable members of the community. The

DRHE works to move people through emergency accommodation with health and support services towards a sustained exit from homelessness. This work is carried out through three main areas of operation, namely, prevention, protection and progression.

Homelessness prevention continues to be a priority for the DRHE and the introduction of homeless housing assistance payment, HAP, and the place finder service have been hugely important in driving capacity and effectiveness of HAP as a preventative option. Of the 1,332 households prevented from entering homelessness in the period from January to September, 1,232 took up HAP tenancies. The DRHE recently began collating data on the number of children prevented from becoming homeless. Figures for August and September indicate that 463 children were prevented from entering emergency accommodation. We have a designated homeless prevention team that works with families presenting as homeless to find an alternative solution to entering emergency accommodation.

In the context of protection, a total of 6,313 adults and children were in emergency accommodation as of 13 September last. This represents 3,431 households. Significant progress has been achieved in moving families from hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation to family hubs. While we recognise that hubs are not a long-term solution, family hubs provide accommodation specifically designed for more optimal family living until additional housing supply becomes available. In addition, rather than placing families in emergency accommodation, the DRHE has been endeavouring to place families and individuals in fully furnished, own-door units that allow families to live independently. Although they are not at risk of homelessness or in emergency accommodation, these families are receiving supports and staff continue to engage with them to support them into long-term tenancies. There are currently 210 families with 308 dependent children in these units in the Dublin region. The number of new families accessing homeless services varies each month, with an average of 98 families in the Dublin region doing so each month. Although an additional 878 new families entered emergency accommodation in the Dublin region in the nine months to the end of September, the overall net increase in the number of families over the same period was 135. The ongoing work carried out by the DRHE in preventing families from entering homelessness and exiting families from emergency accommodation to tenancies is a significant factor in maintaining a low net increase.

Table 5 in my submission details the trends for individuals accessing emergency accommodation from January to September. The Housing First model is integral to the DRHE's response to people sleeping rough and enables individuals who have a high level of complex needs to obtain permanent and secure accommodation. Of the 222 individuals supported in Housing First tenancies to date, 191 have successfully retained housing. This represents a retention rate of 86.1%. The recently launch Housing First implementation plan for 2018 to 2021 sets targets for the roll-out of Housing First in every local authority in the country. Full implementation of the plan, along with further expansion of the Housing First programme nationally, is contingent on additional funding from the HSE.

I will move on to progression and exits from emergency accommodation. From January to September, 801 households exited homelessness to tenancies. The DRHE has recently begun collating data in respect of the number of children exiting homelessness and figures for August and September indicate that 230 children exited emergency accommodation. One of our main challenges is social housing supply, and an increase in the overall supply of housing is critical to addressing homelessness in the longer term. The delivery of single-person social housing over the coming years is essential, particularly to our ability to deliver the Housing First expansion. HAP is a massive solution to addressing and preventing homelessness. If the structures of HAP

allowed us to access private rented accommodation outside the Dublin region, it might add to our ability to prevent people ever becoming homeless in the first instance. Implementation of a more flexible arrangement would help to address tenancy shortages on the HAP side.

On the private rented sector, a real indication of the challenge faced is revealed in our July and August figures for new families accessing emergency accommodation. The information is in figure 2 on the last page of my submission. Over 50% of the families presenting at homeless services are coming from the private rented sector. It should also be noted that the percentage for those coming from family circumstances or family breakdown may include people coming from the private rented sector; they may have gone home to live with family initially only for that relationship to break down. The figure of 50% from the private rented sector may be an underestimation of what is actually coming from that sector.

On complexity of homelessness, our response to the extreme weather events over the last year highlighted the extensive range of medical needs of people in both long-term and short-term emergency accommodation. Many vulnerable people such as those released from hospital, State care and prison often have no other option than to present as homeless. Specific care packages and additional step-down facilities are required to relieve the pressure on homeless services. The DRHE will continue to collaborate with all agencies on behalf of the four local authorities to drive the response to homelessness for the most vulnerable members of the community in the Dublin region.

Chairman: I thank Ms Gleeson and call on Mr. John Murphy from the Homelessness Inter-agency Group to make his opening statement.

Mr. John Murphy: I am grateful for the invitation to attend. I am a former Secretary General in the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. I am also the chair of Depaul, a major provider of homeless services in Ireland North and South. I am joined by Mary Hurley, assistant secretary with responsibility for social housing and homelessness; and David Kelly, who has responsibility for the homelessness and housing inclusion supports unit in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and who is a member of the inter-agency group.

In September 2017, I was asked by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, to chair the newly established Homelessness Inter-agency Group. The key aim of the group is to improve the State's response to addressing homelessness through improving the co-ordination in the provision of services, and to address any existing blockages. The membership of the group includes representatives from the Departments of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Children and Youth Affairs, Education and Skills, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Health, Justice and Equality, Public Expenditure and Reform; the County and City Management Association; the DRHE; the HSE; and Tusla. On foot of one of the group's recommendations, a representative from the Department of Education and Skills has joined the group since the report was published.

The inter-agency group first met in October 2017. It has now met on eight occasions. In addition, several bilateral discussions have been held between bodies represented on the group. The group has considered a wide range of issues including examining the services delivered by the respective Departments and agencies, and identifying existing blockages while also looking at the scope for new initiatives. The group also engaged with the organisations involved in the delivery of homeless services nationally. A one-day workshop was arranged, with all organisations in receipt of State funding for the delivery of homeless services invited to attend. A very productive engagement was held with over 50 representatives from 19 separate

organisations. The prominent issues of discussion included homelessness and health, justice and family and youth homelessness. A number of issues relating to the structural arrangements in place between the State agencies and the NGOs were also discussed. Ongoing engagement with the NGO sector will be important for all the Departments and State agencies involved in the delivery of homeless services.

In June, I submitted a report to the Minister setting out details of the work undertaken by the group to date and making a number of recommendations for further actions to be taken to improve the State's response to addressing homelessness. These recommendations include a range of issues relating to social housing policy; the interaction between health and homelessness, to which Ms Gleeson also referred, justice and research and reporting. The report also notes that addressing homelessness will be dependent on the delivery of measures in Rebuilding Ireland to increase the supply of social and affordable housing and to strengthen the functioning of the private rental sector.

I understand the committee's focus is on homelessness numbers. In respect of the recommendations in the report regarding research and reporting, one of the issues faced by the group was the lack of data available in a number of policy areas. There is a need to have improved information available to the relevant State agencies to better inform policymaking, both in supporting those experiencing homelessness and developing interventions to improve the prevention of homelessness.

The group also considered the current data being collated and published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The Department publishes a monthly report setting out the numbers of individuals in emergency accommodation in each of the nine administrative regions in place for the administration of homeless services and funding at local authority level. The report also includes details of the numbers of families and associated dependants in emergency accommodation in each of the regions.

The group considered that the monthly reports provide a useful indicator to measure the number of people in emergency accommodation. However, the information is limited in terms of the picture it provides of the dynamics of homelessness. The report proposes a number of other matters that should be examined such as information on the numbers of presentations and exits and information on the reason for someone presenting as homeless, to which Ms Gleeson also referred.

Following the publication of the report, the focus of the group will be on overseeing the implementation of the actions set out in the report and considering the further measures that should be considered. There has been progress in a number of areas. The publication of the Housing First national implementation plan in September was a positive initiative, with ambitious targets set for each local authority. Housing First is a good example of the need for interagency co-operation to resolve homelessness, with a co-ordinated approach to providing housing and health supports to some of the most vulnerable users of homeless services, including rough sleepers.

There has also been good progress in the delivery of additional emergency accommodation, with additional beds for singles and family hubs being progressed in Dublin and other areas nationally. The additional funding announced in budget 2019 will support the delivery of emergency accommodation to minimise instances of rough sleeping and, by increasing the number of family hubs, provide appropriate emergency accommodation to families experiencing homelessness.

In terms of supporting households into independent tenancies, the roll-out of the HAP placefinder service nationally has been important and the appointment of dedicated placefinder officers in the local authorities is supporting this objective. However, increasing the supply of social housing and improved functioning of the private rented residential sector will continue to be essential in delivering solutions for those households currently in emergency accommodation.

The group will also review the delivery of services on an ongoing basis and identify further actions that are required. In this regard, it is clear that the first report of the interagency group does not represent a definitive statement of the actions to be taken. Achieving better co-ordination and collaboration in respect of these complex issues will require a continuing focus. I am happy to assist the committee in its deliberations.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Murphy. I all Professor O’Sullivan to make his opening statement.

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: I have prepared a detailed statement that we can take as read but I will take the members through the document.

The homelessness policy statement was issued by the then Government in February 2013. There is a clear acknowledgement in that document that the extent of homelessness in Ireland must be quantified with confidence in order that realistic and practical solutions can be brought forward. Arising from that, three sets of data were generated by the local authorities on behalf of the Department, the first of which was known as performance reports, which talked to what Mr. Murphy mentioned about the dynamics of homelessness. This data, produced on a quarterly basis since Quarter 1 2014, look at the number of new and repeat presentations to homelessness, the numbers of adults in emergency accommodation for more than six months, and the number of exits from homelessness. I provide some data in the document to give members an illustration of the type of data provided via these quarterly performance reports up to quarter 2 2018.

Second, quarterly financial reports were required to be produced by the lead authorities. The expenditure on homeless services under five categories was identified. The concern at the time was that approximately 50% of expenditure was going to emergency accommodation and that expenditure should be diverted instead to preventative services. In practice, however, that has not happened. As I point out, in the first half of this year, 80% of all expenditure is on emergency services.

Third, these monthly reports extracted from the Pathway Accommodation & Support System, PASS, which had been established in Dublin in 2011 as a bed management and client support system, was rolled out nationally in 2013. From April 2014, data on the number of adults, the number of child dependants, the type of accommodation, their age and gender have been produced on a monthly basis.

I felt it was important to go into some detail on the origins of those reports. They came from the national homeless consultative committee, NHCC, and the cross departmental team on homelessness, CDT. In 2013 and 2014, there was a recognition that there was no national data on homelessness and in terms of the implementation of the national homeless strategy, some baseline data were required to measure progress on ending homelessness. There had been an exercise in Dublin known as Counted In, which had been taking place every three years from 1999 but had been discontinued after 2008. There were a range of difficulties with that but particularly the fact that it was only taking place every three years, which rendered it problematic for providing timely data on progress on ending homelessness.

A data subgroup of the NHCC and the CDT was then established to examine this issue. Following a number of meetings, it was agreed and recommended to the overall committee that with the national roll-out of the PASS, it was possible to extract timely data on the number of adults in emergency accommodation. Initially, we proposed that the data be produced every six months. The chair of the committee, an assistant secretary of the Department, on the basis of the Department reporting to the Cabinet sub-committee on social policy every quarter, suggested it be reduced to three months and then later to one month.

There was a clear acknowledgement, which comes up regularly, that the monthly figure is not comprehensive. It excludes four particular categories, which we examined in detail. Regarding non-section 10 funded services, there are a small number of services which, for various reasons, neither receive nor seek section 10 funding. We conducted research with the Housing Agency, which concluded that there were fewer than 200 beds nationally. In terms of establishing a baseline figure, therefore, we were aware of that limitation but the numbers were not that significant.

The monthly figures do not collect data on rough sleeping but there was an alternative source of data via the twice yearly count in Dublin. At the time, we contacted all the other local authorities, apart from Cork, Galway and Limerick, rough sleeping was not an issue in their areas. We were fairly confident, therefore, that we had an accurate minimum figure for Dublin and an estimate from outside Dublin.

The monthly data does not collate data on the hidden homeless but, again, we felt that the housing needs assessments collected that data, so there was an alternative source of data in place. We also did not recommend that long-term supported accommodation, which is funded by section 10 of the Housing Act 1988, be included in the monthly figures. That was reinforced in census 2016 when the homeless methodology liaison group also recommended to the CSO that this group be excluded from its overall count of homelessness. There was a clear acknowledgement and understanding of the limitations of the monthly data but, nonetheless, there was a consensus that it provided timely useful data on those in emergency accommodation.

I will go through the census, the past data and the social housing needs to suggest that the past data are a robust measure of homelessness. It is worth noting that some of this confusion about the data relates to the fact that in some accounts people talk about households, some about adults, and some about adults and children. For example, in September, based on the monthly report, there were 5,202 households in emergency accommodation, or 5,869 adults or 9,698 adults and children, and often these different categories are used interchangeably. There have been two significant modifications to the monthly data, the first on 1 January 2015, when accommodation or refuges for those escaping from gender-based violence, funded via section 10, were removed. This followed a recommendation of the homelessness oversight group in 2013 that they should be removed and that these agencies would be funded by Tusla. That was broadly supported by the national homelessness consultative committee and cross-departmental team and the data sub-group. The second was that in March, April and July of this year, approximately 625 adults, with 981 accompanying child dependants, were excluded from the monthly reports. I have provided several statements from the Minister on that fact and there is a document before the committee from the Department. I have presented one chart which gives the monthly data, excluding the domestic violence shelters and the households excluded in March, April and June 2018, and a second chart which presents the data for each September from 2013 onward and which shows what the figures would look like in September 2018 if those two sets of data had not been removed.

Two modifications have been made to the data. The first, the removal of refugees, did not undermine confidence in the data because there was a clear rationale and logic for its removal. The second modification has created some confusion and undermined confidence in the data because it is unclear what the criteria are for removing these households. It is not clear whether it is the legal basis of the residence or the physical characteristic of the residence that is the determining factor. Hybrid accommodation situations have emerged in recent years that neither the Housing Act 1988 nor the data sub-group of the national homelessness sub-committee anticipated. It would be helpful to spell out in greater detail the criteria utilised and the rationale for the removal of 625 adults from the monthly reports in 2018 to ensure confidence in the reports.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I would prefer not to be having a conversation about statistics and data because the longer we spend talking about them, the less time we spend discussing the real adults and children who are homeless and how we need to tackle their plight. If we do not have accurate data, we will not be able to adequately plan and implement solutions. This is echoed in many of the written submissions the committee has received from the homelessness NGOs. It is, however, important to talk about data.

Professor O’Sullivan stated, “The second modification has created some confusion and undermined confidence in the data as it is unclear what the criteria are for removing these households.” That is a very damning indictment of the data that is being presented on this issue by somebody who, from the outset, was centrally involved in agreeing the methodology, in conjunction with NGOs and the Department, to produce these figures. The Simon Communities of Ireland, in their written submission to the committee, stated that the recategorisation is “a cause for concern”. It said that it has created confusion and caused a range of problems. Focus Ireland went further by stating not only is it unclear but the fact that the recategorisation was not retrospectively applied to give us a proper read lends further weight to the suspicion that the “underlying motive was to produce a lower total figure”. For an NGO funded by Government to make that kind of potential charge is significant. It strongly recommends, as does Merchant’s Quay Ireland, that responsibility for data for this issue should be handed over to the CSO. Barnardos has also raised concerns about this matter.

I was more confused after reading the Department’s report on the recategorisation than I had been beforehand. It seems that this is what has happened: the Department, with the approval of the Minister, created a new category of persons, not housed, not in tenancies as we understand them, but no longer homeless because the temporary accommodation they are in is different from, or better than, the temporary accommodation they were in previously. That means they are neither homeless nor not homeless which is bizarre. We know they are not in tenancies, bar a very few in Louth from the original recategorisation, yet we are still being told that they are not at risk of homelessness. That is where much of the confusion arises.

From the Department’s point of view surely emergency accommodation always included own door accommodation - for some time we have called it transitional accommodation. Therefore, by somehow saying that emergency accommodation is only hotels, bed and breakfasts and night to night, is the Department not redefining the long-standing understanding of emergency accommodation that included both night and transitional accommodation which was under licence for six, nine, 12 or 18 months depending on the circumstances? I also do not understand why the Department’s recategorisation is not consistent. It has not removed all of those households in own-door accommodation. There is no logic for removing some and not others. There are many people, families and individuals, still included in the Department’s monthly report who are in own-door accommodation, transitional accommodation, some in

properties owned by local authorities others in accommodation provided by the NGO sector. How can Ms Hurley explain this lack of consistency in the application of that still unclear recategorisation? Many of us have corresponded directly with local authorities, and Kitty Holland, a journalist with *The Irish Times*, corresponded with all of the local authorities after the September report published by the Department. There is a consistency in their responses. They are telling us, and the documents have been provided to the committee, members have had access to them since yesterday-----

Chairman: Is Deputy Ó Broin referring to the half-page document we received?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There was correspondence from Kitty Holland that was forwarded to the-----

Chairman: We received only half a page.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There is more that I took down from the database this morning.

Chairman: I do not think more came through but we will find out. The half page is all I have.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: There is more on the database. All of those replies say that in terms of the third round of recategorisation - the July-August one - these folks are in temporary accommodation. They do not have tenancies - they are still accessing homelessness services and they are still counted in PASS. How, if all of that is the case, can they not be counted as homeless? I simply do not understand that.

Can Professor O'Sullivan, as somebody involved in this at an early stage, confirm that emergency accommodation, as in the monthly reports, includes those two types, namely, night-to-night and licensed own-door accommodation? Can he give the committee some detail on the kind of transitional accommodation that has always been included in those figures? In his opinion and that of Ms Gleeson, if I lose my tenancy and am in temporary accommodation provided under licence, accessing homelessness services, and am on the PASS system, am I homeless or not? That is the fundamental question.

The inter-agency report refers to the potential move away from the monthly figures and the need for this more comprehensive report. The witnesses rightly point out that we have a quarterly report which provides much of that data, the difficulty is that not many people pay too much attention to that, to the frustration of many of us. Do they think it is a good or a bad idea to lose the monthly reporting, and how could we improve on it?

Ms Gleeson mentioned the 210 families who seem to be in this gap between homelessness and secure tenancies. When Brendan Kenny, the head of housing at Dublin City Council, was on 'Morning Ireland' some months ago and was pressed on this question, he stated quite clearly that these people have homeless priority. They are accessing homelessness services and in his view they are homeless. Does the DRHE agree with that? I will ask the same question I asked Professor O'Sullivan. If I lose my tenancy and I am in temporary accommodation, provided through whatever means, on the pathway accommodation and support system, PASS, and accessing homeless services to get me into permanent accommodation, am I homeless or not? That is what this committee wants to know. I may have a second round of questions, depending on the answers given.

Chairman: Does Ms Hurley want to respond first?

Ms Mary Hurley: All of the speakers this morning, including Deputy Ó Broin, have referred to the importance of the data. The data are a tool for us and enable us to taper our services and provide the right supports to people in emergency accommodation. We are all agreed on that and work is under way in that regard. I hear some of the concerns the Deputy has expressed with regard to some of the NGOs and so on. We want to get to a point where we have enhanced data sets. As Ms Gleeson said earlier, we are working on new data sets and collecting new types of profile data to help us to taper our services. We are all agreed on that.

The Deputy referred to the recategorisation issue and emergency accommodation. As the numbers in homelessness began to rise significantly in the past 18 months, we have been trying to put in place high quality emergency accommodation solutions and that is where the family hub programme came in. When we started to work on emergency accommodation, we looked at the suite of accommodation and arrangements that were already in place. We also looked at the types of supports that were in place for people in emergency accommodation and at what was being classified as emergency accommodation. The Department is very clear that if someone is in a social housing home and has been for a long period, he or she is not at risk of homelessness. Such people are in own-door accommodation, for which licences are in place. In some of the instances where there was recategorisation, people were in HAP houses. It is fair to say that they are not in emergency accommodation and that is the view we took. We worked very closely with local authorities on the emergency accommodation issue. We did the survey, which members have before them, and it was on foot of that, when local authorities came back to the Department and confirmed the arrangements that were in place and the accommodation types, including independent living arrangements, that were in place that the recategorisation survey was undertaken.

On PASS, it is not correct to say that people in own-door accommodation are recorded on PASS. Those people are not on that system. People in own-door, independent units are certainly not recorded on PASS. In terms of section 10 and the funding of accommodation, that section also funds prevention measures so the fact that something is being funded through section 10 does not necessarily mean the person involved is in emergency accommodation. Indeed, many of the units where people were being counted as being in emergency accommodation had been funded under the Department's capital assistance scheme, CAS, or social housing investment programme, SHIP.

In terms of the work that was done, the objective in the Department is to focus our efforts on people in hubs, hotels and emergency accommodation. Individuals that are living in own-door accommodation at no risk of homelessness, or in social housing homes, HAP tenancies and licensed arrangements are not being counted as being in emergency accommodation now.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I have a very quick supplementary question, if I may.

Chairman: It might be better to get the answers first. We might run out of time.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I will be very quick. I have a reply here from Galway City Council. In reply to the questions I posed, the council said in October that the clients are still categorised as homeless but not being housed in emergency accommodation. I am confused because people are either homeless or not homeless. My question is whether the people we are discussing are homeless. I have a reply here from Louth County Council from October which says that the 211 figure in the north-east region, comprising counties Louth, Cavan and Monaghan, relates to people that are now categorised on PASS as being accommodated in own front door units. They are being recorded in PASS but are just being given a new categorisation. Are the people

we are talking about homeless or not? That is the fundamental question that this report is meant to address and that we are trying to understand.

Ms Mary Hurley: The people we are talking about are not in emergency accommodation.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is not the question. Are they homeless or not?

Ms Mary Hurley: The monthly reports count people in emergency accommodation.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I am asking if they are homeless or not.

Ms Mary Hurley: They are on a housing list, waiting on a house and are not in emergency accommodation.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Are they homeless or not? It is a reasonable question to ask

Ms Mary Hurley: They are not homeless. They are being accommodated in an own-door premises.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: The letter from Galway County Council states that “these clients are still categorised as homeless”. Ms Hurley is saying the council is wrong and should not be putting this information into the public arena. This is what all of the local authorities told us. They are telling us that in their view, the people in question are homeless but the Department is saying that they are not. That is a pretty big divergence of opinion on such a fundamental issue.

Ms Mary Hurley: What I am saying is that we publish monthly reports in respect of those in emergency accommodation. There are various mechanisms in terms of housing lists and those in emergency accommodation but the monthly reports that we publish relate to those in emergency accommodation. I am saying that those individuals to whom the Deputy refers are not in emergency accommodation. I am also saying that they may very well be on a housing list and waiting on social housing but they are in a secure home and are not at risk of homelessness and not in emergency accommodation.

Chairman: There were a number of questions for Ms Gleeson.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: First, like Deputy Ó Broin, I would prefer to be here discussing policy rather than numbers. We work on the front line. We work with real people who unfortunately face crises on a daily basis. We work very hard in the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, DRHE, to respond to them in whatever way we can with the mechanisms we have at our disposal. To answer the Deputy’s straight question, I would still consider these people to be still homeless because they are accessing homeless services. They are not counted as they would be if they were in emergency accommodation for the purpose of our monthly report because they are, as the Deputy said, in a hybrid situation in terms of homeless accommodation. They are not in the normal form of emergency accommodation but they are accessing homeless services. We are constantly putting innovative responses in place to deal with the tragedies that the people who present to us face every day of the week. We went after the own-door accommodation to give people a more secure situation. We ensured that people who are particularly vulnerable were put into that accommodation because it is a much better solution. Own-door accommodation allows people to control their lives more, look after their own families better and so on. We jumped at the chance to do it and we will continue to do it where possible. However, the people we are talking about are still in homeless services until such time as we can give them a tenancy and move them to a long-term solution. They are not counted on PASS in the monthly

report for the purpose of that specific report. Is that clear enough?

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Are they still on PASS but categorised as something else?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: They are still on PASS and are categorised the same way as those people who are in long-term accommodation. They are still on PASS and are accessing services in the same way and we are still working to provide them with a long-term solution to their housing need.

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: When we were originally devising these monthly reports on emergency and temporary accommodation, there were two essential criteria. One was whether it was section 10 funding for homeless services, while recognising that section 10 does more than just emergency accommodation, and the other was the nature of the tenancy. If people were licensees, they were counted. If they were in a hub or a hotel, they were licensees and were counted, irrespective of the nature of the physical construction of the dwelling. It is the nature of the tenancy that counts. If they were licensees, our view was that they were in emergency and temporary accommodation and should be counted. To answer the Deputy's question, the people to whom he refers are homeless according to the original definition, that is, being section 10 funded and being a licensee. Whether it is own-door accommodation or a hub does not matter. It is the relationship that the person has in terms of his or her tenancy. If the individual is a licensee, he or she is in temporary and emergency accommodation.

On the suggestion that the data be moved to a quarterly basis, there is no reason that the monthly data could not continue to be published. There is a detailed report every quarter utilising the performance and financial reports and the monthly data to provide a comprehensive report in a way the DRHE does at the moment anyway. As such, it will be a matter of collating the data from the other authorities. There is no reason the two cannot happen. The data are being collected currently and if Ms Hurley is saying it is being enhanced, that is all the better. I still take the view, however, that the monthly data provide a useful snapshot of trends.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Does Professor O'Sullivan consider that there is a reason the recategorisation has happened?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: I suspect the issue relates to the new hybrid situations which have arisen. As I said, however, the objective of the 2003 housing policy statement was to ensure there was confidence in the figures. Regrettably, there was no consultation and this was not discussed. At the time, a number of categories were excluded and some of the NGOs were criticised by others because, for example, non-section 10 funders were excluded. Because there was a consensus, however, everyone could stand over the monthly figures and say that while they were not definitive, they were confident they provided an indication of the trends. If that number was going up, it was really going up and if it was going down, it was really going down. The current confusion is probably not helpful and we have spent an hour here debating an issue we should not have to discuss.

Chairman: Professor O'Sullivan has an advantage on some of us, as there is confusion over the email and what was or was not sent. He has all of that information whereas we do not. While that might be an oversight on my part or a problem with the email from the person who sent it in, I ask him to bear in mind that members do not have all of the information he was sent.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Does he have confidence in the figures going forward on the basis on which they are currently being collated?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: I would have confidence if I had a clearer understanding of the criteria for the exclusion of the 625 households.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: That is a “No”; he does not have confidence.

Chairman: I ask the member not to put words in witnesses’ mouths, with respect.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Without that qualification, has Professor O’Sullivan confidence in them?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: If I knew what the criteria were for the exclusion.

Chairman: At all times, witnesses can answer as they wish and members should note that we never put words into witnesses’ mouths. I ask members to be careful about the precedents we set. I call Deputy Casey.

Deputy Pat Casey: We could get lost in the argument about whether we are looking at 9,500 or 10,300. The regrettable story is that homelessness is increasing. At the end of the day, that is the bottom line. Not only is homelessness increasing, hotels are increasingly being used month on month, which is something we were promised would end in 2017. I do not claim the Department is failing to try. I will never make that statement. The officials are doing everything they can. Clearly, however, we are not getting on top of the homelessness crisis. What are the blockages which are preventing us from dealing with the situation?

I have a bee in my bonnet about HAP tenancies and moving from local authority lists to HAP lists. We then have the homeless HAP list. It is time to scrap the lot and have one list. There is a deterrent out there in that people will not longer take HAP because they will be removed from the council list. We are hearing it in our constituency offices every day. People on local authority lists are afraid to take a HAP tenancy because they will no longer be on the list. They are entitled to a house and they should be on a single list. I do not have the homeless HAP list data in front of me and I will probably be killed for commenting on it. However, if one does the calculation on the number of families who have been housed on the homeless HAP list and the local authority list in the Dublin region, respectively, one will find there is a better percentage chance to get a home on the former. That is another reason to scrap it and have one list on which everyone is treated equally. The figures were presented to us on that last year.

It is frustrating that after two and a half years, we are still sitting here talking about the fact that sufficient data is not collected. When homeless families come to our constituency offices, we ask basic questions. Local authorities interview every homeless family and they also ask these basic questions. All the data are available and it is a matter of collating and presenting them. What is the big issue about data? It is there in every local authority. They ask the questions. They ask if the issue is a notice to quit and, if so, why. Why are we making such an issue of data and waiting for more and more reports? I am tired of reporting at this committee as we have had so much of it.

I will leave it there albeit I might come back in on the second round. The issue here is homelessness. We can argue about the 900 people, but we have an increasing homeless crisis whether we like it. Whether the Minister wants to include the 900, the homelessness rate is increasing. The use of hotel accommodation is increasing. Clearly, we are not getting on top of the housing crisis.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The Deputy asked what the blockages were. The blockage is the

shortage of affordable secure housing. That is at the root of the crisis. The figures for July and August show 236 families entered emergency accommodation in the Dublin region in those two months alone. On average, 98 families a month come into homelessness in the Dublin region and that does not count the single persons who come in. There is no homeless HAP list. People go onto the housing transfer list once they have HAP. The difference between homeless HAP and HAP is that we have placefinders in place in the DRHE and now nationally to address the position of people who are eligible for homeless HAP if they are in emergency accommodation. We have now expanded that to include people with notice to quit to prevent people from ever entering homeless services at all. They get the deposit and two months' rent in advance to give them access to a level playing field in finding rented accommodation in the private market because that is where the supply is. To go back to the Deputy's question, the blockage is a shortage of affordable and secure housing, that is why the crisis continues.

Ms Mary Hurley: I agree that we should not be talking about data but about solutions for the individuals in emergency accommodation. Unfortunately, the numbers continue to increase, albeit the incremental rate of increase has recently slowed. The Minister has been trying over the past number of months, in particular in the Dublin local authority areas, to engage intensively on prevention solutions. A larger prevention team is being put in place across the Dublin region, as that is critical to stem the flow of people into emergency accommodation. The forthcoming rental Bill will address some of the rental issues and challenges we are seeing. We are seeing significant numbers of people coming from the private rented sector on foot of notices to quit. As such, it is important that we deal with that.

I refer to quality emergency accommodation. One of the things on which we have engaged with the Dublin local authorities recently has been putting additional emergency beds in place for our rough sleepers. An additional 200 beds will be in place by the end of the year. We are also making more hub spaces available. What we see in emergency accommodation is that families have more support in hubs and tend to move on more quickly. This is a complex area with a number of ingredients. There are a number of issues and a number of actions to progress. Supply is key and we have increased delivery this year in terms of our build units. As Rebuilding Ireland progresses, increased delivery will begin to kick in.

Deputy Casey referred to HAP and lists. As he will be aware, individuals in receipt of HAP are on a transfer list. I have a figure indicating 1,700 households in receipt of the housing assistance payment, HAP, support have moved from it to a social housing home. We are seeing movement on the transfer list and HAP is a key tool for Ms Gleeson and those in other regions around the country with respect to prevention work. Ms Gleeson referred to another critical aspect of homelessness and meeting people's housing need. We are seeing a number of households being accommodated in other authority areas. To date, over 2,500 households have moved between different local authority areas. That is key as in some areas there is more supply than in others. There is a range of tools in place that we use currently.

Chairman: I have some questions as I must slip out to the Business Committee before coming back, if that is okay. Will Ms Gleeson explain a bit more to us about private rented accommodation outside Dublin and the benefits that may add to the current system? I would like this simplified. Regardless of what heading any family or individual comes under, supports are made available to them and a safe home or environment is provided to them. Am I correct in saying that? I am loath to put anybody under a particular heading and dilute it all the way down. I do not want to put words into anybody's mouth here. What is important to me is that full support is given to those people in need and the State helps them. Am I correct in saying

that is happening?

Am I correct in saying that throughout the country different local authorities have different thresholds for HAP, the adaptation grants and social housing criteria? It is so complex in different local authorities that it is very hard to put everything into the right categorisation. Am I right in saying that? We need to simplify the matter as it is so complex. Anybody who avails of a category of support should not be missed and the local authority should be there to engage with such people, whether they are on a transfer list, in emergency accommodation or a family hub, a hotel or on a social housing list. Supports should be available in each local authority, whether it is a place finder or the housing department in the local authority. They should engage with the people on those lists. Am I correct in saying those supports are available?

We spoke about private rented accommodation, with a figure of 50% given of people coming from the sector. The other 50% may come from the likes of family breakdowns or perhaps we are underestimating the number of people coming from the private rented sector. Am I right in saying the discretionary increase in HAP is helping to offset some of those terminations, although it is not the long-term solution? I have had a number of people coming to our clinic in the past month and I know it has only really kicked in within the past month but the place finder service has helped those people. It is when a notice to quit has been extended and they have engaged with the place finder service. It has been able to help them find accommodation and offset that fear of becoming homeless. I would love to see some figures around that, although witnesses might not have them here today. It is an important matter. I am not saying that any of what we are doing is perfect but we have a social housing construction programme that is coming into a steady stream, although we need far more units. Three years ago we did not have that stream. A year from now, where do witnesses think we will be in being able to support more families in exiting homelessness?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: There was a question on private rented accommodation and looking for properties outside the Dublin region. HAP is structured in the same way as the process for people applying for a housing needs assessment. They go on a list and there are various bands for various local authorities. In the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, we argue that we need to get people in the HAP system out to Cavan, Meath and beyond, as that is where the surplus private rented properties are. That would take the pressure off the centre. There are people who would quite happily live outside the Dublin region if we could give them HAP support to do that and not have an impact on their eligibility for housing. We are working with the Department on changing the structures of the way HAP is formulated so we can apply the process where people want to move. It would be really useful to us to mop up that surplus private rented accommodation.

Anybody in emergency accommodation is automatically linked to a support, whether it is a single person or a family. When these people move to tenancies from emergency accommodation, there are various supports in place, such as the support to live independently, SLI. Sometimes they only need support for a little while and they avail of it, and sometimes they need supports for longer. That is why we have long-term accommodation as well, as some people will always need support.

With regard to prevention, 50% of the people coming to us and presenting in crisis and at risk of becoming homeless come from the private rented sector. It is even more than 50%. The rest come from what we call “family circumstances”. In reality, many of them would have come from the private rented sector as well. They may have gone home or to live with relatives or friends before the relationship broke down. They then come to us. Their last place of

accommodation would have been with a family member or friend. The ticked box is “family circumstances” rather than for the “private rented sector”. There are many more people coming from the private rented sector than we have on the data. We are working on that to specify the last three or four places that people stay so we can get a pattern.

HAP is very beneficial in preventing people from entering homelessness in the first place. In the nine months taken in with the report, 1,232 people were prevented from ever accessing emergency accommodation because we used HAP to prevent them ever coming in. It is a major tool for prevention until social housing supply comes in. I am not here to speak to the supply side but we need a supply of housing, whether it is private or social, to keep people from ever having to enter emergency accommodation.

Ms Mary Hurley: I can speak to supply. We are seeing the construction programme ramping up significantly and this year, between build, acquisition and lease, over 7,800 homes will be delivered. We are on track to do that and we are working very hard with local authorities currently to get as many build units over the line as quickly as possible. We have put many structures in place including, in our own Department, the housing delivery office. We are working very closely with local authorities. There is great clarity on targets and local authorities are aware of what they need to deliver.

As we see the build trajectory increasing, we are seeing that from next year, HAP will start to decrease. We are seeing more units coming through and this year we are very confident of meeting the target of 7,800 new homes. We will continue to try to work with local authorities to meet challenges and help them with the barriers they face. The supply is certainly coming through and we secured additional funding in the budget for next year. An extra €470 million was secured for the housing budget and it will enable us to deliver 10,000 homes across build, acquisition and lease. We all agree that supply is the key to addressing this challenge.

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: It is extraordinarily welcome that we will have an additional 10,000 social housing units but I sound a note of caution as we have lost 10,000 units of private rented housing in the past year and a bit, based on the registered tenancies with the Residential Tenancies Board. As rents are escalating very rapidly, between that and the loss of nearly 10,000 tenancies I suspect that in a year’s time, the homelessness figures will be even higher.

Chairman: While we do not know why we have lost those tenancies, could we surmise that some of those may have been accidental landlords who do not want to be landlords whose properties have returned to the value at which they were purchased, therefore it is natural that they withdraw? Some 86% of landlords own one or two properties. It is not attractive if one is an accidental landlord but there are other incentives for purchasing rental properties. Are we saying that this time next year, with the increased supply that is coming on stream, that we will start to see a decrease in the individuals and families entering into homelessness?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: I think we will see an increase over the next year before things will start to slow down. The pressure is in the private rented sector with increasing rents and the increasing demands on the sector and as Ms Gleeson pointed out, the 50% figure is a gross underestimate. I suspect it is the majority and until something is done with section 34 and the right to terminate tenancies, we will see a continuous flow of families into homelessness.

Chairman: That is trying to balance the rental sector without interfering in it too much, so that there is not the loss of a further 10,000. It is a difficult balancing act. Ms Hurley said the hope is that with increased supply, it will fall next year.

Ms Mary Hurley: The overall objective is to ensure that there is enough housing for the people who come forward. We have a long list. However, this will not be sorted in the very short term. The Rebuilding Ireland plan is there and by its conclusion, an additional 50,000 households will be accommodated in homes compared with when it began. A key thing for us is that when, unfortunately, people present to us as homeless, they are accommodated in quality emergency accommodation. The Minister is resolute that when families present, they should go to a hub or be accommodated through the housing assistance payment, HAP. While small numbers of families continue to go to hotels at present, our overall objective is that when a family presents, our place-finding service will try to direct them to HAP or support them to find a HAP tenancy or else that they would go into a hub where they will have family supports around them to try to exit into a HAP tenancy.

Deputy Mick Barry: My question is for Mr David Kelly. From where did the idea to re-categorise come? Did the Department pitch it to the Minister or *vice versa*?

Mr. David Kelly: It was clear in the Minister's statement earlier this year that during the compilation of the March and April homeless reports, a number of houses and apartments were categorised as emergency accommodation that were not emergency accommodation. They were local authority stock, namely, properties that had been leased by local authorities and, in some cases, HAP properties. The Minister asked that Department to engage with local authorities to examine the full extent of this issue. That was the background of the publication of the report in September.

Deputy Mick Barry: Therefore the person who got the ball rolling was the Minister.

Mr. David Kelly: It was in agreement with the local authorities, to be clear. Some local authorities were doing this but the majority were not counting houses as emergency accommodation. There were discussions between the Department and local authorities.

Deputy Mick Barry: Will Mr. Kelly tell the committee the number of people on the official homeless lists when the idea was first mooted? Was the number decreasing or rising?

Mr. David Kelly: In the March figures, the number of homeless adults was 6,035, comprising 1,720 homeless families and 3,646 dependants associated with those families.

Deputy Mick Barry: What is the grand total?

Mr. David Kelly: The total is 9,681.

Deputy Mick Barry: Therefore 319 short of the 10,000 mark. Was the figure decreasing or rising?

Mr. David Kelly: It was increasing.

Deputy Mick Barry: Was there any discussion between the Minister and the Department about the figure of 10,000 homeless being politically sensitive?

Mr. David Kelly: No, the discussion was around the categorisation of the houses, primarily around the local authority houses being categorised as emergency accommodation.

Deputy Mick Barry: However, it is fair to say that there would have been a keen awareness at the higher levels of the Department that 10,000 was a landmark figure.

Mr. David Kelly: The Minister is on record as saying that 10,000 as opposed to 9,500 does not diminish the crisis, and that the figure is unacceptably high at 9,600.

Deputy Mick Barry: He did not fool anybody when he made that comment. A figure of 10,000 would clearly be seen by most ordinary people, and people with common sense, as being a particular landmark in the homeless crisis. Mr. Kelly would not deny that.

Mr. David Kelly: I believe 9,600 is just as much a crisis in the Department.

Deputy Mick Barry: I note that Ms Eileen Gleeson said that the people who have been taken off this list in that category are people who are essentially homeless and that Ms Mary Hurley from the Department said that people in that category are essentially not homeless. It is an indication of the degree of confusion created by this move that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive and the Department now disagree over the definition of homelessness.

My next question is for Professor O'Sullivan. I was interested in the point he made about the likelihood of the homeless figures increasing or decreasing over the next year in respect of whether the housing and homelessness crisis had peaked. Will he drill down more into his assertion that it has not yet peaked and that the numbers will increase for at least another year? Will he give more detail regarding his basis for saying this?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: It primarily relates to the private rental sector. While the social housing output will increase, it will not be at levels that are sufficient to make a significant dent on homeless figures. There will be a continuous flow of people into homelessness from the private rental sector, which is something we see on a quarter-by-quarter basis. We are seeing a decrease in the number of exits from homelessness. In Dublin, in the second quarter, it was down to almost an all-time low of only 250 adults exiting from emergency accommodation. The indications are that the inflow is increasing and the number of exits is decreasing. That has been the pattern in the first two months of this year.

Deputy Mick Barry: Professor O'Sullivan has said he expects that will continue for another year. Why does he say a year?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: I said a minimum of a year. I will not predict much beyond that but based on the data available to me and the decline in the number of registrations in the private rented sector, and given our dependence on HAP and homeless HAP to exit people and prevent people from coming in, that market will be increasingly squeezed. I can see very little on the horizon to suggest that between the squeeze on the number of units in the private rental sector, the increase in the new presentations to homelessness and the decrease in the number of exits from emergency accommodation in the first half of this year, it will be a productive area in the next 12 months.

Deputy Mick Barry: I thank Professor O'Sullivan. My next questions will be rapid fire as I seek clarity for myself and those watching. Essentially, I want "Yes" or "No" answers as to whether the following groups are counted as part of the official homeless figures in this State. Is it correct that the majority of rough sleepers outside Dublin are not counted?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: Since those data commenced, rough sleepers have never been counted in the monthly reports.

Deputy Mick Barry: That is including rough sleepers in Dublin?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: They have never been included. That was a deliberate decision on which there was consensus. From April 2014 onwards, the rough sleeper count is counted separately and are not included in the homeless figures.

Deputy Mick Barry: Therefore they are not included.

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: They are not and they never have been.

Deputy Mick Barry: Asylum seekers in direct provision are not included.

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: No, they never have been.

Deputy Mick Barry: What about women in domestic violence shelters?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: They were removed in January 2015 by consensus.

Deputy Mick Barry: What about shelters that are not run by local authorities?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: No shelters are run by local authorities, however there are three shelters in Dublin which are not funded by section 10 and therefore are not included in the pathway accommodation and support system, PASS.

Deputy Mick Barry: What about long-term accommodation funded from local authorities?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: A decision was taken by the group I chair not to include that group in the monthly figures. The data sub-group agreed that while they were funded by section 10, they were long-term supported and our focus was to be on the emergency and temporary accommodation. To clarify, they are not in the monthly figures because that was the consensus.

Deputy Mick Barry: What about so-called couch surfers?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: They are not included in the monthly figures. A view was taken that a number of categories in the housing needs assessment, which takes place on an annual basis, would count those households. In 2018, the most recent housing needs assessment pointed to approximately 35,000 households within that hidden homelessness category.

Deputy Mick Barry: I am reading the section in Professor O’Sullivan’s submission that refers to that group. It includes the category of unsuitable accommodation due to exceptional, medical or compassionate grounds.

Chairman: On what page is the Deputy?

Deputy Mick Barry: Page 9. Other categories are overcrowded accommodation, unfit accommodation and unsuitable accommodation due to particular housing circumstances. When Professor O’Sullivan says that there are between 35,000 and 40,000 households assessed as being in these categories, he is referring to the years 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2018. It is not a cumulative figure.

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: No. On average, the number in those categories has been between 35,000 and 40,000 each year.

Deputy Mick Barry: I imagine that the figure is higher in 2018 than it was in 2013. If that is an average figure-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: No. It is lower in 2018 than it was in 2013.

Deputy Mick Barry: The figure for 2018 is approximately-----

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: 35,000 households.

Deputy Mick Barry: Is any of those households counted in the official homelessness statistics? Is there any kind of overlap?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: No. There is a separate category for homelessness in the housing needs assessment.

Deputy Mick Barry: We have just under 10,000 on the official homelessness list. Professor O'Sullivan reckons that, were he to include these groups on top of that-----

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: We need to be careful. The figure in the housing needs assessment is households. The figure of 9,600 is individual adults and children, accounting for approximately 5,300 households.

Deputy Mick Barry: Does Professor O'Sullivan have any idea as to how many persons are living in these households?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: Of the 35,000?

Deputy Mick Barry: Yes.

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: No. The Housing Agency collates those data on an annual basis. I presume it will provide them to the committee.

Deputy Mick Barry: That helps clarify the matter for me. Are so-called couch or sofa surfers included in the 35,000 or are they on top of that figure again?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: It is difficult to know. One could argue that "overcrowded accommodation" is a proxy for sofa surfers.

Deputy Mick Barry: There is an overlap, but a number of sofa surfers are most likely not included in the figure.

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: Probably if they have not registered with their local authorities as having a social housing need.

Deputy Mick Barry: If we were to take the most liberal interpretation of homelessness, there is the official figure, the 35,000 households as opposed to individuals in Professor O'Sullivan's hidden homelessness statistics, and a cohort of sofa surfers who are not included in the latter. That is interesting.

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: It might be useful for the Deputy to examine the appendix on the European typology on homelessness and housing exclusion, ETHOS. It sets out the various categories of what we call homelessness and housing exclusion. They have been broadly agreed at EU level.

Deputy Mick Barry: Speaking the EU, are sofa surfers or the people captured in this definition of "hidden homeless" counted in the official homelessness statistics of other European countries, for example, Germany?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: Only the four Nordic countries have a similar data collection system as ours. There is not a national data system in Germany. The four Nordic countries’ data include sofa surfers.

Deputy Mick Barry: What is the position in Northern Ireland?

Professor Eoin O’Sullivan: It does not include them.

Deputy Mick Barry: That response is helpful. It seems that the homelessness statistics are lower than I feel they are in reality. I say this on the basis of the official statistics not including groups that many ordinary people would view as being homeless and are counted as being homeless in other countries, and on the basis of what I can only describe as the doctoring of the figures by the Minister and the Department. In reality, the figures are lower.

Chairman: The Deputy must be careful with the words he uses. I read out the privilege note at the start of the meeting. We must base our decisions on the evidence we have. Regardless of whether we agree with what is in which category, we must make policy decisions on the evidence. It can be difficult to collate some data, but we base policy on the evidence we have.

Did Ms Gleeson wish to contribute on this matter?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: Not particularly. PASS collates the data for the Dublin region. It also collates data nationally, but we are concerned with the figures for the Dublin region. As to why the DRHE exists, our job is to respond to people who are presenting as homeless or in homeless crises. We will do that in whatever way we can in to reduce the impact of homelessness on families and individuals. We will use whatever innovative solutions we can bring to the table.

Chairman: The DRHE can only help if someone registers with a local authority.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: Once someone presents, he or she is on our radar.

Chairman: The supports kick in.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The four local authorities will deal with him or her, work through whether he or she is homeless and what services are needed, and take it from there.

Deputy Fergus O’Dowd: I apologise for being late. I wish to pick up on a couple of points that I heard while arriving, the first of which is the inequalities between income limits in various counties. I live in County Louth, but a part of my constituency is in County Meath. The maximum net income for a single person in County Meath is €35,000. One can earn up to that amount, receive HAP and get on the social housing list. In County Louth, though, someone can only earn up to €30,000. If a person exceeds that amount, he or she does not get on the housing list or have access to housing supports. At the maximum end of the limit, a couple with four children can have an income of up to €42,000 in Meath or €6,000 less in Louth. There is significant discrimination. I live in the town of Drogheda, part of which is in County Meath for administrative purposes. There could be different limits on the other side of the green in the same estate. That is unfair and wrong.

With all that in mind, I would like to make a suggestion about adjoining local authorities outside Dublin. I appreciate that Dublin has different issues. Would it be possible for the limits in adjoining local authority areas to suffice where, like Drogheda, settlements cross two areas? Someone living in either part of the area covered would be able to benefit. When moving from house A to house B, a person is moving from one county administration to a different one, even

though he or she could still be living in the same estate. That is a problem. How can these inequalities be addressed?

There are other ambiguities. For example, someone can go from Louth to Meath on HAP but not *vice versa*. This creates a major problem. If I heard Ms Gleeson correctly, she spoke about moving HAP applicants from the greater Dublin area out to places like Meath and Cavan. I am not complaining; I am only seeking clarity and equality. Regardless of who or where one is, the income limits for social housing should be the same. There should not be discrimination on geographic grounds. I would appreciate Ms Gleeson's comments on these points.

Deputy Pat Casey took the Chair.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The point I was making was about the bands being based on people's eligibility for housing. They are housing needs assessment bands. They are inter-local authority arrangements and are based on a national policy. HAP was designed to fit into that system. From our perspective in responding to homelessness, we want that HAP structure to change so that we can "HAP" people in Louth, Meath or-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: A seamless transfer.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: Well, at the moment, we can "HAP" them in Meath with Cavan, but a seamless transfer-----

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: That is good. I welcome it.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: We do not want the structure of those bands to impact when we are dealing with people who are homeless and need to "HAP" them into accommodation. There is surplus accommodation in those counties that we could access, were that possible. To respond to a point Deputy O'Dowd made, there are people in Meath who could go into Cavan, for example, or *vice versa*, but the HAP, because of the way it is structured, is limiting them. That HAP structure needs to change and we are in talks with the Department about that.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: To qualify for HAP, applicants must be on the housing list but they cannot qualify if their income exceeds a certain amount. In addition, the qualifying limits are lower in Louth than in Meath. That is the problem. In other words, it is discrimination on income grounds against those who are homeless or have insecurity of tenure. They cannot benefit from the scheme and secure a property that would help them because they are earning less than people in Meath who are securing these homes. That is the ambiguity. I appreciate that Ms Gleeson understands that.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: We are on the same page. It is the way HAP is structured.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: How quickly can that change?

Vice Chairman: Ms Hurley wanted to respond on that point.

Ms Mary Hurley: There are three bands of income eligibility for social housing. As the committee will be aware, to be eligible for HAP a person must be eligible for social housing. The bands are based on local economic issues and there are issues related to more rural counties as opposed to urban counties. We are looking at the bands for each county and we hope to have that work completed at the end of the year. It is related to many of the affordability measures that we have in place. We are looking at that particular issue.

Deputy O'Dowd raised the immediate issue of movement from bands and the fact that a good solution for a homeless household is sometimes available in a neighbouring county. We are working closely with Ms Gleeson on this matter and we have arrangements in place. We have managed to move people up and down the bands to ensure they do not become homeless and we will continue to do so. We will issue guidance on this to local authorities shortly. It is something to which we are committed because it is a no-brainer if somebody can move local authority area to be housed. It is a prevention tool for homelessness.

In terms of the numbers, I mentioned earlier that more than 2,500 households have moved between local authorities to date under HAP. Given that 37,000 households are receiving a HAP support, the number of households moving between areas is significant.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: There is a barrier to that, however, because a person in County Louth earning €31,000 or more will not be eligible for HAP in County Meath, whereas a person in County Meath who earns €35,000 would be eligible for the payment. I appreciate the Department is dealing with the issue and I understand Ms Hurley appreciates the ambiguities involved.

I had a constituent with me the other day who had a problem with accommodation. The individual in question, who is on HAP, wrote to the Residential Tenancies Board, RTB. On foot of that letter, the RTB wrote to the person's landlord stating that X, Y and Z had to be done. The following day the family received a letter or legal document from a solicitor stating the family had to vacate within the legally required number of days on the grounds that a named person, who happened to be a sister of the owner, was moving into the property. That is a case of serious discrimination. The landlord is abusing a loophole. Why should a sister, brother or other family member have a right to dispossess somebody else, particularly in this context? The difficulty is that if the landlord's sister moves into this accommodation, the family will be made homeless and will have nowhere to go. We need a moratorium for at least two years providing that this ground would not be deemed a sufficient reason to require a tenant to vacate a property. Provided the tenant is paying the rent and there are no rent arrears or anti-social issues, he or she should be able to stay in the accommodation. We need that certainty, which would not place landlords at a disadvantage because they would continue to receive rental income. It has never been more attractive for people to rent out properties. Landlords are getting significant rents and are clearly being well paid. We must ensure that nobody is put out of suitable accommodation except in extremely exceptional circumstances until he or she has a social or an affordable house to move into. That should be a core principle of our letting policies. I do not know whether Ms Hurley can comment on that. It seems wrong that the family to whom I referred are being put out because they wanted the house they are renting to be up to scratch. They were paying the rent and are suddenly told that this person, who is not a son or a daughter of the owner, is moving in. I do not know whether Ms Hurley has a view on that.

Ms Mary Hurley: In terms of the rental protections, the rental Bill will be brought forward shortly. I agree on the need to protect the most vulnerable from activities of the type mentioned. I am not aware of the case to which Deputy O'Dowd referred but the objective of the forthcoming Bill is to give the RTB more teeth in dealing with these issues. The legislation will be introduced shortly.

Deputy Maria Bailey resumed the Chair.

Chairman: Does Deputy O'Dowd have further questions?

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: No. I welcome the increase in the level of housebuilding, particularly in my constituency and east County Meath. It is good to see a considerable number of new homes being built. I welcome the attention that is being paid to housing but more radical measures are required in some instances, such as in the cases I highlighted.

The death of a homeless person this week was a tragedy for the individual involved and society. It greatly disturbs me that people are dying homeless on the sides of our streets. Whatever the issues were, and I am not competent or qualified to discuss them, it is morally and ethically wrong that in a country where we are supposed to have a fair deal for everybody, somebody should slip through the net and die in those circumstances. I particularly welcome the role of the voluntary bodies and public servants in addressing these issues. However, I am outraged by another death on the streets of Dublin. It is unacceptable and unforgivable that this should happen in a land of opportunity and equality.

Chairman: We will proceed to a second round of questions.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Before I move on to the two reports, I will make a final comment on the homeless numbers and urge the Department to consider the proposal I raise. It is clear from all of the evidence that there is no longer the consensus or agreement among the different sectors that was presented previously. The best course of action would be for the Department to convene the homeless consultative committee and those involved in the data subgroup to agree unequivocally on what methodology will be used in future. It should then retrospectively apply this methodology to ensure that, to address Professor O'Sullivan's concern regarding confidence in the data, whatever figures are produced are consistent with what was in place in the past. To this end, it should avail of the expertise of the Central Statistics Office. In my view, the CSO should, as has been done in respect of the number of home completions, produce the data on homelessness in the future. That is the best way to end this controversy, which is what all of us want. If the Department were to convene such a meeting, many of us who have been critical of it and the Minister would welcome that decision and we could try to resolve this issue. I urge the Department to take that course of action.

On the two reports, I have a series of questions, which I will fly through quickly. I will start where Deputy O'Dowd ended, with homeless deaths and the recent death of a homeless person in Dublin city centre. Something that concerns me about some of the public commentary - not from anybody in this room - following such deaths is that it somehow apportions part of the blame to the individual who had died and his or her failure to access emergency services, whether because of mental health issues, addiction or other reasons. It highlights a failing or weakness in the emergency accommodation system when people who have chronic addictions or have come out of addiction through recovery and others who have mental issues do not feel able, comfortable or safe accessing some of the emergency accommodation available. The number of deaths among rough sleepers appears to be increasing, although it is difficult to know whether this is because such deaths are being reported more often as a result of the homelessness crisis. I want to know what more can be done to ensure that those who are most difficult to reach or have the most complex needs can be brought into a form of emergency accommodation in which they feel safe and are not left out on the streets to die. That is the first question. The second relates to my increasing concern at the refusal to provide emergency accommodation to people who present to local authorities. This has always been an issue and we have raised it previously. When a person has a notice to quit, it is a straightforward situation. He or she can present and the notice to quit suffices. Where it is a case of a relationship or family breakdown, however, it is too discretionary. Many of the front-line staff in the local authorities are first class

in trying to assess these situations.

It is impossible, however, for a front-line staff worker in the DRHE or a council to manage to balance the tiny level of availability of emergency accommodation with the large number of presentations. Is the Department and the DRHE examining the issue of people who present and are refused? What can we do about that? In that context, for those who are accepted, is there any willingness to review self-accommodation as a way for vulnerable low income families to try to access emergency accommodation? Most of us on the committee have said repeatedly that it is an appalling way to provide emergency accommodation. If it is not being reviewed, can it be?

Turning to some of the data in the two reports, I ask repeatedly if we can get accurate information on the time that people spend in emergency accommodation. I hear some Government figures telling us how quick the turnaround time for people in the hubs is, but they are not telling us the total amount of time that family has spent in emergency accommodation from night to night through to licence and into the hub. The DRHE provides information to Dublin City Council and we get that from the councillors. I would like to see that information provided State-wide to give us a sense of how long families are presenting.

The table refers to 801 exits. I ask whomever would like to confirm this if these are all exits from emergency accommodation. Two groups of people are counted. One group comprises people in emergency accommodation who, through various supporting mechanisms, get out of emergency accommodation. The other group comprises people in tenancies that have an end point but who, through preventative measures, such as providing homeless HAP before the tenancy comes to an end, are prevented from becoming homeless. At what point will we be able to get accurate figures to us how many people have left emergency accommodation - which is the meaning of the word "exit" - and how many people have been prevented from becoming homeless through homeless HAP? That is a good intervention from my perspective.

In regard to the detail of the reports, both of them referred to HAP and various issues with it. We had a detailed discussion of one of those issues previously. That is the disincentive for people to exit emergency accommodation into HAP because they fear losing time on the housing list. I am blue in the face saying this. South Dublin County Council has solved this problem. When a person goes on the HAP transfer list there, he or she has exactly the same access to the housing list as he or she had the day before. He or she loses nothing. That works easily when there is choice-based letting but it is much more complicated when there is not.

Why is it not possible, however, to state that it is now a policy objective of the Department to ensure that nobody loses anything when he or she goes into HAP? Whatever the mechanics of allowing people to continue accessing the mainstream housing list, I do not care if they not counted in the homeless figures. I can go to the HAP figures and add them myself. Families are being asked to make impossible choices. They might have been 11 years on the list. Then they go into emergency accommodation and are being asked to add an unknown number of years to the list for permanent council accommodation because of the way the HAP system operates. My understanding is that the Department has no objection to what I am proposing. Surely it can be progressed in a way that I think solves that problem.

On HAP and the intercounty issues, Ms Gleeson and I have spoken about this, often when I am advocating for people. I do not oppose the proposal but will that create additional pressures and problems? Almost 2,000 homeless HAPs have been generated this year through the DRHE and the local authorities in Dublin. That is a lot of homeless HAPs. If we start provid-

ing homeless HAPs in the commuter belt counties, at that rate of payment, that is going to push up rents in those areas. That will, in turn, make it much more difficult for the good people of Louth, Wicklow, Meath or Kildare to get rental accommodation in their own areas. There may be surplus accommodation but it will have a perverse or negative impact on rent prices. How do we avoid that?

I am willing to look at anything that gets families out of emergency accommodation but there is now a hierarchy for landlords in my own constituency. They know they get more from a homeless HAP tenant than from a standard HAP tenant. It is influencing the market levels of what HAP landlords are willing to take in Dublin. How do we deal with that? On the inter-agency report, to reopen the thorny issue we debated at some length when the report came out, there is that famous line in the report which reads: "Given the need to minimise the number of families in emergency accommodation, it also needs to be considered whether it is appropriate for the State to provide emergency accommodation to households who are unwilling to consider HAP, where HAP may offer an appropriate solution for that household".

In retrospect, was it a mistake to write that sentence in that way, given the disincentives with HAP? Can we get confirmation that, whatever the intention of that sentence because we had an argument about that, there is no intention to action that in the way that many of us feared? I refer to people losing their homeless priority, if they have such a thing, because of the issues with HAP? There was also another line in the interagency report which concerned me greatly. It was in respect of non-Irish and non-EU citizens. The assumption was that the majority of those would not have status. There is no evidence, however, to support that.

I am interested because there has been commentary, some of it very ill-informed, about whether there are people in the emergency accommodation system who do not have legal status to remain and do not, therefore, have the legal right to access homeless services. Where are those people going to end up? I would like some accurate information for the committee on the status of that group of people. I would also like to confirm that nobody will be denied access to homeless services because of a status-related issue.

I agree with Ms Gleeson on the single person units. I am a full supporter of every single new unit and I know that Ms Hurley and her team work very hard with the local authorities to increase those units. One of the frustrations is that in much of the new social housing being developed, there is an under-provision of one bedroom units. In Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council, the two areas in which I know the lists the best, one third of the total housing list, by household, is single persons. One third of the new units being developed are not single units. What is going on? Is it that the Department is prioritising family units?

Is it because of the focus on and the urgency of family homelessness that there is a prioritisation of family units? Why are we not ensuring that the roll-out of the new builds is somehow consistent with the level of need in the housing lists? That is not against any particular unit. Are the targets being agreed with local authorities not matched against the level of need? In some senses, if we provided more one-bed units, we could also encourage greater levels of downsizing. Some good projects are coming online in a number of local authorities.

Professor O'Sullivan mentioned the loss of 9,000 or 10,000 rental units. That is a big concern. He and the RTB have highlighted it. We do not know the reasons but many of us can assume. The Chairman is right. We have a significant rate of buy-to-let mortgages in mortgage distress. We have others who may not be in mortgage distress but they may no longer be in negative equity and, either under pressure from the banks or from their own choice, they are

selling voluntarily. What policy tools could be put in place to try to get a proper read of what is going on? How could that also be prevented?

I agreed with Deputy O'Dowd completely. The vacant possession notices to quit are now a problem. That is particularly the case where buy-to-let landlords bought those properties by availing of a tax break. I suspect but do not know - I have many cases similar to those mentioned by Deputy O'Dowd - that often when the residents gets the vacant possession notice to quit for a member of the landlord's family that if the property was revisited in three months' time, the family member will not be living there. It will be rented out to someone else. The new powers of the RTB will be helpful but of no consequence to the families who lose out.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The other point is that it is every single person as opposed to just families.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: What could we, either as a committee or a Government, do about that situation even on an emergency and temporary basis? I refer, for example, to the Focus Ireland amendment to restrict vacant possession notices to quit for buy-to-let landlords who availed of those tax breaks or other policy measures that could be put in place to stop that flow. We are all conscious that the flow is too great. No action by or increased policing powers for the RTB, which I fully support, will tackle that flow, certainly not in the immediate term.

Chairman: I call Professor O'Sullivan first.

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: I do not know why there is that outflow and if it is to do with registrations. There could be a methodological issue in that there is just a decline in registrations rather than an outflow from the sector. As a proxy, it would seem that after a period since 2004 of continuous increases in registrations we had a decrease in the last year and a quarter. Why is that? I suspect much of it has to do with the market having picked up and people are simply selling their properties at this stage. Perhaps there could be some type of incentivising scheme for local authorities to have first bids on these properties so they could acquire these properties coming on the market quickly. I know they are doing some of it. They could have a link with the Residential Tenancies Board so when they see a tenancy is not being registered they could ask what is happening with it and whether they could potentially get access to it for the housing assistance payment or simply to purchase it.

In terms of the spending of the Residential Tenancies Board and section 34 we could state that on a temporary basis a tenancy cannot be terminated for certain reasons, particularly family possession. The provision is extraordinarily generous at present. As the Chairman said, there is a need to strike a balance to keep landlords in the sector. From my history lessons, in 1915 we brought in rent control on a temporary basis and it was 1981 before we got rid of it. There may be some suspicion that temporary measures stay in place for a long period so we may want to place some guarantee on this.

The issue comes up consistently that this is about the relevant article in the Constitution on the right to private property and the question is asked as to whether this needs to be further tested to see whether the common good overcomes these provisions. This certainly has been the argument by the landlord associations for a long time. They state we cannot do this because of the constitutional provision on private property. There may be a case for the Department to obtain an opinion on this and on whether it is possible in the forthcoming Bill to legislate on this issue.

Deputy Ó Broin raised an issue on the numbers and the difference between exits and preventative cases. This is documented in the Dublin Region Homeless Executive reports. The table presented is somewhat misleading in that the two categories are aggregated in the table but the text below it separates them out. We can see clearly for the Dublin Region Homeless Executive the prevention cases versus the exit cases. It does not happen for any other local authority but I am not sure whether any other local authority has in place the innovative scheme the Dublin Region Homeless Executive has to prevent families from entering homelessness in the first place.

Mr. John Murphy: Deputy Ó Broin raised a number of specific issues on the report and after responding to them I will make some more general comments. He referred to households being reluctant to leave family hubs or other accommodation to take up the housing assistance payment. The concern is not in any way to penalise them but to get more intensive engagement to understand the reasons and identify practical measures, some of which we specifically recommended. These include that people should not be penalised in any way in terms of their place on a social housing list and that there would be greater flexibility in transfers between local authorities. We made a number of recommendations that are being followed up by the Department. There was never any intention of penalising them.

The issue of people who may not have status is, by definition, very difficult to get to the bottom of because such people tend to be below the radar of all arms of the State. If we are trying to find ways to improve joined-up government, which is essentially what I was asked to focus on, we have to shine a light into some corners where everybody around the table is saying we do not know what the story is but we know anecdotally there are issues. If we were to try to design a policy to deal with the issue, assuming we knew the extent of it, it would not be an easy set of questions to answer. This is an area that needs to be looked at. The issue is not to state we will not provide any support to such people. Clearly, there is a humanitarian issue at a very basic level. After this, we must think through what are the implications for how we manage immigration, income support and access to housing, health services and education. This needs to be worked through. One of the purposes of establishing the group is to think about some of the issues that perhaps do not immediately present as headline issues and ensure they are examined.

On the question of numbers, what are counted and how they are interpreted, we identified there are gaps in the data that need to be addressed. I would certainly not favour using a regular monthly set of data because the dynamics of homelessness are changing and, as Professor O'Sullivan said, they are likely to change further. We have not even thought about other issues, such as the potential impact of Brexit on immigration, what might happen in the wider housing market and how it might impact on the supply of private rented accommodation. There are all sorts of other much broader social and economic issues that could impact on the dynamics of homelessness. Therefore, we need more regular data. We also need more detailed data at more periodic intervals that will help us to get to the bottom of some of these issues.

To be absolutely clear, I have absolutely no interest in reducing the number for statistical reasons. I am interested in what the data tell us about practical measures that need to be implemented across government, where the blockages are in terms of interagency co-operation or whether it is a resources issue. This is why the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is on our group, so it is very clear about the resources issues.

At a practical level, if I put on my Depaul hat in the context of the comments made by Professor O'Sullivan that a licensee is not a permanent tenant and, therefore, perhaps he or she should be counted as homeless, I would say if, as I understand is the case, the intention of the licensee arrangement entered into by a local authority is that it will continue until the person

is in a position to move to a permanent tenancy, I would be very happy if many of the people Depaul deals with could move to this situation from the situation they are in. We certainly need to have clarity and consensus on what we are counting and why we are counting it and that everybody operates the pathway accommodation and support system, or any other system that is put in place, on this basis. However, I do not want this to become a distraction from the real challenges we face in terms of getting the best use of State resources and the best level of co-operation we can get between the various arms of the Government working in conjunction with the NGOs. We have made a number of recommendations on improving the level of involvement of and consultation with NGOs, including through the consultative forum and reconvening the data subgroup or some other agreed arrangement.

In addition to the data issues, much research has been carried out by various bodies of which Professor O'Sullivan is very well aware, including some commissioned or funded by the NGOs and some commissioned by the Housing Agency or other parts of Government. We need a better understanding of the areas that need to be researched and who is best placed to carry out or fund this research. I ask that people please talk to each other about it rather than ending up with a small, limited report on one aspect of the issue, with other reports covering other aspects because people have not spoken to each other. I must hold up my hand and state Depaul has been involved in commissioning some research on the health outcomes of homeless people and what it means for the health service. This could be done on a much broader basis but we would need much greater joined-up thinking on what should be done and how it should be done.

My focus in the coming months will be on who is doing what to implement the recommendations of the group. It is not fixed in time. The dynamics of how we will approach this are changing and we may need to think about more innovative solutions. This could mean whatever we are doing does not fit with the categories we count on a regular basis and we will have to think about that. Inevitably, some of these changes will be at risk of being misrepresented as changing the statistics but it is a dynamic situation and what we do and how we do it must reflect this. My focus will be very much on the practical and on calling people to account, asking them whether they did what they said they would do and whether it is working, as well as what we need to do to change.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: This week, we had a tragic death on the street. No one should die on the street. People working on the front line and doing outreach knew the man who died. It is even more upsetting for those people who are trying their best to provide a service. The issues around the number of people who die on the street and what we are doing about it overcame the actual tragedy of what happened. Six people have died on the streets - six people too many - in the Dublin region in the past 16 months, not the 26 or 27 that has been quoted all over the place. The public commentary on it is not helpful for those of us trying to deal with it.

Nobody should die on the street. That is the first and most important point. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive's winter strategy focuses on engaging with long-term rough sleepers and those who are reluctant to engage. Housing First deals, and will deal, effectively with people who do not want to come in, or who have other issues that need supports around them. There is outreach on the streets every night of the week until the small hours of the morning working with people. We hold beds in the system to deal with those people and get them in. It is very complex, as we know, and it would be easier to deal with if it did not become such an emotive issue when something tragic happens because it is so disappointing in the first instance.

We have just completed research around mortality in the homeless population in the Dublin region which we will publish shortly. It covers the period from 2005 to 2015. The committee

might ask about the long delay, as we are in 2018, but there is a time lag with post-mortems and getting proper data. The findings of that report are stark. The average age of a male who dies sleeping rough within the homeless population is 44. It is 37 for females. More can be done. We need to do more outreach and we need more step-down facilities so that when people are going through detox or treatment, they can move to a step-down facility to continue their progression.

Deputy Ó Broin asked about the number who left, or the 801 in my report. They left emergency accommodation and 1,332 were prevented. There are two separate tables in that report. In the Dublin region, we report to our strategic policy committee, probably bimonthly at this stage.

HAP is causing additional pressures on the market. How can we avoid it? We cannot for the moment and we would be remiss in doing our job if we tried to avoid it. I go back to what our role is, and it is to provide a response to people who are homeless, or to prevent people from entering emergency accommodation in the first place. We will continue to do that by whatever means we can within the structures that are there. We are probably distorting the private rental market but if we are giving an advantage to a person who is at risk of homelessness, or who is homeless, we are not going to apologise for it.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Can I ask a question, Chair?

Chairman: We are going in order, if that is all right.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Of course, that is fine.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: Ms Hurley has to come back first. There were some questions for her.

Ms Mary Hurley: I will come back on the question one-beds because some of the other issues were covered. Deputy Ó Broin is right that a third of the list are single individuals. When the Departments set build targets for 2018 earlier this year it worked very closely with local authorities about the need for additional one-bed space because that is what is coming through on the list. There are not as many as the Department would like coming through but it has been working on a spec for layouts of social housing. We will be providing specs to local authorities to make it easier for them in terms of the one-bed units.

One thing we see when social housing homes are being built, or where apartments are being built, is that the cost of building a two-bed, as opposed to a one-bed, can be very small and local authorities can focus on the cost piece. That is something we are looking at. We are encouraging more one-bed apartments. Dublin County Council has a volumetric framework in place for the delivery of apartments and a big focus of that will be on one-bed units. The Deputy is absolutely right that they are very important.

We will see next year as we move into the target-setting process for 2019 in terms of build across the local authorities, and we have the social housing assessments list from last June, more of a focus again on the delivery of one-bed units. We will have our framework and layout specs in place and the Department will be encouraging the building of one-bed units. They are critical to Housing First, whose national director, Bob Jordan, is in the Gallery. The Department is working very closely with Mr. Jordan on those one-bed units, including in terms of acquisitions where we are acquiring in the market, particularly some of the vacant units the housing agency has been securing. We are also targeting one-bed units there.

Deputy Mick Barry: I will ask one question at a time. The first relates to notices to quit from the private rental sector and the announcement of a 100% tax break for landlords who repair properties in the recent budget. My question is to either of the representatives of the Department. The tenants' organisation Threshold has reported that some surveys now indicate that substantial refurbishment is the number three ground for notices to quit. Have the Department's representatives any concerns that a 100% tax break for landlords for repair, which includes substantial refurbishment, is about to be introduced on 1 January, precisely the time of year when evictions from the private rental sector tend to peak?

Mr. David Kelly: Ms Hurley outlined that the Minister is bringing in legislative proposals to strengthen the regulation of the private rental sector which would include increased enforcement powers to the Residential Tenancies Board and I expect that would ensure that any grounds for ending a tenancy were within the provisions of the legislation.

Deputy Mick Barry: Will that legislation be in before 1 January?

Mr. David Kelly: Yes, the Bill will be published before the end of the year.

Deputy Mick Barry: Published.

Mr. David Kelly: It is a matter for the Oireachtas.

The tax break is a taxation measure and I am not in a position to comment on the impact it will have. If there is any suggestion that there would be an increase in the ending of tenancies for this purpose, that will fall within the previous point I raised about the strengthening of legislation in that area.

Chairman: Does anyone else want to come in there? Is Deputy Barry finished?

Deputy Mick Barry: I have three questions. That was just my first one. I have a supplementary on it. When the pre-budget discussions were taking place on this idea of a 100% tax break for landlords for repair, including substantial refurbishment, was any concern voiced at a senior level within the Department that this could actually promote, encourage and be the cause of an increased number of notice-to-quit evictions and homelessness? Was any concern voiced?

Ms Mary Hurley: The budgetary discussions obviously covered a range of initiatives, from those around the delivery of social housing homes to affordability measures and measures in the rental sector. There are a number of different measures relating to different aspects of the sector and that formed a part of the discussions. It was one element of the budget and landlords area obviously a key part of delivering homes and providing accommodation to households. There are various different elements to the budget and that was one. The legislation which Mr. Kelly referred to that will be brought forward shortly will deal with other elements of the rental sector so it is a suite of measures.

Deputy Mick Barry: The question was that landlords are obviously accommodation providers, but are also issuing notices to quit in sufficient numbers that it is the number one cause of homelessness these days. Given that this was just one of many strands in the budget, but it was a strand of the budget, was any concern voiced at any level in the Department in the pre-budget discussions that this measure could fan the flames of homelessness and evictions?

Ms Mary Hurley: I reiterate the point that landlords are a key element of----

Deputy Mick Barry: Were any concerns voiced?

Ms Mary Hurley: The Department worked closely with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the delivery of a suite of budgetary measures. This was seen as a measure relating to landlords. Regarding repair and leasing, landlords play a key role in the provision of social housing. We work with landlords there.

Deputy Mick Barry: Were no concerns raised that this could increase evictions and homelessness?

Chairman: The witness has answered the question twice. If the Deputy is not happy with the answer, that is separate, but she has answered him twice.

Deputy Mick Barry: She has replied twice; she not answered the question whatsoever.

Chairman: That is exactly what I have said to the Deputy. If he is not happy with the answer, that is a different issue. We are now down to 15 minutes and Deputy O'Dowd wants to contribute, as do I. Does the Deputy want to move on to the next question?

Deputy Mick Barry: I will move on to the next question, which is for Ms Gleeson. Earlier Professor O'Sullivan gave his opinion based on his knowledge of the situation that the housing and homelessness crisis has not peaked and that it will worsen in the next year. He was not prepared to comment beyond the next year. What is Ms Gleeson's sense of it?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: I am on record as saying that it will take us until at least 2021 before we see a decrease in the intensity of the presentation of people in homelessness.

Deputy Mick Barry: Ms Gleeson is going beyond what Professor O'Sullivan said. She has said it will worsen next year and the year after, and that it may not be until the following year that we see supply -----

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The key to addressing the current issues is supply. While supply is coming and will come in the next few years, we need to reach the point where supply outstrips demand. Until we reach that point, we will continue to have a crisis in homelessness.

Deputy Mick Barry: Is Ms Gleeson confident that the situation will be reversed in 2021?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: 2021 is a long time away. It depends on whether the economy grows, whether more people come into the country, whether we need more supply and whether the population increases or reduces. Many other factors need to be measured.

Deputy Mick Barry: My final question is for anyone who cares to take it. Why are rough sleepers not counted as part of the official homelessness statistics?

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan: The monthly figure simply covers those in emergency and temporary accommodation. There is a separate count of rough sleepers twice a year in Dublin. We can take cognisance of it, but it was never intended that they would be included in the monthly figures. The monthly report is not a figure for the overall total number of homeless people. It is simply those in section 10 funded temporary and emergency accommodation. We always knew the limits of that figure. It was never intended to be a comprehensive figure.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I want to refer to a point the lady here made. I apologise; I cannot see her name from where I am sitting. I welcome the facts she gave us. As she rightly

said, any death is upsetting for everybody, particularly the family. I acknowledge that it affects the carers and the voluntary organisations, and how difficult it is for them to accept it happens, notwithstanding their best efforts. She said she thought we needed more step-down accommodation. The poor man, who died this week, died on a pavement beside an open green space. There is a very low wall-----

Chairman: We do not want to get into a specific case. The Deputy should just talk in general.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I am talking about the death of a homeless man.

Chairman: I know, but I want to show respect to that man and not get into detail.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I am showing total respect to him. I am talking about where he died. I am not talking about why he died. I am talking about the physical environment in which he passed away. I reiterate that it was on a pavement and there was a low wall behind him. It was beside and part of an open space. Ms Gleeson said we need better or more step-down facilities. I hope the Chairman will agree that this is an appropriate question. While I am not talking specifically about this person, if there are people who for whatever reason are rough sleepers, are there ways in which we could engage in step-down facilities, which are not the hostel bed or whatever that they may not take up but much better than the grey and cold pavement close to Christ Church Cathedral?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: I agree with the Deputy that it is an absolute tragedy that anybody dies. We are failing, as an organisation, when that happens. Homelessness is very complex. People have issues, including addiction and mental health. We need to work with them on that.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I accept that totally.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: We have people on the street every night of the week. Housing First is having a significant impact on that particular group of people, who are at higher risk and do not, for whatever reason, want to access the normal services. We are trying very hard to engage with them. People go through detox and there is a service for that. The gap is in the lack of step-down facilities. When they leave detox, they need to go to a step-down facility so that they do not go back into the same pattern they were in before they went into that service. If we can get them to a step-down facility and work with them to progress out of it, it would be much more beneficial. We need more step-down facilities.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: What basically are those? I welcome and support Ms Gleeson's analysis, and the totality of her concern.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: Step-down facilities include collaboration between housing and health.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: What does that-----

Ms Eileen Gleeson: They need medical support and health support.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Is that absent at the moment?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: There is some there, but we need more of them.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I fully support Ms Gleeson in that. Would it be possible to do an analysis that could be shared with us in the future to identify what additional structures or

supports Ms Gleeson believes may be needed so that we can provide them if they are not there.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: Much of that analysis of what is needed has been done. It has been done by NGOs, such as Simon. We just need to get those facilities in place to respond.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Who provides?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: It is collaboration between health and housing.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I support what Ms Gleeson is saying. I am just trying to get the roadmap outlining the steps we need. I acknowledge what she is saying.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: We have made significant progress with Simon on a project for a step-down facility on the quays in Dublin. It is a step-up and step-down facility where they get ready to go into a medical environment, deal with them and then step back down into the facility again. It is very complex.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I accept that.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: It is slow. We need to ensure we have those facilities in place.

Chairman: I know Deputy Boyd Barrett is in. I normally let him have some of my time. If I have time left, I will give him time; that is not a problem. We need to finish at noon. I have sat here for nearly three hours and I want to ask a few questions if that is all right. I normally share my time with him.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The reason for my absence is that I was dealing with Committee Stage of the Finance Bill.

Chairman: That is great, but he is now eating into my time, which might easily eat into his time.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Could we not go five minutes over?

Chairman: People have commitments.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Five minutes-----

Chairman: If he lets me ask my questions - I will be quick - he might have time. I always share my time and I normally let non-members go before me, but I want to come in on this.

I know we are talking about one pillar of Rebuilding Ireland. From the onset of Rebuilding Ireland, we always said we needed all five pillars to work together to solve the housing crisis. We are picking one pillar today, but we need to keep in context what is happening in the other four pillars where we are seeing improvements. The figures coming back in that area are very promising.

I acknowledge the unbelievable work done by Ms Gleeson and her team during the adverse weather we have seen in the past year. I was in contact with the DRHE a number of times during those. While we are all told to stay at home and stay safe, members of Ms Gleeson's team are out on the street. They repeatedly go back to people who are unfortunately sleeping rough trying to entice them into safe accommodation. For some reason some people just do not want to. I know the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, DRHE, was very successful during the last period of adverse weather. I do not think the enormous work that goes on behind the scenes

or the sacrifices Ms Gleeson's team make are ever really publicly acknowledged, so I want to acknowledge that work. I also want to acknowledge the work of Housing First. Mr. Bob Jordan is present. Incredible work is carried out by Housing First to support people with dignity and respect which enables them to live in their own accommodation. I rarely see the details of that work in the media. We do not include them in our categorisation figures because we are trying to look after those people. Their need is so complex that it is appropriate that they are not categorised. I acknowledge the work that is not always spoken about here.

An enormous amount of work was done during the visit of the Pope to offset any issues that might have arisen and to help families presenting at homeless centres that perhaps could not have been accommodated. I am aware of resources set aside that were not used, but were available in case they were needed. I welcome the fact that there is always forward planning and that adequate facilities are provided for. What provisions are in place in terms of winter planning for the coming months? It would be great if people knew the day-to-day work involved, the hours that are put in and the work done after hours.

What is the rental strategy? I get the impression that "landlord" and "developer" are bad words. We need landlords in this sector, and we need builders and developers to build houses. We have to be practical and realistic about this, and frank when we are talking about it. We need a functional rental market. I am not speaking on behalf of the committee here, but my belief is that when there is too much interference in a rental market 10,000 people will pull out of it. We have to be really careful about interfering in the rental market. The rent pressure zones, RPZs, seem to be working in certain areas, and have been extended. Further measures will be in place before and after Christmas. We have to take it step by step, otherwise there will be a mass exit from the sector and we will have another problem on our hands. We tend to look at the negatives rather than the positives, but I try to be balanced about it.

I understand that, when it comes to the provision of single bed or one bedroom units, it is for each local authority to examine what the demographic need is in its own area and to provide accommodation according to the collated evidence. When the local authorities come to the homelessness interagency group I presume they are acting on that basis and that they are acting proportionate to what the need is. There is a wide need for one bed units on the housing list in Dún Laoghaire. We are seeing a lot of people who need such accommodation. I helped to open houses for older people the week before last. Deputy Boyd Barrett also attended that opening. Dún Laoghaire has done tremendous work around step-down accommodation and people in independent living, and I want to recognise that.

We are here to hold the witnesses to account. They have received a lot of criticism and have rarely been complimented. However, I do not question the bona fides of any of the witnesses before this committee, or their intentions or their goodwill. Any information I have asked for has been afforded to me. I might not like the categorisation in some instances and I might question it, but I never question the goodwill and the intention to solve the crisis before us. The witnesses have come in for a lot of bashing at meetings, which might be fair or unfair, but we never recognise the enormous work they do. They do not work nine to five, and do not get the holidays that those of us working in Leinster House get. I want to acknowledge that and commend the witnesses on that. Although we have a long way to go, we can only solve the crisis collectively. We cannot solve the homeless crisis without solving issues in social housing, the rental sector and building issues. The issues have to be solved in their totality, and we cannot lose sight of that. It is very easy to pick one area over another and politicise that area. I always look to solve the entire crisis.

Perhaps Ms. Gleeson could comment on the winter plan.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: I thank the Chair for acknowledging the efforts made by the DRHE. I acknowledge the efforts made by the NGO sector in facilitating and responding when required during the periods of adverse weather by putting contingency beds in place.

The winter strategy is twofold. We have enhanced services, and we have permanent and contingency beds. We provide extra outreach workers on the street who work with rough sleepers. We have enhanced day services, and there are contingency plans in place for families. We are doing what we do, I suppose. If there is extreme weather we will respond in a certain way. It is wintertime and the weather is cold, so we are providing extra permanent beds, particularly for single people, and contingency beds are in place for families as well.

Ms Mary Hurley: Deputy O'Dowd referred to rough sleeping, which is the real visual aspect of homelessness, and is the aspect that Ms Gleeson and her team, and the NGOs, work so hard on to ensure that there are beds and accommodation for people who want to avail of them. There should always be accommodation for those who want it. One of the things we have been doing is working very closely with the four Dublin local authorities over the last number of months.

The winter is approaching, and the question of temporary and permanent accommodation arises. We will have an additional 200 beds in place by Christmas. We have been working with the local authorities to improve the quality of that accommodation so that people can stay there for the duration of the day, get the medical supports they require, and that they can link in with services so that the Housing First plan in place, including agreed targets for each local authority area, can be met. Everyone is now aware of what the requirements are and what their target is. The objective is that the persons in emergency beds will transition into that accommodation. We have a plan in place, which is why the one-bed units, which Deputy Ó Broin referred to earlier, are so important. We are working very closely on it. We had a 40% reduction in rough sleeping in March. The total was 110 persons. That is still far too many people, and we know that, and we will be working to bring that number down. Emergency and temporary beds are coming on stream to deal with the numbers of people coming forward.

Chairman: Would any other witnesses like to comment?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Perhaps I can comment.

Chairman: Perhaps Deputy Boyd Barrett could wait until I ask him to come in. He has two minutes left, and it is up to him as to whether he gets an answer or not.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Single people who are homeless in Dún Laoghaire are not allowed to self-accommodate. I do not see why single people should not be allowed to self-accommodate if the alternative is to go into a hostel where there are active drug users. The person might be a recovering drug user. If there is no suitable and appropriate accommodation for a homeless person, whether single or whether he or she has a family, he or she should be allowed to self-accommodate if possible. That is a general comment. In Dún Laoghaire specifically there is a particular unfairness, which is probably the case in any part of the outer reaches of Dublin, where one is told that one cannot self-accommodate even though one can find a hotel or a bed and breakfast, and that one has to go into a hostel in Dublin city centre, specifically the Brú Aimsir hostel on Thomas Street. That is not fair, and it is not right. I would like some explanation for that policy, and I ask that that policy is changed so that people who are homeless

and who are from Dún Laoghaire can find emergency or temporary accommodation as near as possible to where they live and to where their family are. If that means self-accommodation, they should be allowed to access that. Second, why it is the policy that people seeking HAP approval from, for example, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, and I assume this is true of Fingal and south Dublin county councils, have to go into Parkgate Street to get such approval? That is crazy. It is bad enough being homeless without being told one has to traipse all the way into Parkgate Street to get homeless HAP approval rather than simply being able to go to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to get such approval.

Chairman: We have to conclude shortly. Deputy Ó Broin asked about self-accommodation, so if we run out of time, that issue has been answered. Does Ms Gleeson want to respond?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The provision of accommodation is provided on a regional basis and the DHRE works to provide accommodation across the region. The only people who self-accommodate are families. We do not include single people in terms of self-accommodating them in hotels.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Why not?

Ms Eileen Gleeson: Because we have emergency accommodation in the region, for the most part, for them.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That does not answer my question.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The policy is to end self-accommodating as opposed to continuing with it. There is less support in self-accommodating and a number of other reasons we would not have self-accommodating if we had a choice.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Ms Gleeson is not answering my question. She is merely stating the existing policy.

Chairman: The Deputy might let Ms Gleeson finish.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am asking Ms Gleeson to change the policy.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: For families, we will continue to self-accommodate.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: How is it better for a homeless person from Dún Laoghaire to be sent to James's Street?

Chairman: Please allow Ms Gleeson to finish. She allowed the Deputy ask his questions without interruption. He should do her the courtesy of allowing her to answer them without interruption. If he is not happy with the answer, he can come back in.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: The DRHE is responsible for putting a regional response in place. We are working with the other local authorities to make sure they have enough accommodation in each of the local authority areas to respond to their particular needs but, in the interim, we have an overall supply of accommodation for single persons; sometimes it is in the city centre, sometimes it is in Dún Laoghaire, sometimes it is in Tallaght. If somebody is homeless, we provide an allocated bed for them as a response. We have no intention of extending self-accommodation to single persons. Currently, self-accommodation is for families but our intention would be to cease it as soon as is practicable because there is much more productive outcomes for people who are in supported temporary accommodation.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I would like to briefly respond. It is cruel and inhumane to defend the policy Ms Gleeson has just defended, namely, to tell a person who is single and homeless in Dún Laoghaire that it is better for them to go into the Brú Hostel in James's Street rather than get bed and breakfast accommodation or a hotel room in Dún Laoghaire when they can get one. It is self-evidently better for that person to find temporary accommodation in the area from where they live close to their family members and on and that they would not have to traipse all the way into town. It is particularly self-evident in cases where that person does not have a drug habit or is recovering from a drug or alcohol problem. However, that person is being told they cannot self-accommodate in Dún Laoghaire, even though they can find a place, and that they have to go into a place where there are active drug users and where it is dangerous for them. How can Ms Gleeson say that is fair, or right, or better? I simply do not understand that.

Chairman: I will leave Eileen have the last word.

Ms Eileen Gleeson: We are responding to a homeless crisis and providing emergency accommodation every day of the week. We are working with those providing emergency accommodation. Providing emergency accommodation is not without its challenges. We have extra people on the streets working with people who are rough sleeping. It is not humanely possible to put an emergency accommodation facility exactly where it is needed. There are other challenges related to putting the emergency accommodations, namely, the physical buildings, in place. We have put emergency accommodation in place. Granted, the majority of it is in the city centre but there are also emergency accommodations in the other local authorities. We are providing a response on a region-wide basis and will continue to do that. There is no question of us extending self-accommodation to single persons.

Regarding HAP approval, I am clear about what the Deputy was saying. People get approval from their individual local authorities for homeless HAP. We do the administration involved in paying the deposits to the landlords. People would have to link in with Parkgate Hall regarding that. However, they do not have to go there, they could do that over the phone.

Chairman: I thank all the witnesses for attending and for the ongoing engagement with us. I also thank them for their submissions.

The next meeting of the joint committee, which will deal with the impact of Brexit on Ireland's housing market, will take place at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 20 November.

The meeting adjourned at 12.05 p.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 20 November 2018.