Joint Meeting of the Cross Departmental Team on Homelessness and the National Homelessness Consultative Committee

3 December 2013, Custom House

Attendance
Michael Layde (Chair) Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Kieran Butler Westmeath County Council
David Carroll DePaul Ireland
Margaret Costello Health Service Executive (Child and Family Agency)
Aidan Culhane Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Paula Donohue Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Dáithí Downey Dublin City Council
Pat Doyle Peter McVerry Trust
Tony Fahey Homelessness Oversight Group
Shirley Groarke Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Claire Hartley Waterford City Council
Maurice Hoare Health Service Executive
Bob Jordan Threshold
Vincent Keenan NABCO
Mark Kennedy Homelessness Oversight Group
Noreen Leahy Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs
Joyce Loughnan Focus Ireland
Rob Lowth Limerick City Council
Kathleen McKillion Irish Council for Social Housing
Joseph Meehan Dept. of Social Protection
Peter Minnock Kildare County Council
Paul Minogue Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Cathal Morgan Dublin City Council
Dairearca Ní Neill Department of Health
Roibeard O’Ceallaigh Westmeath County Council
Martin O’Connor COPE Galway
Joe O’Neill Galway City Council
Niamh Randall Simon Communities of Ireland
Gary Ryan Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Seamus Sisk Irish Prison Service
Joe Sullivan Waterford City Council
Mark Wilson Probation Service

Apologies
Mike Allen Focus Ireland
Kerry Anthony DePaul Ireland
Joe McGuinness Louth County Council
Eoin O’Sullivan Trinity College Dublin
Melanie Rhatigan Irish Prison Service
1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed the various representatives, including members of the Homelessness Oversight Group, and made opening remarks including reference to the latest Dublin Region rough sleeper count which saw a rise to 139 in the number of rough sleepers reported on a given night in November.

The minutes of the previous meeting (24 September 2013) were agreed.

2. Homelessness Oversight Group

Mark Kennedy advised that the Oversight Group would be submitting their first report to the Minister shortly and indicated that the Oversight Group would be satisfied to attend the subsequent CDT-NHCC meeting following finalisation of the report. He thanked all those who met with the Oversight Group. It was emphasised that the Oversight Group have been looking at the issue of homelessness in the context of the 2016 target and that essentially they consider the 3-year period to the end of 2016 as a transitional period. It was noted that progress to date towards the 2016 was slow. The complexity of issues in delivering accommodation and homeless services was acknowledged. It was confirmed that the Oversight Group considered the 2016 target as achievable. The goodwill and positive working relationships across State and non-governmental stakeholders were noted.

Among the recommendations to be included in the report would be the establishment of an Implementation Unit, comprising of individuals from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Social Protection, housing authorities and the Health Service Executive to drive progress towards the 2016 target. This Unit should report to the Minister for Housing and Planning, who will in turn report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy. Other recommendations would include the maintenance of homelessness funding from various sources at current levels for the period to the end of 2016.

The report will outline the need for additional housing to come from a number of different sources and accordingly will contain recommendations regarding: the return of local authority voids to use; an enhanced leasing scheme to secure more units from the private rented sector; approved housing bodies will be asked to make a commitment to deliver greater numbers of units for the homeless; NAMA will also be referenced.

Tony Fahy observed that the goal of ending long term homelessness by 2010 was articulated in 2008 and that despite the considerable efforts that have been put in place in the period since then the scenario persists whereby 1,500 to 2,000 permanent dwellings are required for mainly single adults. It was suggested that while this cohort is a priority in terms of homelessness policy it has not been viewed as a priority in terms of social housing.

The Chair referred to Mr. Kennedy’s recent presentation to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy on the issue of homelessness confirming that there is a commitment to the issue of homelessness and recognition of the 2016 target across the highest level of Government. It was confirmed that once the Group’s report has been received and considered and approved by the Minister for Housing and Planning, and the Government, that the Department would progress work on the implementation of approved recommendations immediately.
3. Data Workshop
Homelessness data has been a regular agenda item across recent meetings. It was agreed at the previous meeting that a dedicated data workshop would be arranged to consider the various issues. The Data Workshop preceded the main CDT-NHCC meeting. Approximately 30 representatives from across the NGO sector, housing authorities, State agencies and departments participated. The workshop was chaired by Associate Professor Eoin O’Sullivan of Trinity College Dublin. During the course of the workshop participants separated into two thematic ‘breakout’ groups which were facilitated by Kieran Butler (Westmeath County Council), looking at local authority performance reporting, and Niamh Randall (Simon Communities of Ireland) looking at the homelessness indicators. Following these breakouts all representatives reconvened for a plenary session.

Among issues identified at the workshop were: guidelines for PASS users; data protection issues; regional variation; varied interpretations of the performance indicators e.g. clarification of long-term homelessness being defined at 6-months of cumulative or continuous homelessness; importance of narrative being provided in the performance reports; scope for useful homelessness reporting from other sectors e.g. Department of Social Protection and Health Service Executive; deadlines for reporting; etc.

The balance sought between accurate and verified homelessness data and the timely submission of reports was acknowledged. The Chair noted that the immediacy of reporting is more important than absolute accuracy. The significant rise in the number of Dublin rough sleepers was cited as an example of a deficiency in the reporting arrangements – it was remarked that such a rise should have been apparent across services at an earlier point and accordingly that the increase could have been flagged earlier. While it may not be possible for each indicator, it is necessary to develop the mechanisms through PASS whereby housing authorities can provide data in real-time or highlight trends through flash-reporting.

It was agreed to revise the performance report template in light of the discussion at the workshop, it was also agreed to hold a workshop in Q1 2014, which would consider the Danish proposal, the potential use, Counted-in, and other issues; and a further workshop would be held in Q2 when the first set of performance reports are received. Professor O’Sullivan agreed to prepare the paper on the Danish proposal and related issues to guide this discussion.

4. Health Service Executive Update
Maurice Hoare updated the group with regard to the ongoing processes of reform within the HSE. There has been a reorganisation of structures based on five newly established service divisions. Homelessness comes under the Primary Care division. Management teams are in place, with John Hennessy as the Director of Primary Care and Diane Nurse as the lead for Social Inclusion. The Division’s Service Plan is currently with the Minister for approval. While it is hoped to protect the Social Inclusion budget, no information is available yet with regard to 2014 finances.

It is expected that the number of local health office areas will be reduced. The mapping exercise of all HSE funded services has been completed. This was a considerable task which will provide ongoing information with regard to the funding and management of services.

Margaret Costello updated the group that the new Children and Family Agency would be established with legal effect from the start of 2014.
5. **2014 Funding Arrangements**

Shirley Groarke confirmed that the national ‘Section 10’ budget would be €45 million in 2014 and advised the group that it was hoped to finalise regional allocations by yearend which would allow notification to issue to the various regions as early as possible in 2014. A working group of lead housing authority officials had met with the Department on a number of occasions over the past few months to consider the 2014 arrangements. The purpose of the working group is to consider the appropriate allocation of the 2014 budget so as to ensure that the funding meets the needs in the various regions – various options, taking a number of factors into account, have been considered by the group.

It was noted that some reorganisation of regional composition would be required during the course of 2014 as certain local authorities would be merged under the local government reform process.

The Department’s intention to publish agreed protocols and finalised financial and performance reports on its website was confirmed.

The issue of consultation with co-funders was raised, especially in the context whereby Section 10 funding for a co-funded project might be reduced. It was recognised that the Management Groups of the various regional Joint Homelessness Consultative Fora is where such discussion should be taking place and that it is therefore critical that the HSE maintains representation on these fora. It was also observed that arrangements would have to be put in place to ensure Children and Family Agency representation on the relevant regional fora following its establishment. The desirability of joint service level agreements between co-funders and service providers was acknowledged as a tool that would be beneficial for all participants – this proposal would be among the issues to be progressed by the Implementation Unit recommended in the Oversight Group’s report.

6. **Any Other Business**

The Chair confirmed that Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2013 would be published later in the month.

An exact date for the next meeting was not set but it will be early in 2014 and will have a focus on the Oversight Group’s report and the implementation of its recommendations.