

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

5th November 2014, Custom House

Attendance

Bairbre Nic Aongusa (Chair)	Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Mike Allen	Focus Ireland
Concepta DeBrun	Health Service Executive
Dáithí Downey	Dublin City Council
Tony Flynn	Cosc
Conor Geoghegan	DePaul Ireland
Shirley Groarke	Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Peter Hanrahan	Dept. Children and Youth Affairs
Maurice Hoare	HSE
Bob Jordan	Threshold
Noel Kavanagh	Dept. of Social Protection
Louise Lennon	Simon Community
Maire McBride	Department of Health
Paul Minogue	Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Cathal Morgan	Dublin City Council
Karen Murphy	Irish Council for Social Housing
Roibeard O'Ceallaigh	Westmeath County Council
Aileen O'Connor	Cork City Council
Eoin O'Sullivan	Trinity College Dublin
Mary Quinn	Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Gary Ryan	Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government
Dermot Sellars	National Association of Building Co Operatives

Apologies

Niamh Randall	Simon Community
Susan Scally	Dept. of Health

1. Introduction

Bairbre Nic Aongusa, the new Assistant Secretary of Housing Division following Michael Layde's retirement, introduced herself as the Chair of the meeting.

The minutes from the meetings of the 7th May and 22nd July were agreed with minor amendments.

2. Data Issues

A note was circulated providing details of the most recent Data Workshop held on the 16th September which had been well attended. This workshop had noted general trends emerging from housing authority performance reports with some critique around the quality of data being produced by housing authorities. The workshop then focussed on analysing the various sections of the performance report template, in the context of data received through reporting to date. This analysis resulted in a number of recommendations with regard to improving the template which are to be considered by the Department. It was requested that any observations on the Data Workshop note be submitted promptly.

Professor Eoin O'Sullivan, who is leading the informal data group, updated those present in relation to the three interrelated research items with which the data group is assisting. This research will be overseen by the Housing Agency with Departmental approval:

- quantitative survey of non-Section 10 funded emergency accommodation;
- profile of the long-term homeless;
- qualitative survey of homeless families.

A researcher has been engaged by the Housing Agency. The non-Section 10 facilities have been identified but access has yet to be negotiated. With regard to the profile of long-term homeless, consideration is being given as to whether a profile of housing preferences can be established from the existing housing needs assessment data without the need for a separate survey.

Discussions followed on the merit of rough sleeper counts outside of the Dublin Region. It was agreed that any such counts would be appropriately housing authority managed. It was acknowledged that significant resources were required to conduct such exercises. It was recognised that counts would not be viable for most areas/towns and that in such locations housing authorities could agree with local services what a realistic estimate would be. There was consensus regarding the desirability of conducting counts in some of the more significant regional urban centres, even if on a once-off basis to establish a baseline from which progress could be measured. It was suggested that winter 2015 might be a suitable target for when to conduct such counts, it was also suggested that a steering group could ensure consistent and consolidated practice nationally. Cathal Morgan offered that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive could provide support to the other regions and accordingly it was proposed that discussion among housing authorities (via the National Lead Authority Network meetings) would be a suitable starting point.

3. Implementation Plan

Shirley Groarke advised that the Quarter 3 progress on measures included in the *Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness* was reported to the Cabinet Committee on the 3rd November. The Q3 Progress Report outlines progress in relation on each of the 80 actions identified in the Plan. A copy of the Q3 progress report is available on www.environ.ie.

The increase in homeless numbers evidenced in the September data was discussed – 2,574 individual homeless adults nationally, of which 63% in Dublin; 387 homeless families nationally of which 309 in Dublin; 164 families occupying commercial hotels in the Dublin Region on a given day in September.

The meeting was informed that the Implementation Plan targets the delivery of 2,700 units for homeless households during the timeframe for the plan with 900 units being provided each year. While the overall number of units provided in 2014 for social housing purposes will is not possible at this stage to suggest how many of these units will be allocated to homeless households. The Department will be collecting such figures from housing authorities in 2015 and a circular recently issued in this regard. It was further outlined that the Minister has power to issue directions to housing authorities in relation to the operation of their Allocation Schemes which is being kept under review.

Concepta de Brun provided an update on Actions 38 & 40 of the Implementation Plan and reported that the HSE has approved seven new posts and the establishment of a homeless psychiatric team to include a nurse, psychiatrist and care team.

The issue of rent caps under the Department of Social Protection's Rent Supplement scheme was raised and it was expressed that the maintenance of the current lower rates would have an impact for the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). It was further remarked that it would be some time before new social housing units would come on-stream at a significant scale and that in the meantime, in the absence of higher Rent Supplement limits, it will be very difficult to secure new tenancies for homeless households. It was confirmed that a Dublin Region pilot of HAP would be introduced shortly with a focus on homeless households and that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive would be coordinating this pilot on behalf of the four Dublin housing authorities. It was pointed out that the Department of Social Protection's Community Welfare Service applied discretion in respect of Rent Supplement on a case-by-case basis and officers have been recently advised of this by circular. The Tenancy Protection Service, operated by Threshold on behalf of the four Dublin housing authorities, and associated Tenancy Sustainment Protocol, agreed with the Department of Social Protection and the four Dublin housing authorities, was also referenced – this service's objective is to protect existing family tenancies by advising tenants of their rights; advocating on their behalf with landlords; and where necessary, engaging directly with the Department of Social Protection if the tenants at risk of homelessness are Rent Supplement clients.

4. 2015 Funding and Reporting Arrangements

Budget 2015 confirmed that the Exchequer will make €55.5 million available to the Department for the purposes of Section 10 in 2015. This is a significant increase on the €45 million allocated for 2014. The meeting was advised that more than €2 million will transfer to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This is the amount of Section 10 funding associated with domestic violence refuges and services. This measure was recommended in the Homelessness Oversight Group's Report and was subsequently included in the Implementation Plan. The transfer of this funding to Department of Children and Youth Affairs, for subsequent allocation to Tusla, will allow Tusla to assume full control of the State's funding and management relationship with such service providers and will in turn provide a service that will be more coherent and adapted to the specific needs of users. Consequently the Exchequer amount for allocation to housing authorities under Section 10 will be in the region of €53 million.

5. Any Other Business

The issue of water charges in respect of emergency accommodation was raised, it was expressed that this would be an additional burden on service providers especially because it would be difficult access the appropriate allowances for clients.

The group were informed that the draft Social Housing Strategy had been considered at Cabinet Committee level and will be presented to Government before being published in the coming weeks.