
Ending Homelessness – A Housing-Led Approach

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1. Introduction

The *Programme for Government 2011*, contains a commitment to ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by implementing a ‘housing first’ approach and to strengthen preventative services. It further proposes that services should be aligned to these overarching objectives following a review of the existing strategies and up-dating them to reflect these policy objectives.¹

Considerable strides have been made since the publication in 2008 of *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland*. A detailed national implementation plan was issued in 2009, and in turn Statutory Homeless Action Plans for the period 2010-2013 were produced by the Regional Homeless fora. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has provided Local Authorities with a broad guideline Framework for implementing the National Homeless Strategy 2009 – 2013. All key aspects of this National Homeless Strategy have been placed on a statutory footing since February 1st 2010 following the commencement of Part 2, Chapter 6 of the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009*. These new provisions aim to ensure that homelessness attains a more central role in the housing authority functions, promotes a more planned approach to homeless services throughout the country and assists housing authorities to ensure that decisions on services are based on criteria of evidenced need, value for money and achieving the best outcomes for homeless people.

Regional Homeless Fora were established arising from Ministerial directions issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Circular HU 1/2010 in accordance with the provisions of sections 38, 39 and 41 of the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009*.² These fora are the key drivers of policy implementation, given their detailed knowledge of existing services and needs at a local level. In 2010 the 34 City and County Councils adopted their statutory Homelessness Action Plans. These inter-related strategies aimed at reconfiguring homeless services to ensure that homelessness is prevented, and for those for whom it is not possible to prevent, that their duration of homelessness is minimal, and that successful exits from homelessness are sustained.

The development of a housing led approach to ending homelessness was implicit rather than explicit in ‘The Way Home’, and the primary purpose of this document is to make explicit this policy principle. Thus, the document does not review the ‘The Way Home’, as the Strategy remains operational until the end of 2013, rather it aims to enhance the existing framework by outlining the evidence for an explicit housing led approach.

This enhancement of the existing Strategy aims to provide the basis for a discussion on how to put in place a policy and operational framework for housing

led services that aim to see the *rapid provision of secure occupation in rental housing, with support as needed, to ensure sustainable tenancies as the key solution to ending homelessness*. In addition, this document sets out a set of proposals to enhance prevention services, which have the potential to minimise the number of people who become homeless. *Ensuring housing stability for formerly homeless individuals reduces their need for other services and thus has the potential to generate considerable cost savings while simultaneously providing a superior and sustainable solution to homelessness*.

The aims of *The Way Home* remain the core response to homelessness in Ireland. These are

- preventing homelessness
- eliminating the need to sleep rough
- eliminating long-term occupation of emergency accommodation
- providing long-term accommodation solutions
- ensuring effective services
- better co-ordinated funding arrangements.³

The National Implementation Plan for the Homeless Strategy also provides for the development of a more devolved allocation-based system for the provision of accommodation-related funding to housing authorities with emphasis on increased decision making at local level, in lieu of the existing individual project based arrangements, to improve overall efficiency, value for money and greater local decision making in homeless services. Responsibility for the assessment, appraisal and decision making in relation to proposals and funding of particular services within the available allocations rests primarily with the local housing authority / management group of the local homeless forum.

Of particular significance is the *Support to Live Independently Scheme (SLI)*, details of which issued to local authorities in July 2009, which provides suitable long term accommodation in mainstream housing with appropriate supports to help people make a successful transition from homelessness to independent living in mainstream housing. It includes the use of accommodation procured through the *Social Housing Leasing Initiative* or available to local authorities in the form of affordable housing that is unsold or considered unlikely to sell in the current market, along with availability of low to moderate level visiting supports, on a reducing basis for a period, to help homeless households address the challenges likely to arise in making the progression to independent living through access to local mainstream health, social and community services. SLI is currently provided in Dublin through the Dublin Simon Community and Focus Ireland / Peter McVerry Trust. Between 1 October 2010 and 31 October 2011, 282 referrals were made to SLI, with just under half the referrals successfully closed in this period – that is no on-going support was required to support the independent tenancy.⁴

Housing Led Approaches to Ending Homelessness

While the fundamental objectives of *The Way Home* remain core to ending homelessness in Ireland, not only has the institutional context for delivering these objectives changed, but in addition, increasingly robust research evidence has clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of ‘housing led’ approaches to ending homelessness. Housing policy, in the context of new institutional realities, is outlined in the Government’s *Housing Policy Statement of June 2011*, which has the overarching objective of enabling all households to access good quality housing appropriate to their circumstances and in their particular community of choice. The Government’s new housing policy statement serves as a framework for a sequence of legislative and policy initiatives in the short to medium term.

Central to this Statement is the policy objective of ensuring equity across housing tenures, in particular ensuring that the private rented sector provides real security of tenure and high standards of accommodation. The centrality of housing in ending homelessness is sometimes lost, and in a recent authoritative review of homeless policies in the United States, this essential message was reiterated, where the editors argue that ‘policies and interventions that make housing more easily available to homeless people can reduce homelessness; policies that don’t do this won’t reduce homelessness’.⁵

In terms of the delivery of social housing, the policy statement clearly identifies that the main focus in terms of supports provided by Government will be on meeting the most acute needs – the housing support needs of those unable to provide for their accommodation from their own resources. In light of the reduction in the social housing capital budget since 2008, it is not possible to return to very large capital funded construction programmes by local authorities. Delivery of social housing will be increasingly facilitated through more flexible funding models such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme, Leasing, and other funding mechanisms that will increase the supply of permanent new social housing. Such other mechanisms will include options to purchase, build to lease and the sourcing of loan finance by approved housing bodies for construction and acquisition. There is also obvious potential, across a range of housing programmes, for the Government’s objective of sourcing and providing suitable residential units for use as social housing to be aligned with the commercial objectives of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and their function of ‘promoting the social and economic development’ of the country.

Consensus on Ending Homelessness

The on-going commitment to ending homelessness in Ireland and the strategies deployed to bring about this objective draws upon a new, evidence based understanding of the nature of homelessness that is becoming widespread across strategic responses to homelessness across the European Union.⁶ Common elements in these strategic responses include a shift in policy approach from ‘managing homelessness’ to ‘ending homelessness’; enhanced preventative services; robust enabling interventions for those sleeping rough and otherwise entrenched in homeless services; and the aforementioned move to ‘housing led’ rather than ‘housing ready’ service provision.⁷

This relatively recently shared understanding of homelessness has led to a consensus across the European Union that a strategic response incorporating preventative approaches can substantially reduce the flow of households into homelessness and that ‘Housing Led’ approaches are demonstrably successful in ending homelessness and providing secure occupancy in rental dwellings.

Evaluations of services that provided ‘support *in* housing’, rather than ‘support *for* housing’ have consistently demonstrated superior rates of housing sustainment for the former rather than the latter model of service provision. The cost-effectiveness of preventative services has also been demonstrated and Housing-Led services have successfully challenged the assumption that homeless people with complex needs are unable to sustain independent tenancies.

A crucial failing of ‘support *for* housing’ is that in attempting to prepare individuals for independent accommodation, both the preparation, and demonstrations of successful adaptations in response to the preparation, takes place in a setting (usually emergency or transitional accommodation) that is least likely to prepare individuals for independent living. Thus, assessments of the capacity of homeless people to maintain independent accommodation distort negatively the perceived ‘housing readiness’ of such individuals. Hence, some service providers consider the provision of housing for long-term homeless people as ‘setting them up to fail’, as it is believed that such households will return to homelessness. However, this is often based on flawed assumptions about the housing readiness of homeless people.

The Cost of Homelessness

While we not have up-to-date national level data on the flow of households into homelessness services, the *Counted In* Survey for Dublin in 2008 indicated that slightly more than half of those adults enumerated in 2005 remained in homelessness services in 2008, suggesting a substantial number of homeless people remain entrenched in homelessness services. Exchequer expenditure on

homeless services is close to €100m annually on the direct provision of services for homeless people in Ireland, yet the outcomes for some of those using some existing homelessness services are regrettably poor. However, exchequer cost is but one of the costs of not ending homelessness in Ireland. Homelessness contributes to ‘dehumanization, diminished capacity to actualize basic societal rights and privileges, and susceptibility to victimization, including violence. While less easily ‘monetized’ these moral dimensions reflect ‘costs’ to the individuals affected, as well as to society.’⁸

Reconfiguring Homeless Services

This is not the consequence of a lack of effort, hard-work and commitment by those who provide services to homeless people, nor the consequence of some inherent fault in people who find themselves homeless. Instead, it is the case that a new internationally shared understanding of homelessness and what works in tackling homelessness has emerged and this tells us that the manner in which our services are currently configured means that they are not always maximally optimized towards either preventing or ending homelessness. Current funding remains stubbornly orientated towards providing and extending services for homeless people, rather than providing sustainable solutions to homelessness. This is despite recent developments towards ending homelessness which in the greater Dublin area have included:

- The development and implementation of a dedicated service user database PASS (Pathway Accommodation and Services System) that provides real-time data on the progress of households through the Pathway to Home suite of services and towards an exit into independent living with support as required;
- The initiation of the local authority Assessment and Placement and Freephone service for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness across the four local authority areas;
- The configuration of all emergency accommodation into one of two forms of provision, thereby ensuring fit-for-purpose accommodation with on-site supports as required.
- The initiation of a unified contact and outreach service for the Dublin region;
- The enhancement of day services for drop-in, information and advice with longer opening hours and closer integrated working with specialist healthcare services;
- The start-up and expansion of the housing support service for formerly homeless households under the SLI initiative;
- The localisation of services across the Dublin region;
- The establishment of greater integrated working across housing, support, welfare, health, addiction and care services via formal inter-agency protocols and dedicated care and case management procedures, practices and resources;
- The delivery of improved competencies and skills among those working for homeless

households via certified training for homeless sector project staff and management;
and

- The maintenance of improved access to mainstream services for households at risk of and experiencing homelessness, especially to health, education, training, employment, welfare, family, addiction, advice and information service.⁹

Enhanced co-operation between statutory and bodies and Approved Housing Bodies has resulted in the development of a Protocol for Social Housing Nominations in the Dublin region which aims to:

- Adopt a consistent approach to homeless nominations in the Dublin region and accommodate cross county referrals.
- Streamline the process of nominations in the Dublin region.
- Ensure clear communication and understanding by all parties to the Protocol.
- Improve efficiency in process and reduce administrative costs.
- Applies to all new lets and re-lets.
- A balance between the statutory duties to meet housing need and to alleviate homelessness.
- A commitment to community cohesion and sustainability; mixed tenure and balanced communities.
- In the operation of this protocol the parties agree to strive towards service user satisfaction and continuous improvement in its operation.
- The parties agree to regular liaison to ensure the effective implementation of the protocol and to ensure that agreed outcomes are achieved.¹⁰

In addition to the enhanced co-operation between statutory and non-statutory service providers, recent years has also seen closer co-operation between non-statutory service providers geared towards improving services and delivering greater value for money.

The positive developments noted above in reconfiguring services to serve the common objective of ending homelessness; the enhanced cooperation between agencies providing services and the considerable financial resources deployed over the past decade are however frustrated by the difficulties encountered in securing appropriate rental housing, which with support as needed, can provide the sustainable tenancies that are key to ending homelessness in Ireland. The remainder of this document outlines the extent and nature of homelessness in Ireland, the growing consensus of a 'housing led' approach to ending homelessness.

2. A National Homeless Strategy

A national strategic approach to homelessness was first initiated with the establishment in 1998, of a Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness under the auspices of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion. In 2000, the team published a national policy document: *Homelessness - An Integrated Strategy*.¹¹

The broad principles enunciated by the strategy document were, that to enhance services, it was necessary to develop:

- a continuum of care from the time someone becomes homeless, with sheltered and supported accommodation, and where appropriate, assistance back into independent living in the community;
- emergency accommodation that should be short-term with settlement in the community to be an overriding priority through independent or supported housing;
- that long term supported accommodation should be available for those who need it;
- that support services should be provided on an outreach basis as needed and preventative strategies for at-risk groups should be developed.

To achieve these broad objectives, Homeless Forums were to be established in every local authority administrative area and three year action plans prepared. Both the homeless forums and the action plans were to include input from both the statutory and non-profit sectors. In early, 2002, a *Homeless Preventative Strategy* was published with the key objective of ensuring that “no one is released or discharged from state care without the appropriate measures in place to ensure that they have a suitable place to live with the necessary supports, if needed”.¹²

Reviewing the Strategy

In January 2005, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government announced the undertaking of an independent review of the Government's Homeless Strategy(s). This report was published in February 2006.¹³ The report systematically reviewed the 43 specific policy proposals identified in the two strategies and put forward 21 recommendations to aid the implementation of the strategies, and the broad thrust of the recommendations were all accepted by Government. In relation to the *integrated strategy*, the consultants suggested that over 60 per cent of the objectives outlined were either fully or significantly progressed. In relation to the *preventative strategy*, just under 30 per cent were fully or significantly progressed.

The report argued that in moving the homeless strategies forward, all agencies working in this area, needed to refocus their energies to make ‘itself largely obsolete, which should, after all, be its overarching goal’. To aid achieving this

objective, the report recommended that the two existing strategies need to be revised and amalgamated, a national homeless consultative committee be established and all government policy should be proofed for any impact it might have on homelessness.

The Way Home – The Revised National Homeless Strategy

In 2007, a National Homeless Consultative Committee (NHCC) was established to provide input into the development of the revised Homeless Strategy and on-going Government policy on addressing homelessness. In August 2008, the revised National Homeless Strategy, entitled *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland, 2008-2013* was launched, and accepted the broad thrust of the recommendations in the review of the earlier strategies.¹⁴ The core objective of the strategy was that: “from 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated throughout Ireland”. This was to be achieved through six strategic aims that would:

1. prevent homelessness,
2. eliminate the need to sleep rough,
3. eliminate long term homelessness,
4. meet long term housing needs,
5. ensure effective services for homeless people; and,
6. better co-ordinate funding arrangements.

In April 2009, a detailed National Implementation Plan of the required inputs to ensure the successful implementation of the revised National Homeless Strategy was published.¹⁵ Noting the changed economic environment in which Ireland found itself with the rapid deterioration of public finances, the plan stated that this ‘reinforces the critical need to maximize effectiveness and value for money in the planning, organization and delivery of quality homeless services’.

The *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009* gave legislative effect to many of the recommendations of the revised national homeless strategy by providing that each housing authority adopt a homelessness action plan specifying the measures to be undertaken to address homelessness, and establishing homelessness consultative fora for each authority which must include voluntary homeless service providers in addition to the key statutory providers. These, in effect, replaced the previous administrative processes with a new statutory basis for both the fora and plans, and were enacted on 1 February 2010. The Act also broadens the choices available to those in need of social housing supports by enacting a more developed framework for the provision of rented social housing by means of leasing or contract arrangements with private and not-for-profit accommodation providers.

The adoption of national, regional and local homeless strategies over the past decade or so represents a shift in the focus of Irish homelessness policy. First, policy now adopts a *comprehensive* approach; second, emphasising *prevention* and *ending long-term homelessness* has resulted in the gradual shift in service provision from temporary services and towards services addressing the causes of people becoming homeless and the need of formerly homeless people to sustain tenancies; third, the scope of the homeless policy was geographically extended to become a national issue rather than one primarily for Dublin; and fourth, evidence plays a significant role in shaping policy in the area.¹⁶

Implementation Constraints

However, the ambitious target set and agreed on by all that by the end of 2010, no homeless person spend longer than six months in emergency accommodation, rather they would be provided with appropriate long term accommodation, became mired in operational and implementation difficulties. This should be set against the necessary re-configuration of homeless service providers, particularly in Dublin, where the greatest concentration of homeless households are located, have proven difficult to achieve despite a series of detailed consensus based implementation plans prepared under the auspices of the Homeless Agency which were largely based on a series of detailed evaluations of homeless services.¹⁷ In addition, structural changes in the Irish economy need to be taken into account when evaluating the outcomes of the strategy.

A key constraint has been the lack of progress in securing the units of accommodation required to move the approximately 900 households that are currently in costly private emergency accommodation. It was envisaged that these units would come from a mixture of units provided under leasing arrangements and managed by the non-for-profit sector, the private rented sector and local authority housing. Voluntary bodies have secured almost 1,900 housing units (including unsold affordable units) for use as social housing. Leasing is just one form of social housing that is considered for social housing applicants that have been deemed as having a housing need by the housing authority. A refusal of a leased unit is considered a refusal of social housing.

Social housing in Ireland is currently undergoing a substantial re-orientation, with a much greater involvement of the voluntary and co-operative sector with local authorities enhancing their role as enablers rather than providers of social housing. The *Housing Policy Statement* of June 2011 notes that “in recognition of both the constrained funding levels available for local authority construction programmes, as well as the capacity and track-record of the voluntary and

cooperative housing sector, approved housing bodies will be at the heart of the Government's vision for housing provision."

Programme for Government 2011

In the *Programme for Government 2011*, a commitment to ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by implementing a 'housing first' approach and to strengthen preventative services is outlined. Services should now be aligned towards achieving these overarching objectives following a review that will up-date existing strategies to properly reflect these new policy objectives.

Submissions were also requested from key stakeholders in the provision of homeless services and constructive proposals were submitted by the *Simon Communities of Ireland*, the *Irish Council for Social Housing* and the *MakeRoom Campaign* (*Threshold*, the *Simon Communities of Ireland*, the *Society of St. Vincent de Paul* and *Focus Ireland*). All the submissions welcomed the adoption of a housing led approach. The *MakeRoom* submission identified five key themes that need to be addressed: (i) delivery of mainstream housing; (ii) the range of responsibilities within the Pathway model, (iii) prevention (iv) setting of timelines and (v) responding to the Habitual Residency Condition problems. The *Simon Communities of Ireland* stressed that ending homelessness requires the availability of appropriate housing with necessary supports and the *Irish Council for Social Housing* confirmed their willingness to work on the sourcing of long-term accommodation for homeless households so that long-term occupation of emergency accommodation can be ending. The absence of adequate and regular national level data on homelessness was highlighted by all submissions as a potential barrier to measuring the effectiveness of interventions to end homelessness in Ireland.

3. Understanding and Responding to Homelessness

Evidence from robust comparative research demonstrates that homelessness is best understood as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and actions *and* structural change.¹⁸ From an almost exclusive focus on pathways *into* homelessness, a focus on pathways *out* of homelessness emerged in recent years as it became evident that homelessness was more likely to be temporary than permanent.¹⁹ Key pathways into homelessness, identified in a range of research in Ireland and internationally, are:

- housing and financial crises;
- institutional discharge;
- family breakdown, including domestic violence;
- substance abuse;
- mental health issues; and,
- the transition from youth to adulthood for young people in care or who were homeless as young people.²⁰

These diverse pathways into homelessness shape the experience and duration of homelessness, and also influence the nature and availability of pathways out of homelessness. Thus, significant numbers of people only experience homelessness for relatively short periods for reasons linked primarily to factors like loss of employment, eviction and relationship breakdown. Others however, particularly those whose youth homelessness transitioned into adult homelessness tend to be entrenched in homelessness and will have experienced multiple forms of social exclusion.

As a consequence of these different pathways into homelessness, experiences of homelessness are varied and this means that homelessness can have different effects on those who experience it. People who become homeless may have economic and social characteristics and support needs that predate homelessness, are worsened by the experience of homelessness or which arise while they are homeless. For example, for some homeless people, mental health issues will have predated homelessness while for others mental health problems will emerge after becoming homeless.

It is also important not to view homelessness as necessarily having a 'single' cause, as while issues like mental health problems and problematic drug use are strongly associated with homelessness, it is clear that only a minority of people with mental health problems and drug use actually experience sustained homelessness. Often it may be a combination of factors that have led to someone being

homeless.²¹ The link between homelessness and mental illness has also been exaggerated as a consequence of extremely broad definitions of mental health problems in some research and sampling focused predominantly on long-term homeless people (who are more likely to have mental health problems).²²

Transitional, Episodic and Chronic Homelessness

Homeless people can be generally described as being members of one of three subgroups, each of which contains homeless people with *broadly* similar characteristics and needs. The three subgroups, based on analyses of shelter usage, can be defined as *transitional* (people who use emergency accommodation for brief periods of time and do not return); *episodic* (people who move repeatedly in and out of emergency accommodation); and *chronic* (people who are long-term users of emergency accommodation and who may have repeated experiences of living rough).²³ Other studies, while devising variations on this theme, nonetheless conclude that homeless people are not a homogeneous population.²⁴

In the categories of chronic and episodic homelessness, the primary population is single men with problematic drug and/or alcohol use and mental illness. Transitional homelessness is associated with *low* individual support needs and while it can involve exposure to living rough and/or emergency accommodation, it may well not involve either. Transitional homelessness is more likely to be experienced by families and couples and appears to be associated with lifelong experience of relative poverty and housing exclusion.²⁵

While the chronic homeless comprise only 11 percent of the total homeless population (the episodic homeless comprise 9 percent and the transitional homeless 80 percent), they consume half of the shelter beds.²⁶ Thus, of particular concern to policy makers and service providers is this comparatively small group of ‘chronically homeless’ people with very high support needs who are very intensive users of emergency shelters and who spend a significant amount of time on the street. They also make disproportionate use of emergency medical, psychiatric and drug services, and criminal justice services. In one study of chronic homeless people in Philadelphia, it was estimated that an annual cost of \$7,500 per person per year and a cumulative total of \$20m was expended on this group, with the authors stating that this significantly underestimated the full public costs of chronic homelessness as not all cost variables could be calculated.²⁷

In Ireland there is evidence of a small group of people with very high support needs and who have been in statutory and not-for profit homelessness services for considerable periods of time. There is also a further group, primarily living in Dublin, who are in private emergency accommodation on a medium term basis, with moderate support needs and a larger group of people who are not homeless

for very long, who are characterised by low support needs. This broad understanding of the differentiated nature of homelessness has informed both national and regional strategies and remains core to responding to homelessness in Ireland.

Developments in Europe

On the 9th and 10th of December 2010, the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council (in co-operation with FEANTSA – the European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless, the European Commission and the French government), organised a *Consensus Conference on Homelessness*. This conference built on the French Consensus Conference held in November 2007 utilising a methodology, which involved the selection of independent experts, or a Jury, in various domains (but not homelessness) who would adjudicate on a range of evidence and viewpoints from those with an expertise in homelessness. The Jury’s report provides a useful overview on a number of issues relevant to developing an explicit housing led approach to ending homelessness in Ireland.²⁸

On the issue of defining homelessness, the Jury recommended the adoption of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), which was launched by FEANTSA in 2005 as a common framework definition of homelessness. ETHOS uses physical, social and legal domains of a “home” to create a broad typology that classifies homeless people according to four main living situations: rooflessness; houselessness; living in insecure housing; and living in inadequate housing.

On the issue of ending homelessness, the Jury concluded that while the flow of people into homelessness will not stop, an increased use of preventative services and ‘housing led’ services can help both to reduce the overall scale of this social problem and reduce the time for which people who become homeless endure being without a home.

The jury concluded that integrated homelessness strategies with a preventative and housing-led focus could, at both national and regional level, prevent people from entering homelessness and ensure that long-term solutions are secured quickly for those who face situations of homelessness. In this context, the Jury recommended a shift from using shelters and transitional accommodation as the predominant solution to homelessness towards ‘housing led’ approaches. This means increasing access to permanent long-term housing and increasing the capacity for both prevention and the provision of adequate floating support to enable formerly homeless people to live sustainably in ordinary homes.

The Jury noted considerable diversity in the ability of non-nationals to access

social and health services, ranging from unconditional access to severe restrictions and also discussed homelessness amongst non-nationals in Member States. The Jury stated that homeless services should not be used to compensate for inadequate migration policies or to regulate migration. It concluded that this issue required the European Union, in the context of the free movement of EU citizens, and to complement existing social security co-ordination to ensure destitution and homelessness amongst migrants is minimized.

More broadly, an increasing number of member states have developed 'homeless strategies', where specific targets, such as reducing the number of evictions, ending rough sleeping etc., form part of an overall strategy to reduce or in some cases end homelessness.²⁹ As part of this rethinking of how to reduce homelessness, homelessness prevention is increasingly identified as a cross system priority, to be implemented across all services, not just within homelessness services. For example, both Germany and England have seen substantial reductions in the number of homeless people in recent years following the investment in prevention oriented services which have included improved housing advice, facilitating access to private rental units, the provision of family mediation services, support for domestic violence victims, inreach to prisons to prevent homelessness among people awaiting discharge, and expanded tenancy sustainment services.³⁰ In the provision of health services for homeless people, a view is clearly emerging that such needs should be met within mainstream services and specialist services should only be used in extreme and time-limited cases.³¹

Summary

As research on homelessness has become methodologically more sophisticated, moving away from cross-sectional or snapshot surveys to longitudinal approaches, researchers became increasingly aware that households moved into and out of homelessness on a more frequent basis than snapshot surveys studies had revealed. Insights from this longitudinal research demonstrated that homelessness was more likely to be temporary than permanent and the majority of homeless people exited homelessness, particularly the transitionally homeless.³²

While all homeless people have a need for adequate, sustainable and affordable housing, the extent to which they will require additional support varies considerably and this is in turn influenced by their pathway into homelessness and their length of homelessness. Maximising access to accommodation with secure occupancy is central to tackling homelessness, as is the provision of subsidies to make that housing affordable where it is necessary to do so. Thus, policy is increasingly stressing the individual support needs of homeless persons in the context of providing quality self-contained and affordable accommodation.³³

Homeless Strategies in countries such as Finland, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands have all adopted ‘housing led’ approaches in recent years, and the evidence to-date on the efficacy of this approach are broadly positive.³⁴ In the case of France, their housing led programme has pulled together “various public policy issues (housing and mental health), innovations in professional and non-professional practice, as well as research. However, the most important focus is on the homeless people themselves. Ultimately, it is about recognizing the abilities that unwell and homeless people acquire and using them to develop new bottom-up policies that aim to address the needs and demands of homeless people themselves rather than those who speak on their behalf.”³⁵

4. The Extent of Homelessness

Local Authorities under section 9 of the *Housing Act, 1988*, are required to carry out assessments of housing need, with 'homeless' one of the categories of need specified. The first assessment took place at the end of March 1989 and, to date, eight assessments have taken place. This data includes only homeless households, which are registered and deemed eligible for housing by local authorities and based on this measurement, shows a variable pattern, and some of the increase recorded between 2008 and 2011 may be attributable to a change in recording practice in the 2011 assessment.

The 2011 assessment of housing need is a data extract from the housing system in respect of each household that has been approved for social housing support at 31st March 2011. In previous recent years, authorities investigated their lists prior to the 31st March deadline to confirm that those on the list were still seeking and in need of social rented housing and contacted voluntary groups regarding local housing needs. This might explain some of the increase in the number of homeless households between 2008 and 2011, because the figures would include households that may no longer be in housing need but have not been taken off the list.

Homeless Households in Ireland, 1989-2011

	1989	1991	1993	1996	1999	2002	2005	2008	2011
<i>Number of Homeless Households Assessed for Housing</i>	987	1,507	1,452	979	2,219	2,468	2,399	1,394	2,348
<i>Homeless</i>									

Source: Department of the Environment and Local Government *Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin - Various Years*. (Dublin: Department of the Environment and Local Government) and Housing Agency.

The 2011 Housing Need Assessment counted 2,348 adult homeless households with 428 child dependents, with single adults with no children accounting for nearly 90 per cent of all homeless households. Nearly 60 per cent of adults were aged between 26 and 50 and the vast majority had incomes of less than €15,000 per annum, reflecting the fact the majority were unemployed and in receipt of a social welfare payment. Over two-thirds were living in hostel or bed and breakfast type accommodation, with a further 10 per cent staying with friends or relatives and 13 per cent accommodated in the private rented sector. Just over half of those assessed were the housing waiting list for two years or less. As in previous assessments, the majority of homeless households were found in the five City Councils and Dublin in particular. *This concentration of homelessness in a small number of urban areas reinforces the strategic objective of devolving responsibility for the*

precise configuration of homeless services to the Regional Homeless fora as it is clear that a 'one size fits all' model is not appropriate in the Irish context, once the key objective of ending homelessness through housing led approaches is adhered to.

Just over 70 per cent of the households were female headed. Just over 10 per cent of the female-headed households were non-Irish nationals. Forty-six per cent of the female-headed households were aged under 30 compared to 29 per cent of the male-headed households. Recent research on homeless women in three urban locations in Ireland highlights the significance of gender based violence in the lives of the homeless women interviewed, whether they were Irish or non-Irish nationals, and the need to develop services that are cognisant of this distinct dimension of women's homelessness.³⁶

In recognition of the fact that not all homeless households are registered with local authorities for social housing and that the assessment methodology was not particularly well suited to capturing homeless households, particularly rough sleepers, commencing in Dublin in 1999 and three other major urban areas in 2008 (Cork, Limerick and Galway), a more rigorous survey methodology was devised to ascertain the extent of homelessness in these areas.³⁷

The results for 2008 *Counted In* show 2,911 unique households utilising homeless services during the week 10th to 16th March 2008.³⁸ It is not possible to identify trends in the case of Cork, Limerick or Galway, as 2008 was the first year in which this survey was conducted. In the case of Dublin, in raw numbers, the number of households utilizing homeless services was 2,067 in 2005 and 2,144 in 2008, but due to a substantial growth in the population of Dublin during that period, a slight decline in the number of homeless households on a per capita basis from 50.1 to 49.5 per 10,000 population is evident. In the case of Dublin and Cork (no data is available in respect of Galway and Limerick) 31 and 50 per cent respectively of those utilising services were in long-term supported accommodation or transitional accommodation.

Rough Sleepers

The most extreme manifestation of homelessness is where individuals find themselves sleeping on the streets. However, the numbers in such situations, generally known as 'rough sleepers', are relatively small, concentrated in Dublin and from the available data, in decline. In Dublin, the number of individuals recorded as sleeping rough declined from 312 in 2002 to 110 in 2008 based on the *Counted In* methodology. Subsequent counts based on a Street Count methodology shows a decline from 98 in April 2009, to 60 in April 2011, but an increase to 87 in November 2011. The vast majority of rough sleepers in Dublin in November 2011 were male, and of the 51 rough sleepers whose nationality was

identified, 17 were non-Irish nationals. The number of counted rough sleepers in Dublin declined to 73 in April 2012.

Outside of Dublin, in the other major urban areas, the number of ‘rough sleepers’ is estimated to be in single figures. This gives a rate of approximately 0.02 rough sleepers per 1,000 population. In England, the rate is estimated at 0.08 rough sleepers per 1,000 population.³⁹

Defining Homelessness

Considerable energy has been expended on attempting to measure the extent of homelessness in Ireland, and yet the extent of homelessness remains a matter of dispute and limits progress on ending homelessness. *Defining and measuring the extent of homelessness in all its dimensions is undertaken to allow us measure progress (or not) in ending homelessness and should proceed on realistic and pragmatic grounds.* As noted earlier, such issues are not unique to Ireland, but considerable progress has been made on obtaining a consensus on this issue across the European Union. The independent Jury of the Consensus Conference on Homelessness recommended the adoption of the *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion* (ETHOS) as a means of defining and measuring homelessness.

ETHOS classifies homeless people according to their living situation:

- *rooflessness* (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough)
- *houselessness* (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter)
- living in *insecure housing* (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence)
- living in *inadequate housing* (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding)

A modified version of this typology was also developed, which is known as ETHOS light, which excludes certain forms of insecure and inadequate housing from the original typology.⁴⁰ A consensus needs to be reached by all the agencies, both statutory and voluntary, on the acceptance of a modified version of ETHOS light outlined below. This could form the future basis for all definitional and measurement issues relating to homelessness in Ireland. This does not require a legislative change as the definition of homelessness in the Housing Act, 1988 is sufficiently broad to include the categories outlined.⁴¹ Rather, this will allow for an agreed assessment of the extent of homelessness, as commonly understood, and importantly allow for the assessment of trends over time.

ETHOS Light Definition of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

Operational Category		Living Situation		Definition
1	People Living Rough	1	Public space / external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight Shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless Hostels	Where the period of stay is less than one year
		4	Temporary Accommodation	
		5	Transitional Supported Accommodation	
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	

Summary

In broad terms, it would appear from the existing, albeit inadequate, data sources that the number of households utilising homeless accommodation and services, many of whom are in long-term supported housing, has remained stable. In contrast, the number of people sleeping rough has declined over recent years, although it is notable that the numbers fluctuate from assessment to assessment.

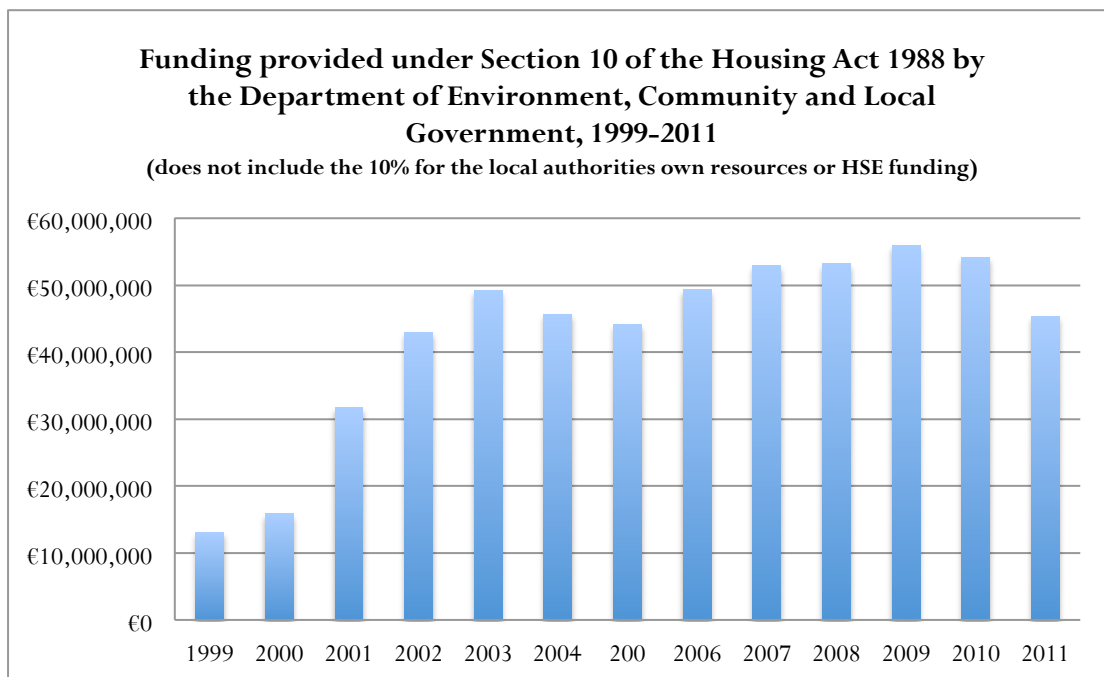
It is important to note that a significant number of those counted as homeless are in fact living in long-term supported accommodation with secure tenancies. This is at odds with the public perception that homelessness equates with sleeping rough or emergency hostel accommodation, a perception often fuelled by media and service provider portrayals of homelessness.

A *Counted In* Survey was not conducted in 2011 in Dublin, although Cork, Limerick and Galway conducted counts, but Census 2011 has enumerated rough sleeping and homelessness utilizing a methodology agreed by the Dublin Joint Homeless Consultative Forum, with the results due later this year. The new PASS (Pathway Accommodation and Support System) system, which has been in operation in Dublin since January 2011, will provide validated data for the four Dublin local authorities on the extent and nature of homelessness in Dublin in 2011, and will replace the *Counted In* survey method previously utilized for that purpose. The PASS system will be rolled out nationally in 2012.

The PASS system will allow for the generation of detailed data on a more regular basis than the Counted In surveys, but the Counted In survey should be replicating on a tri-annual basis, as part of the Housing Need Assessments, in the five major urban to provide continuity of methodology and an as a supplement to the administrative data collated via PASS.

5. Funding and Delivery of Homeless Services

State expenditure of approximately €12m was allocated on homeless services in 1999, which grew to approximately €95m in 2010. These figures include allocations from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Local Authorities and the Health Service Executive. Despite the rapid deterioration in the public finances in Ireland since 2008 and substantial retrenchment in virtually every area of public service provision, public expenditure, particularly Section 10 funding, on homeless services was largely protected from these cuts in 2009 and 2010 and only relatively minor cuts were experienced in 2011. However, a reduction in funding from other State agencies such as the Health Service Executive and Vocational Educational Committees has undoubtedly compromised the ability of agencies to deliver on their existing range of services, particularly when notification of these funding restrictions are not communicated well in advance. The table below provides data on the trends in funding from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government between 1999 and 2011. A more detailed breakdown of the allocation of this funding by local authority functional area is provided in the second table for the period 2008-2011. Of note is that 75 percent of the allocation is to the Dublin authorities, with a further 15 percent allocated to the other four city councils. This broadly matches the distribution of homeless people as discussed earlier in the document and again underpins the necessity for locally based responses based on core principles rather than a detailed uniform approach to ending homelessness.



Funding provided under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988				
COUNTY-AT-LARGE	2008	2009	2010	2011
	€	€	€	€
Carlow	133,351	138,139	168,698	178,262
Cavan	1,265	144	1,323	0
Clare	321,666	569,024	529,036	514,536
Cork	131,804	135,433	131,193	130,748
Donegal	164,753	115,318	116,620	119,254
Dun/rath	1,143,119	1,084,375	1,053,061	510,759
Fingal	445,285	853,455	813,029	825,898
Sth.Dublin	864,916	724,768	754,914	762,609
Galway	109,887	107,913	107,760	104,128
Kerry	776,010	762,389	711,883	598,125
Kildare	397,286	338,510	392,477	319,467
Kilkenny	347,947	408,519	359,049	323,837
Laois	66,563	14,477	11,628	8,276
Leitrim	6,138	5,243	4,217	315
Limerick	327,022	300,399	280,733	279,608
Longford	214,524	197,100	205,584	197,100
Louth	1,124,724	1,186,469	935,874	908,358
Mayo	70,735	53,618	66,133	69,567
Meath	377,112	355,821	339,458	208,588
Monaghan	2,588	10,838	100,420	3,893
Offaly	112,095	28,623	7,970	4,307
Roscommon	11,639	1,193	9,738	0
Sligo	351,660	323,646	302,518	286,766
Tipperary n.r.	124,673	200,325	187,734	221,059
Tipperary s.r.	109,021	174,533	155,966	152,676
Waterford	1,026	36,674	54,271	40,000
Westmeath	289,856	518,870	441,162	415,215
Wexford	256,473	269,767	300,830	267,967
Wicklow	413,905	191,470	174,907	169,610
City Council				
Cork	3,507,202	4,560,390	3,427,067	2,776,876
Dublin	35,923,683	36,304,944	37,900,371	33,633,259
Galway	1,682,850	2,012,589	1,515,657	1,054,001
Limerick	2,481,440	3,039,608	2,438,104	1,890,254
Waterford	941,887	918,971	704,073	1,147,734

While up-to-date national level data on the flow of households into homelessness services is not available, the *Counted In Survey* for Dublin in 2008 indicated that slightly more than half of those adults enumerated in 2005 remained in homelessness services in 2008, suggesting a substantial number of homeless people remain entrenched in homelessness services, albeit that some are in transitional or long-term supported accommodation rather than emergency services. On the basis of the figures from the assessment of housing need in early 2011, which assessed 2,348 homeless households, the majority of which are single person households, and if the flow is approximately 50 per cent, this would give a flow population over the year of approximately 4,000 households, giving an average spend on direct services per homeless household in the region of €24,000.

This does not include expenditure on these homeless households via non-statutory services generated through fundraising, client charges / contributions, other service funding from statutory bodies such as Employment Services and Employment Programmes, the Vocational Educational Committees, the Probation Service, social protection payments to homeless households, use of acute hospital services, addiction / mental health services etc. The international evidence is that homeless people are higher users of, for example, criminal justice⁴² and health related services than the general population. It is on the basis of high usage of criminal justice, health care, child welfare services etc. by homeless households that a number of evaluations have concluded that the provision of housing support to homeless people to reduce their usage on these services is cost-effective, in that the reduced service use offsets the cost of the housing support.⁴³ In a recent Australian study, it was estimated that the annual cost-offset per homeless person, if their use of services were reduced to population averages, was in excess of \$44,137.⁴⁴

In 2010, in Dublin alone, there were 4 outreach services, 24 day centres, support and advice services, 14 emergency facilities, 20 transitional housing services, 14 long term supported housing services and 4 settlement services, employing nearly 900 full-time equivalent employees in statutory and voluntary homelessness services.⁴⁵ This does not include domestic violence services or services for homeless young people. More significantly, it does not include some 33 private emergency accommodation facilities. Outside of the Dublin authorities functional areas, some 50 emergency and transitional accommodation services are operational.

Each bed in emergency accommodation in Dublin costs approximately €28,000 per annum, with beds in Supported Temporary Accommodation costing approximately €29,000 per annum. The maximum DSP rent allowance for a single person in Dublin (excluding Fingal) is (as of January 2012) is €370 per month or €4,440 per annum.⁴⁶ Thus, secure occupancy of rental dwelling in the private market is considerably less costly than provision of short-term accommodation in existing congregate accommodation. Factoring in the cost of providing support services to those in rental housing increases the overall cost, but international evidence all points to better outcomes in terms of tenancy sustainability in addition to cost-reductions. Evidence from many countries all suggests that 'homelessness systems or services' are largely unregulated, unlicensed, underfunded, and ultimately unsuccessful in ending homelessness.⁴⁷ While the homelessness system in Ireland is not underfunded, it does share some of the other characteristics outlined above.

In this context, *the closure of the private emergency hostels should be a priority.* Understanding the blockages to the closure of private emergency hostels, in the

context of a broad consensus that they should be closed, whether institutional or otherwise is key to ending homelessness in the greater Dublin region. They currently cost in excess of €11m per annum to operate, and those homeless households that are currently accommodated in these facilities should be prioritised for leased properties managed by Approved Housing Bodies.

A review of the support needs of homeless people in Dublin in 2008 suggested that 69 per cent could live in mainstream rented housing; (17 per cent with no support, 26 per cent would need short-term support and 26 per cent would require long-term support).⁴⁸ The remaining 29 per cent were deemed suitable for congregate housing with support. It can be further argued that the support needs of people to maintain independent accommodation are best determined when in independent accommodation, rather when in congregate or other forms of accommodation. Determining the support needs of homeless people to live independently, when living in congregate type accommodation may distort the support needs, but the evidence of support needs required suggest that the majority of homeless people can be moved from emergency accommodation into independent accommodation.

The vast majority of homeless services are delivered by not-for-profit organisations, a pattern replicated in many other countries.⁴⁹ Many of these services developed in an *ad-hoc* fashion, but a more strategic approach is evident in recent years as enhanced public funding is now delivered to organisations that are providing strategically important services. This model, whereby local authorities fund not-for-profit services in line with the strategic objectives outlined in the Homelessness Action Plan for each area, should be maintained. In this context, Dublin City Council has both responsibility for the development of a Homelessness Action Plan under the Housing Act 2009, but it is unique amongst housing authorities in Ireland in that it also manages, for historical reasons, a number of congregate facilities for homeless people. In the short-term, *responsibility for the management of these facilities should be transferred*, via a competitive tendering process, to one of the existing non-for-profit agencies with experience in successfully managing such facilities, before determining in the medium term, the need for such facilities.

Summary

It is now clear that the historically high levels of statutory funding for homelessness services is not delivering satisfactory outcomes for homeless households which is the litmus test in delivering value for money. It is on this basis that the shift from services arranged along a hierarchy from emergency hostels, to transitional accommodation to supported congregate housing to adopting a more focused Housing Led Approach is important. There is

increasingly robust evidence that resource intensive ‘Staircase’, ‘Ladder’ ‘Treatment First’ or ‘Housing Ready’ models of service provision can have limited effectiveness and high operational costs. Evidence is mounting that lower intensity and lower cost ‘Housing Led’ models that use floating support services *in housing* and emphasize service user choice may be better at providing sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

6. Ending Homelessness - A Housing-Led Approach

Preventing Homelessness

It is clear that preventing homelessness must be the overarching goal of Government policy. However prevention can be difficult to monitor in the absence of robust, consistent and timely data, and ‘preventing homelessness is not identical with ending poverty, curing mental illness, promoting economic self-sufficiency, or making needy people healthy, wealthy and wise.’⁵⁰ Furthermore, preventing homelessness can raise important issues in relation to the distribution of scarce resources and may generate perverse incentives to achieve performance targets.⁵¹ Despite these caveats, some preventative services can assist households in maintaining their housing.⁵² In terms of preventing homelessness, three levels can be distinguished – primary, secondary and tertiary.⁵³

Primary preventions, which can prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place, are usually associated with mainstream social and health services such as the provision of housing and income supports, health care, child welfare services etc. Both the extent of coverage or entitlement and generosity of such services are usually associated with high levels of primary prevention. While not targeted specifically at homeless people, these social, health and welfare services, including information services - such as provided by the Citizen Information Centres - ensure that the majority of people have sufficient supports and advice when required, ensuring that they do not become homeless at any point in their lives. While such primary interventions are difficult to evaluate in terms of their effectiveness in preventing homelessness, they protect citizens more generally from the risk factors associated with homelessness and therefore the provision of comprehensive social, health and other welfare services are an essential element in preventing homelessness at a structural level.⁵⁴ In addition, *the provision of specific advice, particularly in relation to the private rented sector provided by expert groups should be supported and viable and sustainable funding mechanisms put in place.* Housing advice is crucial in assisting individuals understand both their rights and obligations as tenants in securing and maintaining a tenancy, in acting as mediators between landlords and tenants when issues such as rent arrears or inadequate accommodation standards, and ensuring all options are explored before a tenancy is terminated.

In terms of income support, and housing support via the rent allowance scheme, the Community Welfare Service, which transferred to the Department of Social Protection on a permanent basis in October 2011, is crucial. The Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme is the safety net within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people whose means are insufficient to meet their needs. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for

payment under other state schemes. The provision of Rent Allowance applications comes under the ambit of the SWA Scheme and delays in processing rent allowances have the potential to contribute to homelessness. *The Rent Allowance system should ensure that all tenants, who voluntarily opt to have the allowance paid directly to landlords, can do so, and that rent allowances are paid in advance, rather than in arrears as is the case currently.*

Secondary prevention targets homeless people on their initial point of homelessness or at high risk of homelessness. In a review of preventative services in England, the provision of support to access the private rented sector, ‘sanctuary schemes’ for those at risk of domestic violence and family mediation schemes to enable young people to remain in their family homes all contributed to preventing homelessness.⁵⁵ In Germany, the prevention of rent arrears related evictions has contributed to a decline in homelessness.⁵⁶ Three areas have been identified that contribute to homelessness: evictions, institutional discharge and the discharge of young people from alternative care.

Evictions from the private rented sector are illegal under the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2004* and legal terminations of tenancy are governed by strict criteria that ensures that ample time is given to tenants, determined by their length of occupancy, to find alternative accommodation. Tenants in the private rented sector and those in RAS tenancies, who are illegally evicted may bring their case before the dispute resolution service of the Private Residential Tenancies and the *Residential Tenancies Act 2004* allows for re-instatement if it is determined that an illegal eviction took place as well as substantial fines. Evictions from local authority and not-for-profit landlords are relatively rare and governed by the *Housing Act, 1966* and the *Housing Miscellaneous Act, 1997*. *To ensure that all tenants, irrespective of the status of their landlord, are provided with dispute resolution services, on a phased basis, tenants in the not-for-profit sector in the first instance and then tenants in the local authority sector should be enabled to have their cases determined by the dispute resolution services of a revised Residential Tenancies Board.*

Institutional discharge, in particular discharge from prisons and places of detention is of concern when seeking to reduce overall homelessness. Those who experience homelessness are at heightened risk of incarceration and the experience of incarceration contributes to further residential instability.⁵⁷ In 2010, there were 17,179 committals to Irish Prisons and Places of Detention in relation to 13,758 individuals compared to 10,658 committals in respect of 8,686 persons in 2005. The Homeless Persons' Unit of the Department of Social Protection in partnership with the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service, provides an in-reach community welfare service to 10 prisons. This service ensures that prisoners at risk of homelessness on release have direct access to accommodation and income support. In 2010 some 939 prisoners accessed this

service up from 759 in 2009. Focus Ireland also provides a case management and pre-settlement service for homeless remand prisoners in Cloverhill Prison. By the end of the year, 121 prisoners had benefited from the service since its establishment in September 2007. Focus Ireland also provides homelessness support services to prisoners in Cork and Limerick prisons.

Research has also highlighted that the experience of homelessness could lead to criminalisation, either through engagement in survivalist crimes such as shoplifting, begging and larceny or by virtue of the fact that in many countries, until recently, homelessness or vagrancy itself was criminalized and resulted in imprisonment.⁵⁸ In this context, it is vital that the provisions of the *Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 2011*, which allows for An Garda Síochána to direct individuals to desist from begging in public places, and to arrest an individual if they do not comply with the direction, are carefully monitored.

Young people leaving the care system are particularly vulnerable and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is currently revising the *Youth Homelessness Strategy*, published originally in 2001, to ensure that this pathway to adult homelessness is eliminated through the provision of aftercare.

Tertiary services: Housing-Led Strategies to end Repeat Homelessness

In broad terms, tertiary prevention seeks to slow the progression or mitigate the effects of a particular condition once it has become established. In terms of ending homelessness, the term ‘housing-led’ was developed by the aforementioned Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness in order to describe all policy responses to homelessness that increase access to secure accommodation and increase capacity for both prevention and the provision of adequate floating support to people in their homes according to their needs.

Such an approach, which includes the use of scattered ordinary rented housing, floating support, ‘consumer’ choice and control, including harm reduction, the use of both flexible direct provision of support to high needs and case management/service brokering and open ended support represents a departure from the ‘staircase’ or ‘continuum of care’ approach, which until recently has dominated responses to in Ireland and many European member states and North America. This approach, as the staircase metaphor implies a progression ascending from emergency hostels to transitional housing to regular housing, with individuals developing the necessary skills at different stages of the system.⁵⁹

However, this approach also resulted in individuals descending the staircase when they did not fulfil the required expectations at the different stages. Evaluations of the ‘Staircase’ system has highlighted that few homeless individuals fully ascend

the staircase and obtain regular housing indeed, the system, rather than ameliorating homelessness, may in fact reinforce it. It can do so by inadvertently reinforcing and emphasising deficiencies amongst the homeless that leads to a view that homeless individuals are incapable of independent living.⁶⁰ Through the inability to meet predefined outcomes, homeless individuals can remain stuck in a secondary housing market with little likelihood of successful exit.⁶¹

Support in housing, rather than support for housing

In response to the defects identified in the 'staircase' system, new models were gradually developed that demonstrated that homeless people could live independently with help from floating support services (i.e. mobile support workers and clinical staff).⁶² Evaluations of services that provided 'support *in* housing', rather than 'support *for* housing' demonstrated that rates of housing sustainment using supported housing services were higher than those in staircase models, with housing stability rates consistently in excess of 80 percent.⁶³ There are two broad forms of support in housing: first programme support workers whose role is centred on support to sustain the service user in their housing; second, interdisciplinary team which combine Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) services.⁶⁴

Harm Reduction

Underpinning this model is a 'Harm Reduction' approach, which separates treatment issues, for example substance abuse, from housing issues, where relapse does not compromise housing. Harm reduction is a "pragmatic approach to reduce the harmful consequences of drug use and other high-risk activities by incorporating several strategies that cut across the spectrum from safer use to managed use to abstinence. The primary goal of most harm-reduction approaches is to meet individuals where they are at and not to ignore or condemn the harmful behaviours, but rather to work with the individual or community to minimize the harmful effects of a given behaviour."⁶⁵

Robust research has demonstrated, for example, that abstinence from substance use is not necessary for successful housing outcomes, but for those who enter housing first type projects, having secure occupancy of a dwelling appears to lead to reductions in substance misuse compared to those who are accommodated in congregate homeless facilities.⁶⁶ In particular, a harm reduction approach ensures housing attainment and maintenance amongst some of the most vulnerable, marginalised and severely affected homeless people⁶⁷ and a recent review found that 'housing that is not contingent on abstinence was found to be most effective for improving long term housing tenure'.⁶⁸

Cost Effectiveness

Housing Led provision for homeless people have been shown to demonstrate significant cost savings, whereby the provision of stable housing reduces the sustained use of emergency accommodation and emergency medical and psychiatric services, in addition to reducing the number of arrests and subsequent periods of incarceration.⁶⁹ Thus, significant exchequer savings can be achieved through the provision of secure occupancy in rental accommodation, but as noted earlier, we must also be cognizant of the human cost of homelessness as well as the fiscal cost.⁷⁰ In one of the only European analysis of the cost savings associated with the provision of housing as opposed to shelter services, a study of a supported housing unit in Tampere, Finland demonstrated that housing with intensified support halved the use of social and health care services compared to service-use during homelessness. This equated to savings of €14,000 per resident per annum with the total annual savings for 15 residents in the unit in question amounting to €220,000.⁷¹

Pathways Housing First

One well-known strand of a housing led approach, which deals with the ‘chronically homeless’ is Pathways Housing First (PHF) in New York whose approach views housing as a basic human right, and in developing services, there should be:

- respect, warmth and compassion for service users;
- a commitment to working with service users for as long as they need;
- scattered site housing using independent apartments (i.e. homeless people should not be housed within dedicated buildings but within ordinary housing);
- separation of housing from mental health, and drug and alcohol services (i.e. housing provision is not conditional on compliance with psychiatric treatment or sobriety);
- consumer choice and self-determination;
- recovery orientation (i.e. delivering mental health services with an emphasis on service user choice and control; basing treatment plans around service users’ own goals);
- a harm reduction approach (i.e. supporting the minimisation of problematic drug/alcohol use but not insisting on total abstinence).

PHF places formerly chronically homeless people in furnished apartments provided via the private rented sector. Housing must meet certain quality standards, and service users sign a tenancy agreement either directly with the landlord or more often, an agreement with PHF (i.e. the tenancy is held by PHF and the service user is sub-letting).⁷²

This approach reduces any concerns about letting to formerly chronically homeless people as the tenancy agreement is between PHF and the landlord. Housing is provided immediately (or as quickly as possible) and on an open-ended basis. There is no requirement for compliance with psychiatric treatment or for abstinence from drugs or alcohol. Housing provision is not entirely unconditional, however; service users must agree to a weekly visit from a PHF support worker and also to paying 30% of their monthly income towards rent.

There are two main elements to the floating support services provided by PHF. The first element is the team of programme support workers whose role is centred on support to sustain the service user in their housing. The second element is the interdisciplinary team, which combines Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) services, with the ACT element concentrating on people with the severest forms of mental illness. The interdisciplinary team includes a psychiatrist, a peer specialist (i.e. a former service user providing support), a health worker, a family specialist (centred on enhancing social support), a drug and alcohol worker and a supported employment specialist.

From its inception, PHF has rigorously evaluated the efficacy of the programme⁷³, and the evidence clearly points to higher rates of housing stability in PHF programmes compared to programmes that insist on sobriety and use of transitional housing before the provision of independent housing. There is also evidence of cost effectiveness. PHF costs less than staircase models because no specialist accommodation has to be built. PHF service users also make less use of emergency shelters, less use of emergency medical services, and are less likely to get arrested than when they were homeless, all of which produce savings.⁷⁴ Further service elements identified in evaluations of various housing first type programmes to maintain housing stability were “subsidy mechanisms that permit programs to hold units for people who leave temporarily, as well as a housing supply and program policies that help people obtain a different unit if they cannot return to their unit following a departure.”⁷⁵

While the research evidence on the effectiveness of PHF shows better resettlement and housing sustainment outcomes than the staircase model, it is not presented as a solution to all forms of homelessness, rather it is designed primarily for chronically homeless people. Those who are not chronically homeless i.e. the majority of homeless people, do not require the level of support that PHF provides. Nor will the provision of housing address the issue of the social integration of formerly homeless people. Recent research has demonstrated that while formerly chronically homeless adults showed substantial improvements in housing, they remained socially isolated and showed limited improvement in other domains of social integration.⁷⁶

Variations in Housing First

Recent research distinguishes three distinct variations in the application of Housing First across the European Union.⁷⁷ The *Pathways Housing First* model as discussed above; *Communal Housing First*, or congregated housing with on-site support, but self-contained and with permanent contract, using harm reduction approach and *Housing First Light*, a low intensity mobile support to formerly and potentially homeless people living in scattered housing; case management/service brokering approach, often focussing on people with lower support needs

Communal Housing First services are also focused on chronically homeless people and offers communal housing (single rooms or apartments) with security of tenure provided immediately in a building, modified or designed to this end, and only lived in by homeless people using the service. Support and medical services are situated in the same building or are very nearby.⁷⁸ In Irish homeless services, a certain number of long-term homeless people have experienced institutional living for considerable periods of their lives, often from childhood, and in line with the principle of consumer choice, may express a preference to remain in long-term supported congregate facilities. Others may wish to remain in high tolerance accommodation, such as wet hostels, where they consider the accommodation their long-term home. *Communal Housing First* projects involve the replacement of individual rooms and shared living arrangements in homeless hostels and emergency accommodation with self contained apartments; the provision of security of tenure; no requirement that they comply with treatment, but it should be available if required. Despite the absence of a requirement for compliance with treatment, research has indicated that participants in *Communal Housing First* programs did decrease their alcohol use and alcohol-related problems when in such programs.⁷⁹

In such cases, such accommodation should no longer be viewed as accommodation for homeless people in line with the modified version of 'Ethos Light', nor funded via Section 10 funding, rather such tenants would pay a market rent, subsidised via the rent supplement scheme, and appropriate service charges, on an equitable basis with mainstream local authority/AHB/RAS tenants, funded from personal income supports and, have formal tenancy agreements to replace the de facto licence agreements that exist in many services.

Housing First Light is delivered by using ordinary private rented or social housing and a team of mobile support workers designed to help promote housing stability. *Housing First Light* may be used to help prevent homelessness where an individual or household who has never been homeless is assessed as being at risk of homelessness. HFL can support chronically homeless people but may also be used

for other groups of homeless people, including homeless people with lower support needs. HFL services give considerable choice and control to homeless people as part of following a harm reduction model. If homeless people do not use the medical and support services which can be arranged, or choose to continue drinking alcohol and using drugs, this does not place their housing under threat.

The differences between the three broad types of Housing First Provision are summarized below.

Broad Types of Housing First Services

Housing with security of tenure in private rented sector or in social housing provided immediately or as soon as possible	Yes	No	Yes
Offers communal housing (single rooms or apartments) with security of tenure provided immediately in a building only lived in by homeless people using the service	No	Yes	No
Homeless people have to stop using drugs	No	No	No
Homeless people have to stop drinking alcohol	No	No	No
Homeless people have to use mental health services	No	No	No
Harm reduction approach	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uses mobile teams to provide services	Yes	No	Yes
Directly provides drug and alcohol services	Yes	Yes	No
Directly provides psychiatric and medical services	Yes	Yes	No
Uses service brokerage	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provides support to promote housing stability	Yes	No	Yes

Source: Pleace (2012) *Housing First*. Brussels: FEANTSA / Ministère de l'Écologie, du Développement durable des Transports et du Logement. p.5.

While PHF and other Housing First services are designed to deal with chronic homelessness, they are not intended to tackle the bulk of homelessness.⁸⁰ The variations highlighted above suggest that the overall *response to ending homelessness in Ireland should be 'Housing Led', and the appropriate level of support should be determined by the level of need once secure occupancy in rental housing is obtained.*

Housing First Demonstration Project

In Dublin, a Housing First Demonstration Project commenced in April of this year with 23 entrenched rough sleepers to be provided with independent scattered housing with supports. This demonstration project will assist in providing a robust evidence base for housing led approaches in Ireland. It will also feed into *Housing First Europe*, a project funded under the framework of the PROGRESS programme of the European Commission (DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion). *Housing First Europe* involves five Housing First projects (or "test sites") to be evaluated are in Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Lisbon, with a further five "peer sites", in Dublin, Gent, Gothenburg, Helsinki and Vienna where evaluations are already in progress.⁸¹ Given that much of the empirical research on Housing First

approaches has taken place in the United States of America, this project will assist in formulating Government policy by contextualising Housing First at a European and city specific level.⁸²

In addition, while evidence from countries as diverse as Scotland, Finland and Germany have demonstrated that it is possible to substantially reduce the need for emergency / temporary type accommodation, some emergency accommodation will be required for crisis episodes of homelessness, for those fleeing violence, and for vulnerable young people still developing independent living skills. For example, in Helsinki, the number of shelter beds has decreased from 3,665 in 1970 to 144 by 2011, with independent flats for homeless people now providing 2,296 units.

Summary

Not all are convinced by a Housing First approach and caution needs to be exercised in ensuring that the evidence base supports the rhetoric in relation to the efficacy of Housing First.⁸³ Some of the difficulties in evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of Housing First approaches relate to ‘a number of methodological inconsistencies and ambiguities within the literature.’⁸⁴ However, in a recent comprehensive overview of the research on Housing First, the conclusion was that at a minimum, housing First ‘has shown to be effective in housing and maintaining housing for single adults with mental illness and substance use in urban locations where there is ample rental stock.’⁸⁵

It may be argued that important elements of this philosophy have already been realised in Ireland, with the provision of floating support in housing already happening and harm reduction approaches are widespread.⁸⁶ In a recent review of stakeholder’s perception of Housing First in the UK, many stakeholders claimed that there was little new in the Housing First Approach, that they were ‘doing it already.’⁸⁷ However, closer scrutiny revealed that important differences between existing approaches in the UK and Housing First principles were evident. These included providing housing primarily for households with low or medium support needs, rather than those with high needs; the tenancies provided tended to be time limited rather than permanent, subject to normal tenancy arrangements; and many existing services failed to separate treatment from housing. Overall, the review concluded that ‘a treatment first philosophy still prevails’.

There are clear signs that many stakeholders in Ireland are supportive of moving towards a Housing Led model of provision⁸⁸ and research evidence from the United States suggests that users of homeless services: “rate as efficacious programs that provide housing, refer them to employment-related services, or provide employment services... do not rate programs as efficacious when the

programs discuss housing with them, provide professional services, provide advocacy that helps them obtain income supports, provide tangible goods, or refer clients to any such service.”⁸⁹

A basic philosophical difference exists between those service providers that view housing as something to be earned by demonstrating their housing readiness and those that see immediate access to housing as a basic and necessary component in ending homelessness for an individual. Despite these ideological differences, the overwhelming evidence points to the effectiveness of a Housing Led approach rather than one that seeks to provide Treatment First.⁹⁰

7. A ‘Housing Led’ Approach in Ireland

Some of the lag in implementing a ‘Housing Led’ approach in Ireland stem from a number of assumptions about the type of housing to be provided. In addition, the development of a ‘housing led’ approach needs to fit with the existing housing and welfare programmes in operation in Ireland. *Underpinning this approach should be the principle that, irrespective of whether a tenant has a private, public or non-for-profit residence, a tenant should enjoy secure occupancy of their dwelling.* The principle of secure occupancy is broader than the notion of security of tenure and incorporates access affordability and on-going affordability of accommodation, including financial assistance from the state; security, terms and conditions of the tenancy; with support and sustainment programmes if needed.

For some, a ‘right to housing’ is desirable, but the evidence on the effectiveness of such a policy in other EU Member States demonstrates little consensus on the efficacy of such an approach.⁹¹ Where there is some evidence of a statutory based system being both fair and effective, it is dependent on the existence of a large-scale social housing sector and well functioning allocation system.⁹² Ensuring that secure occupancy is obtained through the statutory entitlement to income support to meet housing costs may be more appropriate in the current environment.

Rental Housing in Ireland

In Census 2011, 450,000, or 27.2 per cent, of all households recorded that they occupied rented dwellings.⁹³ Just over two-thirds of these households are renting from private landlords, with the remaining renting from local authorities and voluntary / co-operative housing bodies. In broad terms, over the last 30 years, we have seen the gradual decline of local authority housing as the primary provider of rental housing in Ireland, the emergence of not-for-profit providers as significant renters since the early 1990s and the substantial growth of the private rental market since the early 1990s, following a downward trend since the foundation of the State.⁹⁴

As Local Authority provision stagnated and gradually declined, the number of households in receipt of a rent supplement grew from less than 30,000 in 1994 to 60,000 in 2005.⁹⁵ At the end of 2011, some 96,800 tenants (primarily in private rented dwellings, but also in a small number of not-for-profit dwellings) were in receipt of a rent allowance, and the cost of this scheme was €516m in 2010, with a provisional figure of €503m for 2011. More than half the current recipients (52,867) are in continuous receipt of this payment for more than 18 months. The purpose of rent supplement is to provide short-term income support to assist with the accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation who are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from

their own resources, and who do not have accommodation available to them from another source. For various historical, cultural and fiscal reasons, for many homeless households and a number of not-for-profit homelessness service providers, their preferred outcome is the provision of accommodation by a local authority, or in close second place, the provision of accommodation by a not-for-profit housing association. However, recent comparative research on homelessness and social housing across 13 EU member states found that social housing meets the housing needs of homeless people only partially. There were six main reasons for this:

- Low availability of suitable social housing relative to general housing need in the countries surveyed; social housing was not always viewed positively by policy-makers, and there had been sustained reductions in social housing investment in several countries.
- The expectation that social housing fulfils multiple roles, such as meeting general housing need and facilitating urban regeneration, which create competing needs for social housing.
- Allocation systems for social housing did not prioritise some forms of homelessness, concentrating instead on other forms of housing need. Social housing providers often avoided housing certain groups, to which homeless people sometimes belonged, including people with a history of rent arrears or nuisance behaviour, people with a criminal record, and people with high support needs.
- Barriers to social housing existed that were closely linked to how homeless people were perceived, particularly the view that homeless people would be ‘difficult’ tenants that would create high housing management costs.
- Tensions existed in some countries between a housing policy imperative for social housing providers to house poorer households (including homeless people), and an urban policy concern with avoiding spatial concentrations of poverty. This sometimes led to the restricted allocation of social housing to homeless people on the basis that they were poor and often faced sustained worklessness.
- A lack of policy coordination between different agencies restricted access to social housing for homeless people in some cases.⁹⁶

Housing Assistance Payment

The Government recently announced its decision in principle to transfer responsibility for households in receipt of rent supplement, but with an established long-term social housing need, from the Department of Social Protection to the housing authorities. Housing authorities will provide this service using a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). This joint proposal by the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government and the Minister for Social Protection arose out of a commitment in the *Programme for Government* to review the operation of the rent supplement scheme due to concerns over the evolution of rent supplement from a short-term income support into a long-term

housing support. It was also one of the key reforms announced in the Minister for Housing and Planning's Housing Policy Statement in June 2011.

Rent supplement would continue to be paid by the Department of Social Protection to certain households. This would include those already in the private rented sector but who, because of a loss of income through unemployment, require a short-term income support to pay their rent. These applicants would not generally require an assessment of need and the expectation would be that a return to employment would obviate the requirement for long term housing support. Thus, rent supplement would remain a short-term income support, as originally intended.

This scheme will also enable job take-up by tenants who have been caught in poverty traps until now, by;

- providing greater security of tenure for tenants, greater stability in the private rented market and contributing towards the creation of a higher quality, private rented sector through improved standards;
- providing a more integrated and streamlined service for households seeking support from the State to meet housing costs;
- delivering greater value for money for the taxpayer for the resources invested.

Rental Rates and Homelessness

A robust finding in analyses of housing markets and homelessness is that the higher the rent is for the cheapest rental units, usually one bed-room apartments, the higher the rate of homelessness. Furthermore, demand side-subsidies, such as rent subsidies are more effective in reducing homelessness than supply-side subsidies.⁹⁷ In a number of urban areas, the State, via the rent supplement scheme, has ability to influence the rent levels through its quasi-monopolistic position in the private rented market and therefore ease access to the private rented sector for low-income households. In doing so, cognisance needs to be taken to ensure individuals who are occupying tenancies are not displaced and therefore become homeless.

Providing Secure Occupancy in Rented Accommodation

In strict legal terms, tenants of local authority landlords do not enjoy any measure of security of tenure as the local authority landlord may terminate the tenancy by serving 4 weeks written notice at any time. In practice, however, local authority tenants who pay the rent and observe the other terms of their tenancy agreement enjoy long-term security of tenure.⁹⁸

The most common tenancy arrangement in the not-for-profit sector has been in the form of a periodic tenancy (usually on a monthly basis). In this situation the

monthly periodic tenancy is automatically renewed and continues indefinitely beyond the initial period until ended by either party, and, in practice, tenants of voluntary sector landlords enjoy the same degree of security as local authority tenants. In contrast, tenants of private for-profit landlords enjoy a greater security of tenure *in law*, than do tenants of local authority or non-for-profit landlords.

Since 2004, under the provisions of the *Residential Tenancies Act 2004*, once a tenant in private rented accommodation has been in occupation of a dwelling for a continuous period of six months, in effect a probationary period, and a notice of termination has not been served during that period, the tenant is entitled to what is referred to as a “Part 4 tenancy”, which entitles a tenant to remain in occupation of the dwelling for a further period of three-and-a-half years after the first six months of continuous occupation.

A landlord only has the right to take back possession of the property in two circumstances during that four-year period. First, a landlord can terminate the tenancy during the first six months without giving a reason so long as the tenant is given at least 28 days' notice. Secondly, after the first six-month period, a landlord can only terminate the then Part 4 tenancy during the next three-and-a-half years where the landlord can satisfy one of the six grounds for termination of a tenancy provided for in the table to s.34 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004.⁹⁹

To enhance *secure occupancy for tenants* and to *facilitate rental certainty and stability for landlords*, the necessity for a second probationary period for further Part 4 tenancies in the forthcoming *Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2012* should be abolished. The *Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2012* will include provision for the inclusion of the majority of not-for-profit landlords within the regulatory framework of the new Residential Tenancies Board, and the certainty of security of tenure enjoyed by tenants of for-profit landlords should be extended to tenants of not-for-profit landlords in order to enhance secure occupancy for tenants of non-profit landlords. In due course, this provision should be extended to tenants of local authorities and ensure equity of secure occupancy across the rental sector, irrespective of who the landlord is.

Between 2008 and 2010, some €18m was transferred to private landlords in the form of cash security deposits via the supplementary allowance scheme provided by the Department of Social Protection. *In the context of the phased transfer of long-term recipients of rent supplement to local authorities, long-term bonds or rent deposit guarantees should replace the current cash deposit scheme for those households remaining in receipt of rent allowances i.e. those in receipt of the allowance for less than 18 months.* Bonds or rent deposit guarantees offer landlords the same financial security as a cash deposit, but avoid the need for payment to be made unless a claim for

damages incurred by a tenant is made by a landlord during the tenancy or at the end of the tenancy, and if a dispute arises, would be referred to the dispute resolution service of the Residential Tenancies Board.

Rental Accommodation Scheme

In addition, to the three forms of renting noted above, commencing in 2004, the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is an initiative by the Government to cater primarily for the accommodation needs of certain persons in receipt of rent supplement, normally for more than 18 months and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need.¹⁰⁰

RAS is a collaborative project between the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, local authorities, and the Department of Social Protection. The scheme involves local authorities sourcing accommodation for these households in receipt of rent supplement for more than 18 months and for homeless people who are not on rent supplement but who have a long-term housing need, by entering into contractual arrangements with for-profit and not-for-profit accommodation providers to secure medium to long-term availability of rented accommodation. Section 19 of the *Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2009* was commenced on 1 April 2011 and gives formal legislative recognition to the Rental Accommodation Scheme as a form of social housing support.

For dwellings to qualify for inclusion under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, landlords must register with the Private Residential Tenancies Board and meet the minimum standards for private rented accommodation – the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008 and the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) (Amendment) Regulations 2009. Rent is paid in full by the local authority to the landlord and no security deposits are required to be paid by the tenants. In 2011, 6,337 households were transferred by housing authorities from rent supplement to the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) or other social housing accommodation. Of this figure, 4,234 were accommodated directly under RAS with the balance accommodated under other social housing options. By the end of February 2012 local authorities had transferred a total of 38,467 households from Rent Supplement (RS) to RAS and other social housing options.

Under the 2009 Act, being a RAS tenant confers a number of key benefits including differential rent i.e. linked to income and that employment blocks, which operate in the rent supplement, are scheme removed, i.e. the poverty trap. Tenants in RAS properties also enjoy the same rights as tenants in the private rented sector in terms of access to cheap and speedy dispute resolution services.

The Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2009 gives legislative recognition to

rental accommodation availability agreements as a form of social housing support. Consequently, since 1 April 2011, RAS tenants are now considered to be in receipt of social housing support and should not generally remain on the housing waiting lists for new applicants for social housing.

In recognition that RAS tenants may have had reasonable expectations about retaining access to traditional local authority rented accommodation, guidance issued by the Department in May 2011 recommended that there should be a special transfer pathway for RAS tenants to other forms of social housing support. This pathway it was recommended should be included in Allocation Schemes that are adopted by elected representatives of housing authorities. It is understood that many authorities have included a provision of this type in their Allocation Schemes.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme has clearly demonstrated its viability in terms of secure occupancy for households in that the scheme provides access and on-going affordability and security of occupancy. While one of the original objectives of RAS was to transfer those in receipt of long-term rent supplement, i.e. over 18 months, the dramatic increase in such households, from 31,667 in 2008 to 52,867 by the end of 2011, due to the rise in unemployment, has not proven possible, nonetheless, in terms of its original targets, RAS has proven successful and the scheme should be strengthened to ensure its on-going viability as a core option for households.

Social Housing Leasing Scheme

Under the Social Housing Leasing Initiative, properties are used to accommodate households on local authority waiting lists. Local authorities enter into arrangements with property owners and Approved Housing Bodies with a lease payment guaranteed for the duration of the agreement. By the end of March 2012, over 4,500 housing units have been approved under the initiative.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, rental housing has been transformed in Ireland. A range of hybrid schemes have developed that blur the boundaries between traditional forms of rental housing and this will intensify with the roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment in 2013. The private rented sector is playing an increasing role in meeting the housing needs of households while the public and not-for-profit rental housing sectors remain key players. Ensuring a level playing field across all forms of rental housing in terms of security of occupancy, dispute resolution, regulation, standards etc. are core to preventing and ending homelessness and creating perverse incentives that can distort housing need in

Ireland. Ensuring secure occupancy in rental housing with requisite supports for all is not only a moral imperative, but is it demonstrably more cost effective than the current range of services that manage homelessness in Ireland.

Homeless people currently using emergency and temporary homeless services are people whose housing and support needs are not fully met, not people with some inherent ‘flaws’ that require various individualised interventions to make them housing ready. We need to move away from some forms of existing homelessness service, to ensure that existing mainstream services, in particular social protection, housing and health related services work with preventative services to ensure that, where possible, households do not find themselves homeless. The provision of some existing services for homeless people, except in emergency cases, can lead to the provision of secondary services that can trap people in often poor quality services that are not in the interest of homeless people, service providers or the taxpayer. For those who do find themselves homeless, the core objective of new homelessness services should be to enable people obtain housing using the housing led approach outlined in this document.

This enhancement of the existing Strategy aims to provide the basis for a discussion on how to put in place a policy and operational framework for housing led services that aim to see the *rapid provision of secure occupation in rental housing, with support as needed, to ensure sustainable tenancies as the key solution to ending homelessness.*

Footnotes

- ¹ The full statement reads as follows: “We are committed to ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough. To address the issue of existing homelessness we will review and update the existing Homeless Strategy, including a specific focus on youth homelessness, and take into account the current demands on existing housing and health services with a view to assessing how to best provide additional services. In line with our Comprehensive Spending Review, we will alleviate the problem of long term homelessness by introducing a ‘housing first’ approach to accommodating homeless people. In this way we will be able to offer homeless people suitable, long term housing in the first instance and radically reduce the use of hostel accommodation and the associated costs for the Exchequer. We believe that prevention is better than cure and we will aggressively target the root causes of homelessness. By having a dedicated body to coordinate policy across Government we will target initiatives in cross cutting areas, which will aim to prevent as much as possible problems like homelessness.”
- ² Mid-East Joint Homelessness Forum (Local Authorities of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow); West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon); South East (Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford); North East (Louth, Monaghan, Cavan); Midlands (Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath); North West (Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal); Mid-West Homeless Forum (Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary)
- ³ These core objectives are broadly in line with what the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) state are required to end homelessness. They are: No one sleeping rough; No one living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an ‘emergency’; No one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on; No one leaving an institution without housing options; and, No young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living.
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tenant. A landlord can also terminate the further Part 4 tenancy by serving a notice of termination within the first six months of the further Part 4 tenancy providing at least 112 days' notice. Thereafter, the further Part 4 tenancy may only be terminated if one of the grounds in s.34 is satisfied.

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