

Issue 43

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Eoin O'Sullivan



The magazine of the Homeless Agency

Reflections on Reconfiguration



Vision: By 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin.

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Note from the editor
The good old days.

In the old days, when the Homeless Initiative was just a gleam in Liz McManus’s eye, no-one planned anything. Funding for homeless services was limited and haphazard; health boards and local authorities vied with each other to pass the buck between one another, each claiming that the other had responsibility for homelessness. And the quality of many services was very poor by today’s standards.

I think it’s important to remember all this, not for nostalgic reasons, but because it’s important to keep in mind how far we’ve travelled.

And we have travelled a long way. Now, for the first time ever, homeless services in Dublin are organised in a planned fashion. The quality of homeless services has improved hugely.

But we’re not there yet. And the main problem is very simple: there isn’t enough social housing.

Last year the government set up the Social Housing Leasing Initiative, which so far has performed pitifully (see News). But there is nothing wrong with its design that cannot be put right with some tweaking and a genuine commitment by everyone concerned to make it work. It’s a new model, which involves risks for all involved, and there has been some understandable hesitancy by many players to dip their toes into the water. But those organisations are that are still dragging their feet should be forced to play their part.

The government’s aim of eliminating long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough will not be achieved by the end of 2010. But there is absolutely no reason why the Social Housing Leasing Initiative should not deliver enough social housing for the aim to be achieved in 2011 or 2012.

Imagine if we were able to say that in the midst of the deepest recession for years, Ireland was able to solve one of its major social problems – now wouldn’t that be something?

Simon Brooke

The magazine of the Homeless Agency

Relections on Reconfiguration



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NEWS

FEANTSA right of reply

In the last issue's news section CornerStone reviewed a recent publication from FEANTSA called *Ending Homelessness: A Handbook for Policy Makers*. Overall, the review was critical, and subsequently CornerStone received an email from FEANTSA's communications officer, **Susannah Young** who requested that we publish a response to the review. We are of course extremely happy to do this.

We were interested to see that you had reviewed *Ending Homelessness: A Handbook for Policy Makers* in July 2010 issue of CornerStone. Perhaps you would appreciate some contextualisation and an explanation of the methodology behind the Handbook.

In the context of recent EU progress on homelessness and the momentum at EU level to make real policy changes in relation to homelessness (see the Written Declaration 2008 on Ending Street Homelessness and the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010, which recommends the development of homelessness strategies in EU Member States), FEANTSA decided to create a handbook with ideas on how to go about the ambitious task of creating a national homelessness strategy, and to give examples of what has worked in countries that already have such strategies, drawing on the expertise and experience of FEANTSA members.

The key target audience is countries that do not yet have homelessness strategies, rather than those who already do. FEANTSA recognizes of course, that national contexts – economic, administrative, political, etc. – will have an effect on a country's ability to commit to having a homelessness strategy at any given time. FEANTSA therefore considers that those countries who have done some very good work at regional level, such as Spain, and those who have chosen to push for a homelessness strategy despite constraints, of whatever nature – Portugal, for example – deserve commendation as well.

The Handbook was thus the result of a long consultation process with homelessness service provider representatives from the 27 countries in Europe, and the five goals are the sum of their collective priorities. It is important to note that the goals relate to aspects of homelessness which are best addressed by specific homelessness policies, rather than

under other policy areas (housing, health, employment, etc.) The goals agreed on and the examples included in the handbook were chosen specifically as they have been proven to work and be appropriate in the national contexts experienced by our members. As the handbook says, the examples are not "one size fits all" solutions but are given to illustrate that real progress can be made on ending homelessness using strategic approaches – the hope is that others may be inspired by them and use them as part of their own homelessness strategies. The handbook is not intended to be exhaustive and the advice and examples contained within it should make up a *part* of countries' homelessness strategies.

Moreover, although the goals do not specifically refer to housing, the five sections include consideration of housing as ways to meet them: I refer you to the sections on "Adequate Alternatives" to rough sleeping and "Ways into and out of homelessness services" (Goal 1); long-term housing as an alternative to long stays in emergency accommodation, "Housing First approaches", "Providing long-term housing options" and "Specific forms of supported housing" (Goals 2 and 3) and "Helping Young People Access Appropriate Housing" and "Supporting Young People to Maintain Housing" (Goal 5). I hope you will find these sections interesting.

With reference to the length of FEANTSA's toolkit, this publication it is intended to list approaches to tackling homelessness as a starting point for further work on them. Examples of each approach can be found in the body of the Handbook and in other FEANTSA publications, to which readers of the Handbook are free and welcome to refer.

Thanking you for your continued interest in FEANTSA and for the useful information also available to us in the CornerStone magazine.

NEWS

Social Housing Leasing Initiative and Grant Thornton

The Social Housing Leasing Initiative (SHLI), which was launched 18 months ago is, as many readers will know, a scheme for turning unsold privately built housing into social housing. Initially the scheme was only for local authorities; then a year ago housing associations were included.

The Comptroller and Auditor General, in his *Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2009*, reveals that by June 2010, a miserly total of 47 social housing units had been delivered under the initiative, 17 by local authorities, and 30 by housing associations. He refers to this, in a masterly understatement, as a 'slow uptake'.

The DoEHLG's financial justification for SHLI relied on a financial appraisal of the initiative by Grant Thornton, in its review of housing association funding that was published a year ago. This appraisal claimed that leasing under SHLI would cost less than purchasing properties. By an astonishing coincidence, this was exactly what the DoEHLG was looking for.

The Grant Thornton review was panned at the ISCH conference where it was launched, and subsequently roundly criticised by Chris White in CornerStone (Issue 40, December 2009), although valiantly defended by DoEHLG's Jim Ganley in the same issue. In his report, the Comptroller and Auditor General joins the critics and takes a swipe at the Grant Thornton review, saying that its appraisal of the Social Housing Leasing Initiative, 'was limited in a number of respects.' He then goes on to list seven of them, all of which are substantial. He reworked Grant Thornton sums, and came to a different conclusion from Grant Thornton, concluding that the cost differences between leasing and purchase 'were marginal'. Interestingly the Grant Thornton review appears to have disappeared without trace.

As well as criticising Grant Thornton, the Comptroller and Auditor General also raps the DoEHLG over the knuckles for cheating – for including some RAS arrangements, and leasing of existing State-subsidised properties in the leasing statistics.

The DoEHLG's rejoinder to this is that despite Grant Thornton's inadequacies, its own current analysis supports the view that leasing is a better option than purchase.

The importance of SHLI's dismal performance must not be underestimated because, as DoEHLG officials are fond of saying, 'It's the only show in town'. There is no Plan B; if SHLI doesn't come up with goods, there will be virtually no new social housing for the foreseeable future. So the pressure is on the DoEHLG to deliver.

NEWS

NIRSA and NAMA

A Haunted Landscape: housing and ghost estates in post-celtic Ireland by Rob Kitchin and colleagues, is on www.nuim.ie/nirsa/research/documents/WP59-A-Haunted-Landscape.pdf



NIRSA, the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis at Maynooth, has published a blistering attack on the planning system, calling for an independent review of the operation of the planning system during the Celtic Tiger years, which would consider the role of planning in the creation of the property bubble, including charges of localism, cronyism and clientelism.

The report's starting point is that there are two ways in which government can regulate property development: through fiscal policy (regulating access to credit, setting taxation rates); and through planning policy (zoning of land and granting planning permission.). Kitchin et al claim that explanations for the Irish property bubble have focused almost exclusively on the fiscal part (the role of banks, tax incentive schemes, failure of financial regulation etc), but have largely ignored the role of the planning system in creating the bubble. They point out if zoned land and planning permissions had been limited, then no matter how much money the banks wanted to lend, housing development could not have occurred in the way it did.

The authors say that a good planning system *should* provide checks and balances to the excesses of unrestrained

development and act for the common good, even if that means making unpopular decisions. Instead, a laissez-faire approach to planning predominated at all levels, which they describe as 'a catastrophic failure of the planning system'. (In response to this, the planning profession has pointed out that much of the excessive or inappropriate zoning was done by elected councillors against professional planning advice.)

This approach, together with fiscal levers of development, was far too pro-growth and so not only was there unsustainable upsurge in property prices, there was also a property building frenzy that to a huge oversupply of housing (and offices, retail units and hotels) in almost all parts of the country.

Kitchin et al share the blame for this between local authorities and central government. Some local authorities are accused of:

- Not heeding good planning guidelines, and regional and national objectives
- Not conducting sensible demographic profiling of potential demand
- Not taking account of the fact that much zoned land lacks essential services such as water and sewerage treatment plants, energy supply, public transport or roads

Ghost estates

So what's to be done about the ghost estates owned by Nama? Kitchin & Co remind us that Nama has six options:

- **Sell** the properties at a price far lower than the original valuation but raising enough to cover the loan transfer cost, i.e what Nama paid for them.
- **Lease** the properties either to private sector or public sector tenants, using the Social Housing Leasing Initiative.
- **Hold** the properties for a few years, hoping for a better price.
- **Develop** uncompleted dwellings with a view to selling them when the market improves.
- **Manage** the properties as a going concern.
- **Demolish** properties that have little chance of every being completed or sold.

Each of these options has difference consequences for existing residents.

- Abandonment of basic planning principles in the granting of zoning and planning permissions by elected representatives.

At the same time central government is accused of:

- Failing to adequately oversee, regulate and direct local planning
- Actively encouraging its excesses through tax incentive schemes and the flaunting of its own principles as set out in the National Spatial Strategy through policies such as decentralisation.

Overall, a pretty devastating critique. And it is because of this, the authors say, that an independent enquiry is required.

On top of all that, they give out about Nama too. In a comprehensive demolition job they claim that NAMA's logic is skewed. 'In order to remedy a crisis brought about by an unsustainable property bubble, NAMA's stated aim is to reinflate this bubble by stabilising those sectors primarily responsible at the expense of the taxpayer.'

Kitchin and colleagues set out 'seven key issues' that need to be addressed before consumers regain confidence, property prices bottom out, and the housing market starts to function properly.

- 1 Supply and demand will need to be harmonized.
- 2 There has to be a sustained growth in the economy with an associated fall in unemployment.
- 3 House prices have to align more closely to average industrial earnings.
- 4 Affordable credit has to be available for first time buyers and those trading up.
- 5 The uncertainties concerning NAMA and its operation have to be dispelled, especially since it will be controlling a sizable share of property and land. This necessitates full transparency of the agency's workings and the assets it is managing.
- 6 Consumers have to be satisfied that the banking crisis is truly over and that financial institutions are properly regulated.
- 7 Substantive changes need to occur in the planning system to ensure that it works for the common good and produces sustainable development.

All in all a very gloomy analysis. And they add to the woes by pointing out that not all the empty housing is suitable for social housing even if the Social Housing Leasing Initiative delivers, which it has up until now conspicuously failed to do.

End of security of tenure in UK social housing

British Prime Minister David Cameron has announced an end to lifetime social housing tenancies and says he wants to see all new local authority and housing association tenancies to be for a fixed term, perhaps as short as five years. He argues that someone who is 'given a council home' may in five or 10 years time be better paid and therefore able 'to go into the private sector'.

It is clear that the superficial attractiveness of this proposal is that under this proposal you would hope to have fewer social rented tenants, and therefore shorter waiting lists, and more efficient allocation of scarce resources. But one obvious problem is that people might refuse well-paid work if they thought it would lead to their eviction. The other – potentially much bigger – problem, is that it would lead to the creation of large concentrations of low income marginalised people, which is bad for everyone, and something that most policy analysts would recognise as a seriously retrograde step.

The coalition partners are not enthusiastic. 'It is not a Liberal Democrat policy. It is not a coalition policy, it was not in the election manifesto of either party, it was not in the coalition agreement', said Liberal Democrat deputy leader Simon Hughes.

The housing and homelessness charity Shelter said that Cameron had 'sidestepped the fundamental cause of our housing crisis: the desperate lack of affordable housing supply'.

NEWS

European consensus

A process has been underway for some time that will culminate in a European Consensus Conference, to be held in Brussels on 9th and 10th December. The aim of the conference is to establish common understandings on fundamental questions about homelessness, in order to provide a basis for future policy progress. The 'consensus conference' model being used was developed in Denmark in the mid 1980s as a way of including lay people's views in issues of societal relevance. The conference will address six key questions:

- 1 What does homelessness mean?
- 2 'Ending Homelessness': A realistic goal?
- 3 Are housing led policy approaches the most effective methods of preventing and tackling homelessness?
- 4 How can meaningful participation of homeless people in the development of homelessness policies be assured?
- 5 To what extent should people be able to access homeless services irrespective of their legal status and citizenship?
- 6 What should be the elements of an EU strategy on homelessness?

Three experts will provide responses to each question, and an independent jury, comprising eminent academics will establish a consensus, which will be published as a report. Two pieces of research will help the jury: transnational consultation with people who have experience of homelessness, and a report setting out the state of knowledge on homelessness and homelessness policy in Europe.

This innovative idea is an initiative of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council, co-organised with the European Commission. FEANTSA (the European Federation of Organisations Working with the Homeless) is co-ordinating the process and the French Government is a key partner. Homelessness is one of the priorities for the Belgian Presidency within its social domain.

For more information, go to www.feantsa.org

New measures to protect people in mortgage arrears

New proposals on mortgage arrears announced by the Financial Regulator will make it more difficult for banks and building societies to repossess homes from households in arrears. People in arrears will be allowed to stay in their homes for longer than the current 12 month moratorium on repossessions. The new rules effectively mean that borrowers who are co-operating with their bank of building society will enjoy additional protection against repossession.

The consultation paper also states that people must not be required to change from cheaper tracker mortgages to a more expensive type of mortgage.

The proposals have been broadly welcomed, which is encouraging news. You can see them on financialregulator.ie.

Market update

The latest crop of Daft.ie's excellent reports show that rents in most areas have either levelled off or are falling at a slower rate than for a long time. Average rents fell by 0.9% during the second quarter of 2010, and are now 27% lower than peak levels.

But property prices are continuing to fall at a fairly steady rate and there's no sign of the market bottoming out yet. According to Daft.ie, asking prices fell by 4.2% during the second three months of this year, slightly more than during the first quarter. The averages asking price is now 36% below its 2007 peak, but in Dublin city centre prices have dropped by 50%.

See the reports at www.daft.ie/report

FEATURES



Kerry Anthony
is CEO of Depaul
Ireland

Reflections on reconfiguration

The reconfiguration of homeless services that has followed from the adoption of the *Pathway to Home* model is transforming the shape of homeless services. **Kerry Anthony** reflects on the process of reconfiguration from the perspective of a NGO that has been at the heart of the changes.

When asked to write a reflection on a process that is still underway, one feels cautious of putting pen to paper as the final outcome is still some way off, and some pieces of the jigsaw are still to be inserted. But here we are in September 2010 and the target we all agreed to, as part of the Homeless Agency Partnership, is looming in the very near future. Of course the landscape in Ireland has changed significantly since the time we pledged to see the end of long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by 2010. We have seen the crash of the housing market and cuts across the country in all walks of life. That said, remaining committed to this goal must continue to be our collective objective and we must pull together to try to make the most of the situation we find ourselves in.

My reflection on the process to date cannot be seen as neutral; as the chief executive of a homeless charity, I have a very specific view from a voluntary service provider's perspective, but I think it is imperative in this process that we all attempt to see one another's position, despite the challenges this may present. I have remained committed to this process, playing a role of active involvement within the Homeless Network. Like many others, I am now growing increasingly nervous about the ability to reach our target as access to housing, the lynch pin on which a *Pathway to Home* has been developed, does still not appear to be within our reach.

Role of the Homeless Network in the process

I have always been a believer in the merits of a partnership approach to service delivery, even when we recognise that within any partnership there can be an imbalance of power. Working on an all Ireland basis, I have had the opportunity to reflect on the role of the voluntary sector in both jurisdictions and the structures in place for consultation. Within this context the structure that we have in Dublin for the implementation of the *Pathway to Home* model can be seen as largely positive. Indeed the presence we have been able to secure on both the Board of the Homeless Agency (now the Dublin Consultative Forum) and on the Implementation Advisory Group that was set up to oversee implementation of *Pathway to Home* has allowed us to have an information flow between the Implementation Advisory Group and the network members and has provided some opportunity to influence the direction of travel. I believe that this was necessary and the leadership shown by the previous and current Chairs in this regard should be commended.

The Network has consulted widely on a series of issues associated with the reconfiguration and has taken a very active role in the many working groups that had been established as part of the implementation plan. There have of course been difficult times for the Network and its members but it is my sense that in terms of preparing ourselves for reconfiguration we have shown commitment to the process on the basis that we saw the overall plan as providing better outcomes for the people we work with. The incredible amount of work that we have done collectively as a Network is to be commended but in addition the work that has been done by individual organisations to prepare them for reconfiguration

should be in no way underestimated. The thought that has gone into remodelling services, the HR implications that have had to be considered, the increased communication required with staff and service users to ensure engagement in the process, the continued focus on delivering quality services to clients must be recognised. All this has all been managed in a very uncertain environment.

I believe one of the most critical achievements in this process was the agreement of the underlying principles of reconfiguration as this gave some grounding to the process and also some comfort to agencies that there would not be a dismantling of a system without certainty that the resources needed to deliver on the new plan were in place.

These principles included:

- A commitment to keep needs of service users at the centre of decision making
- A commitment to try to maintain the existing and valuable staff resources within the sector
- Where services are no longer necessary the partnership will work to re-orient the resulting resource to meet demand in other areas, statutory funding will only be reduced or withdrawn on the basis that housing, support and care needs of the service user are met.

(The full list of principles can be found on pg 5- 6 of the newly published map document)

It is imperative that these principles continue to be at the forefront of both statutory and voluntary providers' minds as we move forward and they should not be an area of compromise but should continue to underpin the next steps.

It is also my sense that as we move into the next phase of discussion on service level agreements and budgets we will see ourselves move from a position of consultation and partnership to one more akin to 'contractor' and 'commissioner' and inevitably we will see a shift in the roles of the partners involved. This does not however negate us working in partnership into the future to ensure the delivery of the Pathway model.

Collaboration within the voluntary sector

Despite the challenges collaborative working poses, the sector's ability to move forward in this way has been significant and should not be underestimated. At Depaul Ireland, we have had the experience of working with six other agencies. Firstly with HAIL, Sonas Housing and Sophia Housing in forming a consortium bid for the SLI tender and then with Dublin YMCA, the Vincentian Housing Partnership and Daisyhouse Housing Association, to look at working collaboratively in order to reconfigure these services to provide Supported Temporary Accommodation.

Another principle underpinning the process was that there would be a strong emphasis on collaborative or integrated working. Individual meetings were held with each provider as to how they would fit within the Pathway Model. For some this would mean significant reconfiguration of services and for others it would mean partnering with another agency, this was the case with regards to single service providers. Support was provided by the Homeless Agency to the Homeless Network to explore partnership working through facilitation with an independent person. My view is that this was a particularly difficult time for the Network as there was real uncertainty for the future – for some more than others - and very difficult decisions to be made by single service providers. During the process of negotiation with each organisation the Homeless Agency had requested that information was treated as confidential until all meetings were concluded. Naturally I can see the rationale from the Homeless Agency perspective on this but it generated some trepidation within the Network, as we did not have the overall picture at that stage and had to continue to move forward on the basis of trusting in the process.

Over the following months single service providers were requested to make decisions about their partner agencies and other providers worked internally in their organisations to prepare for the impact of reconfiguration on them. Depaul Ireland had been invited, along with other lead providers, to meet with some of the agencies who had to make this difficult decision. I believe that this innovative approach was an important part of the process for single service providers. It was imperative for them to be able to make a choice about whether they felt there would be a natural fit for them with their partner and also how any future relationship may work.

The key issue in any collaboration is that you cannot take a 'one size fits all' approach. There is learning in partnership working that can be applied in each setting but there are many models that can be explored. We are continuing to work closely with our partner agencies as we now move into the funding and service level agreements negotiations in order to ensure the best possible outcome for the services involved and ultimately the service users. People often say change is never easy and although it provides challenges, it certainly also provides opportunity and we have found in working with others, although difficult choices have had to be made, there is a real focus on seizing the opportunities to try to achieve better outcomes for our service users.



The role of the Homeless Agency

It would be remiss not to say something of the role of the Homeless Agency who have been leading and driving this process. I think there has been a genuine commitment to engage with the sector and to implement the plan. The role that the Homeless Agency plays in brokering the relationships with the voluntary and statutory providers at a strategic level and with regards to funding is not without its challenges.

The amalgamation of the Homeless Agency with three other organisations that will make up the new Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency has raised more questions in my mind about our 'new system'. We know that the consultative forum will be in place but there is growing concern that should the housing stock not come into play and there is a slippage in the implementation time scales, how will this be monitored, reviewed and repositioned? There has always been an understanding that the implementation of the plan would need to happen on an incremental basis and the role that the Homeless Agency has played in this to date in managing this process has been significant.

The absence of the Homeless Agency looking forward raises a number of questions, including:

- How will data on homelessness be monitored, including the new LINK system, and the Holistic Needs Assessment information?
- Who will have responsibility for introducing and monitoring quality standards?
- Will we have different service level agreements with the HSE and the local authorities moving in to the future? How will this be co-ordinated in the joint commissioning of services?
- How will the ongoing implementation of the *Pathway to Home* be monitored post 2010?

Not without challenges the Homeless Agency has played a key role as a bridge between the voluntary and the statutory sector. Service delivery and standards have hugely improved over the last ten years and it is vital that we protect the progress that has been made.

Access to Housing

I accept that the current system of homeless services could and should be improved, thus my commitment to date to the *Pathway to Home*. However, one must urge caution that dismantling any system without having the infrastructure in place to ensure the new one will be effective, cannot be successful. This is where the continual need to secure housing comes into play and our ongoing re-enforcement of the underlying principles of the process, particularly that no service should be decommissioned unless there is an alternative place for the service users to go.

As we all know, 1200 units of housing are needed in Dublin by the end of 2010 to enable us to proceed with reconfiguration of other services in order to deliver on the overall plan. However, to date very few units have been secured, despite a great deal of work being done by local authorities and housing associations. There are many reasons for this and I will leave it to others more qualified than me to explain these. We have always known, because this is not a new problem, that access to housing in order to free up beds is the only way we can work collectively towards success in our delivery of this plan. We cannot underestimate the impact that the failure to achieve access to housing will have on meeting our target and reconfiguring our services – the success of the *Pathway to Home* has always relied on the ability to deliver housing and provide homes for our services users.

Funding

This brings me to the final reflection – funding. Throughout this process we have been warned that there is **no new money** available to the sector. There was a commitment at the outset of this plan that there would be an effort to try to maintain the current funding to ensure the successful implementation. The protection of the DOE budget in this year is to be commended, but the voluntary sector providers have already received a cut of between 5.5 – 6% on services by the HSE. There is an understanding that we are facing into a challenging financial climate and we all have to ensure that we are making the very best of our resources. Living with capped and then cut funding has ensured that the voluntary sector has taken a long hard look at how they are managing their resources. Speaking for my own organisation I know the work that we have done over the last 18 months to ensure efficiencies on non salary costs has been extensive and in reality there is no scope to take this further. In addition I am aware that other organisations have had to take difficult decisions with regards to their employees.

In entering into this process there was an understanding that the implementation of this plan would be a sector wide approach with all organisations working with people who are homeless being affected in some way. The hope is that by providing housing we will be able to move people who do not need to live in 'homeless services' into housing with appropriate supports in place if needed which would be a better use of resources as well as improved outcomes for homeless people. By achieving this we would then be able to reduce the number of emergency beds in the sector, and ensure that those we had in place would be resourced to work with people presenting with complex needs. This would mean in practice that some services would be decommissioned and others would be asked to reconfigure to deliver a different type of service. This would allow some redistribution of current finances to ensure that future services will be properly resourced. In particular, a reduction in the number of private emergency accommodation beds would allow significant financial resources to be directed to these services. However, this can only occur if enough housing becomes available, and delays in the supply of housing mean that resources have not yet been freed up in the way that we thought they would be.

The new map refers to adequate funding of services and again this raises an issue in my mind as to what is the definition of adequate funding? If all the money that is currently in the homeless services system is used creatively and if all the current resources are considered as 'one pot' we should be able to deliver on the plan. Also the restrictive nature of the budgetary process in terms of funders

responsibilities for particular areas can at times feel stifling, particularly with regards to job descriptions. Whilst it is welcomed that there is a commitment from both DOE and the HSE to the funding of homeless services, as this allows for the housing support and care element of service provision, a more flexible approach based on the overall need of each service requirement would be welcomed into the future.

If it is true that we are looking into a year of substantial funding cuts, we do need to ask the question – will we be able to achieve all we had planned? Can services do more with less? Will we be forced to revisit our priority areas?

Conclusion

Let me reiterate again my commitment to the *Pathway to Home* as the model that we should be striving to implement. As outlined, I believe that the Homeless Network has shown great commitment to this process. It is important to note, particularly in the present financial climate, that the voluntary sector continues to provide ever better quality services and value for money. Service quality has improved hugely in recent years, and there is a much clearer shared focus on getting people out of homelessness rather than managing homelessness.

We know the agreed model is a sensible approach to addressing homelessness and the provision of housing a critical component of this. It is important to remember that many studies have shown that people in stable housing are much less likely to use A+E hospital services or to go to prison than people in emergency homeless accommodation, so moving people into stable housing is not only better for them but has wider positive budgetary impact. It is essential that we have properly resourced 'homeless services' to support people in a crisis, who more often than not are those presenting with the most complex needs. In order to achieve this, there must be an acceptance that these services are properly resourced.

If the original target is not achieved within 2010, I believe that it is still the right target and we shouldn't lose sight of it. We must remain focused with a clear strategic direction. With determination and a genuine commitment by all stakeholders, and with adequate resources, especially in relation to housing, there is no reason why it cannot be achieved soon after that date.

FEATURES



Cathal Morgan
is director of the
Homeless Agency

Pathway to Home simplifying the journey

Cathal Morgan gives the latest update on implementation of *Pathway to Home*, including a detailed map of service provision, and sets out the next steps.

The aim of this feature is to keep you up-to-date on the changes that will be taking place in homeless services over the forthcoming months as a result of reconfiguration and the implementation of a *Pathway to Home*. At this point you are probably quite familiar with the detail outlined in the strategy, but just to reiterate; central to a *Pathway to Home* is the need for access to long-term housing options and the reconfiguration of homeless services in order to simplify and speed up the journey and to support people to exit homelessness and live independently as soon as possible.

A *Pathway to Home* is taking longer to implement than initially planned due to critical issues such as access to housing and also the wider impact of the recession on presentations to emergency homeless services. Remaining cognisant of this, the aim and direction of a *Pathway to Home* is still the planned and agreed way forward in terms of the provision of homeless services in Dublin and it is important to stay committed to the strategy, bringing about positive changes in how homeless services are delivered and to keeping the focus on access to housing in all its forms

Access to housing is the most significant and concerning challenge in relation to the implementation of a *Pathway to Home* and urgently needs to be resolved. The core changes that need to take place in the provision homeless services are contingent on housing becoming available, with particular regard to the attainment of 1200 housing units under the enhanced leasing scheme. Utilising the range

of housing procurement schemes put in place by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the four Dublin local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, Irish Council for Social Housing and the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency have combined efforts to aggressively secure suitable properties but are encountering a market non-response. As a consequence of this, there are not sufficient, suitable long-term accommodation options in place at this time.

A very recent agreement has taken place between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) to enable the four Dublin authorities and voluntary housing bodies to directly purchase housing, we are awaiting confirmation in relation to the detail of this and remain encouraged and focused on the objective of a *Pathway to Home* and must ensure that we keep working together to implement the strategy.

Mapping Of Homeless Services In Dublin In 2010

To provide an overview of the changes that are taking place, it is important to understand the range of support services that are outlined in the *Pathway to Home* model.¹

¹ *Pathway to Home - The Pathway to Home model portfolio: summary outline detail of prevention services, temporary accommodation and services, housing and housing support services is outlined on page 35 of a Pathway to Home.*

The following detail provides an overview of services to be provided; in addition the detail refers to significant organisational changes as a result of the reconfiguration process.

A Prevention –interventions and services that prevent homelessness- 5 core elements

A1 and A:2 Local Authority Homeless Helpline and Local Authority Housing Service	A:3 Community Welfare Service	A:4 Regional Contact and Outreach Team	A: 5 Homeless Prevention Services	
<p>Reconfigured Service Provided</p> <p>The four Dublin local authorities will each offer a contact and assessment service for those presenting as homeless.</p> <p>In the Dublin region there will also be a 24 hour Homeless Helpline and Bed Management System.</p>	<p>Reconfigured Service Provided</p> <p>The <i>Pathway to Home</i> model recognises the need to maintain and enhance the welfare and income maintenance competency as part of the core functions of the Community Welfare Officers aligned to the Homeless Persons Unit.</p>	<p>Reconfigured Service Provided</p> <p>A Regional Contact and Outreach Service is being established to work across the four Dublin local authorities.</p>	<p>Reconfigured Service Provided</p> <p>One of the preventative functions of a <i>Pathway to Home</i> is Day Service provision, which is recognised as a vital frontline role in engaging with and providing services to rough sleepers and other target groups that may not access the accommodation services or other mainstream statutory services.</p> <p>Reconfiguration of day services will ensure that services are coordinated in terms of maximising accessibility, level of cover, opening hours and minimising duplication of service, particularly in the city centre area.</p>	<p>Reconfigured Service Provided</p> <p>Prevention Services include independent housing information, advice, advocacy and brokerage services that work to divert people who are at risk of homelessness away from emergency accommodation.</p> <p>In addition, through advice and information they reduce the time people spend in temporary accommodation and assist with securing longer-term tenancies.</p>
<p>Operational Change</p> <p>All four local authorities have established teams in each of their respective areas for the management of the Assessment and Placement function and the Helpline and Bed Management System.</p>	<p>Operational Change</p> <p>The role of the enhanced Community Welfare Service (CWS) will be reconfigured to provide a diversion from entry into temporary accommodation and towards accessible private rented housing. The intention here would be that the enhanced CWS would work closely with the Local Authority Housing Service to deliver a local registration, referral, placement and welfare advice for people who are presenting as homeless with a particular focus on Prison and Hospital in-reach.</p>	<p>Operational Change</p> <p>The service will take an assertive approach targeting all rough sleepers with specific focus on those who are entrenched rough sleepers or at risk of entrenchment. The service will work as an integral element of the Local Authority Housing Service and will link with specialist homeless psychiatric teams of the HSE where mental health issues are of concern.</p>	<p>Operational Change</p> <p>Extended hours of provision will be provided in the Dublin City Council area and localisation of provision throughout the Dublin local authorities.</p>	<p>Organisational Change</p> <p>An enhanced preventative role will be provided through each of the four Dublin local authorities, given the specific expertise established and necessary, it will be required that additional tenancy sustainment resource from existing NGO provision be made available</p>

A1 and A:2 Local Authority Homeless Helpline and Local Authority Housing Service	A:3 Community Welfare Service	A:4 Regional Contact and Outreach Team	A: 5 Homeless Prevention Services	
	<p>Organisational Change</p> <p>Currently, negotiations are taking place between the HPU, (CWS), HSE and the Department of Social Protection (DoSP) on the wider issue of the transfer of core functions of the CWS back to the DoSP. The HSE are liaising with the DoSP to progress the enhanced function of the CWS and will also work collaboratively with the local authority.</p>	<p>Organisational Change</p> <p>As part of the reconfiguration, there will be a consolidation of the existing outreach provision into a collaborative partnership between two existing service providers, namely Dublin Simon and Focus Ireland.</p>	<p>Organisational Change</p> <p>Preventative and tenancy sustainment services under the new configuration will be provided to Dun Laoighaire/ Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council specifically to assist current social housing tenants at risk of losing their tenancy.</p> <p>In the Dublin City Council (DCC) area, the existing Welfare Team will provide tenancy sustainment to existing DCC tenants.</p> <p>Merchants Quay Ireland and Focus Ireland will provide extended hours for day services at the Focus Ireland coffee shop on Eustace Street.</p> <p>Day Service provision in Dublin city and county will be provided by Crosscare, Focus Ireland, Merchants Quay Ireland and the Capuchin Day Centre on an agreed basis.</p>	<p>Organisational Change</p> <p>In addition to its existing services, Threshold will have an enhanced role and provide assistance and support in partnership with the four local authorities to the providers of Temporary Accommodation (STA and TEA)</p> <p>Dublin City Council Area Dublin City Council Welfare Service, Threshold, Access Housing Unit.</p> <p>Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown Area Threshold, Access Housing Unit, Focus Ireland and Dublin Simon.</p> <p>Fingal Area Threshold, Access Housing Unit, Focus Ireland and Dublin Simon.</p> <p>South Dublin Area Threshold, Access Housing Unit, Focus Ireland, Community Settlement Service and Dublin Simon Re-Settlement Service.</p>

B Temporary Emergency Accommodation and Services – 4 core elements

B1 and B2: Local Authority Housing Service	B3: Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA)	B4: Temporary Accommodation (TA)
<p>The detail in relation to this is outlined in A1 and A2.</p>	<p>(STA) refers to the provision of accommodation and programmatic activities appropriate for persons who have more specialised health, care and support needs or complex needs including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with needs related to mental ill health and drug / alcohol dependency • Persons and dependents fleeing domestic violence • Ex offenders • Persons leaving institutional care • Young persons leaving care • All STA's will all be delivered on the basis of being accessible as 'low threshold' and working with the following groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singles/ Couples • Families • Young People • Gendered focussed accommodation – specifically women fleeing sexual/ domestic based violence 	<p>(TA) refers to provision of fit for purpose accommodation appropriate for persons with either low to no support needs, that is, those that primarily have a housing need and do not require any 'programme type supports'</p> <p>Under the <i>Pathway to Home</i> model, the four Dublin local authorities will work to ensure appropriate quantity of temporary accommodation to meet the needs of the city and county area and that existing resources would be redirected from the current oversupply of emergency accommodation in the city council area to localising same in the other county areas.</p>
	<p>Operational/Organisational Change</p> <p>The following STA will be established in each local authority area, some in existing facilities and other in alternative facilities:</p> <p>Dublin City Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crosscare - Haven House • Salvation Army - Granby Centre and York House • Dublin Simon – Ushers Island • Dublin Simon Harcourt Street Hostel- alternative facility • Peter Mc Verry Trust – Whitwort Road • Focus Ireland – Georges Hill and Aylward Green <p>Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depaul Ireland in Partnership with Rendu, Daisyhouse and YMCA - Aungier Street, Emor Street/ SCR and Rendu Apartments • Crosscare – Bentley Villas <p>Fingal County Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Mc Verry - Ravenswood • Peter Mc Verry - Avoca <p>South Dublin County Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novas- Tallaght • Novas – Clondalkin <p>A number of organisational changes in terms of forming collaborative ventures are in development which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The YMCA and Depaul Ireland (lead service provider) will deliver STA in Dublin city and non homeless funded YCMA programmes continue to operate as normal and to the same quality standard. • Daisyhouse Housing Association and Depaul Ireland (lead service provider) will work to deliver STA in Dublin city. • Rendu and Depaul Ireland (lead service provider) are in negotiation to deliver STA in the Dublin area. 	<p>Operational/Organisational Change</p> <p>The three local authorities Fingal, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council and South Dublin County Council are in the process of establishing TA within their local area to ensure the need for those with low to no support can be accommodated, whilst Dublin City Council has ringfenced a proportion of its required TA units for this purpose.</p> <p>In terms of private emergency accommodation, it was agreed in the <i>Pathway to Home</i> model that the use of private emergency accommodation would be residualised over time and where possible Dublin City Council would work to secure these properties on a long-term basis in order to offer current residents secure tenancies.</p> <p>To date, Dublin City Council has decommissioned a total of 362 private emergency beds that were no longer required within the homeless system. Acknowledging the dynamic nature of homelessness, the city council are monitoring closely the need for adequate bed capacity in the system.</p>

C Housing and Housing Support Services – 2 core elements

C1: Local Authority Housing Service	C2: Dublin Regional Support System in the context of housing	
<p>The detail in relation to this is outlined in A1 and A2</p>	<p>Category 1 – Permanent on-site housing support function & Category 2 – Semi-permanent on-site housing support function</p> <p>The analysis of need for housing support demonstrates that a small proportion of homeless households may never be able to live independently (19%), therefore requiring support and care in an onsite capacity.</p> <p>Existing provision will conform to provide for this group of people as follows:</p> <p>Category 1 – Permanent on-site housing support function</p> <p>Dublin City Council area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIDS Fund, Talbot House • AIDS Fund, Granby Lane • DCC Oak House • Dublin Simon* Alternative • Facilities • Dublin Simon, Dorset Street • Salvation Army, Granby Centre • DCC Maple House • Focus Ireland, Stanhope Green • Focus Ireland, George’s Hill • Sisters of Our Lady, Beechlawn • Depaul Ireland, Sundial/Orchid • House • Depaul Ireland, BackLane • Sophia, Cork Street • Dublin Simon, Canal Road • Salvation Army, York House • Sonas, Ringsend <p>* A replacement for Dublin Simon NCR and Harcourt Street is currently underway.</p> <p>South Dublin County Council area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sonas, Clondalkin <p>Category 2 – Semi-permanent on-site housing support function</p> <p>Dublin City Council area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sonas, Killester • Sophia (various locations) <p>Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophia, Camberley <p>Fingal County Council area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophia, Donabate <p>South Dublin County Council area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophia, Tallaght • All four local authority areas • HAIL Housing (various locations) 	<p>Category 3 – Visiting housing support function (specialist crisis intervention) & Category 4 – Visiting housing support function (generic)</p> <p>The analysis of need shows that approximately 52% of Dublin’s homeless population require some level of visiting support. In terms of providing long-term housing with supports, the DeHLG launched the Support to Live Independently (SLI) scheme in 2009 to assist people to move out of homelessness and into independent living.</p> <p>In addition to the above, the analysis of need also indicates the need for a specialist form of visiting support for a smaller group of people, where mental health and domestic violence is concerned to be made available on a regional basis.</p> <p>The reconfiguration of services whereby specialist competencies can be offered by specialist providers such as Sonas and HAIL Housing Association will be made available across the Dublin region.</p> <p>All four Dublin Local Authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic-SLI – Dublin Simon • Specialist – HAIL (Mental Health) • Sonas (Domestic Violence)

Next Steps

The next steps in this process are for the statutory funders, with assistance from the Homeless Agency, to enter into formal negotiations with service providers in order to re-appraise the funding required for the delivery of the services detailed in this document. This will involve a co-ordinated approach with both the Local Authorities and the HSE establishing implementation teams for the purpose of same. As mandated under the homeless provisions of the Housing (Misc) Act 2009, the statutory agencies are responsible for agreeing funding in accordance with National Homeless Policy, *The Way Home* and maximising the resources available given the current economic constraints. All statutory funding will be subject to a re-appraisal of funding requirements based on the principled agreement of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) reached between service providers. We need to maximise resources and ensure that efficiencies are made is of fundamental importance - especially in this time of economic uncertainty. Notwithstanding the commitment to ensure adequate funding, this will be a key factor as part of the funding appraisal process and the partnership is ultimately reliant on adequate funding being available from central government.

Please contact the Communications and Information Team in the Homeless Agency on 01 7036100 or homeless@dublincity.ie if you require any further detail on the above. Please log onto www.homelessagency.ie to download the comprehensive document outlining the new configuration of homeless services *Pathway to Home – New Configuration of Homeless Services in Dublin 2010*

A very recent agreement has taken place between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) to enable the four Dublin authorities and voluntary housing bodies to directly purchase housing

FEATURES

To make this article more accessible, the references have been deleted, but if you'd like to know the sources for all the assertions please contact Austin O'Carroll at austinoc@hotmail.com

Care in the community works!

Austin O'Carroll and **Kieran Harkin** describe a successful specialised health service that delivers methadone maintenance to homeless people in the community.

Homeless people's health is much worse than the health of the housed population.

Homeless people have mortality rates 3½ to 4 times greater than the housed population; they have higher morbidity from physical conditions that are common as well as conditions that are rarely found in the general population such as HIV, Hepatitis and Tuberculosis. Homeless people have expressed a clear preference for having specialised-services over mainstream-services and the use of specialised-services has been shown to improve access to health-care and decrease the burden on secondary-care services. In the UK, the Acheson Report advocated the development of specialised primary care teams to address the lack of access for homeless people to GPs.

In 2002, Safetynet was established to provide primary health care services to homeless people in hostels and days centres at ten sites in Dublin and two in Cork. Since its inception, Safetynet has expanded rapidly; in 2009, Safetynet members conducted a total of just over 11,000 consultations, made up of 6527 nurse consultations and 4485 doctor consultations.

Rates of Blood Borne Infectious Diseases Irish Homeless People in Comparison with General Population.

(Copyright Dr Austin O Carroll)

One in three has Hepatitis C.
(versus 1/10,000 in the general population)

One in twenty have Hepatitis B.
(versus <1/50 in the general population)

One in twenty has HIV.
(Versus 1/666 in the general population)

In 2007, Dr Kieran Harkin, Nurse Carol Murphy and Dr Austin O Carroll in cooperation with Dr Eamonn Keenan and Dr Brion Sweeney of the HSE addiction services initiated a specialised service for delivering methadone maintenance to homeless people. It is recognised that a vicious circle exists where homelessness causes addiction and addiction causes homelessness. Homeless people have high rates of illicit-drug use (between 52.4% and 78.3% internationally and estimates of one in three Dublin based homeless people having a current drug problem). Poly-drug use is rampant especially the use of cocaine and heroin. As a result of the drug addiction and chaotic lifestyle they are prone to developing blood borne infectious diseases.

This programme was developed in reaction to the following factors:

- The high level of untreated heroin users resident in the Hostel Services where these doctors and nurses worked (it was estimated in 2007 that between 60 and 80% of the residents in these hostels were actively using heroin).
- Most of the serious medical problems presenting in the Safetynet clinics were directly caused by untreated drug use.
- Key workers in these hostels were finding it difficult to place residents who had untreated heroin addictions in long-term accommodation (so confirming the homelessness causes addiction / addiction causes homelessness spiral).

- Lastly, as residents maintained they could not obtain treatment elsewhere either due to long waiting lists or discomfort with the clientele at other treatment centres. Delays in accessing a methadone programme at a time where some stability has been provided through the provision of accommodation is an opportunity lost for vulnerable people such as intravenous heroin users.

Criteria (see table 1) were developed so as to define who would be suitable for treatment in the community, the most pertinent consideration being whether the client would consistently have good behaviour while attending for methadone dispensing in the local community pharmacies.

Table 1. Criteria for admission to the programme
An established heroin addiction (according to ICGP guidelines)
Have a long-term bed (3 months) in emergency homeless accommodation with a key worker.
Over 18 years of age.
Behaviour consistent with that required by a dispensing community pharmacist e.g. no alcohol problems and absence of aggressive behaviour

The pilot programme provided for the treatment of 10 untreated heroin users in the North and South sides of the city using guidelines congruent with the Methadone Protocol. It proved to be highly effective. Fiona O Reilly and Carol Murphy conducted an evaluation of the programme in the Harcourt Street hostel which demonstrated that the Methadone Protocol objective of reducing or stopping heroin use among programme participants was achieved as well as displaying improvements in health status and social functioning including:

- A reduction in the number of medical complications, including abscesses and skin infections that are associated with a decrease in injecting drug use.
- A reduction in the number of residents evicted from the hostel for unsafe drug use. Patients also demonstrated an increased ability to move on to more permanent accommodation.
- Improvements in participation in non-medical stabilisation programmes.
- Increased contact by patients with their families.
- Reduction in resident’s involvement in crime, a consequence of reducing or stopping illicit drug use.
- Some residents have re-engaged with education, a key element in the rehabilitation process.
- Improved relationships in hostels between staff and patients, with hostel staff reporting that patients ‘talk about the positive value of getting prescribed methadone which they say ‘holds’ them and largely reduces if not eliminates the desire to use heroin’.

As a result of this evaluation the Safetynet and HSE members of the pilot programme oversaw an increase in numbers of patients of to between 15 and 20 patients treated on both the North and South side of the cities. Simultaneously, Dr Don Coffey commenced treating homeless drug users in Cork hostels. In total Safetynet members commenced 80 homeless clients on methadone treatment in 2009. (See Table 2)

The Programme demonstrates the important role of addiction treatment in moving clients towards stable accommodation and the importance of accommodation provision in treating addiction

Table 2: Number of patients who received methadone maintenance treatment in their homeless accommodation in 2009

Homeless Accommodation	Number of methadone maintenance patients in 2009	General Practitioner
Harcourt Street Hostel (Dublin Simon)	34	Dr Kieran Harkin
Maple House/ Beech House (Dublin City Council)	14	Dr Austin O'Carroll
Cedar House (Salvation Army)	20	Dr Austin O'Carroll
Cork Simon Hostel	10	Dr Don Coffey
St Vincent de Paul Hostel (Cork)	2	Dr Don Coffey
Total	80	

Fiona O'Reilly and Carol Murphy reviewed the Safetynet methadone programme running in the Dublin hostels in terms of its impact on patients' drug use and homeless status. This evaluation also assessed the service users' views of the programme. This report which is due out in late 2010 has found that the Safetynet methadone programme has provided access to methadone for a very vulnerable group who otherwise would not have accessed a programme at least in the short-term. The impact of methadone provision is dramatic as seen both in the change in drug use, change in accommodation status and in the descriptions of everyday life. It further concluded that "the programme demonstrates the important role of addiction treatment in moving clients towards stable accommodation and the importance of accommodation provision in treating addiction" This is consistent with the evidence that specialised services, (where health services are provided at frontline accommodation or drop in services for homeless people); improve accessibility for homeless people. Rather than being in competition, specialised services enhance mainstream services.

In one sense the term 'specialised' does a disservice to the service it describes. Health practitioners always adapt their services to the needs to the local community. For example, in South County Dublin this means running clinics at unsociable hours. Though these are outside the normal working parameters they are not called specialised but rather 'patient friendly' services. So what we should be aiming for is to provide is not 'specialised' but 'patient friendly' services to homeless people.

An important finding of the first review was that pharmacies were very happy with the running of the programme and wished to continue dispensing methadone to homeless patients. All the original pharmacies still continue to work enthusiastically with the treatment programme. This continued collaboration with the pharmacies goes to the heart of the two alternative social constructions of homeless drug users. One construction views them as dangerous and unpredictable sociopaths who need to be tightly controlled, monitored and kept separate from the public. The other perspective is of them as disenfranchised, distrusting, angry and hurt people who need to be befriended, cared for and engaged into society. We now can say unequivocally that homeless people can be treated effectively and safely within the community.

The Safetynet methadone treatment programme has demonstrated that specialised services are an effective adjunct to mainstream services that increase accessibility to treatment and enable homeless drug users to be safely, effectively, and humanely treated in a their accommodation within the community.

It also provides an example of the way repeated evaluations can aid the development of new service initiatives by enabling the improvement of the initiative through implementation of recommendations, and by the promotion of the programme's value through dissemination of the findings.

The reconfiguration of homeless services that is currently underway includes establishing Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA), which is low threshold emergency accommodation for people with high needs. Based on the success of the Safetynet methadone programme, Safetynet is calling for a visiting doctor and nurse, linked in with Safetynet to be attached to all STAs, to provide general medical care and specialist methadone treatment for residents. This will help to ensure that homeless people with heroin addiction problems can work on regaining a home without being sucked back on to the streets searching for a heroin fix.

FEATURES



Peter Dorman, is a community worker with Community Action Network

Dolphin House: a denial of residents' rights?

In May this year, residents of Dolphin House challenged the Department of the Environment to vindicate their Right to Adequate Housing as defined under the Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights, at a public hearing. This is the first time in the Republic of Ireland that a local community has used their solemn right to adequate housing to address poor housing conditions. **Peter Dorman** reports.

Dolphin House is Dublin's second largest remaining public housing flat complex. Built in 1957, it sits on 18.5 acres and comprises 436 homes (made up of 392 flats in 6 blocks and 44 senior citizen units). Many of the flats are substandard in terms of size, private open space, energy efficiency and accessibility. The estate has very poor physical design with a lot of unusable open space and only one way in and one way out, inadequate play facilities for children and young people while the senior citizen housing is made up of one room bedsits. There is a foul waste-water smell and waste water coming back up into sinks and baths in some flats, problems of dampness and overcrowding where children are sharing a bedroom with a parent in some flats.

Dolphin has been ear-marked for regeneration, to which Dublin City Council says it remains committed, but in the present economic climate, nobody is under any illusion that this could be years away. In the meantime, a new generation will grow up in these appalling conditions.

It was in this context that CAN (Community Action Network) proposed taking a Human Rights based community development approach to tackling these urgent issues. CAN is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1987, which is

based on principles of justice, participation and equality. Through community development, CAN supports people and communities to participate fully in society, to have their voices heard and their choices respected. CAN had already many years of involvement in supporting community work in Dolphin.

CAN established the Rialto Rights in Action Group, a coalition of residents and community workers dedicated to securing health and housing rights for all people of Rialto. Its first project was to address the housing conditions in Dolphin House.

The Human Rights Approach was inspired by the work of the Participation and Practice of Rights Project in Belfast, which had used the process to campaign with a significant degree of success in the Seven Towers complex in North Belfast.

The foundation of the process is the following realities: There are international covenants to which the Irish State is a party which afford every citizen basic human rights. These include a set of rights known as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, under which the Right to Adequate Housing is guaranteed.

“The dampness is in the little girl’s room. It started at the back of the edge of the skirting board and worked its way right up to the top, up to the ceiling. It’s all over the windows as well. Then I noticed, a few years back, it started in the bathroom. It grew and grew and grew. I’ve painted it, and done everything with it. It’s just so severe.”

“It’s every where. All the rooms. The bedrooms more so. It’s all around the beds. The walls are soaking wet. The walls are literally black. I have to wash them down with bleach and its back a couple of weeks later. The vents are all open anyway. There is nothing I’m doing wrong. I don’t dry clothes in the bedrooms. It’s in the walls. It’s black and furry and disgusting to look at.”

“I have massive problems with sewerage from the time I moved into the flat. I’m eight years living in the flat and have had numerous amounts of work done and there is still no success with it at all. The smell and the fumes that come out of the sewerage through my bathroom and when I use the washing machine, is unbelievable.”

“The sewerage that come up through my hand basin in my bathroom, my sink –black, all the black stuff coming up. It came out on to my floors. Human faeces or whatever faeces was in it The smell of it in my toilet coming up through my bath, my hand basin. Since then to be honest with you I’ve been at the doctor with stomach bugs and bacterial infections and its costing me a fortune, out of my own pocket to go to the doctor and I guarantee you if you pull my sink out in my kitchen there is still human faeces behind it because the smell of crap and everything else that’s in my flat is unbelievable.”

“The bath – it (sewerage) gurgles, it comes up a couple of inches. I have to put my plug in every night and I have a big heavy candle I put over it. If the kids are in the bath, well as soon as we hear that gurgle, I have to drag them out of the bath because it will come up in on top of them and you don’t know what’s coming up.”

Residents speaking at the Human Rights Housing Hearing, Dolphin House May 2010

A Committee established to elaborate on these Rights has detailed what the Right to Adequate Housing actually means. It includes, for example “Adequate housing must be habitable, in terms of providing the inhabitants with adequate space and protecting them from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards, and disease vectors” (General Comment 9 UNCESCR) which is obviously inconsistent with damp, mould and sewerage invasion.

The Covenant further identifies the highest responsible minister as a Duty-Bearer who is obligated to respect, protect and fulfil these rights for citizens.

The covenant also talks about the principle of Progressive Realisation, under which peoples’ lives should be progressively improving over a reasonable period of time up to the standard of their rights, not standing still or disimproving.

CAN sought and received support from The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for the work. Residents and their allies were invited to participate in a training programme on Human Rights. As part of the training, links were made between local housing issues and the Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. The training grew into a campaign to call the duty bearers to account for the appalling violation of rights that many residents experienced.



The campaign had a number of steps.

Firstly, evidence was gathered of serious violations of human rights standards for adequate housing. This evidence consisted of door-to-door surveys recording the experience of residents, videoed testimonies, sampling spores of mould present in the units, and photographic documentation of sewerage and dampness.

Secondly, residents set indicators of progress towards the human rights standard. In other words, they put forward reasonable expectations of a progressive improvement in their conditions a twelve month period. Eight indicators were set; here is one example.

Indicator 1	
Number of residents surveyed reporting dampness	
Benchmark May 2010	72%
+4 months September 10	55%
+8 months January 11	30%
+12 months May 11	0%

This means that residents believe it is reasonable to expect that by May 2011 all dampness problems should have been remedied.

Thirdly, the holding of the public hearing at which the evidence was put forward to the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC), leading academics in the field of human rights and housing, public representatives and the media. The Hearing took place on May 25th this year and at it, the IHRC president Dr. Maurice Manning, supported by the academics on the panel, said that these conditions clearly contravene the rights of residents under the United Nations Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, to which Ireland is a signatory. They further concluded that it is the responsibility of the Duty Bearer (the relevant minister) to vindicate the progressive realization of these rights. Media coverage of the event was extensive.

Fourthly, at the hearing, the residents also launched indicators, in line with the principle of progressive realisation. These timed measures of progress towards the Human Rights Standard, which the residents said they intended to monitor over the coming twelve months were endorsed by the panel (including the IHRC) as more than reasonable given the long history of sub-standard conditions in the complex.

Fifthly, following on from the hearing, a monitoring process was set up, whereby the progress or lack of it on the issues will be monitored and the results of the monitoring made



available to the public and the duty bearers. In this way, the community continues to call the duty bearers to account on their derogation of duty.

While there has as yet been poor engagement from the duty-bearer, the Department of the Environment, the effect of the campaign has certainly focused the attention of Dublin City Council on the problem, and some efforts are being made to pilot solutions to the damp problems. The first monitoring report will be launched on the fifth of October next.

It is early days to assess the impact of this campaign. However, it does already show the potential for a human rights based approach in a number of respects.

While Economic Social and Cultural Rights cannot be vindicated in a court, they are clear and unanswerable. Lack of resources is clearly not an acceptable excuse under the conventions, especially in an unequal society. The state is left with the choice of acting, or standing exposed as a violator of human rights.

The process is psychologically empowering. People report feeling strength in knowing that they are asserting rights, rather than asking for favours for which they are often made feel unworthy.

Often in community work, local people and their allies are left fighting for resources from lowly officials at a local level. The Human Rights approach bypasses this and puts the responsibility clearly on the duty bearer the highest responsible minister, where the power to act usually resides.

The work highlights the potential of a vision of a society based on a human rights standard. The more people articulate that and the more the Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights is evoked in campaigns, the more traction such a vision may attain.

Look up the International Covenant at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>



Dr Eoin O'Sullivan,
a senior lecturer
in social policy in
Trinity College

Eoin O'Sullivan

Dr Eoin O'Sullivan, a senior lecturer in social policy in Trinity College, has been involved with Feantsa (the European Federation of National Organisations Representing the Homeless) since its inception at an NGO-organised seminar in Cork in 1985. Outside academia and homeless circles, Eoin is perhaps best known for his contribution to the notable States of Fear documentary, which was seminal in highlighting institutional child abuse issues in Ireland. CornerStone met Eoin in his office in Trinity to hear an academic perspective on Ireland's progress in tackling homelessness.

Tell us about the European Observatory and Feantsa?

In 1991, Feantsa established the European Observatory on Homelessness to get a uniform measurement of homelessness across Europe and to look at models of best practice. The European Journal of Homelessness was launched in 2007. At the Observatory, we have a symbiotic relationship with Feantsa. We agree the programme of research with Feantsa and Feantsa fund us via the European Commission, but the editorial team of the Observatory is academically independent.

Our history can be seen as three phases. At first the observers were all NGO advocates and our early reports made slightly outlandish claims on the extent of homelessness and the need for more services, but these were without scientific basis. In our second phase, we moved to a much more academic level. We looked at homelessness as a housing rights issue and we focused on the housing market and the degree that it shaped the pattern of homelessness in different European countries. Our third phase from 1999 continued that themed approach. We looked at topics like women and homelessness, homelessness and migration, homelessness and support in housing, and homelessness and services. Each member state would write their report and a summary was produced.

Is trans-European comparison possible?

We needed a consistent measurement of homelessness across European countries. Feantsa came up with the Ethos typology, which has sixteen categories of homelessness. As a system it's robust and consistent. We are now on our sixth statistical review of homelessness in Europe. It is complicated as Europe grew from twelve to twenty-five member states, and it's clear that homelessness in southern and eastern Europe is different from homelessness in northern, western and central Europe. Also there are different levels of data in different countries – some have city level data, some national level; some have stock data, others flow data. But our 'Ethos' definitions are easy to adapt and increasingly countries are accepting it as a typology of homelessness.

So it's all going well?

Our chief failure across Europe is that we don't have decent longitudinal data. Cross-section or sampling methodology give a very distorted picture - with these snapshot surveys you just get the demographics and disabilities. From that comes a skewed picture of homelessness, based on the mistaken assumption that a lot of homeless people are always drunk or in and out of prison, when in fact that's only a tiny proportion of the homeless population, and then that misunderstanding often drives policy.

As Denis Culhane one of your previous interviewees showed, longitudinal data, often based on administrative databases linking homeless data with criminal justice and addiction service data, shows the real dynamics of homelessness. These are that a lot of people enter and leave homelessness and there is a small number that are stuck there.

With this accurate data you can start doing cost benefit analyses. Even if you don't accept any moral argument about the need to provide homeless services, you can accept the straightforward economic argument that there are more cost-effective ways of providing better services.

So we should introduce more quantitative research?

Some NGOs tend to be very resistant to this sort of data collection: they cite ethical grounds or client confidentiality. In most cases I think it poses fundraising problems. Without data people can claim a huge increase in rough sleepers or new people in a hostel, which brings in funds, whereas with the data you can say that these people were counted already but they are just moving around the institutional circuit. They come from somewhere - probably from another service. In the absence of data people just speculate and at different times of the year it suits them to say different things. Certainly in the next few months we will be hearing lots of how awful things have become in Ireland.

The whole portrayal of the homeless as people who are desperate, deviant, alcoholic and who need to be looked after has to be challenged. People need to be moved to accommodation. But at an emotional level the organization that promises to move somebody to their own home is less appealing to a potential charity-giver than that which claims to care for 'hopeless cases'.

The NGO sector in Dublin have generally bought into and been supportive of Housing First though?

Yes in Dublin it has, although there are still some outliers. But even if you agree the theoretical model it can take a while to bring all agencies along simultaneously.

Is it possible to end homelessness in your opinion?

The lesson from all the research is that these things are possible. There is no mystery; ending homelessness is relatively straightforward. It needs some co-operation, some money and of course housing.

There is increasing international policy diffusion absorbing research lessons. The big change in recent years is that governments in Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, France, Portugal and the four Nordic countries all have national homeless strategies and they are all remarkably similar. The Irish one is probably the most detailed and in some ways that is its biggest weakness. The others are more concise. But the basic principals are the same in them all.

You can transpose the principles?

You can transpose models but putting them in the local context requires a degree of subtlety. You have to be conscious that there are other factors - it's not just about the housing model. It may relate to the justice policy, the addiction policy and a whole range of other services. Housing First is based on a harm reduction type model and it won't work in a country that won't accept harm reduction.

We have a robust evidential base at this stage, so in terms of developing services we can broadly tell you the things that work, and the things that we think should be avoided because the evidence is that they trap homeless people, don't work or are very expensive.

What works then and what doesn't according to your research?

There are different local contexts but there are general principles that apply. People will become homeless for all sorts of reasons. Prevention only works up to a certain point. The key lesson is that when people become homeless then we must get them out of homelessness as quickly as possible. In many cases people do that without any support, they just need a temporary place to stay and they can move on. For others it's just income insufficiency at a particular point in time.

A major question regarding long-term homeless people is, do you provide them with institution type accommodation, or do you take the Housing First model and say yes, even people with dual diagnosis can live independently with decreasing levels of support?

Continuum-of-care models or staircase type models generally don't work. Hostels may have an immediate short-term effect in terms of dealing with the problem, but in the long run, big uniform type hostels need to be closed down. Emergency accommodation should be for emergency only and should be very small and tightly guarded. The growth of private emergency accommodation over the last decade was a disaster and the difficulty of getting people out of that will probably stymie the current reconfiguration.

Transitional housing, in the main, doesn't work, except for a small minority of long-term homeless people. The vast majority of people don't want to live in communal accommodation. There is an American review of transitional housing called *The Therapeutic Incarceration of Homeless People*. I think it's a wonderful title. They are about training people to be good citizens: to learn how to cook and to wash. Why this intermediate layer? You can learn it better in your own accommodation with somebody coming in to support you as necessary.

However, a lot of service providers don't seem to trust their clients. People can almost view homeless people as 'theirs' to protect when the objective should be to get them housed.

There is a sense of fatalism in mythologizing homeless people as hopeless cases. 'If X was to move into accommodation he would need 24 hour care. I know him and he wouldn't survive five minutes in a flat'. But there is very strong evidence that shows that this isn't the case. Once you're in your own independent accommodation, difficulties dissipate because you're not protecting yourself. A lot of the behaviours displayed by people in institutional environments are reactions to those environments. The skills you need to survive in a hostel are very different from those you need to survive in independent accommodation. So there is a need for a greater sense of optimism and a greater belief in the ability of people to adapt when given the right circumstances.

I think there is a growing awareness that housing with support is crucial. For a lot of NGOs the desired outcome for their clients is social housing, and that's just not going to happen. I think there is a growing awareness that there are more housing options. What's happening across most of Western Europe is a much more resurgent, but more regulated private rented sector. This should be the first port of call for many moving out of homelessness, and now you have hybrid schemes like RAS where there are no poverty traps.

Overall are you optimistic?

Yes, in part because when I think back to the conference in Cork and contrast the situation then with today, there have been extraordinary changes in the last twenty-five years. You couldn't have envisaged then that you would have the understanding of homelessness we have developed, homeless strategies, huge amounts of exchequer funding going into homeless services, and the changes in the legislative framework.

The goal of ending homelessness by 2010 won't be achieved but I do think the Homeless Agency's target could be achieved by next year. There have been a lot of unpredictable external influences and the practical shift from a Continuum of Care model to a Housing First type model has proved difficult - there is a lag in reconfiguring services and fully implementing it will take time. There is also still resistance to thinking about ending homelessness and as it came closer to the date, a stickiness started to emerge and things started to slow down considerably. However, I think most people now realise at an abstract level that this is the right approach. And as money gets tighter in the economy there is an added onus to target it correctly at evidence based approaches and services.

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QUESTIONNAIRE



Eamon Martin,
Joint CEO
Sophia Housing
Association

When and why did you first get involved in the area of homelessness?

Having worked for many years in Banking, I gradually realised that waiting to get my 'service gold watch' was not for me. Life had more to offer and maybe I could offer something too. I got involved with Freidreichs Ataxia, and as chair of DFI, my admiration for people with disabilities, witnessing their unique take on life, and their courage moved me to get more involved with areas of special needs, including homelessness.

Has your understanding of homelessness changed since then?

All too often people without a home are labelled and dismissed as somehow being guilty of getting themselves into this situation. What I have learned is that the causes of homelessness are so numerous and complicated, and every individual has their own story.

What one policy initiative would make the most difference to homelessness people?

Currently, there are too many departments dealing with the issues. This can result in a labyrinth of bureaucracy that slows the process down and prevents us from helping people as efficiently as we need to. There should be one government department that would be responsible for dealing with all aspects of homelessness; one source of funding; one initiative to push through the complicated policies that are holding up the acquisition of housing at the moment.

What have you learnt from homeless people you have met?

The distance between people with homes and people without homes is not as great as we sometimes perceive. I have learnt that life deals you a hand of cards and some of us are lucky and some not – as Paul Durcan says, there but for the clutch of luck go I.

Do you think poverty and homelessness will always be with us?

In the present economic climate it's hard to see where poverty and inevitable homelessness will be eradicated. In fact the gap between the rich and poor is ever widening. Have we the will to tackle this and make uncomfortable decisions in this economic crisis or will we deem it to be a low priority? Ultimately, how we treat our most vulnerable members is how we will be judged as a society.

What's the difference between NGOs and the statutory sector?

I believe that NGOs are willing to be innovative, to experiment, whilst utilizing the talents and expertise of the many totally committed voluntary boards and a totally dedicated staff.

Which matters most, charity or political change?

While we always need support from charitable donations real change must come from political will.

What would you do if the homelessness problem was solved and you were no longer needed?

I would tend very happily to my garden.

Do you give money to people who are begging?

Yes – while giving money directly to organisations that address the long term problems of people without a home, I try not to judge and always remember - as I said before, - there but for the clutch of luck go I .



The Homeless Agency is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and administration of funding for the provision of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area and for the development of responses to prevent homelessness.

We work in partnership with a range of voluntary and statutory agencies to implement the agreed plan A Key to the Door, Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007-2010, to deliver integrated services to people who are homeless and assist them to move to appropriate long-term housing and independence with appropriate supports as required.

We advocate for improvements in mainstream policies and services to make them responsive to the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and we work with voluntary and statutory bodies to develop strategies to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first instance.

The vision of the Homeless Agency is that by 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin.