

CornerStone

ISSUE NO.9 OCTOBER 2001

The magazine of the Homeless Agency

Can they meet their targets?

Declan Redmond on local authority house building programmes



Do we need homelessness campaigning?

Homeless Persons Unit, **Charles Street**

Housing Forum: does it work?



The Homeless Agency is a governmental body launched in May 2001 that has taken over many of the functions of the Homeless Initiative, which no longer exists. The Homeless Agency is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and delivery of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area. Its Director is Mary Higgins, who leads a staff team which operates under the direction of a Board, and is advised by a Consultative Forum. It involves a range of voluntary and statutory agencies working in partnership on agreed plans to deliver integrated services to people who are homeless and assisting them to move rapidly to appropriate long term housing and independence. A major task will be co-ordinating the three year action plan **Shaping the Future** produced on foot of the government report, **Homelessness — An Integrated Strategy**.

The Homeless Agency will co-ordinate all homeless services in the Dublin area; deliver some direct services; provide training and other supports; monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of services; carry out research; and administer funding to homeless services.

Publications referred to in this issue of **CornerStone**:

A Clearer Future: New Funding Arrangements for Homeless Services in Dublin

Report of the Working Group on Funding for Homeless Services. August 2001. Published by the Homeless Agency. Available from the Homeless Agency, 6 St Andrews Street, Dublin 2. Free

FreshStart: A Feasibility Study for the Implementation of a Deposit Guarantee Scheme in Ireland Emmet Bergin

Published by Dublin Simon Community, August 2001. Available from Dublin Simon Community, 1-2 Cope St, Dublin 2. Tel 01 872 0188. Free

Good Practice in Housing Management Series — Managing Voids: Co-ordinating the Monitoring, Repair and Allocation of Vacant Dwellings

Michelle Norris

Published by the Housing Unit. Free to local authorities, housing associations, tenants' and residents' groups, voluntary sector. £10 €12.70 to everyone else

Healthy Hostels: A Guide to Promoting Health and Well-being Among Homeless People

Teresa Hinton, Naomi Evans and Keith Jacobs
Published by Health Action for Homeless People and Crisis. Available from Crisis, Challenger House, 42 Adler Street, London E1 1EE.
Tel 0044 20 7655 8300,
Fax 0044 20 7247 1525
email: enquiries@crisis.org.uk. Stg£7.50

Homelessness — An Integrated Strategy for Cork 2001-2003

Available from Cork Simon Community, Anderson Quay, Cork. Free

Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers is at www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/rough/goodpractice/index.htm

The Second Progress Report on the Government's Strategy on Rough Sleeping

is at www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/progress/index.htm

Still Beyond the Pale...? The Response of Social Landlords to the Housing and Related Needs of London's Irish Community

Helen Cope
Published by An Teach HA Ltd, Cara Irish HA Ltd, Irish Centre Housing Ltd, and InnisFree HA. July 2001. Available from Innisfree Housing Association, 190 Iverson Road, London NW6 2HL. Tel 0044 20 7625 1818. Free

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9 Can local authorities deliver?**Declan Redmond**

Local authorities are under great pressure to deliver the targets set out in the National Development Plan. Achieving the output will require changes and at the same time provides a great opportunity for local authorities to be at the centre of strategic developments in housing and planning.

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The existence of a three year action plan to eliminate street homelessness doesn't mean the end of campaigning. Campaigning is an integral element of service delivery, and there are many other issues which go beyond the Homeless Agency's remit and need action.

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The Housing Forum is an important mechanism for carrying out the essential task of monitoring the delivery of Programme for Prosperity and Fairness commitments, but it needs continuous effort from members to ensure that it does its job.

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Despite what you might think, emigration hasn't come to a halt.

Private rented guarantees

Deposit Guarantee Schemes (a bit of a misnomer since they actually do more than guarantee a deposit) aim to help homeless or potentially homeless people move into decent private rented accommodation. They work by offering landlords a guarantee of payment if damage is done; by paying rent allowance directly to landlords, and by providing continuing support to both landlords and tenants to ensure the stability of the tenancy.

There are over 250 schemes operating in the UK operated by both local authorities and the voluntary sector. UK experience is that schemes run by voluntary organisations can be developed more quickly than those run by local authorities, and they have an advantage in their closeness to the client group. But they have more difficulty in securing long-term funding and in securing better quality accommodation.

Dublin Simon Community have recently completed a feasibility study into the implementation of a Deposit Guarantee Scheme in Ireland.

FreshStart: A Feasibility Study for the Implementation of a Deposit Guarantee

Scheme in Ireland finds that, '...the implementation of a deposit guarantee scheme in Ireland is feasible, practical and would serve an identified need.' It recommends piloting a Deposit Guarantee Scheme aimed at single homeless people with the following features:

- Help to tenants in finding somewhere to live, including vetting landlords and properties
- Help to landlords in letting their property, including vetting of tenants
- Deposit guarantees which offer a guarantee up to twice the monthly rent
- Direct payments of rent allowance to the landlord
- Support to tenants in settling in, ensuring they maintain the property and ensuring rent is paid
- Intensive mediation if a serious breach of the tenancy agreement occurs.

It acknowledges that setting up a scheme will not be without problems:

- Eligible rent levels under the rent

allowance scheme may be too low

- There is uncertainty over the future role of Community Welfare Officers in administering rent allowance.
- There are difficulties in making payment in advance.
- There may be difficulties in working with different Community Welfare Offices rather than one central point.
- Rent allowance only helps those on benefits
- The scope for the scheme to release substantial amounts of accommodation for homeless people is limited. It may be sensible to consider financial incentives to encourage landlords to participate in the scheme.

The Homeless Agency is in the process of contracting out the housing access unit, which aims to improve access to the private rented and housing association sectors by homeless people. One of this unit's functions will be to operate a Deposit Guarantee Scheme. ■

'...the implementation of a deposit guarantee scheme in Ireland is feasible, practical and would serve an identified need.'

The Irish question

The 2001 census in Britain was the first to include 'Irish' as a separate ethnic category, following a long campaign by Irish community groups for recognition of Irish ethnic minority status.

In the light of this, research commissioned by the four London Irish housing associations (An Teach Irish HA, Cara Irish HA, Irish Centre Housing Ltd and Innisfree HA) assesses the response of local authorities and housing associations

to meeting the housing and related health needs of London's Irish community.

With a population of 2.5 million, a third of whom live in London, the Irish are the largest ethnic minority in Britain. In relation to housing, the research identifies specific elements of disadvantage: 'More Irish people endure poor housing conditions than the rest of the population. Many Irish people in London encounter particular difficulties in finding housing and suffer worse

housing conditions when they do. They are over-represented amongst the homeless of the capital.'

In examining the response of local authorities and housing associations, the research found that, '...although there is a growing awareness and commitment to race equality, the Irish community still faces a problem of recognition despite the fact that it is the largest ethnic minority in Britain.'

In this context it is hardly surprising that it went on to find little evidence that Irish needs are taken into account in resource allocation: ‘...lettings of local authority housing to households of declared Irish origin are low even in boroughs where the population is at its highest. Housing association performance presents an even bleaker picture.’

The survey tested a number of areas relating to equality and housing management and found a patchy response in most of the areas tested.

The research concludes with 24 recommendations including:

- Local authorities and housing associations should ensure that there is an Irish dimension to all race equality policies and schemes

- The needs of the Irish community should be properly addressed in existing and new funded programmes, both capital and revenue

- Local authorities and housing associations should review their allocation policies with a view to increasing lettings to Irish people to reverse the clear trend of disadvantage

- Local authorities and housing associations should work more closely in partnership with Irish agencies and

Irish housing associations to develop new culturally sensitive schemes and services.

The second part of the report comprises a very comprehensive annotated bibliography of the housing and related health needs of London’s Irish

community and would be an invaluable resource for anyone doing research on the Irish community in Britain. ■

With a population of 2.5 million, a third of whom live in London, the Irish are the largest ethnic minority in Britain.

National Strategy on Youth Homelessness

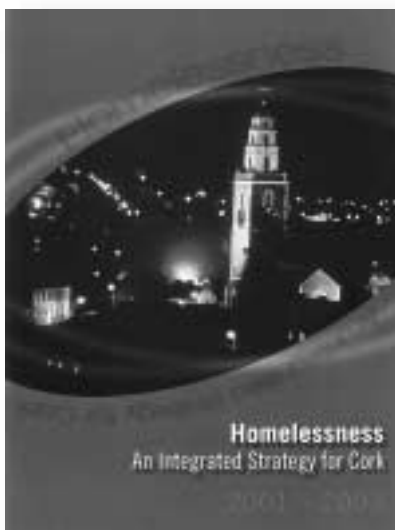
By the time you read this, the long-awaited National Strategy on Youth Homelessness should have been approved by Government. Readers will recall that upbeat Ministers first promised a launch over a year ago, in September 2000. Since then it seems to have been put on the long finger (or perhaps they were all arguing about which department will have to stump up the cash).

Then all of a sudden somebody remembered that there’s an election coming up, and with minds thus concentrated, the strategy was completed. It was due to go one of the weekly Government meetings held throughout September. Only if Government approves it will a date then be set for publication, so you may have to wait some time to see what they have in store for homeless children. ■



Mary Hanafin, Minister for Children

Cork action plan



‘Homelessness is solvable and preventable,’ declares Cork’s three-year action plan, *Homelessness — An Integrated Strategy for Cork*, which was published in July. The plan was developed by Cork Homeless Forum, which comprises Cork Corporation, Cork County Council, Southern Health Board, and five voluntary sector organisations: Cork Simon Community, Society of St Vincent de Paul, Good Shepherd Services, Cuanlee, and Threshold.

The strategy contains six objectives

- 1 Develop the Homeless Persons Unit – through a research and consultative

process involving all agencies and with the input of homeless people

- 2 Provide appropriate accommodation – a range of housing options including a foyer, transitional housing, high support accommodation
- 3 Provide appropriate health and welfare services – including medial cover, health promotion initiatives, addition services, appropriate mental health services
- 4 Reintegrate homeless people into the community – access to appropriate long-term housing, community care and other support services

- 5 Prevent and break the cycle of homelessness
 - including assessment of ‘at risk’ households, co-ordinating discharge policies, aftercare support and release protocol with relevant authorities.
- 6 Restructure the Homeless Forum
 - to reassess all aspects of the Forum, in the context of the promotion of a

partnership culture and ensuring equal participation of all agencies

A Homelessness Forum was established in Cork before *Homelessness — An Integrated Strategy* was published, which had identified gaps in provision. ‘It was not so much the lack of hostels but the lack of supported and transitional housing, and

that is one of the areas that is being addressed,’ said Cork Threshold’s Margaret O’Neill.

The Southern Health Board has already committed funds to the plan and begun to recruit new staff. Cork Corporation will be approaching the government for finance later in the year. ■

House prices

Those who worship at the altar of market economics live in a state of constant amazement at the beauty of the law of supply and demand. For here is a wonderful self-balancing system in which a change in supply (or demand) is automatically followed by an exactly compensating change in demand (or supply) thus ensuring that everyone is happy all the time.

But we’re not. And this wonderful system has manifestly failed to deliver enough housing for people who can normally afford it, never mind people who want it. Of course some

will argue that this is precisely because of government interference which has prevented the laws of supply and demand with delivering the goods. Others mutter about elasticity of supply and land constraints.

But there’s something else. The suppliers of houses, and even more importantly, the purchasers, are human beings. And human beings, when they are deciding whether or not to buy a house are concerned not only with today’s price, but also with *what they think is going to happen tomorrow*. Because if people think prices are going down, they will wait and hope to buy at a lower price in the future. Equally if they think prices are going up, they’ll buy now, even if they can’t really afford it, because



they reckon they definitely won’t be able to afford it in the future.

Each of these is of course a self-fulfilling prophecy, since if lots of potential purchasers suddenly decide not to buy because they think the price is going to go down, what happens? The price goes down, that’s what happens.

And that is why the wrath of estate agents came down on Hibernian Investments economist Fiona Adkins when she forecasted a fall in house prices of 10% over the next two years (in fact back in February she forecasted a drop of 20%, but in the light of IT job cuts she adjusted her prediction).

Estate agents are terrified that people might listen to Fiona Adkins, and even worse, act on her

pronouncements by postponing house purchase, thus pushing prices further downward. Because they know that prices have been falling for some time. For a year now, estate agents, builders, local authority housing officers, have been all saying openly but quietly that prices are falling, and the anecdotal assessments of people working daily in the area are at least as valid as graphs from the Irish Permanent or figures from the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

That doesn’t necessarily mean that Fiona Adkins is right. Whatever about expectation, demand remains strong. So the current drop in prices may well be temporary. But on the other hand, it may not. ■

Sleeping rough? It's like a holiday!

For a mere £300 you could spend four days living in London's poshest areas. Piccadilly, Oxford Street, Pall Mall, the choice is yours. Sounds like a bargain doesn't it?

Yes, of course there's a catch: you have to sleep rough. You will be given a sleeping bag and a musical

instrument or a sketch book and then left to your own devices.

This is courtesy of a Dutch travel company, which is marketing 'sleeping rough' holidays in London and Paris, describing them as a 'life changing experience'.

Not surprisingly, homeless organisations in London have

condemned the plan. Jim Minton, Director of Centrepoint, which provides services to young homeless people said, 'Any company offering "homeless holidays" is trivialising the very real experiences that the young people we see have gone through. No one chooses to be homeless, they end up on the streets because they have nowhere else to go.' ■

Preventing homelessness

Most of the published material on preventing homelessness has been rather woolly; high on aspiration and low on specifics. Until now that is. During the summer Britain's Rough Sleepers Unit published *Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers — A Good Practice Handbook*, which is exactly what it says it is.

Without any shilly-shallying it gets straight down to business with an opening chapter on assessing the risk of homelessness. Three groups of factors are identified: **trigger factors**, **welfare factors** and **protecting factors**.

Trigger factors help identify people most at risk of homelessness. Crucially these are most likely to be observed by someone in a position to take action to prevent a decline into housing crisis. These are:

- Eviction or abandonment, sometimes related to either recognised, unmanaged or untreated welfare need;
- Family or relationship dispute and breakdown, including domestic violence;
- Leaving an institution such as prison, local authority care, the Armed Forces or hospital, with limited/no family or other support ties to return to.

Even when these **trigger factors** occur, most people can resolve their housing problem by themselves. But there are a number of **welfare factors** that indicate a greater likelihood of homelessness:

- Mental ill health
- Substance misuse
- Anti-social behaviour

- Lack of 'coping' or practical skills
- Learning disabilities
- History of sleeping rough.

However people whose lives have both **trigger factors** and **welfare factors** may avoid homelessness if they have **protecting factors**. These are:

- Strong networks of family or friends
- Employed, in training or education
- Co-operating with or actively seeking assistance
- Statutory or voluntary help.

People who have a both **trigger factors** and **welfare factors** but no **protecting factors** are particularly at risk of homelessness. **Protecting factors** offer some clues as to how homelessness may be prevented.

The handbook suggests that many of the existing assessments that are carried

out by a wide range of professionals could be easily adapted to include an assessment of the risk of homelessness.

Subsequent chapters deal with:

- preventing tenancy breakdown
- effective tenancy sustainment
- effective management of discharge from hospital, care, prison and the armed forces
- responding to people who are sleeping rough, because they are unaware of help that is available or who have had experience of rough sleeping and are drawn back for a range of reasons
- strategies for preventing young people becoming homeless.

The handbook is peppered with examples of good practice from English local authorities and NGOs, and contains a comprehensive contact list at the end. ■



House condition survey

Fieldwork for the decennial National House Condition Survey will start soon. The survey, which is being carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of the Department of the Environment and Local Government, will cost €2.8 million (£2.2 million) and will, it is hoped, be published in summer 2002. The representative sample of approximately 37,500 addresses on which it will be based is large enough to allow for a breakdown by county. The survey will not involve a structural survey of each property — that would cost perhaps twenty times more — but instead will use a questionnaire. Information will be gathered about the size and type of accommodation, types of facilities and amenities (e.g. water, sewerage and heating), household composition and the general condition of the property. There is a strong focus on heating and heating types as well as energy and energy conservation. Physical problems such as dampness, leaks, badly fitting windows and doors will be identified.

Announcing the survey, Housing Minister Bobby Molloy said, 'The information obtained from the survey is essential to measure progress in improving housing

conditions and also to identify problems or potential problems and to plan a coherent policy for the future development of the national housing stock.' ■



Better news for British homeless

Britain's Labour Government has introduced legislation that will ensure that some homeless people have greater rights to a home. Currently local authorities have a duty to provide housing for homeless people in 'priority need' (mainly adults with children), for two years. Under the proposed legislation, such people must be given either an offer of local authority housing, or an offer of housing from an RSL (housing association), or an offer of less secure accommodation in the private rented sector. However if they turn down the offer of private rented accommodation they still have a right to local authority or RSL housing.

'Crucially the Bill requires housing authorities to put together a strategy for tackling homelessness in their district,...

The bill has been widely welcomed by housing organisations and NGOs, as a step in the right direction. However not all local authorities have reacted as

positively and familiar claims of queue-jumping by homeless people have surfaced. One local authority official, in a letter to a housing journal said, 'Unless there is a massive investment in social housing, the result of this will be that homeless applicants gain an unfair advantage over other housing applicants.'

When preparing the bill, someone may have cast an eye in the direction of Ireland, since it requires local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area. Speaking at

the launch of the bill, Housing Minister Lord Falconer said, 'Crucially the Bill requires housing authorities to put together a strategy for tackling homelessness in their district, working with the social services authority, other housing providers and voluntary organisations to ensure that all available resources are harnessed together.'

Sounds familiar doesn't it?

At the same time, the Rough Sleepers Unit, set up by Tony Blair to eliminate rough sleeping, has published figures claiming that the number of people living on the streets in England has fallen to 700 a night from 1850 in 1998 and 1180 a year ago. Although some organisations have challenged the authenticity of the figures, all accept that there has been a significant reduction. ■

Managing voids

The Housing Unit's latest publication in its *Good Practice in Housing Management Series* is *Managing Voids: Co-ordinating the Monitoring, Repair and Allocation of Vacant Dwellings*. The guidelines point out that the current shortage of local authority housing, '...has propelled the issue of vacant dwellings to the top of the housing management agenda.'

Particular emphasis is placed on tackling the problems on difficult-to-let estates, which for a number of reasons are unpopular with prospective tenants, and are therefore likely to have higher than normal

vacancy rates. The guidelines suggest a number of measures that may assist in reducing the number of vacant dwellings:

- Maintaining a separate register of applicants willing to live on the estate
- Offering applicants a larger dwelling than they would normally be entitled to
- Making use of the allocations system to encourage a wider social mix on estates
- Limiting eligibility for a transfer to tenants who have been resident for a minimum period
- Decorating properties to a higher standard than normal



- Establishing an estate-based housing management system. ■

Healthy hostels

Healthy Hostels is a rather misleading title for this handbook published by the British homeless charity Crisis, which aims to help homeless organisations develop effective health promotion work. Misleading because it is aimed at organisations providing settlement services and transitional housing as well as those running hostels.

The handbook's premise is that health promotion work with homeless people or people settling into long term housing is not well developed. '...health as an issue can take a back seat when put alongside finding appropriate accommodation and assisting residents to move on.'

The authors paint with a very broad brush when they see health and health promotion, '...not just about physical well-being and the absence of disease but also about mental health, emotional health, social and sexual health and spiritual health. It also encompasses political health, or the ability to stand up for beliefs and have a say in the factors which influence our life.' Few people would see resident participation as primarily a health promotion issue, and by casting their net so widely the authors perhaps weaken their argument.



However, there is useful information about models of health promotion work and key good practice lessons as well as suggesting ways in which health promotion might be tackled in a number of topic areas, including:

- Diet and nutrition
- Personal hygiene
- Exercise
- Alcohol and drugs
- Smoking

- Sexual health
- Women's health
- Positive mental health
- Using health promotion materials and resources.

The handbook contain many case studies, and with commendable honesty a good number are not success stories, but provide the reader with useful information about how not to do health promotion. ■



The Homeless Persons Unit at Charles Street **What happened?**

The roots of the HPU

To understand the role of the Homeless Persons Unit is necessary to look into its background. It was established in 1983, to provide a centralised response to the needs of people who were homeless and to ensure that there was no abuse of the social welfare system by ensuring that multiple claims could not be made.

The main role of the HPU was and has continued to be the administration of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme (SWA) including rent supplement, on behalf of the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs; and the placement of homeless people in emergency accommodation. These two activities fulfilled the duty of health boards under the Health Act 1953 to provide 'institutional assistance' to people 'unable to provide shelter' for themselves.

Under the Housing Act 1988 local authorities were given additional powers to provide services to people who were homeless, including providing emergency accommodation or funding others to do so. Since it was already involved in this area, the HPU proposed that it would place people in emergency accommodation on behalf of the local authorities in its area. The authorities paid for the full cost of this service with 90% being recoupable from the Department of the Environment.

When in the winter of 1992/3 three homeless people died on the streets of Dublin, a new shelter was opened in Grangegorman (since replaced by Cedar House) and the then Housing Minister Emmet Stagg looked to the local authorities to establish an out-of-hours freephone service. In spite of an alternative bid by Focus Ireland, who at the time were already providing such a service, it was agreed that the freephone service would be provided by the HPU and funded by the local authorities and the Department of the Environment. The freephone was established in November 1993 and has been providing an out of hours placement service between the hours of 5pm and 1am daily ever since.

Recent events

The HPU's recent closure was precipitated by a walk out of staff, due to dangerous conditions following a break-in. There had long been concern that conditions

in Charles Street were unsuitable, for both staff and service users. Alternative premises had at this time been secured but were not yet ready for occupation.

Following the closure of the building, arrangements were made for the payment of social welfare at local employment exchanges by community welfare officers attached to Charles Street. The freephone service was immediately extended to operate during the day. However people had difficulty getting through to the freephone service and the use of local employment exchanges was unsatisfactory from a number of perspectives.

Alternative temporary accommodation has been secured for the HPU at 77 Lower Gardiner Street. This will continue to provide a point of contact for people who are homeless until two alternative premises are available in late October. One of these will provide a service to women and families, the other to men. In the meantime, the freephone service will continue to operate day and night.

In many ways the difficulties at the HPU epitomise the problems with current service delivery to homeless people. It is over-centralised (there is no provision outside the city centre); there are both overlaps and gaps in provision, and there is inadequate emphasis on prevention of homelessness.

The future

The Action Plan acknowledges that the HPU premises at Charles Street are not suitable for its purpose, and envisages a relocation of the HPU together with the development of an outreach service with community welfare officers operating on a 'patch' system.

The HPU is currently developing services along these lines; three community welfare officers now provide welfare services on an outreach basis to some of the B&Bs on the city's north side, and twice-weekly clinics are held at one of the hostels.

'This facilitates a partnership approach to tackling the multi-faceted problems of homelessness.

Establishing a good relationship with the family or homeless person and keeping in regular contact with them ensures that referrals can be made to the appropriate services and issues can be addressed at an earlier stage,' says Christy Grogan, Superintendent Community Welfare Officer at the HPU. ■

The closure of the Homeless Persons Unit at Charles Street in July of this year caused major disruption to the delivery of services to people who are homeless, and once again focused media attention on the inadequacies of service delivery in Dublin.

Mary Higgins reports.

CAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES MEET THEIR TARGETS?

The National Development Plan envisages local authorities building over 41,000 homes between 2000 and 2006. **Declan Redmond** argues that although this is an ambitious goal, it is achievable.

Can local authorities deliver their housing programmes as laid out in the National Development Plan (NDP)? One answer, which is becoming increasingly prevalent, is that many public agencies which are responsible for providing much needed social and physical infrastructure across the country are incompetent to a greater or lesser degree and cannot deliver projects on time or within budget. In truth, there is plenty of evidence to sustain and confirm this view, with well-publicised delays in key road, rail and housing projects. Some have argued that, when compared with somewhere like France, there are chronic weaknesses in public management in Ireland,

and, that no matter how many resources are committed, there is a malaise at the heart of public administration which handicaps authorities from delivering efficiently and economically.

Is this the case with housing, and in particular, is it the case that local authorities are incapable of delivering their housing programmes? Contrary to the cynical view, though with serious caveats, local authorities are capable of delivering their housing programmes. Many of the difficulties in providing housing, and there are many, are outside the immediate scope of local authorities. Crucially, it must be remembered that central government effectively controls resources to local authorities and that these have been modest in



recent years. For the future, however, authorities have the opportunity to become central players in delivering housing through devising and implementing integrated and comprehensive housing strategies under the new Planning and Development Act and delivering on the funding in the NDP.

Some have argued that ... there is a malaise at the heart of public administration

Historically, at least, local authorities have had little difficulty in delivering housing programmes. In the 1970s and 1980s local authority house completions averaged 6,500 per annum. However, in the past five years they have built 2,600 new houses per annum, which is just 6% of the total new house completions. Indeed, in 2000 this fell to 4% of total house completions. This performance is improved somewhat when acquisitions are taken into account with authorities buying an average of 760 houses per annum. However, the reason for this low output is primarily because of the lack of resources provided by central government and not because of some inherent inadequacy of the authorities. In the period from 1995 to 1999, capital expenditure on local authority housing increased by an average of 10% per annum. In the context of serious housing need and problems of affordability, and an exchequer awash with funds, these can be viewed as very modest increases indeed. It is only last year, in 2000, that expenditure increased significantly, by 47%, and this was in the context of the belated government decision to increase social housing funding under the NDP. In other words, resources have come to local authorities, but they have come relatively late in the day. The decision not to fund local authority house building has of course been a political one, with the current government having a clear ideological disposition towards private sector provision and increasing pluralism of provision in social housing. That is now changing somewhat, though not fundamentally.

Local authorities are now operating in a context whereby the NDP has substantially increased funding

for social housing. According to the NDP, there will be a housing requirement of 350,000 dwellings over the period 2000–2006, or an annual average requirement of 50,000 new homes over the seven year period. Between 80–85% of this will be provided by the private sector, which assumes an average of between 40,000 to 42,500 new private houses per annum, well below that forecasted by the Bacon reports. The remaining 15–20% is to be provided through various social housing measures, including direct provision by local authorities, provision by the voluntary sector and subsidies to produce shared ownership and affordable housing. The Table below, adapted from the *Operational Programme for Economic and Social Infrastructure*, shows expenditure on housing over the period of the plan.

The housing measure under the NDP envisages a total expenditure of €9.9 billion on social housing. Of this, the local authorities have been allocated €4.9 billion (50%) to build or acquire new local authority houses for letting, and they are expected to produce 41,500 houses by 2006, which is 12% of the total requirement. For the authorities this means building or acquiring 6,000 units on average per annum. Given the historically low rate of completions this is a significant increase. The voluntary sector is to receive significant additional funding and is expected to produce 15,500 dwellings by 2006. Local authorities will also be responsible for overseeing the delivery of 7,000 shared ownership units and 7,000 units under the affordable housing scheme. All of this represents a new challenge for local authorities and their potential establishment as key players in the provision of social housing and in implementing broader housing strategies.

One of the key challenges for local authorities is to deliver on their own programmes. On the positive side, it seems clear from the most recent evidence that authorities have increased production this year and that completions and acquisitions will increase significantly on 2000. The new multi-annual funding programme, which seeks 25,000 local authority housing starts between 2000 and 2003, gives authorities a degree of certainty regarding funding which was absent before. With regard to forward planning, the completion of a

...resources have come to local authorities, but they have come relatively late in the day.

Housing Expenditure and the National Development Plan

	Planned expenditure € million	Planned expenditure £ million	Total target output 2000–2006 Units	Average output per annum 2000–2006 Units
Local authority housing	4,900	3,859	41,500	6,000
Voluntary housing	1,860	1,465	15,500	2,200
Shared ownership	800	630	7,000	1,000
Affordable housing scheme	813	640	7,000	1,000
Improvements to local authority housing	1,214	956	–	–
Special needs (Traveller accommodation and homeless)	359	283	–	–
Total	9,946	7,833	71,000	10,200

number of integrated local plans, such as Adamstown in Dublin, clearly shows that some authorities are using new legislation on local area plans and Strategic Development Zones, to create imaginative residential areas. And therein lies a key and new challenge in local authority provision. No longer can authorities build large estates of just local authority housing. Best practice, higher densities, and the 20% social and affordable housing provision, now dictates that social housing in general is more imaginatively designed and is integrated into new neighbourhoods along with private housing. This is a positive development, but a much more challenging one than before.

However, there are some negatives, some internal to authorities, others external. A crucial problem has been land. Authorities have had to compete in the private land market against commercial developers and are thus at a clear disadvantage in obtaining sites, a situation at its worst in the Dublin Region, where it is alleged there is a virtual oligopoly of ownership of residential land among a small number of private developers. The long battle over the 20% social and affordable housing provision should improve matters, though this is dependent on the level of activity in the private market. The evidence suggests that, at least in the short term, most local authorities either own enough land, or have identified lands, which will enable their programmes to be delivered. A second major problem has been that many housing projects are subject to various planning and other regulatory delays, partly because of increasing public opposition, but also because of staff shortages in planning and housing departments. A third problem has revolved around the public procurement systems. One quantity surveyor interviewed for this article argued that the public procurement system seriously militated against local authorities, significantly adding to time and to costs, which because of the structure of contracts, generally worked against authorities. However, a recent Circular from the Department of the Environment and Local Government encourages authorities to use Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements in a range of housing areas. Such arrangements might include: partnerships between local authorities and developers building on local authority land; involving the private sector in housing management; partnerships between local authorities and the private sector in the provision of rented

...the key caveat regarding local authorities and their ability to deliver relates to the lack of a performance culture.

accommodation for people dependent on rent supplement. These may prove cheaper and more effective in some cases. Already there are interesting developments in the pipeline where local authorities are using the equivalent of PPP arrangements to develop residential areas. Likewise, the blame for the various infrastructure deficits must be shared with central government and other agencies. There are clear difficulties of agency fragmentation, lack of co-ordination, lack of a regional planning dimension and so on.

However, the key caveat regarding local authorities and their ability to deliver relates to the lack of a performance culture. Despite the inevitable and correct protestations that there are many very able, professional and hard working people in local authorities, there remains the suspicion that most authorities primarily operate through a series of administrative procedures which lack a strategic and performance led dimension. It is here, in the internal workings of local authorities and other public agencies, that commentators detect the malaise. This may be partly because housing departments have mainly been staffed by administrative personnel who have traditionally viewed the housing department as a place to get out of quickly. More centrally, even the harshest critics would agree that local authorities generally, and housing departments in particular, have been severely under resourced with regard to staffing.

It is to be hoped that the changes sought by *Better Local Government* and other strategic developments will change this. The push for a more strategic and performance led system is in itself an acknowledgement that they have been absent in the past.

Local authorities are thus at a crucial stage in their history. They can grasp the opportunities of greater funding and the opportunity to be at the centre of strategic developments in housing and planning. They can become positive and leading advocates for social housing provision, something which is not just in their own interests, but more importantly, essential in delivering housing for those in need and thus delivering one element of social justice. If they do not, then the relatively optimistic and uncritical tone of this article will have to be abandoned, and we will have to acknowledge that there is a malaise in public administration and look to radical and better ways to provide essential public goods and services. ■

Local authorities are thus at a crucial stage in their history



PHOTO BY IMAGE BANK

Now that we have an Action Plan that aims for the elimination of rough sleeping in ten years, surely there's no need for any more homelessness campaigning? **Emmet Bergin** doesn't agree.



An anonymous letter in the Guardian a couple of weeks ago by the Chief Executive of a UK homeless charity expressed some of the concerns that many UK voluntary groups have about the partnership arrangements developed under the Rough Sleepers Unit there. Although the Rough Sleepers Unit has been undeniably successful in taking people off the streets, the unnamed Chief Executive

complained that compacts with government had meant 'unequal partnerships, bullying and meeting government quotas rather than addressing the needs of the most vulnerable¹'.

Partnership arrangements in Ireland have taken a more consultative form. The present Taoiseach sees social partnership, crystallised under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, as 'the best opportunity for all of us to overcome existing and emerging

¹ Readers' Letters, Wednesday 8th August 2001, Guardian Newspaper

difficulties². Anyone who has attended a PPF plenary session, where employer, union, farmer and community and voluntary representatives sit around a huge table with the Taoiseach, Ministers and officials, and talk *at* one another, without analysis or decisions taken, would have their doubts.

Of course these plenary sessions are just set pieces. The real negotiations go on behind closed doors. Even so, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what voluntary organisations have achieved from participation in social partnership. While voluntary organisations have not been diverted from addressing the 'needs of the most vulnerable', their participation in social partnership has subdued their outspokenness and has been exploited by Government to give itself an undeserved cloak of social concern.

A much happier example of partnership, yet a closer analogy to the Rough Sleepers Unit in the UK is the developing work of the Homeless Agency. Its vision, to end long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough within ten years, is shared by all participating groups. Part of its remit is to involve the range of voluntary and statutory agencies to work in partnership to deliver integrated services. The Agency even sees a role for itself in 'advocating for improvements in mainstream policies and services to make them responsive to the special needs of people who are homeless'.

In such a scenario of shared visions, joint delivery of services and the Agency itself advocating for improved policies, why should voluntary homeless organisations cling so fervently to their independence? Now that the argument has been won and voluntary organisation's objectives are now mostly contained in the three-year action plan, what more can voluntary organisations possibly demand without sounding like 'left-wing pinkos' who are never satisfied no matter what? In particular, why continue to campaign when the focus is now on implementation and delivery?

A number of responses need to be made to these questions and the attitude that informs them.

what more can voluntary organisations possibly demand without sounding like 'left-wing pinkos'?

Firstly such questions misunderstand what campaigning is really about. Campaigning is about social change, not column inches. The days of marches to the Dail as an effective way of informing the policy debate are now over, if they ever existed. While bad decisions should be challenged, campaigning is just as much about building alliances and reinforcing good policies.

Secondly there is no simple division between campaigning and the implementation of new services. The provision of high quality services by voluntary organisations acts as a campaigning tool by improving standards and putting pressure on under performance, particularly in the public sector. On the other hand, effective campaigning should also include timely research which can work to prove that the implementation of new services previously seen as too expensive or unworkable is in fact feasible.

Thirdly, external analysis is required to point out any slippage in meeting targets to ensure that new service commitments are met. While the Homeless Agency is presently enjoying a honeymoon of sorts, its first anniversary will certainly provide an opportunity to review its progress against commitments made.

Fourthly there is a need to look for the bigger picture, beyond the framework of the Homeless Agency. For one thing the Agency's geographic scope is limited to Dublin's four local authorities, which neglects the growing numbers of homeless outside Dublin and the fact that many homeless people in Dublin actually arrive from elsewhere. Furthermore a number of significant issues which go beyond the Agency's remit but cause homelessness need to be campaigned for.

There is no shortage of these issues! A meaningful and legally recognisable right to housing is perhaps the biggest, considering that Irish legislation on homelessness is amongst the weakest of all EU states. But there is also the continued 'silting up' of hostels because of the lack of appropriate and affordable move-on accommodation; the increasing incidence of mental illness among homeless people and the failure of the community care system to respond; the massive profits made by developers and land owners at the expense of low pay workers who are unable to pay housing costs; the failure to properly manage local authority housing estates and poor neighbourhoods leading to a breakdown in conditions; the disastrous environmental consequences of low density suburban and unplanned developments and the socially divisive impact it is having on existing communities, as well as the underlying growth in the numbers of people homeless nationally and the Government's refusal to set a target for its reduction. If campaigning is in fact less prevalent or dynamic today than before, it is more about the skills of the campaigners and the amount of resources that the voluntary organisations are committing to research and policy than to a lack of policy issues.

Voluntary organisations in Ireland have constantly been at the forefront of social change. Their independence has allowed them to be constructively critical while at the same time engaging with statutory agencies to maximise delivery of services. Today these organisations need their campaigning skills more than ever. Without it we won't change policies, improve practice and confront the root causes of social exclusion and poverty. ■

The days of marches to the Dail as an effective way of informing the policy debate are now over, if they ever existed

² Speech by Bertie Ahern at the Plenary Meeting with the Social Partners, 26th July 2001 in Dublin Castle

The Housing Forum was set up under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. But what does it actually do? And it is effective? Housing Forum member **Kieran Murphy**, who is Director of Threshold, which provides housing advice and campaigns for reform of the housing agenda, explains.

THE HOUSING FORUM: TALK OR ACTION?



PHOTO BY IMAGE BANK



The documentation for the next meeting of the Housing Forum has just arrived on my desk. This is its sixth meeting and coincides with the half-way point in the three year life of the Forum. This seems like a good time to take stock and to offer some insights from experiences to date of the aims, complexities, frustrations, potential and limits associated with the Forum. All of this matters for the very good reason that the core issues at hand — the ability of people to access a home — is one of the most pressing social issues and policy challenges of the present day. We still have a complex housing crises with multiple dimensions and harsh implications for those most adversely affected. Between January and August 2001 over 7,000 people, with annual incomes of less than £12,000, contacted Threshold's advice offices in Dublin, Cork and Galway. The majority of them faced serious housing difficulties and were experiencing the full brunt of the chronic lack of sufficient affordable, secure, good quality, appropriate housing. Accordingly the success of the work of the Forum is critically important not just to the social partners directly involved but also to the community at large. But what is involved exactly? How has the Forum been working? How has it evolved since its

inception? Will it make a difference? This article offers some perspectives from the Community and Voluntary Pillar viewpoint.

The Forum, set up to monitor the implementation of the housing and accommodation commitments in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, meets quarterly and is made up of members of various Government departments, Employer and Union representatives, Community and Voluntary Pillar, local authorities and the Voluntary and Co-operative Housing Sector. Ministers Molloy and Dempsey attend the meetings. The Forum is therefore an important means of access to Government Ministers and senior officials. Such direct access is particularly important for the Community and Voluntary Pillar. It helps to keep a focus on housing and accommodation poverty and inequality when other issues compete for government attention.

A typical meeting of the Forum will involve reviewing a series of progress reports, prepared by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, which cover a wide variety of housing policy areas. The agenda for the September meeting includes the following: 'Housing output for the year to date and house price and rental trends', 'Implementation of Action on Housing'

(which covers among others, social housing output, and Strategic Development Zones) 'Implementation of the report of the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector', 'Rental Assistance Planning Group', and 'Implementation of Housing Strategies'. With such a wide remit an early concern was that it would slip into a pattern where the meetings were a succession of progress reports from the Department of the Environment and Local Government with some limited discussion after each but without but without any real engagement with the issues.

In the early stages we (the C&V Pillar) drew up a list of what we wanted to achieve within five priority areas: social housing building programme, homelessness, the Traveller Accommodation programme, reform of the private rented sector and housing of refugees and asylum seekers. Focusing our attention around these issues prompted a number of actions: meetings with employer and union representatives seeking support for some of our positions; pressing for more detailed progress reports from the Department of the Environment and Local Government, and conducting our own research into progress.

The Forum is an important mechanism for carrying out the essential task of monitoring the delivery of PPF commitments. Without close monitoring delivery dates can slip. Capacity constraints have emerged within the Department of the Environment and Local Government and the local authorities over the last few years as they try to manage a variety of housing policy initiatives. For example, the original 6 month time frame for the production of Homeless Action Plans was extended to 12 months. The language of policy commitment in negotiated agreements, such as the PPF, can often be ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. It is important therefore to track the actions to ensure that they meet with what our Pillar originally understood to be the commitment.

One of the tasks within the Forum is to closely track issues from one meeting to the next. The agendas are packed and it is possible that six months can pass without any real progress being made on an issue. For example, the last meeting of the Forum reviewed the progress being made by local authorities in producing Homeless Action Plans. It was an opportunity to raise a serious concern over the absence of any coordinating authority, to ensure that Action Plans were completed on time, were of sufficient quality and were implemented. These issues will be pursued at the next meeting to ensure that real progress is being made in addressing our concerns.

We have also used the Forum to monitor the development of particular policy initiatives, such as the reform of the private rented sector. The Government-

established Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector produced its report in July 2000 without any indication from Government on what they intended to do with it. We highlighted this inactivity at the Forum. When in January 2001, Government published its intentions the two-year time frame for the introduction of the new legislation was discussed. At future meetings of the Forum progress reports will be sought on the establishment of the Private Rented Tenancies Board and the drafting of the new legislation, thereby preventing a situation whereby the proposals might slip from the priority list.

It is difficult to point to specific examples where actions are directly attributable to the interventions of the Forum. Ministers and senior officials would probably argue 'Nonsense, we do not need a Forum to make us deliver'. Experience however suggests otherwise. In a context where there is insufficient political and administrative will to comprehensively tackle housing and accommodation poverty and inequality, mechanisms such as the Housing Forum potentially play an important role in focusing the minds of policy makers on delivering on existing commitments.

One of the frustrations with the Forum is trying to maintain a sense of urgency. With house price increases beginning to moderate, the output of social housing likely this year to reach a ten year high, new legislation on the way for the Private Rented Sector, Homeless Action Plans, Local Housing Strategies, and Traveller Accommodation Programmes all having been prepared by local authorities, millions of pounds being spent on combating homelessness, and now a changing

Ministers and senior officials would probably argue 'Nonsense, we do not need a Forum to make us deliver'

we (the C&V Pillar) drew up a list of what we wanted to achieve within five priority areas

economic context, it is almost as though the Department of the Environment and Local Government are taking the view 'enough has been done for now'. There is no doubt that over the last few years much has been done however the scale of future challenges is immense. Initial figures coming from local authorities suggest that over the next five years the demand for social housing will continue to escalate. Many of them anticipate having as many people on their waiting lists in five years time as they do now. The test of the Forum will be its ability to move beyond monitoring the implementation of existing programmes to begin tackling the challenges ahead. ■

Fáiltiú Services

Last autumn, Fáiltiú, which provides a drop-in advice, information and crisis intervention service for homeless people, set up a Service Users Forum to enable people to comment on its services. However it has taken on a wider brief, as **Shay Fagan**, one of Fáiltiú's full-time project workers explained to **Simon Brooke**.

The Forum was originally an idea aimed at developing our services. We felt it was important that service users were given an independent voice, to be able to tell us — warts and all — what they thought of the service, rather than saying what we wanted to hear. We put the idea to the Homeless Agency who provided funding to pay for an external facilitator.

We had the first meeting in November last year. The original idea was to get down to the practicalities of how Fáiltiú works on a day-to-day basis, and a lot came out of that, for example, practical suggestions around the breakfast service we provide — cereals and hot milk as opposed to toast. A small thing but we just weren't thinking that people might not like it that way.

Very quickly it became evident that there were bigger issues: the conditions people were experiencing in hostels, the way they'd been treated by other agencies. They were all issues that people needed an outlet and had to discuss, and we felt that the forum was a very safe place for people to be open about things like that. A lot of the concerns that people have in the hostels is that they don't have a right to complain. And small and all though it is, being able to sit in a group with people who have had the same experience is strengthening. People feel they're not on their own; they're being listened to. So in some ways it can drift into a support group at times.

As part of helping people to understand other agencies better, we invited Mary Higgins from the Homeless Agency to come and talk. And Christy



Users Forum

Grogan came from Charles Street — fair play to him — he didn't get an easy ride! We've been in touch with Dublin Corporation and we're hoping to get someone to address the group.

Unplanned expansion

'The Forum has expanded in other ways we didn't envisage:

We have a research project in Fáiltiú about how we operate our advice and information service. The researcher presented her findings to the Forum and we had a discussion about them.

Also, it became evident through the Forum that not everybody had medical cards so we picked up on that and launched a drive to ensure that as many people as possible got them.

We made a direct complaint about one hostel where there were health and safety issues — locked fire doors.

The forum is a very effective two-way communication because we can express the limitations of our own services as a staff team and say 'look, this is what we're working with.' If we can create a dialogue with service users, they'll be better informed about how we make decisions. Also we are prepared to listen to concerns and explain the reasons why decisions are made. That is useful because even if people don't come to the Forum they'll hear things from those who do and hopefully things will filter through.

But some of the demands have been impossible. For example, the users asked if we could provide lockers where they could store personal things safely. We thought it was a great idea, but we simply don't have the space. But if sometimes something like that can be fed into a bigger picture, you can explain that it's not up to us as an agency to solve all the problems but in co-operation with other agencies, if this is a consistent need.

Realistic

The Forum has been very realistic about what it could achieve. We set that up at the start; we weren't here to listen to a wish-list. But users know that having a voice there strengthens our position. We're looking to expand our Sunday service and if you can hear it from service users, then it's not just service providers saying this is what we think you need. It is recognised that if service users are asking for something there's a better chance of it being listened to.

We get an average of about 12–14 attenders — more when we have an external speaker. We're over-represented by older clients e.g. over 35s. It's been difficult to attract the 18–25s on a regular basis. That's something that has been noticed within the group. We've had difficulty attracting women too, but we've had some success with that. All the staff make a point of encouraging users to come to the forum. We don't pretend that the Forum members

Service Users Forum Rules include:

- No interruptions whilst a person is talking
- People should be allowed to get their point across
- No one should come to the Forum if they are off their head
- People should try to come to the Forum on time
- There should be no personal attacks on any member of staff or service users in Fáilteú or any other agency
- If somebody new comes to the next Forum they should be made aware of these points

are necessarily a cross-section of the 200 or so people a week who use the service.

My role is to encourage people to attend, to explain how Fáilteú works, to co-facilitate the meetings, and to bring issues raised at the Forum to Fáilteú management. I'm not there to defend everything that goes on. I've been asked a lot of questions but I've never felt it was a personal thing about me. The users know that decisions are made at a management level. The Forum has been very easy to facilitate, we've stuck to the rules since the start and anyone new coming in has respected them.

I'd like to see similar meetings held in other agencies as well. It's a great way of finding out what the services users think, what they would like to see, and how best to adapt services.

We had terms of reference for a year, which is up in October, so part of the evaluation will be to see how best to proceed in the following year, if we are to continue with it. Whatever we decide to do, the Forum definitely will need to feed into policy making at a higher level, because we cannot continually ask people for their opinions unless there is the possibility of change arising from that. We'd be doing them a disservice. ■

I met three members of the Service Users Forum, to find out what they thought of it. But, as Shay had suggested, they were far more interested in the bigger picture.

They appreciated Mary Higgins's visit to the Forum, although they were critical of the Homeless Agency's lack of progress.

'Look at this,' said Denis (names have been changed) waving the last issue of **CornerStone**. 'It says here, the Homeless Agency was launched 'in brilliant early May sunshine'. Well now it's four months on, and what have homeless people seen?'

'It's a talking shop,' said Jimmy. 'All talk and no action.'

I asked about their experience of the Service Users Forum. Denis responded, 'Yeah, it's grand, but there are still hostels and B&Bs where you have to be out during the day. You shouldn't have to be out in the year 2001.'

'Crosscare's starting up again,' said Paul.

'It's only coming up to Christmas that people start talking about homelessness,' added Jimmy.

'What about Christy Grogan's visit to the Forum?' I asked.

'Christy Grogan, he did ten years in Ballymun so he knows what the front line is,' said Denis.

'He told us about our entitlements,' said Paul. 'But if you're homeless you can only get those entitlements from Charles Street, so what kind of entitlement is that?'

I asked again about the Forum.

'Mary Higgins talked about integrating services,' said Jimmy.

'But if the money's there why can't they provide better services now?' asked Denis.

I had one more go.

'A couple of lads were giving out about one particular hostel, and Fáilteú did something about it. There've been some changes there,' said Denis.

'You people, you want to do something about it,' said Jimmy kindly, 'but you don't understand the homeless.'

The Action Plan

Homeless Agency Director **Mary Higgins** gives a flavour of progress made so far in implementing the Action Plan.

New board members

Philip Maguire Assistant City Manager, Dublin Corporation led the Board of the Agency in its first year of operation. Philip has now moved from Housing to Corporate Affairs in the Corporation. He has been

replaced on the Board by Brendan Kenny who was selected as the new chair in September. Pat McLoughlin, Director of Planning and Commissioning in the Eastern Region Health Authority is vice chair.

The Board has two other new members, representing the South Western and East Coast Area Health Boards. They are, respectively, Hugh Kane, Assistant Chief Executive and David Walsh, Senior Executive Officer. ■

New staff

Following acceptance of the Action Plan, the Homeless Agency has recruited seven new staff all of whom are based at St Andrew's Street.

The new staff are Administrative Assistants **Aine Behan, Maria Fitzpatrick** and **Keith Comiskey**; and Personal Assistant to the Director **Eobhan O'Brien**.

Ivan Mahoney is Head of Service Delivery with responsibility for co-ordinating homeless services. He comes to the Homeless Agency from Focus Ireland.

Ger Sweeney is Head of Organisation Development with responsibility for finance, administration and development of the Homeless Agency.

Ger previously worked with the Irish Kidney Association.

The Head of Research, Policy and Information is **Maureen Lyons**, who has worked at University College Dublin and the Economic and Social Research Institute. The position of Head of Service Development was not filled but will be in the near future. ■

Monitoring and evaluation

The Dublin Action Plan places much emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of the action plan and the Agency. The Board of the Agency has agreed to use a Balanced Scorecard as a means of monitoring progress. The scorecard provides a framework which translates vision and strategy into a coherent set of performance indicators. It also takes into account the views of various stakeholders. The performance indicators require the collection of various information which will ultimately allow the Board to track progress on the implementation of the plan; the impact of

the plan on the levels and profile of homelessness; and the perspectives of different stakeholders, including service providers, service users, funders and the general public. The Agency is the first

non-commercial body to use the Balanced Scorecard in Ireland.

The Agency will also be subject to external evaluation which will be carried out by Price Waterhouse Coopers. ■

Dublin County Councils

Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin County Councils have appointed officers responsible for the implementation of the Dublin Action

Plan in their areas. These are: Liz Clifford, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, (tel 205 4700), John Burke, Fingal (tel 890 5000) and Margaret Campbell South Dublin (tel 414 9000). ■

New funding arrangements

Under recently agreed new funding arrangements, organisations providing services to people homeless in Dublin will no longer have to negotiate with different statutory bodies to secure funding for their services. Under the new arrangements, the Department of Environment and Local Government/local authorities and the Department of Health and Children/health boards have agreed which elements of services each will fund and the Homeless Agency will act as a clearing house for statutory funding.

The purpose of the new arrangements is to ensure that there is a coordinated and transparent mechanism for funding homeless services and that funding relates to the actual cost of providing services. The new arrangements will improve access to funding, particularly for smaller agencies

which may not be familiar with the current complex range of funds available, by providing a one stop shop for applications.

A working group of representatives of the Departments of Health and Children and Environment and Local Government, health boards, local authorities and voluntary organisations agreed the new arrangements in August and produced a report, *A Clearer Future: New Funding Arrangements for Homeless Services in Dublin*. Under the new arrangements, organisations providing direct services to people who are homeless in Dublin will be offered three year funding which will be based on service contracts. Funds will also be available, on a once off basis, for pilot and innovative projects, for research and for projects which relate to the improvement of standards. Funding will

cover the full cost of providing services, subject to the availability of public funds

The Homeless Agency will manage the application process, including the promotion of the availability of funding. It will assess applications, in conjunction with relevant statutory bodies and will monitor and evaluate services, on behalf of statutory bodies. The Agency will also negotiate service contracts with providers. Assessments for funding will be based on the extent to which services and projects relate to the needs of people who are homeless and the overall objectives of government policy and the Dublin Action Plan.

The closing date for applications in 2001 is 22nd October. In future years, this will be brought forward to June so that decisions are finalised in September. All funds will be paid quarterly in advance, commencing in January of each year. An information seminar for potential applicants was held on 25th September. Application packs and copies of the report of the working group are available from the Homeless Agency. ■

The new arrangements will improve access to funding, particularly for smaller agencies ... by providing a one stop shop for applications.

Night services

As part of the Dublin Winter Strategy, the Crosscare night service in Longford Lane has started again, and will run to the beginning of May 2002 after which it is planned to move to different premises and offer an all year round service. The service, which is aimed at men aged over 35 who normally sleep rough, offers shelter, food, support and referral. It is a direct access service, and referrals can also be made through the freephone and street outreach teams.

The Homeless Agency is currently in negotiation with other services to ensure 24x7 availability of drop in centres in Dublin city and Dun Laoghaire. Meanwhile, Dublin Corporation will continue to provide its night time bus service. ■

Training programme

A new Homeless Agency training programme is currently being finalised. This year, the range of short courses aimed at homeless service providers will be extended by the introduction of a health promotion programme. For further information contact Maria Fitzpatrick at the Homeless Agency. ■

Directory of Services

The Directory of Services published last year by the Homeless Initiative will this year be updated and published by the Agency in January of next year. The updated edition will include information on services for young people out of home. Information can be obtained from the Homeless Agency. ■

Long term housing

A site has been acquired for accommodation for street drinkers. The site is being developed by BIH Housing Association. BIH will manage the building aspects of the project and the Agency is currently in negotiation to contract the management of the service elements to a voluntary body. The project will provide medium to long term accommodation for twenty committed street drinkers, where they can consume alcohol in a controlled environment. ■

Emergency accommodation

Bed and Breakfast' accommodation continues to be an important component of emergency accommodation in Dublin. However, through the efforts of Dublin Corporation the quality of the accommodation and services provided have been improved. Two hundred beds have been lost due to higher standards and have been replaced by 350 new ones, giving an additional 150 emergency beds in the last six months. There are now about 1500 beds in this sector.

Currently people staying in privately leased properties do not pay rent. Proposals for the introduction of a

rental payment which would bring this type of accommodation in line with other emergency accommodation are currently under consideration. Negotiations are underway with hostel managers for the ring fencing of beds for homeless people referred by street outreach teams during the day.

Plans are in the process of being drawn for the refurbishment of Haven House, Regina Coeli and Morning Star Hostels. These hostels which are located on one site in Morning Star Avenue will be replaced by a mix of emergency and longer term accommodation for families and single men and women. The project



is expected to be completed by the end of next year. ■

Multi-Disciplinary Outreach

The Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team for Homeless People which aims to link homeless people with health services, is now up and running. The team, which covers the Dublin city area will work with

people until they are successfully linked to appropriate services; ensure that people have easy access to a doctor, nurse, chiropodist, dentist, counsellor, optician, health promotion, and harm reduction as appropriate; provide fast

track medical cards; identify barriers to services and work with service providers to eliminate them.

The team can be contacted for a referral form or discussion on (01) 855 9211 Fax (01) 855 9269. ■

24 hour free phone service

It is expected that the 24 hour free phone service will be operational on schedule in January 2002. The free phone will provide comprehensive advice, information and referral services for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. ■

Client monitoring system

The Homeless Agency is due to pilot a new internet-based client monitoring system from November. The system will allow service providers to record client details and interventions, and to share information. It will also allow the Homeless Agency to collect crucial information, which will assist in the review and planning of services. ■

Service users

Work is underway on the preparation of proposals for a 'voice' programme for people who are homeless. Proposals

will include direct activities with people who are homeless to facilitate them to speak about the experiences of homelessness and of services, as well as activities with people providing services to encourage and enable them to work in an empowering way with service users.

A satisfaction survey of homeless service users is planned for December and work is underway on the development of a complaints procedure and a charter of rights for service users. ■

Care managers

The proposals in the Action Plan to pilot a project of care managers has run into difficulty with trade unions representing the Community Welfare Officers in the Homeless Persons Unit. It is envisaged that care managers would have responsibility for overseeing the route of people homeless through the system and into long term settlement. The

Community Welfare Officers believe that they are currently carrying out this role. The care managers are a central part of delivering a seamless and integrated service to people homeless and hopefully this matter will be resolved in the near future. ■

Worker networks

Networks of street outreach services, settlement workers and hostel managers have been established and other networks will start over the coming months. The networks will be used to inform the development of services and training. ■

Public education and awareness

A survey of public attitudes on homelessness and responses to it is planned for December. As with service users, the survey will provide information from which a programme of public education will be developed. ■

FROM THE Roof Tops



A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

Anne O'Donovan

Co-Ordinator, CentreCare and Emigrant Advice

People are still leaving...

There is a myth in Ireland today that involuntary emigration is a thing of the past. Indeed if one was to believe some of the headlines that followed the release of the recent Central Statistics Office population and migration estimates one would think that there was no longer any emigration from this country.

The reality is that although emigration has declined drastically since the late 1980s (an estimated 228,200 people left between 1987 and 1990), thousands still emigrate from Ireland each year. In the year to April 2001 approximately 19,900 left the country, the majority of which were aged 18–25.

Irish support agencies in the USA and Britain report that new arrivals contacting them are no longer solely economic migrants, but are more socially excluded and more vulnerable than in the past with complex support needs. Many of these immigrants are poorly educated, unskilled and in housing need, and have addiction or psychological problems. For many the service structure to support them is not available and one way of getting help is to emigrate.

Lack of suitable affordable housing here and the hope that they would be housed faster and in better conditions in Britain has motivated some people to leave. Yet there is a high incidence of Irish people in Britain living in insecure or temporary accommodation and therefore at a high risk of becoming homeless. Single Irish people are over represented among the homeless population in Britain.

There is also the matter of the debt we owe to those who emigrated in the past. The remittances that they sent home were of huge economic significance to this country. Now many of them wish to return, but they do not have access to affordable accommodation and local authorities will not accept them onto their housing lists.

Emigration has long been a feature of Irish life and continues to be so. It is time that resources are put into services that support emigrants and returning emigrants. It is also time that we recognised our own experiences as immigrants in other lands as we now come to terms with the phenomena of immigration to Ireland. As Fintan O'Toole commented, we need to stop acting as if being Irish and being immigrant are opposing 'categories of humanity'.

Involuntary emigration and the high levels of vulnerability that accompany it, is the ultimate form of social exclusion. It is time we called a halt and started to address the needs of these people who feel they have no option but to leave. One of the first steps would be to put in place the Task Force on Emigration that was promised in the PPF, however over a year later there is still no progress. Another is to support the provision of pre-departure information and advice to those considering emigration as an option. The most valid passport is good advice and information. ■

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