

**Couples and Families in B&B's:
Potential for Access Housing Unit Referrals**

Access Housing Unit

**HOME
LESS
agency**

**COUPLES AND FAMILIES IN B&BS:
POTENTIAL FOR AHU REFERRALS**

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COUPLES AND FAMILIES IN B&BS: POTENTIAL FOR AHU REFERRALS

Research purpose

The project's objective is to assess the potential for increased referrals of couples and families living in private emergency accommodation (PEA) to Threshold's Access Housing Unit (AHU) for setting up tenancies in the private rented sector (PRS).

The AHU settled 103 homeless couples and families (including lone parents) in the private tenancies during 2003 and 2004. Very few of these tenancies failed. The AHU could handle considerably more referrals than it receives.¹ Increased activity by the AHU should help to bring stability to more lives, reduce homelessness and reliance on costly PEA. Over the two year period only 39 of the referrals to the AHU involved families or couples in B&Bs, raising questions about the potential for expansion. There were 184 families and couples living in PEA in February 2005 when the survey was undertaken.

The number of referrals depends on the numbers in PEA, the proportion who do not have issues that preclude successful independent living, the availability of support workers and their knowledge of their clients and of the housing option available through the AHU. Referrals also are determined by the preferences and alternatives perceived to be available by the PEA households. This research focuses on the potential for referrals from the perspective of households in PEA.

A variety of barriers may impede households moving from PEA to private tenancies including

- financial disincentives especially where the household does not pay a charge for the PEA provided and where full-time employment is likely in the near future²
- fear of losing priority for social housing placement and/or perception that PRS is very insecure
- lack of support by service providers to facilitate the shift or personal issues still unresolved that would compromise the sustainment of a private tenancy
- lack of information from service providers about the PRS option i.e. information about availability, quality etc. of the accommodation and the settlement supports at hand.

The research aimed to learn about the intentions and willingness of PEA households to move into private tenancies.

¹ The Unit has the expertise available to deal with more referrals and, in contrast to the situation for single persons, can readily find suitable private rental accommodation within the rent supplement ceilings. However a large increase in referrals would require additional staff.

² Persons working more than 30 hours per week are ineligible for rent supplement.

- Would renting privately be regarded as the best or even second best housing situation for their household?
- Would they consider a private rented tenancy of appropriate size, quality and location and given help in getting settled?
- Had they looked for a place in PRS while living in emergency accommodation?
- Is the household paying an accommodation charge?

Another aim was to determine whether there are obstacles in the way of moves to renting privately that stem not from family preferences but rather from lack of information or supports.

- What do PEA residents say impedes them from moving into private tenancies?
- What would make moving on more feasible?
- Is access to information about housing issues adequate?
- Do they have a key worker who might assist the household contemplating a move?

The research was undertaken in two stages. The first examined available data on the trends in homelessness and in PEA usage for families and couples, and also on the characteristics of families who have been referred to AHU in the past. The views were gathered from a number of Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) and service providers working in the PEA sector about the potential for more referrals. The results of this stage were described in an interim research report presented to the project's advisory committee.

The second stage of the research involved a survey of a sample of households living in PEA. This final report focuses on the findings but also refers to the earlier work where this provides relevant context, helps in interpreting the survey results or in formulating recommendations.

The structure of the report is as follows: The environment in which referrals to AHU are made is described briefly as is the role of the AHU. The survey of PEA households is outlined and then the main findings are summarised, initially from the perspective of the number of potential candidates for private tenancies, followed by a probing for conditions or situations that would support such moves. The main conclusions are outlined, and the final section suggests measures that could enhance referrals to the AHU.

The environment

During the late 1990s when rents were rising steeply in Dublin and social housing was not expanding, increasing resort was made to private bed and breakfasts to house homeless families. In response PEA 'capitation' arrangements were developed by Dublin City Council (DCC) in co-operation with the Health Boards.

DCC contracts with property owners to supply properties for a length of time which DCC pays for irrespective of occupancy rates.

Almost all the properties are located in the central Dublin area. The accommodation varies, with the 'D' type of PEA providing traditional B&B accommodation where residents have no access to a kitchen. Type 'A' contains apartments each with its own bathroom and kitchen, while the B and C types of properties provide space and facilities intermediate between these two. Allocation is said to be based primarily on availability at the time a household presents but sometimes information about suitability is influential.³

While the properties resemble those at the lower-priced end in PRS, the responsibilities and rights of residents are rather different from those of PRS tenants. The PEA owner employs a property manager who typically lives on the premises and enforces the rules by which residents must conduct themselves (e.g., no visitors). Managers can ban residents for misbehaviour, a step which usually involves the household moving to a different property.

Each household is visited weekly by their CWO. There are six patch CWOs attached to the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) who cover the B&Bs, each with a caseload of about 100 households. The homeless person may also see other professionals, sometimes based on referrals by their CWO. Movement around the properties by homeless persons can interfere with the service provision by the social workers and other support workers.

Traditionally PEA residents have not contributed financially towards their housing although any move-on accommodation would involve payments. In 2005 the authorities began the staged introduction of an accommodation charge in PEA which the resident pays, as it is not deducted at source from their social welfare payment. The charge is set at an amount based on the average differential rents paid by social welfare recipients in local authority housing; an adult is charged €16, a couple €25, plus an additional €3 per child. The payment is greater than the contribution that would be required by a two-adult family rent supplement recipient.⁴

The Public Private Partnership concept inherent in PEA is being extended through the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) which eventually will affect all recipients of rent supplement who are assessed in long term housing need. Indeed, when RAS is implemented some PEA households may be shifted out of PEA properties over to it rather than being offered a local authority or housing association unit. For the foreseeable future however PEA households looking to

³ For example, there tends to be less supervision of households in apartment, type A accommodation.

⁴ A rent supplement recipient would probably have to pay for utilities as well. Also their contribution would increase for earnings above any applicable disregard.

move can apply for social housing, transitional housing or they can seek a private rental unit either independently or via a referral to the AHU.⁵

The HPU is steadily improving its information collection methods for homeless persons including those in PEA, but at present information is limited. The duration of stay in PEA-type accommodation by individual households and information about where people go on exiting the sector is lacking. Residents range from people whose only issue is not having a home to those who need high levels of medical and social support. Information is not available on the mix of residents by level of need across the property types as there is not co-ordinated collection of comprehensive assessments of residents. The HPU data that is available suggests that turnover within PEA (amongst properties) and into and out of PEA is considerable.⁶

The number of families and couples presenting as homeless to HPU has been declining, as has the number of family and couple referrals to the AHU. The trend shown in Table 1 under-represents the drop that occurred in 2004; included in the statistics for that year only are 29% repeat (rather than new) cases presenting to the HPU. Referrals of couples and families to AHU from B&Bs and other sources amounted to 78 cases in 2003 and 29 cases in 2004, a decline of 63%.

Inevitably the downward trend affects the scope for establishing more B&B families in private tenancies. The decline probably reflects easier access generally to the rental market, leaving a greater proportion of the families in B&Bs remaining there not simply because of the scarcity of accommodation.⁷ In other words, fewer PEA residents may be obvious candidates for PRS or for social housing.

Table 1
Cases presenting to the Homeless Persons Unit by household type

	2004*	2003	2002
TOTAL	2642	2988	3049
Couples	68	86	124
Lone parent	202	232	334

⁵ Other possibilities such as moving into permanent supported accommodation are relevant to few households.

⁶ For example during the second half of 2004 there were 529 family and couple cases in PEA occupancy with 299 cases placed during the period and 328 'unplaced' (i.e. no longer in the particular property). However it is not known what portion of the placed and unplaced are churn where a household leaves one PEA address to move into another, as opposed to moving into permanent or transitional housing or to hostels or another part of the homeless sector

⁷ The CSO index of private rents shows a 3.8% drop between September 2002 and September 2003. It dropped a further 4.1% over the following 12 months.

families			
Two-adult families	57	77	150
Families & couples	327	395	508

* 1878 new presentations and 764 repeat presentations in the total.

The limited information available suggests that movement along some of the other routes out of PEA declined between 2003 and 2004. Focus Ireland has announced that it is closing its Family Transition Programme and Children's Services in Stanhope Green and George's Hill on 1 July 2005 due, among other factors, to "a marked reduction in families applying". Another major transitional housing provider, Vincentian Housing Partnership's Rendu Apartments also reports a fall in applications from families. Dublin City Council estimates that it provided social housing to 3 couples and 76 families from B&Bs in 2003 and for 2 couples and 29 families in 2004.

Local authority allocations officers were contacted during the first stage of the research to learn about the application and waiting process for social housing. Dublin City noted recent examples of B&B families turning down offers of housing; research had been commissioned to look into the situation.⁸ A refusal in the other three local authorities means relegation to the standard housing list.

Officers in Fingal and South Dublin emphasised the lengthy time it often took to fulfill the council's requirements for priority listing, but noted that once assessed, applicants usually were offered a social housing unit quite quickly. Although the possibility of a private tenancy might be raised at the presentation interview, officers did not look at that market as a housing solution for any of the applicants. The contact at Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown on the other hand, prioritized finding permanent homes for those in B&Bs saw her clients and she would facilitate moves into private tenancies for those families on the council's list who would suit such accommodation.

Under the last Action Plan for the Homeless Agency Dublin City Council set a target for itself of dedicating one third of its social housing allocations to homeless persons; South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown committed to 10% but Fingal set no targets. Information provided by the Homeless Agency late in the project indicates relatively strong performance by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. It exceeded its target every year whereas Dublin fell increasingly short of its (much higher) target.

Data from the Homeless Agency shows that overall the number of social houses allocated by the four local authorities fell from 1,757 units in 2002 to 1,721 in

⁸Prior to the launch of the household survey, this researcher viewed a draft of the report by Aspect|One. The report entitled "Assessment of Needs of Residents staying in 'Bed and Breakfast' Accommodation" had been commissioned by Dublin City Council early in 2004.

2003 to 1,527 in 2004. The percentage of the allocations given to the homeless (whether in B&Bs or elsewhere) fell as well, from 20% in 2002 to 17% in 2003 to 15% in 2004.

Access Housing Unit

The AHU began operation as a pilot scheme in 2003, funded by the Homeless Agency and organised as a small unit within Threshold, the national housing organization. Now on a permanent basis, the Unit has built up a list of about 50 landlords who are willing to take its clients. AHU presently is setting up an average of seven tenancies per month. An AHU tenancy sustainment worker has been employed who provides continuing support for those tenants who require it.

Homeless persons come to the Unit via a settlement or other key worker who completes a detailed referral form based on their knowledge of the household, and judgement of the members' ability to live independently. An AHU staff member meets the home-seeker and carries out an assessment to learn the housing history and motivation to move on. The staff find suitable properties for viewing, proactively supporting the person through the process of getting rent supplement and a deposit; they help sort out other furnishing needs and put the household in touch with local services. Usually the settlement/key worker continues to work with the household concerning non-housing issues.

The AHU's data base provides information on the households living in private emergency accommodation who were referred in past and accepted by the Unit. Only 13% of the referrals to the Unit involved family and couples in B&Bs; there were 39 referrals in total over 2003 and 2004; 14 described as couples, 20 as one parent families and 5 as two-adult families.

- Of the 31 case summaries with information on duration of homelessness, 26% (8 cases) indicated 6 months or less.
- Nine of the couples referred had children, usually with part-time access.
- In a number of referrals the woman was expecting a baby.
- Of the 32 households saying that they had children with them, at least part time, 17 were caring for several children while 15 had one child.
- Of the 33 referrals with council registration data, 21% (7 cases) involved anti-social records.
- Almost every case with an anti-social record involved a household with several children.

The household survey

The survey took place over three nights during February 2005.⁹ It involved 53 face to face interviews to complete a questionnaire comprising some 32 queries. The respondents were members of lone and dual parent family and couple households living in private emergency accommodation. The survey questionnaire focused on the resident's experience and views of PRS to facilitate identifying who amongst the respondents was positively disposed to moving, to ascertain their knowledge of the PRS and under what circumstances they would consider moving into private rented accommodation. Appendix 1 gives details about the survey method and includes a copy of the questionnaire.

Perhaps the most striking revelation of the survey is the wide variety of situations reported by respondents and the uncertain future perceived by some of them. When asked how long they expected to remain in PEA, many lone parents and couples in particular, predicted that they'd be gone by the time 12 months had passed (Table 2). But across the household types there were others who could not estimate when they were likely to get alternative accommodation or predicted a very long stay in emergency.

Table 2
Expected duration of stay in PEA

	Lone parents	Two-adult families	Couples
	No.	No.	No.
Less than 6 months	4	3	4
6 to 12 months	8	3	4
Long term	1	5	1
Don't know how long	8	6	6
TOTAL	21	17	15

In this context, it should be noted that most children living in these households are of school age (Table 3). In addition there were five lone parent family, six two-adult family and seven couple households who had children living elsewhere.

Table 3
Children in the households surveyed

	Under 5 years	5 to 18 years
	No.	No.
Lone parents	14	45

⁹ A plan to survey Irish non-nationals in PEA did not take place. According to the Asylum Seekers Unit number of families in PEA who have an entitlement to source private rented accommodation declined over the winter months from over twenty to six.

Two-adult families	11	29
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Housing preferences

According to the service providers (including CWOs) who were interviewed in the first stage of the research, people in PEA are apt to consider social housing as their right since they mostly were reared in local authority housing and it is the sector they know best. Most (81%) of the survey respondents considered local authority housing to be their preferred housing situation. Appendix Table 1 breaks down much of the survey information by grouping respondents according to household type. It shows that all but one of the couples surveyed said that local authority housing was best. Amongst two-adult families 13 out of 17 selected local authority housing first as did 16 out of 21 lone parent families.

Only five households out of 53 considered renting privately to be their best housing situation: two lone parents, two two-adult families and one couple. Transitional housing was favoured by four families in total and staying put by one two-adult family.

Transitional housing was almost as popular as PRS as a second best housing situation amongst families while ten couples chose it compared with four choosing PRS. Three respondents had no second best after their first choice of local authority housing.

The service providers indicated that families may resist the idea of considering accommodation other than social housing even if the prospect of an offer from the council is remote. They added that putting in time in temporary accommodation was often seen as an investment towards a council house, not to be sacrificed. Given the improved condition of much of the private emergency accommodation, putting in time may well be seen as tolerable by some homeless households.

The survey results confirm the importance of the social housing alternative, and they suggest that accurate information about their housing options may not be absorbed in some cases. There were three respondents who would not give a second best alternative to social housing and there were another 12 who would not rank PRS as a preference even though they expected to wait more than one year for social housing.¹⁰

Forty-six of the respondents had registered with Dublin City Council. Only four out of the 53 survey respondents said that they were not registered with a local authority for housing.¹¹ Less than half (45%) had been waiting two years or less

¹⁰ They chose transitional housing, suggesting that personal issues required attention. The other five long wait respondents chose local authority as first and PRS as second best.

¹¹ According to three, anti-social records explained their non-registration while the fourth said they'd recently become homeless and illness had prevented them from registering.

while 36% expected a further wait of one year or less. There were 14 respondents (26%) who could not estimate how much longer they expected to wait for a council unit while 17 (32%) anticipated a wait exceeding one year.

The source of information for respondents about their prospects of getting social housing was their CWO, council official and/or social worker for 11 lone parents, for 10 two-adult families and for four couples. Most of the other respondents said that they relied only on their own experience or friends for information.

Perceptions of PRS housing option

To provide a broad brush picture of the possible interest in PRS by the survey respondents, Table 4 shows the results for the final interview question on the likelihood of the respondent actually moving into PRS. Across the sample 45% (24) respondents indicated an open mind to the PRS housing option, an equivalent percentage were not interested in moving to PRS while for another 9% (5) were uncertain about the PRS option. The table displays how respondents with different attributes or experiences were distributed across the three-attitudinal positions about PRS.

Table 4

Summary assessment of potential for moving to PRS in future

	Respondent	Potential	No potential	Uncertain
	No.	%	%	%
In property A type	14	43	57	0
In property B type	13	31	62	8
In property C type	20	45	35	20
In property D type	6	83	17	0
Lone parents	21	29	67	5
Two-adult families	17	47	35	18
Couples	15	67	27	7
Small household (fewer than 3 persons)	22	55	41	5
Medium size households (3-4 persons)	20	20	65	15
Larger households (5 or more persons)	11	73	18	9
Pay charge*	12	17	75	8
No charge paid	39	54	36	10
Don't know about charge	3	25	75	0
Time in emergency 6 months or	19	74	21	5

less				
Time in emergency more than 6 months	33	30	58	12
Expected wait for council house less than 6 months	5	40	60	0
Expected wait for council house 6 months or longer	31	29	58	13
Expected wait unknown**	14	79	14	7
Key/settlement worker assigned	31	52	35	13
No key worker	22	36	59	5
<i>Total respondents</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>9</i>

*Five respondents in A properties confirmed that they pay and seven in B properties. ** Two respondents did not answer and one said irrelevant as not accepted.

As pointed out by the service providers some households would have great difficulty getting social housing because of rent arrears and/or an anti-social history. Two out of the three survey respondents who were not on the waiting list due to anti-social records expected eventually to get social housing and were uninterested in PRS. It is amongst the respondents who could not say how long they were likely to wait before getting an offer of social housing who tended to be receptive to the PRS option. Seventy-nine percent of them indicated interest in PRS while only 14% did not.

The interviews with service providers suggested that while more occupants of the type A (apartment) properties might be well able to cope with living independently in PRS, they were probably less likely to consider the PRS option. The quality of their current accommodation usually is good, and by staying put, they maintained their priority for council housing.¹²

Introduction of the accommodation charge addressed the financial incentive to stay in PEA. However a number of service providers expressed doubts about its enforceability. The charge had been introduced in some type A properties just before the start of the survey and to several type B properties during the survey period. The degree of compliance is not known.

As shown on Table 4, the type of property is not closely correlated to receptiveness to the PRS option except that those in B type properties were least likely and those in D most likely to be open to a private tenancy. A lower percentage of those who said that they paid the accommodation charge were open to PRS than those who said that they did not pay. However the very recent and partial application of the charge makes drawing inferences about its impact hazardous.

¹² In addition, rules about visitors etc tended to be less onerous in the apartment-type properties.

The CWOs who were interviewed suggested that people were most likely to move during the period immediately after their entry into PEA, before they became acclimatised. According to the survey the time spent in emergency accommodation appears to influence receptiveness to the PRS option. Almost three quarters of respondents who said they had been living in emergency accommodation for 6 months or less appeared receptive compared with 21% of longer term residents.

Relatively more respondents who said that they had a key worker were positively disposed to PRS than those who did not. Doubtless some of the former were actively looking for a way out of their present situation and the key worker could help them to overcome obstacles to finding a way out. But often the extra support was there for the children or for substance abuse issues, according to the comments included with the responses.

Household type and size appear to be related to acceptability of PRS. Lone parents were least positive about PRS and couples were the most positive. Only 29% of lone parents indicated a move to PRS was a possibility compared with 67% of the couples surveyed. The factor that appears to influence couples was an inestimable or lengthy wait for social housing. Larger households were more receptive than smaller-sized ones. Almost three-quarters of households with five or more members responded positively.¹³ Three quarters of these receptive families were in emergency accommodation for six months or less and the same percentage had a key worker.¹⁴ Again six out of the eight did not know when they would get into social housing.

Of course the results shown in Table 4 are not definitive. The confidence given to these summary assessments can be tested by reviewing the responses to various other questions posed about PRS during the interviews, and singling out only those respondents who were consistently positive to all the questions. Twenty-three of the twenty four respondents who were assessed as open to renting privately also said that they would positively consider suitable PRS given help moving. However there were three amongst them who had not searched for a private tenancy while in PEA, and a different seven who did not choose PRS as either their first or second best housing option. Under this more rigorous test of receptiveness to private tenancies only 13 respondents (25%) appear to be potential candidates for PRS.

Table 5 shows a variety of measures or tests of PRS potential in the sample. While the selection yields a wide range, it lends credibility to the estimate that,

¹³ A review of the responses for the eight larger households who were positive showed two had volunteered information about issues ('drug problem'; 'our history') that would affect their acceptability for council housing.

¹⁴ Six of the eight receptive large families with a key worker had been living in PEA for less than six months.

from the household’s perspective, more than one quarter of the households would be candidates for helping into private tenancies.¹⁵ The respondents who consistently reacted positively to questions on PRS, although small in number, reflect patterns described earlier: relatively few were lone parents but disproportionate numbers were a short time in emergency housing and had a key worker.

Table 5
Indicators of interest in a private tenancy

	No.	%
Would consider suitable PRS with support getting settled	35	66
Have searched PRS while in PEA	30	57
Assessed PRS a real possibility	24	45
PRS first or second best housing option	23	43
Consistently positive responses	13	25
PRS best housing option	5	9

There are other cautions to bear in mind in interpreting the survey results. The situations of respondents can change quickly, prompting changes of opinion. But even as a snapshot view, it is hard to tell how many negative comments about PRS were based on perceptions about barriers to moving that could be addressed by improvements in information or supports.

Barriers to moving to PRS

When asked what hampered them finding a home in PRS, a minority of the respondents said nothing prevented such a move (Table 6). Affordability and competitiveness (e.g., the ability to get financing together in time) were seen as a barrier for a proportion of respondents across all the household types. But losing their place on the council list was the barrier to which most lone parent respondents referred. Couples in particular pointed to the difficulties finding places that accept rent supplement and getting the rent and deposit together quickly enough.¹⁶

Table 6
Perceived barriers to moving to private rented by all households*

	Lone parents	Two-adult families	Couples
	%	%	%
Nothing hampering search in PRS	14	35	13
Lose position on council list	62	12	20
Affordability	29	47	60

¹⁵ Whether all the households would meet AHU’s criteria is another matter.

¹⁶ Discrimination against rent supplement recipients has been noted in other research. See Clodagh Memery and Liz Kerrins (2001) *Who wants to be a landlord: a profile of landlords in Dublin City* Dublin: Threshold page 44.

Cannot compete with other home seekers	5	0	20
Insecure	24	6	20
Other (e.g., personal issues; dwelling standard)	24	18	13
<i>No. respondents</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>15</i>

* Some respondents noted more than one type of barrier

Table 7 shows the perceptions of only those respondents who said that they would positively consider 'a private rented tenancy of appropriate quality, location and size, along with support to get settled'. Affordability has the highest profile although amongst lone parent families losing their place was mentioned as frequently. Insecurity also appears to be important for family households.

Table 7
Perceived barriers to moving to private rented by households willing to consider good PRS offer*

	Lone parents	Two-adult families	Couples
	%	%	%
Nothing hampering search in PRS	27	38	9
Lose position on council list	36	8	9
Affordability	36	38	45
Cannot compete with other home seekers	9	0	45
Insecure	36	15	9
Other (e.g., personal issues)	27	15	18
<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>11</i>

* Some respondents noted more than one type of barrier

Those who said that they would consider PRS if a good offer made were questioned about the types of help they would like. The importance of help to get a deposit and to qualify for rent supplement is especially important for couples but assurances about rents and security of tenure are also relevant to most of the respondents (Table 8).

Table 8
Supports that enhance attractiveness of PRS option

	Lone parent families	Two-adult families	Couples
<i>Who would consider private tenancy of suitable size, quality, location</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>11</i>
For whom help in finding and	8	11	10

setting up tenancy important			
For whom assurance important that rent no higher than if council tenant	10	8	6
For whom assurance important of no eviction without good reason	10	9	5

Information and support

Only two respondents said they had no professional source of information about housing, with only nine respondents saying that the information provided was not what they want. Sixty percent (32) said that they had more than one source of advice about housing issues. CWOs were most often referred to, with 43 respondents relying on them for information. Sixteen mentioned Focus Ireland but seven of these could not name their contact. One respondent referred to Dublin Simon, two named a DCC resettlement worker and another four council workers. Three said Threshold had provided information. The 21 other mentions of sources referred to social workers or workers for organisations such as Faltiu, the Drug Treatment Centre Board (Trinity Court) and Merchants Quay.

Amongst the 31 respondents who indicated that they had a key worker, twelve mentioned Focus Ireland (seven giving names), five DCC settlement (all named), with the remaining 14 were spread amongst several agencies (eight naming workers). Ten of those with key workers mentioned other sources for housing advice in addition to their CWO, typically referring to a 'social worker'. There was no obvious pattern between providers of key workers and supplementary advisors.

Two-thirds (14) of lone parents said they had a key worker in addition to support from a CWO. Only one said they had requested a key worker but had none. Ten (59%) two-adult families had a key worker and another was about to be allocated one. Three had requested a key worker but had not yet obtained one. Seven couples (47%) had a key worker with only one of the others saying they had requested one to no avail.¹⁷ When asked, a minority of the respondents identified specific ways in which their key worker helped them address accommodation issues.

Looking for a private tenancy

Life in a PEA is structured by rules enforced by property managers and weekly visits by a CWO while budgeting demands are limited. Finding and sustaining a private tenancy requires skills and commitment not required in PEA. In the first

¹⁷ Residents typically are obliged to register for social housing but individual effort is required to get into PRS or transitional housing. While gaining a key worker would help in moving on, the initiative of some residents may have been undermined by previous experience.

stage of the research an issue was raised about the availability of professionals working in PEA who could make referrals to AHU and provide settlement services. In particular Focus Ireland experienced a shortage of settlement workers for several months in 2004 which has since been rectified. More generally some service providers felt that support wasn't always there promptly or consistently. Concern was expressed about people leaving PEA without access to the supports needed for successful independent living.

Twenty-nine survey respondents said they had been encouraged to search for private rented accommodation, in most cases by the CWO. Eleven respondents said that they had been discouraged from searching, usually by friends. Respondents who had encouragement were more likely to say that they had searched for private rented accommodation (Table 9). Altogether 30 respondents (57%) said that they had looked for private rented while in emergency accommodation.

Table 9
Impact of encouragement to searching for private rented accommodation

	Lone parent	Two-adult	Couple
No. encouraged to search	9	13	7
% of those encouraged who had searched	67%	69%	86%
No. not encouraged to search*	12	4	8
% of those not encouraged who searched	17%	50%	63%

* though not necessarily discouraged from searching.

Two-thirds of respondents who searched for a private tenancy had a settlement worker or key worker. Of those without support, couples were the most likely to search independently for private rented accommodation (Table 10).

Table 10
Searching in PRS and access to support

	Lone parent families	Two-adult families	Couples
No. who search PRS	8	11	11
Searchers who had key worker	6	8	6

Ten out of 53 respondents either knew what the AHU does or had heard of the AHU. As Table 11 shows all those aware of the AHU were encouraged to search in the PRS and almost all of them said that they had in fact searched.

Table 11
Awareness of AHU and PRS search activity

	Know about AHU	Had heard of AHU
No. aware of AHU	6	4

No. aware and searched PRS	5	4
No. aware and encouraged to search	6	4

Conclusions

- It is difficult to determine the potential for attracting B&B households to PRS on the basis of the responses. A range of 66% to 9% can be extracted from the results. However an estimate of about one quarter of the households being likely candidates appears plausible. Given 327 presentations to HPU in 2004 (and assuming these households are allocated to PEA properties), this would imply AHU handling 6 referrals per month.¹⁸ This rate would be considerably larger than experienced to date, given that there were only 39 referrals of couples and families from B&Bs during the first two years of the Unit's existence.
- The readiness of interested households for independent living was not a focus of the interviews but comments during the interviews suggest that issues exist for some households.
- There appears to be a connection between time in emergency accommodation and interest in PRS with many more short-timers apparently open to moving to a private tenancy.
- Households typically receptive to PRS are those unable to estimate when they might be get an acceptable housing offer from the local authority. Either they did not anticipate an offer anytime soon or getting an offer was not a priority.
- Households with a key worker are more likely than those without to be open to PRS.
- Few respondents said they pay an accommodation charge. Because the charge had just begun to be introduced, the survey does not reveal its impact on perceptions about housing options.
- The new policy of charging for PEA does not appear to be well established in the mindset of the residents. Amongst households in apartment type properties, many of whom were subject to the charge at the time of the survey, only 43% said that they pay.

¹⁸ Using the PEA cases placed monthly average of 50 would imply 12 possible candidates. However it is likely that a substantial portion of the cases placed are simply moves within PEA.

- While some of the support workers who were interviewed objected to B&B households being pressed to look in the PRS, describing it as a useless exercise in paperwork, such stimulus does seem to prompt search efforts.
- Some of the support workers also expressed concern about the sustainability of tenancies established by B&B households under their own steam. According to the survey 68% of those who are or have been looking in the PRS have a key or settlement worker.
- Most of those who would consider a good offer of private rented said that support and assurances would make that option more attractive. These responses suggest that even households who are receptive to PRS perceive barriers to moving. The challenge will be in convincing the households in B&Bs that the perceived barriers are manageable.
- Access to professionals by no means guarantees that information gets through. Many respondents could not give the name of their CWO or their key worker. Fourteen out of the fifty-three respondents could not estimate when they would get an acceptable council house offer. Yet less than one fifth of the survey respondents saw any gaps in the housing information provided.
- A considerable number of respondents said that their information about access to council housing did not come from professionals.
- Determination to hold out for local authority housing is evident in the sample. Among the 31 respondents who expected to wait more than one more year for an offer, or could not estimate how long they would have to wait, 26% would not consider renting privately even if the place was suitable and they got help with the move.

Recommendations

Any recommendations that seek to promote more referrals of PEA clients to the AHU must take into account the PEA scheme as a whole. Long-term residence in PEA is neither cost effective nor conducive to child rearing and family development. The AHU service is one possible means of reducing reliance on PEA but it cannot work in isolation. Indeed such a narrow, exclusive focus could undermine the PEA programme. **A range of preventative actions are needed to ensure PEA is short-term.**

Dublin City Council (and the other Dublin local authorities) play a key role in facilitating the exit of households from PEA:

- **The accommodation-charging scheme in PEA must be made to work.** Housing alternatives to PEA involve regular payments, and residents

- should become accustomed to living with this financial discipline and no longer face a financial disincentive to moving on.
- **Reform the scheme of letting priorities for social housing applicable to PEA residents finding private rented tenancies through AHU referrals.** There are households who stay in PEA to maximise their chances for an offer of social housing. They refuse to consider a move to private rented with the help of AHU because their housing priority status would be adversely affected. Consideration should be given to amending the scheme to reduce this incentive to stay put. Perhaps the relevant authority could commit to households who successfully manage a private tenancy for one year that they would receive an offer of social accommodation.
 - **Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's proactive housing placement role** should be considered by the other local authorities as it appears to yield both private rented and social housing placements. This would involve council staff considering private tenancies for suitable households and looking for places in that sector as well as in the social sector. Such an approach would supplement AHU's main focus on the city centre, thereby providing better coverage across the capital region.
 - **Investment in social housing must be increased, as this is the main avenue out of PEA.** NESC identified a shortage of social housing in its recent review, identifying a serious imbalance in the Irish housing system. A major recommendation of the NESC report, *Housing in Ireland: Performance and Policy* (2004) is "to create an expanded and more flexible stock of social housing-adding in the order of 73,000 permanent social housing units to bring the stock to 200,000 dwellings by 2012".
 - **The integration of the new Rental Accommodation Scheme, PEA and AHU service must be developed to ensure that PEA residents benefit.** For example, the rent supplement rule disqualifying those who work more than 30 hours weekly acts as a disincentive to moving from PEA to private rented, a disincentive that is to be avoided in RAS.

A twin-track approach is needed to respond both to PEA residents who are ready to live independently and those who are not. **The Homeless Agency** should ensure that all residents in PEA are progressing along individually defined exit routes, by bringing together the various service organisations to develop effective, integrated systems.

- **The Agency should co-ordinate effective assessment of PEA residents and their access to appropriate services.** For example DCC settlement services might be made responsible for arranging comprehensive assessments of housing and other needs of households. At present there is no computerised data source on the needs mix of households in PEA properties, much less holdings of comprehensive client histories. (We understand that Dublin City Council recently appointed an officer with responsibility for this area who will work with the

- Agency. This initiative is most welcome; progress will be followed with interest.)
- **PEA residents should be linked to key workers** who can explain their options, help access services and monitor progress.
 - **PEA residents should be prepared for independent living** even when such a move depends on substantial progress on health and social issues. To illustrate, pre-tenancy training for individuals about to leave institutional care is being developed by AHU that could be adapted to suit PEA residents.
 - **PEA residents should be tracked after they have moved out of homeless services** to improve programme implementation and evaluation. For example, information is lacking on the number of households who leave PEA to rent privately and the number of those exiting who soon return to homelessness. It would also be useful to know more about those who move on successfully, such as the level of support they received before and immediately after their move.

In conjunction with **the HPU, the AHU** should target new arrivals to PEA since they are more likely to be receptive to moving on. A number of initiatives can be implemented in the short term.

- **The AHU and patch CWOs should liaise more closely** to ensure that potential candidates are identified quickly after presentation at the HPU. The working arrangements would have to take into account the heavy caseloads CWOs currently manage and the detailed assessment the AHU requires for referrals. Steps are already underway to bring this about.
- **The AHU should advertise its service and its high success rate** throughout the homeless sector to counter the perception that renting privately is an option of last resort. Improved information on the private rented sector along with estimates of their individual waiting times for social housing would give for PEA households a better picture of their options.
- **Continuing health and social issues should not preclude households from the AHU service** if community-based services are possible in lieu of centralised homeless services.

In brief, the research indicates that changes can be made to allow more people in PEA to move out of homelessness through the Access Housing Unit. More comprehensive and integrated changes are required to make PEA a short term transition to settlement for the majority of those living in PEA.

APPENDIX 1

The survey method

Two experienced interviewers conducted the interviews, following the questionnaire replicated below.¹⁹ Respondents who participated received a €15 TESCO gift voucher at the conclusion of the interview.

Dublin City Council officers expedited the research process by contacting property managers who in turn informed residents that interviews would be taking place. Officers escorted interviewers to the properties but excluded themselves from the interviews. Interviewees were told that the survey was being conducted by Threshold, an independent non-profit organisation, and that their responses would be confidential. All residents contacted agreed to take part.

The aim was to get 50 completed questionnaires from households across the PEA appropriately distributed by property rating and by household type. There were 184 families and couples in PEA in February 2005 so the survey amounts to more than one quarter of the occupants (29%). The distribution of the respondents by household type across the four quality types of PEA is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Respondents by property rating and household type

Household type/ Property rating*	Couple	Single adult + children	Two adults + children	<i>TOTAL</i>
	No.	No.	No.	<i>No.</i>
A	0	5	9	<i>14</i>
B	4	7	2	<i>13</i>
C	7	8	5	<i>20</i>
D	4	1	1	<i>6</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>53</i>

An A rating is the top quality, usually an apartment whereas a D rating means traditional B&B accommodation with no access to kitchen facilities.

A comparison between key attributes of the households surveyed and the Homeless Persons Unit database for February (Table 3) indicates that the survey is a reasonably good representation of households living in PEA during February 2005.²⁰ The survey covered 29% of the couple and family households in the AHU database with the distribution across household types almost identical to the HPU data.

¹⁹ The questionnaire was checked by a CWO and AHU staff and it was tested on two PEA households.

²⁰ The HPU database does not include a few small B&Bs.

Looking across the property types, the survey is skewed in favour of apartment properties as it was anticipated that these would be the only properties subject to an accommodation charge at the start of the survey. More specifically, the distribution of lone parents is similar comparing the survey and the AHU data but the two-adult families in the survey are skewed in favour of occupants of apartment properties while couples are disproportionately accommodated in D rather than B properties.

Table 3
HPU Count of Households in PEA in February 2005

Household type/ Property type*	Couple	Single adult + children	Two adults + children	<i>TOTAL</i>
	No.	No.	No.	<i>No.</i>
A	0	15	17	32
B	18	27	18	63
C	28	25	24	77
D	9	5	1	15
<i>TOTAL</i>	55	72	60	184

- An A type property is an apartment, a D type is traditional B&B accommodation with B and C types falling in between these in terms of space and facilities.

QUESTIONNAIRE

How long have you been living in this temporary (also termed emergency or B&B or homeless apartments) accommodation?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Number of years & months	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	

Were you living in other B&B accommodation prior to this, and, if so, for how long?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes --- Number of years & months	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know – [Go to Q 3]	
<input type="checkbox"/>	No --- [Go to Q 3]	

Do you have to pay anything for the accommodation that you live in now?
[the 'accommodation charge']

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
<input type="checkbox"/>	No [Go to Q 5]	

How much do you pay per week?

<input type="checkbox"/>	€	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	

How much longer do you expect to be living in B&B accommodation?

<input type="checkbox"/>	years & months	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	

Considering this list of possible housing situations, please rank the best and the second best from your standpoint. *[Read from card showing above options and identify the best ranked as '1']*

<input type="checkbox"/>		rank best 1 & 2
<input type="checkbox"/>	Council housing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tenancy in private rented sector	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Move to transitional housing e.g. a Focus Ireland house	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stay in present type of accommodation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify)	

For which local council(s) are you registered on the homeless (and/or standard) waiting for local authority accommodation? [May be multiple ticks]

	Dublin City/The Corporation [Go to Q 9]	
	Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown [Go to Q]	
	South Dublin [Go to Q 9]	
	Fingal [Go to Q 9]	
	Other council(s) [Specify] [Go to Q 9]	
	Have to wait (mos expected)	
	None/don't know	

Why are you not registered/do you have to wait? [summarise the reason] [Go to Q 12]

	Arrears	
	Anti social	
	Other	

How long have you been on the waiting list for a council house?

	Number of years & months	
	Don't know	

How much longer do you expect you'll have to wait to be offered acceptable council housing?

	Number of months	
	Don't know [Go to Q]	

Who told you about this likely waiting time? [Spontaneous responses]

	Information from CWO	
	Information from local authority officer (specify)	
	Information from other type of worker (specify)	
	Friends' experience	
	Other (specify)	
	Don't know	

What do you think of renting from a private landlord as a place to live?

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While living in this B&B accommodation, have you made attempts to find a place in the private rented sector?

	Yes	
	No	
	Don't know	

Did anyone encourage you to look for private rented accommodation?

	Yes <i>[Name organisation if possible]</i>	
	No	
	Don't know	

Did anyone discourage you to look for private rented accommodation?

	Yes <i>[Name organisation if possible]</i>	
	No	
	Don't know	

What is the main factor hampering, or stopping, you from trying for or getting private rented accommodation? [Summarise reason]

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If you were offered a private rented tenancy of the appropriate quality, location and size, along with support to get settled, would you be interested? [Tick one]

	Positively consider offer <i>[Go to Q 19]</i>	
	Not interested in offer	
	Hard to say <i>[Go to Q 19]</i>	

Why would you not be interested in any offer of private rented accommodation? [Summarise reasons]

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Would any of the following make the prospect of becoming a tenant of a private landlord more attractive than it is now? [Show card & read out each scenario and tick one or other column below. Go to Q 21 next except if Yes to help finding tenancy]

		Yes	No
	Help in finding and setting up the tenancy with a private landlord (<i>eg getting a deposit & rent supplement</i>)		[Q 21]
	Assurance that rent won't be higher than would pay for council housing	[Q 21]	[Q 21]
	Assurance that landlord won't evict without		

	Good reason	[Q 21]	[Q 21]
	Other (specify)	[Q 21]	[Q21]
	Nothing would make PRS acceptable	[Q 21]	[Q 21]

What kind of help & support would you like?

	Help getting deposit & rent supplement	
	Help moving furniture	
	Help getting basic utensils etc	
	Other (specify)	

Have you a settlement or key worker?

	Yes (organisation?)	[Go to Q 24]
	No	
	Don't know	

Have you asked for such help?

	Yes [whom?]	
	No	

What was the response to your request?

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While living in your present accommodation, who (from what organisation) do you meet who can advise you about housing options? [Tick and name where possible]

	Community Welfare Officer	
	Family Support Worker (name if known)	
	Local Council officer (name if known)	
	Focus Ireland worker (name if known)	
	Threshold advice worker (name if known)	
	Other person/organisation (identify if possible)	

	No one	

Is any housing information that you need not provided? [What?]

	Yes	
	No	
	Don't have a view	

What do you know about the Access Housing Unit at Threshold? [Read options and tick one]

	I know what it does	
	Have heard of it, but nothing more	
	I know nothing about it	
	I applied but wasn't accepted	

Some information please about who is living here with you.

	Number of adults in the household (18 years +) including you	
	Number of children under 5 years (plus any babies expected)	
	Number of children 5 years up to 18 years	
	Not willing to say	

Do you (or your partner if living here) have children who are not staying with you?

	Yes	
	No	
	No response	

Have you ever contacted Threshold, the housing advice and campaigning organisation?

	Yes	
	No <i>[If No go to End]</i>	
	Not sure <i>[If No go to End]</i>	

How would you rate the help you got from Threshold?

	Helpful	
	Unhelpful	
	Not sure	

Did you participate in another survey last autumn that asked some similar questions about housing?

	Yes	
	No	

	Don't recall	
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Having gone through all these questions, my impression is that at present a tenancy with a private landlord might well suit you, given help in making the move / is unlikely to be appropriate for your household. Is my impression correct?

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END

Appendix Table 1	Families-				Couples-				PEA Sample	
	Lone parents		Two adults + children		All families		Couples			
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%		
TOTAL	21		17		38		15		53	
<i>Property type</i>										
Cat A	5	24%	9	53%	14	37%	0	0%	14	26%
Cat B	7	33%	2	12%	9	24%	4	27%	13	25%
Cat C	8	38%	5	29%	13	34%	7	47%	20	38%
Cat D	1	5%	1	6%	2	5%	4	27%	6	11%
<i>Household size</i>										
2 person	7	33%	0	0%	7	18%	15	100%	22	42%
3-4 persons	9	43%	11	65%	20	53%	0	0%	20	38%
5+ persons	5	24%	6	35%	11	29%	0	0%	11	21%
children elsewhere	5	24%	6	35%	11	29%	7	47%	18	34%
<i>Time in emergency don't know</i>										
homeless time	1	5%	0	0%	1	3%	0	0%	1	2%
3 months or less	4	19%	2	12%	6	16%	3	20%	9	17%
3 to 6 months	3	14%	5	29%	8	21%	2	13%	10	19%
6-12 months	2	10%	3	18%	5	13%	3	20%	8	15%
1-2 years	2	10%	0	0%	2	5%	3	20%	5	9%
Over 2 years	9	43%	7	41%	16	42%	4	27%	20	38%
No. paying charge	5	24%	4	24%	9	24%	3	20%	12	23%
<i>Social hsg option</i>										
DCC registration	19	90%	13	76%	32	84%	14	93%	46	87%
Not registered anywhere	2	10%	2	12%	4	11%	0	0%	4	8%
6mos or less wait on list	5	24%	5	29%	10	26%	3	20%	13	25%
2 yrs or less on list	10	48%	6	35%	16	42%	8	53%	24	45%
Less than 6 mos further wait	3	14%	2	12%	5	13%	0	0%	5	9%
6 months to 1 year or less further wait	8	38%	3	18%	11	29%	3	20%	14	26%
More than 1 year further wait	4	19%	8	47%	12	32%	5	33%	17	32%
Cannot estimate further wait	4	19%	4	24%	8	21%	6	40%	14	26%
<i>Preferences</i>										
Council best option	16	76%	13	76%	29	76%	14	93%	43	81%
Transitional best	3	14%	1	6%	4	11%	0	0%	4	8%
PRS best	2	10%	2	12%	4	11%	1	7%	5	9%
Stay put best	0	0%	1	6%	1	3%	0	0%	1	2%
Council second best	4	19%	3	18%	7	18%	0	0%	7	13%
Transitional second	6	29%	6	35%	12	32%	10	67%	22	42%
PRS second	6	29%	8	47%	14	37%	4	27%	18	34%
No second best	2	10%	0	0%	2	5%	1	7%	3	6%
<i>PRS option</i>										
Have looked for	8	38%	11	65%	19	50%	11	73%	30	57%

PRS										
Encouraged to look PRS	9	43%	13	76%	22	58%	7	47%	29	55%
Discouraged from PRS	4	19%	5	29%	9	24%	2	13%	11	21%
Would consider appropriate PRS if support	11	52%	13	76%	24	63%	11	73%	35	66%
Would not consider PRS	8	38%	4	24%	12	32%	4	27%	16	30%
Hard to say if would consider	2	10%	0	0%	2	5%	0	0%	2	4%
<i>Perceptions PRS</i>		0%								
Affordability issue	6	29%	8	47%	14	37%	8	53%	22	42%
Lose place an issue	10	48%	2	12%	12	32%	5	33%	17	32%
Insecurity an issue	2	10%	3	18%	5	13%	3	20%	8	15%
Too competitive/other	3	14%	1	6%	4	11%	6	40%	10	19%
Nothing impeding search for PRS	2	10%	6	35%	8	21%	2	13%	10	19%
PRS likely possibility	6	29%	8	47%	14	37%	10	67%	24	45%
PRS unlikely	14	67%	6	35%	20	53%	4	27%	24	45%
Uncertain about PRS	1	5%	3	18%	4	11%	1	7%	5	9%
<i>Access to information</i>		0%								
Key worker access	14	67%	10	59%	24	63%	7	47%	31	58%