

1. Introduction

1.1 Focus of the report

This evaluation report on the Homeless Initiative was commissioned by the Initiative. It is the fourth and final annual evaluation report (see Boyle and Brown, 1997, Boyle and Worth-Butler 1999, Boyle, Butler and O'Donnell, 2000 for previous reports). The report presents an independent evaluation of the operation and impact of the Homeless Initiative from its start in 1996 to its end in 2000. The work of the Homeless Initiative is to continue, with the Initiative itself replaced in the Dublin region by a provisionally titled Dublin Homeless Services Agency.

The evaluation report has three main purposes:

- a) to assess the impact of the Homeless Initiative;
- b) to describe and analyse the structure, process and workings of the Homeless Initiative; and
- c) to draw lessons from the experience of the Homeless Initiative relevant to continuing efforts to address homelessness in the Dublin region.

1.2 The rationale, objectives and structure of the Homeless Initiative

The Homeless Initiative was launched by Ms. Liz McManus, T.D., then Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, on 21st October 1996. At that time, there were perceived difficulties both with the range of services provided for the homeless and in the planning and co-ordination of service delivery. There was a lack of clarity with regard to the respective statutory responsibilities of housing authorities and health boards regarding the provision of services for the homeless (Dublin Corporation and Eastern Health Board, 1995). Voluntary organisations were looking to develop services for the homeless, but each agency tended to operate and liaise with the statutory bodies independently. There was substantial potential for duplication and an un-coordinated response to issues such as settlement, outreach and accommodation.

The Dublin Housing Forum, which was an attempt to improve co-operation and co-ordination between statutory and voluntary bodies, was widely seen as failing in this task.

It was in this context that the Homeless Initiative was set up to secure better co-ordination and delivery of services for the homeless in the Dublin region. As the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal noted when the Initiative was set up: 'Under the initiative, new arrangements will be put in place which will provide a framework for a more co-operative and unified approach by the statutory authorities, working with the voluntary sector, to plan and co-ordinate the development and delivery of services for the homeless'.

This objective remained throughout the Initiative, but was developed further, and the December 2000 edition of *Cornerstone*, the magazine of the Homeless Initiative states that the Homeless Initiative:

... works to create an effective, appropriate and equitable framework for the future development of homeless services in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. Particular emphasis is placed on improving the planning, co-ordination and delivery of services, and ensuring the development of responses which will enable homeless people to move out of the cycle of homelessness into sustainable independent living, appropriate to their needs and abilities. The main tasks of the Initiative are research, analysis, planning and developing a strong partnership between all the statutory and voluntary agencies involved.

With regard to the administrative structure of the Initiative, administrative arrangements were established jointly between Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Health Board (latterly the Eastern Regional Health Authority) to oversee and co-ordinate the provision of services for the homeless in the Dublin region as follows (see Appendix I for details):

- A *Management Group*, comprising senior officials of Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Health Board, to oversee and co-ordinate the provision of services.

- A *Consultative Board*, comprising representatives of the major housing authorities concerned, the Eastern Health Board (latterly the Eastern Regional Health Authority) and the voluntary organisations in the region who provide services for the homeless. This Board replaced the Dublin Housing Forum. The Board advised the Management Group on all matters relating to the provision of services for the homeless.
- The Management Group appointed an *Administrative Director*, with responsibility for co-ordinating the activities of the Homeless Initiative. She was supported by one administrative support staff up to 1999, and subsequently by two project workers and an administrator.

The Homeless Initiative budget was £600,000 per annum, provided jointly by Dublin Corporation/Department of the Environment and Local Government (£350,000) and the Eastern Health Board (ERHA)/Department of Health and Children (250,000). Of this total, approximately 60 per cent went on grants to voluntary organisations for innovative projects, 25 per cent on implementation of the plan of work, and 15 per cent on administration and evaluation (including evaluation of grant-aided projects, which was conducted and funded separately from this evaluation exercise).

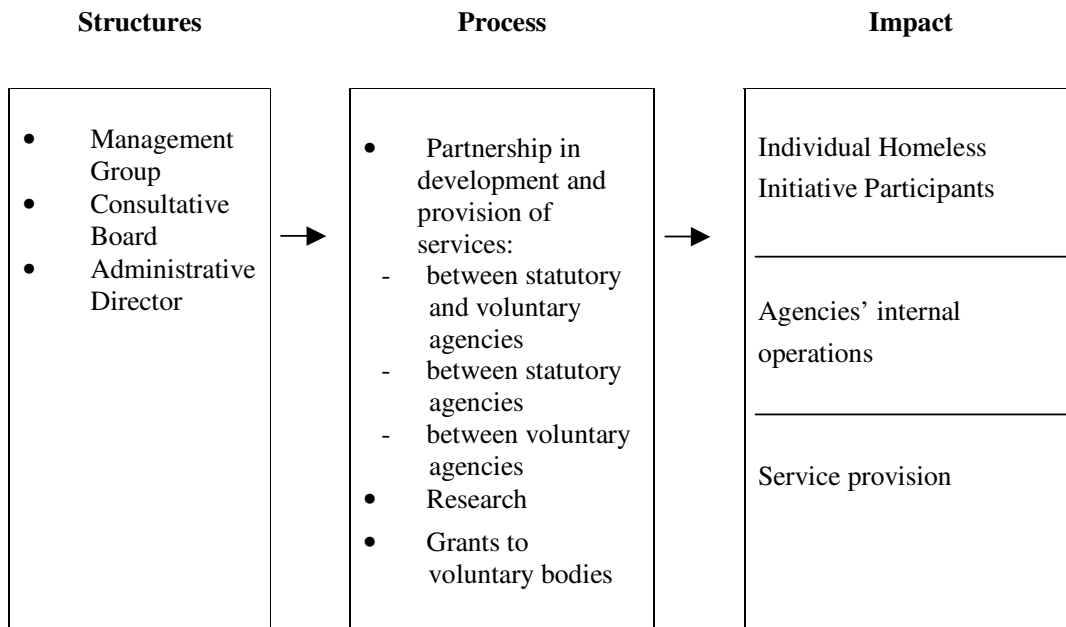
1.3 Evaluation approach, methodology and cost

It is of importance to the evaluation to have an analytical framework that makes explicit the workings and assumptions underlying the establishment and operation of the Homeless Initiative. This involves specifying the needs that the Initiative is meant to address, the process by which it will do so and the expected impact. Figure 1.1 outlines the framework we developed to guide the evaluation (this framework is derived from a previous evaluation study of community youth and employment consortia conducted by the Institute of Public Administration, Joyce and Daly, 1987).

The structures of the Initiative – the Management Group, Consultative Board and Administrative Director – have been mentioned above. These structures were intended to facilitate a process of partnership development between the agencies. This partnership approach was aimed at encouraging closer co-operation and co-ordination between the statutory and voluntary sectors; between the statutory

authorities; and between the voluntary agencies. Also, the Initiative commissioned research regarding homelessness, and made grants available to voluntary bodies providing homeless services for innovative and developmental activities. This funding was in addition to funding normally available for homeless services.

Figure 1.1 A framework for the evaluation of the Homeless Initiative



These processes can in turn be expected to have an impact on service delivery at three different levels:

- *individual Homeless Initiative participants*, in terms of their knowledge of service provision and awareness of needs;
- *agencies internal operations*, in terms of their responsiveness to the needs identified; and
- *service provision*, in terms of the better co-ordination and delivery of services.

Three main methods were used to gather the information needed for the evaluation throughout the course of the evaluation:

- *Interviews.* Semi-structured interviews were carried out annually with members of the Management Group and Consultative Board. Where interviews were not possible, respondents were encouraged to send in written responses if they wished.
- *Observation of meetings.* Meetings of the Consultative Board were attended, as were a number of seminars and workshops run by the Initiative.
- *Documentary analysis.* Homeless Initiative documentary sources, such as notes of meetings, directors reports and commissioned research reports were examined. We also looked at literature relevant to the development and operation of the Initiative.

In addition, a short questionnaire was circulated to approximately 100 hostel and housing projects, advice and support services, and government departments involved in the cross-departmental team on homelessness, in November 2000. The intention was to gauge the reaction to the Homeless Initiative of a range of organisations dealing with homelessness but not necessarily directly involved with the Initiative. However, a low response rate of around 20 per cent was achieved. Consequently, information is included as appropriate from this source in this report, but as background information rather than as comprehensive evaluation findings.

The evaluation process itself fed back information to the Homeless Initiative over its lifetime. Annual evaluation reports were produced and circulated to all participants and the main findings fed back to the Consultative Board in an annual presentation. In this way, the evaluation findings contributed to the development of the Homeless Initiative over time.

The total cost of the evaluation over the four years was £30,500, plus VAT at 21 per cent.

1.4 Structure of the report

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two looks at the impact of the Homeless Initiative. Chapter three examines the operation of the Initiative's structures and processes. Chapter four draws overall evaluation conclusions. Finally, chapter five

sets out lessons learned of relevance to the future provision of services for the homeless in the Dublin region.

2

Impact of the Homeless Initiative

2.1 Introduction

In order to assess the impact of the Homeless Initiative, it is helpful to first look at the main recorded outputs of the Initiative. These outputs were targeted at achieving the overall objectives of the Initiative and the objectives set in the annual work plans. From this analysis, it is then possible to look at what has changed as a result of producing these outputs, both in terms of policy and practice. Also, as referenced in the Introduction, previous evaluation reports give further information on the impact of the Initiative as it has progressed.

2.2 The main outputs of the Homeless Initiative

Each year the Homeless Initiative agreed an annual work plan which provided a focus for most of the activities undertaken. While the emphasis shifted from year to year, a number of core activities ran over the lifetime of the Initiative and formed the basis for a substantial part of the programme of work of the Initiative. These activities are outlined in Figure 2.1, together with the main outputs related to that activity and the associated objectives which the activity was intended to achieve. These activities and outputs are now outlined in more detail, and their impact assessed later in the chapter.

Co-ordination. Initially, the objective here was to improve contact and trust between agencies and in doing so improve knowledge of services and gaps and enhance the understanding of partnership. As the Initiative evolved, the need to plan for the new structure to replace the Initiative, and to ensure a co-ordinated response to the national initiative on homelessness caused by the establishment of the cross-departmental team on homelessness took more prominence. The development of a coherent framework for planning, monitoring and developing services was the key objective.

Figure 2.1 Activities, Outputs and Objectives arising from the Homeless Initiative

Activities	Outputs	Objectives	Ultimate Objective
• Co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Under One Roof' report - Submission to cross-departmental team on homelessness - Structure for Homeless Service Agency - Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003 	Develop a coherent framework for service planning, monitoring and development	<p>To secure better co-ordination and delivery of services to homeless people in the greater Dublin Area</p>
• Best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Putting People First' good practice handbook 	Development of performance indicators and new operating policies, procedures and service standards for homeless people	
• Communications, Awareness, Research and Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment of homeless sleepers count - Jointly agreed rough sleepers count - Audit of Services - Directory of Services - Cornerstone magazine 	<p>Promoting greater understanding of the needs of homeless people and the complexity of the problem.</p> <p>Accurate information base for the planning and developing of services for homeless people</p>	
• Settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Settlement strategy 	A co-ordinated strategy aimed at the settlement of homeless people out of emergency hostels into permanent accommodation	
• Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outreach strategy 	A co-ordinated outreach strategy integrated with other services which will ensure that all homeless people receive appropriate assistance	
• Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grants to voluntary organisations - Outline funding proposals for future funding of services 	The introduction of a transparent funding regime which will best ensure that the needs of homeless people are met	
• Development of local responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of local plans by each of the participating local authorities 	Develop a coherent framework for service planning at the local authority level	

Key outputs associated with this objective include the production of the *Under One Roof* report looking at the development of a 'one stop centre' for homelessness. This report was generally well received by the Initiative participants (see Boyle and Worth-Butler, 1999, pp. 22-23). While the detailed plan that eventually emerged differed somewhat from the proposal in *Under One Roof*, the report established the agreed principles for the development of a more co-ordinated service. The plan itself for the new structure of the Homeless Services Agency was one of the major outputs of the Homeless Initiative. Together with the *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003*, it represents the culmination of the work of the Initiative, drawing together information from all the various strands of the work of the Initiative. Similarly, the submission to the cross-departmental team on homelessness was an important output in promoting national thinking on the need for improved co-ordination.

Best practice. The best practice strand of the Initiative's work programme focused on the need to develop appropriate operating policies, procedures and standards of services to the homeless, together with appropriate indicators of performance. The key output of this work was the production of *Putting People First*, a good practice handbook for homeless services. The handbook contains quality standards and performance indicators for homeless services which were devised by the service providers themselves. Building on from the handbook, a training programme was developed by the Initiative to address issues raised in the handbook.

Communications, Awareness, Research and Policy. One of the main gaps that the Homeless Initiative was set up to address was a lack of agreed information on the extent and nature of homelessness in the Dublin region. The commissioning of the ESRI to carry out an assessment of homelessness agreed by all the parties was a major step forward in getting reliable information on which to base future decisions (see Boyle, Butler and O'Donnell, 2000, p.8). Similarly the agreement by Dublin Simon, Focus Ireland and Dublin Corporation to conduct a joint annual survey of rough sleepers rather than collect information separately provides a sound basis for the development of appropriate responses. The audit of services had a more limited impact, due to concerns about data limitations (see Boyle, Butler and O'Donnell, 2000, p. 8). The directory of services, however, has been widely viewed as a useful additional source of information on service providers in the Dublin region.

With regard to communications generally, there was seen to be a lack of a forum for the exchange of information before the Initiative. One of the main outputs of the Initiative aimed at addressing this gap was the publication of *Cornerstone*, the magazine of the Homeless Initiative. A readers survey elicited a very positive response overall from those who replied to the survey, indicating that the magazine was providing good information and improving understanding of the work of other agencies in the homeless sector.

Settlement. A major cause of concern among agencies prior to the establishment of the Homeless Initiative was the absence of a clear settlement strategy aimed at ensuring the settlement of homeless people out of emergency hostels into appropriate longer-term accommodation. Consequently, a large part of the work of the Initiative focused on the development of an appropriate settlement strategy. In the early stages grant funding was provided to cover research into settlement and to fund pilot initiatives. From these actions, the main output to arise was the production of an agreed settlement strategy, covering not just re-housing but also the ongoing supports needed by individuals.

Outreach. As with settlement, prior to the Homeless Initiative, there was no clear agreed understanding of outreach services. There was a perceived need to clarify what constituted outreach services, identify who provides them and which government agency should be responsible for funding them. Again as with settlement, funding was provided through grants to develop outreach services, and the main output of this activity was the production of an agreed outreach strategy aimed at moving people off the streets, at their own pace, by linking them to appropriate services and housing.

Funding. Early research undertaken for the Initiative indicated a funding system that was uncoordinated, inequitable, unclear and unrelated to the needs of the homeless. The objective for the Initiative in this case was to develop a more transparent funding regime, linked to the service standards agreed under best practice. While a new approach to funding was developed, this was not agreed in detail by the Initiative.

Development of local responses. Given that the Homeless Initiative covers the Dublin region, a significant objective for the Initiative was the development of appropriate

responses to homelessness by local authorities outside of Dublin city. This task was achieved or well advanced in all local authorities (South Dublin, Fingal, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, Wicklow) except Kildare county council.

It should also be noted that apart from these main activities in the work plans, the Homeless Initiative was also involved in a range of other activities over the course of its lifetime. Some examples include the development of a cold weather strategy for improving supports for the homeless in the winter months (see Boyle, Butler and O'Donnell, 2000, p. 12), initiatives in the areas of drugs and homelessness; women and homelessness and action on the issue of street dwellers.

2.3 The main impacts of the Homeless Initiative

Any discussion on the impact of the Homeless Initiative must take place in the context of the growth in the numbers of people homeless in recent years (see *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003*) during the lifetime of the Initiative. The Initiative was set up to secure better co-ordination and to provide a more effective framework for the provision of services, rather than directly tackle the level of homelessness itself. Nevertheless, the growth in the numbers of homeless people provides a sobering background against which to assess the impact of the Initiative.

The framework of the evaluation identifies three levels at which the Initiative might be expected to have an impact: individual Homeless Initiative participants; internal operations of the agencies involved; and services provided by the agencies. A further impact identified during the course of the evaluation was in the area of policy development, both locally and nationally. These impacts are now assessed in turn.

2.3.1 Impact on individual participants

Members of the Consultative Board and Management Group interviewed during the course of the lifetime of the Initiative for the evaluation overwhelmingly had a generally positive attitude toward the Initiative. Many respondents, particularly from the voluntary sector, noted that the Initiative had given them a better knowledge and understanding of how other organisations engaged in services for the homeless operate. Discussions and exchange of views informed thinking on individual and

collective planning. Working together to produce the main outputs of the Initiative listed in section 2.2 was cited as a positive experience. Also, through fora such as the Consultative Board and working groups, individuals had developed personal contacts, strengthening the local information network. A couple of people interviewed, however, felt that the Initiative had had little impact on them and their thinking on addressing the needs of the homeless.

A positive reaction to the Initiative at the level of the individual is important. Securing better co-ordination and delivery of services relies to a large extent on good interpersonal working. This issue is examined in more detail in the next chapter, when discussing the development of partnership in section 3.3.

2.3.2 Impact on agencies internal operations

Securing a positive reaction among individuals on its own is not enough to ensure lasting co-operation and improved service delivery. The agencies involved also need to change the way they work. Prior to the Initiative, there was a sense of agencies operating independently of each other, with a lack of clarity with regard to roles and responsibilities. Respondents generally were of the view that the Initiative had helped to improve the way agencies operate so that they worked better together. Voluntary agencies had more of a structured input to policy. Statutory agencies became more aware of the diversity of needs and responses necessary to address homelessness.

Internal changes in the way agencies work to improve co-ordination did take time, however, and the issue was not seen as one that was completely solved. In the early stages of the Initiative, there was some concern expressed by voluntary sector respondents with regard to frequent changes in personnel involved in the Initiative by statutory agencies, and the messages this sent as to commitment to the Initiative (see Boyle and Brown, 1997, p.27). This particular problem was overcome and respondents cited evidence of positive changes in the internal workings of the statutory agencies, particularly Dublin Corporation. Similarly in the voluntary sector respondents cited examples of changes in internal workings which have led to improved co-operation and co-ordination among the agencies. But there were times when agencies operated independently from the Initiative when addressing issues of common concern to Initiative participants. As with individual participants, this issue

of the impact on the working of agencies as it affects co-ordination is addressed in more detail when considering developments in partnership in section 3.3.

In terms of the way agencies operate to deliver services, one of the main impacts of the Initiative is seen as the development of the quality standards contained in *Putting People First*. This handbook, and the work generally on quality standards and performance indicators, was cited by several respondents as one of the main positive impacts of the Homeless Initiative. The fact that there are now agreed standards for the sector that all should work towards in the future is seen as having a significant impact on the future internal operation of agencies.

2.3.3 Impact on service provision

There was a generally held view among respondents that the impact on actual service provision by agencies was probably the weakest impact of the Homeless Initiative over its lifetime. Much of the work of the Initiative in areas such as developing settlement and outreach strategies and the development of local responses took longer than had been initially envisaged. While new strategies were agreed by the end of the Initiative, they had not worked through into practice. Also, much of the work of the Initiative in its latter phase was directed towards developing the new structure to oversee homelessness provision in the Dublin region and the production of a three-year plan to tackle homelessness. Consequently, actual service provision was not the main focus of activity. As previously noted, this is in line with the strategic co-ordination focus of the Homeless Initiative.

This is not to say that no changes in service provision took place as a result of the Initiative. Pilot projects grant-aided by the Initiative in the settlement and outreach areas led to improvements on the ground. Similarly, the development of the cold weather strategy has resulted in improved availability and access to accommodation in the winter. Hostels Online, whereby services in contact with homeless people can access vacancies in hostels more efficiently, is a further example of service provision development arising as a result of the Homeless Initiative. Rather than nothing happening in the sphere of service provision there is a widespread sense that not enough has happened in a comprehensive manner. This view is supported by the responses to the questionnaire sent out at the end of the Initiative for this evaluation

(see Appendix 2). Half the returns indicated that the Initiative had impacted on service provision, half indicated it had had little or no impact.

2.3.4 *Impact on policy development*

When asked about impact, respondents most commonly cited the impact of the Homeless Initiative on policy thinking and development as one of the main benefits of the Homeless Initiative. In the questionnaire sent out for this evaluation (see Appendix 2) the Initiative was scored highly by those replying for its effect on policy thinking, particularly at local government/health board level. This issue of the impact of the Initiative on policy development was addressed in some detail in the 1999 Evaluation Report (see Boyle, Butler and O'Donnell, 2000 pp. 5-9). To briefly summarise some of the main points here:

- The Homeless Initiative has had a notable impact on policy development at national level. *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000), the report of a cross-departmental team on homelessness drew significantly on the work of the Initiative and contains proposals which the Initiative has advocated and developed. Similarly, the National Economic and Social Council strategy report *Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice* (NESC, 1999) in its chapter on housing contains a section on homelessness which draws significantly on the work of the Initiative.
- The development of the *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003* effectively enhances and pulls together many of the strategies developed by the Initiative in areas such as settlement, outreach and prevention. The Action Plan provides the policy context for tackling the growing problem of homelessness in the Dublin region. As several respondents stated, this is the first time that policy planning has been advanced for the homeless sector rather than the previous focus on planning within individual agencies. The production of the Action Plan is seen by the majority of respondents to the evaluation as one of the main benefits of the Homeless Initiative.
- The improved co-operation and co-ordination of the assessment of homelessness and the street count of homelessness has led to figures on homelessness which are jointly agreed between all agencies involved. Before the Initiative, there would

have been disagreement about the basis of the figures arrived at in various surveys. Now, it is possible to take the figures arrived at as the basis for planning for the future provision of services. This strengthening of analysis and planning was rated particularly highly by those responding to the questionnaire on the work of the Initiative (see Appendix 2).

- The development of local responses to homelessness in participating local authority areas was a notable policy advance. Given the varying commitment of participating authorities to the Homeless Initiative meetings (see section 3.2.2), the development of local response was important in involving local authorities more fully in the work of the Initiative.

In all, the Homeless Initiative contributed to a fundamental shift in thinking at the policy level, towards a shared understanding that homelessness is more than the absence of a roof. The need for a continuum of care, and the importance of prevention, support and rehabilitation were emphasised by the bringing together of a diverse network of service providers.

2.4 Would these changes have happened anyway?

What emerges from this picture to date is significant developments in policy and understanding of how to address homelessness, a move to more co-operative working between individuals and agencies, and limited improvements in on-the-ground service provision. A significant question to ask is whether or not such changes might have taken place without the existence of the Homeless Initiative. This is a question to which it is obviously impossible to give a definitive answer. But respondents were asked for their impressions on this issue, which give a pointer as to how things might have looked.

There was a general view shared among the vast majority of respondents about likely possible scenarios if the Homeless Initiative had not been established:

- Activity would have been more fragmented, with ad hoc responses by individual agencies in reaction to the latest crisis.

- There would have been no comprehensive research and planning for the homeless sector in the Dublin region. Instead, planning would have focused on individual local authority areas and within individual agencies.
- There would have been a recognition of the need to establish something like the Homeless Initiative at a later date, so eventually it would have happened anyway.

A small minority of respondents felt that the absence of the Homeless Initiative would have meant no difference, or very little, in practice. In particular, given the growth in the numbers of homeless people, this point of view would emphasise that there has to date been limited practical benefits for the homeless.

The predominant view, however, is clearly that the Homeless Initiative has made a positive difference. It is unlikely in the extreme that the same degree of co-ordination of activity and of planning would have taken place in the absence of the Homeless Initiative. Such a view receives further support from the fact that some voluntary agencies in other major urban areas such as Galway and Cork, watching the development of the Homeless Initiative, have looked to get similar arrangements in their own areas. Similarly, the government's cross-departmental report *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy* (2000) advocates a partnership approach to developing plans to tackle homelessness, with the establishment of homeless fora with representatives from both the voluntary and statutory sectors in every county. There is a general recognition that the principles behind the establishment of the Homeless Initiative are good ones and that the Initiative itself has made a difference.

3

The Operation of the Homeless Initiative

3.1 Introduction

The focus in this chapter is on the structures set up by the Homeless Initiative, how they operated, and the process of interaction amongst the various participants. It is important to know how the Initiative operated as the lessons learned from this experience have important implications for future arrangements for co-ordinating approaches to homelessness in the Dublin region. As with other issues, this issue of the operation of the Initiative is also addressed in earlier evaluation reports, with a specific chapter addressing the issue in the 1997 and 1998 Evaluation Reports.

3.2 The structure of the Homeless Initiative

As noted in the introduction, there are three main parts to the structure of the Homeless Initiative: the Management Group; the Consultative Board; and the administrative support, headed by the Administrative Director. The Management Group, composed of senior managers from Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Regional Health Authority (formerly the Eastern Health Board), had executive responsibility for the Initiative. The Consultative Board, composed of a range of statutory and voluntary bodies with an interest in homelessness, had an advisory role on all matters relating to the provision of services for the homeless. The administrative support team, headed by the Administrative Director, was responsible for co-ordinating the work of the Initiative.

3.2.1 *The Management Group*

The Management Group met around once every couple of months on average during the lifetime of the Initiative. Attendance patterns were generally high among participants. Meetings tended to focus on identifying priority actions and reviewing progress against the work plans.

In general, both members of the Management Group and of the Consultative Board felt that the Management Group had worked reasonably well as an entity. The Group contributed significantly in helping to clarify the respective responsibilities of the housing authorities and health boards, one of the issues which was a major concern prior to the establishment of the Homeless Initiative. A couple of issues of concern with regard to the working of the Management Group did, however, surface during the life of the Initiative:

- The absence of local authority representatives other than Dublin Corporation was raised as a possible weakness. Participation by all local authorities was seen by some respondents as a means of securing their commitment to the Initiative. Similarly, there was some debate as to whether or not voluntary agencies should be represented on the Management Group.
- Several Consultative Board members had concerns about the degree of interaction of the Management Group with the Consultative Board (see Boyle and Worth-Butler, 1999, p.14). While the Management group did ensure that a member attended some Consultative Board meetings where possible following this issue being raised in 1999, there were still concerns at the end of the Initiative about the degree of interaction, and about the respective roles of the Management Group and the Consultative Board.

3.2.2 The Consultative Board

The Consultative Board met every two months over the lifetime of the Initiative. Table 3.1 shows the average rate of attendance at meetings. Levels of attendance varied significantly among participants. With regard to the statutory sector, attendance was problematic in the case of South Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow County Councils. Attendance levels generally were higher in the voluntary sector, leading to attendance at the Consultative Board often being dominated by the voluntary organisations.

Consultative Board members were generally happy with the operation of the Board, with the role of the independent chair being cited as particularly important to the successful running of meetings by several respondents. Most participants felt that the

Table 3.1
Attendance at Consultative Board Meetings

	Average Level of Attendance (%)
Local Authority	
Dublin Corporation	86
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown C.C.	64
Fingal C.C.	73
South Dublin C.C.	27
Kildare C.C.	5
Wicklow C.C.	36
Eastern Health Board	
Homeless Persons Unit	82
St. Brendans Hospital	55
Voluntary Organisations	
Focus Ireland	100
Dublin Simon	95
Failtiú (Franciscan Social Initiative)	95
Crosscare	77
SVP	77
Iveagh Trust	91
Sonas Housing Association	73
Salvation Army	41
TRUST	68
Barrett Cheshire Homes (until 21/7/98)	33
PACE (from 22/9/98)	67

Board took some time to establish itself and in the early days was in danger of becoming a 'talking shop'. But once the relationships were established (helped by the greater continuity of personnel attending from the statutory agencies, particularly Dublin Corporation, from 1998) members became more engaged and participatory.

On a less positive note, some Board members expressed a sense of limited progress at meetings, and of research being done but little follow through action. The limited capacity of the Board to deal with issues outside the work plan, particularly emerging issues needing a speedy response was raised by a couple of respondents. Also, the issue of the role of smaller voluntary agencies in the Initiative was raised at times by a couple of respondents. Smaller agencies can sometimes be stretched for resources to attend Board meetings and working group meetings, and could subsequently feel distanced from some of the work of the Initiative. In this context, one respondent indicated the sense of an inner core of agencies which dominated the agenda of the Initiative. However, as noted above, such a view was not commonly shared among participants, who in general had a positive view of the working of the Consultative Board.

Early on in the lifetime of the Initiative working groups were set up as sub-groups of the Board to progress specific issues in the work plans. These working groups were seen as very useful in progressing issues and in involving other personnel involved in homelessness but not on the Consultative Board. There was some continuing tension regarding the respective roles of these groups and the Consultative Board, particularly that the role of the Board could be diluted as the main action was in the working groups. However, in practice while this was an issue which needed constant attention, the use of working groups was widely seen as useful and necessary to ensure the work plans were achieved.

3.2.3 Administrative Support

The Administrative Director was widely regarded as having played a pivotal role in keeping the Homeless Initiative going on a day-to-day basis. It was a vital role in ensuring that the Initiative kept momentum and moved the agenda forward. It was also a challenging role in trying to balance the interests of differing constituencies and developing a co-operative approach to the issues. Key activities were co-ordination of the work associated with the work plan; acting as a link between the Consultative Board and the Management Group; and managing individual projects.

In 1997 and 1998 the Administrative Director only had one administrative support staff. This led to workload problems and some work items not being progressed as

planned (see Boyle and Worth-Butler, 1999, p.13). Subsequently, the Management Group agreed the appointment of two additional project workers. This helped ensure that all work items were progressed, particularly in areas such as the development of local responses.

3.3 Partnership

Partnership was a key theme highlighted in the objectives of the Homeless Initiative. Given the unco-ordinated approach that existed before the Initiative, lack of agreed areas of responsibility between housing authorities and health boards, and the independence of many of the voluntary organisations, there was a need to secure effective co-ordination. Partnership was seen as a way of achieving co-ordination and co-operation without any one organisation or group imposing their agenda on the others. Three strands of partnership were identified in the evaluation framework: between the statutory agencies; between the voluntary agencies; and between the statutory and voluntary agencies.

3.3.1 Developing partnership between the statutory agencies

There is general agreement that there is now much greater clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities of the local authorities and the Eastern Regional Health Authority. Particularly in terms of the relationship between Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Regional Health Authority, respondents from both agencies noted significant improvements in co-operative activity with regard to homelessness, and a consequent reduction in 'territorial' disputes during the life of the Initiative.

3.3.2 Developing partnership between the voluntary agencies

In general terms, as with the statutory agencies, there has been a notable increase in co-operation between the voluntary agencies over the course of the Initiative. There are some strong individual partnerships being developed between agencies. A couple of respondents indicated that the voluntary agencies had never co-operated so much before. However, there was also a sense that while partnership was happening there was still a tendency for it to be ad hoc rather than comprehensive. Also, as noted above a small number of agencies felt insufficiently involved in the process.

3.3.3 Developing partnership between the voluntary and statutory agencies

Partnership between the statutory and voluntary agencies was seen as the most challenging and complex aspect of partnership. Over the course of the Initiative, there was seen to be an improvement in relationships between agencies on the Consultative Board. Dublin Corporation's restructuring of its services for the homeless in 1998 was helpful here (see Boyle and Worth-Butler, 1999, p.13), both formally through the Initiative and informally on an ongoing basis between meetings. Overall, there evolved what might be characterised as a more mature and reasonable approach where, as one respondent noted, there were still disagreements between the voluntary and statutory sectors but this did not stop the agenda moving forward. In general, the closer working together led to a better understanding of the position of the other sector. The general response to the questionnaire for this evaluation was that the Initiative had made a significant contribution to a sense of partnership between statutory and voluntary agencies (see Appendix 2).

This does not mean, however, that full partnership was achieved by the Initiative. There was still a lack of clarity about what partnership means in practice and how it should operate. The voluntary and statutory sector still had concerns that the other sector did not fully understand the practicalities and constraints acting on the other. Despite the need to address such issues being highlighted in previous evaluation reports and in a workshop held by the Initiative in late 1998, the partnership issue was not subsequently addressed in a substantive way by either the Management Group or the Consultative Board.

3.4 The place of the Homeless Initiative in the homeless sector

Apart from the workings of the individual constituent parts of the Homeless Initiative, it is important to look at the place of the Initiative structure overall in the range of national and local bodies concerned with the issue of homelessness. As noted in the 1999 Evaluation Report (Boyle, Butler and O'Donnell, 2000, p.9) there was a tendency among some individuals and agencies to view the Initiative as yet another organisation dealing with homelessness rather than as the natural forum representing the collective voice of the homeless sector in the Dublin region. For example, in some instances whether or not the Initiative was consulted or informed of

developments was as much by chance as by purpose. Of those who replied to the questionnaire for this evaluation, less than half regarded the Initiative as a key player in the provision of services for the homeless (see Appendix 2). While the Initiative significantly improved co-operation and co-ordination, it did not fully establish itself in its co-ordination role throughout the system.

4

Evaluation Overview and Conclusions

4.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the conclusions on the workings and impact of the Homeless Initiative and the role of the Initiative structures. It briefly summarises the main changes arising as a result of the Homeless Initiative, as well as the main limitations of the Initiative.

4.2 Overview of impact of the Homeless Initiative

Table 4.1 summarises the impact of the Homeless Initiative in the light of the Initiative's declared objectives as outlined in section 1.2. It can be seen that to a large extent the objectives for the Initiative have been met. There is now a comprehensive strategic and planning framework for the homeless sector. Co-operation and co-ordination of activities between voluntary agencies and statutory agencies has been substantially improved. Particularly notable effects of the Initiative, which are expected to significantly influence service provision for the homeless in the future include:

- The production of the *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003*. This plan pulls together much of the work of the Initiative over its lifetime, particularly in areas such as settlement and outreach, where little had been done prior to the Initiative. The plan provides a coherent and comprehensive framework for tackling homelessness.
- The production of quality standards and indicators in the *Putting People First* good practice handbook and associated training programme. The introduction of agreed standards for services represents a significant step in the improvement of services for the homeless.

Table 4.1 Summary outline of achievement of Homeless Initiative objectives

Homeless Initiative Objectives	Comment
Create an effective, appropriate and equitable framework for the future development of homeless services in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow	Framework created for the Dublin local authorities area. Some development in Wicklow and less in Kildare
Improve the planning, co-ordination and delivery of services	Planning and co-ordination of services significantly improved. Limited improvements in delivery of services
Ensure the development of responses which will enable homeless people to move out of the cycle of homelessness into sustainable independent living, appropriate to their needs and abilities	Appropriate responses developed and brought together in Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003
Improve research, analysis and planning capabilities	Significant improvement in research, analysis and planning capabilities for the homeless sector
Develop a strong partnership between all the statutory and voluntary agencies involved	Improvements in co-operation, particularly between individual agencies, but strong partnership among all agencies yet to be achieved.

- The assessment of homelessness and other research activities. This research provides, for the first time, an agreed basis on which to determine plans and priorities to address needs.
- The development of an agreed structure for the new Homeless Services Agency. This new structure will be tasked with progressing improvements in service provision.

The Homeless Initiative has had a lesser impact on service provision. While the Initiative has led to some innovations and more co-operation in service provision, this

has been limited in the context of the growing needs. The growth in the numbers of people homeless and of those sleeping rough continued to be a major problem during the life of the Initiative. Also, the Initiative had more of a limited impact in Wicklow and, particularly, in Kildare, compared to its impact in the four Dublin local authority areas.

The Homeless Initiative started a process of change and succeeded in developing a framework for the co-ordinated delivery of services to homeless people in the greater Dublin area. It is in these terms rather than in terms of the Initiative's concrete impact on service provision that its main achievements can be seen. To a large extent, the Initiative met the objectives set for it.

4.3 Overview of the structure and operations of the Homeless Initiative

The main features of the Homeless Initiative structures are outlined in summary form in Table 4.2. Generally, the structures worked reasonably well. The structures were designed to lead to the development of partnership in the development and provision of services. In this context, there was a notable development in co-operation and co-ordination among agencies. However, this co-operation was not fully developed or comprehensive, and partnership remained an issue which was not fully resolved.

The structure and processes adopted were an effective means of involving a wide range of people and organisations in the planning of the provision of services. But one issue with regard to the structure was the extent to which the Homeless Initiative was viewed as the key player in the co-ordination of services for the homeless or as one more of a number of agencies involved in dealing with homelessness. How the Initiative was perceived reflected its role and influence, both at local and national policy levels. The evidence is mixed, but there were suggestions that the structure had to rely on using influence to be heard on some occasions rather than being turned to naturally by decision-makers as and when the occasion merited.

Table 4.2 Main features of the Homeless Initiative Structures

Management Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good attendance levels • Good working relationships developed • Confined to Dublin Corporation and Eastern Regional Health Authority • Limited contact with Consultative Board and some uncertainty as to the respective responsibilities of the Group and the Board
Consultative Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable attendance, with poor attendance from some local authorities • Variable commitment to Homeless Initiative • Good working relationships and co-operation developed • Influential in planning future provision of services • General agreement on objectives • Independent chair important in driving the process forward • Working groups covered huge amount of work
Administrative Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative Director had key pivotal role in ensuring achievement of work plans • Great enthusiasm and hard work • Difficult challenges faced in balancing interests of different constituencies and managing work load

4.4 Evaluative Conclusion

The Homeless Initiative was in existence for four years. Given its innovative nature and the difficulties in planning and co-ordinating services that existed prior to that

time, the Initiative can be seen to have made a substantive contribution to improving the planning and co-ordination of services for the homeless. A sound strategic foundation has been laid on which the development of services to tackle homelessness can be built.

The Homeless Initiative has been particularly successful in gathering the evidence needed to improve services and in building on that evidence to develop a co-ordinated and widely agreed policy to tackle homelessness. Where it has been less successful, and where the focus now needs to shift towards is in moving from policy to practice.

5

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for the Future

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, the work started by the Homeless Initiative continues. The Initiative itself has been replaced by a provisionally titled Dublin Homeless Services Agency. Key elements of the structure of this new arrangement for co-ordinating homeless services are outlined in Figure 5.1. The Management Group is replaced by a Board of Management, whose membership includes senior managers from the four Dublin local authorities, the health board/ERHA, Probation and Welfare Service, FÁS, the VEC, three representatives from the voluntary sector, and the chair of the Partnership Consultative Forum. The Consultative Board is replaced by a Partnership Consultative Forum, with broadly similar membership and responsibilities to the Consultative Board. The administrative support for the new structure is headed by a Director of Homeless Services. In this context, it is important that the lessons learned from the operation of the Homeless Initiative are taken on board by the new structure.

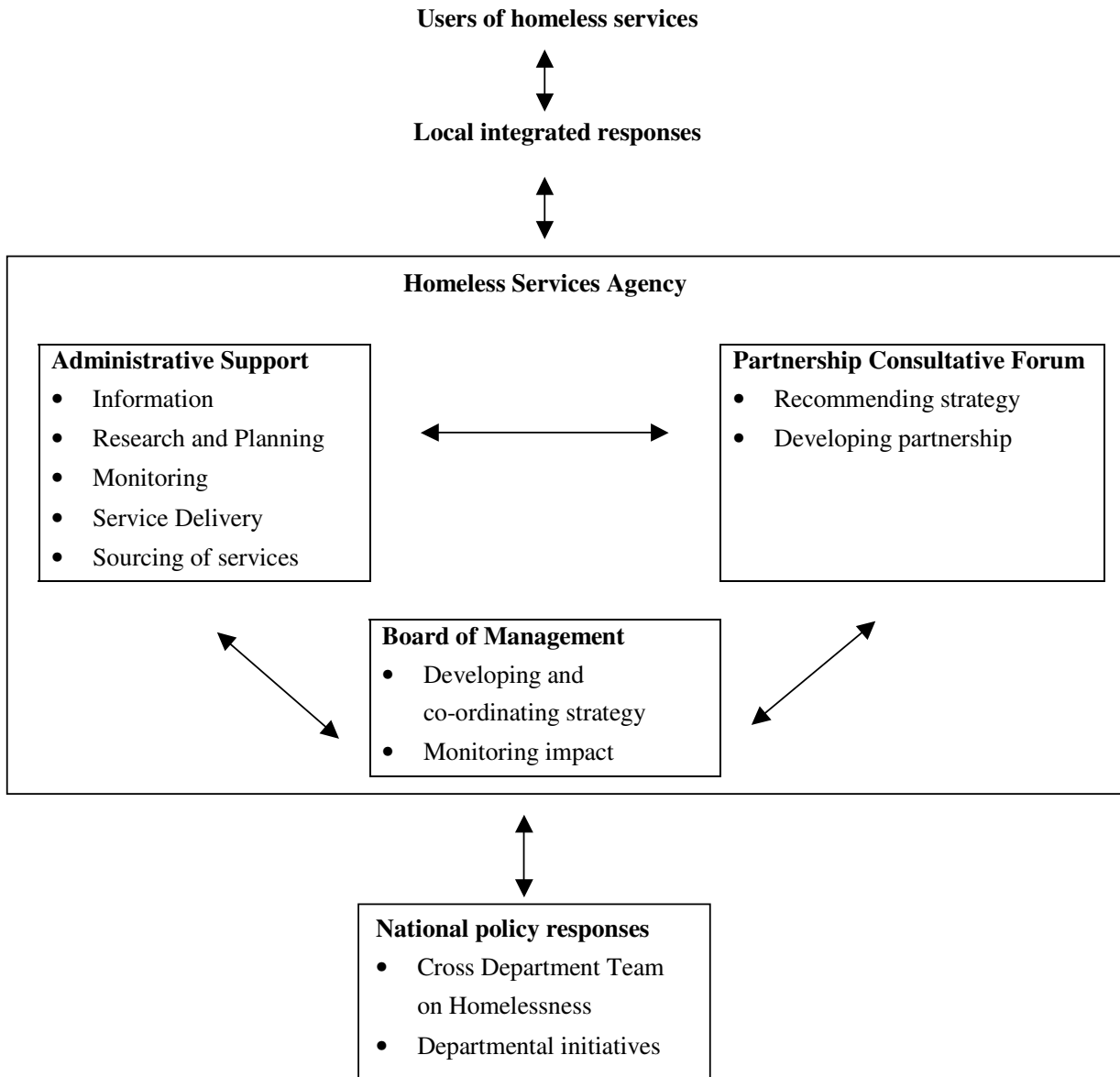
5.2 Applying the lessons learned

The focus here is on issues which the Board of Management, Partnership Consultative Forum and administrative support need to be concerned with if the new structure is to take on and develop the strengths of the Homeless Initiative and minimise the limitations.

5.2.1 *Issues for the Board of Management*

The Board of Management will be responsible for developing and monitoring strategy and has a broader membership than the old Management Group. It will need to give particular regard to a number of issues:

Figure 5.1
New arrangements for co-ordinating homeless services in the Dublin region



- Linkage to national and local policy developments was an important aspect of the work of the Homeless Initiative, but this linkage was somewhat ad hoc. The new Board of Management will need to establish the Homeless Services Agency as a key player in determining policy for the homeless at both national and local levels. In this context, the development of good working arrangements with the Cross Department Team on Homelessness and with the relevant Strategic Policy Committees of the Dublin local authorities will be particularly important.
- Changes in service provision arising from the activities of the Homeless Initiative were slow to occur. Given the changing level and pattern of homelessness, a vital task for the Board of Management will be to focus on service provision and the impact on homelessness of the Agency. The *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003* provides a basis for progress here, with particular targets outlined for areas such as the supply of emergency, transitional and permanent housing and the reduction of rough sleeping. The Board will need to take particular responsibility for assessing the achievement of these service provision targets.
- The impact on the internal operation of participating agencies so as to get them to collaborate more effectively varied in the Homeless Initiative. But it is a crucial element of service delivery, co-ordination of services, and in the development of partnership. Given that the Homeless Services Agency, like the Homeless Initiative, is not a direct provider of services itself, it will be dependent on its ability to influence the activities of statutory and voluntary service providers. In particular the achievement of targets in the *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003* is dependent on agencies committing themselves to action. The Board of Management encompasses a wider range of agencies than the Management Group. Shaping the reaction of these agencies to homelessness, and not just the reaction of individuals participating directly in the process, will be an important challenge facing the Board.
- Also in a partnership context, the development of partnership between voluntary and statutory agencies presented particular challenges during the life of the Homeless Initiative. Voluntary agencies are now represented on the Board of Management. Ensuring an effective and balanced approach to partnership at

Board level will be an issue to which the Board will need to devote some time and attention.

- Enhancing the research and information base was one of the major advancements achieved by the Homeless Initiative. The use to which such information is put determines its worth. In particular, the use of appropriate monitoring information to assess progress with the implementation of the *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003* will be a key task of the Board, as will the identification of blockages/problems regarding implementation.

5.2.2 *Issues for the Partnership Consultative Forum*

The Partnership Consultative Forum will need to pay attention to a number of issues if it is to progress the work of the Consultative Board:

- Planning for the future, and ensuring widespread consultation in proposals, both directly at the Board itself and through the working groups, was a successful feature of the Consultative Board. The Partnership Consultative Forum will need to continue this work. The Forum will also need to take on the unfinished business of the Consultative Board, such as developing an agreed funding regime.
- Attention to the development of partnership was intermittent in the Consultative Board. If partnership is to evolve on a more systematic basis, the Forum will need to give particular attention to:
 - Laying the foundations for continuing partnership, particularly being explicit in the contribution and commitments required from members and how these will be delivered on, and in how success will be judged. Recognition of the need for and the difficulties involved in balancing the shared and individual interests of agencies will be important.
 - Identifying and promoting the positive differences made by partnership, in terms of behavioural changes, policy development, systems development and service outcomes.

- The direct involvement of the homeless in the planning of service provision was not an explicit aim of the Homeless Initiative, but was raised as an issue during its lifetime. The Partnership Consultative Forum will need to give attention to this issue of the direct involvement of service users in the planning and co-ordination of services.

5.2.3 *Issues for the administrative support structure*

The administrative support team will be pivotal in driving forward the work plan of the Dublin Homeless Services Agency. Particular issues which will need attention based on the experience of the Homeless Initiative include:

- Development of the research and planning information base was a major achievement of the Homeless Initiative. This information base will need to be further developed. Particular areas requiring attention are: the monitoring of progress of the *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003* as assessed by agreed performance indicators; monitoring trends in the level and nature of homelessness; and developing project planning and management procedures.
- The production of the *Putting People First* service standards and associated training package represented a development which has significant potential for long-term impact on service provision. A key task for the administration of the Dublin Homeless Services Agency will be to promote the widespread application of the service standards into practice.
- Clarity of the role of the support structure will be important. In the Homeless Initiative, its role as an integral part of the overall policy making and planning framework for the sector was not always seen as central by all the players, national and local. The new support structure will need to establish itself clearly and be accepted as a key component of the policy system for addressing homelessness. It will need the support of the Board in particular in this process.
- Staffing levels and quality of staff are central to developing an effective administrative support. The work overload of the early days of the Homeless

Initiative illustrates problems that can arise when work demands are out of line with the capacity to respond.

5.3 Conclusions

The Homeless Initiative made a significant contribution to improving the planned co-ordination of services for the homeless in the Dublin region. As an innovative approach to addressing problems of co-operation and co-ordination which apply across many areas of the public sector, the Initiative represented an important new way of working. As an attempt to promote better planning and management across statutory and voluntary agencies, the Homeless Initiative has highlighted both the potential and the structural limitations to be faced in such an approach. It is important now that the experiences gained through the Homeless Initiative is built on and developed in the new Dublin Homeless Services Agency. The Homeless Initiative has shown what needs to be done to tackle homelessness. The challenge now is to put that learning into practice.

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Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Appendix 2

Replies to questions circulated to hostel and housing projects, advice and support services and government departments

The extent to which the Homeless Initiative has influenced each of the following activities (number in boxes refers to the total number of replies in that category)

Activity	Very much	Much	A fair amount	A little	Not at all	No opinion	Blanks
Policy thinking on homelessness at central government level	4	7	6	3	-	-	1
Policy thinking on homelessness at local government/health board level	3	11	4	2	-	-	1
The internal workings of agencies involved in delivering services to the homeless	1	5	6	4	3	-	2
The actual provision of service to the homeless	-	5	5	3	7	-	1
A sense of partnership between the statutory and voluntary organisations dealing with homelessness	4	9	2	3	1	-	2

The extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements? (number in boxes refers to the total number of replies in that category)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion	Blanks
The Homeless Initiative has been a key player in the provision of services for the homeless in the Dublin region	3	5	6	4	1	1	1
The Homeless Initiative has resulted in better co-ordination and delivery of services for the homeless in the Dublin region	4	7	6	1	1	1	1
The Homeless Initiative has improved the analysis and planning of service provision for the homeless	7	10	-	2	-	-	2