

Review of Temporary Accommodation

Roger Courtney
for the Homeless Agency

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Foreword

I am very pleased to welcome this report of *The Review of Temporary Accommodation*, which has been completed by Roger Courtney of Courtney Consulting on behalf of the Homeless Agency.

The Homeless Agency is a partnership body that was established as part of the Government strategy on homelessness in May 2001. It is responsible for the planning and co-ordination of the delivery of quality services to people who are experiencing homelessness in Dublin. The Homeless Agency co-ordinates homeless services in Dublin, provides training and other supports, monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of services, carries out research and administers statutory funding to homeless services.

The Homeless Agency is comprised of voluntary and statutory agencies, who are working in partnership to implement agreed plans for the delivery of services people who are homeless, assisting them to move rapidly to appropriate long term housing and independence. A Consultative Forum advises the Board of Management.

The report examines all forms of temporary accommodation including emergency and transitional in the public, voluntary or private sector.

Under 'A Clearer Future' the funding guidelines of the Homeless Agency, we will be undertaking individual service evaluations with all emergency accommodation providers in 2006. It is hoped that these will build on the key recommendations within the report and also enable us to begin their implementation.

Dr Derval Howley

Director · Homeless Agency

The logo for the Homeless Agency, featuring the words "HOME", "LESS", and "agency" stacked vertically. "HOME" and "LESS" are in a bold, black, sans-serif font, while "agency" is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The text is set against a light blue rectangular background.

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The Homeless Agency has commissioned and funded this report. Responsibility for it (including any errors or omissions) remains with the Consultants. The views and opinions contained in any reports arising from this contract are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Homeless Agency

Acknowledgements

I very much appreciate the time and thought of all the individuals who agreed to take time out of their busy schedules to meet with me to discuss the review of temporary accommodation in Dublin. Their names are listed in Appendix 8.

I am also grateful to the members of the steering group who substantially improved the quality of the report with their thoughtful questions and comments on previous drafts. The names of steering group members are listed in Appendix 8.

I am also grateful to Simon Brooke for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of the report.

i Introduction

This review of temporary accommodation was commissioned by The Homeless Agency, the statutory body leading and co-ordinating the response to homelessness in the Greater Dublin Area. The review was to cover all forms of temporary accommodation, emergency and transitional, in the public, voluntary or private sector. Specifically the terms of reference for this review were as follows:

- To assess the range and type of existing accommodation and skills of staff against the current and emerging needs of people homeless;
- To assess current use of accommodation against stated target groups of providers;
- To examine blockages and barriers in system (i.e. why temporary accommodation is blocked, why access is denied to some people);
- To assess the suitability of buildings for current use; and
- To make recommendations for the future composition, use and organisation of temporary accommodation in Dublin.

ii Key Review Questions

The review addressed a number of key questions in relation to temporary accommodation. These key questions were as follows:

- What is the policy context within which the current review is being carried out, and temporary accommodation currently operates (see section 2 – Policy context)? And what precisely is temporary accommodation? (see section 3 – Defining services)?
- What hard information is available to make judgements about the use of temporary accommodation in Dublin and is it adequate? (see section 4 – Information that is currently available on homelessness and use of temporary accommodation)
- How are the needs of people who are homeless currently assessed and how are their cases managed and are they adequate? (see section 5 – Assessment)
- What are the principles which should underpin good practice in relation to temporary accommodation? (see section 6 – Principles underpinning good practice in emergency accommodation)
- Is there an adequate quantity of temporary accommodation to accommodate the number of people who are homeless in the greater Dublin area (see section 7 – Temporary accommodation by location)? And is it in the right locations (see section 7 – Temporary accommodation by location)?
- Does current temporary accommodation accept, and meet the needs of, specific groups of people who are homeless (re household type, age, gender, support needs, etc)? (see section 8 – Temporary accommodation by client group; and section 9 – Private temporary accommodation)
- Is the quality of temporary accommodation in terms of buildings and services appropriate to meet the needs of people who are homeless? (see section 9 – private temporary accommodation; and section 10 – Quality of accommodation) Do staff have the right skills? (see section 11 – Skills)
- What needs to happen in future to build on the strengths of the current provision and deal with the weaknesses? (see section 13 – Conclusions and recommendations)

iii General Approach and Methodology

In summary, the methodology for the review of temporary accommodation in Dublin included:

- Carrying out a literature review of relevant materials on temporary accommodation in Ireland, the UK and internationally as well as analysing existing data held by the Homeless Agency on temporary accommodation for people who are homeless, including number of projects, number of bedspaces, acceptance criteria, occupancy levels, length of stay, etc.

- Meeting with the Homeless Person's Unit¹, providers of temporary accommodation and rough sleeper teams to clarify information contained in materials provided to the Homeless Agency, especially in relation to accessibility, waiting lists and times, barriers to access and move-on, gaps in provision and suitability of buildings.
- Meeting with the Steering Group to discuss various drafts of the report.

iv Conclusions

In relation to the key questions highlighted above the report came to the following conclusions:

Progress

Very positive progress has been made over the last ten years in the provision of temporary accommodation for people who are homeless in Dublin. The quantity and quality of temporary accommodation has improved and additional provision has been developed for specific client groups which previously lacked appropriate provision. Along with the provision of temporary accommodation, there have been important developments in the range of relevant services for homeless households, which have become more individualised, responsive and holistic.

Reduction in Homelessness

There is now evidence of: a reduction in the number of individuals sleeping rough; fewer families presenting as homeless, due to increasing availability of private rented accommodation; and some easing of pressure in some other parts of the system. However the experience of those delivering services to people who are homeless is that while the number of referrals of people with low support needs has decreased, the number of those with multiple needs, usually involving substance abuse and physical or mental health problems, and which may also result in chaotic or challenging behaviour, has increased.

Disjointed Arrangements for Temporary Accommodation

It is clear from the evidence that arrangements for temporary accommodation for people who are homeless are still somewhat fragmented and disjointed, with inadequate cohesion and effective co-ordination. Although each of the individual agencies may be doing their best, within their own ethos, to meet the needs of service-users, the overall arrangements do not ensure a consistently well co-ordinated service that meets the needs of people who are homeless.

Lack of Systematic Information

There is currently not the appropriate information base to make a clear and detailed assessment of the flow of homeless households through homeless services and therefore to make appropriate assessments of the real need for various forms of temporary accommodation. This has limited the ability of this present review to appropriately quantify the "current and emerging needs of people who are homeless", or "assess current use of accommodation".

¹ *The Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) is an assessment and placement service for single people, couples and families who are experiencing homelessness. It makes social welfare payments and provides information and referral to emergency accommodation. The unit operates a freephone between 10am and 1am, all year round – 1800 724724.*

Inconsistent Approach to Assessment

The current assessment of people referred as homeless, through the HPU, or by providers of individual services, does not lend itself to the kind of consistent holistic assessment that is required to provide a sound basis for the arrangement of support services and accommodation to meet their needs.

Prevention Crucial

The development of a Preventative Strategy, which the Homeless Agency is undertaking is critical to successfully tackling homelessness. The main aim of such preventative strategies should be to prevent households from becoming homeless in the first place and therefore not requiring any form of temporary accommodation. Initiatives in the Preventative Strategy in relation to people coming out of institutions such as prison, mental hospitals and residential care are crucial in preventing these groups from becoming homeless.

Case and Care Management

The development of key working/case management in individual agencies is to be welcomed and should improve the quality of services to service-users. However, it is important that this is co-ordinated through out the sector.

Concentration of Temporary Accommodation

Temporary accommodation is much too focused on the Dublin City Centre, with very little accommodation in other parts of Dublin City, or the other local authority areas. Making referrals from the other local authorities to the HPU in Dublin City, compounds the problem of dislocating people who are homeless from their roots.

Adequate Amount of Temporary Accommodation

There is probably an adequate quantity of temporary accommodation, but there is not a sufficient flow through this accommodation and it is often not adequate in terms of location or quality. There are also still difficulties faced by particular client groups, especially those with challenging behaviour, an undiagnosed mental health problem, a diagnosis of personality disorder, and/or a multiple diagnosis.

B&B Private Emergency Accommodation

The Government's target on ending the use of B&B style emergency accommodation to house homeless households has not been met in Dublin but there has been some progress in the use of B&B's. Many homeless families are referred to B&Bs and tend to stay there for long periods of time, despite its unsatisfactory nature.

There is concern that many homeless households, particularly families with significant support needs, are being placed in private emergency accommodation without the appropriate support or settlement arrangements being put in place.

Far too many people are still staying for long periods in what is supposed to be short-term emergency accommodation. The assessment of the needs of this group is vital to make appropriate alternative arrangements that suit their needs (a specific objective of both *Shaping the Future* and *Making it Home*).

Priority for Options Based on Independent Housing

Investing in permanent rented housing for people who are homeless is much more cost effective than supporting the same households in supported temporary accommodation. Transitional accommodation which has an option of becoming permanent should be prioritised over transitional housing where the person is required to move on to permanent housing, similar to the Sophia Housing model.

Culture of Settlement

Some hostels, including several very large temporary accommodation providers, have not encouraged a positive culture of settlement. Settlement services need to be expanded, as does the provision of tenancy sustainment or community support arrangements to maximise the likelihood of success once a homeless household is resettled. The Homeless Agency is in the process of awarding a tender to Dublin Simon to deliver tenancy sustainment services in the Dublin City Council area. The services are being commissioned on a pilot basis over a two-year period and will be openly available to other homeless service providers in Dublin to use and refer individuals to.

Longer-Term Options for Some Residents

A significant group of people who are most institutionalised have a range of personal problems which will not be easily, or in many cases, ever, be resolved. They require the development of a wide range of different types of long-term accommodation/housing, with a range of different levels of care support.

Homelessness Legislation

The current homelessness legislation should be reviewed following the current review of the Government's homelessness strategy.

v Recommendations

The report makes over 50 recommendations in relation to the future of temporary accommodation in Dublin. The broader recommendations of this report will be available in the report on the recommendations for all reports commissioned by the Homeless Agency under the Action Plan *Making it Home 2004–2006*

However, some of the key recommendations from this particular review of Temporary Accommodation are highlighted below:

Overall Coordination

There needs to be effective pro-active co-ordination and regulation of all forms of temporary accommodation for people who are homeless. Each local authority should have responsibility for contracting with, and ensuring the quality of, all temporary accommodation for people who are homeless (public, private and public), and ensuring that the system in the area works as a whole (see detailed recommendation).

The Homeless Forum in each area needs to act as an effective and influential co-ordination body, tasked with ensuring that appropriate arrangements and support are available for people who are homeless.

Information Management

The Homeless Agency should significantly develop the gathering and analysis of the information on referrals into, and the flow through, temporary accommodation to inform the future development of services. All temporary accommodation providers should be required to participate fully in the LINK system, whether it receives funding from the Homeless Agency or not (see detailed recommendation). The Homeless Persons Unit and Multi-Disciplinary Team also need to provide regular information for the LINK system*. Information also needs to be effectively captured on people being referred from institutions (hospitals, care, prisons, etc.) to homelessness services.

Assessment

Arrangements should be put in place for the consistent, thorough and holistic assessment of each homeless household (see detailed recommendation). There should be an agreed common assessment process and pro-formas for a basic stage 1 assessment and if required a more detailed stage 2 assessment and an agreed common process for reporting progress through the system.

Referrals and assessments should take place in the four local authority areas and no longer be contracted to the HPU. The local authorities should be the lead bodies in carrying out the initial assessments. Clear procedures for carrying out assessments need to be developed and implementation monitored and documented.

The Health Service Executive should examine the best way of making appropriately trained and experienced staff available to contribute, when required, to the stage 2 to the assessment of homeless clients, to prevent clients having to go to another place to be assessed.

Once someone is referred to emergency accommodation, the following working day they should be actively followed up in the emergency accommodation by the local authority and, if the stage 1 assessment indicates it is required, the relevant care support agency, in order to further assess the households needs and ensure appropriate support arrangements are put in place.

Care support

One agency should be given the lead role in co-ordinating the care support arrangements for each homeless household, convening and chairing case conferences and for tracking the progress of each homeless household.

Progressive plans, and the necessary resources, should be put in place so that by 2008 the assessment of the care support needs of all homeless households placed in temporary accommodation should commence within the emergency accommodation within 24 hours of being placed.

The hostel licence (see below) should include the requirement that appropriate assessment and key-working is available to all service-users².

* The HPU are currently putting in place a new ICT system which will provide the Homeless Agency with access to their regional reports section and are starting to make use of the Homeless Dublin System.

² The development of a hostel licence is outside the scope of the Homeless Agency and would need to be reviewed at Government level

All families in private emergency accommodation should have their support needs thoroughly and holistically assessed and appropriate packages of care support put in place, as well as comprehensive settlement support to ensure they stay in temporary accommodation for as short a period as possible.

The HSE should ensure that residents in temporary accommodation have good access to specialist services, including Occupational Therapy (OT), Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN), Community Health Nurse (CHN), social work, addiction specialists, counselling, and health services.

There should be a review of progress in implementing the recommendations of the external evaluation of the Multi-Disciplinary Team.

Permanent Housing

The public/social rented housing stock for both families and single people should be substantially increased in line with the NESC report.

A range of other initiatives to promote the access of homeless households to ordinary rented accommodation should be actively promoted and resourced.

Tenancy sustainment arrangements need to be put in place for those at risk of homelessness, as a preventative measure, to prevent households losing their accommodation, as well as helping ensure the success of settlement processes.

Acceptance onto and retention on the housing and homeless lists need to become consistent across the four local authorities.

The arrangements for exceptional needs payments to homeless households moving into unfurnished local authority housing need to be reviewed so that these households are not forced to buy new furniture and equipment, which is not covered by the exceptional payment award.

Location

The report makes a number of recommendations regarding the development of service provision outside of Dublin city centre for emergency and transitional accommodation. These recommendations will be reviewed as part of the work in 2006 for the next Action Plan.

Evictions/Barring

A mechanism for comprehensively documenting and monitoring evictions and barring in all temporary accommodation should be put in place through the LINK system, and staffing arrangements and a programme of training put in place to reduce the level of barrings/evictions.

Settlement

The assessment of the needs of each long-stay resident in temporary accommodation should be carried out on a progressive basis i.e. each year the needs of the longest stay residents should be assessed (see detailed recommendation).

A strong culture of settlement should be developed in all temporary accommodation (or the accommodation should accept it is long-term supported accommodation and make plans accordingly) and this should be part of the licence agreement/contract.

All emergency and transitional accommodation should have appropriate resettlement arrangements in place (either employed directly by the accommodation provider, or linked to an external agency) to ensure pre-settlement support is available to all residents.

A comprehensive Tenancy Sustainment/Community Support arrangement should be put in place, so that people who are settled into permanent housing have appropriate support to enable them to successfully remain there.

A volunteer mentoring/befriending scheme should be established in the voluntary sector to provide non-professional support to homeless people who have moved into permanent housing. This recommendation should be reviewed by the Homeless Network as many services already have volunteer schemes in place.

Standards

A system of licensing for all temporary accommodation should be introduced so that all temporary accommodation is required to have a signed contract, which will ensure compliance with agreed standards regardless of how it is financed³.

The *Putting People First* standards should be reviewed to add minimum and good practice standards to the current PPF best practice standards. Funding should be linked to the achievement of agreed standards. Achievement of the standards should be regularly and effectively monitored.

A comprehensive framework for estimating the level of care support provided to service-users is developed and used to assess all temporary accommodation, rather than the current simplistic low, medium and high support, with no clear evidence to back this up. This framework should then be used to assess appropriate staffing levels and as part of the funding negotiations.

A system for the regular inspection of temporary accommodation managed by voluntary and public sector organisations should be put in place to ensure compliance with progressively improving physical quality standards.

The Homeless Agency should agree a set of physical standards for temporary accommodation and commission a one-off assessment of the compliance of all temporary accommodation with these standards and estimate the cost of bringing the voluntary/public sector accommodation up to standard.

A special initiative should be established to assess the disability access of all temporary accommodation for people who are homeless and draw up and implement an action plan for creating universal accessibility in all emergency accommodation within 5 years. This may be carried out as part of the assessment of physical standards.

A one-off assessment of compliance of all temporary accommodation and providers (public, voluntary and private) with relevant health and safety legislation should be commissioned and an action plan agreed with the relevant agencies.

Negotiations should take place with the relevant fire officers and public health officers to ensure that all temporary accommodation (public, voluntary and private) for people who are homeless is inspected comprehensively at least annually.

³ Again, the development of a hostel licence is outside the scope of the Homeless Agency and would need to be reviewed at Government level.

The terms and conditions for private landlords to be maintained on the emergency accommodation capitation list should be reviewed and substantially improved.

A deadline should be set for all voluntary, public and private hostels to provide 24-hour access.

A clear time-limit should be set to the length of time that families or pregnant women can be placed in B&B accommodation with any shared toilet, cooking or washing facilities.

Private Rented Accommodation

The impacts of the Rental Accommodation Scheme and the introduction of service charges into private temporary accommodation should be thoroughly monitored and evaluated.

Staff Skills

The recommendations of the Learning and Performance working group should be implemented to continue the development of the skills of those working in temporary accommodation.

Specialist Accommodation Required

The feasibility of developing, or adapting existing accommodation into, specialist accommodation projects for single women, young people, single people with challenging behaviour, drug users, heavy drinkers, families, couples and victims of domestic violence (see the detailed recommendations for details) should be explored and more detailed briefs in relation to size, type of premises, level and type of support provided, location, etc. should be developed.

vi Action Plan

A draft action plan for implementing these above mentioned recommendations is contained within the *Review of Temporary Accommodation* main report.

Parkgate Hall
6-9 Conyngham Road
Dublin 8
Tel 01 703 6100
Fax 01 703 6170
Email homeless@dublincity.ie
Web www.homelessagency.ie

The logo for Homeless Agency is contained within a blue square. The word "HOME" is written in large, bold, black, uppercase letters. Below it, the word "LESS" is also in large, bold, black, uppercase letters. Underneath "LESS", the word "agency" is written in a smaller, white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

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