

**Update on recommendations arising from the Report of the Expert Group  
on Mental Health Policy, "A Vision for Change"  
Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government  
February 2010**

**1. Recommendation 4.1: All citizens should be treated equally. Access to employment, housing and education for individuals with mental health problems should be on the same basis as every other citizen.**

1.1 The core objective of Government housing policy is to enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice. The housing policy statement - Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, which was published in 2007, outlines an overarching vision to guide the development of the Irish housing sector over the next ten years, by delivering more and better quality housing responses in a more strategic way, focused on the building of sustainable communities. The statement sets out a range of actions geared at building sustainable communities by responding to housing need in a way that improves choice and encourages individual responsibility within communities and effectively delivering housing programmes, to get better outcomes for the households supported, and better value for money for the tax-payer. It also underpins the commitment in the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* to develop a housing strategy for people with a disability to inform housing action plans and recognises that specific strategies and actions, including inter agency responses, are required in order to address the varying range of special needs housing.

1.2 The Government considers the most appropriate way of addressing individual need for housing is to continue the various programmes and fiscal incentives currently in place, to secure the necessary level of funding to support them, to review their operation on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are meeting their objectives and to put in place new programmes or measures as required. Record levels of investment in recent years has seen a significant increase in the numbers who have had their housing needs met through the full range of social and affordable housing programmes with the needs of some 20,000 households being addressed in 2008. However, the scale and composition of the social housing programme in the years ahead will be dependent on a

number of factors, including the level of available funding and the evolution of the housing market generally. Subject to these factors, and taking account of the increase in housing needs evident in the 2008 Housing Needs Assessment, it is essential that the programme is framed in a manner which optimises the use of available Exchequer supports and explores alternative solutions to addressing housing needs. This will provide a robust basis for maximising the capacity to meet housing needs, particularly in respect of those with specific needs.

1.3 The voluntary and co-operative housing sector has a particular role to play in meeting specific categories of housing need, including those of persons with a mental health disability, and the Department will continue to support a vibrant voluntary and co-operative housing sector through the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS scheme) with funding increasing by over 30% in 2010 to €145m. Grants under the CAS scheme for 2010 were announced in February and include support for a number of projects being progressed by approved housing bodies in association with local authorities that are specifically intended to meet the housing needs of people with disabilities including those with intellectual or mental health related housing need.

1.4 A new means of assessment of housing need is being developed to provide an improved basis for policy development and service delivery to ensure that all people can live with maximum independence within their community. The key components of this new approach will include, inter alia, the identification of those with specific housing needs, such as people with a disability. It is envisaged that this approach will involve two stages, a preliminary assessment to identify those with a short-term need and those for whom income support of short-term duration is the most appropriate response. The second stage of the assessment will examine longer term housing need.

1.5 An important new component will be the incorporation of the life cycle approach into the assessment of need, reflecting the fact that different households may experience a need for different types of housing supports at various stages of the life cycle. While persons with a disability may well have been underrepresented in previous housing needs assessments, the most recent assessment of housing need carried out by authorities in March 2008 recorded an increase of almost 154% for this category when compared to the previous assessment carried out in 2005.

1.6 The intention to reform housing allocation policy was signalled in Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities. The reform of allocation policy is part of a suite of reforms aimed at improving service and ensuring that social housing is delivered in a way that is fair and efficient. The modernisation and reform of the allocation practices of local authorities also aims to provide a better fit between needs and resources and to respond, as far as possible, to the expressed preferences of individual households. Following discussions with various stakeholders in the housing area, including the Housing Forum, a new allocation policy has now been developed.

1.7 The legislative framework for the new needs assessment and allocation policies system has been provided for in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 and work is underway on the preparation of regulations and guidelines for housing authorities which must be finalised prior to implementation. The intention is to commence relevant sections, which cover assessment and allocation issues, as soon as possible in 2010 - when the detailed regulation and guidance for housing authorities has been finalised. Work is currently underway on this in consultation with the County and City Managers Association (CCMA). The implementation of the new needs assessment and allocation policy is happening at national level (though ultimate implementation will be undertaken by housing authorities in due course).

**2. Recommendation 4.7: The provision of social housing is the responsibility of the Local Authority. Mental health services should work in liaison with Local Authorities to ensure housing is provided for people with mental health problems who require it.**

2.1 In order to bring a new focus to addressing the specific housing needs of people with a disability and in line with commitments under *Towards 2016* and the Disability Act, 2005, the Department is developing a national housing strategy for people with a disability. The strategy will have particular regard to people who experience mental health disability. The strategy, which is due to be finalised by April 2010, is being progressed by a National Advisory Group, under the aegis of the Housing Forum, headed by this Department and involving the Department of Health and Children, the Health Services Executive, social partners and other relevant stakeholders, including the National Disability Authority.

2.2 A sub-group of the National Advisory Group was established to examine the specific housing needs of people with a mental health disability. The work of the sub-group also included the development of a protocol governing liaison between housing authorities and the HSE (Community Mental Health Teams) in relation to the housing needs of people with a mental health disability. It is expected that the protocol will be implemented by mid 2010.

2.3 On a broader level, and to provide a more strategic framework for inter agency cooperation between housing authorities and the HSE in relation to the delivery of services for people with a disability, including those with a mental health disability, a protocol has been developed in relation to the governing of liaison arrangements between the housing authorities and the HSE in relation to the assessment of housing need of children aged under 5 years who have been assessed under Part 2 of the Disability Act, and likely to require a housing support. This protocol is being implemented by the housing authorities and the HSE since July 2007. This protocol, which ensures that there is a smooth and transparent system to facilitate referral between housing authorities and the HSE in these cases, will be reviewed by this Department and the Department of Health and Children in 2010.

2.4 Work is almost finalised on the development of a protocol to govern liaison arrangements between the housing authorities and the HSE in relation to the provision of revenue funding, by the HSE, for ongoing operational / supports costs for social housing projects provided by approved housing bodies for people with a disability. This protocol will facilitate better co-ordination of funding and is expected to be implemented during quarter 1 2010.

2.5 A further protocol to govern liaison between housing authorities and the HSE in relation to the strategic assessment of the nature and extent of local housing needs of people with a disability, is being progressed in the context of the development of the national housing strategy for people with a disability. This protocol will improve the capturing of data in relation to the housing needs of people with a disability, including those with a mental health disability, and is expected to be implemented by mid 2010.

2.6 In the context of the publication of the *VFM and Policy Review of the efficiency and effectiveness of long stay residential care for adults within the Mental Health Services*, discussions are ongoing between this Department and the

Office for Disability and Mental Health in relation to the more appropriate accommodation of people with a mental health disability.

**3. Recommendation 4.9: Community and personal development initiatives which impact positively on mental health status should be supported e.g. housing improvement schemes, local environment planning and the provision of local facilities. This helps build social capital in the community.**

3.1 Since 1997, in excess of €1 billion has been spent on programmes to improve run-down local authority estates. The housing policy statement provides for a planned and concerted increase in investment in social housing stock over the coming years. This will provide an opportunity to tackle some long-standing problems in communities that have experienced multiple disadvantage. Under new funding arrangements applicable from 1 January 2007, local authorities were allowed to apply the revenue received from the sales of houses to programmes of regeneration, remedial works and planned maintenance. This encourages greater accountability and responsibility at local level and provides an important incentive to maintaining quality of housing, ensuring that authorities act proactively in this area. Through these new funding arrangements, local authorities will have resources to fund programmes of planned maintenance, to undertake improvement works to dwellings and estates and to support related environmental and community enhancement projects which will, in turn have a positive impact on an individual's living environment.

3.2 A Sustainable Communities Fund was established in 2007 to provide revenue funding to local authorities on a project-by-project basis, for a defined period of up to three years, subject to conditions, to support the achievement of sustainable communities, through initiatives that provide for housing renewal and improvement of the housing stock and living environments, in the context of the housing policy framework. Some 50 proposals were approved for funding under the scheme. To date payments totalling €5,132,830 have been made from the Fund, peaking with payments of €3,039,454 in 2009, for multi-annual projects encompassing areas such as Equality, Diversity and Special Needs Initiatives, as well as initiatives in the areas of supported housing, tenancy sustainment and case management projects for people who face multiple challenges.

**4. Recommendation 15.2.1: A database should be established to refine the dimension and characteristics of homelessness and analyse how services are currently dealing with it.**

**Recommendation 15.2.2: In the light of this information, scientifically acquired and analysed, make recommendations as to requirements and implement them.**

4.1 *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness 2008 – 2013*, the new national strategy on homelessness was launched in 2008. It recognised the importance of accurate data in developing a targeted response to homelessness. It has committed to the development and implementation of a single integrated national data information system on the use of homeless services. The Homeless Agency carried out a review of the Dublin LINK database system and has devised a new client based data system which will be implemented in Dublin initially and will be rolled out nationally following the initial pilot in Dublin. A sub-group of the National Homeless Consultative Committee continues to play an important role in addressing the issue of data collection, including input into the development of the new data system.

4.2 The Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government participated in the EU MPHASIS project (Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems). This study aims to enable organisations on an EU level to share knowledge and good practice on data collection regarding measurement of homelessness. The Department hosted a national meeting in November 2008, and a further meeting was hosted by the Department on 11 December 2009 which brought together both statutory and voluntary agencies and international speakers to discuss important issues relating to data collection on homelessness.

4.3 In addition to the development of a database on people using homeless services, regular counts of homeless people are also undertaken. The Homeless Agency, involving the four Dublin local authorities, has refined a survey method (published as "*Counted In*" 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2008) that provides a robust, point-in-time assessment of those using homeless services. This is used to monitor the extent of homelessness and to identify the needs of people who are currently using homeless services. In 2008, the Counted In survey method was used for the first time in Cork, Galway and Limerick. In 2010, a scaled down version of the *Counted In* will be held in Dublin to track progress in relation to

persons categorised as long term homeless in the *Counted In* 2008. *Counted In* is normally held every 3 years.

4.4 Under the Housing Act 1988 housing authorities are responsible for making periodic assessments of the number of households in their administrative area that are in need of social housing support. Triennial assessments of housing need have been carried out by housing authorities since 1991. As part of that assessment, housing authorities categorise households according to the nature of their housing need, including those household that are homeless. In 2009, 427 households who were in temporary accommodation obtained permanent accommodation. This is a minimum number as this figure relates to Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford City Councils only

**5. Recommendation 15.2.3: The Action Plan on Homelessness should be fully implemented and the statutory responsibility of housing authorities in this area should be reinforced.**

5.1 It is noted from the *Vision for Change* Report that the "Action Plan" on Homelessness being referred to here is the Homeless Agency's Dublin Action Plan. The Homeless Agency is the partnership body responsible for the management and coordination of services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area and for the implementation of agreed action plans which aim to eliminate homelessness in the capital by 2010. In its action plan, *A Key to the Door – the Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007 – 2010*, it describes its vision as the elimination of long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough by 2010. Since the publication of the Key to the Door, the Homeless Agency have produced a 'Pathway to Home' model which is based on a comprehensive review of homeless services and a review of expenditure to ensure that value for money is achieved.

Major changes are being implemented to increase the effectiveness of homeless services in Dublin in line with the homeless strategy including the reconfiguration of emergency accommodation, rationalisation of outreach and day services, such as information and advice centres, reconfiguration of existing homeless support resources into visiting housing support teams.

These changes are based on the recommendations regarding Dublin homeless services, set out in 3 reports, published by the Homeless Agency. These

recommendations led to the comprehensive model of homeless services in Dublin outlined in the Pathway to Home report developed by an Implementation Steering Group, which emphasises the changes needed to make homeless services as effective as possible and to help people move away from homelessness.

In Dublin by the end of 2009 provision had been made for the accommodation of over 800 homeless households, in terms of social housing lettings made and other accommodation sourced or long term tenancies agreed in homeless facilities that are being converted to independent self contained units. Arrangements to finalise these are proceeding.

5.2 This Government's National Homeless Strategy sets out a vision, underpinned by a detailed programme of action, with 3 core objectives:

- eliminating long-term occupation of emergency homeless facilities by end 2010;
- eliminating the need to sleep rough by end 2010; and
- preventing the occurrence of homelessness as far as possible.

5.3 A detailed Implementation Plan for the strategy was published in April 2009 which sets out more specific timelines and assigns lead roles for the various national actions. The local actions are generally a matter for local homeless action plans and relevant bodies at local level. The strategy committed to putting local homeless action plans on a statutory basis and provision for this in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 commenced on 1 February 2010 and arrangements to establish statutory Homelessness Fora are proceeding

**6. Recommendation 15.2.4: A range of suitable, affordable housing options should be available to prevent the mentally ill becoming homeless.**

6.1 For the most vulnerable groups (e.g. homeless persons, persons with addictions, persons with mental health and other disabilities) interventions will require an inter-agency response, particularly where there is a care dimension in to the supports required. The links between mental health disability and homelessness are widely recognised. *The Way Home* identifies people with mental health disabilities as a particular target group in the prevention of homelessness. This will continue to be a focus for interagency work by the



Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the HSE who will take the lead role in this area. To this end, the HSE will undertake a number of actions to reduce the numbers of people with mental health disabilities becoming homeless. These include the development of national guidance to ensure access to addiction, mental health and other treatment services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, which has been recognised as a priority action. The HSE and the Department of Health and Children will commence work on jointly developing this guidance in 2010. The HSE will ensure that the mental health services, through the proposed community mental health teams and integrated care approach, will target those who are homeless. The HSE will put in place appropriate and effective discharge policies/procedures for homeless people being discharged from acute hospitals and mental health facilities and to monitor discharge policies to ensure that they are effective.

6.2 *The Way Home* identifies a continuum of housing options to provide long term accommodation for formerly homeless people. These range from mainstream housing with various levels of housing support to residential accommodation for people who are unable to live independently, for example Sundial House in James' St, Dublin. Mainstream housing options include voluntary and social housing including accommodation provided through RAS and the Social Housing Leasing Initiative, private rented housing, the rental accommodation scheme, the proposed new leasing and support scheme and accommodation in the family home. These options are available for homeless people, including those with mental health disabilities. The most suitable option for each individual household, including supports if necessary, must be determined and utilised. In addition, a **new scheme of homes and support – Support to Live Independently or "SLI"** was announced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in July 2009. This forms an important element of action to end long term homelessness by providing suitable long-term accommodation in mainstream housing with appropriate tenancy supports (where required) to help people make a successful transition from homelessness to independent living. This support is housing related and is separate to any healthcare personal or social supports that may be required which is the responsibility of the HSE.

6.3 The promotion of access to suitable mainstream housing options for people with a mental health disability is being considered further in the context of the development of the national housing strategy for people with a disability.