

Support

Innovation is required to foster a culture that promotes independent living, with supports as appropriate. Those persons in secure occupancy of rental accommodation with floating support services should enjoy the same rights and duties as other individuals in rented accommodation and as such should be expected to contribute an appropriate amount towards their accommodation costs on the same basis as those in receipt of rent supplement.

Youth Homelessness

The approach to tackling all forms of homelessness – child, youth and adult homelessness should be fully integrated. In this context, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is currently overseeing a review of the Youth Homelessness Strategy.

Measuring Progress

Measurement of progress is essential to determine if policies are working. Appropriate systems must be in place to assess the extent of homelessness and to facilitate monitoring and reporting over time of people moving in and out of homelessness. To this end, the national rollout of PASS must continue. The ongoing extent of homelessness in Ireland must be quantified with confidence so that realistic and practical solutions can be brought forward. It is acknowledged that good data is critical.

Delivery will be pursued through arrangements with housing authorities where the provision of funding is linked directly to specific targets and outcomes. The central goal is to ensure that as many homeless persons as possible succeed in having secure sustainable tenancies. A set of indicators will be used to demonstrate the dynamics of homelessness as it is addressed. These indicators will give a clearer picture of homelessness in Ireland: the rate of entry, duration and exits, together with the type and nature of accommodation.

Oversight

There are already many institutional arrangements in place to monitor and measure progress, and it is not intended to change these. However, it is essential to ensure that policies are working and that there is evidence to support this. A high-level three-person oversight group will be established for the purpose of reviewing the approach being advocated in this Homelessness Policy Statement, reviewing progress with indicators, identifying obstacles and proposing solutions. It will be appointed by, and report directly to, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning.

Conclusion

Homelessness has proved to be an enduring and difficult problem for many of the people affected, and for society as a whole. Central and local government and the voluntary sector have devoted considerable resources and effort to the issue and real progress has been made. However, the problem remains. It is the purpose of this policy statement to refocus those resources towards providing people who, for a variety of reasons, have found themselves homeless with a home. It will guide all the commitment, energy, funding and goodwill of service providers in a coherent and focused way to deliver a real home for those who are now caught in the trap of homelessness that prevents them from living a free, dignified life.



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

Homelessness Policy Statement

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Overall Policy Objective / Context

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by implementing a housing-led approach. This approach recognises that long-term secure housing is the best outcome for people affected by homelessness. By moving away from expensive emergency or shelter type accommodation better use can be made of scarce resources.

The Government's Housing Policy Statement has an overall objective to enable all households access good quality housing appropriate to their circumstances and in their particular community of choice. It acknowledges that delivering better outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged households is a key priority for the Government. In this context, a continued focus on tackling the root causes of homelessness and maintaining an integrated and efficient approach to service delivery is required.

Despite considerable investment by the state and the voluntary sector, homelessness remains an enduring social phenomenon. It is recognised across society that homelessness is an affront to the dignity of the person, and that government has an important role together with local authorities and the voluntary sector in addressing the issue.

This Homelessness Policy Statement responds to the commitments in the Programme for Government and will facilitate the better outcomes advocated in the Housing Policy Statement. Its overall strategic objective is to bring an end to long-term homelessness in Ireland.

This Government's policy on homelessness places the rapid provision of appropriate accommodation, with support as needed to ensure sustainable tenancies, as the key solution to ending homelessness. Stable housing is a sustainable solution to homelessness. It also reduces the long-term need for other services and has the potential to produce more and better outcomes for the individual or family involved and for the public money invested.

While all homeless people have a need for adequate, sustainable and affordable housing, it is also recognised that homelessness is a complex phenomenon, and that a variety of other supports can be required by individuals to meet their individual needs.

It has been widely accepted that the strategy "The Way Home" is fundamentally sound. The development of a housing-led approach to ending homelessness was implicit rather than explicit in that document and the primary purpose of this policy statement is to make explicit this policy principle.

As part of the review of homelessness policy provided for in the Programme for Government, research commissioned by the Department strongly endorsed the principles of "The Way Home", criticised the value for money obtained from the high levels of funding for homelessness services and found that securing appropriate rental housing with support as needed could provide the sustainable tenancies that are key to ending homelessness in Ireland.¹ This policy statement is informed by that research together with related consultations with other Departments, agencies, and the voluntary sector.

Accordingly, the core of this Government's response to homelessness in Ireland is:

1. Preventing homelessness
2. Eliminating the need to sleep rough
3. Eliminating long-term occupation of emergency accommodation
4. Providing long-term housing solutions
5. Ensuring effective services
6. Better co-ordinated funding arrangements.

It is the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016

While it is clear that a proportion of funding must be used to provide sufficient bed capacity to accommodate those in need of emergency accommodation, it is equally important that resources are channelled to deliver more permanent responses in a more focused and strategic way.

This more strategic approach includes measures already in train:

- SLI, (Support to Live Independently) provides supports for persons leaving homelessness and co-ordinates tenancy and other supports to meet each individual's needs in their local community setting. It has a central role in ending homelessness.

- A reconfiguration of existing emergency or transitional homeless facilities to provide a substantial number of secure long-term tenancies for homeless persons is an ongoing priority.
- Devolved funding arrangements are being put in place in lieu of the existing individual project based arrangements so as to improve overall efficiency, achieve better value for money and provide greater local decision making in homeless services.

The goal of public policy is to ensure a consistency in approach across the country, that decisions on services are based on need and on achieving the best outcomes for homeless people.

The main focus in terms of housing supports provided by Government is on meeting the most acute needs. Increasing the supply of rental stock as well as increasing permanent new social housing through innovative means is a vital part of ensuring that Government meets its commitments. The non-profit sector has a central role in realising the Government's vision for housing provision.

Progress has been made but not enough and it is recognised that much more is needed. Results indicating measurable degrees of progression of people exiting homelessness are lacking. There is a need to refocus our efforts on delivery and on achieving better outcomes that can be quantified and contribute to better service delivery nationwide.

Government policy in future will focus on the following distinct areas:

Housing-led

A housing-led approach is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. It includes the prevention of loss of existing housing, and it incorporates the provision of adequate support to people in their homes according to their needs. Housing First is one example of a housing-led policy approach.

Housing-led is a significant departure from the "staircase" or "continuum of care" approach which has largely dominated homelessness policy across Europe. This model saw stable housing being the end goal with homeless people being moved through various stages in different residential services before becoming "ready" for re-housing.

In an Irish context, housing-led is about the rapid provision of secure housing, with support as needed to ensure sustainable tenancies.

Supply

The availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing, the availability of appropriate measures to prevent homelessness and the availability of appropriate facilities and supports for homeless people are critical to guaranteeing the success of the housing-led approach in Ireland.

It is acknowledged that there have been ongoing difficulties in these regards which actions under this policy framework will address. A reliable supply of secure, affordable accommodation is vital to ending long-term homelessness.

There is a need for greater innovation to accelerate the transfer of homeless people from inappropriate and expensive emergency accommodation into more appropriate and sustainable housing, and to identify the barriers and solutions to accessing a supply of appropriate and adequate housing. There is no one-size-fits-all housing solution. Individuals and households have varying housing needs and preferences, from individual units to shared accommodation. In all cases, people should have secure tenure and a belief that the place they live in is their home, where they have a responsibility and a sense of belonging.

Prevention

Effective action is required to prevent, as far as possible, the occurrence or recurrence of homelessness. This will require a range of measures from identifying households at risk, to working with people who are losing tenancies and ensuring that adequate advice, advocacy and sustainment measures are in place in the context of overall social housing policy as set out in the Government's Housing Policy Statement.

¹ Associate Professor Eoin O'Sullivan of TCD was commissioned to produce a report, Ending Homelessness – A Housing-Led Approach.