

ANALYSIS OF 78 NEWLY HOMELESS FAMILIES ACCOMMODATED BY DUBLIN'S HOMELESS SERVICES IN AUGUST 2015: A BRIEFING PAPER

October 2015


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ISBN: 978-0-9933012-4-7

Foreword

In August 2015 there were a total of 607 families in homeless services in Dublin¹. This briefing paper provides a careful analysis of the explanation for presentation to Dublin's Pathway to Home services given by 78 of these families, all of whom were new to the experience of homelessness in August 2015. This paper was prepared by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and was submitted to the Senior Official Group for the attention of the October 2015 meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy.

The method used here captures sufficient data (arising from the assessment of these household's circumstances) to demonstrate that forced departure from a tenancy in private rented accommodation was the most commonly reported cause of homelessness.

Previous research confirms there are often a complex set of circumstances that combine with known trigger events (such as an income shock or housing insecurity) that lead quickly into rooflessness and the loss of a home. Frequently, families try to forestall their homelessness by moving in with their extended family or their friends. This experience is often called 'sofa surfing' and it can work for those with positive familial relationships and good friendships but usually only temporarily, and very rarely without another set of, often unsustainable, costs to both the hosts and the guest household.

Notably, many of the 78 families examined here who identified 'relationship breakdown' and 'overcrowding' as their primary reason for homelessness had been residing in such a stressful 'sofa-surfing' environment because they had previously lost private rented accommodation.

This initial analysis was useful but it remains partial. It does not provide the comprehensive story behind the reasons for presenting to homeless services, the experience of that presentation and placement into emergency accommodation and the costs arising. Therefore in order to more fully assess the extent and experience of the problems facing homeless families in Dublin in late 2015 a more detailed qualitative enquiry is being undertaken. Results from this research will be available in quarter 1, 2016.

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1. For more details on family homelessness in Dublin see here <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/homeless-families>

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1. Overview

Seventy-eight families were accommodated by homeless services in Dublin during the month of August 2015 whom had no active or previous PASS² record i.e. they were 'new to homelessness'.

As detailed in Table 1 overleaf, a review of the initial assessments conducted with families upon their presentation to homeless services reveals that:

- Thirty-nine families (or 50%) stated the primary reason for their homelessness related to a loss of or inability to secure private rented accommodation.

Further analysis of these household's circumstances at presentation to Dublin's Pathway to Home services confirms that:

- Thirty-two families were issued with Notices to Quit.
- Three families left their accommodation as it was of poor quality.
- Two families, who were returning to the Dublin region, could not afford private rented accommodation in the region.
- One family had to leave the parental home as it was sold and could not source private rented accommodation.
- One family had left a private rented property as they had sourced an alternative but this fell through at the last minute and they could not source an alternative.

Of the remainder, a further thirty-one families (or 40%) state the primary reason for their presentation as homeless is that they were departing an overcrowded living situation or that there was some element of relationship breakdown that triggered their rooflessness.

It should be recognised that further investigation is required to fully determine whether these factors arose as a direct result of losing private rented accommodation (e.g. departing private rented accommodation and moving in with other family members - so-called sofa surfing – and thereby residing in unsustainable and overcrowded living situations that can contribute to relationship breakdown).

Causation among the remaining eight families (or 10%) breakdowns as follows:

- Three families left properties due to being victims of anti-social behaviour.
- Two families state they left their properties voluntarily. Further investigation is needed to determine the reason.
- There was insufficient information available on the remaining three families.

2. PASS provides real-time information for homeless presentation and bed occupancy across the Dublin Region

1. Overview (cont.)

Table 1: Reasons given for presentation to homeless services at initial assessment

Notice to Quit		
General	10	
Invalid notice/Illegal eviction	3	
Landlords family use	4	
Property to be sold	7	
Landlords bankrupt/receivership	1	
Tenant Rent Arrears/Rent increase	6	
Tenant Anti-social behaviour	1	
Total Notice to Quit		32
Unsuitable/Poor Quality Accommodation		3
Other		
Parental family home sold – unable to afford rent in the Dublin region	1	
Returning to Dublin – unable to afford rent in the Dublin region	2	
Rented property secured but fell through	1	
Total Other		4
Overcrowding		9
Relationship Breakdown		
General	8	
Parent	9	
Partner	5	
Total Relationship Breakdown		22
Victim Anti-Social Behaviour		3
Voluntarily Left Property		2
Insufficient information		3
TOTAL		78

Notably, as of October 1st 2015, twelve of the seventy-eight families had departed from homeless services.

One family had relocated to a domestic violence refuge and was being housed. For the remaining eleven families that departed homeless services no given reason is recorded. However their primary reason for initial presentation include the following factors:

- Notice to Quit: 3 families;
- Overcrowding: 1 family;
- Relationship Breakdown: 3 families;
- Unsuitable accommodation: 1 family;
- Other: 1 family;
- Insufficient information: 2 families.

In line with the current DRHE analysis of patterns of use among homeless service users, it is expected that some families will use Dublin's homeless services in an episodic manner and so may return to homeless services in the near future³.

3. DRHE are currently undertaking a major research enquiry into patterns of service use among persons experiencing homelessness. Initial findings from this study were presented at the European Observatory on Homelessness and FEANTSA international research conference in Dublin on September 2015 by Dr Bernie O'Donoghue-Hynes (Head of Research at DRHE).

2. Notice to Quit (41%)

As detailed in Table 1 above, landlords issued thirty-two families with a Notice to Quit (NTQ). Based on the detail provided by families at their initial assessment, eleven of the thirty-two properties were being taken back by landlords for family use or to be sold, while one landlord had gone into receivership.

Six families said they were given a NTQ because of rent arrears and three were subject to illegal evictions. Only one family stated they had to leave because of anti-social behaviour.

There was no detailed reason provided for the NTQ for the final ten families.

Further investigation is required for 16 of these families to determine whether unaffordable rent was the primary contributing factor for their loss of private rented accommodation. Records indicate that three families noted illegal evictions but ten gave no further details about why NTQ was issued.

As of October 1st 2015, three of the thirty-two families had departed emergency accommodation with no reason for their departure.

3. Overcrowding (12%)

Nine families stated their cause for presenting as homeless as being the result of living in overcrowded accommodation. Further investigation is required to gain a more detailed description of the circumstances that led to these overcrowding situations.

DRHE expect that some of these families will have moved in with family or friends following a loss of private rented accommodation and that this move was unsustainable.

One of these nine families had exited homeless services giving no reason for their departure.

4. Relationship breakdown (28%)

Of the twenty-two families that detailed relationship breakdowns, nine were with parents and five with partners, two of which refer to domestic violence.

However, further investigation is required to determine whether the loss of private rented

accommodation contributed directly or indirectly to these relationship breakdowns.

Four of the twenty-two families had exited homeless services giving no reason for their departure.

5. Victims of anti-social behaviour (4%)

Three families stated they were required to depart their accommodation as they were victims of anti-social behaviour. One family exited a private rented property, one was a local authority tenancy and further investigation is required to determine the tenure of third case.

6. Unsuitable / poor quality accommodation (4%)

Of the three families in this category, one was leaving a private rented property that was uninhabitable due to its poor quality and general housing condition and a second family departed a poor quality caravan on a halting site. Further investigation is required of the final case to determine the family tenancy type and reasons for departure.

At 1st October, one of these three families had exited homeless services giving no reason for their departure.

7. Voluntarily left property (3%)

Two families departed their residential properties voluntarily. One departed an Approved Housing Body house. The other had departed a private rented property despite being approved for the uplift in SWA rent supplement payments as per the ITSP protocol between DSP and DRHE and referred via the Tenancy Protection Service at Threshold support. Further investigation is required to determine circumstances.

8. Other (5%)

There were four families in this category, all of whom were unable to source private rented accommodation. Two families had moved back to the Dublin region, one from abroad and one from Ennis, Co Clare but found Dublin rent unaffordable. Another family had to leave the parental home as it had been sold and they could not source affordable alternative

accommodation. The final family had sourced a private rented unit. This fell through after they had given notice to their landlord to terminate an existing tenancy. This family has since exited from homeless services giving no reason for their departure.

9. Insufficient data

There are three families with little data/information on their files following initial assessment. Two of these families have departed from homeless services giving no reason for their departure.

Further investigation is required to determine the circumstances that led to their homelessness.

Notes

