

**To the Lord Mayor and City Councillors**

**Re: Report/Update on COVID-19 and Homelessness**

Dear Lord Mayor and Councillors,

We previously updated you on 26<sup>th</sup> March regarding the work currently being undertaken by Dublin City Council and the DRHE in relation to Covid-19 and its effects on homelessness. Much has happened in these last three weeks and we wanted to give you an updated overview of the key actions that have taken place.

First, and foremost, every effort has been made to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection within homelessness and we remain grateful for the very strong level of collaboration between our statutory partners, the HSE, the other Dublin local authorities and the Homeless Charities in Dublin.

We would like to again, acknowledge the dedication and resilience of all our own staff who have been working really hard on this issue over recent weeks.

It is important for us to reiterate that both DRHE and DCC remain open for business and continue to provide a broad range of critical services and we will continue to provide these services in partnership with the HSE and our Charity partners.

While the usual responses have been required to cater for families and single persons continuing to present as Homeless during the month of March (Weekly average of 43 households compared to 60 in February and 77 in January) there has been a major campaign to address the Covid-19 risk to the existing Homeless population in Dublin.

**Testing:**

In partnership with the HSE, Safetynet, (a medical services NGO), have put in place a rapid response system with accommodation providers to test for Covid-19 amongst the most at risk homeless population. This includes assessment for Covid-19, transport to and placement in self-isolation beds including integrated health and accommodation supports for persons tested positive that do not require hospitalisation.

**Accommodation:**

The following are the various accommodation needs (In line with agreed protocols with the Public Health Service) to cater for Covid-19:

- **Positive Cases:** Individuals who have tested positive but who do not require hospitalisation.
- **Self-Isolation:** Suspect cases who are waiting for a test result and need to stay in isolation to prevent infection, or are symptomatic and waiting for a test.

- **Quarantine:** This is the lowest level and can be achieved anywhere, although the ideal is own room, but may share facilities where social distancing can be maintained.
- **Cocooning:** Cocooning is provided for most at-risk homeless persons. It recognise the need to minimise the contact for those over 60 years of age. A matrix is being used by the HSE appointed Clinical Lead, to assess the age and underlying health needs of homeless persons in emergency accommodation or Rough Sleeping.
- **Decanting/ Additional Capacity:** A small number of Supported Transition Accommodation (STAs) and a larger number of Private Emergency Facilities (PEAs) provide large dormitory style rooms. It was identified that additional emergency accommodation was required to reduce the risk of infection clusters as Covid-19 became more widespread. In addition, existing capacity is under pressure because of a higher concentration of hospital, prison discharges and family breakdown situations.

### **Accommodation Provision:**

The DRHE has worked in close partnership with the HSE to provide additional accommodation. The exact number of beds assigned to each category is fluid according to presenting needs, but in excess of **1,000** additional beds have been sourced during the Covid-19 period to date. Of these additional beds, 670 are for cocooning and isolation purposes and 450 extra beds are in place to facilitate social distancing and to facilitate decanting from existing larger hostels in the city. This means that several of the existing hostels in the city have significantly reduced their full capacity in order to facilitate social distancing and a safer environment during the Covid-19 crisis. The additional beds have allowed two hostels to close altogether temporarily, in order to carry out remedial works to facilitate better social distancing. In all this the most vulnerable and older residents were prioritised.

The following additional accommodation has now been sourced over recent weeks; (Inclusive of the numbers set out in our previous report on 26/03/2020)

- 400** Beds involving eight Hotels
- 165** Self-contained apartments
- 470** Single occupancy beds (Hostels)

Total: **1035**

Some self-isolation and cases tested positive may require a range of supports and for high-risk medical cases, monitoring is provided by the HSE. On-site staff provide regular check-in with all residents, observing HSE guidance for congregated facilities. This means that in some situations DRHE has sourced/leased the property but the HSE have taken responsibility for managing the property through a Service Provider selected by HSE.

The vast majority of the additional accommodation has been sourced directly by the DRHE property team, which is a considerable feat in itself. A smaller number have been sourced by our Charity Partners and are funded through the DRHE by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The Department of Justice are also currently sourcing emergency accommodation for Direct Provision in the Dublin area and our staff work closely with them (We are not in competition)

### **Enhancement of existing provision:**

- For the duration of Covid-19, all residential accommodation for families and singles has moved to 24 Hour access to allow the implementation of the Covid-19 HSE Guidelines, thereby reducing the public health risks to homeless persons. This has caused some difficulties in certain properties where thorough cleaning services can be complicated while all residents are in situ 24 hours but we are working our way through this issue with reasonable success. Secondly in regard to hostels for singles some individuals do not turn up for their booked bed which results in beds being left empty, under the previous one night only system the Freephone service could late in the night allocate the bed to somebody else.
- Meals are being provided to homeless households across all residential services where there are no cooking facilities (shared or self-contained).
- The DRHE self-accommodation team has negotiated considerable reductions in commercial hotel room rates and are also concentrating on moving families from hotels to self-contained accommodation (if long term housing is not an immediate option). Up to **100** such moves to more appropriate temporary accommodation are planned over the next 4 weeks. These **100** self-contained apartments are separate to the numbers mentioned above. The cost of these apartments will be significantly cheaper than the equivalent hotel accommodation and obviously a much more suitable living environment for the families involved. The number of families in self accommodating hotels has been reduced by 150 since the beginning of the year down to 330 and this will be reduced to around 200 by bringing the above 100 apartments on stream. We will continue to seek out more similar opportunities.
- Support is also in place to lone parents for essential shopping if they wish to keep their children indoors.

### **Accommodation Pipeline:**

To meet the needs of the expected surge in cases over the coming weeks, the DRHE will continue to source additional beds.

As reported in our previous report on 26<sup>th</sup> March there has been a very significant adjustment in the Dublin property over the last 5/6 weeks that has given the DRHE a welcome opportunity to source additional and better emergency accommodation facilities.

While this availability of temporary facilities is indeed welcome, we are obviously very keen to maximise the number of long term Housing Units that may become available for Dublin City Council to acquire or to lease over 20/25 years. Then we can be in a position to offer permanent/long term housing to more families currently in emergency accommodation. The Dublin City Council Acquisitions Section is open for business and is seeking out opportunities to purchase, so is our Long Term Leasing Section who are currently negotiating a significant number of leasing possibilities.

There is also an opportunity to further increase the number of Homeless HAP tenancies. During 2019 we sourced an average 200 Homeless Hap tenancies per month.

### **New Arrangements for Support of Families in Emergency Accommodation:**

It is not safe for families to have contact with support workers who are moving from site to site to visit them, so telephone, video calling and other remote contact is being utilised. Every family should expect a minimum of one check in per week during the Covid-19 period.

Our Housing Support Officers, HAP, Leasing and Allocations teams continue to prioritise the exiting of families and singles/couples from emergency accommodation as always. Virtual viewings have been used where possible to operate within safe distancing guidelines.

In the Dublin Region:

- 51 families exited emergency accommodation into Homeless HAP in March
- 22 singles and couples exited emergency accommodation into Homeless HAP in March.
- 80 families and 24 singles/couples were prevented from entering homelessness through Homeless HAP.

We expect that the number of families residing in emergency accommodation for March 2020 to be the lowest for well over two years.

In addition to having enhanced service provision for all homeless households, DRHE funded day services, which are now largely closed to the public, have redeployed staff either to the Covid-19 response in residential facilities or are providing the same services remotely.

### **Communications:**

The DRHE continues:

- To have a dedicated communications team and remain in contact with all our Charity partners, private operators and voluntary groups.
- To keep the public informed, the DRHE website is updated daily – see [www.homelessdublin.ie/covid19](http://www.homelessdublin.ie/covid19) as well as twitter accounts @HomelessDublin and @housingdcc
- To circulate and display notices (including on-line) encouraging homeless family/individuals to contact staff in the DRHE should they have any questions and concerns. We are anxious that people are encouraged to contact us so we can respond and alleviate any concerns they may have at this time. See useful numbers on the next page for all contact details.
- To remain available at the Homeless Freephone number **1800 707 707** for access to emergency accommodation out of hours for the Dublin Region, which has been extended - 10am to 2am. 7 days a week.
- To operate all services, with staff in both Parkgate Street and the Civic Offices with additional support offered by telephone.
- To provide a critical service and continue to operate in the current crisis circumstances.

As always, we would encourage any individuals in our services, to make contact directly with the DRHE if they have any concerns. These are unprecedented times and we here in the DRHE/DCC continue to work very hard to maintain a full range of services and the provision of information to all. We would also encourage Councillors to contact us directly when and where they become aware of specific problems within the Homeless system. We appreciate your continuing strong support during this unprecedented crisis.

**Eileen Gleeson**

**Director,**

**Dublin Region Homeless Executive**

**15th April 2020**

**Brendan Kenny**

**Deputy Chief Executive,**

**Dublin City Council**



## Useful contacts:

Email: [www.homelessdublin.ie](http://www.homelessdublin.ie)      twitter: @homelessdublin and @housingdcc

**Central Placement Service for singles and couples;** Tel: 01 - 222 6944 Monday to Friday: 10.00am – 4.00pm.  
Email: [homelesscps@dublincity.ie](mailto:homelesscps@dublincity.ie)

**Central Placement Service for families;** Tel: 01 – 222 6977 Monday to Friday: 10.00am – 4.00pm. Email:  
[family.support@dublincity.ie](mailto:family.support@dublincity.ie)

**Homeless FREEPHONE 1800 707 707;** for access to emergency accommodation out of hours for the Dublin Region, extended hours - 10.00am to 2.00am 7 days a week;

**Housing Support Officers** providing housing advice and move on options to families in emergency accommodation. Tel: 01 222 7414 Monday to Friday: 10.00am – 4.00pm.

Email: [housingsupport@dublincity.ie](mailto:housingsupport@dublincity.ie)

**Homeless HAP** Tel: 01 – 222 6955 Monday to Friday: 10.00am – 4.00pm.

Email: [homelesshap@dublincity.ie](mailto:homelesshap@dublincity.ie)

**Fingal County Council** Homeless Section Tel 01 890 5090

Monday to Friday 9am to 4.30pm email [homeless@fingal.ie](mailto:homeless@fingal.ie)

**South Dublin County Council** Homeless Section Tel: 01 414 9364

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm [sdchomeless@sdblincoco.ie](mailto:sdchomeless@sdblincoco.ie)

**Dún Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council** Homeless Section Tel; 01 205 4804

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm email: [homeless@dlrcoco.ie](mailto:homeless@dlrcoco.ie)