

To the Lord Mayor and  
Dublin City Councillors

### Re: Report/Update on COVID-19 and Homelessness.

We welcome the national data released this week by the Government that indicates a further decrease in the number of homeless households throughout the country. In this report, we are again focussing on the situation in the Dublin area. Throughout this difficult period of Covid-19, we (the DRHE & DCC) have been committed to keeping you well briefed throughout. This is our fourth update since the onset of Covid-19.

In Dublin the main points to note are:

- At the end of April 2020 there were **974** families in emergency accommodation, this is the lowest number since June **2016**. We expect that there will be a further decrease in May 2020.
- **230** families entered emergency accommodation for the first time between January and April 2020 (It was 293 for the same period in 2018 and 276 for the same period in 2019). 14 families presented and were assessed as Homeless in April 2020 compared to 94 in January, 80 in February, and 42 in March.
- The number of children resident in emergency accommodation has reduced by over 400 since January.
- There were 450 families in Hotel accommodation at the end of April 2020, this is the lowest figure since 2015, there were 871 families in Hotels in March 2017 (the peak figure).
- In the period (January to April 2020), **783** families were prevented from using emergency accommodation or exited such accommodation into new tenancies. **472** families exited from emergency accommodation to tenancies during this period, (It was 222 for the same period in 2018 and 329 for the same period in 2019). **311** families were prevented from entering emergency accommodation between January and April 2020. **In April 62 families were prevented from entering emergency accommodation mainly through proactive use of the HAP Scheme.**
- It is important to note the families that have moved from hotels to self-contained apartments (less than 100) in recent weeks are **still included** in the emergency accommodation data. These moves are separate from the above-mentioned exits from emergency accommodation into tenancies.

While the cost of these self-contained apartments is still expensive, it is significantly less expensive than the hotel accommodation that they were previously in, thus providing **better** value for money. In addition, this accommodation is much more suitable for the families involved. The contracts negotiated are for a twelve-month period but we may be able to negotiate a longer term at a later stage. The DRHE will continue working with the families involved with a view to moving them into HAP or permanent tenancies.

- The number of presentations for single persons into emergency accommodation in April was 99 (down from 216 in January 2020) and the number of exits for singles was 96 (up from 39 in January 2020). Generally, there is sufficient emergency accommodation for all rough sleepers who are prepared to accept such accommodation but we are trying to source some further accommodation to cater for a likely increased demand.

The measures put in place over the past number of years by the DRHE in partnership with the other Dublin Local Authorities are now having a positive impact. This, together with very strong support and ongoing funding from the Department of Housing, has resulted in a steady decrease in the number of homeless households over the last year.

Obviously, this is set in the context of a very significant increase in homelessness generally since 2014.

It is important for us to reiterate that both the DRHE and DCC have been open for business right through this crisis period and we continue to provide a broad range of critical services in partnership with the HSE and our Charity partners. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive and the four Dublin Local Authorities continue to deal with demand for emergency accommodation across the Dublin Region.

The overall reduction in the number of presentations into homelessness over recent months is linked to; (1) the Government's decision to prevent evictions in the private rented sector, (2) families remaining at home during the pandemic period rather than presenting for emergency accommodation, (3) prevention policies by the DRHE and an increasing supply of housing leading to more exits into tenancies.

### **Standards in emergency accommodation:**

The DRHE has Service Level Agreements in place with all our Charity Service Providers, which monitor performance and ensure compliance with all the statutory Health and Safety Standards and particular legislative requirements, including the Children First Act 2015 and the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012.

The Standards/Facilities Team in the DRHE oversee all private emergency accommodation and seek to ensure that all relevant guidelines, policies and procedures are complied with in order to deliver a safe and comfortable place to stay for service users.

Regular inspections are carried out.

The Private Service Operators managing emergency facilities in Dublin City have a good track record so far. We are satisfied with their performance and they always respond quickly to any problems that arise.

There is no policy that says that the private sector operators cannot do this type of work and we think that some competition in this area of work is a good thing. There is no reason why they cannot provide a quality and cost-effective service under the supervision of the DRHE.

However, we are conscious that residents in Private Emergency Operations do not get the same level of care and re-settlement support as those in facilities managed by the Charities. We need to address this and prior to Covid-19 we had already planned to commission a comprehensive review of how all our emergency facilities are managed, including a comparison study between the Private and Charity operators. Covid-19 unfortunately put a halt to this plan but we will re-activate it as soon as possible and when completed, bring it to the Housing SPC in the first instance. In the meanwhile, we are going to assign two of our new Housing Support Officers to work with residents in these facilities.

### **DCC Housing Response to COVID**

In homeless services, we have a strong partner in HSE CHO9 (lead for HSE COVID response in the Dublin Region) and in the NGOs who staff the new facilities set up by the DRHE. On the housing side, the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP) provided invaluable assistance and support to DCC by fast-tracking payment requests for vulnerable older persons and families moving out of emergency accommodation during the COVID period. The systems we set up in partnership with DEASP will facilitate faster move-on time. Our thanks also to the Approved Housing Bodies who fast-tracked lettings for emergency cases during the COVID period. As part of the raft of measures introduced to reduce risk in emergency accommodation, DCC prioritised the housing of households from emergency accommodation. While 350 households were cocooned across the four local authorities, DCC also worked to ensure that an additional 134 homeless households moved to social housing tenancies during the shutdown period. The number of persons within the Dublin Homeless population who have contracted the virus is relatively low compared to other congregated settings, a small number have been hospitalised and there have been no deaths. We continue to work closely with the HSE on all aspects of the Covid-19 response in relation to the homeless population in the Dublin area.

### **Homeless HAP (HHAP)**

Homeless HAP has continued to operate in collaboration with the Housing Support Officers in moving families out of emergency accommodation. While the office is currently closed to the public, business is conducted in the main by telephone and HHAP applications are submitted by email or put in the post box located in Parkgate Street.

In April 69 families and 25 singles/couples moved on from emergency accommodation (the best so far this year) through Homeless HAP.

Place-finders and the Housing Support Officer team have adapted quickly to the movement restrictions and worked with Landlords to source lettings by:

1. Virtual Viewings
2. Staggered appointments for a smaller number of referrals

In March/April despite the restrictions, we have continued to achieve higher rates of exits from emergency accommodation by families and individuals through Homeless HAP.

The guidance clinics and one-to-one sessions provided by the Housing Support Officer team to prepare households in emergency accommodation for viewings is translating into better outcomes for households in Private Emergency accommodation, and there has been positive moves from hubs and supported temporary accommodation. The DCC Housing Support team have also secured some properties - previously used for short-term rentals - for tenancies under the HAP scheme.

We also appreciate the important work done by the Focus Ireland Support Team who are commissioned and funded by the Government through the DRHE to deliver out a support/welfare service for vulnerable families in emergency accommodation.

## **Housing First**

25 homeless individuals were provided with permanent social housing allocated by the Dublin Local Authorities under the Housing First programme in March and April. The total number housed at the end of April under this important programme was 324. The Housing First service is delivered by the Peter McVerry Trust, (funded by DRHE) which supports homeless individuals into housing and provides them with intensive tenancy and health supports provided directly into their home. In the main, the housing units are provided by the Local Authorities. This programme could be greatly expanded if there was an increased availability of small apartments (Studio or one Bed) in the Dublin area.

A Street Outreach Service, operated by Dublin Simon Community on behalf of the DRHE (funded by the Department through DRHE), is assertively engaging with people sleeping rough across the Dublin region. This service operates 365 days a year from 7am - 1am Monday to Friday and 9am – 1am Saturday and Sunday. Outreach teams meet with people sleeping rough, including people in tents, to support/encourage them into the available emergency accommodation. The Outreach Service works in close collaboration with the Housing First Programme. The team also bring sandwiches and snacks along with clean clothes, hand sanitisers and face masks for anyone sleeping rough.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, Day Services have been unable to operate their full range of services, but the Street Outreach Service run by Dublin Simon Community is now offering **showering** facilities to people who are rough sleeping and not accessing accommodation. The Outreach Team will bring the person to a showering facility run by Dublin Simon Community and provide them with toiletries, towels and fresh clothing as required. The priority remains to support people into emergency accommodation where showers, meals and other supports are available onsite. So far, there has been no uptake of this new service.

## **Planning for post Covid-19**

While we must continue in the months ahead to respond to issues posed by Covid-19, we must also not lose sight of the potential serious challenges that may occur after this crisis has been resolved. For example, the commercial hotels will obviously revert to their core and very important role in hospitality and tourism, and many of the self-contained apartments that we have sourced may not continue to be available to us. The restrictions on evictions may no longer apply and family breakdown situations may increase again leading to pressure on the level of presentations. On the positive side, the level of social housing supply has been increasing and will continue to do so.

The changed property market in the short term will give us renewed opportunities for acquisitions and long term leasing. We mention all this to demonstrate that we have a strong focus on post Covid-19 and the need to ensure that the level of homelessness in Dublin continues to decrease and certainly not to go back to unacceptable previous levels. We also fully recognise that while the reduced numbers are very welcome they are still too high.

Currently we are carrying out a review of Day Services for Homeless persons in Dublin, we are also reviewing the Freephone service in the context of moving away from one-night offers of emergency accommodation. We also intend carrying out a review of the management of homeless facilities both by our Charity Partners and by private sector operators.

We are very satisfied with the work carried out by our newly appointed Housing Support Team (we recruited 15 new staff for this role in August 2019) and they have played a huge part in supporting and assisting families to exit successfully from emergency accommodation over recent months. We are planning to recruit further such officers and to carry out a comprehensive review of Family Support Services generally. The DRHE is well placed to respond to any changed situation post Covid-19, it was already in crisis mode over the last few years and similarly during Covid, so it is well experienced in tackling new situations particularly with the help of the many strong working partnerships that they have developed and nurtured.

## **Conclusion**

We would like to again, acknowledge the dedication and resilience of all our own staff who have been working very hard on homelessness issues over recent months, indeed they have been doing this for a considerably longer period. It is welcome and satisfying news for the staff who work so hard to finally see some progress in the level of homelessness.

Everyone from the Place-Finders team to the Family Support Team, the Central Placement Service to Outreach all work together with the one goal to help homeless people and of course, we could not do any of this without the very strong and ongoing support and funding from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

As we have mentioned before, we would encourage any individual 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 period.

**Eileen Gleeson**

**Director,**

**Dublin Region Homeless Executive,**

**4th June 2020**

**Brendan Kenny**

**Deputy Chief Executive,**

**Dublin City Council**

## Key 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)

