

Quality Standards for Homeless Services

National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF)

Supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is a key priority of Government. To assist in ensuring that homelessness services provided are of a high standard, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has developed a National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) on behalf of the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government.

WHY DO WE NEED A NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK?

The policy aim is to achieve services for people experiencing homelessness that are well organised, co-ordinated and integrated and focused on moving people out of homelessness, as quickly as possible, into long-term, sustainable housing.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STANDARDS ARE TO:

- Promote safe and effective service provision to persons experiencing homelessness
- Support the objectives of National Homelessness Policy, i.e. enabling people to move into and sustain housing with appropriate levels of support
- Establish consistency in how persons experiencing homelessness are responded to across different regions and models of service delivery.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS?

Quality standards support service providers in meeting their core objectives. Service users, providers and funders all require sustainable outcomes, which in the area of homelessness can be categorised as:

- Where possible, preventing homelessness
- Moving people who use homeless services out of emergency provision as quickly as possible
- Supporting persons, who were formerly homeless to sustain housing with levels of support appropriate to their needs.

Benefits for Service Users: a National Quality Standards Framework informs service users as to what they can expect from homeless services.

Benefits for Service Providers: Having an agreed National Quality Standards Framework assists organisations to ensure they are clear about their responsibilities to deliver safe and effective services and that services provided ultimately result in the prevention and/or the reduction of time spent in homeless services.

Benefits for Funders: Funding bodies or service commissioners are concerned with the effectiveness of the service relative to expenditure and its success at preventing and reducing homelessness. Funders include national and local government through various departments but primarily the DHPLG, local authorities and the HSE as well as donors to organisations providing homeless services.

WHAT SERVICES ARE COVERED BY THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK?

People at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness receive support from a broad range of specialist and mainstream organisations.

The National Quality Standards Framework will be applicable to all homeless service provision in receipt of Section 10 funding, whether the delivery mode is via a statutory, voluntary or private service provider.

The National Quality Standards Framework will apply to homeless services for single adults, for adult couples, and for adults with dependent children.

THE MODEL FOR NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK FOR HOMELESS SERVICES

There are 8 themes under which the standards are organised.

Themes 1-4: focus on the provision of **person-centred** services, which are safe and effective, and support the rights and equal treatment of persons at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness.

Themes 5-8: focus on the **organisational capability** and capacity to deliver high quality services.

Each theme consists of a number of standard statements, which describe the high level outcome required to deliver effective homeless services. The features under each standard statement give examples of what the service may consider to reach the standard statement and to achieve the required outcome. The list of features under each standard is not exhaustive and the requirements of the standard may be met in different ways.

Theme 1: Person-Centred Services:

This theme focusses on service users' rights and autonomy, including the right to have a complaint heard and responded to. The standards in this theme support inclusive services that put persons at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness at the centre of the decision-making process at the personal level, and involve service users in planning and delivery of services at organisational level.

Theme 2: Effective Services:

Effective services are built around responding to the individual service user's needs, and engage in good practice in relation to referrals, assessment, support planning and integrated working.

Theme 3: Safe Services:

The standards under this theme focus on the provision of a safe environment to reside and work in.

Theme 4: Health, Well-Being and Personal Development:

This theme seeks a consistent approach in responding to the broad range of health, well-being and developmental needs of persons at-risk-of or experiencing homelessness.

Theme 5: Leadership, Governance and Management:

This theme focuses on organisational capacity: governance, management and leadership.

Theme 6: Use of Resources:

This theme is concerned with the alignment of funding of services to the overall policy aim of reducing/preventing homelessness and the need for services to be accountable and transparent with regard to the use of public money.

Theme 7: Responsive Workforce:

Person-centred, effective and safe service provision is dependent on having trained, competent staff with the relevant skills, knowledge and experience. The standards under this theme are concerned with how staff and volunteers contribute to high quality service delivery.

Theme 8: Use of Information:

Effective information systems are in place to enable services to operate within statutory guidelines, to use information to support planning and research and to have a high level of information governance at individual and organisational levels.

HOW WILL A NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK FOR HOMELESS SERVICES BE USED?

Attaining and maintaining quality standards in service provision for homeless households is not a static process. NQSF monitoring and reporting will involve a multifaceted approach. There will be continuous review of standards by services implementing the NQSF 'Quality Assessment and Improvement Workbook' and verification via Local Authority analysis of the service's KPIs, site visits, and performance reviews.

- *Self-Assessment:* service providers internally assess, monitor and improve the quality of service provision against the quality standards. The NQSF 'Quality Assessment and Improvement Workbook' outlines how service providers can self-assess and develop 'Quality Improvement Plans' covering all 8 themes.
- *Service User Participation:* Site visits conducted by the Local Authority will include meeting with service users in each service to explore the service users perspective directly.
- *Local Authority Monitoring and Assessment:* KPI performance reviews, Site Visits and assessment of services will verify the quality of service provided, and ensure a consistent approach is being taken.

CONSULTATION AND STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The National Quality Standards Framework has been developed through an extensive consultation process. Sincere thanks are due to the full range of stakeholders involved in guiding the development of the standards. Key stages are set out in the table below.

At the outset, a review of international and national QS literature was undertaken and informed the development of the National Quality Standards Framework. The framework takes account of published research, other standards for social services in Ireland, standards used in other countries, government policy and legislation.

Expert opinion on the National Quality Standards Framework was provided by an Advisory Group. The DRHE would like to thank the members of the National Advisory Group for their contribution. Membership of the Group is included in Appendix 1.

Extensive feedback from focus groups, held in locations nationwide, informed the National Quality Standards Framework. Focus groups were convened for service users, service providers, LA personnel and other stakeholders. As a result of a National Consultation process with briefing sessions held across the country, extensive feedback on the National Quality Standards Framework was received. A list of written submissions is provided in Appendix 2.

The trial period of the NQSF saw 9xservices participating in Phase 1 in the Dublin region. In Phase 2, 20 x Services participated, from Dublin as well as Midlands, North East and Southern Local Authority Regions. These services are listed in the Table below, and were instrumental in ensuring that the standards and workbook are practical, implementable, and effective in supporting quality improvement.

KEY STAGES IN DEVELOPING A NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK:

2014	<p>Established National Advisory Group: Chaired by DRHE, with all key stakeholders represented: Local Authorities, NGOs, Service Users, HIQA, HSE, Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), Housing providers, Housing Agency, Education Providers, Support Services, Tusla - Child & Family Agency, Probation Service. This National Advisory Group provided guidance to the Quality Standards project team at key points throughout the development and trial period of the QSF: 2014-2017.</p> <p>Held Regional Focus Groups x 4, consulting Service Users, service providers and Lead Local Authorities, held in Galway, Cork and Dublin on the broad quality standards themes and introducing the project to key stakeholders.</p> <p>National Consultation Process to review draft documentation with stakeholder groups: service users, service providers and regional Homeless Fora. Written submissions were invited nationally.</p>
2015	<p>Developed QSF model: structure, performance indicators, monitoring framework.</p> <p>Briefing Seminars on the draft standards.</p> <p>Prepared for Phase 1 trial implementation : briefings for participating service providers, support materials, implementation workbook, etc</p>
2016	<p>Q1 & Q2: Implemented Trial Phase 1: 9x projects participating:</p> <p>Dublin Region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crosscare: St Marys STA, Cedar House ONO, Amiens St TEA • De Paul Ireland: Peters Place STA, Rendu family STA, Migrant HAT. • Focus Ireland: Georges Hill STA, Family HAT <p>Q3 & Q4: Implemented Phase 2: 20x projects participating: Dublin & 3x other Lead LA regions:</p> <p>Dublin Region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Mc Verry Trust: Avoca • Dublin Simon: Maple House • Sophia: Camberley <p>Midlands region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon Midlands: Emergency Accommodation Service Athlone; & Tullamore • St Vincent De Paul: Bethany House, Longford • Teach Failte: Mullingar <p>North East Region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dundalk Simon ▪ Drogheda Homeless Aid <p>South west Region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Novas Arlington House ▪ Cork CC: Foyer <p>Prepared for Phase 3: aligning HSE and LA QS frameworks; additional projects</p> <p>Finalised the QSF Implementation Workbook, for use by Service Providers. The Workbook is publicly available.</p>
2017	<p>Q1: Implemented Phase 3: alignment with Safer Better Healthcare</p> <p>Q3: Draft report to Participating Services, Lead LAs, & National Advisory Group for final input.</p> <p>Q3-4: Proposal to SMG for Dublin Region; & Outline report to Dept HPLG</p>
2018	<p>Included in SLAs Across the Dublin Region, and quarterly KPI reports to DRHE.</p> <p>Included in redevelopment scoping for PASS: KPI reporting</p> <p>Preparation for National Implementation</p>
2019	<p>Site Visits begin in Dublin Region, (Feb 2019) based on QSF checklist, conducted by DRHE.</p>

For each service, site visits involves:

- A review of documentation: SLA, Schedule, KPIs, and policies procedures in place;
- a review of the facility,
- interviews with service users and
- interviews with staff regarding each aspect of the standards checklist, to check implementation in practice.

April 2019: DHPLG circular issued to Lead Local Authorities outlining steps for full national implementation of the NQSF, from 1 July 2019.

NQSF PROJECT TEAM

The NQSF project has been led by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, on behalf of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, with a number of key personnel overseeing the consultation and development process, supporting participating services throughout the trial period, and producing the final NQSF Standards, tools, and implementation documentation:

- Project Manager: Elaine Butler, Integrated Services Coordinator, DRHE
- DRHE Monitoring and Standards Team:
 - Brenda Kador Lynch
 - Eliz Toal
 - Diarmuid Kiernan
 - June Walsh
 - Noelle Ruddy
 - Johanna Lloyd
 - Kathryn O Sullivan
 - Carmel Comerford