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CornerStone

The magazine of the Homeless Agency

ISSUE 25
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The right solution?

note from the editor



The NESC debate continues! You may remember that the issue before last included a number of responses to NESC's comprehensive report on housing. Reviews were, shall we say, mixed, so NESC director Rory O'Donnell penned a lively reply to his critics, and much to my delight (every editor loves a controversy), Rory named names! One of the names in question, Declan Redmond, was naturally affronted to be told that he was 'simply incorrect' and entering into the spirit of this

ding-dong he has returned to the fray with a vigorous defence of his position.

CornerStone makes no apology for encouraging debate on this vital report, particularly since debate elsewhere appears to be virtually non-existent.

Greatly to the relief of its author, the first 'Diary from Down Under' passed a comprehensive socio-political evaluation by two Australians working at the Homeless Agency with flying colours. So with renewed enthusiasm Christine Dibelius has written a second diary, which among other things discusses the birth of a housing association sector, (complete with regulation), and reveals the hottest topic of conversation around the barbie.

The review of the homelessness strategy, commissioned by the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government, has been carried out by Fitzpatrick Associates, and was expected to be published during the summer. However it is now expected to hit the streets 'before the end of the year', so we hope to cover it in the next issue. Hints dropped at the Irish Council for Social Housing's conference in Sligo suggest that there will be no great surprises in the review with a likely emphasis on long term housing solutions; improved co-ordination of non-housing services; better co-ordination of funding; and improved data collection. Publication of the local authority assessment of housing need, which of course includes the assessment of homelessness, has also been delayed and it too will be covered in the January 2006 issue.

Eithne Fitzgerald's article on the disability strategy prompted us to look at ways of making CornerStone accessible to people with visual impairments. We've done some initial research, and the solution will probably involve putting CornerStone on the internet in more than one format. We'll be examining this further.

When Kieran Stenson, who is interviewed in Portrait of a Project, started work at Focus Point, in August 1988, it employed 15 staff, and 'professional' was a dirty word; 'tea and a chat' being the preferred approach. Seventeen years later Focus Ireland employs 350 staff, professionalism in all its forms is very high on the agenda, and Kieran is still there. He talks openly and entertainingly about the coffee shop, which despite its age remains innovative and practically unique in Ireland.

Simon Brooke

Editor of CornerStone · Housing and Social Policy Consultant

The Homeless Agency is a governmental body launched in May 2001 which is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and delivery of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area. The staff team, is advised by a consultative forum, and reports to a board of management comprising representatives from the statutory and voluntary sector. The agency brings together a range of voluntary and statutory agencies that are working in partnership to implement agreed plans on the delivery of services

to people who are homeless, assisting them to move rapidly to appropriate long term housing and independence. A major task is the implementation of the second three year plan *Making it home* covering the period 2004–2006. The Homeless Agency co-ordinates all homeless services in the Dublin area; delivers some direct services; provides training and other supports; monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of services; carries out research; and administers funding to homeless services.



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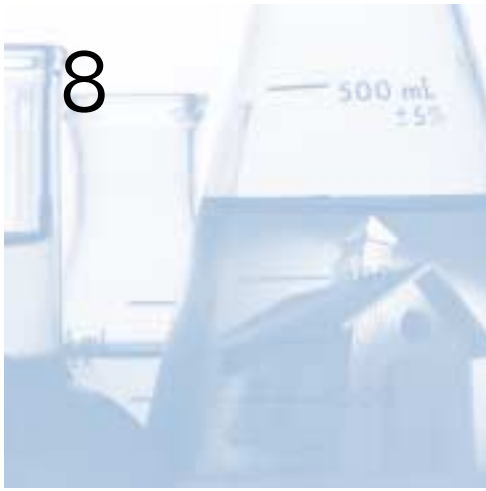
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The views expressed in CornerStone do not necessarily represent the views of the Homeless Agency, its management board, or consultative forum

**HOME
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agency



feature article

Settlement First: The right solution?

Pat Doherty, Russell Chapman, and Liz Clifford, respond to the Simon Communities of Ireland's report *Settlement First*.

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Homeless Agency reports

We have been very busy at the agency; between late 2004 and early 2005 we commissioned a number of research, evaluation and review pieces focusing on an array of homeless issues. Each report contains a range of recommendations, which we plan to prioritise and incorporate into our action plan *Making it Home*. On 25th October we will hold a joint board and consultative forum meeting to work through the action plan progress report. Any refocusing required, arising from the recommendations at this mid-stage, will be flagged. We are organising a two day launch of all the reports at the end of November 2005. As part of the launch we will be hosting a series of workshops and seminars highlighting the key findings and recommendations in each report and presenting how they will fit with 'Making it Home'. To give you a flavour of some of what is to come, the following is a short summary of the various reports.

Comprehensive Preventative Strategy

The five year *Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent Homelessness in Dublin*, was carried out by Dr Jane Pillinger. It reviewed the importance of identifying areas of prevention to tackle homelessness. Prevention is seen as encompassing three stages: to prevent homelessness in the first instance, to prevent prolonged experiences of homelessness for those who currently are within homeless services and to prevent the cycle of homelessness for those who have resettled. The prevention strategy focuses on understanding the causes and complexity of homelessness to develop innovative approaches to handling situations in order to limit the impact on a person's physical and mental health.

The key findings include the need to reduce the number of households becoming homeless, increasing housing options for single homeless persons, and to ensure each local area develop their effective response to homelessness.

Rough Sleepers Pilot Report

In Spring 2004, an initiative was launched between the Homeless Agency and four outreach teams to target nine of the most challenging of rough sleepers in Dublin using a care and case management approach.

The pilot scheme was run for a period of three months following a step-by-step process involving set criteria for selection, assessment, referral, acceptance and refusals, key working, case management and case review. The selection represented a cross section of the homeless population between the ages of 26-49 years old; histories included that of alcohol and drug misuse, aggressive behaviour, mental health illness and/or had been in prison.

The report indicated that the accommodation situation for all rough sleepers who

engaged with the pilot improved. Towards the end of the pilot there was increased interaction and communication between the accommodation providers and the outreach teams leading to higher permanent accommodation being obtained.

Care and Case Management

The benefits of adopting a team based, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach to supporting the needs of individuals with chaotic lifestyles is presented by Anne Eustace and Ann Clarke to Dublin's homeless sector in *Care and Case Management: Review of the Homeless Agency's Model*.

The report analyses the international best practice model of care and case management system and the ways to apply it in the Dublin context. By exercising new ways of working, it has been shown internationally to improve service delivery and achieve more positive outcomes for the client.

Elements of good practice are already in place with Dublin's service providers, and the report highlights the need to build on these and develop common understanding and standardised processes to capitalise on the current good work being done.

Improving Access to Services for Children in Private Emergency Accommodation

The report *Planning for Children* arose from concerns expressed by the sector regarding the welfare of children living in private emergency accommodation. Experience had shown that although this type of accommodation was for emergency and short-term purposes, families with children remain in B&B accommodation for much longer periods. It has been documented that stays in this type of accommodation damages the child's right to:

- experience wellbeing
- achieve the highest standard of health
- a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development
- education

This research was carried out by Liz Chaloner and Joan O'Flynn, who conducted over 40 structured consultations with key stakeholders dealing with families experiencing homelessness, along with a number of information gathering sessions.

Five key recommendations emerged from the report: the need for the establishment of a high-level joint management structure, recognising the welfare and individual rights of children, clearer and seamless transfer of child protection cases, addressing the service needs, and targeting the length of stay in B&B accommodation.

Communications Strategy

In its *Communications Strategy*, the Homeless Agency took a different angle and commissioned a study on the level of media, public and community awareness about the Homeless Agency itself and government's strategies in handling homelessness.

Gibney Communications Ltd reviewed the agency's existing communication strategy recommending ways to improve and raise the agency's profile. Aspects of the new Communication Strategy include building relationships with media contacts to give a balanced view on homelessness in Dublin, and to increase public confidence in the measures in place to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The report identifies areas in need of strengthening, by way of holding a public information week and an annual national conference.

Review of Temporary Accommodation

The *Review of Temporary Accommodation* by Courtney Consulting covers emergency and transitional accommodation. The report assesses the range and type of existing accommodation, current use of accommodation against stated target groups of providers, examines blockages and barriers in system, and the suitability of buildings for current use.

In the last ten years, the quality and quantity of temporary accommodation has improved significantly, and with more effective co-ordination by the local authorities in contracting quality temporary accommodation, this can be continued successfully towards 2010. The report makes over fifty recommendations covering areas of information management, care support, assessments, permanent housing, eviction/barring policies, and specialist accommodation to name but a few. The main recommendations suggest local homelessness fora take a lead as the effective and influential co-ordination body to ensure suitable support and arrangements are in place for people out of home in their areas. Information management is also highlighted as a key area for improvement with full participation of all temporary accommodation providers to use the LINK system, thus capturing the true picture of outcomes for people are using the services.

Review of Food and Food Centres

'You need never go hungry in Dublin unless you are out of your head or just don't know where to look. Not like London. I would never go over there unless I had a few bob in my pocket or for a holiday. You get the best of food here, from breakfast to dinner and the soup run at night if you want it'. (Homeless man, mid 30s)

Each week, approximately 13,000 meals are served through nineteen food centres in Dublin to homeless people and others who are housed but experiencing difficult times. Over half of the food centres provide food daily meeting basic nutritional needs and giving opportunity for sociability. In his report John Weafer concludes that we should not seek to fix

what is not broken, however improvement could be made through the expansion or development of existing services into centres of excellence.

Homeless Sector's Competency Framework

As part of the vision 'meeting the needs of homeless people by developing a quality workforce', the Homeless Agency commissioned Adare Human Resource Management to develop a competency framework available for use by all organisations delivering homeless services. The competency framework is now nearing phase 2, following the successful presentation of its initial design to the Competency Framework Steering Group and to the Homeless Agency Consultative Forum. A cross-section of managers, project leaders and project workers from voluntary and statutory homeless services were invited to attend several workshops to identify and map the key competencies most pertinent to the sector. Phase 2 will define the uses and applications of the framework in the selection, support and performance management processes.

Launch of the Homeless Agency Annual Report

The Homeless Agency will also be launching its inaugural Annual Report for 2004. The agency was launched in May 2001, and has seen continuing improvements in the co-ordination and delivery in services to the homeless in Dublin. The Annual Report highlights the key achievements from 2004.

Review of Participation Structures

In his review of the participation structures within the Homeless Agency, Roger Courtney highlights the how the existing structures operate in comparison with other best practice models of partnership and participation. The role of the voluntary sector on the board of the agency was seen as a key strength that not all other models shared. The recommendations from this review are concerned with reviewing the membership, the roles of representatives and terms of reference of the board,

consultative forum and networks.

The need for an increased localisation of structures is also highlighted.

Review of Funding

The *Review of Funding Arrangements* was undertaken by Aspect One and its primary purpose was to assess the effectiveness of the process to distribute state funds fairly and responsibly to enable the effective delivery of services to people who are homeless.

The review identified a number of issues that needed attention in the process and in total, there are 34 recommendations made for changes or adaptations to the current process. They cross a number of areas including, the need to differentiate between new and roll-over applications for funding, timelines, communication, documentation, criteria for assessing applications, decision-making, appeals, payment, performance measurement and monitoring, emerging needs and resourcing of the Homeless Agency.

Development of Unit Costing for the Provision of Homeless Services

The Homeless Agency decided to commence an exercise that will ultimately lead to the determination of unit costs for the provision of services to people who are homeless. The project undertaken by Aspect One is still at an interim stage. It will provide an agreed set of service units and determine the average cost per service unit being provided currently.

Habitual Residency Condition

TSA Consultancy were awarded the contract to undertake an examination of impact of the habitual residency condition on homeless service providers. This research is currently underway and seeks to describe the context and background to the habitual residency condition, quantify the use of homeless services by non nationals, profile the households using services, establish and describe the reasons why people are using the services and make recommendations on the appropriate policy and service responses to the needs of these households in the immediate and long term. ■

THE BIG LAUNCH!

We are currently working on finalising a venue and date for the conference at the end of November and will be posting details on our website shortly. We look forward to meeting you all at the launch.

A new type of housing statistic

Yes, we know it's nearly Christmas and a bit late to be only now hearing about last year's housing statistics, but that's the way it is with Housing Statistics Bulletins and the annual statistics for 2004 were published just too late for the last issue of CornerStone.

However, it was worth the wait, because the latest bulletin has had a major makeover and is published in a brand new reader-friendly format. All the statistical tables have been banished to an appendix and the bulk of the bulletin comprises a commentary written in plain English, with a scattering of colour photographs. There is even an explanation of all the different affordable and social housing schemes in a second appendix. The tables in the appendices are presented in a groovy layout comprising multiple shades of green, which to be honest makes reading the numbers a bit hard, and printing pages for further perusal would cost a fortune in printer ink, but at least it looks cool.

So you no longer need to be a statistician to make sense of the bulletins and the DoEHLG should be congratulated.

So, what's inside?

Housing output

The bulletin confirms that 2004 was another record breaker, with a total of nearly 77,000 houses completed – up 12% on the 2003 figure. Ireland has the highest building rate in Europe, at over 19 houses per 1,000 population, compared for example with only 3.5 per 1,000 in the UK.

Of the 77,000, just under 7% were social rented with local authorities completing 3,539 homes (they also bought 971), and housing associations finishing 1,607 homes. Total local authority output was a disappointing 22% down on 2003 whereas housing association output remained steady.

Among the four Dublin authorities there is evidence of a shift from local authority to housing association provision. Housing association output was 36% up on 2003 whilst local authority output was

down by the same percentage. Total social housing output in Dublin (local authorities and housing associations) was down 10%. These overall figures mask some fairly wild swings – in Dublin City Council both local authority and housing association output was down on 2003; in South Dublin County Council both local authority and housing association output increased significantly; and in both Fingal and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown local authority output was down by over two thirds, and housing association output increased dramatically, albeit from a low base.

The worst performer in the country was Galway City Council who managed to complete a microscopic 25 houses – 92% fewer than in 2003.

A major shift in house types is taking place and in future, many of us, especially if we live in Dublin, are going to have to get used to apartment living.

Part V

Up to 20% of nearly all new housing developments must be comprise social rented or affordable housing (housing sold at cost price to people who cannot afford to buy on the open market). This has been a very slow burner but is now beginning to show results. Three years ago Part V produced no social rented housing and only 46 affordable houses, but in 2004 this increased to 271 social rented houses (135 local authority and 82 housing association), and 374 affordable houses.

All the Housing Statistics Bulletins can be found on the DoEHLG's website at www.enviro.ie. Click on 'Housing Statistics' in the orange box on the bottom right hand corner of the screen.

House prices

Nationally, average house prices for both new and second hand houses increased by 11% over 2003, a slight drop on the previous increase. This trend has been confirmed in figures published subsequently by Permanent tsb, which show a national increase of just 3.3% in the first 7 months of 2005, the lowest such increase for nine years. This indicates that the housing market may be heading for a nice soft landing rather than a very painful crash.

House type

A major shift in house types is taking place and in future, many of us, especially if we live in Dublin, are going to have to get used to apartment living. Although currently only 6% of the country's housing is made up of apartments; 21% of all housing units built in 2004 were apartments. And in Dublin City Council area, *two thirds* of all new housing built in 2004 was apartments.

This represents a major change in inner city life for many people. It means new thinking about play space, storage, housing management, service charges and many other key issues, all of which need to be tackled very soon. However, people in many other European cities have been living in apartments for donkey's years, so perhaps we could learn something from them?

Policing the private rented sector

Although the Private Residential Tenancies Board has taken over responsibility for registration of private lettings and landlords, responsibility for enforcing legal minimum standards remains with local

Ireland has the highest building rate in Europe, at over 19 houses per 1000 population, compared for example with only 3.5 per 1000 in the UK.

authorities. And with a very small number of exceptions, their performance remains absolutely woeful.

Of the 34 city and county councils, 16 did not inspect a single property in 2004, and a further 11 inspected 10 or

less properties. Of the total of 7,232 inspections carried out, a staggering 96% were carried out by four authorities: Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, Cork City Council, and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

A total of 2,106 sub-standard dwellings were found but legal action was initiated in only 4 cases.

Of course the private rented sector is generally concentrated in urban areas, but that doesn't mean that there

is no private rented housing outside these four authorities.

There have been numerous initiatives recently that have aimed to stimulate the private rented sector, and it is absolutely vital that these are accompanied by a genuine commitment to ensuring that existing legal standards (which are themselves not high) are maintained. Conditions in the private rented sector in Paris were highlighted in recent tragic fires, but no-one should assume the same could not happen in Ireland. ■

A happy mix?



Michelle Norris

The most recent offering from the Housing Unit is *Mixed-Tenure Housing Estates: Development, Design, Management and Outcomes*, and it does, as Housing Unit publications always do, exactly what it says on the tin.

The context for this piece of research, carried out by Michelle Norris, is the increasing emphasis placed on mixed tenure housing developments. Public Private Partnerships, urban renewal schemes, and Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which requires that up to 20% of new residential developments are given over to social and affordable housing – all of these involve the creation of mixed tenure estates.

The rationale behind this policy approach is that estates comprising social housing, affordable housing, and private housing help to avoid the

problems sometimes found in single tenure social rented estates, and help to create more socially and economically successful communities.

Key findings of the research are that mixed tenure estates have some significant social, economic and community development advantages over single tenure social housing estates. At the same time, tenure mixing is not a panacea for all problems found in low-income areas.

Tenure mixing needs to be implemented carefully if its full potential is to be realized. There are a number of challenges, including opposition from home buyers, although this is not as great as some interest groups have claimed. Furthermore, representatives of the construction industry expressed a preference for Public Private Partnerships and expressed concern about Part V, particularly in relation to its potential to introduce delays into the development process. In addition, ensuring the design of social housing in a mixed tenure estate is

Tenure mixing needs to be implemented carefully if its full potential is to be realized.

appropriate to the specific needs of the sector can be challenging.

However, management of most mixed tenure estates is not problematic, except in

Mixed-Tenure Housing Estates: Development, Design, Management and Outcomes is at www.housingunit.ie

the case of high density mixed tenure developments. In such estates there may be difficulties co-ordinating social management functions with those carried out by managing agents; and service charges pose a serious difficulty for social rented landlords.

Recommendations include:

- More information from local authorities on procedures for Part V developments and design issues specific to social rented housing.
- Social rented housing should be externally indistinguishable from other tenures whilst reflecting the specific needs of this sector.
- Clustering of social rented housing rather than 'pepper potting' has significant advantages, but the complete separation of social housing from the rest of the development would undermine the objective of counteracting segregation.
- There is no simple answer to the problem of meeting extra management costs associated with high density mixed tenure estates but there are a number of options which the DoEHLG should consider.
- There should be increased competition and/or regulation of managing agents. ■

Rent supplement fails most vulnerable in Cork

The rent supplement scheme is failing a significant minority of vulnerable households who are living in substandard accommodation and are forced to pay 'top up' payments to secure a home. So claims Threshold in its report snappily entitled, *Seeking a Home on Rent Supplement: Experience in Cork City in 2004*.

The research, which was based on interviews with 70 people on rent supplement found:

- People on rent supplement were excluded from over two thirds of the rental market, either because rents were too high or because landlords wouldn't accept people on rent supplement.
- Half of the tenants were living in accommodation that did not meet the very basic statutory minimum standards. 7% were living in windowless rooms and 11% did not have access to a sink with hot and cold water.
- Over a fifth of people on rent supplement were forced to make a 'top up' payment in addition to their required contribution which meant they were left with less than the basic minimum welfare payment to live on.

Seeking a Home on Rent Supplement: Experience in Cork City in 2004 is at www.threshold.ie

Recommendations include:

- The rent ceiling for single person households should be raised.
- The Private Residential Tenancies Board should publish reports on local authority enforcement of minimum dwelling standards and those authorities that fail to reach an adequate standard should be penalised financially.
- The DoEHLG should up date dwelling standard criteria to reflect modern living standards.
- Funding should be provided to establish an agency to help people find and settle in private rented accommodation in Cork on the lines of the Access Housing Unit (a Threshold based project in Dublin).



A new face

Vincent Healy has recently taken over from Máire Twomey as team leader of Homelessness Services at Dublin City Council. He is responsible for private emergency accommodation; hostels; transitional and long term supported housing; resettlement; outreach and the night bus service.

Vincent has been a local authority official for just over thirty years; twelve of them with Dublin City Council. He has come to homelessness from the planning department where amongst other things he was responsible for overseeing the process of planning applications.



The CornerStone quiz



...there have been significant improvements in the last eight years, perhaps most noticeably in the drop in the number of rough sleepers, but (the report) also lays bare some of the significant remaining challenges.

The desperate shortage of affordable move-on accommodation, the limitations of funding and the often patchy homelessness services on offer in some parts of the country are all causes for concern.



Is the above:

- a) a leak from the forthcoming review of homeless strategy;
- b) an excerpt from the Homeless Agency's annual report;
- c) an excerpt from an analysis of homeless services in Britain;
- d) an excerpt from the Ninth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners in Ireland from 1856?

If you were further told that the author is called Territorial Commander you might either give up altogether or correctly surmise that the report in question originates from the Salvation Army and

that the answer therefore is c). But it could just as easily been a) or b), which just goes to show that both Britain and Ireland are facing very similar challenges in homeless provision.

However the Salvation Army report goes on to raise two other issues; one which is just emerging in Ireland, and another which may well emerge soon.

It points to increasing numbers of asylum seekers and other migrants who fall through the net and become homeless. In Dublin homeless services are now reporting increasing numbers of migrant workers who have not satisfied the

habitual residence condition and so are not entitled to social welfare and other benefits. Secondly it refers to the increasing criminalisation of homelessness, and refers specifically to ASBOs. It warns, "...unless they are accompanied by comprehensive packages of support, injunctions and ASBOs merely serve to displace activities such as begging and street drinking to other areas."

The law is of course different in the two countries, but the issues are similar and it's fair bet that these two themes will be prominent in future discussions of homelessness policy in Ireland. ■

Erratum

In Derval Howley's article on *Drug Use Among the Homeless Population in Ireland* in the last issue of CornerStone,

a table was printed with the wrong totals. CornerStone was inundated with phone calls from angry readers and as an expression of

our regret, this issue of CornerStone is being distributed free of charge to all readers. The correct table is shown below.

Presentations to the HPU Assessment Centres from Institutions: 2001–2004

Source of Referral	2001	2002	2003	2004
Ex Prison	80	225	197	181
Prison In Reach	0	22	99	212
Ex Hospital	21	59	53	46
Ex Treatment (substance abuse)	1	3	2	40
Ex Care	6	2	3	5
Ex Mother & Baby Home	0	5	0	0
Total	108	316	354	484

Source: Homeless Persons Unit (HPU)

The database was introduced in 2001 and the figures recorded are not for a full year. They do however provide a picture as to the numbers of people presenting to the

HPU since 2001. The reason for the increase in people presenting from ex treatment centres from 2 to 40 over the period 2003–2004 is as a result of a

tighter recording of clients by the HPU; this includes clients that have been treated for substance abuse issues in treatment centres and psychiatric hospitals. ■

A research report published by the Simon Communities of Ireland assesses the effectiveness of the Housing Act 1988 and the Integrated Strategy 2000, in assisting people who are homeless to access long-term stable accommodation. Many of the recommendations in **Settlement First** are aimed at local authorities; NGOs (voluntary organisations); and the private rented sector. **CornerStone** invited three experts in these areas to respond to the report.

Settlement First

The right solution?

Pat Doherty

Pat Doherty is director of DePaul Trust

The DePaul Trust has been working with homeless people in Dublin for the last 3 years. We provide 119 beds of accommodation, which is mostly emergency provision, to some of Dublin's most marginalised people in our four services at Clancy Nightshelter, Aungier Street, Back Lane and Tus Nua. In this time we have come across many an obstacle that has proved difficult in moving people away from homelessness. *Settlement First* is an obvious approach to moving people on and

one that all who are engaged in this work should be aiming towards.

Settlement First spells out in one document many of the numerous difficulties that homeless people and thus the agencies that work with them face and lays out many of the sensible, and need I say common sense solutions to the situation.

There was much that resonated with me in the report, in particular the call for a clear definition and understanding of what homelessness is and how it is

measured. Once this is done and adopted throughout the country then there will be a greater chance that we can quantify and qualify the true extent of homelessness in Ireland today and provide better responses to the needs of those who are homeless.

There is no doubt that for the concept of 'settlement first' to work, one will need more investment in the provision of long term housing, in particular accommodation for one and two persons households. One of the most pressing problems for providers such as the Depaul Trust, is not being able to locate good supported independent accommodation. We know that if the housing stock was there and the appropriate aftercare support was invested in, then the 'continuum of care' model would be able to work better. I also back the report's call for housing associations to be facilitated to develop more units of accommodation. This model has been very successful in the provision of social and affordable housing in the UK and is one that in the right circumstances and conditions (capital and revenue wise) would see a huge impact on the supply of housing available for homeless people. I would also support the call for more regulation of the private rented sector, which has also been backed up in reports into the low standard of the accommodation from other organisations such as Threshold and the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

If 'settlement first' is to work, it must be accepted that solving homelessness is not just about providing a roof over the head of a person but the provision of good initial and ongoing support for people that assists their integration into their community. This is a task that is becoming more and more challenging as there is an increasing number of people on the homeless scene with a complexity of needs that require intensive support once in the community.

The report calls for transitional and emergency accommodation to be managed and on a whole there is a truth in this but this does not mean that we have all the emergency and transitional accommodation that we need. There may be enough beds in the system but I would argue that there are still groups of people out there who are not being cared for. For example, there is yet no appropriate dedicated emergency

Launching Settlement First

Launches of annual reports, research reports, and policy reports generally follow a well-established format, which includes a speech from a relevant government minister or a media celebrity who trumpet the government's record or speak movingly about an encounter with a homeless person when a cub reporter many years ago. After this and many other speeches including a brief presentation on the actual report from the author, which gets lost in all the pomp and ceremony, food is provided. In the old days it was ham sandwiches but now it is always goats cheese tartlets and prawns wrapped in filo pastry.

But when the Simon Communities of Ireland launched *Settlement First* in July they broke with tradition. They broke up the launch too, into five separate rooms which guests were guided through in groups of ten. In the first three rooms they were given an introduction to the research; a summary of the findings; and a presentation on the recommendations. In the fourth room participants were invited to give their feedback to the research and recommendations. Then in the final room they got a copy of the report and food. The Simon Communities should be congratulated for making a real effort to get people involved in the launch of an ambitious research project. CornerStone was not able to attend the launch, so cannot say whether the refreshments included goats cheese tartlets and prawns wrapped in filo pastry.

service for women who are homeless; and for people coming out of detox there is need for more supported hostel spaces that will assist them through what is often the hardest part of breaking the cycle.

Russell Chapman

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) is a crucial source of long-term accommodation for many homeless people and in the absence of government commitments to increase social housing stock and with greater legislative control over the PRS it will continue to be so. *Settlement First* is correct in stating that neither the Housing Act, 1988 nor the Integrated Strategy envisaged that the PRS would be a valid and sustainable long term accommodation option. However, the Homeless Agency's action plan for

2001–2003, *Shaping the Future* did and the establishment and success of the Threshold Access Housing Unit is testament to this principle.

The PRS recommendations in *Settlement First* concern facilitating access to the PRS, quality, and SWA rent supplement restrictions to those who refuse local authority accommodation offers. In Threshold's opinion, the key recommendation with regard to access concerns Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) allowing rents to be paid above the rent cap as noted in SWA Circular 06/03. This circular applies to people coming out of



Russell Chapman is manager of the Access Housing Unit at Threshold

The fact that this provision is not applied with any continuity is, in Thresholds opinion, the single biggest obstacle to sourcing private rented accommodation for single homeless people

homeless situations with specific consideration being given to recommendations made by relevant voluntary and statutory organisations. The fact that this provision is not applied with any continuity is, in Thresholds opinion, the single biggest obstacle to sourcing private rented accommodation for single homeless people and one which needs to be addressed centrally. Thresholds most recent survey of bedsits (July 2005) in Dublin illustrates the difficulty. 137 landlords were contacted regarding bedsits they had advertised over a two week period. The average rent was €130. Once you exclude those rents that are above the rent cap of €120 and those landlords who will not take rent supplement, you are left with 14 possibilities, reduced further to 5 when you exclude non self-contained bedsits.

It's interesting to note that in Cork when homeless people access private rented housing, the Homeless Persons Unit pay the rents and administer the claim for three months before transferring it to a local health centre. Threshold supports this model, as it would introduce a level of continuity which does not exist currently in Dublin. Through developing a closer relationship with the HPU Thresholds Access Housing Unit could place more homeless people in the PRS at less cost to the state of maintaining people in emergency accommodation. Both the HPU and The Department of Social and Family Affairs have shown an interest in this arrangement for Dublin.

We agree with the recommendation to extend the Access Housing Unit model to other cities, with Galway and Cork being obvious examples. The unit has been a success in Dublin and will clearly succeed in other cities. The issue of 'scaling up' PRS inspections of substandard properties probably does not go far enough. A licensing system would be preferable whereby inspections are mandatory in order for landlords to be granted the licence to rent. This would finally deal with the issue of quality and subject to a gradual introduction would probably have little effect on supply.

The recommendations looking at leasing, building and managing new properties would need closer scrutiny. For example, facilitating voluntary sector service providers to build accommodation is not, as far as we know, the problem. Capital funding is clearly available however it is often funding for the support elements which prove problematic.

With regard to rent allowance, *Settlement First* refers to the inequity between people in emergency accommodation who can make multiple refusals of LA offers of accommodation; and those already in the PRS who can only refuse one offer. Since January 2005 (SWA Circular 01/05) two refusals of local authority accommodation can now be made rather than one and so it is unclear whether this now meets the recommendation.

Liz Clifford



Liz Clifford is homeless co-ordinator at Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council

I want to focus first on a particular area of concern that affects local authorities throughout the State. *Settlement First*, as the name implies recommends a series of initiatives, all of which hinge on placing homeless people into long-term housing. The provision of permanent housing for homeless people in emergency accommodation who continue to engage in anti-social behaviour is a challenging one, not only for the housing authority but for all engaged in service delivery.

There would be a significant reduction in the number of homeless people in emergency accommodation if the anti-social question was addressed and resolved.

The housing authorities are oft times charged with being too harsh in excluding people from being considered for inclusion on the housing list, or too arbitrary in taking proceedings to evict where a tenant is engaged in anti social behaviour. There are an increasing number of people in emergency accommodation currently who cannot be considered for social housing because of serious anti-social activity. Statistics show that anti-social behaviour is directly linked to alcohol, drug substance abuse and/or mental health issues, behaviours that make placement of these individuals even more problematic.

This situation needs to be addressed urgently, but cannot be left to the housing authorities alone. It requires a resolution through involvement by all agencies involved in service delivery.

Generally the anti-social units within the local authorities liaise very closely with the Gardai, HSE, and local communities in advance of any decision to take legal proceedings to evict a tenant on anti-social grounds. An Excluding Order may be taken by a local authority against any member of a tenant's family or any visitor to the tenants dwelling who is engaging in anti-social behaviour. Local authorities can no longer take an excluding order against a joint tenant. This power was repealed by s.197 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004; however a tenant may take an excluding order against a joint tenant or any member of the household engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Eviction is the last resort, and while it is not the solution in itself, unfortunately it is the only route currently available where serious anti-social behaviour is taking place and the impact on the community is extremely distressful. On the positive side many people who have been evicted from social housing have been rehoused once they have ceased to engage in the activity for which they have been evicted.

In 2003 in Dun Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council 44 housing applicants were deferred from being housed under s.14 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) 1997 because they had been engaged in

anti-social behaviour. In 2004, 21 applicants were deferred. It is worth noting that approximately 55% of deferrals involve homeless applicants.

There would be a significant reduction in the number of homeless people in emergency accommodation if the anti-social question was addressed and resolved. Until a debate takes place and a concerted effort is made to find a solution, emergency beds will continue to be occupied by people who will not be housed either in social housing nor referred to other housing options because of their behaviour.

Moving on to another issue raised in *Settlement First*, access to local authority housing for single homeless people has historically been difficult. Traditionally, house building programmes have catered for family households as their housing need was, rightly or wrongly, perceived as greater. However, more recently local authorities have become committed to reflecting the housing needs of all households, including single person applicants in their housing

programmes. Any arrangements with voluntary housing associations also reflect this need. In the 2002 assessment of housing need in the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown area 24% of net housing need was single person applications.

In the Homeless Agency's most recent action plan, *Making it Home* Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and South Dublin County Council have committed to ensuring that 10% of all lettings are made to people who are homeless. This target was exceeded in both local authorities in 2004. Dublin City Council has a policy of allocating one in three of its vacancies to homeless Households and one in five one bedroom lettings to homeless single people.

Finally, while Local Authorities are key to the delivery of social housing, the crucial factor in addressing and resolving homelessness and achieving the ideals stated in *Settlement First* is the provision of an integrated service and linkage between all accommodation providers and related health services.



Tanya Lalor
of TSA presenting a
summary of the findings

Photos: Fran Veale

Emmet Bergin
presenting
recommendations



Settlement First's main findings include:

- There is no commonly agreed definition of what constitutes homelessness among local authorities; homeless persons' units; or NGOs
- Some local authorities use concepts such as a local connection or intentional homelessness which do not appear in the legislation
- A comprehensive analysis of numbers of local authority houses allocated was impossible because data from local authorities was not available
- Single people find it difficult to access housing in the private rented sector
- Most housing for homeless people provided by NGOs is emergency and transitional, and therefore intended to be short term. But for some residents in this accommodation becomes long-term housing
- Only one third of homeless interviewees who had applied to the local authority for housing expressed a preference for local authority housing over the private rented sector
- Without long-term stable housing, virtually no supportive intervention for homeless people works

Settlement First's recommendations include:

- All organisations, statutory and NGOs, should adopt a 'settlement first' approach.
- Government should formulate a definitive interpretation of the definition of homelessness contained in the Housing Act 1988
- Homeless counts should be conducted annually rather than triennially
- More local authority housing for single people
- Larger local authorities should agree a minimum number of allocations to homeless people
- The homeless and allocation functions in local authorities should merge
- NGOs should develop long term housing for formerly homeless people
- The role of transitional housing should be reassessed
- The supply of emergency accommodation should be re-examined
- Special measures should be developed to facilitate homeless people's access to the private rented sector
- Homeless people should not be placed in sub standard private rented accommodation
- Better interagency collaboration
- Prevention measures should be established for people being discharged from prison or hospital, and people experiencing domestic violence
- Funding for NGOs provision of long-term housing ■



housing and disability: time to have your say

The latest stage in the government's disability strategy is consultation on sectoral plans produced by six government departments. **Eithne Fitzgerald** outlines the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's plan and calls for individuals and organisations to make submissions.

Eithne Fitzgerald is a member of the CornerStone advisory group

Sectoral plans on disability

Next July, the Oireachtas will be asked to adopt sectoral plans on disability for six government departments, including the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). This is the next stage in the disability strategy announced in late 2004, and which was made the centrepiece of the 2005 Budget. The Disability Act, passed in July, provided for a year's consultation process before final adoption of these sectoral plans.

The outline sectoral plan for the DoEHLG is on the department's website, www.environ.ie. Click on 'Publications' and again on 'Local govt'. Some housing issues are raised in the outline plan where it addresses the building code (s. 2) and the role of local authorities (s. 4).

Profile of disability

Over 8% of the population has a disability, according to the 2002 Census, which is the first official count we have. The incidence of disability rises steadily with age – over 40% of people with disabilities are aged over 65. Mobility difficulties are the most widely experienced ones.

Setting up home – young people with disabilities

Setting up an independent home may be significantly more problematic for young people with disabilities than for others in their age group. In the 35–44 age group, for example, people with disabilities are twice as likely as others in their age group to still live with their parents. People with intellectual disabilities are the most likely to live with their parents, and an

additional 1,900 for residential places are estimated to be required by 2009.

People with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to have a job than their peers, putting house purchase out of the reach of many. Local authority housing now forms a much smaller share of new housing provision than in previous decades, and waiting lists are long. The outline sectoral plan states local authorities have been asked to review their scheme of letting priorities to give people with disabilities appropriate recognition, and new guidance was given towards including people with disabilities in the housing assessments conducted in March 2005.

The absence of care supports outside the family may also make it more difficult to leave the parental home, and the Irish Council for Social Housing has consistently raised the difficulties in getting funding for on-site support recognised as an intrinsic part of the funding package for special needs housing funded under the Capital Assistance or Rental Subsidy schemes.

Mental health

Over the last forty years, the numbers of people living in psychiatric hospitals has declined steadily, in line with government policy that such care should be in the community. While a very welcome development, the fall in the number of in-patient places has not been fully matched by the increased provision of community residences for people with mental health difficulties.

People with mental health difficulties are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. The estimated proportion of homeless service users who have mental health difficulties ranges from about a quarter to about 40%, according to a number of different studies (Collins and McKeown, 1992; Haase and McKeown, 1999; Holohan, 2000), considerably higher than among the population at large.

People with mental health problems are at risk of falling through the gaps of a public sector housing policy which is largely focused on families, and a private rented sector which historically has offered little stability or support. However, as the Private Residential Tenancies Act 2004 takes effect, security of tenure may improve.

Accessibility



While the wheelchair is the most widely recognised disability symbol, a wheelchair-friendly environment is only one aspect of a fully accessible environment. As Ireland takes to apartment living, controlled entry systems that rely simply on spoken messages or audio signals pose difficulties for people who are hard of hearing, one of the most widely experienced forms of disability, as well as being impossible for people who are totally deaf. People who are blind require tactile and audio signs, and people who have low vision require colour contrast to help find their way. And accessibility is more than about entrances. It means people should be able to fully use a building for its primary purpose, and should be able to leave it safely.

Building code

Part M of the Building Regulations – the part which deals with disability access – was extended in 2000 to cover new build housing, with full effect from the start of 2004. The principle here is that buildings be visitable by people with disabilities – so new homes are required to have level access, and a WC at the living room level. However, it is also still legal to build walk-up apartment blocks up to a certain size, a form of housing increasingly favoured by city local authorities. A WC under the stairs is handy for people who find stairs difficult, but may be too small or awkward for a wheelchair user.

While the building code deals with entrance to and the internal layout of a building, other important access issues like parking are dealt with under separate planning rules which will vary from one local authority to the next.

The sectoral plan promises a review of the Part M standards, and replacement of the current poorly policed system with a system of Disability Access Certificates which would be required for new buildings.

 The consultation process offers a particular opportunity for concerned individuals and organisations to make an input to policy in this important area. 

Adapting our housing stock

As most disability is acquired later in life when people have their own home, a majority of people with disabilities are homeowners. For them a key issue is adapting their home to their needs as they get older, for example providing a downstairs bathroom or bedroom, or a stairlift. In 2004, there were 8,000 applications for Disabled Persons' Grants and 5,200 grants paid, amid reported lengthy waiting lists in certain counties, including long delays in assessments. A review of the scheme, discussed in the outline sectoral plan, proposes amendments to prioritise resources on those most in need on medical and financial grounds.

Independent living

While most disabled people live at home, the proportion of people with disabilities who live in residential care or similar is three times that for the rest of the population. Care supports can make the difference between living at home and moving into residential care. The limited hard data we have on the need for such care comes from the Physical and Sensory Database for 2004, covering people under 65 with a disability (there are no corresponding figures readily available for the elderly) and suggests significant levels of unmet need. 10% of people in this age group with a disability were thought to potentially require a personal assistant, 7% to require home care assistance and 11% to need a home help.

A chance to have your say

The consultation process on the draft sectoral plan offers a particular opportunity for concerned individuals and organisations to make an input to policy in this important area. ■

ETHOS

towards a common definition of homelessness

FEANTSA, the European umbrella organisation for agencies working with the homeless, is developing a European typology on homelessness. Earlier in the year, the Homeless Agency hosted a seminar on this topic as a contribution to the debate. **Bill Edgar**, research co-ordinator for the European Observatory on Homelessness explains what it's all about.

Bill Edgar is research co-ordinator for the European Observatory on Homelessness

Many politicians, policy makers and journalists think of homelessness as sleeping rough. However, those working in the sector know that many more people live in vulnerable situations at risk of homelessness or in conditions that amount to 'homelessness' than appear on the streets. The prevention of homelessness or the re-housing of homeless people requires an understanding of the pathways and processes that lead there and hence a much broader perception of the meaning of homelessness.

One of ETHOS's great strengths is that it is specifically designed to take account of national differences at the same time as offering a pan-European definition.

The EU Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion requires member states to ensure access to decent housing, to prevent the risks of (housing) exclusion and to help the most vulnerable in society. Such a strategy demands a broader conception of homelessness than the visible face of rough sleeping.

FEANTSA has produced a typology of homelessness and housing exclusion that allows for improved, and more consistent, data collection as well as for use for policy purposes which goes by the acronym ETHOS (European Typology on Homelessness and housing exclusion).

The ETHOS typology begins with the conceptual understanding that there are three domains which constitute a home, the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness. Having a home can be understood as: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (*physical domain*); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (*social domain*) and having legal title to occupation (*legal domain*).

These are used to provide four main concepts of Rooflessness, Houselessness, Insecure housing and Inadequate housing, all of which can be taken to indicate the absence of a home. These broad categories are used to identify 13 operational categories that can be used to collect or collate data and that is flexible enough to adapt to different policy purposes.

The detail of the ETHOS typology can be found on the FEANTSA web site – <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=484>.

An important characteristic of ETHOS is that it provides a broad definition of homelessness that identifies it as a housing issue rather than a personal problem. This does not mean that health, employment or other needs are not important, simply that they are not part of the ETHOS typology. This approach confirms that homelessness is a process rather than a static phenomenon that affects many vulnerable households at different points in their lives. Furthermore, by confirming that homelessness is much more than rough sleeping and by taking a housing perspective, it focuses attention upon the pathways into homelessness experienced by different types of vulnerable households. This in turn means that it should be easier to develop policy responses which aim to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place.

One of ETHOS's great strengths is that it is specifically designed to take account of national differences at the same time as offering a pan-European definition. As a consequence, it means that it is possible to move in the direction of making meaningful transnational comparisons of aspects of homelessness.

A number of countries are using the ETHOS definition as a platform to debate the approach to data collection and to debate the nature and form of more integrated policies in relation to housing exclusion and homelessness. FEANTSA are promoting trans-national exchanges on the application of ETHOS in different national contexts. The European Observatory on Homelessness is developing the typology by examining the definition and measurement issues involved in each of the operational categories. This will be published in the Fourth Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe in December 2005 and will be used to refine the typology.

The development of ETHOS and the application to the member states has already thrown up a number of issues. First, and alarmingly, despite the prevailing perception of homelessness as rough sleeping only one country undertakes any regular count and the issues of underestimation are well known. However, most countries do not even have an up-to-date count of the number of available night shelter spaces or their occupancy. Second, there are difficulties comparing between countries (and even in the same country over time) because there is no clear definition of a homeless hostel or temporary accommodation used to

ETHOS DEFINITION

Roofless

- ROUGH SLEEPING
- NIGHT SHELTER

Houseless

- HOSTEL / TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION
- WOMEN'S SHELTER
- ASYLUM / IMMIGRANTS SHELTERS
- INSTITUTIONAL RELEASE
- SUPPORTED HOUSING

Insecure housing

- NO TENANCY
- EVICTION ORDERS
- VIOLENCE / THREAT

Inadequately housed

- TEMPORARY / ILLEGAL STRUCTURES
- OVERCROWDING
- UNFIT FOR HABITATION

alleviate homelessness. Third, the use of supported accommodation for homeless people can not always be distinguished from other forms of supported accommodation or it is not measured in a consistent manner. Finally, despite being signatories to international conventions and being required to ensure access to decent housing as part of the EU Strategy many member states do not have official definitions of overcrowding or of fitness for habitation.

First, and alarmingly, despite the prevailing perception of homelessness as rough sleeping only one country undertakes any regular count and the issues of underestimation are well known.

Potential developments in the use of ETHOS by FEANTSA in the future may include action to lobby governments and to provide guidance to its members. There is clearly a case to lobby on to improve data collection and measurement at member state level. This requires an understanding of the need for and relevance of stock and flow data (for different ETHOS categories) for different policy purposes. FEANTSA is contributing also to the debate within the EU Social Protection Committee for appropriate indicators on housing exclusion. ETHOS also points to the need to make better use of NGO data and for more investment in electronic databases (similar to Dublin LINK) in more countries. Finally, in this regard FEANTSA will identify the nature and type of core variables that should be capable of extraction from databases maintained by its members so that a more consistent comparison can be made. ■

DIARY FROM DOWN UNDER TWO



Christine Dibelius works for the Victorian Office of Housing in Melbourne, Australia

Housing association policy officer **Christine Dibelius** is in Australia for a year where she has landed a job in the Victorian Office of Housing. In her second diary, she reports on acronyms and barbie talk.

April

Exactly three months after landing in Melbourne I report to duty for my first day at the Office of Housing in Victoria. Of course, three months is plenty of time to absorb the Melburnian passion for good coffee. But as to being properly integrated? I still can't tell a possum from a bandicoot, never mind distinguish between the Swans and the Demons in the all important 'Footie' league. So my mind boggles at being entrusted with government business. Yet here I go!

Initially I don't understand a word my colleagues say. Not because of the Aussie accent, even though that is a strange one indeed! It's just that the housing sector in Victoria brings acronyms to a level hitherto unknown! Housing agencies may provide HEF, THM and SAAP services while others operate GHP or RHP programs under FAF, manage SHIP properties and seek registration as an AHA. Oh, I see..... !!

Other aspects, however, are rather familiar. A preoccupation with 'affordable housing' for keyworkers and first time buyers who are being priced out of home ownership. Mutterings about the introduction of inclusionary zoning and other planning mechanisms – did I really, really travel

around the globe for God knows how many miles to end up worrying about Part V again?

Housing affordability certainly is a growing problem in Melbourne. In a horrible insult to Melbourne's persistent claim to be the 'world's most liveable city', an American study recently included Melbourne in the 10 most expensive cities in the world to buy a house. Melbourne prices have reached 7.6 times of annual income and the percentage of persons in 'housing stress' (i.e. paying over 30% of income on housing) is on the rise. Interestingly, some researchers claim that the problem is not caused by actual scarcity of housing but rather by a mismatch: too many people who could afford higher rents or a mortgage are occupying low cost dwellings and are unwilling to budge!

May

Victoria witnesses the formal registration of its first housing association by the Registrar of Housing Agencies. This is reason for celebration as it is the outcome of a fairly long and arduous process of legislative change and negotiation between the Government and the community housing sector to radically reform the provision of social housing.

...did I really, really travel around the globe for God knows how many miles to end up worrying about 'Part V' again?

The main change sees the establishment of a core group of housing associations, that will receive significant capital funds from the state to grow the supply of social housing but are expected to contribute additional funds from the private sector or from philanthropic sources. The strategy intends to foster agencies with solid governance and healthy balance sheets that can cope with greater risks involved in property development and long term asset management than could be managed by the primarily small agencies to date.

Apart from the strong incentive to augment funds available for social housing through borrowings ('leverage' being the magic word!) a number of other benefits are also envisaged. One being the increased diversity of housing provision. The current state monopoly, whereby the Office of Housing manages about 88% of the 70,000 social housing units in Victoria, is no longer seen as appropriate. Particularly not at a time when declining federal funds and reduced rental income (due to smaller households, higher needs tenants and a strict income related rent policy) only barely let the Office of Housing avoid running a deficit. Tax exemptions for charities and access to rent assistance (from federal coffers) by housing association tenants make the shift to a housing association model therefore also financially very attractive.

Increased growth through housing associations was however only seen as acceptable within a rigorous regulatory framework. Such a framework was regarded as key to building confidence in the sector, giving comfort to lenders and of course ensuring a high level of accountability for public funds. As good children of the Commonwealth the inventors of the Victorian regulations naturally turned to the experience of the UK for a lesson and kept a close eye on the Housing Corporation. And the outcome is indeed quite similar. A Registrar of Housing Agencies will carry out an initial assessment and will monitor on an ongoing basis a whole range of performance standards relating to governance, financial viability, tenancy management etc. The registrar will have intervention powers in case of mismanagement, financial breach or other severe problems.

Naturally some aspects of the new legislation caused some housing providers sleepless nights, at least initially. The sector, represented by the Community Housing Federation of Victoria, saw the changes as being the opposite of enabling legislation and criticised the intervention powers available to the new registrar. Some criticism was levelled at the Office of Housing for trying to 'cut and paste' UK legislation into the Victorian context without due regard to whether it was a good fit.

The regulatory framework aside, there is also still some nervousness about the likely success of the housing association strategy in general. Will the agencies really bring in significant leverage? Will they be able to manage the trade off between financial viability and affordability, or will the need to use debt finance force them to target higher income groups and ignore the needs of the homeless? Will the trend to

'corporatise' housing providers lessen the focus on empowering local communities and responding to local needs? As one commentator put it, will the 'pride and passion' inherent in community ownership be lost as a result of all this? Hopefully it won't. Meanwhile, housing association no. 1 celebrates!

August

A 'historic' meeting is held in Melbourne by all state and federal ministers with responsibility for the housing, planning and local government portfolios to agree a framework for national action on affordable housing. The national approach was seen as necessary to unite various initiatives undertaken by the states, increase learning from each other and build a stronger alliance to tackle affordability problems. Despite the appearance of a united front, the meeting was however accompanied by a fair amount of finger pointing as to who is to blame for the problems in the first place. Sort out stamp duty, land supply and infrastructure costs at state level, scolds the federal government, while the states demand reform of Canberra's home ownership grants, rent assistance policies and declining funds for social housing. Unfortunately, my difficulties in figuring out the respective roles of the states versus Canberra in relation to housing policy are only matched by my current struggle to decipher the rules of cricket. In light of the excitement about the Ashes Series which has normally sane Australian friends suddenly stay up all night and talk about nothing but 'reverse swing' and ground conditions at the Oval, I think I might prefer the latter challenge and leave Australian politics for another day!

August also sees the launch of the consumer charter for people accessing homelessness assistance and social housing services. This rights based charter was one of the priority actions identified in the Victorian Homeless Strategy 2000. Based on extensive consultation with stakeholders including homeless persons and agency representatives, the consumer charter sets out 11 rights for customers of any social housing or homelessness service funded through the Victorian government. The list includes rights such as the right to receive assistance in a crisis or to prevent a crisis, the right to access services based on fair policies, the right to participate in decision making and the right to make a complaint and receive a fair hearing. The charter is due to come in force in January 2006; however some challenges appear to still lie ahead in getting all parts of the services sector embrace it equally strongly.

September

First days of spring, first days of warmth – looks like our love affair with the mighty big gas barbecue in the garden is about to resume. Speaking of barbecues, it is now officially proven, at least according to one of the local print products of the Murdoch empire, that '(conversation about) housing tops our barbie menu'. So give me some steak and let's talk property! Isn't it nice to combine research with pleasure... ■

In a horrible insult to Melbourne's persistent claim to be the 'world's most liveable city', an American study recently included Melbourne in the 10 most expensive cities in the world to buy a house.



THE NESC DEBATE

In the last issue **Rory O'Donnell** responded to criticisms of the NESC report on housing published in *CornerStone*. **Declan Redmond**, one of the critics named in the article, responds.

Dr Declan Redmond lectures in the School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy, University College Dublin

...it is a bit naïve to suggest that there are no vested interests in land and property development.

Rory O'Donnell attempts to caricature my views on the NESC report and its analysis of land. He suggests I might be comfortable that the Kenny report is the final word on land. This, of course, would be an absurd position to hold, one which I did not argue and do not believe. Likewise, I trust that NESC is not totally comfortable that their view on land is the final word analytically, although the tone of the response might suggest otherwise. More significantly, he goes on to suggest that I misunderstand the NESC argument and that I have failed to see the 'subtle analytical shifts' in the debate. However, he might be surprised to learn that I actually agree with a significant amount of the NESC analysis, though with some differences. Using Evans (2004), NESC argue, correctly I think, that the conditions of land supply do in fact matter with regard to land price determination. The analysis suggests that with a sophisticated system of land delivery the proportion of house price accounted for by land will decrease because of greater and more certain availability of land. This sounds plausible but I would be much more comfortable with some substantial empirical analysis which demonstrates this rather than its being merely a claim. Recent deceleration in house prices does not in itself prove the NESC argument. Overall, the NESC position is an advance on the simplistic view of residual values which would imply that there is no justification for state interference in land. This latter position is an attractive one for landowners and other vested interests as it suggests that land price has no real overall impact on house prices. This has always seemed a ridiculous proposition and the NESC view of 'active land management' would also suggest so. Therefore, I agree with the general argument that active land management will improve land supply. However, whether it will necessarily impact favourably on land price determination and ultimately on house prices and affordability is something I think that needs to be proven rather than merely asserted.

Analytically, the residual view of land suggests that the market value of housing is determined by what the market will bear (demand) and that therefore land value is a residual. In the words of Tom Dunne (2003), property developers are price takers. If this is indeed the central argument of the residual view, I am not sure whether the NESC argument really represents a subtle analytical shift, especially as much of it is reliant on Evans (2004). Centrally and crucially, it needs to be demonstrated in detail why and how property

developers will not be price takers in the market. Put differently, a central aspect of active land management has to ensure that land is actually brought to the market and that it impacts favourably on the affordability of housing. How, for example, would potential oligopolies of landholding be dealt with? Even releasing lots of land to developers will not necessarily guarantee that it will be brought to the market. It is here that I am not quite convinced of the NESC argument. In particular, it has little to say empirically about patterns of land ownership or the behaviour of landowners. It may seem harsh to blame NESC for this, but this dearth of information seriously hampers analysis.

With regard to policy prescriptions, my reading of NESC is that there is a general reliance on supply-side arguments with respect to land and a general scepticism with regard to economic instruments such as betterment and levies. It is certainly somewhat odd for a report which is mainly economic in terms of its analysis to be so unconvinced with respect to financial instruments and to promote so heavily regulation and investment. Nor am I persuaded about the claim that the analysis goes beyond notions of vested interests and political power. From a purely empirical viewpoint, we do not have good enough information (hardly any) on land ownership patterns, so it is difficult to see how he can conclude that vested interests are immaterial. He seems to be investing a great deal in his analysis here and it could be argued that it is a bit naïve to suggest that there are no vested interests in land and property development. I would be happy to be proved wrong but neither the NESC nor Goodbody reports convince me of that. I am sure Rory O' Donnell is committed to evidence-based policy making; however, and as stated previously, we have little evidence on land ownership patterns, land prices or of the impact of land prices on market values in Ireland. My own view is that we have but a rudimentary empirical understanding of how the land market has operated in Ireland in recent times and that our theoretical and analytical positions are consequently untested and somewhat fragile. Yes, it is a difficult and complex subject and, given that, I would be more persuaded by comprehensive empirical analysis than is currently available. The NESC report is a very useful contribution to the debate but far from being the last word. In order that we achieve more affordable housing, my hunch is that the notion of active land management in the NESC report needs to be expanded to incorporate the various ideas of tax, betterment and levies with regard to land. ■

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Focus Ireland's coffee shop

Lots of people have heard of Focus Ireland's coffee shop, after all it's been around for nearly two decades. But apart from coffee drinking, what else goes on there? **Fran Cassidy**, who worked in the coffee shop ten years ago, met **Kieran Stenson** to refresh his memory.



We're a drop in centre for homeless people and we are open 365 days a year. Eighty percent of the people who come to us are sleeping rough, or in a B&B or hostel. We also have people who have just been accommodated or who are looking for help so they don't lose the accommodation they're in. We average about a hundred and thirty hot meals a day, not including breakfasts and sandwiches, so over a year with you're talking about roughly 45,000 hot dinners.

'And we want our customers to know that the people preparing their food are trained to as high a level as any hotel or country club, because that says something important. In fact the catering team follow a system called HACCP¹ that was devised as a way of ensuring that astronauts wouldn't get sick.'

Kieran Stenson, who is in charge of open access services, laughs. 'It's mind boggling to me' he continues, 'thanks to the Department of the Environment we put in a state of the art kitchen and I think we've the best kitchen facilities in Temple Bar.'

Fran Cassidy is a writer and researcher

The most important thing is that it makes contact and befriends people.

¹ Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point – a systematic approach to the preparation of safe food.



Probably the best testament is the daily queues and the fact that customers care about the place. ... They have a smile on their face but they care about what happens here.

We have three fully qualified chefs and all our suppliers have to supply certificates that show that the food sources are clean and that it arrives in a suitably refrigerated compartment at the correct storage temperature. Our catering assistants must be trained to Health Service Executive hygiene standards.'

Kieran is a genial American who joined Focus Ireland in 1988, when he smilingly alleges that he 'got hell for taking Irish peoples' jobs'. He recalls that himself, Maura Russell and John Farrelly were brought in to professionalise services and dryly observes that, 'professionalism then was considered a dirty word: it meant uncaring, cold and distant.'

There has been is a longstanding concern that increased professionalism can mean less humane services, The concern that the essential movement toward professionalism might detract from a humane approach is longstanding and in my opinion

legitimate, but Kieran assures me that Focus Ireland have got the balance right.

'We're not clinical, we're genuinely interested in people. I think we succeeded and it's now a very professional operation. When Focus Ireland was young we were all very enthusiastic, full of good ideas and had great people. But we had a little bit of a chip on our shoulder: we thought our way was the only way. We've since learned to work in partnership with other voluntary and statutory agencies. We realised we're not the only ones with good ideas and that there's a lot we could learn from other agencies and other people, and there is a lot they can learn from us. And I think that's a much more mature and fruitful way of looking at it.'

'And here, the three teams, the catering team, the coffee shop team and the crisis team work very well together.'

An earlier random survey of customers had assured me that the catering is indeed top notch so I asked about the other two teams.

'The coffee shop team is about establishing good relationships and contact work, and the crisis team is built on a social work model of intervention. It's good that the crisis desk is at the front of the coffee shop. But that wasn't an accident. We never wanted a door that said social work department. We don't want to make it into a very structured environment; we know that our clients live day to day so we try to work like

that. We wanted people to have two experiences so they could choose in a neutral environment. So downstairs people are having cups of tea, and some people that's all they're doing. But other people are having cups of tea and waiting for their social worker. People can't say that person is for social work or that person isn't. It removes the stigma.'

There is certainly a palpable sense of efficiency and clarity of purpose about the coffee shop, but comparing it with a decade ago, it does not seem to have lost its easygoing ambience.

'That atmosphere is worked on and worked on. Any really professional person makes it look effortless. The original idea Sister Stan (founder of Focus Point, as it was originally called) had was that homeless people got a lot of hassle from other homeless people or the public; they spent their time talking to people through hatches or they were ignored. So when people ask what does Focus Ireland do I say we give people good attention. We shut up and listen, and once we get that right everything else follows.'

'The coffee shop team does three things. The most important is that it makes contact and befriends people. The service is being there with people, holding people. These days they might have two years to wait before they're housed. They need a place to come, to feel that they're known, that people enjoy them being there. And we offer that as we always have.'

'But our staff have to know the distinction between being welcoming and friendly, and being somebody's friend. You never set someone up or give them a false impression. We train a lot around boundaries, both for our staff and for our customers' sakes. So we don't socialise with our customers. And it isn't our job to follow people around twenty-four hours and save them. Our job is to empower people to look after themselves. So if someone comes in and they're suicidal or whatever, we will deal with that very seriously and we will give them everything we can. But when the doors close we're very clear that it isn't our job to follow that person around. Because there's no end to that logic.'

'The second thing the coffee shop team do is keep the place safe. We very much structure the coffee shop as a sanctuary. We reject street values, we don't let them in. We don't let people talk in racist or sexist ways, we don't let them tap cigarettes or borrow money. We expect people to behave as they would in any mainstream coffee shop because that's the real world, that's the world that we're preparing them to re-enter. We challenge people in terms of their behaviour and motivation. We like people to graduate. It's not a good sign for people to use the coffee shop for more than two years. You know the old saying that homelessness should be a stage and not a state. We firmly believe that people can move out of homelessness and when they do the last thing they need is to come back to a homeless café. They should use an ordinary one.'

'And that's one reason we have always had a minimal charge for food. When you're housed no one's going to give you free food so why pretend? It also makes the people who come into us customers. If you

pay for your food you have a right to complain or say something about the way that you are treated.

'The third thing the coffee shop team have to do then is to manage a queue every day. There are people who come to the coffee shop for nefarious purposes, to sell drugs or stolen goods, maybe to pick up young people for sexual purposes. Our job is to know who those people are and to not let them in. Also we are a drug and alcohol free area. We believe that the majority of people who are homeless don't have addiction problems or are trying to overcome their addiction problems, so it is really important that they have a place where they feel safe enough to deal with their issues and where they can get the attention they need.

'There's a certain type of person who can work here. You have to be very comfortable with ambiguity. You have to know that just because it's quiet now doesn't mean that in five minutes all hell isn't going to break loose. Staff do a lot of de-escalation and communicating, bringing people together and creating an atmosphere of unity.

'Unfortunately in our job a lot of the time we have to give people bad news. The art of communication is being able to give bad news in a way that people can hear and understand. Sometimes happiness isn't on the agenda, but you can change it from a horrific experience to a bad experience. The team are very good at it, they can say difficult things to people in a way that's not difficult to hear. That's an important skill. Not too many people have it naturally but it is possible to learn.

Probably the best testament is the daily queues and the fact that customers care about the place. They'll say "excuse me, there's dirt on the floor", or "don't fight here". They have a smile on their face but they care about what happens here.'

Kieran explains that if somebody has a specific problem, the coffee shop team will bring it to the crisis team.

'The crisis team do four things. First they provide a professional advice and information service. So we have people coming in with all types of queries, it could be something rather routine in terms of filling out a form, to maybe a very complicated issue around possible eviction.

The second would be crisis intervention for somebody who is having a hard time. It could be something emotional like the break up of a family or maybe someone has been assaulted.

The third is key-working where the team will case work people who have specific needs. A lot of that is counselling or advocacy – ringing up, getting things together, helping people through the maze.

The fourth thing they do in conjunction with the coffee shop is to keep things safe, de-escalate behaviour and deal with difficult incidents. If people come to us on a day and they're drunk or very high they won't get barred but if they consistently did that they would. If they threatened another customer or staff, again that would be a very serious offence.'

I wonder does Kieran think there is a need for services for those people who are excluded.

'I think there already are. I think that different services have different thresholds and also different personalities and different cultures. So there are people who use Brother Kevin's (Capuchin day centre) or Fáiltiú (Merchants Quay) who don't use here, and I have absolutely no problem with that. It may not be because we sanctioned them but just because they feel more comfortable there. I remember Linda O'Nolan writing in Cornerstone years ago saying that there should be an element of choice. I don't think it's a big problem to have two or three different dinner centres with different ways of approaching it. There are all kinds of people who are homeless. You can't cookie cutter it. You can't go overboard, you don't want to have twenty dinner centres, but there's certainly a need for more than one or two. I'm not saying that we're the coffee shop for everybody and there are people who choose not to use our service or we feel can't use it very well. But it does work for a huge amount of people.'

Seventeen years is a long time working in the homeless field and I put it to Kieran that he seems to have retained his sanity and sense of humour.

'I used to think I had a hard job until we had builders in, and then I realised that I'd rather deal with Croke Park full of homeless people than three builders. I think the percentage of really nice interesting people to serve is higher in the homeless community than in an ordinary restaurant. I'd say about 90 percent of the people who come in here are a pleasure to work with. It's amazing – their humanity and patience, their optimism and ability to see a future, given what they've had to endure in their lives. It's very inspiring.'

And enjoyable?

'There's lots of laughs so we learn not to take ourselves too seriously. In Eustace Street I would be the dinosaur of the piece and one of the reasons I keep my interest and enthusiasm is because we have young staff and they talk about bands that I have never heard of and things like that. And they slag me unmercifully for it. It keeps me feeling somewhat young. You see them doing incredible things that I could never do at their age. And in their ability to help people who haven't had the advantages they had, you see the part of the families that work in Ireland, the good things that are happening in society. Kieran laughs 'They keep me sane and they certainly keep me humble.' ■



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CornerStone Questionnaire

Vincent Healy

Senior Executive Officer, Homeless Services, Dublin City Council

When and why did you first get involved in the area of homelessness?

I worked in both Dublin City and Dublin County Council for over 30 years mainly in the fields of Planning and Finance. My appointment to my current position in April 2005 is, however, my first direct involvement within the homeless sector.

Has your understanding of homelessness changed since then?

Yes. Naively, I initially thought that the solution to the problem was simply to provide enough beds for the homeless. However, the underlying reasons that lead people into homelessness are often much more complex and difficult to solve.

What one policy initiative would make the most difference to homelessness people?

It's more of an attitude change by the public i.e. local communities and businesses. In my short time in this job I have been struck by the fact that services to the homeless are largely 'invisible'; that is to say there are a number of hostels, shelters and other buildings used for emergency and transitional accommodation throughout our city that do not

advertise their use. The underlying reason for this is that to do so would lead to objections from the local communities and/or businesses. I would like to see a greater public understanding and acceptance that such services must be allowed to exist and operate openly.

What have you learnt from homeless people you have met?

That they are as varied and individual as people from other walks of life.

Do you think poverty and homelessness will always be with us?

Ideally, the Homeless Sector's goal is to make itself redundant. I do believe, however, that there will always be a level of poverty and homelessness. Our responsibility is to keep such levels to a minimum.

Are there gaps in current homeless services? If so, what's missing?

What do homeless people do all day? I think we should be providing more advice/care day centres where homeless people can access information receive medical attention and meet with their friends. Perhaps such centres might even have a 'wet' element.

What's the difference between NGOs and the statutory sector?

The Voluntary Sector's strengths are its flexibility, its dedication and its freedom to campaign publicly on issues. The Statutory Sector's strengths are its public accountability, its public representatives and its durability.

Which matters most, charity or political change?

Live Aid in 1985 showed that charity can solve an immediate crisis in Africa. That said, however, the problems of the continent have continued and will do so until there is a will from both African and Western governments to change. I believe the same holds true for us.

What would you do if the homelessness problem was solved and you were no longer needed?

Dublin City Council has responsibility for a variety of services and ongoing projects in the city. I would be happy to work in any of these areas. However, if the Council had no need of my services, I would like to work as an 'Extra' in films and TV. I think I have a background type of face!

Do you give money to people who are begging?

Not generally. ■

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