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Ready for Work

CornerStone

The magazine of the Homeless Agency

ISSUE 30
MARCH 2007

A key to the door

Homeless Agency action
plan is launched



note from the editor



The Homeless Agency action plan *A Key to the Door* dominates this issue of CornerStone. We have a summary of the report for those who like summaries; a discussion of the role of an action plan; and a personal view of the challenges faced in implementing its actions. It's the third and last action plan, which takes the Homeless Agency to its demise in the present form in 2010. The work plan of the agency will include planning for post-2010 and this process is due to start this year.

Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, which was published on 15th February, is the first comprehensive statement of government housing policy since *Social Housing – The Way Ahead* was published in 1995. The great majority of people will strongly support its overall thrust, that creating communities is as important as building houses. It arrived too late for analysis, but we've provided a summary on page 5, and we'll cover *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* in more detail in the next issue.

Because it's such a wide-ranging document its summary took up most of the news section, so there wasn't room to mention two other important documents published recently; the *National Development Plan 2007–2013*, and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*. We'll cover these two in the next issue as well.

In the last issue I promised a bottle of champagne to the author of the best explanation of the significance of a 9% increase in housing in the Book of Estimates 2007. Deciding upon the winner of the prize did not present any difficulties, since no entries were received. But at least I got to drink the champagne, which was very nice thank you.

This does however raise a serious concern, which is that discussions concerning housing finance are generally limited to arguments about the iniquities of stamp duty. And whilst it is most definitely true that housing finance is complicated, and also true that some people find it mind-numbingly boring, the fact is that it is enormously important. Because you really can't discuss housing policy thoroughly without thinking about how much it costs, who pays for it, and how much alternative policies would cost.

So, in a bid to fill this gaping hole, I've revised my offer. The closing date has been extended indefinitely, and the new title is *Housing finance: a guide for fairly intelligent laypeople with low boredom thresholds*. I've upped the word count to 1800 words, to take account of the wider scope of this title. The new bottle will go to the first guide received that is judged to be up to standard. Have fun!

Simon Brooke

Editor of CornerStone · Housing and Social Policy Consultant
simonbrooke@eircom.net

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.

CornerStone

EDITOR

Simon Brooke

ADVISORY GROUP

Eithne Fitzgerald, Independent
Brian Harvey, Independent
Brendan Kenny, Dublin City Council
Alice O'Flynn, Health Service Executive

PUBLISHER

The Homeless Agency, Parkgate Hall
6–9 Conyngham Road, Dublin 8
Telephone 01 703 6100
Fax 01 703 6170
Email: homeless@dublincity.ie
Web: www.homelessagency.ie

CONTRIBUTORS

- Nathan O'Connor is information analyst at the Homeless Agency
- Dermot Kavanagh is assistant director of Merchants Quay Ireland
- Evelyn Hanlon is head of the Private Housing Unit at Dublin City Council
- Paula Mayock is a senior researcher at the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin
- Fran Cassidy is a writer and researcher

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feature articles

A Key to the Door

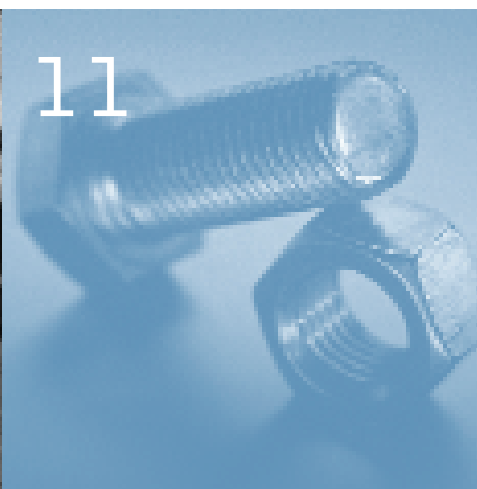
Homeless Agency
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Launch of the Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007–2010

A key to the door



Derval Howley, director of the Homeless Agency addresses the launch

The Homeless Agency Partnership launched *A Key to the Door*, Action Plan on Homelessness 2007–2010 on Tuesday February 6th 2007 in City Hall, Dame Street, Dublin 2. The launch was attended by 160 people from voluntary and statutory organisations working with people who are homeless in Dublin, representatives from statutory organisations working with homelessness throughout Ireland also mainstream services in Dublin that would be accessed by people who are experiencing homelessness in Dublin.

Speakers at the launch included leading authorities working with homelessness from an Irish, European and United States perspective including Mr Noel Ahern TD, Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, Mr Philip Mangano,

Executive Director, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Mr Freek Spinnewijn, Director of FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Vincent Jackson, Ms Kathleen Holohan, Chair of the Board of the Homeless Agency and Dr Derval Howley, Director of the Homeless Agency.

Current government policy, outlined in *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy*, requires that every local authority agree an action plan, in partnership with the Health Service Executive and relevant voluntary and statutory organisations in their area. *A Key to the Door* is the third action plan on homelessness in Dublin and will cover the period 2007–2010. It will continue to build on the work of the last two action

plans *Shaping the Future* 2001–2003 and *Making it Home* 2004–2006, in order to achieve the vision which is:

By 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin. The risk of a person or family becoming homeless will be minimal due to effective preventative policies and services. Where it does occur, homelessness will be short-term and all people who are homeless will be assisted into appropriate housing and the realisation of their full potential and rights.

Ms Kathleen Holohan, Chair of the Board of the Homeless Agency and Director of Housing in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council gave an overview of the consultation process and partnership approach that took place in the formation of the action plan.

Mr Noel Ahern TD, Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal officially welcomed the action plan and gave an overview of the work that has taken place to address homelessness over the past 6 years and the measures that need to be put in place to accomplish the vision of the partnership.

Dr Derval Howley, Director of the Homeless Agency gave an overview of the three strategic aims of the action plan; Prevent people from becoming homeless; Provide effective services in each local area to address the accommodation, housing, health and other relevant needs of people who are homeless in that area; Provide sufficient long-term housing, with appropriate supports as required, for people who are homeless, especially single



(L to R), Freek Spinnewijn, director of FEANTSA; Kathleen Holohan, chair of the board of the Homeless Agency; Noel Ahern TD, Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal; Derval Howley, director of the Homeless Agency; Philip Mangano, executive director, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

person households. The three strategic aims will provide a guide for the direction of the actions needed to take place to tackle homelessness in Dublin over the next 4 years. Dr Howley also looked at the challenges and the opportunities that exist within the action plan for the Homeless Agency Partnership in addressing homelessness in Dublin.

Mr Freek Spinnewijn, Director, FEANTSA spoke about homelessness from a European perspective and focused on the

role Ireland and the city of Dublin could play in setting the homelessness agenda in the European Union. According to Freek, Dublin has one of the most progressive and effective homelessness strategies in Europe. He said that the Homeless Agency should profile itself more on a European level and promote its approach to homelessness abroad.

Mr Philip Mangano, Executive Director, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness looked at homelessness

from a United States perspective and gave an overview of the 10-year plans of the USICH to end chronic homelessness in the United States. He highlighted that their goal is to implement agreed plans and work together to address homelessness on a national level with local solutions with over 200 communities across the country, 49 states and three territories.

The Lord Mayor of Dublin Councillor Vincent Jackson formally closed the launch of the action plan. ■

Competency framework

The development and rollout of the Homeless Services Sector Competency Framework is now at an advanced stage with the recent signoff of the recruitment and selection tools having been achieved.

The rollout has proven to be a great example of the sector's commitment to working together in partnership and mutual sharing and support in building a lasting sectoral resource. The integration of the competency framework into the recruitment and selection processes will help to ensure that people who experience homelessness are met by workers who have the skills and capacity

to address their needs. Through its use it is envisaged that individuals and organisations will become increasingly confident in the knowledge that workers entering the sector will have the required competencies to effectively support service users as they move towards more independent living. It will also raise the awareness of prospective workers of the competencies that are expected to work in the sector.

It will also raise the awareness of prospective workers of the competencies that are expected to work in the sector.

To date much dedication, work and participation has been invested throughout the sector to bring the framework to life. This participation has taken many forms including: the

establishment of an active steering group, the nomination of trainers/ facilitators to facilitate both the process and the jobholder sessions and the organisational hosting and active participation / facilitation of the job holders sessions.

Once trained in the use of the recruitment and selection tools, the trainers will co-host sessions for hiring managers throughout the sector (who may not have already been trained in the use of the tools). A manual will also be developed which will facilitate the ongoing training of persons who will be involved in the recruitment and selection of staff throughout the sector.

The roll out of the competency framework takes full cognisance of the following roles as determined in the report '*Work Worth Doing*' (Simon Brooke) which reviewed staffing in 140 homeless services throughout Ireland: project manager, project leader, project worker, assistant project worker, night worker and childcare worker. The

rollout aligned the framework competencies for all levels of those roles across the sector.

The long-term success of the implementation of the framework is reliant on the continued commitment and enthusiasm of all individuals and organisations working within the homeless sector. ■

Holistic needs assessment and care plan

The Homeless Agency and the Health Service Executive have developed a holistic needs assessment and care plan. The aim of the assessment is to identify the current needs of the service users and begin to address those needs through services currently available, identifying gaps in current service provision and making recommendations for future service development to meet these needs.

In 2006, a pilot was carried out in 4 services in Dublin including a total of 61 assessments being completed and 32 staff members being trained across the pilot projects.

The assessments captured the aspirations of individuals using homeless services including the wish to move out of homelessness and to live independently and also the interest in exploring training and employment opportunities. A steering

group was set up to oversee the pilot and in September 2006 agreed that a structured roll out of the assessment tool would take place to introduce it to the rest of the homeless sector in Dublin. The strategy agreed and adopted by the sector was to train a nominated group of individuals from across homeless services to provide cross-sectoral training.

A training for trainers course was developed to support the effective roll out of the assessment tool and associated care plan. The training took place in October and November in 2006. It is envisaged that nominated participants will provide one-day training courses to homeless services, with four courses to be provided by each trainer in 2007. The first training for trainers course has been completed including emergency accommodation providers, transitional, outreach and settlement services.

The training courses will be completed by May 2007, at this point all emergency services in Dublin will have received training in the holistic needs assessment and implementation advisors will have been identified in each service. The next service area to be targeted will be settlement service providers and transitional housing providers and training courses will be provided for these services by December 2007.

One day training courses in early 2008 will target long-term supported housing and ancillary service providers including drug service providers and mental health service providers. In 2008 the one-day training course will also be mainstreamed as part of the Homeless Agency Learning and Performance Schedule. A panel of trainers will be formed from those who participated in the training for trainers Course in 2007. ■

Goodbye Derval

As many readers will know, Derval Howley left the Homeless Agency in February this year. She has left Dublin to renovate a house in the middle of county Wexford and she's getting to know her family again after two very busy years as director. She steered the Homeless Agency through

implementation of much of *Making it home*, and through the development of *A Key to the Door*. Her calmness, approachability, astonishing ability to remember detail, and her diplomatic skills were appreciated by many people. Everyone at the Homeless Agency wishes her the very best for the future. ■



Delivering homes, sustaining communities

Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities is can be downloaded from www.environ.ie
Click on 'Housing Policy Statement' at the top of the terracotta-coloured box.

people want to live and work, now and in the future". They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are "safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, offer equality of opportunity and good services for all".

All of this has to be viewed in the context of the core objective of housing policy in Ireland which is:

to enable to enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice.

So those are the overall themes – but what does the statement actually promise?

The key actions are listed here under eight chapter headings. In order to cover the ground without taking over the entire magazine we've reduced most actions to bullet points which will at least give you a flavour of the statement. But the relatively small part of the statement that is concerned with homelessness is covered in more detail.

Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, which was published in mid-February is very comprehensive and wide-ranging, so for those of you too busy to read the whole caboodle, **CornerStone** presents here a sort of condensed version. It has to be said that it is not an easy report to summarise, partly because it covers a lot of ground, and partly some of the actions are hidden away behind obscure paragraphs and need to be rooted out, but we hope the following represents a fair synopsis of the actions.

As Des Dowling (assistant secretary, housing division, DoEHLG) said at the launch, it is underpinned by the thinking in the NESC report (see *CornerStone* issue 23) and the partnership agreement *Towards 2016* (*CornerStone* issue 28); and many of the elements in the statement are already in place. A housing bill will be published later this year to deal with actions requiring legislation.

So what's it all about? Let's start with the vision:

'The statement outlines an overarching vision to guide the development of the Irish housing sector over the next ten years by delivering more and better quality housing responses and by doing this in a more strategic way focused on the building of sustainable communities'.

That paragraph, taken from the summary leaflet, pretty well sums it up, but before listing some of the key actions, it's important to have a look at what the statement means by 'sustainable communities'. It's set out clearly in chapter two:

'Sustainable communities have a high quality natural and built environment, with a dynamic and innovative economy, good transport, supportive community and voluntary services, and are environmentally sound. In December 2005, an Informal Council of EU Ministers agreed the Bristol Accord20. This accord defines sustainable communities as places "where

Housing now – delivering sustainable communities

- New planning guidelines on preparation of development plans are being finalised.
- Co-operation between relevant departments and local authorities will explore innovative ways of linking new school provision to development of residential areas.
- Housing strategies (these are produced under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2006) will be further developed to ensure better information on nature of demand for housing in a local area as well as the location of the demand.
- Sustainable communities provide a means for newcomers to integrate and participate fully in Irish society. The DoEHLG is supporting research under the auspices of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism to consider issues arising for neighbourhood planning, housing provision and estate management policy from increased ethnic and cultural diversity.
- A 'use it or lose it' scheme will be introduced through new legislation that give local authorities powers to accelerate development of land zoned for housing.
- A Property Service Regulatory Authority will be set up to regulate the auctioneering/estate agency business, managing agents, property letting agents and others.
- Other problems concerning management companies and managing agents will be addressed.
- The review of minimum standards in the private rented sector has already begun, and measures to improve local authority enforcement of these and other aspects of regulation will follow.

Housing services

- More investment in housing will lead to 4000 extra starts/acquisitions (i.e. homes either built or bought by local authorities) during the period 2007–2009, above the 23,000 already committed in the Housing Policy Framework. This will bring total starts/acquisitions to 27,000 units (20,000 local authority; 6,000 housing

association (referred to as 'voluntary and co-operative housing sector' in the statement; 1,000 Rental Accommodation Scheme [RAS]).

- In addition full implementation of RAS will bring in more units.
- 17,000 affordable homes will be produced during 2007–2009.

- Housing advice centres will be established in all the larger local authorities. Advice work will focus on determining eligibility for affordable housing; assessing the need for other housing support.
- Legislation will be introduced to allow people to appeal a housing decision made about them by a local authority.

Paths to home ownership

- 40,000 affordable homes will be delivered during the period of the National Development Plan (2007–2013).

- The focus will be on optimising the output of affordable housing through a number of mechanisms:

- Part V arrangements (Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2006)
- Construction on state or local authority owned land

- Units acquired through purchase, land exchanges, partnering with the private sector or housing associations

These units will be offered to eligible purchasers in a way that will maximise choice and ensure that the range of needs of eligible households can be met.

- Eligibility for affordable housing will be determined by local authorities based on local circumstances, within parameters set by the DoEHLG.

- The Affordable Homes Partnership, which was set up in 2005 to co-ordinate and accelerate measures for the delivery of affordable housing in the Dublin region, has commissioned a study to consider ways in which affordable housing might be enhanced. The study will examine the concept of 'affordable renting' as an alternative to affordable housing for purchase.

- A new 'incremental purchase' scheme will broaden access to home ownership for lower income groups.

(This appears to be a variation on the shared ownership scheme, and will allow existing and prospective local authority tenants to start out by buying a proportion of their home, and 'staircasing' up to full ownership.)

- The sale of apartments to tenants has been mooted for some time. Legislation to make this work is currently being drafted.

- It is intended to introduce versions of tenant purchase for housing association tenants (who currently do not have an opportunity to buy their homes), by running a pilot scheme based on the 'incremental purchase' scheme described above.

Social housing supports

- A new way of assessing housing need is being developed. This will involve a two stage process – a preliminary assessment to identify those with a short-term need, and a second stage which will examine long-term need.

- Social housing options available will include local authority rented homes; housing association rented homes; and

homes provided under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

- Sustainable community proofing will be introduced for all new projects. The Centre for Housing Research will develop an appropriate toolkit and publish best practice guidance.

- The role of housing associations (voluntary and co-operative housing

sector) will be developed:

- Housing associations will have greater involvement in home ownership options (e.g. 'incremental purchase')
- Rationalised and streamlined funding arrangements will be introduced
- Improved regulatory structure will be introduced

Supply of housing for special needs

- Inter-agency protocols will be developed for the most vulnerable groups (e.g. homeless people, people with addictions, people with mental health issues).

- Housing strategies and housing action plans will reflect specific strategies for different special needs categories.

Homelessness

- 'It is generally accepted that there is an adequate supply of emergency accommodation in the major urban areas. It is also recognised that the primary objective is now to provide transitional programmes, where necessary, and in due course long term accommodation with

necessary care supports, to enable people to move from emergency accommodation to independent living. The current strategies of both the statutory and voluntary sectors must be amended to reflect this objective. Existing funding mechanisms will be retargeted to support the amended strategies.'

'In order to further progress the long-term response to homelessness, the DoEHLG will:

- Amalgamate and update the existing homeless strategies, having regard to the recommendations of the independent review of the strategies. In this context, a National Homelessness Consultative Committee is being established. Measures will be adopted to achieve the more effective operation of homeless fora and improved co-ordination of service provision to ensure a more coherent and comprehensive response to the needs of homeless persons;
- On the basis of established need, the provision of long-term accommodation and associated care supports will be promoted through social and voluntary housing, the private rented sector (including the use of the Rental Accommodation Scheme) and the provision of dedicated accommodation and support systems for homeless persons who are assessed as being not capable of independent living;
- Continue to provide the funding necessary to support the provision of

accommodation and related supports to homeless persons and develop a more effective and transparent funding mechanism for both the accommodation and care elements through greater co-ordination at local level between the local authorities and the HSE;

- The situation of homeless persons who are currently in long-term emergency accommodation is of particular concern. The revised strategies will include the objective for the elimination of such homelessness by 2010.'

Travellers

- The DoEHLG will continue to facilitate strategies to accelerate provision of accommodation for Travellers and will continue to work through the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee

Older people

- A role for RAS in provision of housing for older people will be considered.

- DoEHLG will encourage the expansion of 'financial contribution schemes' where private housing is part exchanged for social rented accommodation.

- Local authorities will include a specific strategy reflecting their response to accommodation needs of older people and will specifically outline role of housing associations.

- New protocols for inter agency co-operation where there is a care dimension will be introduced.

- Revised grant schemes for older people in private housing will be implemented.

- A cross departmental team on sheltered housing will be established.

People with a disability

- Much of this is covered in the sectoral plan described in CornerStone issue 29.

- The grants scheme for people with a disability in private housing will be reviewed, to ensure funding is targeted at lower income households and those with greatest needs.

Housing and neighbourhood renewal

- A new nation-wide approach to regeneration of run down local authority estates will be undertaken.

- A Sustainable Communities Fund is being established to provide revenue funding to local authorities to support the various steps involved in housing renewal and improving the housing stock. An element of the fund will be

devoted to measures taken to address anti-social behaviour.

- Under new funding arrangements from January 2007, local authorities will be allowed to apply the revenue received from sales of houses to programmes of regeneration, remedial works and planning maintenance.

- The DoEHLG will continue to provide

funding, some in the form of matching funds, to local authorities for improvement schemes. Local authorities will be able to fund schemes to improve housing association housing (although most of this is relatively new).

- Ten yearly audits of housing stock will be undertaken, with a benchmark audit being conducted in 2007/08.

Managing and maintaining social housing

- Allocation policies need reform, and this will be the subject of consultation with housing providers and the Housing Forum.

- Rents policy across all social housing options will be rationalised. This will not

involve the centralised setting of rents, but rather the agreeing of a national framework of appropriate parameters.

- Supports available to local authorities to tackle anti-social

behaviour will be strengthened through increasing their statutory powers and actions facilitating a targeted approach to combating anti social behaviour in particular estates.

Institutional and implementation reforms

- Better systems of co-ordination and joint working between different players involved in the provision of housing and development of communities will be introduced.

- Housing action plans will be placed on a statutory footing and will be improved.

- Local authorities are now required to engage in a process of active land management that will ensure that the right amount of land is available for housing in the right locations.

- The Housing Management Initiative will involve the setting up of an incentivised system for housing authorities to encourage and promote best practice in the meeting of housing objectives.

So there it is. By the time you've absorbed all that you'll be ready for the analysis that we'll carry in the next issue of CornerStone. ■

'Those who have knowledge don't predict. Those who predict don't have knowledge.'

House price pundits clearly did not heed Lao Tzu's excellent advice (perhaps because he said it in the 6th century), and so, to CornerStone's

continuing astonishment they queued up earlier in the year to predict publicly how much house prices would increase in 2006. This is what they forecasted:

And the right answer? Very nearly 12%–11.8% in fact, according to the Permanent tsb house price index that is compiled in association with the ESRI. So, of the 11 clairvoyants who consulted their crystal balls, only 3 were anywhere near correct.

This year however, it's a different story, and nearly everyone predicts an increase of between 3 and 6%. Bear in mind that with an inflation rate of about 4.5%, this means real price changes are predicted to be somewhere between a drop of about 1.5% and a rise of about 1.5%. In other words if you're thinking of buying your first home, you might be sensible to wait a bit and save a few bob. ■

Hamilton Osbourne King (Joan Henry)	4%
EBS	5%
Friends First (Jim Power)	'at least 5%'
IIB Bank	6%
Irish Life and Permanent	6–8%
CBRE Gunne	6–8%
Douglas Newman Good	'less than in 2005'
Bank of Ireland (Dan McLaughlin)	8%
Sherry Fitzgerald (Marian Finnegan)	10%
Hooke & MacDonald	10%
Permanent tsb / ESRI	10%

New director at the Homeless Agency

Cathal Morgan has been appointed as the new director at the Homeless Agency, following **Derval Howley's** departure into the depths of county Wexford. Cathal comes to



the Homeless Agency from the HSE where he was the national drug strategy manager focusing on strategic policy development and the implementation of National Drug Strategy actions within the Health Service Executive. Before this he was the rehabilitation co-ordinator in the HSE Northern Area Addiction Service, and he

has spent over ten years working in the intellectual disability, mental health, youth at risk/ in care and mediation/ guidance field. Cathal holds a BA in Psychoanalytic Studies and an MSc in Clinical Psychotherapy and is currently conducting PhD research into the area of suicide amongst young people. ■

Other new posts



Sharon Cosgrove has been appointed director of Sonas Housing Association, taking over from **Muireann Morris** who left for a more peaceful life as a consultant.

Before she came to Sonas, Sharon was head of projects in Combat Poverty Agency where she was responsible for a number of anti-poverty programmes. Before that she worked as a freelance consultant providing services to Combat Poverty on a number of issues; she managed the URBAN programme in south Dublin; and earlier still she worked for Bristol City Council in housing and inner city renewal.



Occupying the director's office at Threshold is **Bob Jordan**. He replaces **Patrick Burke**, who moved to head up the

Simon Communities of Ireland. Bob was previously research and communications manager at Threshold and before that he worked in a similar capacity with Dublin Simon Community. Bob's qualifications include a BSc from Trinity College Dublin and an MA in International Relations from Dublin City University.



David FitzGerald took up the post of chairperson of the Homeless Agency's consultative forum at the beginning of 2007. David is

Director – Member Services with the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland (CPA), a leading Irish professional accountancy body with over 5,000 members and students. Prior to joining CPA in 2004, he worked in a variety of senior marketing and commercial positions in the food industry in Ireland, UK and USA. ■



Nathan O'Connor is information analyst at the Homeless Agency and was responsible for much of the research, preparation and writing of the action plan

A key to the door summary

There is of course no substitute for the full monty, but for all those readers too busy to read *A Key to the Door* from cover to cover, **Nathan O'Connor** has produced a short summary.

Vision

By 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin. The risk of a person or family becoming homeless will be minimal due to effective preventative policies and services. Where it does occur, homelessness will be short-term and all people who are homeless will be assisted into appropriate housing and the realisation of their full potential and rights.

Strategic aims

- Prevent people from becoming homeless.
 - Provide effective services in each local area to address the accommodation, housing, health and other relevant needs of people who are homeless in that area.
 - Provide sufficient long-term housing, with appropriate supports as required, for people who are homeless, especially single person households.
- 1 Identify people and households at risk of homelessness and intervene appropriately with a co-ordinated multi-agency approach.
 - 2 Ensure access to mainstream health services and other services for people and households at risk of homelessness.
 - 3 Implement an information and awareness strategy.
 - 4 Implement the holistic needs assessment and the care and case management approach across the homeless services sector.
 - 5 Continue the localisation of mainstream and specialist homeless services.
 - 6 Increase service user participation.
 - 7 Local authorities and housing associations to provide social rented housing.
 - 8 Identify and advocate for the removal of barriers preventing access to private rented accommodation.
 - 9 Maximise housing provision for people and households through the Rental Accommodation Scheme.
 - 10 Evaluate and review existing models of long-term housing supports and seek appropriate revenue funding streams for the implementation of best practice in this area for people who have been homeless.

Core actions

A *Key to the Door*, the Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007–2010, is the third plan produced by the partnership.

The new action plan builds on the work of the partnership since 2001, and reiterates the Homeless

Agency's vision to eliminate long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough by 2010.

Key terms have been defined in *A Key to the Door*, for example that the vision of eliminating long-term homelessness includes anyone who has been homeless for over six months, unless he or she is

The Homeless Agency Partnership has renewed its commitment to the vision of eliminating long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough and *A Key to the Door* presents a strong set of actions that outline how this can realistically be achieved.

undertaking a transitional programme. The last periodic assessment of homelessness showed that there are over 1,000 households who are in this category. So the Action Plan makes clear the scale of what must be achieved by 2010.

The work of the next four years has been laid out under the three strategic aims of prevention, support and housing. Each of these aims is developed in a series of actions.

One innovation in *A Key to the Door* is that some actions have been given higher priority over others. Ten 'core actions'

were identified during the consultation process. These are actions that will have most significance in achieving outcomes in line with the vision. The other actions are also important, for many reasons, but they are unlikely to significantly reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness unless the core actions are also achieved.

Under prevention, there are three core actions.

Core action 1. *Ensure that there is an 'early warning system' in place to identify and engage with households at risk of homelessness or newly homeless.* This warning system should be quick to engage supports such as tenancy sustainment in order to prevent people from sliding into long-term homelessness.

Core action 2. *Ensure that mainstream services are fully accessible to households at risk of homelessness.* This will involve research into what difficulties people have experienced in accessing services during crisis periods, as well as liaison between the partnership and mainstream service providers to ensure that gaps and barriers to access are dealt with.

Core action 3. *Implement a broad-ranging information and awareness strategy.* This will be a multi-faceted action, involving raising public awareness of the reality of homelessness and homeless services, providing people at risk of homelessness and service users with appropriate information, as well as alerting government and stakeholders to research and issues in the sector.

There are also three core actions under the area of support:

Core action 4. *Implement Care and Case Management across the sector.* This means that there will be a process of assessing the full range of service users' needs through a holistic needs assessment and ensuring that all of these needs are addressed in a comprehensive care plan. A care manager for the whole sector will be based in the

Homeless Agency and will address gaps, blocks and barriers in accessing services that are identified through the care and case management process.

Core action 5. *Localise services.* That is, where there are presenting needs in an area, it has been agreed that the most appropriate response is for support services to be available locally so that people do not need to move away from their community, friends and family. In addition, there is a desire to reduce the concentration of services in the city centre in favour of localised services.

Core action 6. *Increase service user participation at every level.* This action will include direct representation of service users on the Homeless Agency's consultative forum as well as a wide range of initiatives in every service, from service user's charters to direct involvement in decision-making.

The lack of appropriate housing was raised again and again during the consultation process as the largest single barrier to eliminating long-term homelessness.

Four core actions were identified under long-term housing and supports:

Core action 7. *Ensure that local authorities and housing associations provide social housing.* The local authorities have agreed to continue to allocate a minimum proportion of housing to homeless households and have agreed more ambitious targets up until the end of their current social and affordable housing action plans in 2008. The Homeless Agency will engage in research during 2007 to bring clear evidence of the social housing needed to achieve the vision so that it can be included in the next round of local authorities' social and affordable housing action plans.

Core action 8. *Identify barriers to households moving into private rented accommodation and work to overcome them.* This action is concerned with maximising use of all appropriate housing options for homeless households in the private rented sector.

Core action 9. *Maximise access to Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) tenancies for households experiencing homelessness.* This action involves building on current pilot projects set up under RAS.

Core action 10. *Examine existing models of long-term housing supports and seek appropriate revenue funding streams.* The Homeless Agency will, having evaluated different models of support provision, develop models of best practice. Establishing a funding scheme will ensure that that households moving out of homelessness have access to appropriate support services that will prevent them from returning to homelessness in the future.

All 10 core actions, as well as the 74 additional actions, are set into a timeline for the next four years. The Homeless Agency Partnership has renewed its commitment to the vision of eliminating long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough and *A Key to the Door* presents a strong set of actions that outline how this can realistically be achieved. ■

It is vital that the process is inclusive of all stakeholders and genuinely open to discussion and new ideas.

A key to the door the nuts and bolts

A Key to the Door is the Homeless Agency's action plan for 2007–2011. But what's the point of an action plan? How do you make one? And what does it achieve? **Nathan O'Connor** explains.

On February 6th, the Homeless Agency Partnership launched *A Key to the Door*, the new Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007–2010. The plan is ambitious and lists 84 actions to be achieved over the next four years. Its launch also marked the hand-over from the previous three-year plan *Making it Home*.

I am going to suggest that there are three major elements to any action plan and I will discuss each in relation to *A Key to the Door*. Firstly, the way in which a plan is developed is very important. It is vital that the process is inclusive of all stakeholders and genuinely open to discussion and new ideas. Secondly, the document itself serves as a guide to what needs to be done on a month-by-month basis between now and 2010. For this, the plan must strike a balance between realistic goals on the basis of available resources and ambition to make real change happen. Thirdly, the action plan is a public document that communicates the goals and ambitions of the partnership to a wider audience than just the homeless services sector.

The development of *A Key to the Door* was in many ways as important as the finished document itself. A steering group drawn from the board and the consultative forum of the Homeless Agency, with representatives from both the voluntary and the statutory sectors, led the consultation process. Simon Brooke, an independent housing and social policy consultant, was engaged to facilitate the consultations with stakeholders.

The whole consultation process took place over four months, from June to September 2006. The process had two phases, with open consultation on what should go in the plan in the early stages followed by a review of the draft plan in the later stages. This two-step process allowed stakeholders to input into the process twice. This was important to ensure that contributions made in the first phase were not misconstrued in the draft document. The second phase of participation also gave interested parties more ability to shape the final plan.



Nathan O'Connor is information analyst at the Homeless Agency



A key to the door the nuts and bolts

Stakeholders

Service Users

- Current service users and people who have used services in the past

Homeless Agency

- Board
- Consultative Forum

Government

- The Cross Departmental Team on Homelessness

The four Dublin Local Authorities

(Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin)

- City/County Managers
- Directors of Housing (Assistant City Manager in Dublin City)
- Homeless Forums
- Strategic Policy Committees
- Rental Accommodation Scheme (Dublin City)

Health Service Executive

- National Director (Social Inclusion)
- National Director of Care (Mental Health)
- Director of Social Inclusion (Mid Leinster)
- Manager National Drugs Strategy
- Homeless Persons Unit
- Community Welfare Officers (Homeless Persons Unit)
- Multidisciplinary Team
- Mental Health (Suicide)

Voluntary Sector

- Homeless Network

Other Stakeholders

- Access Housing Unit
- An Garda Síochána
- Irish Probation Service
- Irish Prison Service

The development of *A Key to the Door* was in many ways as important as the finished document itself.

The box lists the stakeholders who were identified and met as part of the development of *A Key to the Door*.

In addition to the meetings with the above stakeholders, four open half-days were organised. Two of these took place in June and two more took place in September. These were advertised in the national press as well as in sector publications and email notices. The aim of the open days was to encourage the widest participation, including service users, ex-service users, project workers, interested members of the public, etc. All four open days were well attended, with 30–50 participants at each of them.

Finally, written submissions were also sought. A total of 37 submissions were received, ranging from one-page letters to lengthy documents.

All of the contributions made a valuable input to *A Key to the Door*. However, it is important to pay special attention to the contribution of service users. 105 men, women and children were met as part of the consultations, in 12 services as well as in long-term housing and on the street. This included people

who had used services in the past as well as current service users. Fran Cassidy worked with Simon Brooke in holding these consultations, most of which were held in groups.

These consultations focused on the reasons people had become homeless, what might have prevented this from happening and their comments on existing homeless and housing services. The reason people became homeless included family breakdown, alcohol, heroin and mental health problems. This reinforces the accepted wisdom in the sector that most people who are vulnerable to long-term homelessness have one or more other presenting needs that must be addressed in addition to their housing need and in tandem with housing.

Service users largely expressed the opinion that little or nothing could have been done to prevent them from becoming homeless, however the interviewer felt that this might be a reflection of the state of mind of people who are currently homeless and who may be focusing their attention on their present circumstances rather than hypothetical alternatives.

In relation to homeless and housing services, service users made a number of comments (detailed in Section 1 of *A Key to the Door*) including their appreciation of services that treated people with respect and without judgement, but also their frustration at the lack of housing, detox/rehab facilities and places to go during the day.

“All of the contributions made a valuable input to *A Key to the Door*. However, it is important to pay special attention to the contribution of service users.”

From the extent of the consultations, it should be clear that *A Key to the Door* is more than a document. The process of developing the plan involved a lot of discussion, some new ideas and some challenges, but at the end of the day, it also involved a strong reaffirmation by the participants of the vision of the Homeless Agency Partnership to eliminate long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough. Not only did participants agree that this was their shared aim, but they also agreed that the vision is really possible, if all concerned play their part.

And this is where the document is important, as a written record of the commitments made and the actions that are required between now and 2010 in order for the vision to become reality.

The Government has a vital role in ensuring that resources continue to be made available through the partnership to fund the various specialist and mainstream services that address the many issues faced by people who are experiencing homelessness. The Government also has a vital role in providing the resources for an increase in the availability of social housing.

A Key to the Door has a special role for the four Dublin local authorities as it satisfies their obligations, under Government policy, to develop a homeless plan in partnership with the health services and voluntary sector. The local authorities have reiterated their commitment to meeting the presenting need of homeless households in the supply and allocation of social housing. The four elected councils have all voted to adopt the plan. The Health Service Executive has likewise signed off on its commitments to ensure that people experiencing homelessness have full access to health and social support services.

A Key to the Door sets out the specific commitments made by the local authorities, the Health Service Executive and other agencies. In addition, the action plan specifies timelines and details on how progress towards the vision will be monitored through a set of key performance indicators.

The board and consultative forum had a special role to play in the formation of the plan, as they are the driving force behind the Homeless Agency and their commitment and ambition will be crucial to *A Key to the Door*'s implementation. In addition, the steering group, drawn from the board and forum was actively involved throughout the plan's development.

During the consultation, the board and consultative forum met in two joint sessions, each lasting a full day. These sessions gave them time to review the outgoing plan, *Making it Home*, as well as time to discuss the overall direction of the Homeless Agency through the new plan. Over the period 2007–2010, both the board and the consultative forum will be kept

informed of progress on *A Key to the Door* and they will have a vital role in addressing gaps or blocks in service development and delivery, as well as in formulating new actions to address any new challenges in the sector.

Finally, as well as a participatory process and a record of commitments made, *A Key to the Door* is also an opportunity for the Homeless Agency Partnership to communicate to a wider audience about the realities of homelessness and the services that exist to tackle it.

This communication includes making a clear statement about the complexity of issues tied up in homelessness, and how any solution to homelessness must also address issues of mental health, addiction and life skills. This nuanced understanding of homelessness is sometimes lacking in media treatment of the issue and it is important for the sector to remind the general public of the multiple needs and entitlements of those who are experiencing homelessness.

A Key to the Door also provides a summary of the direction homeless services in Dublin are taking over the new few years, which is a useful update for Government and other statutory partners who do not deal with the detail of day-to-day operations. Also, every local authority (homeless forum) in Ireland is obliged by Government policy to have homeless plans and the Dublin plan may provide useful guidance and inspiration to some of them.

Changes that have happened in the homeless services sector in Dublin in recent years include the movement from looking after people when they experience homelessness to a stronger focus on moving people out of homelessness and addressing any additional issues in tandem with housing. *A Key to the Door* describes and reinforces the development of best practice in the sector.

A Key to the Door represents strong continuity both with the previous plans and within the partnership process, which have delivered real improvements in the delivery of homeless services over the last six years. This continuity is part of the bigger ten-year strategy to eliminate long-term homelessness and the need for anyone to sleep rough.

The title of the new plan is symbolic. *A Key to the Door* reflects the importance of long-term housing options for people who are currently experiencing homelessness. At the same time, the title acknowledges the barriers that can prevent people from accessing housing. The role of the Homeless Agency Partnership over the next four years will be to act as the key that unlocks the barriers and assists people who are homeless into housing with whatever supports they need. ■

“The reality is that it’s not going to be simple. It will be difficult.”



A key to the door turning the key



Dermot Kavanagh is assistant director of Merchants Quay Ireland

What are the main challenges facing those working to implement *A Key to the Door*? **Dermot Kavanagh**, who was a member of the action plan steering group and thus saw the plan’s development from start to finish offers a personal view.

“By 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin”.

If we pull this off, it will go down as one of the most striking achievements of imaginative Government and of partnership working in the 21st century.

The plan on the face of it is simple. There are three things we must do. We must prevent people from becoming homeless. We must move those who are currently homeless out of homelessness and we must ensure that there is sufficient accommodation and additional supports in place to achieve this.

The reality is that it’s not going to be simple. It will be difficult.

Preventing people from becoming homeless is difficult. While identifying those at risk of homelessness is relatively straightforward, effective intervention is difficult. This is because actions need to be taken by a wide variety of agencies, well beyond the homeless sector. Effective prevention involves things such as family support, early school leaving projects and drug prevention initiatives. It also involves ensuring there are no unplanned discharges from hospitals, prisons, residential drug or alcohol treatment centres and other institutions.

We will have to ensure that housing advice and support for persons in housing crisis is available in all

“If we moved all of the people who are currently homeless into houses and apartments tomorrow morning a significant proportion would be homeless again within months or even weeks.”

local authority areas. We need to ensure that homelessness does not result from people falling through gaps in the provision of health and social services and we have to take early action so that a problem relating to rent arrears or anti social behaviour does not escalate to the point where it results in homelessness.

We also need to ensure that the standard of accommodation available to those at risk of homelessness – generally vulnerable people often with multiple needs – is at least as good as the standards operating in the homeless accommodation sector. This is a particular issue for the private rented sector where standards are often very poor and little is done because the risk of being inspected and held to account are low.

Prevention also involves increasing housing supply especially the provision of housing for persons with special support needs, i.e. older people, people with physical or mental health issues etc. In this regard we currently have a situation whereby people who have successfully completed Transitional Housing programmes and who now need supported housing cannot access such housing. This puts them at great risk of falling back into homelessness, putting months of effort and investment to waste. This situation must change.

Finally, prevention involves homeless proofing of policy. This has been an aspiration of the two previous Homeless Action Plans and yet there have been some notable failures in this area including the implementation of the Habitual Residency Condition, which arguably left hundreds of Eastern European nationals dependent on homeless services. The Agency needs to be vigilant in this regard

The second plank of the plan, moving people who are currently homeless out of homelessness sounds fairly straightforward, right? Wrong. If we moved all of the people who are currently homeless into houses and apartments tomorrow morning a significant proportion would be homeless again within months or even weeks. This is because homelessness is often an effect of a constellation of personal problems including mental health issues, illness, addiction problems and so on which are created or exacerbated by the experience of marginalisation and exclusion from an early age.

As reflected in the plan, there is a clear consensus at this stage that an effective solution is

dependent on a wide range of initiatives aimed at ensuring the formerly homeless person is included in society. This means that their health and social care needs are adequately assessed and addressed, that there are people they can turn to in a crisis (this may include tenancy sustainment workers or so called “visiting support”) and it means that we need a range of measures to ensure that formerly homeless people have access to employment, training and education as appropriate.

A further key aspect of the plan involves ensuring that mainstream and specialist homeless services are provided at local level, rather than concentrated in the city centre. The city centre holds attractions for all people including the homeless but many homeless people come in because there are few services in their own area. Developing or relocating services for homeless people is always difficult, especially in an election year, but it is achievable with sufficient will, patience and resources. The creation of a significant network of drug treatment services at local level across the city offers a useful model in this regard.

The greatest challenge in the implementation of this plan concerns the development and provision of sufficient long term housing with appropriate supports to meet the needs of the entire homeless population by 2010. It is worth quoting directly from the plan to see the scale of the task ahead:

“Based on existing trends, it is estimated that between 2006 and 2008, an estimated total of 6,150 homeless households will require housing. Many of these households will be able to successfully re-settle in the private rented sector or return to their family home, however approximately 3,300 of these households are estimated to require social housing because of their higher support needs. The local authorities’ existing plans should provide 2,862 additional houses by the end of 2008, but given that these plans are behind target, a shortfall in excess of 1,000 units is likely. This fact alone clearly signals that there is a mountain to climb if we are to achieve our Vision.”

It is clear that we will require a substantial increase in annual social housing output and substantial development of appropriate social and personal supports for those who have difficulty in creating and sustaining homes.



The longer a person is stuck in homeless services, the harder it is to get them unstuck.

In this regard, when you consider that the Homeless Persons Unit estimates that one third of newly homeless households have moderate support needs and a further one third have high support needs in addition to their housing needs the task seems all the more daunting.

For homeless people with moderate or high support needs the best housing option is undoubtedly social housing (whether provided by a local authority or a voluntary housing association) because of the stability associated with that form of tenure. The reality is that there will not be sufficient social housing in place to accommodate many of those homeless persons who have moderate support needs, and so they will have to rely on the private rented sector for accommodation. The risk of suffering repeated housing crisis is greater in this sector for a number of reasons including lack of security of tenure and the degree to which private landlords may be equipped to deal with clients with difficulties.

A further challenge in helping newly housed persons to maintain their homes lies in ensuring continuity of support. It is envisaged that ultimately formerly homeless people will be integrated into mainstream healthcare services. While in principle this is sensible there are risks in this also – sometimes mainstream services (for example social work services) are stretched to the point where they can only deal with emergencies rather than fulfilling their proper role. Specialist homeless services should only be withdrawn when we can be confident that their withdrawal will not increase the risk of a return to homelessness and where mainstream services are in a position to be effective.

Without doubt we will all be challenged in the coming years to ensure that services, action plans and strategies are capable of addressing the rise in numbers of non nationals and non English speakers experiencing homelessness. As I noted earlier, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of eastern Europeans and other non-nationals finding themselves homeless in Ireland since the enlargement of the EU. The challenges here are to

...the political will to address homelessness is there. We are assured that the necessary resources will be put in place. Most of all, this new action plan provides a clear roadmap to our destination.

ensure that all those involved in the delivery of homeless services are aware of and able to deal with intercultural issues that may arise, that additional resources are made available towards interpretation and translation services and towards the recruitment of staff from new communities into homeless services.

The implementation of this plan will ultimately involve closing down homeless accommodation services and replacing them with long term housing with supports as necessary. Private emergency accommodation (B&Bs) hostels and shelters are symptomatic of social exclusion at its worst. No matter how well run they may be and regardless of the physical quality of the accommodation provided they are not the solution to the problem of homelessness. They are simply a bandage.

The longer a person is stuck in homeless services, the harder it is to get them unstuck. If we can reduce the numbers of people who become homeless, if we reduce the amount of time a person remains homeless and if we prevent people falling into homelessness once again then we will also need to reduce our investment in private emergency accommodation, in hostels or shelters and in day services. Paradoxically those of us involved in delivery of homeless services have a vested interest in the continuation of such services and as such for many of us this may be the greatest challenge of all.

Achieving the plan will involve effective inter-departmental and inter-agency working. It will involve influence as much as direction, imagination as much as resources.

In this article I have focussed on the difficulties involved in delivering on the action plan. I have talked about risks and challenges. I have made it clear that it won't be easy.

Nonetheless, the political will to address homelessness is there. We are assured that the necessary resources will be put in place. Most of all, this new action plan provides a clear roadmap to our destination. Let's get driving! ■

APARTMENT LIFE



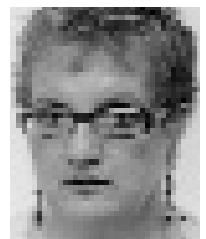
Most new homes built in Dublin are now apartments rather than houses. **Evelyn Hanlon** describes a recent survey of apartment living in Dublin, which shows that it can be a complicated business.

The Law Reform Commission's Consultation Paper (December 2006) found that 57.36% (8,236) of Dublin housing completions (January to September 2006) were apartments. Apartments therefore are here to stay, and this is mostly a response to the social and financial cost of commuting and the price of houses generally.

However most developers still seem sceptical that Irish families will be prepared to live in apartments and seem unconvinced that current supply issues are affecting demand. Concerns about schools, crime, drugs and teenagers apply to traditional houses as well as apartment in the city, but it does not affect demand for these houses, logically therefore concerns about

apartments in the same areas must centre on design, size, facilities, legal issues and management.

Recently Dublin City Council surveyed nearly 200 private apartment schemes and found that only 25% of them had open space suitable for children. The DOEHLG published draft guidelines for the design of apartments (Jan 2007) and Dublin City Council has committed to providing 'market rate' family apartments (i.e. owner/occupier purchasers paying the market rate for apartments rather than buying under affordable schemes or local authority sales schemes) in its regeneration projects in city locations to help demonstrate that demand, while stifled, does actually exist.



Evelyn Hanlon heads up the new Private Housing Unit in Dublin City Council which has been concentrating on developing a role for the local authority in private apartments



All the research suggests that there is an 'understanding deficit' among owners. Confused buyers are told to beware and to read the legal documents, (which are rarely provided in advance of signing). This type of advice does not acknowledge that apartment law (contract, company and land law) is fairly murky, and that owners as non-experts are expected to understand it

in ways that experts still struggling to get to grips with themselves. One of the problems with apartment leases and the head lease is that the language is complex and multi-layered and therefore only readily understood by legal experts. Even apart from the opaque language, multi-ownership itself is a complex, abstract, new and unfamiliar concept to most Irish apartment owners.

This is partly because of the extreme demarcation between tenures in Ireland, something that has been reinforced by fiscal policies that promote home ownership which until recently was exclusively seen as houses and not flats, (young apartment purchasers cannot call on their parents for advice as they tend to do when buying a house). If apartments remain unpopular with some sectors and household types, differentiation will extend beyond tenure into the form of housing itself.

The maintenance of the building structure e.g. lifts, roofs, windows, and external painting that apartment owners pay through their service charges is comparable to costs paid by owners to main their houses. However the privatisation of 'quasi' public infrastructure e.g. lighting, drains, water systems, communal open spaces, roads and pavements places an additional financial burden on apartment owners not faced by the 'house' owner. A recent article in the journal *Urban Studies* (December 2006) demonstrates that in New Zealand and the UK there is concern 'about the increasingly privatised nature of urban governance at a time when forms of property ownership are becoming progressively more differentiated'. Gated communities (flats and houses) present a challenge to social policies designed to improve social cohesion through greater social mix. In the long run people on low incomes and social housing landlords cannot afford to become part of privatised urban governance schemes but without them differentiation will become segregation and then social exclusion will be inevitable.

Concerns about governance and management affect perceptions of apartments as family homes. These concerns are fed by the 'drip-drip' of complaints in the media about problems with service charge levels, sinking funds, inappropriate designs, strike off by the Companies Registration Office of the owners' management company, and poor quality management. It is possible to detect unease, confusion, powerlessness and frustration in much of the discussion by owners about apartment living. The *Urban Studies* research theorises that this can all be

encapsulated as the usurpation of the owners 'right to manage' by the experts, (developers and the agents who effectively step into their shoes). Inexperienced owners and even commentators mix up the roles of the owners' management company and the managing agent. People with shared ownership and/or affordable housing options often experience confusion and a sense of helplessness in apartment developments. Much of this is because owners do not understand what services their agents have contracted to provide. Agents can be seen as 'mammy' and 'policeman' whose job is to do everything from getting the washing machine fixed to enforcing house rules against other owners but also to get the developer to complete the scheme and make good on the snag list for common areas and interiors of flats. They must take a lot of the blame for this confusion they almost never use formal written contracts or service level agreements. Some owners believe that all the service charge amount goes to the agent instead of being used to pay the insurance, electricity etc. Thus when owners feel aggrieved they resort to punishing the agent by not paying service charges. Of course if this becomes prevalent then utility bills, insurance, and auditors go unpaid and naturally stop providing services. Annual returns are not filed and the company can even be struck off. This means the flat cannot be sold because the legal title becomes unmarketable and the development becomes run down with a consequent negative impact on the residents quality of life.

Currently, there is no regulation or licensing system for managing agents, however the Government established the National Property Services Regulatory Authority during 2006, and when operational it should address many existing concerns. While licensing of agents is welcome, regulation needs to extend to a wider group of stakeholders:

- Owners' management companies should use prescribed formats for accounts, budgets and sinking funds to facilitate comparative analysis and provide owners with relevant information about management.
- Developers should be forced to vest common areas and remove their appointed directors as soon as possible to give owners control over their property. Sanctions should be imposed for non-completion; ideally there should be incentives to encourage completion e.g. retention of part of purchase price by purchaser's solicitor pending completion.
- Planners and architects should ensure designs are appropriate for families. Security and personal safety concerns are important in designs whether the scheme is gated or not. Lighting should be energy efficient and appropriate, waste areas should be secure, separate, covered and have access to water. Storage for bikes and bulky household items are needed. Layouts and construction standards should allow for taking in charge of elements of the infrastructure by the local authority to minimise privatised urban governance.
- Awareness raising and education of owners improves regulation, as does effective dispute resolution systems.

Agents can be seen as 'mammy' and 'policeman' whose job is to do everything from getting the washing machine fixed to enforcing house rules against other owners...

Developers and their advisors determine how service charges are to be apportioned and this is set out in the terms of the lease, apportionment is usually weighted to take account of area or number of bedrooms, but there is no clear agreement on what the most equitable basis is. Both agents and owners complain that developers and estate agents set service charge levels unrealistically low in Year 1 to encourage sales, the agent is then blamed in Year 2 when charges increase.

The research reports, consultation papers and media coverage of the last 12 months have all mentioned that the absence of hard information about service charges including comparative analysis is a significant contributor to the 'understanding deficit'. This lack of hard data increases the perceptions of potential apartment purchasers that the market is risky and uncertain. This latest research by Dublin City Council while including some qualitative information is predominantly quantitative and seems to test these largely anecdotal and qualitative research against some facts.

The financial information from the annual returns of 62 of the 193 schemes surveyed by Dublin City Council found that for 2005 the average the annual service charge per flat is €1,570 or €157,025 per scheme and of this the average managing agency fee is 11%, i.e. €178 per flat or €14,934 per scheme. Insurance is the most expensive item at 16%, cleaning 15%, repairs and maintenance 15%, refurbishment 4%, electricity 8%, security 7%, waste management 7%, landscaping 6%, lifts 5%, miscellaneous 5%, and gates/car park costs at 1%. In 2004 insurance represented an average of 20% of total expenditure which is nearly double what the agent charged in 2004.

In the survey arrears of service charges (debtors) are taken as an indicator of owner satisfaction, non-payment of service charges cause cash flow problems because few schemes have overdraft facilities. In general sinking fund provisions are very low. On average owners owed €243 each or 17% of total expenditure in service charges and had cumulative sinking fund savings of only €488 each or 34% of the annual revenue budget. (Sinking fund is the term used when money is put aside by owners each year to replace big items such as lifts, roofs, sewers, drains, but also to replace carpets and paint the outside of the buildings.)

The survey carried out by DCC referred to above found that few accounts gave even the most basic information; name of scheme and managing agent, if and when common areas were vested, if owners were directors, if company was limited by guarantee or shares. Revenue accounts often showed betterment and capital works. Some guarantee companies filed

abridged accounts which is not provided for in the acts.

While owners are in theory responsible through their board of directors for the decisions of their agents, there are obstacles to owners taking control. The most serious is the failure of developers to vest ownership of the common areas. While owners feel that vesting is the key to taking control, a study of Hong Kong

condominiums concluded that 'the power of ordinary owners is limited to participation at the AGM and, given the presence of a powerful management agent, even executives of the owners' corporations can be pushed to a marginal advisory role.'

In Ireland agents are seen as powerful by owners, they become the company secretaries, their office becomes the registered office, they set the budget, sign the cheques, and employ sub contractors. They are the only point of contact between owners and auditors, solicitors and the developer. Even when these services are done well and with the best of intentions, it can still be experienced as usurping the owners' right to manage. The research reported in *Urban Studies* into apartment living in New Zealand and the UK found that apartment owners felt 'they lack control over the management of the site and its facilities, despite their rights of legal ownership' and 'many residents complained of feelings of powerlessness and/or lack of knowledge, both with respect to the developer and with respect to the professional managing agent.'

In new schemes owners can become bogged down in snagging which can prevent them from coming together as a cohesive community able to challenge the powerful agent/developer relationship, indeed they often have to rely on the agent to be introduced to each other. They tend to view the management company as a faceless and vague entity whose significance is not understood. Dublin City Council is piloting a mentoring system to strengthen and encourage owners to take control. The industry as a whole is awaiting the outcome of regulation and most people are hoping that it will bring with it clarity, order and accountability. Research has highlighted a number of areas of potential tension, one between owner/occupiers and landlords (owner/occupiers see landlords disinterested in their tenants behaviour and exclusively interested in capital appreciation). The other tension is related to life style differences mostly centred on attitudes to open space i.e. solely visual or for active use. This affects attitudes to children, and also tenants particularly from other countries who tend to be use open space more actively. ■

...apartment owners felt 'they lack control over the management of the site and its facilities, despite their rights of legal ownership'...

Further reading: Dublin City Council's Successful Apartment Living (June 2006) and Research and Survey (February 2007). The National Consumer Agency published a report from the consumers' perspective in 2006, and both the Law Reform Commission and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement are currently consulting about their areas of interest (both reports December 2006). *Urban Studies* (Dec 2006) *Theorising Power Relationships in Multi-Owned Residential Developments; Unpacking the Bundle of Rights* by Sarah Blandy, Jennifer Dixon and Ann Dupuis.

A CAREER IN HOMELESSNESS
Dreadful living conditions - no money
- possibility of drug use - no prospects -
DO NOT APPLY!

A 'career' in youth homelessness?

It doesn't sound like something to look for in the job ads, but a 'career' in homelessness describes very well the progression of events that happen after someone first becomes homeless. **Paula Mayock** describes some of the findings of the first phase of a longitudinal study of youth homelessness in Dublin.



Paula Mayock is a senior researcher at the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin

Understanding Youth Homelessness: Key Findings from the First Phase of a Longitudinal Cohort Study, by Paula Mayock and Križan Vekić is published by the Office of the Minister for Children. You can download it from www.omc.gov.ie/docs/youth_homelessness.pdf (note 'homelessness' really is misspelled.)

Youth homelessness in Ireland is primarily an urban phenomenon and Dublin city has consistently recorded the highest number of homeless youth countrywide. Although available indicators suggest a decrease in the number of homeless people of all ages, the most recent estimate indicates that young people constitute a significant group among the overall homeless population¹. Despite this, youth homelessness has received relatively little research attention in Ireland, particularly in recent years, and there is a poor understanding of the events that typically unfold during the weeks and months following young people's first 'out of home' experience. This article draws on selected findings from Phase I of a longitudinal cohort

study of youth homelessness in Dublin city and considers what the research tells us about youth homeless 'careers'².

Although definitions of youth homelessness vary, there is general consensus that consideration needs to be given to a *continuum of housing situations* – ranging from young people at risk of homelessness to those who are temporarily without shelter to individuals who are persistently homeless – when seeking to understand the extent, nature and complexity of youth homelessness³. There is also growing recognition that the state of homelessness does not remain constant and is, instead, most often in a state of flux^{4 5}. In other words, the homeless experience is almost always subject to change: for some young people

¹ Homeless Agency (2005) *Counted In 2005*. Dublin: Homeless Agency.

² Phase I of this research was commissioned by the Office of the Minister for Children. Phase II is funded by the Homeless Agency.

³ Definitions of youth homeless have varied over time, particularly in terms of the boundaries between 'youth' and 'adult' homelessness. The research referred to in this article examined the life experiences of *single young homeless persons* but does not include children or young people who are part of homeless household.

⁴ Fitzpatrick, S. (2000) *Young Homeless People*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

⁵ Hudson, S. & Liddiard, M. (1994) *Youth Homelessness: The Construction of a Social Issue*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

homelessness can be fleeting, temporary or episodic while, for others, it is a more protracted experience punctuated by periods of temporary accommodation. Other youth remain homeless for prolonged periods of time and face overwhelming obstacles in their efforts to leave street life. The concept of 'career' is therefore useful in unravelling the paths that young people follow after their first homeless experience; it is also one that can potentially inform the development of strategies and interventions aimed at tackling the cycle of events that typically push young people towards longer-term homelessness.

The study set out to investigate the experience of homelessness using a *pathways approach*^{6 7} with the core aim of generating an in-depth understanding of youth homelessness based on the life histories, experiences and perspectives of young homeless people⁸. A total of 40 young people (17 young women and 23 young men) between the age of 14 and 22 years were interviewed in-depth for the purpose of the study; over half (55%) were 17 years or younger. At the time of interview, thirty-eight of the young people were living on the street or in other forms of unstable accommodation (e.g. adult hostels, short-term residential settings for young people under 18 years) and the remaining two had recently returned home following a period of rough sleeping. For the total sample, the duration of reported homelessness ranged from a two months to nine years: 45% of the young people had been homeless for 2 years or under, 27.5% for between 3 and 4 years and a further 27.5% for 5 years or more. Hence, over half of the young people interviewed had quite lengthy homeless 'careers'.

Although all of the young people had the common experience of leaving home prematurely, there was enormous diversity in the type and chronology of events precipitating their homelessness. In general, however, the move out of home (or care) was the 'end point' in a series of difficulties linked to home-based crises and/or their failure to adapt to care settings. Almost without exception, the young people came from poor neighbourhoods and most endured hardship during childhood linked to poverty, household instability and difficult life events. A large number experienced some form of disruption to family life arising from one or a combination of the following: household disruption (e.g. frequently moving house), family conflict, the presence of a stepparent and/or parental alcohol or drug problems. Seven of the young people reported an episode or prolonged period of physical abuse by a parent or caregiver (step parent or

aunt) and a further four witnessed violence against a family member (mother or siblings) in their homes during childhood. Finally, 40% reported a history of state care. This high number with prior experience of living in care settings is consistent with previous Irish and international research which has identified a care history as a key risk factor for homelessness.

On becoming homeless, some young people made immediate contact with the Out of Hours Service (OHS), that is, the designated service established to provide children and young people (under the age of 18) *in crisis* with accommodation⁹. Others did not access this service for a time and, instead, stayed with friends or extended family members for a period of days or weeks; a smaller number slept rough in their home neighbourhoods. Young people often returned home intermittently during the initial weeks of homelessness, suggesting that they were reluctant to make a more enduring break from family life at this juncture. This pattern of returning home highlights a 'window of opportunity' in terms of prevention and early intervention between young people and their parents or carers that is all too frequently missed. None of these young people resolved their home-based difficulties and they subsequently entered the official network of homeless youth through the Out of Hours Service.

Upon making contact with the OHS, young people entered into a system of intervention that was quite distinctive and the ensuing period saw many *engaging with the system* in numerous complex ways. At the point of accessing OHS accommodations – referred to invariably by young people as *hostels* – they had to familiarise themselves with their new surroundings and with those individuals who already occupied the living space they now shared. This was largely a process of 'sounding out', learning and waiting. Although many commented positively on the practical conveniences (food, shower and laundry facilities) and supports available to them in the hostels they accessed, settling in was nonetheless a stressful experience. Young people faced the challenge of negotiating new relationships within these highly transient settings and there was also considerable pressure to conform to the expectations of peers who were more established within the hostel 'scene'. Added to this, hostels are volatile environments where tensions often run high and, for residents, daily life has an intensity that is uncharacteristic of most other living situations. Overall, young people's entry to city-centre hostel settings constituted a significant turning point experience. Most made explicit reference to their

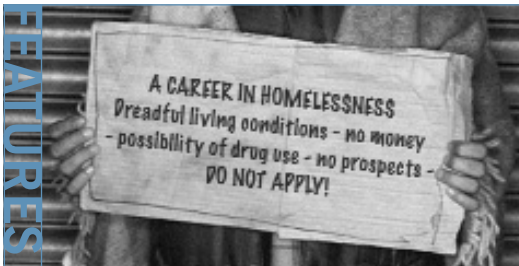
...young people constitute a significant group among the overall homeless population.

⁶ McKenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. (2003) *Homeless Careers: Pathways In and Out of Homelessness*. Swinburne and RMIT Universities.

⁷ Clapham, D. (2003) Pathways approaches to homeless research. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 13, 119–127.

⁸ For further detail on the research methodology and findings, see: Mayock, P. & Vekic, K. (2006) *Understanding Youth Homelessness in Dublin City: Key Findings from the First Phase of a Longitudinal Cohort Study*. Dublin: Office of the Minister for Children.

⁹ In 1992 the Health Service Executive (East) established a designated Crisis Intervention Service for homeless children and young people (referred to most commonly as the Out of Hours Service (OHS)). The requirements of the OHS stipulate that young people can only access the service by going to a Garda station after 8p.m. It is then the duty of the Gardaí to contact the out-of-hours social work team, which determines whether the young person can return home. If not, accommodation must be provided in one of the residential beds allocated to the emergency service. The residential settings where young people are typically placed are located in, or adjacent to, Dublin's city-centre.



exposure to unconventional activities and behaviours and to changes in their perception of opportunities and risk. Brendan, who was homeless since the age of twelve, explained:

I was twelve, about twelve and a half. I ran away from me ma's to into the city and just got known, got in with the wrong people, started robbing with them and then takin' drugs. Heroin was the second drug I took. I was just messed up from there on and kept fuckin' (pause) ... fucking up from that.
Brendan, age 17

Like many others who had been homeless for a number of years, Brendan had embarked on a path of alternating between various emergency and short-term accommodations, interrupted by periods spent sleeping rough, squatting and/or staying with romantic partners, relatives or friends. This was a time of profound instability for young people and many quickly developed strong connections with street-based youth homeless 'scenes'. Although a considerable number were already drug-experienced by the time they accessed city-centre hostels, most expanded their drug repertoire and several initiated heroin use. This period also saw many extending or embarking for the first time on behaviours and activities that enabled them to finance their everyday needs, including criminal offending.

It's a life of fucking crime, that's it. It's like a big circle being in the hostels. I've been in them years, you know what I mean ... Because if you're homeless, right, you're kicked out at half-nine in the morning and you can't go in 'till eight o'clock. So you've that whole day to waste, do you know what I mean. And how are you meant to be in school as well? It's very hard to be in education because like, by the time you go in at eight they see you, you know what I mean, you get placed, they bring you off somewhere, you stay there for the night, you wake up. It's very hard to get up in the morning and to FÁS and all ... And, you know, in Le Froy you'd wake up with six people there, you know what I mean. And they say "I'm going off robbing" and "Where are you going?" And you're automatically sucked in to the robbing business. Rather go out and rob something, and that's what you earn in the whole week, you know what I mean, for going out robbing someone, you earn the same amount. That's it.
Christian, 17

In general, young people with longer histories of homelessness reported far greater involvement in the street economy where they engaged in theft, drug selling and begging as part of a wider repertoire of survival strategies. Many also became entrenched in heavy or problematic drug use. As time progressed, their ability to manage their daily lives was hampered

increasingly by the absence of a stable place to live and, for a considerable number, by physical health and psychological problems. The stresses in the lives of these young people were numerous and ranged from everyday worries to more acute stress related to specific or ongoing personal, social, health or psychological problems.

Well, living on the streets causes stress like, sometimes it can cause me stress. Heroin causes me stress, robbing causes me stress.
Wayne, aged 21

[What kinds of things do you worry about?]

Prison now would be a big worry now, prison. And being homeless for longer and longer, you know. It's like it will never end. I can't sort myself out.
Connor, aged 19

The use of alcohol and drugs to self-medicate or as an escape route from daily hardships was commonly reported, highlighting the absence of alternative and more affirmative sources of social support.

The only thing that helps me is hash. Helps me with all me problems. If I've anything [pause] ... I have a joint and mellow out and I'd be alright, do you know what I mean.
Joe, aged 19

There is nothing fixed or absolute about youth homeless careers and no inevitable progression to more chronic homeless states. However, this study's Phase I findings demonstrate just how rapidly 'careers' in homelessness can progress and highlight patterns that suggest that homelessness can become a progressive decline for young people. Those whose participation in homeless street scenes extended for longer moved incrementally towards making a more *permanent break* from home, family and community. Their life stories also point to the services they accessed as teenagers – and their interactions with and responses to these services – as a significant and, all too often, negative turning point experience. The concentration of services targeting youth *in crisis* in city-centre locations is clearly problematic and may well facilitate young people's entry to street life.

One of the most obvious ramifications of being homeless and young is the absence of a stable home, and the shelter, security and protection that it affords. Homeless children and young people's low level of guardianship limits their ability to protect themselves or to be protected from the harm that potentially awaits them on the streets. Not all of the young people interviewed for the purpose of this study developed drug problems nor did all become involved in criminal activity. Nonetheless, the findings suggest a corresponding progression of homeless, drug and criminal 'careers' among at least a proportion who reported longer histories of homelessness. ■

Prison now would be a big worry now, prison. And being homeless for longer and longer, you know. It's like it will never end. I can't sort myself out.



READYFORWORK

The *Ready for Work* programme, run by Business in the Community, offers training and work experience for ex-homeless people. **Fran Cassidy** interviewed *Ready for Work*'s co-ordinator **Rosemary Carvill** to find out more.

In a previous Cornerstone, Warren Pherson of the Foundations Project spoke of the value to (ex)-homeless people of earning a wage, citing a graduate of Business in the Community's *Ready for Work* programme, who is now a manager with Marks & Spencer, and who 'speaks of the huge difference it makes to be treated with full respect like a normal citizen.'

Then last October, the *Ready for Work* Programme was the subject of both a half hour

discussion on the Pat Kenny Show, and an editorial in The Irish Times that characterised the programme as 'representing something of a minor miracle for those involved.' And so, armed with a vague scepticism about 'business' and 'altruism' inhabiting the one sentence, I am dispatched to Business in the Community's head office on O'Connell Street.

'That publicity was very welcome' the *Ready for Work* co-ordinator Rosemary Carvill tells me. 'We also did a Bite Size learning session in the



Rosemary Carvill is co-ordinator of Ready for Work

When they actually meet candidates, that removes the fear – it's not somebody with seven heads waiting to attack, it's just a person who happens to be homeless.

Homeless Agency, which had a large turnout from services, with great feedback. People have started applying for the next course before this one is even half way through. It seems to have filtered through to services that we are here and what we do.'

Which is?

'Well in conjunction with business we offer training and work experience to people who are ready for work. We run a programme for sixteen 'candidates' three times a year (in January, May and September with registration some weeks prior to these). And with the support of our Steering Group, more recently, we set up interviews for 6 to 12 month job contracts for these candidates, and try to steer them through those.

'It's like brokering a deal between a business and someone who is or has been homeless, and defusing the fear on both sides. If a business wants to get involved they can first come along to our training as a volunteer. When they actually meet candidates, that removes the fear – it's not somebody with seven heads waiting to attack, it's just a person who happens to be homeless. And homeless people gain confidence to rejoin the working world.'

I wonder what's in it for the businesses involved.

'Businesses are thriving in the current economy. And that's wonderful, but they often have difficulties recruiting staff. For the firms involved this programme can be a recruitment solution and we engage with them on a business level. *Ready for Work* also gives them a chance to change the face of homelessness in Ireland. Instead of complaining about somebody sleeping in their doorway, they can shift the focus. If we can move more settled people on from hostels, perhaps the next guy can get a bed and more care. It's also an opportunity for businesses to give something back, consumer surveys show that homelessness is an issue that the public cares about. It's a very practical solution to provide somebody with a job.

And for the candidates?

'It's a chance to start afresh for people who are ready for work. It's about people moving on, not dwelling on past mistakes. We are not social workers. From a candidate's perspective we offer a friendly, supportive service.

'For the candidate the programme involves a couple of days motivational training followed by two weeks work experience, and then they are teamed up with a Training and Employment Officer who is trained in adult guidance. In all, this takes three weeks, which is unpaid so it's a commitment on the candidates' behalf.'

What does the motivational training involve?

'People tend to look a bit shocked when I describe the initial motivational training' Rosemary

laughs. 'It includes visualisation exercises, how to manage change and move forward, and pointers around presenting yourself, such as maintaining eye contact, shaking hands properly, the way you sit, or how to accept a compliment.

'It's a very cheerful informal process though, a bit like a social event, but people learn a lot and it greatly increases their confidence. One of the many great things about this programme is the intimacy in these groups, and it's absolutely great fun, please stress that.'

I am happy to do so. Talking to Rosemary it is clear that the professionalism and seriousness of purpose of the working world are combined with a disarming and easy good humour, which I suspect makes her training very enjoyable and effective. In fact at one point she gives a brief, affectionate impression of a typical Irish response to praise (replete with down cast eyes and 'ah shure' mutterings and shrugs) that is so painfully accurate, that it makes me laugh out loud while making a mental note to reassess my own habitually clumsy responses.

'After the two days training' she tells me, 'most candidates feel extremely motivated and confident, but simultaneously terrified. Literally, we have the two days, everybody relaxes and we all get to know each other and everything is great and they are all gung-ho heading to their placement, and then they can disappear en-route, even though it's just down the road. So now we actually bring people into the business where they are having their placement'

'And here again, it's very supportive because the business teams them up with a "Buddy" in the workplace to give on the job support. The "Buddies" don't stand on their shoulder because that's too time consuming and it's not like having a proper job. The idea is that you are shown how to do something and then encouraged to do it.

'At Marks and Spencer for example they have a little book and as each person completes a task it is stamped and signed off, so that each candidate has a passport of skills at the end. Other companies like Brown Thomas wouldn't be so formal but that's not to say that they aren't equally as effective. If the buddy is on their break or has a day off, then other members of the team will take up that role. Of course it's important within the businesses that the managers keep involved and check-in periodically that things are going okay and provide a reference at the end.

'After the work experience each candidate accesses our training and employment officer (TEO) who assesses their levels of need and the barriers before trying to help the person move on. They produce an updated CV. We understand that people may have gaps here, that they may have been in prison or whatever, and we encourage them to be honest about that whilst not inappropriately disclosing their whole life stories.' We also have business volunteer Job Coaches who have been trained by us to supplement the TEO's role.

I wonder how the programme defines being ready for work.

Ready for Work

'It depends. A lot of what ready for work is, is a state of mind. To recognise that it is time to move on and to be happy to embrace change. One individual may have very few skills but be highly motivated. We can help that person work towards a goal and they can get there rapidly. Then you can have a highly skilled, intelligent person who has decided to put up every self-limiting barrier known to man. They can find it more difficult to progress than someone with a lower skill set.'

'Ready for Work requires courage of candidates as well. I was terrified starting this job and I hadn't been homeless. For homeless people who can already be vulnerable, the fear can be enormous.'

'And sometimes key workers have to let people go too. Sometimes they might say that "I don't think he or she will be able for that." And in fact they are. And then again you have the other side where keyworkers are saying, "Well he/she is able". And they're not. So it's trying to find that balance. And of course candidates have to want to be here. If someone is not engaging, or is unwilling to put in the work, that's an issue.'

And the entry requirements?

'People from 18 to 60 access the programme. We have people who have mental or physical health problems, addiction problems or who have suffered separation or bereavement. As anybody in homelessness services knows the gamut is wide.'

'The reality though is that candidates need to have reached a certain level if they are to cope. The core requirements would be that people are in stable accommodation, and present as clean, sober and with any mental health issues under control, for a minimum of 12 weeks prior to starting. If you send somebody out that might still be using drugs for example, you don't just ruin it for them, but for anyone hoping to get a placement there. So we don't take those sorts of chances. We are very honest with people'

Do you take people on methadone?

'We do – in fact it's seldom that a programme runs without someone on methadone. And it isn't an issue for most companies provided that everything is well managed. From experience, it's easier to have someone who is on weekly or fortnightly takeaways rather than someone in early stages of recovery who has to go in every day.'

'Candidates also need basic skills such as the ability to communicate. Very poor interpersonal skills need to be worked on before coming to us because this person is going in to work as part of a team. If a person can't say "Hello" at registration without choking, then there isn't a hope that he or she is going to go on into a successful work placement.'

'We can cope with literacy difficulties. During the training itself we have a volunteer sit with the person and we ensure that people aren't put in a situation where they are under pressure. Then there are jobs such as gardening or working with horses which might be more preferable for candidates who have some literacy challenges.'

And referrals?

'A key worker makes the referral. We have a range of services that refer, including those dealing with people in transitional housing, as well as those in hostels, B&Bs or with people who are lucky enough to have moved on to a Council or Private Rented Flat. We are willing to take referrals from key workers from any service really. But there isn't any point in sending us people who are chaotic.'

'The application assessment form that is quite detailed and a keyworker needs to sit with their client to do that. And we do take quite personal details though in terms of data protection we take all necessary precautions. We have also developed a risk assessment form. This form is really about how vulnerable a candidate is, and so that you can approach a company with accurate information, some of this information is shared with the manager. In the real world of job seeking, the reality is that the company have every right to ask if you have a criminal record and if you lie about that it's a dismissible offence. It's far better to have it out there from the beginning. Nobody wants secrets.'

'We have service level agreements for the referral services and the businesses so that they know what we are offering and what we would expect from them in return. We also have a service level agreement for the candidates so again they know what we offer and what their supporting host business is to provide. That's their key to the whole thing.'

It's also an opportunity for businesses to give something back, consumer surveys show that homelessness is an issue that the public cares about.

And in the future?

'Anglo-Irish Bank have been great in terms of funding us over the last few years, and their chairperson Sean Fitzpatrick and the rest of the Steering Group have been phenomenal. Business Action on Homelessness our 'sister company' in the UK have also been helpful, and this year we got funding from FAS as a special project, so we're really hoping that we can continue in the vein we are in. Ready for Work is one of a number of social inclusion programmes run by Business in the Community. Others include Linkage which works to establish links between employers and ex offenders referred by Probation Officers., and EPIC, for foreign nationals with Irish born children who have been given leave to remain here. We also have a consultancy for business that deals with corporate responsibility and community involvement in addition to a Schools' Business Partnership initiative. So a lot goes on here! ■



CornerStone Questionnaire

Sam McGuinness

Director, Dublin Simon Community

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

When I was involved with the Galway Lions Club in the early eighties distributing food parcels to needy families in the Rahoon flats area I got very frightened, not for my safety, but by the devastation around these families.

Has your understanding of homelessness changed since then?

At that time I could not conceive solutions. Now I believe there is no excuse. The same problems have been identified time and time again, the resources are available and the action plan for 2007–2010 is launched awaiting implementation. Results are needed now.

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

(a) People should have a legislative right to housing and the supports they need. If a partnership model won't work, we need to name that and find a structure that will, be it a National Statutory body or an elected representative responsible for the Greater Dublin area who is politically accountable.
(b) Outside of Policy: I would stop gathering people from the streets and closeting, roofing and warehousing them in sub standard accommodation, out of sight and out of mind of the

general public. We need to raise our own expectation of meeting the 'Putting People First' standards and consistently treating people in the manner we would wish our friends and relatives to be treated in similar circumstances. We should all have the same right to health, safety, respect, dignity and information.

What have you learnt from homeless people you have met?

All have lost friends and that scares them. Most are tired, suffering illness, lonely and vulnerable. They are looking for help and feel discarded. They want to get their lives back and know they are recycling themselves constantly.

They know the problems because they have them, they know the answers and want to share them. They want their lives back. They want a place and a neighbour like the rest of us. They know they have health issues, behavioural issues, and relationship issues. In many cases they did not start out with any or all of these but they have them now. We need to ensure their participation in decision making and involvement in drawing up of their care plans.

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

Certainly not to the extent or the depth we witness today on the streets in shelters or B&Bs. Plans to make a difference have been identified. We

need to solve the problem not keep treating it. The root causes are known and have been well documented in the present Homeless Agency plan.

We must be more impatient for progress, play our collective parts **and** be more demanding for conclusions not treatment, otherwise today's children will be the next generation of homeless adults.

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

While the statutory sector may have the same end goals and sincerity, they are constrained by the system. NGO's have a passionate sense of urgency, less constrained and in many cases less selfishly driven. NGO's may also be expected by the public to be more responsive and closer to the problems and the solution.

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

Celebrate! Reinvent Dublin Simon and guide the community towards some other place where we can work together to 'Bring Sunshine'.

Do you give money to people who are begging?

Seldom – the offer I make is my personal commitment to playing my part in working within the sector to make a difference and bring on change faster. ■

CornerStone is distributed free by the Homeless Agency. If you know someone who would like to receive CornerStone, or you would like your own copy, contact:

Homeless Agency
Parkgate Hall
6–9 Conyngham Road
Dublin 8
Tel 01 703 6100
Fax 01 703 6170
Email homeless@dublincity.ie
Web www.homelessagency.ie

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