

Issue 42

July  
2010

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### CornerStone interview

Martin Naughton



The magazine of the Homeless Agency

# New configuration of homeless and housing support services in Dublin



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

**ISSN No: 1393-7766**

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**Design** Red Dog Design Consultants  
**Print** Glennon Print

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



**Note from the editor**  
**The changing shape of social housing in Ireland**

Joe Finnerty's article in this issue of CornerStone on the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, asks a fundamental question: does the implementation of this Act mean the end of social housing as we know it?

One thing we definitely do know is that social housing from now on will be different. Housing Minister Michael Finneran said in September last year: "Once again let me be clear on this – new social housing supply will for the foreseeable future, largely come from market based mechanisms and long-term leasing is central to this." Just to remind you, long-term leasing means that housing is rented from developers by local authorities or housing associations for say 20 years, and during that time sub-let to tenants.

So what are the implications of this new arrangement for tenants? Well, the first thing, as Joe Finnerty points out, is that tenant purchase goes out of the window. Since the social housing provider (local authority or housing association) won't own the housing, it won't be theirs to sell. Secondly, since at the end of the lease, the housing will be returned to the owner, long-term security of tenure will no longer apply. Finally, the Act allows for the possibility of replacing the differential rent system (where the rent is based exclusively on the tenant's income and not on the property), with a market rent system.

Not all these changes are necessarily bad: many commentators have criticised the tenant purchase scheme; and the differential rent scheme, which has one major advantage of guaranteeing affordability, also has major weaknesses.

But whether or not these changes occur, it is essential that there is a debate about it; one that involves tenants, local authorities, housing associations, the Oireachtas and others. Right now I don't see any sign of that debate, and that is a worry.

**Simon Brooke**

**The magazine of the Homeless Agency**

**New configuration of homeless and housing support services in Dublin**



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## NEWS

## After prison: aftercare or no care?

*"It's like stepping on a landmine..." Reintegration of Prisoners in Ireland can be downloaded from [www.iprt.ie](http://www.iprt.ie)*

A report published recently by the Irish Penal Reform Trust points to patchy provision of after-care facilities for prisoners. There is a shortage of probation and education staff and prisoners are often left to find out about services themselves – often from other prisoners. The lack of planning for release means prisoners have difficulty linking in with necessary services on release, including homelessness support, mental health care, and addiction treatment. The report noted that prisoners who leave without a place to stay are more likely to re-offend, and it found that homelessness and the provision of suitable accommodation was by far the most frequently mentioned difficulty facing prisoners and the service providers supporting them on release. Whilst acknowledging progress made through a number of new initiatives, the report's authors are concerned by the lack of support provided to people leaving prison.

Contrast this with research published recently in the UK by an offender charity, St Giles Trust, that assessed the benefits of one of its programmes, called Through the Gates, which provided support to prison leavers around accommodation, employment, and training. The research assessed the economic impact of Through the Gates by balancing the costs of the programme against the costs of re-offending. The researchers found that the Through the Gates reoffending rate is 40% lower than the national re-offending rate, and was concluded that for every £1 invested in Through the Gates, £10 is saved through the costs of re-offending.

So it's as plain as the nose on your face: planned release from prison with structured access to comprehensive aftercare services will reduce re-offending rates, reduce homelessness, and save bucket loads of money. It's a no-brainer ... isn't it?

## Bullying and harassment

*Bullying and harassment in hostels and supported housing: research and recommendations can be found at [www.streettohome.org/Aboutus/LatestNews/Bullyingandharassmentresearchandrecommendations](http://www.streettohome.org/Aboutus/LatestNews/Bullyingandharassmentresearchandrecommendations)*

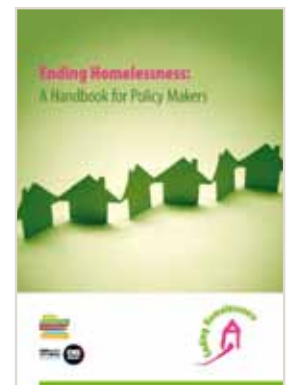
Not a lot is known about bullying and harassment among residents in hostels and supported housing, so research by London homeless charity Broadway into this issue breaks new ground. Interviews and focus groups with residents and staff found the following:

- Bullying and harassment can take many forms, including 'borrowing' money, cigarettes, phones or other possessions and not returning them; banging on doors and using people's rooms to take drugs; physical violence; and sexual exploitation.
- Good practice in dealing with bullying and harassment included prominently displaying information, staff dealing with bullying both proactively (without waiting for clients to report it) and discreetly, and staff who are seen to take bullying and harassment seriously.
- There are several barriers to dealing with bullying and harassment, in particular clients rarely reporting it (often because of stigma or fear of retaliation); and staff not always having the tools or power to deal with it (for example by swiftly evicting serious perpetrators).
- Successful ways of **preventing bullying** include: client information, advice, training and support; staff presence in the building; and intercoms.
- Successful ways of **identifying bullying** and encouraging reporting include: ensuring confidentiality; trusted staff discussing the issue in key work; providing a range of forums for discussion; and tackling stigma.
- Successful ways of **responding to bullying** include: formal chats and warnings about eviction; mediation; and moving people's rooms.

## NEWS

# A not very handy handbook

*Ending Homelessness: A Handbook for Policy Makers* can be downloaded from [www.feansta.org](http://www.feansta.org)



As you all know, 2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and as part of this, FEANTSA, the European network of national NGOs working on homelessness, has produced *Ending Homelessness: A Handbook for Policy Makers*. The handbook's starting point is that the aim of homelessness policies should be to end homelessness rather than manage it, stating that 'continuing to manage the problem is neither sustainable nor acceptable in today's Europe'. It sets out five goals that, when achieved, will lead to the end of homelessness:

1. No one sleeping rough
2. No one living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an 'emergency'
3. No one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on
4. No one leaving an institution without housing options
5. No young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living

Rather surprisingly, the provision of long-term housing isn't one of these goals, and whilst appropriate support in long-term housing is referred to in passing, neither of these crucial elements play a central role in the proposed strategy framework. It is difficult to see how a strategy that

doesn't include long-term housing with appropriate support as a headline aim, will lead to the end of homelessness. It might manage homelessness better, but as the report itself acknowledges, that is not good enough.

*Ending Homelessness* includes a 'toolkit', which sets out 10 approaches that should be included in the development of a strategy. CornerStone is all in favour of brevity, but when a 'toolkit' covers less than a page and a half, and comprises a list of rather vague bullet points, it is less like a toolkit and more like an old bent screwdriver in a shoe box under the stairs.

However, *Ending Homelessness* does include a fascinating European tour of homelessness strategies, which shows, amongst other things, that Ireland's aim of eliminating the need to sleep rough and ending long-term homelessness by the end of this year is ambitious compared with other countries. Not surprisingly most other strategies are found in Western and Northern Europe (e.g Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK). Southern European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece) have traditionally resisted anything as organised as a national plan, and are mainly maintaining this position, but Portugal has broken ranks and encouraged by the European Commission, has now started to implement its own strategy.

Overall though, a disappointing handbook from an organisation whose publications are normally of a high standard.

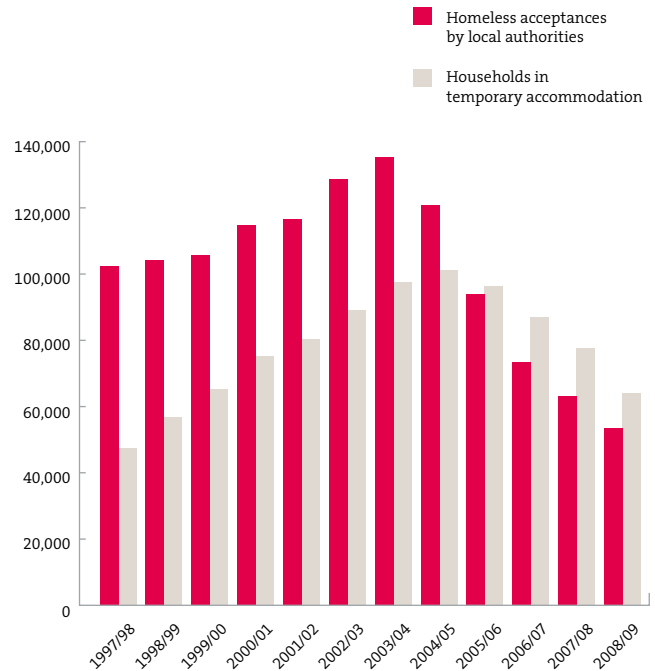
NEWS

# Homelessness down in England

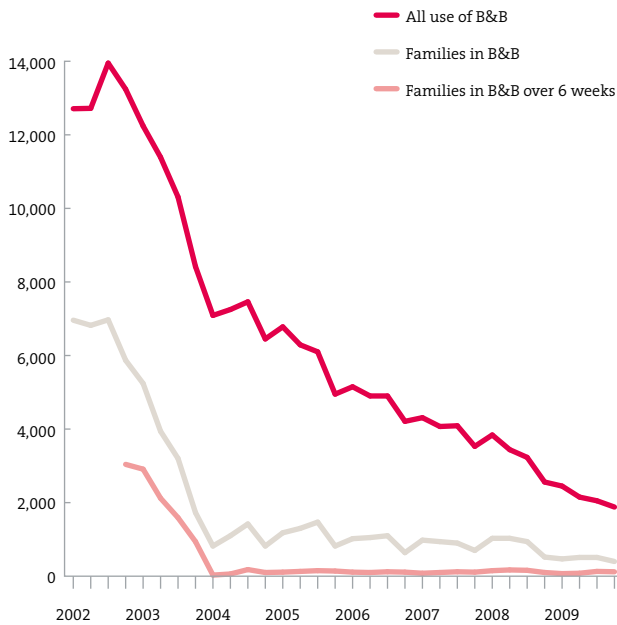
More on tackling rough sleeping in London is on [www.london.gov.uk/media/press\\_releases\\_mayoral/ending-rough-sleeping-london-one-year](http://www.london.gov.uk/media/press_releases_mayoral/ending-rough-sleeping-london-one-year)  
 More figures on homelessness trends in England are on [www.communities.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/homelessnesstrends](http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/homelessnesstrends)

In 1988, the British Labour government set out to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds. This was achieved, and ten years later a rough sleeping strategy was put in place that aimed to eliminate rough sleeping completely by 2012. In London, this has involved targeting the most entrenched rough sleepers first: a group of 205 people were identified who had been seen sleeping rough for at least five out of the last ten years or on more than 50 separate occasions. Three quarters of this group are now off the streets – some in their own flats, some in specialist housing. The rough sleeping initiative has also included identifying hidden rough sleepers who sleep on London’s night buses; discharge protocols for prisons and hospitals (this seems to be a universal problem); improving health outcomes for rough sleepers; tackling rough sleeping among people from Central and Eastern Europe. London NGOs, whilst welcoming this progress, are not complacent; they know there is a long way to go before rough sleeping is eliminated. But which ever way you look at it, it’s a huge step forward.

In England, families with children (and some single people) have a legal right to a home. Local authorities have the responsibility for providing housing for these households. The graph opposite shows the numbers of households accepted as homeless by English local authorities.



As you can see this peaked in 2003/4 and by 2008/9 had dropped by a whopping 60%. The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation peaked a bit later, in 2004/2005 and by 2008/9 had dropped by a third.



In March 2002, the government set a target of ending the use of bed and breakfast for homeless families with children except in an emergency and then for no longer than six weeks, by March 2004. The graph shows that this target was achieved – from 2004 almost no families were in B&B for more than six weeks and the total number of families in B&B had dropped by nearly 90%. At the same time the total number of all households (including single people and couples without children) in B&B has continued to fall.

## A daft report

The latest report from daft.ie, *The Daft.ie Rental Report* suggests that in Dublin at least, private rented sector rents are beginning to bottom out, having fallen between 25% and 30% from their peak in early 2008. Rents in Cork and Waterford seem also to have hit a trough whilst in Galway and Limerick, they're still falling, but gently. The pattern across the country is very similar with rents either static, or falling less steeply than before. This may not be what renters want to hear but will be music to the ears of landlords.



## homelesspages.org.uk

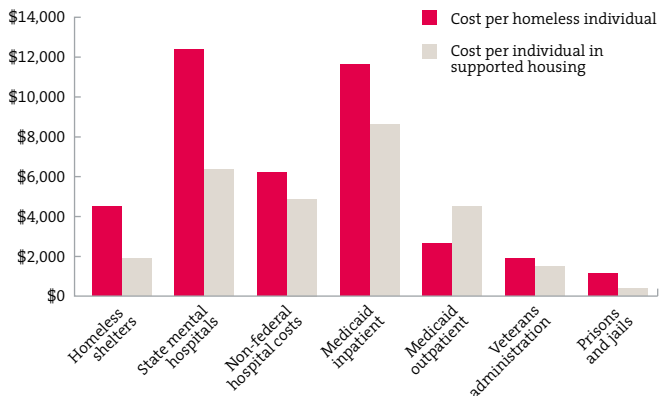
...is the address of a new website run by UK homeless service umbrella group, Homeless Link. It contains details of over 1,600 publications published by about 120 voluntary organisations, 30 commercial publishers, 30 statutory bodies, and over 400 local authorities. Obviously, since it's UK-based, it is not the place to look if you want to know how many people are homeless in Ireland, or what to do if you're homeless in Dublin. But if you want to know about current best practice in homeless services, or research on homelessness in the UK (including Northern Ireland), it's a really good resource. And as well as an easy to use search engine, it has a cool feature called a tag cloud which is a sort of index of keywords in which the size of the font tells you how much information there is on any particular topic.

## NEWS

## Housing homeless people saves money

Most research on homelessness that is carried out in Europe is qualitative; whereas in the USA most of it is quantitative. There are lots of reasons for this and somewhere someone is probably doing a PhD on this very topic. One of the consequences of the quantitative approach is that if you put your mind to it you can work out what the costs (or savings) might be of implementing a social programme.

For example, if you know which health and other services people use and how often, you can work out the cost of using those services. And if you do that for people who are homeless, and again when they're housed, you can find out how their use of services changes when they're housed, and what this costs. Have a look at the chart below, which is from a paper produced by the National Alliance to End Homeless.



This shows that people in supported housing use nearly all the services listed less than people who are homeless. The one exception is outpatient hospital care which – not surprisingly, since they now have homes to go back to – people who are housed use in preference to inpatient hospital care. So this demonstrates conclusively that housing homeless people **saves money**. And if that doesn't bring colour to the cheeks of policy makers, I don't know what will.

Of course that is the USA, and this is Ireland, so not all the costs are comparable. But CornerStone would put a very sizeable bet on Irish results being very similar to the American findings.

## Update on Update

Update is the Homeless Agency's online bi monthly newsletter, which you can read on [www.homelessagency.ie](http://www.homelessagency.ie). The May/June issue is on the website and includes the following:

- Progress on Pathway to Home 2010
  - 1 Prevention Services
  - 2 Temporary Accommodation and Services
  - 3 Housing and Support Services
  - 4 Map of Homeless Services
- Homeless Directory replaced by Case Management Guidebook
- Dublin Homeless Action Plan Adopted by Dublin Local Authorities
- Homeless Survey 2010
- Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency – [www.housing.ie](http://www.housing.ie)
- Viva House Opens in Blanchardstown
- Review of Methadone Treatment Protocol
- Introducing Board Member Charles MacNamara, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
- Introducing Consultative Forum Member Clare Schofield – CDVEC
- Write on 4 Work – Distance Learning Programme by NALA
- Merchants Quay Ireland – Return to Employment, Training & Education
- Minister John Gormley Protects Homeless Budget
- A day in the life – Barbara Corcoran, Sundial House, Depaul Ireland



FEATURES



# New configuration of homeless and housing support services in Dublin

**Cathal Morgan** is director of the Homeless Agency

Implementation of the *Pathway to Home* model is at a very important stage. **Cathal Morgan** outlines the progress made so far, and sets out a profile of the new services that will be provided.



### Implementing a *Pathway to Home* – where are we now?

We are at a very important stage in the implementation of the *Pathway to Home* model and the agreement of the future direction of homeless service provision in Dublin. The key principle for all partners involved in the *Pathway to Home* model is the placement of the person who is experiencing homelessness at the centre of decision making, recognising that services would only be configured on the basis that the person's housing, support and care needs would be met and that resources would be redirected to addressing their needs in long-term housing. No service will be decommissioned in 2010 unless there is an alternative for service users in place.

I would go as far as to suggest that access to housing is perhaps our greatest challenge to date, and one which we must resolve in order to meet the vision of 2010. The process of changing how services will be delivered to people who are homeless in Dublin has been a challenging task and is wholly dependent on the provision of housing with particular regard to the attainment of 1200 housing units under the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) enhanced social housing leasing arrangements. These arrangements will play a central and critical part in the delivery of suitable long-term accommodation options for people who are homeless and currently residing in temporary forms of accommodation. The four Dublin local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's) are combining their efforts to source suitable properties that can be used as part of the new leasing arrangements. An enhanced programme for long-term provision of mainstream accommodation for people exiting temporary homeless accommodation with the investment of €20 million capital funding has been agreed. More recently, the Minister approved a Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) for the provision of accommodation, with a further €25 million, which includes people who are homeless as a specific 'category of need'. Minister Finneran and his officials have and continue to be very committed to making the enhanced leasing arrangements work, in addition to all stakeholders who are working hard to ensure the successful implementation of the social leasing process.

*No service will be decommissioned in 2010 unless there is an alternative for service users in place*

The last period since November 2009, has seen extensive formal discussions with executive management and respective Board members from individual service providers and a statutory subgroup of the *Pathway to Home* Implementation Advisory Group (IAG), under the chairmanship of the Homeless Agency. The IAG was constituted by the Board of the Homeless Agency Partnership in 2009 as a decision making body to ensure implementation of agreed actions and to take on a negotiating role with funded service providers in terms of the changes required to minimise the length of time people stay in temporary forms of accommodation and to maximise the delivery of long-term housing with supports.

The core objective of each meeting was to discuss and agree the future direction for each individual organisation in the new configuration of homeless and housing support services aligned to the *Pathway to Home* model and in accordance with the key strategic aims as set out in *A Key to the Door, 2007-2010* and the National Homeless Strategy, *The Way Home 2009-2013*.

A number of key principles were taken into consideration during the negotiations that took place between individual service providers and the statutory subgroup of the IAG, which informed services, including:

- Strategic fit with a *Pathway to Home* model
- Localising services – moving a number of services from the city centre area
- Quality standards taking into account previous evaluations and audits of built environment
- Guiding principles of reconfiguration
- Analysis of data – Holistic Needs Assessment, *Counted In, 2008*
- Individual organisations strengths and existing service provision
- Individual organisations express view in their future role in the *Pathway to Home* model
- Audit of homeless accommodation
- The need to consolidate resources
- Governance and financial sustainability of individual organisations
- Outcomes and recommendations of various working groups

To give you a sense of the changes that will be taking place it is important to recognise and understand the portfolio of housing and temporary accommodation types and services outlined in the *Pathway to Home* model.<sup>1</sup> The following detail provides an overview of the new services to be provided under the portfolio of services, in addition the detail refers to significant organisational changes as result of the reconfiguration process.

### **A. Interventions and Services That Prevent Homelessness – 5 core elements**

#### *A1 and A:2 Local Authority Homeless Helpline and Local Authority Housing Service*

The four Dublin local authorities have developed draft operational plans for the Local Authority Housing Service, which will be the main contact point for persons presenting as homeless. All four local authorities have established teams in each of their respective areas for the management of the Assessment and Placement function and the Helpline and Bed Management System.

#### *A:3 Community Welfare Service*

As recognised in a *Pathway to Home* it is important to maintain and enhance the welfare and income maintenance competency as part of the core functions of the Community Welfare Officers aligned to the Homeless Persons Unit to prevent homelessness for those who are at risk. The enhanced role of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) would be reconfigured to provide a diversion from entry into temporary accommodation and towards accessible private rented housing. The intention here would be that the CWS would work closely with the Local Authority Housing Service and the Prison and Probation Services to deliver a local registration, referral, placement and welfare advice for people presenting with homelessness.

#### *A:4 Regional Contact and Outreach Team*

A Regional Contact and Outreach Service is being established to work across the four Dublin local authorities. The service will take an assertive approach targeting all rough sleepers with specific focus on those who are entrenched rough sleepers or at risk of entrenchment. The service will work as an integral element of the Local Authority Housing Service and will link closely with the specialist homeless psychiatric teams of the HSE.

Operational plans are currently being developed and it is anticipated that the service will be operational over the summer period.

#### *A: 5 Homeless Prevention Services*

One of the preventative functions of a *Pathway to Home* is Day Service provision, which is recognised as a vital frontline role in engaging with and providing services to rough sleepers, a critical element of the 2010 vision to eliminate the need for people to sleep rough. Under the new structure of provision Day Services will be aimed at reducing harm and social isolation, nutrition and access to the network of homeless, housing, social/welfare and healthcare.

There are two specific operational changes forthcoming to Day Service provision, which will ensure extended hours of provision in the Dublin City Council area and localisation of provision throughout the Dublin local authorities.

*The process of changing how services will be delivered to people who are homeless in Dublin has been a challenging task and is wholly dependent on the provision of housing*

<sup>1</sup> Pathway to Home – The *Pathway to Home* model portfolio: summary outline detail of prevention services, temporary accommodation and services, housing and housing support services p35

## **B. Temporary Emergency Accommodation and Services – 4 core elements**

### *B1 and B2: Local Authority Housing Service*

The detail in relation to this is outlined in A1 and A2

### *B3 and B4: supported Temporary Accommodation (STA) and Temporary Accommodation (TA)*

As outlined in a *Pathway to Home*, the four local authorities will work to ensure appropriate capacity of temporary emergency accommodation to meet the needs of the city and county area and that existing resources would be redirected from then current oversupply of emergency accommodation in the Dublin City Council area to localising same in other county areas. In planning for the provision of Supported and Temporary Accommodation, it is estimated that a minimum of 200 units of fit for purpose, quality accommodation would be put in place.

## **C. Housing and Housing Support Services – 2 core elements**

### *C1: Local Authority Housing Service*

The detail in relation to this is outlined in A1 and A2

### *C2: Housing and Housing Support System*

Support for people leaving homelessness and moving into housing is a critical feature of the reconfiguration of services. This will mean that both visiting and on-site support and care will be available within a housing context.

## **Where to next?**

The detail of the individual organisations that will be aligned to the new configuration of homeless and housing support services will be circulated to all staff in homeless services in the forthcoming weeks and will also be available to download on [www.homelessagency.ie](http://www.homelessagency.ie). In addition to this, statutory funders with assistance from the Homeless Agency are commencing a funding process with service providers regarding the funding required for services. This will involve a co-ordinated approach with both the local authorities and the HSE establishing implementation teams for same. All statutory funding will be subject to a re-appraisal of funding requirements based on the principled agreement reached with service providers.

Again and just to reiterate, critical to the success of implementation is achieving the required level of housing to meet the objective of the 2010 vision and ongoing work is taking place between the DEHLG, AHB's and the local authorities to secure and achieve this. On behalf of the Homeless Agency, I would like to extend our gratitude to all homeless service providers, who were involved in the negotiations around the new configuration of services, as the level of change at organisational level for both voluntary and statutory service providers cannot be underestimated. In the final months, leading up to the end of our homeless action plan *A Key to the Door 2007-2010*, we all have important work to do in ensuring that we succeed in our efforts for the people that are accessing our homeless services.

Please contact the Communications and Information Team in the Homeless Agency on 7036106 or [homeless@dublincity.ie](mailto:homeless@dublincity.ie) if you require further information on the implementation of a *Pathway to Home*. Also please log onto [www.homelessagency.ie](http://www.homelessagency.ie) for the forthcoming mapping document on the new configuration of homeless and housing support services aligned to the *Pathway to Home* model.

## FEATURES



**Joe Finnerty** teaches social policy in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork

# A new model of social housing?

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 includes a number of provisions that may signal major changes to the provision of social housing in Ireland. **Joe Finnerty** explains.

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 is a wide-ranging piece of legislation, that includes provisions to extend the long-standing strategy of selling council housing to sitting tenants and to improve accommodation standards in the private rented sector.

However, given space constraints, this discussion will confine itself to those sections of the Act covering: the incorporation of rental arrangements with private landlords into the repertoire of social housing provision; updated provisions re the assessment, allocation, rent setting and management of this expanded social housing repertoire; and strategic housing planning by local authorities.

The concluding section offers some general, and occasionally speculative, comments on the Act in the context of the evolution of Irish social housing policy and provision.

## **The Rental Accommodation Scheme and the Social Housing Leasing Initiative**

Sections 23 to 27 of the Act legislate for the increasing role of private (including non-profit) landlords - via the Rental Accommodation Scheme and long-term leasing - in supplying dwellings for social housing. Participating landlords make accommodation available for an agreed term and let dwelling units to households from the social housing waiting list, as provided for in a rental accommodation availability agreement. The housing authority pays the rent on behalf of the tenant, and the tenant pays a 'rent contribution' to the authority. Details of the substance of the availability agreements, including the term of the agreement and the termination procedures, and of the tenancy agreement - known as a chapter 4 tenancy agreement, are to be specified by the Minister. (Notwithstanding this, the terms of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 are to apply to such tenancies).

## **Assessment, allocation, and rent-setting and management**

Section 20 of the Act updates section 9 of the 1988 Act, allowing the Minister to make regulations concerning the factors relevant to the assessment of a household's eligibility for particular kinds of social housing (the legislation refers to 'social housing support' which confusingly means normal social housing; it doesn't mean 'support' in the sense that people working in homeless services would understand it). These factors include the determination of a maximum income threshold, taking into account prevailing market housing costs.



Section 21 of the Act deals with measurement of social housing need – which must be prepared for every draft housing services plan, and on certain other occasions as required. Allocation of dwellings is covered in section 22, updating section 11 of the 1988 Act. Housing authorities are required to set out the order of allocations priority for households eligible for social housing, which includes units owned by the housing authority and by housing associations, and also those provided via private landlords (see above). A welcome change now requires the allocations scheme to set out how the locational preferences of households are to be taken into account in this process, with the meaning of 'household' now expanded to include '2 or more persons who, in the opinion of the housing authority concerned, have a reasonable requirement to live together' (section 20 (1)).

The matters which must be covered by tenancy agreements (other than a chapter 4 tenancy agreement) are the subject of section 29. Section 31 requires each housing authority to make a rent scheme, with ministerial regulations requiring such a scheme to set out, inter alia, the manner in which the 'size, standard, location and amenity' of dwellings are to be reflected in determining rent, having regard to the market rents for similar dwellings. Evidently, this allows for the abandonment of the existing differential rent system based solely on household income and size.

In relation to all of the above, it is noteworthy that the Act grants the Minister very wide-ranging authority to review; modify the terms and operation of the various schemes.

### **Strategic planning for social housing**

#### *The social housing services plan*

The 2009 Act requires elected city or county council members to draw up a plan for the provision of social housing services, specifying the level and kind of 'social housing supports' to be provided to a specified number and type of households, over the lifetime of the plan. The Act goes into considerable detail on the process by which the services plan is to be prepared, involving apparently wide-ranging consultation with relevant statutory and voluntary bodies and fora. The services plan must 'have regard to', inter alia, the local development plan, the demand for social and affordable housing in the area, the promotion of sustainable communities, the traveller accommodation programme, and the local homeless action plan and the anti-social behaviour. The minister may (s. 15 (2)) direct that the plan details the precise level and mix of social housing supports to be provided.

#### *Homelessness action plans*

The Act, under sections 36 – 42, requires each city and county council to adopt a homeless action plan (thus giving welcome statutory recognition to the existing homeless action plans). The action plan is to make provision for prevention and reduction of homelessness, and the co-ordination of responses to homelessness. As with the social housing services plan, an ostensibly wide-ranging consultation process is called for, with a homeless consultative forum (comprising statutory and voluntary actors) and a management group involved in the drafting and oversight of the action plan.

### *Anti-social behaviour strategies*

All housing authorities are required, under s. 35, to draw up and adopt an anti-social behaviour strategy within one year of the Act coming into effect, including procedures in relation to the making of complaints to the housing authority in respect of anti-social behavior. (Individual tenancy agreements are now to include terms and conditions relating to anti-social behaviour, under section 29).

### **So what does this mean for housing policy?**

#### *Anti-social behaviour*

Estate management has come to play an important part in combating anti-social behaviour, and evidently this may conflict with social inclusion aspirations in the housing services plan. More specifically, however, it seems unlikely that the 2009 Act gives adequate powers to local authorities to deal effectively with serious cases of anti-social behaviour. (Many local authorities feel constrained in using the 1966 Housing Action to evict tenants involved in serious anti social behaviour because of an on-going Supreme Court Challenge).

#### *Information and evaluation*

A lack of clear data on many aspects of social housing has bedeviled housing policy analysis for decades (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2006). It is to be hoped that the Act facilitates high-quality and timely data collection on all aspects of social housing need and provision. (Such data would seem to be a prerequisite if the reviews required of both the housing services plan and the homelessness plan are to result in a proper evaluation).

#### *Local authority vs. housing association provision*

Whereas housing has traditionally been one of the few social policy functions involving direct local authority provision, this Act presents the platform for a likely diminution in this role, given the continuing commitment to tenant purchase and to increased reliance on rental accommodation agreements. However, the likely increased role of housing associations poses challenges for the sector in terms of expertise in managing these new responsibilities (McManus, 2010). Another challenge arises in terms of legitimacy and accountability: whereas councillors could routinely scrutinise the management and operation of traditional council housing, no similar accountability mechanism exists for housing associations.

### *Central and local powers*

As noted above, the Act potentially provides for far-reaching central powers over local authority housing programmes, in key areas of planning, assessment and allocations, rent setting, and management and control. In this context, one reading of the Act would see it as re-positioning the social housing role of central government vis-à-vis local government. Norris and O'Connell argue that the Act "indicates that Ireland is moving towards the more regulated social housing provision arrangements which have been adopted in the UK, rather than towards increased landlord autonomy" (Norris and O'Connell, 2010, p. 333). The view of the DoEHLG, on the other hand, is that the local consultation required in drawing up the housing services and homelessness plans evidences a strengthening of local democracy (DoEHLG, 2008).

One positive outcome may be greater consistency and transparency across local authorities in areas such as assessments and allocations.

### *The end of social housing's historic role*

In the context of an ongoing fiscal crisis, and a large supply of unsold private dwellings, the likely extensive use of the rental accommodation framework will end the historic role played by social housing as a stepping stone to home ownership, as the dwelling remains the property of the private landlord with no possibility of tenant purchase. The rental accommodation framework will also break with another key feature of local authority housing, viz. long-term security of tenure. Indeed, the reliance on contract and leasing arrangements in this social housing sub-sector will likely generate a momentum for short-term tenancies and rents tied to market costs (already a possibility in council housing under section 31 above) to become the norm throughout all sectors of social housing.

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FEATURES



**Fran Cassidy** is a freelance writer, researcher and social policy consultant

## Harm reduction: “more Florence Nightingale than Che Guevara?”

The International Harm Reduction Association’s (IHRA) annual conference brought together policy makers, drug user activists, frontline workers, health professionals, police, researchers, and educationalists for updating on good practice in harm reduction, and an exchange of knowledge and ideas. **Fran Cassidy** was there and reports on some of the issues that were debated.

The Arena Conference Centre, which overlooks the sparkling Mersey in Liverpool’s magificently regenerated docklands, is bathed in sunshine for this, IHRA’s 21st conference. Billed as ‘a coming of age’ and ‘a look forward to the next generation’, a sense of nostalgia, homecoming, cheerful industriousness, and at times somewhat futuristic thinking prevails.

Liverpool is the undisputed home of harm reduction in the UK and has been seminal internationally. In 1985, the Mersey Regional Health Authority, with the active involvement of local police and key figures in public health promotion, controversially set up a drug information centre with a converted toilet housing the first UK needle exchange. Despite initial tabloid hostility, international interest in Merseyside’s radical experiment eventually led to IHRA’s foundation and the first harm reduction conference in the city in 1990.

Twenty one years on, it is clear from the introductory conference speeches that harm reduction is now mainstreamed and that IHRA has national and international dimensions.

Dr Russell Newcombe, a veteran proponent of the approach in the UK, defines harm reduction as ‘a policy that promotes the reduction of drug related risks and harms above the prevention of drug use in itself,’ and notes that ‘the original four cornerstones of harm reduction were needle exchange, prescribing, health care and drug user information’.

Dr Mukta Sharma, the Chair of IHRA’s Board of Directors, asserts that ‘IHRA is the leading organisation that promotes a harm reduction approach for all psychoactive substances on a global basis. Their aims are to improve public health and the human rights of people who use drugs, and reduce the individual and community harms from psychoactive drug use. They also challenge laws and policies that have negative effects on the lives of drug users’.

Michel Sidebe, the UN/AIDs executive director, points out that ninety three countries now support the approach, and suggests that it has ‘reached a tipping point with solid evidence that it prevents new infections’, and that ‘reaching zero HIV infections among new drug users is no longer a dream, but a reality in those countries with full-scale programmes’.

Injecting a note of caution, Mat Southwell of the The International Network Of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD) argues that while the evidence for harm reduction is overwhelming, it’s success is predominantly a developed world experience. ‘We cannot continue to live with the contradiction of lives being saved in the developed world with proven interventions while our brothers and sisters are allowed to die in Africa, in Eastern Europe, and in Asia when the cheap available preventative interventions and cheap available prevention strategies are available and proven’.





The outgoing executive director of IHRA Professor Gerry Stimpson states that ‘challenges for the next generation of harm reductionists include expanding HIV related harm reduction into places where it is much needed, increasing demands on international agencies to properly fund harm reduction, and getting to grips with the way psychoactive substances are controlled and regulated as massive investment in law enforcement has not paid off’.

The perceived negative effects of drug criminalisation on the lives of people who use drugs and on society is a recurring theme over the week. Other themes include the potential damage that could result from the on-going ‘harm reduction vs treatment debate’, and an increasing interest in framing drug users as part of the solution in drug policy.

The majority of the sessions and discussions are about new evidence, and practical ways and experiences of reducing drug related harm however. A plethora of topics including but not restricted to HIV and Hep C, stimulant use, ‘new’ drugs, non injecting routes of administration, youth recreational drug use, aging drug users, and alcohol and tobacco harm reduction are discussed.

Between three plenary sessions, 14 major sessions, and 36 concurrent sessions (each with four or five individual presentations and discussion), there is ample opportunity for learning and debate over the four days. These sessions are notably well attended and absorbing.

There are also a couple of hundred poster presentations, a film festival (where Mick Egan’s film about RADE in Dublin is warmly received), an exhibition space, a new Dialogue Space, and a veritable forest of literature to take away.

At times it must be said, the Arena feels like a self-contained bubble. This is partly a function of the architecture, but also of the sense that discussions are protected by a membrane of consensus that is not representative of the current drug debate or the prevailing national and international socio-political contexts.

The lower emotional temperature this allows, creates an interesting space for the consideration and evaluation of ideas and approaches that usually become quickly embroiled in bitter controversy. Despite one delegate’s observation that harm reduction is ‘losing its revolutionary aura, moving from Che Guevara to Florence Nightingale’, and ‘risks moving away from humanitarian commitment and turning into technical management of drug related problems with a nine to five mentality’, there is still plenty of radical thinking in evidence.

One example is Transform’s launch of their document *After the War On Drugs : Blueprint For Regulation*.

Drug decriminalisation arguments are well aired at this stage. It’s a long way off I suspect, and indeed may never happen, but Transform possibly took a step into the future by exploring what it might look like. Launching the *Blueprint* document, Steve Rolles emphasises that they are ‘not advocating a libertarian, free-for-all economy, but regulated markets, based on evidence and public health principles’ and that ‘rollout of any model would need to be phased and cautious’. He contends that ‘this is not a strange idea – almost every risky product is regulated by government. It is prohibition and the war on drugs that is the radical experiment’.

The substantial *Blueprint* document offers five different models: medical prescription and/or subsidised use; a specialist pharmacist sales model; various forms of a licensed retail model; licensed premises for sales and consumption, and unlicensed sales’. According to Rolles, regulation should apply to production and transit, products, vendors, outlets and buyers/users. ‘There is not a one size fits all programme.’

An example of new ideas becoming reality is perhaps the increasing international acceptance of drug users’ right to an independent voice as evidenced by the contributions of Dublin’s UISCE and a revitalized INPUD (International Network of People Who Use Drugs).

Mat Southwell of INPUD argues that for many people who choose to use drugs, harm reduction is an end in itself rather than a step on the road to abstinence. He promotes harm reduction as a means of supporting safer drug use, and argues that drug users need to be framed as part of any solution rather than being viewed as the problem.

INPUD are clearly a revitalized organization after a debacle of a general meeting at the 2008 conference. While 'not underestimating the challenge of representing the interests of a group whose behaviour is criminalized in every country of the world', they 'advocate and lobby for the rights of people who use drugs, and aim to bring their voices to the policy table'. Mat argues that people who use drugs 'have historically been the subjects of this conference and of drug policy discussions around the world. The challenge to the global community is to meaningfully involve people who use drugs in policy discussions, in the delivery of services and in the allocation of funding'.

Harm reduction's move to the mainstream, Mat argues 'does not mean there is not still substantial reticence – while people accept many of the core harm reduction functions they can remain ambivalent about things such as consumption rooms, heroin prescribing and crack pipe distribution. The evidence for harm reduction is overwhelming; it's dogma that prevents us from implementing it'.

I share the view that the war on drugs has not worked, and it was interesting to see drug user groups developing an articulate voice and being taken seriously, but by day three, I was also pleased to see a dissenting voice on the programme.

Professor Neil Mc Kegany is most readily associated with 'new abstentionist' arguments that have recently been framed in opposition to harm reduction, and in a debate in the dialogue space he queries the 'comfortable consensus around treatment' and argues for 'the need to ask fundamental questions as to what it is for'.

It is probably facile to try and reduce this complex debate to a couple of paragraphs, but essentially the 'new abstentionists' argue that harm reduction and particularly (methadone) maintenance means abandoning hope for many people and sentencing them to a lifetime of drug dependence. Harm reductionists point out that many fail abstinence-based residential treatments – sometimes many times, and some don't even want them. Keeping those people alive and as safe as possible within their risky behaviours is their goal.

Some argue that the two can be complementary approaches, while for others abstinence and maintenance are diametrically opposed and incompatible visions of recovery.

Professor Mc Kegany argues that 'questioning what treatment is for has become sacrilege. Yet achievements of drug treatment are so modest – to raise the quality of treatment it is right that we ask fundamental questions.

'Methadone maintenance has become hallowed territory and we are expected to universally celebrate the success of methadone. But go to a methadone clinic and you won't find the children of the wealthy. You'll find them in residential rehab. Methadone is the treatment for the masses. We should have a treatment world, which is aspirational for its clients, rather than continued reliance on a highly addictive medication. Yet to express these views is unwelcome. There is a scandalous lack of resources to enable people to become drug free'.

For what it's worth, my own view is that the polarised nature of the harm reduction/abstinence debate in the UK, and the bitter intensity at which it sometimes has been conducted, have risked obscuring the fact that both approaches are necessary and must co-exist in society even if for some they are mutually exclusive roads. It is often funding considerations that place them in conflict.

I think the abstentionists' trenchant critiques of harm reduction are valid, necessary and useful, and those people I have met who successfully take the abstentionist path are generally those whose outcomes seem happiest. However, there will always also be people who cannot or do not want to give up drugs at any particular time. Reducing harm for them should be an equally high priority.

I leave the conference with a head full of ideas and information, and with my conviction that harm reduction philosophies are a necessary element of any realistic discourse on drugs fully intact. I don't think there is an 'answer' to the drugs question in terms of a definitive solution, but only answers in terms of what are the most intelligent, effective and humane societal responses. Drug users are not homogenous, and there is a need for a multiplicity of approaches. Whilst fully aware and mindful of the complexities and sensitivities of the issue, I am increasingly convinced that society's demonisation and stigmatisation of drug users is counterproductive and damaging to often very vulnerable people, and that from a housing perspective, stable long-term accommodation for people who use drugs, and easy access to treatment pathways and supports are essential pre-requisites of reducing drug related harm both for them and for wider society.

## FEATURES



**Andrew Conlon-Trant** provides consultancy and interim management services to social care companies in Ireland and the UK

## Castlebrook: partnership in practice

The McDonaghs, who are an extended Traveller family, live in a small development of seven houses near Newcastle, Co. Dublin. It is an unusual and innovative scheme because the McDonaghs were closely involved in the development's conception, planning, and construction. **Andrew Conlon-Trant**, who was commissioned to review the project, tells the story and outlines the lessons learned.

### Background

Castlebrook started as an idea over 12 years ago. The McDonagh family at that time were living in St. Oliver's Park Traveller site in the Dublin City area. Some family members had considered the idea of a housing development customised to meet the specific needs of Traveller families. In their experience Travellers were traditionally provided with accommodation, either housing or trailers, in environments that often evolved into ghettos. They often moved into these environments against their will as they found the accommodation unsuited to their needs. Consequently, Travellers living there would not show due care to the accommodation, the Local Authority would react to this by not carrying out maintenance or repairs and ultimately the accommodation breaks down. To people outside this environment, all their prejudices about Travellers were confirmed and so a cycle commences and continues.

In the late 1990s, a proposition was presented to Dublin City Council (DCC), as the family's local authority at the time. DCC chose not to pursue the concept but later in 2000 the McDonaghs brought the concept to South Dublin County Council (SDCC). In principle, SDCC accepted the idea from the start, even though the family was not living in their area. While this was an important milestone in the journey to Castlebrook, it marked the beginning of a very long process, which continued until 2008 when the McDonaghs moved in to their new homes.

### Key Stakeholders

There were four key groups involved in or impacted by the development of Castlebrook, all of which had different needs for one development. Fundamentally, this meant people had to prioritise their needs and understand where they could compromise. The groups are referred to here as stakeholders and not just involved parties; stakeholders having needs and wants, irrespective of what anyone else thinks. The stakeholders in this development are the McDonaghs, SDCC, neighbours and Clúid.

### The McDonaghs

The family comprises seven separate households ranging from grandparents to grandchildren. The idea for the development came from the McDonaghs themselves and in submitting their proposal to SDCC they were clear what they wanted, which was to live in an environment that went beyond the look and atmosphere of many local authority housing schemes for Travellers and would accommodate the changing needs of an extended family.

From the time the site was acquired and agreement to commence was given, the family's involvement was intense. They had early discussions with the architect and introduced their needs into the design phase. The changes requested were not extreme; they were practical but significant for the family. For example they wished to make the interior space more open plan; to have more natural light by increasing the size of the windows; to have a living space that acknowledged the outdoor and open space nature of where the family was coming from; to eliminate boundary walls at the front to give



The McDonagh family at Castlebrook

more of a community feel; and to increase the height of the walls at the rear to provide greater security. All of these changes made the transition to housing easier.

### South Dublin County Council

From the beginning SDCC accepted the idea of a housing development based on the family's current and emerging needs. SDCC approached this from a strategic viewpoint, considering the proposal in the context of their Traveller Development plan.

The McDonaghs speak very positively of SDCC. They say openly that their experience of dealing with other local authorities was not positive. They characterised many of the local authority employees they had encountered with responsibility for Traveller sites as bullies with little respect for Traveller families or their culture. They described SDCC as different. They were respectful of Travellers; their approach was professional; they were straight and true to their word.

### Neighbours

Castlebrook is located in a rural area off the M7 motorway near Newcastle. Interactions with neighbours during the planning phase were at two levels; residents association and individuals. The local Residents Association was positive towards the development. However, it had little impact as most of the issues were at individual household level. There were many objections from residents of Tay Lane but with much communication with SDCC, the development finally proceeded. These objections undoubtedly added many months, if not years, to the development.

### Clúid Housing Association

Clúid first became involved with the McDonaghs in 2000, having been chosen by SDCC as a partner for Castlebrook. Clúid's involvement was to project manage the development, working with the architect, builder and other professionals. Once completed, they took responsibility for estate management of Castlebrook, a function they continue today.

The McDonaghs speak positively of Clúid. They felt Clúid was respectful of their needs and listened to what they had to say at different times in the development. Clúid staff were professional, open, fair, and supportive of the McDonaghs when they faced opposition and needed support.

### Costs

The quality of the seven Castlebrook properties is high and appears to be as good as any modern private development. Some resentment was reported around why Traveller families should have accommodation of this quality and cost, and comparisons were made at the time with the purchase price of properties in the private market. In a letter to SDCC, the Residents Association determined itself that the cost per unit would be c.€365,000, representing city centre prices for a one-bed apartment at that time. Such a comparison is not relevant; a more relevant benchmark is the cost of other Traveller accommodation in a similar property market. SDCC kindly provided cost comparisons of other traveller developments.

The cost per unit of the Castlebrook development was €370,070. The range of cost for all Traveller accommodation developments was €246,294 (Lynch's Lane) to €527,843 (Hazelhill) with the average at €353,079. While Castlebrook has cost approximately 5% more than the average, the main reason is the extra costs added by developing the sewerage system to accommodate local private houses connecting. This added approximately €20,000 to the cost of each Castlebrook house. On this comparison the cost per unit at Castlebrook is around the average for Traveller accommodation.

The architect, in particular, emphasised that any changes made to the development arising from the McDonagh family were made cost neutral, i.e. if they requested something requiring additional cost, they forewent something else to reduce cost.

### Lessons from Looking Back

At a general level the Castlebrook development has to be viewed as a success, for many reasons.

- To start, the project took a stakeholder approach where it was acknowledged that everyone involved in and impacted by the development had needs. Not all needs could be met but the legitimacy of someone having needs was accepted.
- The involvement of the McDonagh family as future residents of Castlebrook gave them ownership of the end product.

- The acceptance by the architect, developer, Clúid and SDCC of changes suggested by the McDonaghs meant that the Traveller culture, as articulated by the McDonaghs, could be retained. Other Traveller accommodation may not have included such changes.
- The McDonagh family were not going to let it fail; it was a risky venture for them and to fail would have impacted on their standing within the Traveller community.
- The characteristics of the McDonagh family were very important. They were described by others as resilient, consistent, willing to stay the course, and ultimately reasonable on the changes they requested.
- The development was for one family, not households from a mix of families, thereby ensuring, if not guaranteeing, full compatibility in the development.

At a more specific level there were areas that were not as successful, the most significant of which related to the amount of time taken by this project, and in this context a view shared by many is that the objections were entertained and given credibility for too long.

### **Future Developments**

If a similar Traveller accommodation is planned by another local authority the following recommendations should be considered.

#### *Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Development Plan*

Any development should clearly contribute to the Traveller Accommodation Development Plan of the relevant local authority. The promoters of any new development, therefore, should position their proposed development within that plan.

#### *Stakeholder Approach*

Local authorities should promote a stakeholder approach to the development of Traveller accommodation, acknowledging that all stakeholders have needs that are legitimate, irrespective of anyone else's opinion.

The prospective residents of the proposed Traveller accommodation should be involved in the planned development from the start. They should input to its location, design and development, and their commitment throughout the process is important

Local authorities, and others providing input to the development of Traveller accommodation, should respect and accept that Travellers have different, legitimate needs to be met in their accommodation. It should not be assumed that houses are the correct type of accommodation.

For local authorities, the evidence from Castlebrook shows that working in partnership with a Housing Association has benefits. After the planning process they can establish new relationships throughout the construction, liaising with all the stakeholders as appropriate. Housing Association involvement does take away many headaches during construction that otherwise have to be dealt with by the local authority.

All stakeholders must be willing to compromise, working on the principle of meeting other stakeholders half way

#### *Openness to Change*

Local authorities, the design team and developers should be open to changes following input from the prospective tenants of the Traveller accommodation.

#### *Operating within Budget*

Notwithstanding the importance of taking input and facilitating change to meet the living needs of Travellers, a budget should be set and adhered to overall, though some fluidity should be allowed within the total budget envelope.

#### *Communications*

Communication with all stakeholders to such a development should be direct and open. As a public development it should be transparent and no promises should be made that cannot be kept. All communications must also set very real expectations.

#### *Managing Objections*

If objections are raised and part of addressing those objections is for stakeholders to meet, then this should be facilitated. If one stakeholder refuses to meet then this action should impact on the outcome of the objection.

#### *Future Planning for Changes in the Traveller family*

If new Traveller accommodation is being planned the local authority must be cognisant of future changes to the make-up of the Traveller family that results in an accommodation unit becoming vacant. It will be important to address this early, thereby avoiding future conflict.

The development of Castlebrook is an interesting story to retrace. It has resulted in seven households now living in high-quality, long-term social housing, all of whom are happy to call them home. From the vantage point of today, Castlebrook is a success story and what made it such was the positive force of two key stakeholders; the McDonagh family and SDCC. And while neither can be labelled as unique, a question remains as to whether this development would have been a success if a different local authority or a different Traveller family were involved.

## FEATURES

*Managing an Unstable Housing Market*, by **Brendan Williams**, **Declan Redmond** and **Brian Hughes** is available for download at [www.uep.ie](http://www.uep.ie)

# Managing an unstable market

A major oversupply of housing in parts of Ireland has led to a major fall in house prices, and market fragmentation. **Brendan Williams** and **Declan Redmond** who have recently researched this, discuss some of its consequences, and what should and should not, be done about it.



**Brendan Williams** and **Declan Redmond** are lecturers at the School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Planning, University College Dublin

The current oversupply of housing and the consequent correction in prices and market fragmentation creates complex market conditions for all those either involved with or managing housing. Taking all recently published studies it appears that over 300,000 housing units are vacant with approximately 50% of the vacant units being assessed as excess supply above market vacancy churn rates, holiday homes and obsolescent dwellings. In other words there are about 150,000 more housing units than are currently needed. In planning and development terms the current housing market can be seen as the result of an ad-hoc development led urban growth pattern.

This has contributed to a dispersed development pattern with problems in oversupply. The mismatch between oversupply and demand patterns means that much of the current oversupply will not be needed over the medium term. This is creating a fragmented market with continuing oversupply and price decreases for poorly located stock distant from real demand, infrastructure and services, while real housing needs continue to be present in some areas. Markets as they recover are likely to see stabilisation and recovery in prime and established districts in urban growth centres such as Dublin and Galway, while other areas face an uncertain future regarding the viability of surplus and unfinished housing stock.

However, it will be possible to reduce the severity of future property market corrections through the implementation of factual and evidence based management systems in terms of planning, development and financial decisions.

Policy orientation towards boosting the development and investment market when not necessary, are evident on examination of the recent period. With a growing economy in the 1990s and supply/demand imbalances, growth in prices accelerated in this period and affordability became a serious concern. A pause in economic growth prospects in 2001, allied with policy interventions to calm the market, was followed by a strong recovery from 2003 onwards with resulting strong housing market growth occurring. This price surge continued through to 2007 with active interventions by government continuing to incentivise development contributing to price rises while simultaneously trying to assist house purchasers acquire affordable housing at ever rising prices.

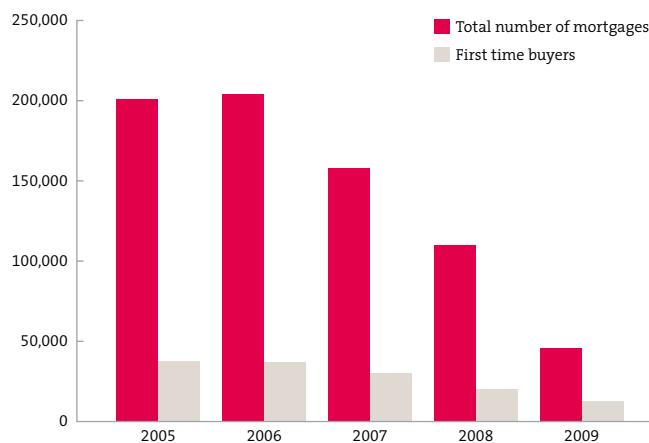
It can be argued that policy interventions aimed at influencing pricing levels are often inappropriate. The arguments against rent/price control were widely debated during the market upswing. It was suggested that such restrictions would lead to a curbing of the supply process. In reverse, the same debate now emerges related to market support measures including NAMA and other measures which have the intended or unintended effect of supporting existing market price levels. The reasonable conclusion is that such measures could assist holders of existing stock but fail to address the more fundamental issues which would improve long-term market efficiency.

A more reasonable case can be made for a reduction in the current confusion of conflicting policy interventions and overlapping initiatives aimed at house pricing issues and affordability. Poorly resourced and ad-hoc initiatives can prove at best inefficient for the operation of the housing market and at worst have unintended and wasteful impacts given the scarce resources available and the genuine needs which need to be addressed.

A review of the key demand features is necessary in 2010 in light of major economic changes over the recent period, which have included the major downturn in economic conditions and the crisis in the financial sector. The economic cycle has moved sharply downwards and reductions in real income, employment and population trends might be expected over the next year. With little confidence and limited credit availability house prices and supply levels have reduced significantly, particularly for large volume developments in weaker locations. This is in line with expectations that demand for property is a derived demand linked strongly with real economic growth and decline. In particular, critical indicators show 2009 commencements are expected to be down 53% and 2009 completions estimated at fewer than 26,000, with the estimates of this research on supply for 2010 and 2011 of under 20,000 per annum.

The value of loans paid out in 2009 was down 56% on 2008 figures, and analysis of 2009 figures indicate credit growth at its lowest level since the beginning of 1994 (Figures 1 and 2). The overall decline in the value of loans paid out as the property market went into decline over 2007 and 2008 is clear in Figure 1.

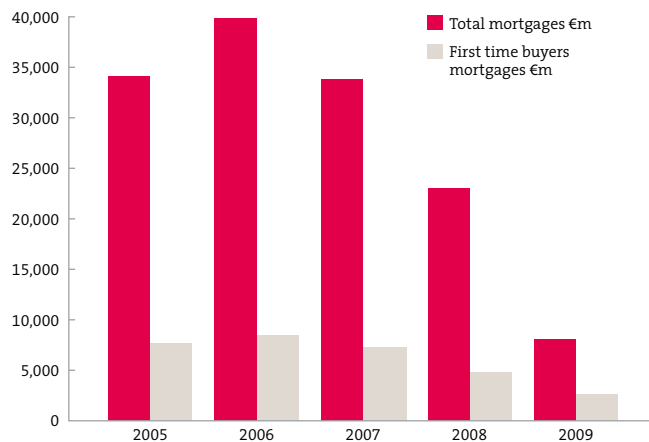
Figure 1 – Number of residential mortgages issued



Total mortgages includes first time buyers, mover purchases, investment to let, remortgaging and top-ups.

Source: Irish Bankers Federation, <http://www.ibf.ie/researchset.html>

Figure 2 – Value of residential mortgages issued



Total mortgages includes first time buyers, mover purchases, investment to let, remortgaging and top-ups.

Source: Irish Bankers Federation, <http://www.ibf.ie/researchset.html>

In our analysis of early 2010 trends based on figures released in February 2010 by the Irish Bankers Federation the volume of new lending in Q4 2009 was down 18% compared to the previous quarter and was down 47% year on year reflecting the general economic environment and lending patterns. The average value of mortgages issued was stated to be back at levels similar to early 2005. The resulting supply contraction is a matter of concern as the supply of housing moves below its 40 year historical average as listed below.

**Table 1 – National House Supply Averages – 40 year trends**

Years	Average supply per year
1970s	22,919
1980s	23,338
1990s	30,191
2000s	63,643
40 year average (1970-2009)	35,022
20 year average (1990-2009)	46,916

Source: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (various years)

Critical issues arising from this analysis are those of finance availability and lending in a falling market. This will include banks current and future capacities and attitude to lending and credit risk. As we move from a vendor to purchaser driven market price pressures are downward in spite of the reluctance of market interests to make such reductions. A recovery in limited areas of established housing market sectors can be expected at the low point in the market as the pent up demand of potential cash buyers who have sold in recent years but delayed moving due to market turbulence, return to the market at recovery price levels. Many of these purchasers are not as dependent on availability of finance as the majority of purchasers. Housing affordability for the majority has continued to be a major problem as house prices continue to remain at very high multiples of average incomes and loan to value ratios move from 100% to lower levels.

Looking forward, the central principle of the measures contained in the Planning and Development Bill 2009, which has currently completed its second stage in the Dáil, is that planning decisions should be made on the basis of an evidence-based core strategy, supported by factual evidence. This is long overdue and will assist in ameliorating the worst elements of an uncontrolled market correction. This legislation should also include placing blockages in the way of corruption and malpractice, especially relating to land rezoning, and it should be backed up by clear rules based on available best international standards and conflict of interest guidelines.

*The central principle of the measures contained in the Planning and Development Bill 2009, is that planning decisions should be made on the basis of an evidence-based core strategy, supported by factual evidence – this is long overdue*





**Fran Cassidy,**  
writer and  
researcher

# Martin Naughton

Disability activist **Martin Naughton** has been central to the campaign for independent living for people with disabilities in Ireland, and is a founder member of The European Network for Independent Living (ENIL).

**Fran Cassidy** met him at his home in Baldoyle.

ENIL celebrated its twentieth anniversary this year with the fourth bi-annual 'Freedom Drive' to the European parliament in Strasbourg. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to accompany some remarkable members of the Irish Centre for Independent Living (CIL). The logistics and frustrations of so many people with significant disabilities getting themselves from different parts of Europe to Strasbourg were immense, and while it seems clichéd to link disability with courage and good humour, those qualities along with the quietly unassuming decency of family members were what struck me most.

Many times when I mentioned to international participants that I was from Ireland, the response was that I must know Martin Naughton. In fact I didn't, although he was much in evidence as a benign organising presence who injected an element of fun to proceedings.

The finale of an extraordinary few days of lobbying, networking, and socialising was an afternoon long plenary session with MEPS. An abiding memory is Martin being invited for a photo opportunity by the president of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek. If there was political opportunism in Mr Buzek's invitation, he was put in his place by Martin firmly reminding him off-mic that this was a serious issue that affected the lives of fifteen million Europeans.

When the photo had been taken, Martin joined the assembly of a few hundred people with various disabilities in singing ENIL's adopted anthem We Shall Overcome.

Martin downplays this incident when I meet him months later in his North Dublin bungalow. He instead steers my attention to a portrait by the 'wonderful' artist Mary Duffy, which skillfully captures him steering his electric wheelchair in his trademark fez and poncho.

*Tell me briefly about the genesis of the Independent Living movement.*

It can be traced to California's Berkeley University in the early 1970s. A group of students with significant disabilities brokered an unprecedented compromise whereby they were given the money that would have been provided to an institution for their care, to look after themselves.

These ideas of people with disability doing it for themselves quickly spread throughout America and subsequently into Northern Europe. Where there had been dependency and often despondency, there was now dreaming and a new energy.

*And Ireland?*

We had to go looking for it. The people who managed the purse strings were traditional service providers, and many hadn't a lot of time for each other. However, we the service users were happy to come together and focus on the issues that confronted us. A small group with significant disabilities started to meet regularly in Dublin in 1987. We didn't have much to lose, and as time went on we realised we probably had nothing to lose. The only hope we had then was to get in a long queue for some sort of residential centre.



Martin Naughton

We started to ask questions - firstly of ourselves and then of Irish society. We weren't talking about developing independent living. We didn't dare to dream about a job or a family or a place of our own. We just wanted a fairer deal.

Over the next few years we started to believe in ourselves. Simultaneously there was increased European funding available. Part of the condition of this was transnational activities, so people were going to Europe and seeing things. By 1991, we were a fairly tight, organised group. None of us had a home but we all had dreams. We put our experience together and realised that we had wonderful lived experience, although in some cases people had been very confined and isolated.

We came up with four major challenges. One was mobility. At that time, if you were somebody who was disabled but had the capacity to drive your own vehicle you got a rebate. If you were somebody who was so significantly disabled that you couldn't drive, you didn't, which felt like a really low blow. Also we couldn't get on buses. There were no accessible taxis. So we were being completely excluded.

Secondly, we came up with the personal assistants approach, which would enable us to participate in society and live independently.

Thirdly, we looked at how IT aids might make life easier for people with significant disabilities.

And fourthly there was housing. If we weren't to go into residential care we needed some sort of housing approach. So we concentrated on what housing might look like for us and got busy lobbying.

My role was partly to keep pushing out the envelope and I spent a lot of time in the States seeing how independent living groups worked. We set up our own company and put forward a solid European funding proposal. We brought in Jana Overbo, who had lived independently as a person with a disability in California. She had worked for Channel 5 and we were blessed to have her skills. We spent the first six months explaining to her that 'we don't do things like that in Ireland - you're going to get us all locked up'. When she finished up with us four years later we were saying, 'Ah Jenna, you're too easily satisfied. We can do better.'

She got all sorts of groups involved including U2, Christy Moore and Mary Black. We started to bring a visibility to people with disabilities by turning up in different places. If you put ten people in wheelchairs in a hall, no matter how big the hall is, the impression is that there are loads of us.

Ministers certainly noticed. By 1994, there was not a member of the cabinet that couldn't talk about independent living. Plus the concept of an inclusive society was gaining currency.

*Tell me a bit about the housing issue.*

The issue was entitlement to housing. Simply because someone didn't fit in to the traditional approach, did not let people off the hook. The fact that in their understanding of housing provision, someone was not bedless and not sleeping under the stars because they were living in some institution, did not mean that they weren't entitled to or in need of a house.

The issue of housing for people with significant disabilities was huge. People like us didn't live in the community - there was no understanding of that concept. People queried how will these people manage? We made it very clear that what we very much wanted was the opportunity to have a home of our own'.

*Independent living is about having the personal assistance and supports to live in the community rather than institutions?*

People who set up the institutions had very good intentions and nobody questions the skills or capacity of the people who work there. That's not the issue. It is just no longer appropriate. That's not Martin Naughton saying that, although I've been saying that for years. That's the UN Convention, Article 19. It also says that equality is not just for people who have the

capacity for responsibility. It is for everybody. Capacity means that we have a greater human responsibility. We have to make sure that everybody's human rights are delivered in the best possible way for each individual.

It is actually much more cost effective to house people in local communities the same as anybody else. Any economist would tell you that, and although it may make perfect sense to some people to isolate and separate people from the rest of society, the reality is that it is not sustainable, because it is not what people want.

Independent living gives you the win-win. Firstly, it's what people with disabilities want and secondly in time it is actually more cost effective. We as people with disabilities want to get value for the buck. I know as somebody with a disability that I am going to need the support that I have for the rest of my life. I have a responsibility and a duty to manage that in the most cost effective way.

#### *What are the barriers today*

There still isn't an understanding of the house space that somebody like me needs. I will automatically require a second bedroom because I always have somebody with me and they've got to sleep somewhere. To get that simple message across can be quite difficult. Now in saying that there have been successes in different parts of the country. But it doesn't transfer. By the time we've persuaded another local authority to get it right, the first may have gone backwards.

There is also still something of the mentality out there that says 'these guys are not going to be around for long'. And I keep saying 'Guess what? There are so many more of us coming along, that you had better adjust'.

Today, they have protocols for everything and another difficulty is that if I want to get a house, I have to be able to prove that I have the necessary back up facilities. We have to get one part of the state to give another a letter of comfort. It is almost as if I have no right in one part of the state and I do in another.

We have to convince ourselves to take our place in mainstream society. We are long past the stage where we can only come in if we are able. It is up to us to make sure that we have the right flexible supports that meet our needs, and are designed and managed by us where possible. Not something where we build the capacity of an organisation into empire status. It's not about that. It is very much about individual packages, and that we increase our confidence and life-skills so that we are able to take our place, whether that is on the buses, in work, in our own houses.

We have the disability legislation, we have the sector plans, and there is a willingness there, but we need to bring to it that lived experience of people with disabilities and that is missing at the moment.

At the moment with the economic situation, we worry that equality and fairness is only something that society feels it can only afford during the rich days. We have to have it now for people and it has to be here all of the time.

#### *Is there a place for institutions?*

The only people that should be living in institutions are those who choose to. Why should people with disabilities be left there? Simply because there is nobody to yell for them? There are between over 4000 people still in institutions today that should be living in a house with support in the community like other members of society. And these institutions are not necessarily cheap. There is very good public money being invested. We have to question whether we should continue that. If we can get that part done this year, then we might make real progress.

#### *And what are the barriers?*

Attitude, a nervousness as to whether it can be managed. What if this, that or the other happened? What if it cost more? There are a huge number of medically qualified people involved in running institutions, but they are the wrong people to have working with people with disabilities in the community. And they frighten parents of people with intellectual disability and mental health issues in institutions. You can imagine if you are an elderly parent and you are being told that your son or daughter is safer, happier or better off in an institution and if Ministers are making the same noises. And that fear feeds fear.

There is also some vested interest from people whose jobs are in the institutions. So there are a lot of barriers. However, there are many good reasons to do it. The overriding reason is that it is the right thing to do to support people to live like everybody else, especially when public money is involved.

#### *Are you hopeful?*

We have to be. The genie is out of the bottle. The dream is getting bigger and expectation is spreading. Not just to people with disabilities but to their families and society as a whole. Can the powers that be deliver. That's a challenge. But yes, probably later than we would wish, but I think they will.

## QUESTIONNAIRE



**Pat Doyle**, chief executive officer, Peter McVerry Trust

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

In 1989, as a relief worker in Los Angeles Society for homeless boys. This had come out of a number of years of working with marginalised kids in Finglas and Ballymun in a voluntary capacity. I wanted to effect change and this prompted me to change career and move into the sector.

### Has your understanding of homelessness changed since then?

Yes, most definitely. I used to think it was about food and shelter and now I am confident that it needs to tackle the underlying issues in relation to social exclusion.

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

An inter-departmental strategy to tackle the underlying issues of poverty and social exclusion, such as health education and housing. In the meantime, the full implementation of the pathways model will help to ensure a housing first for those most in need, particularly those with complex needs.

### What have you learnt from homeless people you have met?

It is that ultimately the levels of strength that people display in the face of such adversity. And despite the difficulties that people face everyday, most people try to get on with it and put their current situation behind them. Unfortunately, as we know only too well, we are still, in 2010, seeing the premature deaths of vulnerable young people engaged in this sector.

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

I believe until we ultimately tackle the underlying issues of poverty and social exclusion, that unfortunately, homelessness will always be a lens through which to view poverty.

### Can you think of anything we can learn from another country about tackling homelessness?

Take the Nordic countries for example - housing for all is viewed as a right and rights are measured by outcomes alone. As we move towards a Housing First model in the Dublin region, the success should be measured by the outcomes for those who are homeless and, in particular, for those with complex needs.

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

While the latter has a responsibility for establishing legislation to protect those on the margins, the NGOs have played a huge part over the years in advocating for change in legislation to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable in society. If we keep those who are homeless at the centre of any debate then both voluntary and statutory should complement each other.

### Which matters most, charity or political change?

Political change – if we use our political will to construct our society in a way that ensures that the most vulnerable get priority access to state services, then this would eliminate the need for charity.

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

As I don't take myself too seriously, I'd take a break and review how best my skills could be used elsewhere.

### Do you give money to people who are begging?

Yes. Not all the time, but most – as I haven't yet been able to do enough to effect political change, so it's no time to be withdrawing charity; but more importantly because when I meet homeless people I truly believe that there for the grace of God go I.

**HOME  
LESS  
agency**

The Homeless Agency is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and administration of funding for the provision of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area and for the development of responses to prevent homelessness.

We work in partnership with a range of voluntary and statutory agencies to implement the agreed plan A Key to the Door, Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007-2010, to deliver integrated services to people who are homeless and assist them to move to appropriate long-term housing and independence with appropriate supports as required.

We advocate for improvements in mainstream policies and services to make them responsive to the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and we work with voluntary and statutory bodies to develop strategies to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first instance.

The vision of the Homeless Agency is that by 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated in Dublin.