



### Report/Update on Covid-19 and Homelessness-December 2020.

This is the twelfth report/update on homelessness in the Dublin region that we have issued since the onset of Covid-19 early last year. From the beginning of 2020, national data has been showing a significant and welcome reduction in the number of people (in particular families) that are now residing in emergency accommodation throughout the country. This report focuses on the situation in the Dublin Region at the end of **December 2020**.

At the end of December, there were **755** families in emergency accommodation. This is the lowest monthly figure since **December 2015**. The December family figure represents a decrease (26) on November and a total decrease of 446 families since the start of the year (In January 2020 there were 1,201 families in emergency accommodation).

#### ***Families in emergency accommodation:***

Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020
1,201	1,178	1,103	974	893	871	862	856	865	858	783

The number of children residing in emergency accommodation at the end of December was 1,864. This represents a decrease (**50**) on the November figure. This figure has been reducing steadily since September 2019, when the figure was **2,872**. It also represents a decrease of **814** since the start of the year (2020).

#### ***Children in emergency accommodation:***

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
2,678	2,669	2,491	2,232	2,065	1,979	2,017	2,023	2,008	2,070	1,914

#### **Families in hotels:**

At the end of December, there were **181** families residing in hotels. **This is the lowest number of families in hotels since September 2014**. The highest ever figure was in March 2017 when it reached **871**. In relation to the **181** families, this is broken down between contracted Hotels (65) and accommodation sourced through self-accommodation (116).

### **New presentations (Families):**

**699** families entered emergency accommodation for the first time between January and December 2020. **This compares to 1,112 for the same period in 2018, and 1,031 in 2019.** **60** new families presented and were assessed as Homeless in December 2020. The table below shows presentations during previous months.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
94	80	42	14	25	59	56	78	71	64	56

The table below gives some information on the 60 new families that presented in December:

Citizenship	No. of Families	No. of Adults	No. of Children
Irish	23	30	40
EU	23	46	48
Non EU	13	16	27
Unknown	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>117</b>

As to the reasons for Homelessness, 14 of the cases were related to family circumstances, 24 were related to private rented issues and the remaining 22 came from various other situations.

In December, **67 families** were prevented from entering emergency accommodation, mainly through HAP and **65 families** exited from emergency accommodation into new tenancies.

Over recent months, our Housing Support Officers have reviewed the position of just over 500 families that were living in emergency accommodation and 306 families have been supported in moving to HHAP accommodation, 84 have moved to Social Housing and 10 families have returned home. A further 97 families have moves pending with most destined for permanent social housing.

### **Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP):**

The Homeless HAP Scheme has continued to operate successfully with our Housing Support Officers and Place-Finders assisting households to move out of emergency accommodation. These staff adapted quickly to the Covid-19 restrictions and have consistently worked with property owners to source new tenancies.

The level of Homeless HAP tenancies sourced monthly has remained stable throughout the Covid-19 emergency despite revised working arrangements.

223 Homeless HAP tenancies were sourced in December 2020.

***Breakdown of family type and previous accommodation of those accessing HHAP in November:***

- 20** Families leaving hotels - Private Emergency Accommodation
- 45** Families leaving Supported emergency accommodation
- 67** Families who did not use emergency accommodation (Prevention)
- 29** Singles/Couples leaving Private Emergency Accommodation
- 31** Singles/Couples leaving supported emergency accommodation
- 31** Singles/Couples who did not use emergency accommodation (Prevention)

**Summary: Breakdown of individuals in Emergency Accommodation in the *Dublin Region* – to December 2020, as published nationally:**

Month	Families	Adults in Families	Children	Singles	Total Adults	Total Individuals
Dec 20	755	1,131	1,864	3,027	4,158	6,022
Nov 2020	783	1,150	1,914	3,093	4,243	6,157
Oct 2020	858	1,246	2,070	3,051	4,297	6,367
Sept 2020	865	1,257	2,008	2,994	4,251	6,259
Aug 2020	856	1,242	2,023	2,962	4,204	6,227
July 2020	862	1,269	2,017	2,919	4,188	6,205
Jun 2020	871	1,276	1,979	2,895	4,171	6,150
May 2020	893	1,309	2,065	2,855	4,164	6,229
April 2020	974	1,412	2,232	2,854	4,266	6,498
Dec 2019	1,162	1,682	2,553	2,586	4,268	6,821

While it is important to acknowledge the significant progress made during 2020, (an unprecedented year), there is still a long way to go and the obvious challenges will continue into 2021 and beyond.

**Single Homeless Adults:**

As we indicated in our previous reports, the situation in relation to **single persons** is more challenging. While the total number of single adults in emergency accommodation did increase slowly during the year, with a slight decrease in **December**. **Currently the number of emergency beds in place throughout the region (mostly in the city) is just over 3,000.**

There was some success in terms of exits for single persons, with **108** single adults exiting to tenancies and **39** singles preventions through new tenancies in December (HAP). This figure

was **108** and **67** respectively in **November**. The number of single adults presenting as homeless and using emergency accommodation for the first time has remained high and unfortunately, there was an increase in December.

In December **133** single adults used emergency accommodation for the first time; it was **116 in November**, **156** in October, **135** in September, **134** in August, **176** in July, **105** in June, **123** in May, **99** in April, **108** in March, **160** in February, and **215** in January.

As we mentioned in a previous report, we have now assigned additional Housing Support Officers (5) to work full time with single persons and couples who are residing in emergency accommodation particularly those facilities managed by private operators with the aim of assisting them to source accommodation that is more suitable. Over recent months, the team have reviewed the position of **777** single persons currently living in emergency accommodation.

Since this work started over the latter months of 2020, 42 individuals (2 couples) supported by the team have moved onto HHAP (20) and Social Housing tenancies (20). A further 34 have moves pending. This intensive work will be continued and enhanced during 2021.

This progress demonstrates the significant benefit that has arisen over the last 18 months from the recruitment directly by the DRHE of 25 Housing Support Officers. The first tranche of these officers made a big difference in supporting families to move out of emergency accommodation.

We have commissioned an external consultant to carry out a comprehensive review of all properties/facilities managed by both the Charity Organisations and by the Private Operators, the Pandemic has delayed the start of this review in particular the necessary inspection of properties, this report when complete will be published.

We have also initiated a procurement process for the engagement of an external body or company to take on the permanent role of inspecting and reporting back on all properties being funded by the DRHE. Such reports will be published on the DRHE Website.

1,006, single persons exited from emergency accommodation in 2020 and they moved to the following:

640 to Hap Tenancies.

208 to Local Authority Accommodation (including 90 Housing First).

38 to Long Term Supported Accommodation.

91 to Approved Housing Body Accommodation.

27 to Private Rented Accommodation

2 to the Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS)

Currently there are a significant number of emergency beds unused each night and this has been the situation consistently over recent months.

### **Covid-19**

Shielding (previously cocooning) is provided for most at-risk homeless persons and recognises the need to minimise the contact for those who are older and more vulnerable. At the end of

December, there were 262 homeless individuals residing in shielding facilities in the Dublin Region.

The DRHE, in partnership with the HSE continues to identify more individuals that may require shielding to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected.

At the end of December, approximately 1,400 people accessing emergency accommodation or rough sleeping had been tested for Covid-19. Unfortunately, there have been 3 COVID related deaths. (In long-term supported accommodation) since the onset of the Pandemic in early 2020.

At the end of December, there were **88** confirmed cases in Homeless Services but this number has increased significantly since the beginning of January, However, there is a comprehensive Covid-19 response in place by the DRHE and the HSE to deal with this.

The DRHE and the HSE have a robust system in place to deal with all suspected or confirmed cases that occur within homeless services in the Dublin Region, including a dedicated homeless testing service, referral and transportation to isolation facilities where required.

When a suspected case is identified, this system is immediately triggered, along with contact tracing and a general audit of any other risks to public health in the facility that need to be managed. We work closely and very regularly with the HSE on Covid-19, issues and we very much value their ongoing strong support.

### **Deaths of people in Homeless Services**

Sadly, in 2020, **8** people died while rough sleeping in the Dublin Region. Three of the individuals who died had recently stayed in emergency homeless accommodation and had ongoing access to such accommodation (2 died in the final few days of December 2020).

Of the other five people, and no less tragic, three were not known at all to Homeless Services in Dublin, while in 2 cases it had been a number of years since there was any previous contact.

44 people died in emergency homeless accommodation during the year. These deaths occurred while they were residing in Supported Temporary Accommodation, and Private Emergency Accommodation.

27 people died in long-term supported tenancies where there is on-site medical services, (3 of these deaths resulted from Covid-19).

Overall, a total of 74 people who were connected into to Dublin Homeless Services sadly died in 2020. There was a further five deaths (rough sleeping) where the persons involved had not been connected into Homeless Services in Dublin. The comparable number for deaths during previous years was:

2019 - 49

2018 -47

2017 - 62

It should be noted that the recording of deaths in previous years was done differently and there was sometimes late reporting or indeed a lack of reporting where people had died from

natural causes. The current Notification Practice (reviewed in 2020) is more robust and accurate.

The DRHE is concerned at the significant increase of deaths in the latter months of 2020 (from July) and a comprehensive review of such deaths for the full year is underway in conjunction with the HSE.

During most of 2020, there was excess capacity of emergency beds and during the latter months of 2020, there was a consistent and unprecedented number of unused beds available each night. The DRHE has maintained an excess supply of emergency beds into 2021.

### **The 'RTE Investigates' Programme aired on 18<sup>th</sup> January.**

This programme placed a welcome spotlight on the complex issue of homelessness in Dublin and the task that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has in leading a multi-agency response to this issue. The experiences of the three people featured in the programme showed this complexity and it highlighted areas where we need to provide a better response.

Dublin mirrors the patterns shown in international research, where the vast majority of people will move out of homelessness never to re-enter, a smaller percentage experience recurrent episodes of homelessness and a small minority experience rough sleeping. The programme identified some of the issues behind the most vulnerable and at-risk category, rough sleepers.

#### **Rough sleepers with access to beds who do not take them up:**

Over recent months there has been significant excess capacity in emergency accommodation (for the first time in years) and we do believe that standards in such facilities are reasonable with heating, showers, toilets, food and a range of social supports. While not a substitute for a home, these facilities in our view are significantly safer and more secure than sleeping on the streets or in tents etc. However, we do appreciate that the issue is not as simple as this, and there is a small minority of the homeless population who will not take up such accommodation or will not take it up on a regular basis for various reasons.

This can range from a person with underlying mental health issues who isolates very consciously, to the more recent phenomenon of drug-use in tents. There are also cases where an individual could have had a bad experience when residing previously in emergency accommodation.

Emergency accommodation is managed either by charities funded by the DRHE, including Peter McVerry Trust, Dublin Simon, DePaul Trust, Crosscare and the Salvation Army or by commercial operators, where in-reach teams provide supports from the DRHE, the HSE and some charities. Charity homeless service providers funded by the DRHE are subject to inspections based on the National Quality Standards. Private Emergency facilities are inspected for *physical* standards only, as the care and case management elements are provided by visiting support teams. Inspections are both proactive (planned) and reactive (based on complaints received). The growth of expenditure on emergency accommodation reflects the growth in homelessness from 2014 to 2019 in particular.

The situations depicted in the programme are difficult, but not without hope. It was by adopting a system-wide Housing First approach that Finland made such progress on ending long-term homelessness. In Dublin, with a quarter of all applicants for social housing on our list, we have well -documented challenges with regard to supply, particularly of one bedroom

or studio accommodation, but good progress is being made on creating Housing First tenancies in the Dublin Region and throughout the country.

This means that many people who formerly experienced rough-sleeping or long-term homelessness are now in tenancies with wraparound supports.

The DRHE piloted the Housing First approach in Ireland and our support for housing led responses to homelessness is absolute.

Ms Natalie Grogan is on the Housing First Intake team list and will be moving into her own home in the near future. She has had a number of different placements and is currently residing in DRHE emergency accommodation.

### **Homeless Persons moving from another Country/Outside the Dublin Region:**

At the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the DRHE moved away from night shelters, and converted all facilities to 24-hour accommodation.

An unintended consequence was that migrants or people presenting to Dublin from other counties no longer had a place they could access directly without an assessment of their eligibility, housing need and requirement for emergency accommodation.

Each local authority is responsible for the provision of emergency accommodation within its functional area. There has been a strong emphasis on local authorities over recent years in developing responses at local level through statutory homeless action plans. Each local authority has responsibility to ensure that hospital, prison and other institutional discharges are planned and co-ordinated so that people can access homeless services in the area they originated from.

We are strongly of the view that the provision of homeless services should never be separated from access to housing services.

We acknowledge too the critical role of specialist interventions from the HSE or NGOs/Approved Housing Bodies in the areas of health, social and addiction supports.

Nationally there is a strong focus on prevention through enhanced rates of HAP for persons presenting at risk of homelessness.

However this is only available to households registered with a local authority for housing services, (local connection rules for housing are established in legislation).

The DRHE always strongly encourages households who present for homeless services to register for social housing.

Without access to Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or social housing, the experience of homelessness can become prolonged.

Where people come to Dublin, we explain why a person has a better chance of exiting homelessness by presenting to their own local authority where they may be eligible for social housing, HAP or Housing First and where the waiting times are not as lengthy as in Dublin. We are in regular contact with other local Authorities and local agencies to facilitate situations, where for one reason or another, placement is not available locally or where the circumstances may warrant discretion on humanitarian grounds.

In addition, the DRHE makes dedicated beds available to the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team for people they encounter rough-sleeping regardless of whether they are from the Dublin Region or not.

During the broadcast, Mr Joe Nolan was shown making a call to the Freephone Service and during a part of this call that was not transmitted; he was in fact advised to contact the Dublin (Outreach) Rough Sleeper Team and given a phone number in order to get a bed. However, that initial contact with our service was not good enough and we apologise for that.

With regard to his present situation, we have made contact with Carlow County Council and we have allocated emergency accommodation to him until he can, if possible, be accommodated again locally. He is currently residing in emergency accommodation in Dublin City.

This specific incident does not reflect the quality/ sensitive customer service and advice that the DRHE/Freephone Service aims for and with which a great many calls that are answered on a daily and nightly basis. With the onset of Covid-19, we have had to severely restrict counter and face-to-face interviews with customers, with the telephone becoming the main form of contact. There is an ongoing review of the Freephone Service but Covid-19 has delayed the finalisation of this.

Mr Dan Orlovs was given emergency accommodation in DRHE-funded emergency accommodation in Co Kildare back in October 2020 and he is still residing there. This facility is managed very well on behalf of the DRHE by the Peter McVerry Trust and they are supporting Dan in every possible way.

Notwithstanding any of the above, the programme showed how individuals who cannot or will not return to take up services in their own local authority are more vulnerable to rough sleeping. The DRHE fully accepts the Minister's position that there is a balance to be struck between necessary assessment and ensuring that nobody should have to sleep rough while awaiting for this assessment/eligibility to be completed.

*We accept that we did not get that balance right in a small number of cases over recent months.*

We will ensure that all people in such situations will be offered temporary emergency accommodation if available, and if they at risk of having to sleep rough, until we can contact the local Authority of origin and coordinate a response.

In recent months there has been a significant increase in people presenting as homeless and seeking emergency accommodation as they arrive from other parts of the country (outside Dublin), and this increase has come despite the serious Covid-19 restrictions on travel. Over 50 such cases have presented and have been allocated temporary emergency accommodation over the past month; one person has been successfully prevented from entering homelessness and has returned to his local area.

At present, we have emergency bed capacity to respond to this demand but pressure on the system is likely to increase in the months ahead, particularly if surges of the Covid-19 virus occur within Homeless Services.

We will continue to circulate a monthly report to city councillors and we are in the process of formulating an annual report for 2020 that will have comprehensive information on financing, funding and other matters relevant to the DRHE.

*Finally, it is important again to acknowledge the efforts of all frontline staff who work in demanding circumstances and who have kept all essential services open and safe for homeless people throughout the Pandemic.*



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3rd February 2021

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