

Press Releases - Strategy For the Homeless - 04/02/01

Councillor Eoin Costello (FG) is calling on the Council to provide adequate emergency accommodation for the homeless of our County. He stated that the current situation whereby groups of people are living rough in the shelters along Queens Road in sub zero temperatures is inhuman.

This call comes as a major plan to tackle homelessness in Dublin, entitled "Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness" is to be considered by the March meeting of the County Council. The report sets out a number of objectives to be addressed by Local Authorities in consultation with the Health Boards and the voluntary sector. The main objective contained in the report was that a three-year Action Plan would be drawn up by every local authority in the country. These plans are required to address all issues relating to homelessness including prevention, accommodation, health, education, employment and support services. The report put forward the aim of providing a totally integrated service to persons who become homeless that would address all of their needs during the period of their homelessness.

For the first time the report clearly states that the responsibility for tackling homeless lies with local authorities in respect of providing accommodation (including emergency hostel accommodation) for homeless persons and with Health Boards for the provision of in-house care and health needs.

A board of management has been set up to give a high level of support and policy direction to the new Homeless Services Unit. The board has representatives from the four Dublin local authorities, from the Eastern Regional Health Board, FAS, VEC, Probation and Welfare.

The Dublin action plan on Homelessness is quite specific and it addresses the issues of accommodation provision (emergency, transition and long-term) health services, settlement services, advice, outreach services and measures aimed at preventing homelessness. It outlines the need for a guarantee of move on accommodation for persons in both emergency and transition units, as at present emergency accommodation has become silted up because of the absence of move on accommodation.

The plan also outlines measures to eliminate the use of B&B accommodation for anything other than emergency short-term

accommodation. The plan also deals with the matter of specialist type hostels, which cater for specific groups with particular needs. These would include low threshold hostels and wet hostels as well as a number of refuges for women and children.

The plan is ambitious in its targets and challenges it sets. It proposes to reduce the number of rough sleepers by two thirds during the period of the plan. It also proposes that by the end of the plan no person will be in emergency accommodation for longer than six months.

The Department of the Environment and Local Government has indicated on a number of occasions that funding will be made available for the implementation of the plan.

According to Councillor Costello such a strategy is long overdue. He stated that there has been an enormous increase in the use of B&Bs as accommodation for homeless people. In the Dublin area there are approximately 650 families being accommodated in B&B's. Councillor Costello was recently contacted by a number of people who are in this position. Life in a B&B is most unattractive. He stated that occupants are thrown out every morning at 9pm and told that they are not allowed to come back to the room until 6pm and this can go on for months under the current system. Councillor Costello had met one person who was doing her best to bring up a teenage daughter in this situation. It was impossible for the daughter to study as they have to walk the streets each evening until the B&B will allow them to enter their room.