

Midlands Region
Homelessness Action Plan
May 2010 – May 2013

Adopted by Offaly County Council 21st June 2010

Introduction

Under the *Integrated Homeless Strategy 2000* produced by the Department of Environment, each Local Authority was required to establish a County Homeless Forum and prepare Homelessness Action Plans. Each of the four Local Authorities in the Midlands Region, Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath have in the past prepared such plans which were formerly adopted by their respective Housing SPC's and the County Councils.

A new National strategy was prepared in 2008 entitled *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013*. This strategy outlines three core objectives

- Eliminating long-term occupation of emergency homeless facilities;
- Eliminating the need to sleep rough; and
- Preventing the occurrence of homelessness as far as possible

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 now provides a statutory framework for Homeless Fora and Homelessness Action Plans and also provided for Regional Homelessness Action Plans where appropriate. In December 2009, the Minister for Housing and Local Services at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government made an order bringing into force the provisions in relation to homelessness with effect from 1 February 2010 under Section 37. The Minister also gave a direction in relation to the establishment of Joint Homeless Consultative Forum under this Section and Westmeath County Council has been assigned as the lead Authority for the Midland Region.

Section 1

Vision and Strategic Aims

This section outlines the long term vision for homelessness in the Midlands region (Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly) which this plan will lay the ground for achieving. This section also outlines the mission or purpose of the plan and the values and principles which underpin it. Overall the plan reflects *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008 - 2013* and is also guided by national policy on mental health and the National Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2013.

Vision

The Way Home states that from 2010 long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough will be eliminated throughout Ireland. The risk of a person becoming homeless will be minimised and where homelessness does occur the experience will be short term and the aim will be to move the person in as short a time as possible into appropriate long term accommodation.

The Midland Homeless Forum's vision is of a region without homelessness where appropriate preventative policies and services are available. The needs of people who are homeless will be met in a co-ordinated and planned manner and will offer a range of appropriate, affordable and supportive services aimed at the prevention and reduction of homelessness.

Mission

The purpose of the Midlands Homelessness Forum is, in accordance with section 38 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, to provide information, views, advice or reports in relation to homelessness and in relation to the provisions of the draft homelessness action plan and the operation and implementation of the action plan. This requires the Forum to place an emphasis on strengthening preventative policies, procedures, working relationships and services to reduce levels of repeat homeless, thus reducing the overall level of homelessness. In particular the Midlands Homeless Forum aims to address the needs of the long term homeless currently resident in emergency facilities.

Values and principles

A number of values and principles have informed the development of this plan, and will underpin its implementation.

- Homelessness is solvable and preventable.
- Homelessness can only be addressed by relevant bodies working in partnership to agreed objectives.
- Homelessness has as much to do with appropriate support services as with bricks and mortar. Housing by itself will not solve homelessness in every case. There is also a need for interventions to assist people to move out of homelessness and support services to help them to maintain independent living.
- The co-operation of all relevant parties in providing co-ordinated service provision and integrated care planning is essential to eliminating long term homeless and rough sleeping.
- Services and funding made available to tackle homeless in the Midlands region must be used in the most efficient and effective way possible.
- Each person is unique and must be valued as such.
- People who become homeless have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to have their beliefs and choices respected.
- Services should provide continuing encouragement to people to be as independent as possible and to move out of homelessness.
- The views and experience of homeless service users and front line providers will be used to inform the planning of regional and local policy and service responses to homelessness.

Strategic Aims

This Midlands Homelessness Action Plan mirrors the six strategic aims as outlined in *The Way Home*:

1. To reduce the number of households who become homeless through the further development and enhancement of preventative measures – preventing homelessness.
2. To eliminate the need for people to sleep rough.
3. To eliminate long term homelessness and to reduce the length of time people spend homeless.
4. To meet the long term housing needs through an increase in housing options.
5. To ensure effective services for homeless people.

6. To ensure better co-ordinated funding arrangements and re-orientate spending on homeless services, away from emergency responses to the provision of long term housing and support services.

Key performance indicators

Key performance indicators will be developed to monitor the implementation of the Midlands Homelessness Action Plan in line with the six strategic aims outlined above:

- Aim One: Progress will be measured by collecting accurate data on the number of new homeless individuals presenting in the region and monitoring the primary reason for their presentation.
- Aim Two: Progress will be measured by collecting accurate data on the numbers of people sleeping rough and monitoring the patterns of rough sleeping. The trend in numbers sleeping rough relative to available accommodation is the main indicator of a need to sleep rough.
- Aim Three: Progress will be measured by collecting accurate data on the number of people in emergency accommodation, duration of stay in emergency accommodation and the number of homeless people who have a Homeless Action Team approved personal action plan in place. The trend in numbers longer than 6 months in emergency accommodation is the main indicator of reduction in long term homelessness.
- Aim Four: Progress will be measured by collecting accurate data on the number of assessed as suitable to be moved into appropriate long term accommodation, with intensive, medium or short term supports. The trend in numbers moved to suitable long-term mainstream housing (with transitional visiting supports, where necessary) is the main indicator of progress in meeting long-term housing need.
- Aim Five: Progress will be measured by the number of services with Service Level Agreements in place with both the relevant Local Authority and the HSE. Progress will be measured by collecting accurate data on the number of homeless people who have a Homeless Action Team approved personal action plan in place.
- Aim Six: Progress will be measured by the share of expenditure on Homeless Services between expenditure on emergency responses and expenditure on the provision of long term housing and support services.

Section 2

Definition of Homelessness

For the purposes of this Homelessness Action Plan the definition of homelessness is that as has been defined in the Housing Act of 1988 as:

A person shall be regarded by a housing authority as being homeless for the purpose of this Act if

- a. there is no accommodation available which in the opinion of the authority s/he together with any other person who normally resides with him/her or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of; or
- b. s/he is living in a hospital, county home, night shelter, or other such institution and is so living because s/he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a).
- c. s/he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources.

Section 3

National Policy Context

In drawing up this Homelessness Action Plan the Management Group of the Midlands Homeless Forum took particular account of homeless and housing policies published over the past two decades. The policy framework incorporates the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government National Housing Strategy *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities*, the 2008 National Homeless Strategy *The Way Home* and the subsequent 2009 National Implementation Plan, the 2002 Homeless Preventative Strategy, the 2001 Youth Homeless Preventative Strategy and the 2000 National Homeless Strategy.

The planning and delivery of Homeless Services is directed by the provisions of Part2, Chapter 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the Housing Act 1988 and is underpinned by the National Partnership agreement, the National Development Plan and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

This section identifies significant developments in responses to the problem of homelessness over the past two decades. Overall it is evident from policy that homelessness has moved from the direct provision of accommodation, to a more co-ordinated approach that enables homeless people to access long term accommodation and prevents homelessness from

occurring and re-occurring. The key policies and legislation affecting the delivery of this strategy are outlined as follows;

Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 provides a comprehensive statutory framework for the operation of statutory Homelessness Consultative For a and Management Groups and the making and adoption of homelessness action plans within specified time periods, publication and circulation of the adopted plans and procedures for undertaking a review of a plan or preparing a new plan are outlined. These new provisions will help to make homelessness a more central element of the housing authority functions, promote a more planned approach to homeless services throughout the country and help housing authorities to ensure that decisions on services are abased on criteria of evidenced need, value for money and achieving the best outcomes for homeless people.

2009 Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan

Implementation of the Homeless Strategy will be carried out primarily through the local homelessness action plan process, which has been put on a statutory basis through the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. The 2009 National Implementation Plan provides a framework to guide the action required at national level to promote and support effective implementation locally. It sets out a sequence of strategic aims, key approaches, priority actions, constituent/supporting measures necessary for implementation of the overall Homeless Strategy. The implementation plan indicates appropriate lead roles, timelines, key performance indicators and linkages to relevant local action. The plan also brings to bear on the implementation process important considerations such as efficiency, value for money, organisational and financial streamlining and the roles of various agencies, particularly in the context of the changed economic context.

Priority areas highlighted for attention, particularly those focused on the elimination of long-term dependence on emergency homeless services, include the following:

- Action to provide effective long-term solutions for people leaving homelessness, including development of a new scheme of supports and homes through leasing or equivalent accommodation supply arrangements.
- Re-orientation of investment to support a significant increase in suitable accommodation and support for people leaving homelessness.
- New arrangements and procedures for funding of homeless services based on needs, priorities and maximising efficiency, quality and value for money.
- Engagement between the relevant Departments and the HSE to identify ways of enhancing effectiveness and best value nationally from resources in relation to homelessness.
- Co-ordination of guidance to local authorities, homeless fora and health services, particularly in the context of formulation of homelessness action plans.

2008 – 2013 *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland*

The Way Home was launched in 2008 and is informed by the findings and recommendations of the 2006 Fitzpatrick report. The emphasis of the new strategy is to prevent people from becoming homeless or if they should become homeless this would be short term. The ultimate intention is that persons who have accessed homeless services will be assisted out of homelessness and into long term housing in as short a time as possible.

The strategy sets out six strategic aims around three core objectives:

- Eliminating long term occupation of emergency homeless facilities.
- Eliminating the need to sleep rough.
- Preventing the occurrence of homelessness as far as possible.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016

The NAPSI sets out a comprehensive programme of actions and goals to address poverty and social exclusion. It places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery and offers a framework for implementing a streamlined, cross cutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

The National Development Plan 2007-2013

The NDP incorporates measures agreed in "Towards 2016" and the social inclusion priority is of most relevance to homelessness. This priority outlines measures to address barriers to social inclusion by improving access to health care, education, training and employment and high quality housing. The main objective is to provide a coherent approach to social inclusion by improving co-ordination across central and local government, better monitoring and evaluation of interventions and consultation with stakeholders.

2007 *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities*

The 2007 National Housing Strategy *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities* places emphasis on the interagency approach to combating homelessness. It also places emphasis on the use of a case management approach in meeting the needs of homeless households. The strategy prioritises actions aimed at the inclusion of special needs groups within services that are focused around homelessness.

Towards 2016

Towards 2016 is part of a series of national social partnership agreements. It makes particular reference to homelessness and makes proposals in relation to improved coordination of service provision and joint approaches at local level. The aim of this national agreement is to facilitate a holistic response to the needs of homeless persons through the further development of a case management approach based on needs assessment and access to multiple services by all the key stakeholders. Other features include the elimination of long term occupation of emergency accommodation by 2010. By 2010 it is expected that no individual should remain in emergency accommodation for longer than six months.

An Independent Review of Homeless Strategies (2006)

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government commissioned Fitzpatrick Associates to carry out a review focused on *Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy (2000)* and the *Homeless Preventative Strategy (2002)*. It also carried out a review of local action plans. The review made 21 recommendations around 7 key themes. The Government has accepted the broad thrust of the recommendations including, a more concentrated focus on development of long term accommodation options, an improvement of co-ordination of funding, the development of a case management approach to addressing the needs of homeless people based on key workers and the development of preventative strategies, appropriate local services and supports, and better data on the extent, nature and causes of homelessness.

The Homeless Preventative Strategy (2002)

The 2002 strategy focused on ensuring that no one is discharged or released from state institutional care without the appropriate measures in place to ensure they have a suitable place to live. The aim of the strategy is to target adult and young offenders, people leaving mental health residential facilities, people leaving hospitals and young people leaving care. It highlighted that an effective preventative strategy would help break the cycle of homelessness.

The Youth Homeless Preventative Strategy (2001)

The 2001 strategy was published by the Department of Health and Children. It aimed to eliminate homelessness amongst young people under the age of eighteen years. A key element of this strategy is the prevention of homelessness among young people leaving care through the implementation of education, training, information, awareness, care and aftercare supports.

Homelessness- An Integrated Strategy (2000)

The 2000 strategy set out a new policy approach to homelessness. It involved a whole Government approach to ensure that homelessness is addressed and prevented. It recognized that homelessness would not be solved by housing or shelter alone. It focused on the need for a holistic approach involving health, care, welfare, education, training and support to enable people who experience homelessness to re-integrate into society and prevent it from happening. It made Local Authorities and Health Services jointly responsible for homelessness, with Local Authorities charged with a lead role to prepare three year action plans on Homelessness. It led to the establishment of Local Homeless Fora.

The Housing Act 1988

The 1988 Act defined homelessness for the first time in legislation and expanded the role of Local Authorities in addressing Homelessness. It resulted in improvements in funding available to voluntary bodies for accommodation for homeless persons. It also resulted in greater awareness of homelessness as an issue and in development of additional responses to it.

Health & Drug Strategies

There are a number of strategies relevant to the development of homeless services as health needs and addiction issues are often a contributory factor to a person becoming homeless. The National Health *Strategy Quality and Fairness A Health System for You* (2001) has a specific aim of improving the health and well-being of homeless people and an overall aim to improve the operation and quality of health services generally.

The 2006 *Vision for Change* report by the Mental Health Expert group recognises that homeless people with mental health problems have more difficulty meeting their accommodation needs. The report makes seven recommendations relating to data collection, the role of housing authorities in meeting the accommodation needs of people with mental health problems, the need for affordable and suitable housing options and the identification of a Community Mental Health Team in each catchment area.

The National Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2016 focuses on the needs of specific groups in accessing services. The strategy recognises the complex needs of homeless people and prioritises further engagement with homeless people and the provision of drug treatment and prevention measures at national, regional and local level.

County/City Development Plans 2007-2013

Each Local Authority has a County/City Development Plan which seeks to develop and improve in a sustainable manner the social, economic, cultural and environmental assets of the county/city. The purpose of the plan is to inform the public, statutory authorities and service providers, developers and other interested parties, of the policy framework that will guide development decisions within the county/city over the plan period.

Each County/City Development Plan includes a Housing Strategy which seeks:

- to ensure that sufficient land is zoned for residential use and made available to meet the requirements of all sectors of the population.
- to ensure that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income, particularly those in need of social housing.
- to ensure a mixture of house type is developed to match requirements of different categories of households, particularly vulnerable households.
- to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different backgrounds.

Arising from the Housing Act 2009, a Housing Services Plan will be developed by each Local Authority which will outline the provision of housing services in their County having regard to the requirements of the housing strategy. The Housing Services Plan will outline the demand for affordable housing, and will include the Traveller Accommodation Programme, Homelessness Action Plan, the Anti-Social Behaviour strategy and the Sustainable Neighbourhood Strategy for each county.

Section 4
Regional Implementation Structures

Midlands Management Group –Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum
A Management Group of the Midlands Joint Homeless Forum was established in accordance with legislation with the primary responsibility for the preparation of this statutory Midlands Homelessness Action Plan. This Group will make recommendations to relevant statutory bodies in relation to the services required to address homelessness in the region, on funding for such services and on the ongoing operation of this Homelessness Action Plan and subsequent blueprint for Homeless Services.

Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum
The Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum was established in May 2010 arising from Ministerial directions issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Circular HU 1/2010 in accordance with the provisions of sections 38, 39 and 41 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. The role of the Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum is to provide a consultative mechanism in relation to homelessness in the context of the preparation of this statutory Midlands Homelessness Action Plan 2010 - 2013.

Membership of the Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum
The 22 members of the Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum are drawn from the sectors as outlined in Circular HU 1/2010 and will work together over the next five years. The membership is drawn from the following sectors:

Midlands Local Authorities	Westmeath County Council – Responsible Authority (2) Laois County Council (1) Longford County Council (1) Offaly County Council (1)
Mandatory Representation	HSE Midlands (1) HSE National Specialist Rep. (1) Prison Service (1) Probation Service (1) Vocational Education Committee (1) FAS (1)
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>11</i>
Other Representation	Member of Westmeath County Council (1) Department of Social & Family Affairs (1) Regional Drugs Task Force (1) Approved Bodies & Other Bodies (8)
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>11</i>

Overall Membership 22

County /City Homeless Action Teams are in operation in each of the Local Authority and are comprised of Local Authority Housing officials, HSE healthcare and community welfare staff and representatives from voluntary service providers. Each Homeless Action Team meets to co-ordinate an inter agency response to the support needs and case management of homeless people and individuals at risk of becoming homeless. HAT's not only work together on coordinating support for individuals but also in identifying gaps in services which the team can then address.

Section 5

Homeless Services in the Midlands Region

The Financing of Homeless Services in the Midlands Region is provided by a number of Statutory Public Agencies and the Voluntary Sector. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government provide funding for the construction, purchase and leasing of facilities through the Local Authorities to the Voluntary Bodies under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). This scheme allows for 100% funding for these projects for Homeless Services. The Voluntary Bodies are also entitled to apply for Section 10 funding to cover their costs in relation to maintenance and management of facilities. The HSE provides for the cost of the salaries of the care staff employed in these facilities.

As indicated in the introduction, the four Local Authorities each adopted their own individual Homelessness action Plans and assist in the provision of homeless services in their respective areas. At the outset, due recognition should be given to the voluntary bodies involved in delivering services to homeless people in the Midland Region. The Local Authorities while having statutory responsibility for homelessness, work in partnership with the HSE and various voluntary bodies in delivering services to homeless persons. Funding for the Capital provision of buildings and Section 10 funding is financed by the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government. Applications to access such funding are approved by the Local Authorities in the first instance, before a formal submission is forwarded to the DOEHLG. The HSE provide valuable financial assistance for the payment of appropriate care staff. This plan gives a brief outline of the various services provided and a map of same will be included as an Appendix to the Plan.

Co. Longford Homeless Services

At present, Longford is reasonably well served by two homeless hostels run by St. Vincent de Paul with accommodation for 11 males and 19 females and children. There is also a dedicated settlement worker in the county, with a Homeless Liaison Nurse employed by the HSE who covers Longford/Westmeath. The HSE also provides a dedicated Community Welfare Officer to deal with homeless persons in the Longford/Westmeath Region.

Co. Westmeath Homeless Services

Mullingar is currently served by an 11 bed unit that caters for women and children. This facility is run by TEAM (Temporary Emergency Accommodation Mullingar) Ltd. TEAM have long term plans for a male unit and also operate a drop-in centre at Bishopgate St. Mullingar.

Athlone is served by a 6 bed mixed unit hostel run by Midland Simon Community and a Women's Refuge Centre, namely Esker House, which has 3 family units. ONE also has a number of units in Athlone that cater for homeless ex-servicemen.

Midland Simon also has a Regional Settlement Service, with its Headquarters in Athlone, which provides a dedicated Settlement Worker for each of the four midland counties.

Co. Offaly Homeless Services

There are currently no homeless hostels in Co. Offaly. Homeless clients are referred to neighbouring counties. Proposals are currently being developed to provide 4 units of emergency accommodation at Clontarf Road, Tullamore in conjunction with Midlands Simon Community and Tullamore Housing Association.

Co. Laois Homeless Services

Laois Co. Council has no homeless facilities but have 2 transitional 2 bed apartments in Portlaoise and Portarlington. The HSE also employ a Homeless Liaison Officer who serves Laois and Offaly.

In addition to the above mentioned, each of the four Local Authorities have in the past provided B&B emergency accommodation for homeless clientele. This practice will continue in order to service gaps in the provision of homeless services.

A map showing the location of all hostel facilities in the Midlands Region can be found in Appendix 1.

The Midland Region has, for the last 4 years, been served by a *Regional Inter-Agency Adult Homeless Forum*. This Forum was made up of key personnel from the four Local Authorities, the HSE and Voluntary Bodies all who are involved in providing services to homeless people in this area. This forum was set up in order to better co-ordinate services to homeless people in the midland region. This forum proved an effective tool for sharing information between the various agencies involved as well as developing strategies for homeless persons in the four counties. However, it had no statutory remit and this forum did not feed into the various homelessness action plans as developed by the four individual local authorities.

The success of the above Forum has been the level of inter-agency co-operation between all the statutory agencies and the voluntary bodies. As well as the Local Authorities and HSE having representation, the Gardai and Probation Service also attended meetings with

practically every Voluntary Housing Body in the four counties on a quarterly basis. It is vital that the same level of co-operation will continue in the new Forum.

The 2009 Housing Act now provides a statutory footing for this regional forum which now becomes the Joint Homeless Consultative Forum. This new body is now charged with developing a regional homelessness action plan, one that will be then presented to the DOEHLG with concrete and agreed recommendations.

Contents of Midlands Region Homeless Action Plan 2010-2013

The Midland Region has been asked to prepare a draft plan by 24th May 2013. Because of this time constraint a generic high level framework plan has been prepared. After this plan is adopted the Forum will be required to prepare a more detailed implementation blueprint of homeless services which will identify gaps in the existing provision of homeless services in the Midland Region and prioritise future developments.

Section 6

Homeless Services Framework

This element of the Action Plan, the Homeless Services Framework, seeks to outline a comprehensive model, at a generic level, of the various components of homeless services and arrangements required. This will constitute an overall policy framework for homeless services at local/regional level, providing a comprehensive model for effective homeless services and arrangements designed to achieve the aims of the Government's Homeless Strategy in the area/region. The role of the main statutory stakeholders is as follows: Housing authorities are responsible for accommodation and related aspects of homeless services, including tenancy supports, where necessary, the HSE is responsible for health/care aspects, including personal, social and community supports, where necessary.

Following compilation and analysis of more detailed data and completion of a rigorous review of homeless service requirements, the Action Plan will be supplemented by a detailed Implementation Blueprint of homeless services, which will provide the necessary detail to give effect to the framework model, with more specific identification of the nature and extent of homeless services, facilities and arrangements required during the life of the plan and necessary details such as location, quantification, operational arrangements, service provider involvement, etc.

6.0 General principles relating to homeless services

Key principles which will be applied in decisions relating to homeless services include:

The overall objective in planning and delivery of homeless services is to achieve the best outcome for homeless households by matching services to needs.

It is essential to maximise effectiveness and value for money in homeless services and make the best possible use of available resources to pursue the core objectives of the Homeless Strategy, particularly ending long-term homelessness.

Homeless services will be configured to promote the objectives of the Homelessness Action, having regard to needs and priorities in the area and available resources. The scope for greater rationalisation and improved organisation of all aspects of homeless services will be examined with a view to avoiding or eliminating any duplication, maximising effectiveness and efficiency and ensuring that scarce resources are only used for services which make a significant contribution to addressing homelessness. As well as examining the match between supply of and need for different categories of accommodation, this will include critical examination of elements (where relevant) such as the operation of placement services,

outreach services, information services, other possible daytime services and various types of support services. All existing support type services and resources, however termed (e.g. housing support, tenancy support, social work, tenancy sustainment, settlement, re-

settlement, housing welfare, etc) will be identified and taken into account in determining service requirements.

Decisions relating to the configuration of services will be based on rigorous analysis of relevant, comprehensive, accurate, and up to date information, particularly in relation to needs and existing homeless services, including aspects such as unit cost analysis, cost variations between services, usage of services, duration of homelessness and outcomes for service users.

In considering any new proposals, account must be taken of likely constraints on availability of capital and the need to pursue any projects that may be warranted, through revenue based "leasing" type arrangements.

6.1 Main elements of homeless services

Homeless Services will be configured and operated to support the successful implementation at local/regional level of the Government's Homeless Strategy and the National Implementation Plan for the Strategy, which contain the following main objectives:

Prevention of homelessness

Eliminating need to sleep rough

Eliminating long term homelessness and meeting long-term housing need

Ensuring that homeless services are effective and of adequate standard.

The following is an outline of the main elements of homeless services to support achievement of these objectives.

6.2 Homelessness prevention/intervention

Arrangements to ensure identification of and contact with and by, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including possible outreach services as warranted.

Measures to help prevent homelessness due to loss of accommodation or to identify a route away from entering homelessness (e.g. provision or retention of housing, securing necessary income support to retain tenancy, etc).

Effective arrangements for provision of clear information and advice on housing options, homeless services and other relevant services to prevent or address homelessness.

Arrangements for early intervention in cases of risk of homelessness due to other factors, including securing relevant in-reach services e.g. to prisons, hospitals, or other relevant institutions.

Prompt initial assessment to determine homelessness, applying appropriate and consistent operational criteria.

Arrangements to ensure prompt access to or contact by the Community Welfare Service for people at risk of homelessness or actually homeless, both in relation to general social welfare entitlements and rent supplements and deposits.

Liaison with HSE and Prison/Probation Services through the Forum in relation relevant matters, including inreach services, discharge protocols and arrangements for

accommodation and other relevant services (e.g. health/addiction services) for persons approaching discharge.

Arrangements for identification and preventative action, through relevant agencies, in respect of particular risk groups and risk factors such as rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, family breakdown, offenders (including sex offenders and ex-offenders, domestic violence (including possible removal of perpetrator).

Liaison with HSE to address the potential risk of youth homelessness to act as a route to adult homelessness.

6.3 Rough sleepers

Rough sleeper counts in areas where warranted.

Provision of street outreach service, where warranted, and compilation of information and implementation of arrangements to eliminate any need to sleep rough.

Arrangements for access to and appropriate admissions policies to emergency homeless facilities.

Arrangements for access by rough sleepers to drug, alcohol and health services, including adequate awareness by rough sleepers of available services.

Availability of appropriate contingency arrangements for deployment to assist habitual rough sleepers in the event of severe weather or significant emergency.

6.4 Temporary Homeless Accommodation

Provision of temporary accommodation where necessary, including, as warranted, different types of accommodation to meet different levels of need, including complex needs requiring involvement of more "specialist" agencies.

Implementation of effective "bed management" arrangements for operation of accommodation and placement of people. Minimise use of relatively expensive B&B accommodation and promote and plan for movement to mainstream housing as soon as possible.

Arrangements to ensure adequate standards of accommodation.

6.5 Assessment, health/care, case management/planning, service availability/quality

Prompt and effective follow up and support in relation to persons entering temporary accommodation, with a view to minimising duration of homelessness (target maximum duration of 6 months but less as far as possible) and the risk of recurrence of homelessness, including:

Proactive arrangements to ensure all eligible persons are "registered" for social housing.

Ongoing liaison with HSE, which is responsible for health/care aspects, including ensuring availability of any relevant specialist services, e.g. in relation to mental ill health, other disabilities, psychological, addiction or behavioural issues, ex-offenders, young people leaving care, etc.

Arrangements to ensure that people in homeless facilities have access to or are referred to relevant mainstream services e.g. in the health, welfare, education, employment and training sectors and have access to information and advice on such services.

Arrangements for adequate in-reach services to people in temporary accommodation e.g. by education, training, employment or other agencies with functions relevant to helping people to progress out of homelessness.

Full assessment (with involvement of relevant agencies) to determine housing, health/care and other needs (including complex and multiple needs) and determine most appropriate options: 1. housing and housing support needs. 2. health and care needs. 3. other possible non-housing support needs; Needs relating to the foregoing to be specified in an accommodation/support plan

Arrangements for case planning and care and case management and ongoing case assessment, as appropriate, and action to implement an accommodation and support plan. A case management approach is considered beneficial in the delivery of homeless services. In particular, decisions to provide housing supports and the extent and duration of any such supports, must be based on rigorous assessment resulting in an accurate housing support plan for each individual.

Measures to ensure the quality and effectiveness of homeless services and that best practice and health and safety requirements are fully implemented.

Arrangements to ensure adequate availability and appropriate localisation of homeless services.

Implementation of arrangements to plan and deliver appropriate accommodation for households, ranging from homeless facilities to long term accommodation, including reconfiguration/adaptation of existing facilities for use as long-term accommodation.

6.6 Long-term homeless accommodation

Implementation of licence or tenancy agreements, as appropriate, in respect of long term residence in homeless facilities or independent accommodation (in which case the households concerned will no longer be counted as homeless).

Action to ensure availability of an adequate supply of suitable long-term supported residential accommodation for homeless people who do not have capacity to progress to mainstream housing. The potential to provide such accommodation by adapting existing emergency or transitional facilities will be exploited.

Audit/survey of existing premises (private, local authority or voluntary) used to accommodate homeless households to be undertaken to assess its potential suitability for use as long-term accommodation, in line with overall service re-configuration requirements, instead of emergency or transitional use, with adaptations where necessary, with emphasis on providing

self contained mainstream accommodation units. Decisions to this effect would have regard to relevant factors such as the nature, size, capacity, condition, facilities, etc, of the existing

accommodation, the requirements for use as long-term accommodation and the extent and cost of any adaptations required.

Possible conversion of existing arrangements with private accommodation owners, where relevant, to leasing or RAS type arrangements.

6.7 Care and supports and inter-agency protocols

Consideration of need for tenancy support services of appropriate duration and intensity for homeless households who move to mainstream accommodation.

A detailed blueprint will be required in order to document input from various agencies who are tasked with having an input in the new Homeless Services Framework. These agencies include the VEC, FAS, the Probation Service, the Prison Service, Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force, the Department of Social Protection as well as the four Local Authorities, the HSE and Voluntary Representatives from the Midlands Region.

Co-ordination with HSE and other relevant agencies to ensure availability of necessary health/care and other services and personal and social supports for people who move from homeless facilities to mainstream housing.

Appropriate protocols between the housing authorities and the HSE or other relevant agencies, in relation to the provision of the foregoing services and supports and other matters relevant to homelessness such as children leaving care, older people with care needs who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, discharge of people at risk of homelessness from health or other institutions.

In the Midlands Region a protocol already exists between the Local Authorities, HSE and the Midland Simon Community in relation to a four county settlement service. This protocol also specifies the roles and obligations of the parties who signed this agreement. This protocol model should be extended to cover other relationships/responsibilities of all service providers in the area.

6.8 Data and information

Production of comprehensive and accurate data and information in relation to homelessness (including numbers, flows, duration and other relevant characteristics) and homeless services (including capacity, adequacy, usage, staffing, cost, revenue and other relevant operational and other information).

Specific arrangements to obtain relevant data on homelessness, including maximum participation in new national client database (PASS), undertaking homeless counts/surveys as appropriate and ensuring adequate reports and information from service providers.

Accessing relevant data available through other agencies such as CSO, hospitals, prisons, as appropriate, to underpin the effectiveness of policy and action to address homelessness.

Provision of directories of homeless services, as warranted.

Appropriate arrangements for sharing of data/information subject to ensuring compliance with data protection requirements.

6.9 Organisational/resource aspects

Appropriate staffing, training, staff information, procedures and organisational arrangements to facilitate effective action to address homelessness.

Adequate prioritisation of action to address homelessness relative to the incidence of homelessness.

Accurate costing of the various elements of homeless services and accessing of all available sources of funding to prevent/address homelessness.

6.10 Ending long-term homelessness and providing long-term housing

In accordance with the Government's Homeless Strategy, a core objective of the Action Plan is the ending of long-term homelessness and providing adequate long-term accommodation, as necessary, to achieve this and help homeless households to independent living. Homeless services will be organised and operated so as to promote this objective. This will involve appropriate arrangements to provide adequate supply of suitable housing, housing supports, where necessary, and policies and procedures to enable homeless households to move to mainstream housing as quickly as possible. This is likely to involve largely phasing out the use of transitional facilities, which experience internationally has found to be relatively ineffective from a cost/benefit perspective, confining the supply of emergency accommodation to a level appropriate to meet short-term needs and decommissioning any accommodation that may not be fit for purpose.

This will be underpinned by arrangements to provide mainstream accommodation for people progressing from homelessness using the full range of relevant housing interventions, particularly the following:

private rented accommodation, if people are assessed as not needing tenancy support and have prospects of being able to meet their own housing costs in due course.

social housing (including RAS, which is considered appropriate for households assessed as having low or no housing support needs); housing authorities' allocations policies to support the objective of ending long-term homelessness;

use of additional sources of accommodation for the purposes of the SLI (Services for Living Independently) scheme.

SLI involves the provision of accommodation (utilising unsold affordable houses available to local authorities or units procured through any of the mechanisms available under the social housing leasing initiative), for people who can progress to independent living in mainstream housing with low to moderate visiting housing supports, where necessary, procured through

open competitive tendering, with supports tapering off as a person progresses to independent living (expected to be generally within 6 months).

The provision of long-term accommodation of homeless households has now been further underpinned by a new Enhanced Programme which involves a combination of existing schemes and current and capital funding, largely through the social housing leasing initiative,

but with a number of improved conditions to address the particular issues arising in sourcing accommodation for homeless people and streamlined processing arrangements, including detailed briefing and information for AHBs e.g. regarding type and location of units needed, sustainable communities issues, etc. People housed under the programme will be long-term homeless and consequential savings on the operation of homeless facilities must be identified.

A detailed programme for provision of long-term accommodation for homeless households will be drawn up in the context of the Implementation Blueprint, including:

- identifying numbers of households requiring different types of long term provision – mainstream housing without support; mainstream housing with visiting support; accommodation in facilities with on-site support; other (e.g. nursing home).
- setting specific targets, having regard to the profile of homeless households, for providing long term accommodation for homeless households, with particular emphasis on 2010, whether social housing (local authority and voluntary), private rented, RAS, or additional accommodation procured through social housing leasing.
- ensuring, through the HSE or other relevant agencies, availability of adequate health and social services to address health/care, personal and other non-housing needs.

6.11 Role of relevant organisations and co-ordination of activities

The overall system or model of homeless services to be provided for in the Implementation Blueprint will incorporate appropriate arrangements relating to the role of the various relevant agencies and service providers and co-ordination of their activities and functions, including the following matters:

Housing authorities (responsible for accommodation aspects) must operate in partnership with HSE (responsible for health/care aspects) in planning, funding, delivery, monitoring and review of homeless services. Active involvement is needed on the part of all relevant public authorities, mainstream services/specialist services and any other relevant agencies, with effective inter-agency co-ordination and collaboration, including the implementation of relevant protocols, as appropriate. The Homelessness Consultative Forum will provide a vehicle for ensuring effective inter-agency arrangements and protocols to determine responsibilities, liaison, etc, between agencies and also co-ordination with adjacent/constituent local authorities.

An inter-agency approach is particularly important to ensure effective measures for prevention of homelessness, with emphasis on maximising active participation locally of all relevant agencies (Strategic Aim 1 of the Homeless Strategy Implementation Plan).

Housing authorities will not take responsibility for services that are appropriate to other agencies (e.g. of a specialist nature) or which involve duplication of services as funding will not be available to them for any services that do not accord with these requirements. All

potential sources of funding relevant to addressing homelessness should be accessed as far as possible.

All service providers will be required (subject to an appropriate lead-in period, where necessary), as a condition of funding, to enter service level agreements and to participate in a new shared client database (PASS) which is currently being developed and will be rolled out nationally, as appropriate (Priority Actions 8.4.4 and 8.4.5 of the Homeless Strategy Implementation Plan).

Appropriate procurement arrangements for the provision of services (e.g. visiting tenancy support), involving competitive tendering as far as possible/appropriate, will be operated in accordance with Government requirements/guidelines.

Engagement and operation of services will be subject to contract or service level agreement, as appropriate, setting out relevant requirements, responsibilities, etc, including performance requirements, targets, data provision, reporting, accountability, financial conditions, etc.

The Homelessness Forum Management Group, utilising the statutory and voluntary membership of the Forum, will promote cross cutting engagement with appropriate statutory, voluntary and community partners generally to address identified and emerging need.

Section 7

Implementation Blueprint of Homeless Services

An Implementation Blueprint will be formulated by 31st January 2011 setting out the specific measures and detailed arrangements required to give effect to the Action Plan and which will, in effect, constitute a supplement to this Plan.

The Blueprint will, in particular:

Determine the appropriate configuration of homeless services and any need for re-configuration of existing services. Due consideration will be given to the existing transport links or lack of same between the various hostels.

Provide a decision template for any proposals relating to homeless services.

Ensure that consultation continues with the local county foras and voluntary groups.

Inform decisions in relation to funding allocations for homeless services.

The Implementation Blueprint will provide the basis for decisions relating to services and investment in that regard. All proposals relating to homeless services will be rigorously assessed by the Homeless Forum Management Group and the housing authorities by reference to the blueprint (with particular focus on the core objective of promoting availability of long-term accommodation) and decisions will be made on the basis of their compatibility with the blueprint and the criteria of efficiency and value for money, as set out in Priority Actions 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 of the Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan.

Estimated costs of services will be identified as accurately as possible in developing the Implementation Blueprint. As in all areas of public expenditure currently, the total level of resources available for the operation of homeless services will, inevitably, be constrained during the lifetime of the Action Plan. Accordingly, any new services or expansion of existing services that may be needed can only be funded from savings which arise from the reorientation of services in accordance with the Implementation Blueprint. Cost reductions in the economy generally should also be reflected in homeless services.

The Implementation Blueprint will also facilitate implementation of Strategic Aim 6 of the Homeless Strategy Implementation Plan, which signalled an intention to introduce a more devolved system of funding allocations for homeless services, based on rigorous costings and assessment of needs and priorities. For this purpose, the Implementation Blueprint will establish accurate costings and robust budgets for each housing authority's homeless services. In the context of proposed devolved global allocations for homeless services, decisions in relation to funding of particular services will primarily be made at local level, based on needs and priorities in accordance with the foregoing principles. Decisions to provide new services would only be made where it is established that sufficient operational funding will be available, for accommodation allocations, for HSE health/care elements, or from any other relevant sources. The shared responsibility with the HSE for addressing adult homelessness is a key element in the planning and delivery of homeless services, while the HSE has full responsibility in relation to child/youth homelessness.

In preparing this blueprint for Homeless services in the Midlands Region, consideration will be given to research work already carried out by the Midland Simon Community in 2007 which reviewed the effectiveness of the Regional Settlement Service in the context of PROVIDING SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS.

Section 8

Monitoring, Evaluation and Progress Reports

In developing this Homelessness Action Plan the Management Group of the Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum is aware of the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the actions outlined in the plan and the subsequent blueprint for homeless services. The ultimate responsibility for the monitoring and review of the Homelessness Action Plan lies with the Management Group in consultation with the Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum.

However the Management Group recognises the need to work in partnership with the voluntary service providers to develop a systematic process which will provide an accurate

picture of the trends, issues, challenges and opportunities which may emerge in the implementation of the plan and ongoing monitoring and assessment of performance relative

to targets, reporting and assessment of outcomes for service users and assessment of barriers to performance. The Management Group will also work to ensure that service provision maximizes effectiveness, efficiency, quality, value for money and cost minimization and is meeting evidenced need in the most effective way. Appropriate performance management and unit costing arrangements will be operated for this purpose.

This will be achieved through the following monitoring and evaluation processes:

- An annual county/city progress report will be provided by each housing authority outlining the information relating to homeless services provided at a local level, an analysis of users of homeless services and funding received. The format of the data collection process will be agreed as part of the development of the blueprint for homeless services.
- In accordance with Priority Action 8.2 of the National Implementation Plan, regular (e.g. quarterly) reports will be submitted by service providers to the Homelessness Consultative Forum. The Forum will provide information, views, advice and reports in relation to homelessness and the operation and implementation of the Action Plan. Having regard to these, the Management Group will provide reports and recommendations to the housing authorities, the HSE and where appropriate, other bodies specified in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, in relation to the operation of the Action Plan. The housing authorities will, in turn, provide progress reports in relation to the Action Plan to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on a quarterly basis.
- In accordance with Priority Actions 6.3 and 8.4 of the National Implementation Plan for the Homeless Strategy, housing authorities will ensure adequate information and evaluation in relation to service providers and their services, plans, finances and other inputs, structures, cost composition and performance, including requirements of accountability, transparency and controls, particularly with regard to utilization of public funding.
- Lead Agencies will be assigned to ensure actions are implemented and annual reports will be submitted to the Management Group on progress achieved. The measurement of progress on performance indicators will be a key feature of the progress report.
- An annual review and planning meeting of the Midlands Joint Homeless Consultative Forum will focus on the reports submitted and inform the Regional Homelessness Action Planning process.
- Local implementation structures will need to be agreed locally to ensure participation and consultation with voluntary service providers and key local statutory staff implementing homeless services

Appendix 1

A list of all homeless facilities in the Midlands Region will be included in this plan, as a mapping exercise.

Homeless Services in the Midlands Region

Hostels:

- Esker Women's Refuge, Athlone
- St. Martha's Hostel, Longford
- Bethaney House, Longford
- TEAM, Mullingar
- Midland Simon, Athlone
- ONE, Athlone
- Transitional 2 bed apartment, Portlaoise
- Transitional 2 bed apartment, Portarlington
- Transitional Housing, Llanello 2010
- 4 Emergency Units, Llanello 2010

Services:

- Local Authority Housing Departments
- Community Welfare Officers
- Longford Women's Centre
- The Open Door Men's Project, Athlone
- The Open Door Men's Project, Mullingar
- Community Liaison PHNs for Travellers
- Liaison PHNs between the hospital and the community
- Probation and Welfare Services
- Tullamore Housing Association
- Athlone Community Services
- Social Work Services
- Mullingar Women in Crisis
- Tullamore Women in Crisis
- Community Liaison PHN for Homelessness, Longford/Westmeath
- Homeless Liaison Officer, Laois/Offaly
- Midland Simon Regional Settlement Service
- TEAM Drop-in Centre Mullingar

Appendix 2

Membership of the Management Committee:

Mr. Ray Kenny, Director of Services, Westmeath County Council (Chair)

Mr. Declan Leonard, Senior Executive Officer, Westmeath County Council

*Mr. Joe Ruane, Local Health Manager, HSE Longford/Westmeath

Ms. Deirdre Matthews, Probation Service, Midlands and Portlaoise Prisons

*Mr. Joe Whelan, Manager of Residential Services, Westmeath has been delegated as a stand-in when Mr. Ruane is not available.

(Members of the Management Committee are ex-officio members of the Joint Homeless Consultative Forum)

Membership of the Joint Homeless Consultative Forum:

Mr. Brian Pey, Administrative Officer, Offaly County Council

Ms. Anna Marie Delaney, Director of Services, Laois County Council

Ms. Teresa Duffy, Social Worker, Longford County Council

Mr. Peter Egan, Manager, STB & Community Services, FAS

Ms. Anne Quinn, Manager, Teach Failte, Mullingar

Ms. Rina McKenna, Adult Education Officer, Westmeath VEC

Governor John Malone, Midlands Prison, Portlaoise

Mr. Tony O'Riordan, Chief Executive Officer, Midland Simon Community, Athlone

Cllr. Michael Dollard, M.C.C. T.C. P.C., Westmeath County Council

Department of Social Protection (TBA)

Ms. Antoinette Kinsella, Co-Ordinator, Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force

Mr. John Burke, Tullamore Housing Association

Ms. Molly Buckley, Oakley Housing Trust, Tullamore

Ms. Marna Hatton, Laois Support Services Against Domestic Abuse, Portlaoise

Mr. Brendan Nealis, Co-Ordinator, Community Welfare Services, Midlands Region

Ms. Lynda Tiley, Manager, Esker House Refuge, Athlone
