1. **Introduction**

The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) is the national federation of housing associations in Ireland. The ICSH has over 300 affiliated member housing associations providing accommodation for families, single people, the elderly, homeless people and people with disabilities. There are currently over 60 ICSH members providing housing related services to the homeless nationwide.

Housing associations provide accommodation for people who are disadvantaged and homeless people through a number of different models of accommodation as follows:

- General family type accommodation
- Hostels
- Refuges
- Transitional accommodation
- Long term supported accommodation
- Foyers
- Group homes for persons with disabilities
- Group housing schemes with low support for elderly
- Sheltered housing schemes for elderly

The provision of accommodation is linked with care and support services, depending on the type of scheme. Homeless people are accommodation in all of these models of accommodation, for example sheltered housing schemes for the elderly take referrals from homeless services for homeless people who are older.

2.1 A number of positive outcomes can be identified in relation to the current Action Plan:

- Increased resources have been made available for developing services and projects for homeless persons.
- Implementation of the recommendations has had the effect of further bringing the stakeholders from statutory and voluntary sectors together in the development of homeless services.
- Overall improvement in the quality of services provided to homeless people. Establishment of new services such as a tenancy sustainment service.
- Increased awareness at local level of the gaps in services and to some degree greater awareness of the incidence and extent of homelessness.

2.2 **Gaps in Provision of Services**

*Accommodation Provision*

- Lack of progress since the introduction of the plan is largely related to unresolved accommodation issues:
  - Lack of suitable housing options is a major issue in particular the lack of long-term accommodation. Funding is still focussed on short term accommodation models and this is impeding progress in this most vital area of the Plan.
  - The continued use of B & B accommodation as an emergency solution for families.
  - The continued lack of appropriate move-on accommodation for particularly for single people is still problematic.
- Delays in getting capital assistance scheme applications approved, decisions agreed at LA level leading to inefficiencies in system in developing capital projects and higher abortive rates.
- Resources involved in generating new schemes not adequately recognised; development costs greatly undervalued and this is an impediment to new developments.
- Access to building land a continuous problem.
- Issue of revenue funding for supported housing a problem.
- Dublin City Council expenditure of €15.6 million on homeless projects and €186,000 by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council between 2000 and 2004 compared to lack of such expenditure in South Dublin or Fingal County Council a significant problem that needs to be rectified.
**Funding**

- The continued absence of a structured revenue funding system for organisations intending to provide supported housing for the homeless.
- Issue of 5% contribution in CAS schemes.

**Assessment**

- The assessment of housing need for homeless persons including the issue of the definition of homelessness under the 1988 Housing Act.

**Local Area homeless forums**

- Not all operating to full potential. Need to have more strategic input and implementation powers.


**Preventing people from becoming homeless**

- **Adopt a Housing First Approach.**
  The ICSH has highlighted this policy approach adopted in the United States and recommend that this be incorporated as a basic principle into the new action plan. A Housing First approach is one which moves away from a system of emergency shelter/transitional housing, which tends to prolong the length of time for people experiencing homelessness. The Housing First approach is premised on the belief that vulnerable and at-risk individuals and families are more responsive to interventions and social service supports after they are in their own housing rather than while living in temporary housing. Obviously there are some examples which would not fit this model such as refuges for domestic violence.

  *Prioritise the delivery of accommodation to homeless people as the chief objective of the action plan. This has been the most difficult objective to achieve and every other action depends on the provision of the Housing First. The thrust of the next action plan on the delivery of housing will effectively underpin the delivery of the range of support services required for homeless people.*

- **Other preventative measures should include:**
  - Strategy should include a menu of supports for people who are not yet homeless including eviction prevention; information; rent subsidies; effective support for people with special needs – mental health support;
Increasing long-term housing options

Accommodation

- Appropriate long-term accommodation should be a priority, including move-on, particularly for single people.
- Provision of properly resourced sheltered accommodation for long-term homeless with support needs. Special target groups need to be identified and offered solutions. Along with this the identification of health care needs is particularly important in this to determine the specific profile of homeless households to be housed in sheltered and supported housing.
- Resolve accommodation issues identified above such as continued overuse of B & B accommodation for families.
- Adopt targets for allocations by each local authority to homeless persons and a time limit for the offer of accommodation. Expand the DCC protocols and standards around lettings for homeless people.
- Issues relating to the project development of accommodation schemes for homeless persons, for example delays experience in Capital Assistance Scheme applications, should be highlighted and tackled – e.g. 5% funding shortfall.
- A Revenue funding scheme for supported accommodation should be introduced. Capital funding in the voluntary housing sector will only be used if revenue funding is in place to provide the service. The Homeless Agency should pursue this through extending the provisions of section 10 of the 1988 Housing Act or examining using the provisions under section 6 of the 1992 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act. As part of interagency co-operation a joint capital and revenue funding application process should be introduced which will improve the planning and funding of new projects.

Local area services

- Frequency of meetings should be identified and monitored
- Should link into Housing SPCs more clearly
- Prison and mental health services involved needs to be more specific
- Build up the capacity of local fora and clearly establish their role and function (if any) in areas such as funding services at local level

Collection and dissemination of information on nature and extent of homelessness

- Assessment should be undertaken on a more frequent basis.
- Assessment should include a care/support needs as part of the process.
- Need to move towards system of identifying the at-risk groups so that interventions can be addressed in relation to prevention.

Role of the homeless Agency

- The Homeless Agency should continue to ensure that standards in the delivery of services are continually improved.
o Assist in the identification and removal of blockages and duplication in the delivery of projects.
o Link in with commitments on homelessness in the new Social Partnership Agreement Towards 2016.
o Encourage and ensure all local authority areas promote capital projects for homeless people to alleviate the burden on DCC and move to a more local area approach in accommodation provision.