What is the Housing Needs Assessment?

The Housing Needs Assessment is a statutory count, carried out every three years nationally by local authorities to identify the number of households who require social housing in each area.

**Important for planning & policy**
The results of the assessment are used in planning for the provision of social housing by both the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government and by local authorities.

The process provides information which is comparable with previous assessments and shows trends in housing for each particular area over time. While many local authorities maintain up to date waiting lists of those in need of housing, the national assessment presents an important opportunity to create awareness and to reach those who may not be registered, yet are in housing need.

The assessment also provides valuable information for housing associations on the level and type of housing need in any given local authority area and this will assist them in planning and developing housing projects to meet that particular need.

**Scope of the Legislation**
The provision for the assessment is contained in Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988.

Under Section 2 of the Act, there is provision for a separate assessment of the number of homeless persons.

How are housing associations involved?

A person or household who is included in the assessment of housing need is eligible to be housed by a housing association. Therefore, the assessment process should be seen as a gateway to a housing association tenancy.

Housing associations should take the opportunity to feed into the assessment for this reason. Local authorities are required under the 1988 Act to give approved housing bodies one month’s notice to give them time to feed into the assessment.

It is particularly important that housing associations working with special needs groups such as the elderly, people with physical, sensory, mental or intellectual disabilities or homeless persons to ensure the inclusion of all those who may be eligible, as historically these groups have been significantly under-represented in previous assessments.

- Establish contact with your local authority in the assessment process.
- Establish contact with voluntary and community organisations working with special needs groups to ensure inclusion of all those eligible.
- Find out when/how applications can be made.
- Encourage individuals you are aware of, who may be in need of housing, to make an application.
- Forward details of individuals who are unable to apply themselves to the local authority.
Who can apply for housing under the assessment?

In accordance with the Housing Act 1988, the assessment should include people who require housing but are unable to provide it from their own resources. They are therefore in need of social rented accommodation, from either a local authority or a housing association.

The Act states that the assessment should include the following categories of persons who are:

- Homeless
- Pursue a nomadic way of life
- Live in unfit accommodation
- Live in overcrowded accommodation
- Sharing involuntarily
- Young persons leaving institutional care or without family accommodation
- In need of accommodation for medical or compassionate reasons
- Elderly
- Disabled or handicapped

- Unable to meet their accommodation costs or to obtain suitable alternative accommodation

**People with special needs**

It is clear then, that the Act envisaged that the housing needs of people with special needs should be included in the national assessment.

The reality has been, however, that such categories as people with disabilities etc. have not been included in previous assessments to any great extent. There are many reasons for this.

Housing associations should ensure, where possible, that this trend is reversed and encourage those with special needs who may need it, to apply for social housing.

**Assessment of homeless people**

At the same time as the housing needs assessment, a separate count of the number of homeless people in a local authority area is also carried out.

This includes people sleeping rough or those living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution due to a lack of suitable accommodation. For example, people accommodated in hostels should be included in the assessment as homeless as they do not have suitable accommodation and must therefore reside in a shelter or hostel.

This assessment usually takes place in the same week as the housing needs assessment. The process can vary according to area, for example in larger urban areas, such as Dublin, the homeless count takes place over a week and involves street counts of rough sleepers.

**Assessment of sites for Travellers**

Each local authority will also carry out an assessment of the need for sites for travellers, in accordance with Section 6 of the Housing Traveller (Accommodation) Act 1998.

Each local authority should promote the assessment process in their own way. Some will advertise in their local media to invite applications from the general public, others will notify organisations working in the community and some will used a combination of measures to ensure that the upcoming assessment is widely known among potential applicants.

- In carrying out the assessment local authorities are requested to assess the extent to which housing needs can be met by other housing options.
- The process involves each applicant completing an application form and furnishing details, such as evidence of income, to the housing department.
- The local authority will then examine every application, new and existing, with up to date information collated.
- Those who meet the criteria and are deemed to be in need of social rented housing, will be included on the waiting list.

Details for the need for social rented housing in each local authority area is then forwarded to the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government and collated on a national basis.

The results of the housing needs assessment process are important in that they feed into the future production of local authority social and affordable housing action plans. These are important in determining the delivery of different types of housing projects in any area.

Housing associations dealing with homeless persons and with other persons in housing need are asked to advise their clients to contact their local authority, if they have not already done so, to ensure that they are included in the Assessment. Alternatively, the housing associations themselves may wish to submit details of persons in need of accommodation.

Further information is available from the housing department in your Local Authority.

For queries on the assessment and housing associations, please contact Caren Gallagher, Projects Officer

Tel: 01 6618334 or caren@icsh.ie