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**The Changing Structure of the Homeless Population in  
Cork City: Implications for Theories of Homelessness  
and Service Provision.**

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**Abstract.**

The last two decades have seen extensive reform of policy on homelessness in Ireland, but these changes have not been underpinned by any extensive research which would shed light on the causes of homelessness and help in the design of settlement services. This article, which describes the results of the first detailed survey of the homeless population of Cork city, is intended to address the dearth of empirical evidence on homelessness in Ireland. This information is presented in three parts. The opening section of this article outlines the methods which were used to collect data on the homeless population in Cork. The findings of this research are outlined in the middle part of the article and where possible compared to the results of other equivalent research which has been carried out in other parts of Ireland and abroad. This section presents evidence on: the numbers of homeless people; their personal characteristics; a socio-economic profile of respondents, their housing history and

accommodation preferences. Finally, in the concluding section of the paper, the implications which this research has for the explanations of the causes of homelessness which are most prominent in the international literature and for current policy on the settlement of homeless people in Ireland are outlined.

**Key Words:** Homelessness; Cork City, Profile.

### Introduction

The last decade has been distinguished by several important changes to the legislation on homelessness in Ireland. These reforms have served to move policy in this area away from its roots in the vagrancy laws and the Poor Law of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the direction of a modern, rights based approach. The 1988 Housing Act includes a detailed definition of homelessness and places a responsibility on the local authorities to ensure that homeless adults who fall within this definition are provided with accommodation. Although it does not *require* local authorities to house homeless people themselves. The Child Care Act (1991) was the first piece of Irish legislation to deal specifically with homeless children. It defines a child as someone up to the age of 18 and under Section 5 of the Act places a clear obligation on the Health Boards to provide accommodation for homeless children.

In common with most other aspects of housing policy in Ireland, however, these recent developments in policy on homelessness have not been grounded in any empirical research (O'Sullivan,

1998). Up to recently the only data, which was available on homelessness in this country, was based on estimates of level of hostel use from voluntary groups, which provide services for homeless people, and much of this information only included the Dublin region. Although Section 9 of the 1988 Housing Act obliges local authorities to carry out an assessment of housing need every three years, and since 1991 this assessment has included details of people who need of accommodation by virtue of being homeless, commentators have argued that the local authority estimates of homelessness have significantly underestimated the extent of the problem. Furthermore, the information which is supplied as a result of these counts provides only a crude headcount which contains no information about the personal characteristics of the homeless population or on their accommodation preferences, which might shed light on why they become homeless in the first place and would help with the design of settlement services (O'Sullivan, 1996).

This article, which describes the results of the first detailed survey of the homeless population of Cork city, is intended to address the dearth of empirical research on homelessness in Ireland. This information is presented in three parts. The opening section of this article outlines the methods which were used to collect data on the homeless population in Cork. The findings of this research are outlined in the middle part of the article and where possible compared to the results of other equivalent research which has been carried out in other parts of Ireland and abroad. Finally, in the concluding section of the paper, the implications which this research has for the explanations of the causes of homelessness which are most prominent in the international literature and for current policy on the settlement of homeless people in Ireland are outlined.



### Research Methods.

Defining homelessness is a task fraught with difficulties and there is no universal definition, which is conceded at a macro level. Rather varying definitions are used in different countries and by different service organisations and researchers (Pleace, et al, 1997). For the purposes of this study, the homeless population was defined as those people who fall within the statutory definition of homelessness in Ireland which is laid down in the 1988 Housing Act. Section 2 of this, defines the homeless population as those individuals for whom:

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

This definition has been criticised for its narrow focus which excludes most of the 'hidden homeless' such as those living with friends or relatives and those in inadequate, overcrowded, insecure or insanitary accommodation (Harvey, 1995). However, on the positive side, the use of this definition allows for comparability with the results of the local authority surveys of homelessness and with most other research on homelessness which has been conducted in this country.

Within the parameters of this definition, the research had two principal aims.

- 1) To accurately assess the size and major categories of the homeless population in the geographical area which is covered by the Cork North Central and Cork South Central Dail Constituencies. This area includes all of the Cork Corporation local authority district which takes in Cork city centre and the inner suburbs as well as outer suburbs of Cork and the principal dormitory towns which surround it: Ballincollig, Glanmire, Carraigaline and Blarney. Although these latter towns fall within the remit of Cork County Council, it was felt that given their proximity to the city, they form part of the geographical hinterland of Cork.
- 2) To identify the main categories of people who are homeless in terms of personal characteristics, socio-economic background and personal housing histories and to ascertain their accommodation preferences.

The first of these research questions was operationalised by means of a count of the homeless population, which was carried out during the week of Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup> of April to Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1999. Since the homeless population is a transitory one, the accurate assessment of numbers is not an easy or straightforward task. It is not uncommon for homeless individuals to present themselves at a range of services during one week. This makes it important to gather sufficient information on respondents in order to identify duplication and thus avoid counting the same person on two or more occasions. In order to achieve this, respondents were identified by their initials, gender and date of birth, and they were also asked in

which venue they filled out the questionnaire and whether or not they had filled in a similar form during the week. In total, 22 respondents were eliminated from the survey on the grounds that they had previously been counted at some other venue during the week of the survey.

The count of the homeless population was administered using the following methods.

- 1) A large-scale postal survey of organisations was conducted in the city, aimed at those who are likely to come in contact with homeless people. This postal survey targeted groups such as Gardai, social workers, Community Welfare Officers, members of voluntary organisations, psychiatric and alcohol centres, youth workers and members of religious organisations. A total of 100 individuals and organisations were contacted in this way and responses to this postal survey accounted for 10 per cent to the homeless population which was identified.
- 2) The researchers administered the questionnaire on a face to face basis with clients availing of the main services for homeless people in the city. Three such centres: the St. Vincent de Paul Hostel, the Simon Community hostel, the Homeless Unit of the Southern Health Board accounted for a total of 75 per cent of respondents to the survey. The various women and children's refuges in Cork accounted for 9 per cent of respondents.
- 3) Finally, members of the Simon Community also counted the rough sleepers who availed of the soup run during this week. This cohort accounted for 6 per cent of identified homeless population.

In order to operationalise the second research aim, all of the homeless people who were identified in the survey were asked to fill out a detailed questionnaire recorded information on their personal characteristics, socio-economic profile, accommodation preferences and personal housing history. 80 per cent of the total population, which was identified in the count, agreed to participate in this second stage of the research process. It is important to note that the majority of those who refused to participate in the detailed questionnaire survey were elderly male residents of homeless hostels. This may have introduced an element of age bias in to the research results.

### **Research Findings.**

#### *Assessment of the Numbers of Homeless People in Cork City*

This research found that the total number of homeless adults in Cork City during the last week of April 1999 was 237 and 50 children were also identified as homeless. This figure of 287 homeless persons is in keeping with the results of the three assessments of homelessness, which have been carried out by Cork Corporation over the past decade. These assessments accounted for 303 homeless people in 1991, 257 in 1993 and 308 in 1996 (Department of the Environment, Various Years). Thus, contrary some of the arguments which have been referred to above, Cork Corporation's assessments of homelessness would appear to have been reasonably accurate. Williams and O'Connor's (1999) assessment of the homelessness in counties Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow accounted for 2,900 adults and which marks a significant increase on the results of the 1996 local authority assessment of homelessness in this area. This

indicates that the percentage of the adult population of the Dublin region which is homeless, is significantly higher than Cork – 0.224 per cent as compared to 0.136 per cent respectively.

### *Personal Characteristics of the Homeless Population in Cork City*

The information collated in this study on the personal characteristics of the homeless population in Cork, generally supports the findings of other similar Irish research (see O'Sullivan, 1996). In line with the general trend regarding the gender of homeless people, for example, our survey found that over three-quarters (77 per cent) were male, with 23 per cent female. The 1999 assessment of the homeless population in the Eastern Health Board region found that a slightly lower proportion of the homeless population (64 per cent) were male (Williams and O'Connor, 1999). However, the full extent of homelessness among women and children in Cork, may not be accurately revealed in this survey, since they tend not to use hostels and night shelters to the same extent as men, and generally stay in non-institutional settings, for instance with friends or relatives instead (Kelleher et al, 1992). Additionally, most of the hostels refuse to take in people under the age of 18 years, hence it is very difficult to determine the proportion of young people under 18 years who may be homeless. This is particularly the case for young boys, as girls are often accommodated in the women's shelters. Thus, hidden homelessness is a significant issue in relation to women and young people. Avramov (1995) estimates that women with dependent children constitute one of the fastest growing subgroups in the homeless population across Europe.

The average age of the homeless population identified in this study was 42 years, however this mean figure disguises a substantial spread across the age groups from infants to pensioners. The largest numbers were concentrated in the 25-54 age group (62 per cent), however there was also a relatively large number of young people in the 17-24 year age group (16 per cent) and similarly in the older age group of 55-82 years (22 per cent). This indicates that, in common with trends in other European countries the number of children and teenagers among the homeless population in Ireland is increasing, although the average age of homeless people in this country is still relatively old in comparative terms (Harvey, 1999b; Avramov, 1995). When age groups are classified according to gender, we find that in general, homeless females are younger than their male counterparts, with the numbers distributed rather evenly across three age groups ranging from 17 to 54 years. In contrast, over one fifth of male respondents to the Cork survey were in the 55-82 year age cohort compared to a mere 1 per cent of females. This concurs with the results of Williams and O'Connor's (1999) survey of the homeless population in the Dublin region which found that 19 per cent of homeless females were aged 20 years or less, compared with 8 per cent of their male counterparts. Regarding the homeless children of respondents, the largest cohort consisted of 1-3 year olds (32 per cent), but again there is a considerable spread across the ages, with one fifth of children in the 4-7 years category and one fifth in the 8-12 years group. In addition, there were 17 per cent in the teenage bracket (13-17 years), and 11 per cent were infants aged less than one year old.

Solitude has been identified as an important aspect of the experience of homelessness (Harvey, 1999b). Our survey found

that in line with prevailing trends, the majority of the homeless people surveyed were single (71 per cent), while over one fifth were no longer married (18 per cent separated, 5 per cent divorced). In addition, only 5 per cent were married, and 1 per cent were widowed. Regarding family structure, lone parents constituted a large proportion of those surveyed with almost one fifth (19 per cent) of respondents stating they had children who were also homeless, with vast majority of those being female. In contrast, 'no dependants' was the most frequently occurring status amongst males (66 per cent). Only 4 per cent of respondents had partners who were also homeless.

#### *Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents*

The part of the survey which examined the geographical origin of respondents revealed an interesting cross-section of personal histories. Although 43 per cent of the sample were from Cork - 29 per cent from Cork City, 14 per cent from Cork County, a wide geographical spread of birthplaces was revealed with 14 other counties mentioned by respondents. Outside of Cork, the second largest group of respondents were from Dublin (13 per cent), while three other counties; Kerry, Limerick and Waterford were mentioned as the place of origin for 7 per cent, 5 per cent and 4 per cent of respondents respectively. In relative terms, there was a rather large proportion (13 per cent) of respondents from the UK (Northern Ireland 3 per cent, England 10 per cent, Scotland 0.5 per cent). Other countries mentioned by one respondent in each case were the Netherlands, France and Kosovo (an asylum seeker). Although the growth in the asylum seeking population has had significant implications for homeless services in Dublin, this study indicates that it has not yet become an issue in Cork (O'Sullivan 1997).

A varied picture is evident regarding levels of educational attainment amongst the homeless respondents. On the one hand, in line with dominant trends associated with homelessness, the study reveals that a large proportion of homeless people have low educational levels, with 10 per cent having no formal education, and over a third (32 per cent) with primary education. However, almost half of the respondents (49 per cent) attained secondary level education, while 9 per cent have tertiary-level education - 3 per cent have third level education while 6 per cent have a trade or vocational education. One third of respondents did not provide any information regarding their educational background. The level of education attainment among the homeless population in Cork is significantly higher than was indicated by McCarthy's (1988) survey of Simon Community hostel residents in Dublin which found that only 35 per cent of those surveyed had achieved higher than primary level education. The higher level of educational attainment among the population which was surveyed in Cork is difficult to explain. Although one might assume that it is reflective of increasing numbers of homeless young people which was referred to above, when educational attainment among the Cork sample is analysed in terms of age-group, those with no formal education and those with primary education are generally concentrated in the middle-aged cohort of 25-54 years, while the majority of those with secondary education are spread more evenly across three cohorts, 17-24 years (16 per cent), 25-39 years (18 per cent), and 40-54 years (11 per cent).

As would be expected, the study found that the bulk of respondents (86 per cent) were unemployed, with a mere 10 per cent in employment - 6 per cent full-time, 4 per cent part-time. The lack of in-house/sheltered employment is evident, with only



1 per cent working in such employment. Following on from above, it is not surprising therefore to find that most respondents are dependent upon state benefits as their main source of income. An unemployment payment is mentioned by the largest proportion of respondents - 46 per cent of respondents were claiming unemployment assistance and 6 per cent unemployment benefit. The other two main sources were supplementary welfare allowance (18 per cent), and disability payments (17 per cent). Only 11 respondents (7 per cent) received a wage/salary as their main income source while 2 per cent were in receipt of invalidity benefit.

#### *Accommodation History and Settlement Issues*

The survey included a question enquiring where respondents had slept during the previous seven days. Many respondents said that they had slept in a combination of venues during this week - 111 people used hostel accommodation at some time during this period. In addition, 36 of those surveyed slept rough, while 24 stayed with friends; 11 respondents slept in a caravan/tent and 5 respondents were residing in a psychiatric hospital. Bed and breakfast accommodation does not appear to be a frequently used option in Cork, with only 8 people reporting to have slept at a B&B during that particular week. It is notable that the homeless population in Cork appears to rely more heavily on hostel accommodation than their Dublin counterparts. Williams and O'Connor's (1999) assessment of homelessness in the Eastern Health Board region found that hostel accommodation accounted for only 41 per cent of the of the accommodation which was used by the homeless population, while bed and breakfast accommodation and nights spent in a friend's home accounted for 11 per cent and 27 per cent respectively.

Homelessness often tends to be episodic. Our survey revealed that for the majority of respondents (65 per cent) had been homeless on a previous occasion. Furthermore, long-term homelessness is the dominant trend among respondents with 9 per cent stating that they have been homeless between 6-12 months, 21 per cent have been homeless for between 12 and 24 months, while 34 per cent have been homeless for at least two years. Regarding short-term homelessness, 15 per cent of respondents reported to be homeless less than one month, while just over a fifth have been homeless for between 1 and 4 months. These figures indicate that whilst the homeless population in Cork has remained numerically consistent over the past decade, there is significant 'churning over' effect in operation, the same people are moving in and out of homelessness and the numbers escaping from this cycle is small.

In terms of previous residency, the largest percentage of homeless people (36 per cent) previously lived in private rented accommodation, while a fifth lived in Corporation/Council houses, and 16 per cent lived in their parents/relatives home. The proportion of homeless people coming from the owner-occupied sector is strikingly low at 3 per cent, in contrast to 79.3 per cent of the general population, which resided in this tenure in 1991 (Central Statistics Office, 1997). This finding collates strongly with research on the homeless population in the United Kingdom, which has found that only 1 per cent of owner occupiers had previously experienced homelessness (Burrows, 1997). Although it is notable that in this British study the proportions of people in the public rented and private rented tenures who had experienced homelessness were even. The low level of homelessness among former local authority tenants in



Cork may be explained by the relatively small size of this tenure in the Republic of Ireland.

The reasons given by respondents for leaving that accommodation and becoming homeless vary considerably, however some major trends are discernible. It is notable that abuse or violence in the home was mentioned by 17 per cent of respondents as their main reason for leaving their previous accommodation, 15 per cent of those surveyed were asked to leave by parents or relatives, while 14 per cent of respondents were evicted by private landlords. Other reasons included inability to pay rent/mortgage (7 per cent), and immigration to Ireland (6 per cent). An institutional past was also a significant factor in accounting for the homelessness. 11 respondents became homeless after leaving a hostel or sheltered accommodation, 5 respondents became homeless after being discharged from hospital, 4 became homeless after being released from prison, 1 respondent became homeless after leaving the defence forces, and 1 became homeless after being told to leave an orphanage. Personal care needs were also mentioned by several respondents as an explanation for their homelessness. 2 respondents has that they had became homeless due to the need for care, two respondents mentioned psychiatric problems, alcohol abuse was referred to by 5 people, and drug abuse by 1 person. When the reasons for leaving previous accommodation are analysed according to gender, the most common reason given by women (10 per cent) was abuse or violence in the home. In contrast, the reasons given by men varied considerable, with the eviction by private landlord (10 per cent); being asked to leave by parents or relatives (10 per cent); inability to pay rent/mortgage (7 per cent) and abuse/violence in the home (5 per cent), the most frequently mentioned reasons.

Despite the fact that Southern Health Board requires all recipients of Supplementary Welfare Allowance rent and emergency needs payments to apply for local authority housing, it is striking that the majority of respondents (63 per cent) were not registered on the housing list in Cork. When we compare those who are not on the list by gender, there is a greater amount of indifference to this housing option amongst men. Males accounted for nearly half (49 per cent) of the total number of respondents who were not on the housing list, while, in contrast, the proportion of women who were and were not on the local authority housing list was even. It is important to note that the Cork survey only assessed respondents own perceptions of whether they were on the local authority. Williams and O'Connor (1999) found that 26 per cent of the homeless people surveyed in Dublin, thought they were on the local authority housing list while in fact they were not registered at all. Although no means were available to test for this phenomenon in the Cork survey, it is reasonable to assume that that our figures for registration with the local authority may be an over estimate of the real situation.

Regarding the 37 per cent of respondents who were on the local authority housing waiting list, considerable variation was found regarding the length of time in which they have been on the housing list. The bulk of respondents were on the list 2 years or less - 14 respondents are on the list less than a year, while 10 have been on the list 1-2 years. Furthermore, long-term waiting periods are evident, with 7 respondents are on the list between 5-6 years, while 5 people have been on the list 8-9 years.

A wide range of reasons were given for respondents not registering on the housing list. Although only one third of those

not on the housing list gave reasons for this decision, amongst those who did answer, an nonchalant attitude is evident, with 13 respondents saying that 'they just never applied', a further 8 respondents have not yet applied as they have recently moved to Cork, while 7 people stated they do want local authority housing. In addition, 4 respondents were not aware of the option; 4 were long-term residents in hostels and were not interested in moving into local authority housing; 4 respondents were discouraged from applying due to the very long waiting lists for young, single persons; 3 persons stated a need for assistance in making an application for local authority housing; 3 cannot register due to barring orders, and 3 stated an intention to apply.

Respondents were also asked what type of accommodation they would deem most suitable for their needs. The responses to this question collated strongly with the tenure in which they had lived before becoming homeless. Thus, the highest proportion (43 per cent) preferred private rented accommodation with the bulk of those (37 per cent) opting for single dwellings, while 6 per cent would like shared private rented accommodation. The second most popular option was a Council/Corporation home (26 per cent). It is notable that 14 per cent of respondents stated a preference for long-term sheltered accommodation - a housing option that is currently in short supply in Cork. Furthermore, 8 per cent said they would favour owner occupation. Over a third of respondents did not state a preference for a suitable type of accommodation. When we analyse preferred type of accommodation by gender, some interesting findings are forthcoming. Single private rented accommodation was the most popular option amongst the males, whereas a council/corporation home was the most popular amongst the

females. Furthermore, all of the respondents who opted for long-term sheltered accommodation were men. The location where respondents would like to live was also ascertained, and since the survey was conducted in Cork, it is not surprising to find that the vast majority 87 per cent would like to live here (83 per cent in Cork city, 4 per cent in rural Cork), with 8 per cent saying they would like to move to their home town in Ireland.

As well as the location and type of housing preferred, another crucial issue which needs consideration is that of the support and assistance services which are necessary for those making the transition out of homelessness. It is important to note that the total number of answers to this question exceeds the number of people surveyed, since respondents chose more than one type of support in many cases. Significantly, more than half of the respondents who answered this question (n=62) said they would not require any support in their preferred type of accommodation. The remainder gave diverse range of answers spanning a wide combination of support options; the largest number requested the support of a social worker (n=28), the second largest group (n=23) requested money and budgeting advice. Other supports mentioned were sheltered/foyer accommodation (n=12), home help services (n=10), a drop-in centre (n=10), and a public health nurse (n=9). When classified according to gender, we find that the following options were more prevalent amongst men: home help, public health nurse, sheltered/foyer accommodation, money, advice and budgeting. In contrast, even proportions of men and women requested a social worker, and a drop in centre.

## Conclusion

Traditionally, the homeless population has been presented as a relatively homogeneous group in terms of gender, age social and economic background, etc. The stereotypical 'homeless person' is described as a middle-aged, single, unemployed male. The contemporary international literature on homelessness has increasingly challenged this viewpoint. Neale (1997) states that a key finding of much recent research is there is a striking diversity in the homeless population - with more women, more children and young people, more people with educational qualifications, more separated people, constituting this group. This study indicates that the structure of the homeless population in Ireland has not yet 'modernised' to the extent of other European counties. Males still account for vast majority of the homeless population in the city, and this finding is supported by the results of surveys of the homeless population which have been carried out in other cities in Ireland (O'Sullivan, 1996). On the other hand, this survey found evidence that the homeless population in Cork is getting younger and more women are joining the ranks of the homeless. With the growing relevance of marital breakdown and family breakdown in Irish society as well as the increasing problems of affordability in the housing system, it is reasonable to assume that these trends will accelerate and the homeless population in Ireland will look increasingly similar to that of our European neighbours.

Value systems have a crucial affect upon perceptions of homelessness. The literature which examines the reasons why individuals become homeless, has tended to cluster around the dichotomy of structure versus agency. The former approach regards the homeless in sympathetic terms, concentrating on

external obstacles and structural forces largely outside of the individuals control which predispose them to becoming homeless. Alternatively, the agency perspective focuses on inherent characteristics of individuals, usually regarded as deviant or pathological, which predispose them to becoming homeless. This perspective is sub-divided into two poles: one is a 'victim-blaming' approach, which views the homeless in a critical, culpable way, and regards homelessness as a conscious 'choice' by individuals; the other individualist approach maintains that some people become homeless as a result of their vulnerability, for instance people with poor physical health, psychiatric or psychological problems. These classifications can be directly related to the concepts of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor', which have underpinned the development of social policy on homelessness since the Poor Law.

In recent years, homelessness in Ireland has been primarily explained from a structuralist perspective (O' Sullivan, 1996). This has entailed a movement away from a micro-focus on the individual towards a macro-perspective which takes account of an amalgamation of social, economic, political, legal, and administrative factors such as long-term unemployment, poverty, the lack of low cost and specially tailored housing options, early school leaving, cut-backs in social welfare and health care spending, the lack of strategic planning and action for dealing with homelessness and so on. Hence individuals are not deemed to have caused their homelessness, rather is it the result of a combination of factors which ultimately lead to this condition.

While not giving credence to the victim blaming agency perspective, this study of the homeless population in Cork also contradicts the more simplistic structuralist explanations, which



have been employed to explain the levels of homelessness in Ireland. Homelessness is caused by the interaction of a wide range of factors ranging from social inequalities and the structure of the housing system to the failure of social care interventions to problems such as alcohol and drug abuse. This finding points to the need to move away from the simplistic structure versus agency polarity and to develop explanations of homelessness which are grounded more solidly in sociological theory, most particular in the sophisticated literature on social exclusion (Neale, 1997; Pleace, 1998).

The recognition of the diversity of the homeless population and of the complexity of the causes of homelessness implies that a sophisticated range of services and policy instruments must be devised to address the needs of homeless people and to aid their settlement into long term accommodation. This study has highlighted the existence of a wide range of preferences regarding suitable accommodation among the homeless population in Cork and the need for a wide range of supports if formerly homeless people are to escape the cycle of homelessness in the long term. A review of the services which are available to the homeless population in Cork at present, indicates that current provision does not match these needs. In the area of housing, there is a significant shortage of medium term transitory accommodation and long term secure supported accommodation for the formerly homeless. This deficiency means that many of short-term, emergency hostel beds which are available in the city, cannot be put to appropriate use as they are occupied by elderly residents for up to years at a time. The lack of success in addressing the long-term accommodation needs of the homeless population is not aided by the fragmentary situation characterises services for the homeless in most parts of Ireland.

There is considerable confusion over responsibility roles amongst different statutory actors in this area, including the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of the Environment, the Health Boards and local government. There is an urgent need for the development of a holistic settlement strategy for the homeless population in the city which would provided a range of accommodation types which would be complemented by a variety of housing supports. However, the successful implementation of such a strategy would also require the establishment of an integrated, transparent, co-ordinated approach establishing clear, but flexible lines of responsibility regarding services for the homeless. Measures also need to be taken to address the socio-economic factors which lie at the root of the problem of homelessness, and the scant attention which was paid to this issue in the National Anti Poverty Strategy is disturbing in this regard. Finally, the lack of preventative strategies and programmes for early intervention in cases of homelessness is the most glaring deficiency in current services provision. Those who are at high risk of becoming homeless, such as children leaving residential care, former prisoners and former psychiatric patients, must have access to a range of advice and support services, if they are to avoid falling into a cycle of homelessness from which there appears to be minimal hope of escape.

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