

Review of Participation Structures

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for the Homeless Agency

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Foreword

I am very pleased to welcome this report on *The Review of Participation Structures*, which has been prepared by Roger Courtney of Courtney Consulting on behalf of the Homeless Agency.

The Homeless Agency is a partnership body that was established as part of the Government strategy on homelessness in May 2001. It is responsible for the planning and co-ordination of the delivery of quality services to people who are experiencing homelessness in Dublin. The Homeless Agency co-ordinates homeless services in Dublin, provides training and other supports, monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of services, carries out research and administers statutory funding to homeless services.

The Homeless Agency is comprised of voluntary and statutory agencies, who are working in partnership to implement agreed plans for the delivery of services people who are homeless, assisting them to move rapidly to appropriate long term housing and independence. A Consultative Forum advises the Board of Management.

This report reviews the participation of organisations involved in the delivery of services to people who are homeless in Dublin. It examines the formal structures of the partners, the views of members of the various bodies, the best practice in partnership and the need to develop responses in areas outside the city centre.

Since the writing of this report, five local homeless fora have been established within Dublin City Council covering the North West, North Central, Central, South Central and South East areas. These fora will play an increasingly important role in mapping local area services, identifying gaps and feeding into the next Homeless Agency Plan.

Dr Derval Howley

Director · Homeless Agency

The logo for the Homeless Agency, featuring the words "HOME", "LESS", and "agency" stacked vertically. "HOME" and "LESS" are in a large, bold, black sans-serif font, while "agency" is in a smaller, white, lowercase sans-serif font. The text is set against a solid blue square background.

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The Homeless Agency has commissioned and funded this report. Responsibility for it (including any errors or omissions) remains with the Consultants. The views and opinions contained in any reports arising from this contract are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Homeless.Agency

i Introduction

The Homeless Agency is responsible for the management and coordination of services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area and for the eventual elimination of long-term homelessness and rough sleeping in the capital. Its Action Plan 2004–2006, *Making it Home* sets out a range of measures aimed at preventing homelessness and improving interventions with people who are homeless so that they are assisted quickly out of homelessness. The Agency operates under the direction of a partnership board, comprising representatives of the Dublin local authorities, Health Service Executive, FÁS, Probation and Welfare Services, City of Dublin VEC and voluntary bodies delivering homeless services in the area.

Since its establishment, the Homeless Agency has been concerned to ensure that there is appropriate participation of organisations involved in the delivery of services to people who are homeless in Dublin in the review and development of responses. To this end, a number of formal mechanisms, issue-based working groups, forums, networks and reviews have been established over the last three years. The Homeless Agency has decided that now would be an appropriate time to review the effectiveness of these structures and to make recommendations for future mechanisms to promote partnership and participation. The Homeless Agency commissioned Courtney Consulting to carry out this review.

The terms of reference of this review are to:

- Review previous assessments of structures;
- Seek the views of members of the various bodies;
- Examine best practice in partnership and participation in other areas; and
- Take account of the need to develop responses in areas outside the city centre.

The main report of this review is divided into the following sections:

- Introduction to the review
- Brief explanation of the concept of participation
- Description of formal structures of the Homeless Agency
- Evaluations of the Homeless Agency
- Views of stakeholders
- Best practice in partnership in other areas
- Development of local fora
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Diagrams representing the Homeless Agency structure
- Appendices outlining the terms of reference for the Board, Consultative Forum and model terms of reference for working groups as well as a list of individuals consulted as part of the review.

ii Methodology

The methodology for the review of participation structures includes the following:

- Meeting with the Homeless Agency to finalise arrangements to fulfil the brief, including discussing the potential value of establishing a small steering group to oversee the project (which might include representatives of bodies delivering services in the area)
- Analysing existing information held by the Homeless Agency on working groups, forums and networks that have taken place over the last three years and previous reviews that have been undertaken
- Organising focus groups of representatives of bodies providing services for people who are homeless in each council area within greater Dublin, to assess their views on the participation arrangements that have been available and gather suggestions for improvements
- Carrying out a literature search on best practice in relation to participation structures
- Following up suggested examples of best practice elsewhere in Britain and Ireland
- Drawing up a draft report including, a review of previous assessments of structures; the views of members of the various bodies; information on best practice in partnership and participation in other areas; the need to develop responses in areas outside the city centre; and recommendations for the future
- Discussing the draft report with the Homeless Agency and any steering group established
- Producing a final report.

iii Definition of Participation

Participation can be defined as “having a share, or taking part in something”. Partnership can be defined as “a joint business” (Concise Oxford) or “a contract between individuals or organisations engaged in any business” (Chambers).

Sherry Arnstein developed a model of participation in relation to citizen involvement in planning in 1969. Since then his ladder of participation has been adapted to various different contexts. The following is an adapted version of this ladder, based on eight levels of participation:

Ladder of Participation	Characteristics
8 Shared reflection, decisions and implementation	Issues are initiated and reflected on jointly. Decisions are made jointly and implementation is carried out and monitored jointly
7 Supporting initiative	Organisations have the initial idea and decide how the project will be carried out. The public body provides support
6 Involved	Public body has the initial idea. Other organisations are involved in every other step of the planning and implementation
5 Consulted and informed	Organisations are consulted. They understand the issues and their opinions are taken seriously
4 Assigned but informed	The public body decides and invites others to participate. The organisations involved understand this
3 Tokenism	Organisations are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice in how they express those views, or the scope of ideas they can express. The responses are not taken seriously
2 Decoration	Organisations take part in events, etc and are publicised doing so, but do not understand or permitted to influence the issues
1 Manipulation	Participants used to promote the agenda of the body, without real understanding of, or ability to influence, the issues

In presenting such a ladder, there is a danger that it is assumed simplistically that in all contexts, the higher up the ladder of participation, the better. However, different contexts may require different levels of participation. The model is useful however in trying to clarify the level of participation that the Homeless Agency is trying to aim at.

Hodgson suggests that there are five preconditions for meaningful partnership, as follows:

- Access to those in power
- Access to relevant information
- Choices between different options
- Independent support
- A means of appeal or complaint

In relation to the current review, the Homeless Agency is not simply a public body that informs and consults its partners. As we shall see below the very make up of the Agency is a partnership of organisations from the public and voluntary sectors. Those partners expect to have access to power and information; to be involved in making choices from real options; to receive support from the Agency in facilitating participation; and for there to be effective means of redress. How well the Homeless Agency fulfils these criteria will be discussed in detail below.

iv Formal Structures

The Homeless Agency is a partnership structure under the auspices of Dublin City Council. It is not constituted as a separate organisation. However, the governance of the Agency is the responsibility of a Board of Management.

1. The Board of Management

The terms of reference of the Board were reviewed in May 2004, following the evaluation of the Agency by Price Waterhouse Coopers. These terms of reference (Appendix 1 in the main report) clearly describe the primary role of the Board as one of governance.

Terms of Reference

Specifically, under the terms of reference, the Board is required to:

- Set the strategic policy framework
- Approve the Plan devised by the Consultative Forum, with or without amendment
- Approve the budget for the Plan, with or without amendment
- Propose the Plan and budget to the Cross Department Team
- Propose the Plan and budget to the relevant Strategic Policy Committees, health authorities and local areas.
- Receive and/or seek submissions from the Consultative Forum
- Hold at least one meeting annually with the Consultative Forum
- Ensure that constituent groups are appraised of the work of the Agency
- Review progress of the Agency against its agreed plan
- Agree impact measures for the structure and its effect on homelessness and monitor
- Address any obstructions to progress by participating and other agencies
- Publish and formally submit to constituent organisations an annual report on the work of the Agency
- Approve the appointment of the Director
- Provide support and guidance to the Director

The Terms of Reference do not make it clear whether the Homeless Agency acts as the Homelessness Forum, required by Government in its *Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy* and whether this function is for Dublin City (which does not have a Homelessness Forum) or the Greater Dublin Area, which includes Fingal, South Dublin and Dun laoghaire-Rathdown, each of which do have a Homelessness Forum.

Membership of the Board

The Board is comprised of sixteen representatives of voluntary and statutory providers of services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area, who are required to:

- be at senior management level in their organisations;
- have a clear understanding of their own area and of the wider policy world in which homeless services operate;
- be interested in interagency working and change; and
- commit to the Board for three years.

Four voluntary sector representatives (this increased from 3 in May 2004) selected by the Homeless Network, made up of voluntary organisations involved in the delivery of services to people who are homeless in Dublin. Of these four representatives, three are nominated by the Homeless Network and one from the Irish Council for Social Housing. The voluntary sector therefore represents one-quarter of the membership of the Board. Prior to the creation of the Homeless Agency, voluntary sector representatives were only on the Homeless Initiative's Consultative Forum, not its Board. These arrangements were put in place following the evaluation of the Homeless Initiative, which preceded the Homeless Agency.

In addition to voluntary sector representatives, the composition of the Board includes one representative from each of the four local authorities; one representative from each former Health Board area and the Health Authority (now four representatives from the Health Service Executive); Probation and Welfare; FÁS; VEC; and the Chair of the Consultative Forum. Statutory sector representatives are nominated by their respective agencies.

The Board formally meets at least four times a year, but often meets much more frequently. For example, during 2004 there were a significant number of extra meetings in relation to the discussions on the new action plan and the recruitment of the new Chief Executive. In 2005 the Board has been meeting bi-monthly.

2. Consultative Forum

The Consultative Forum is described as the “strategic planning forum” for homeless services in Dublin. It has the task of monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2004–2006, *Making it Home* from a service delivery and operational perspective, and proposing the next Action Plan to the governing board. However, in practice the development of *Making it Home* was a partnership between the two bodies, delegated to a working group made up of representatives from both the board and the Consultative Forum.

The Forum was established to provide an important mechanism for the promotion and development of partnership between organisations and sectors, which underpins the approach of the Agency. In particular, the Forum is tasked with formulating proposals for the development of the partnership approach with relevant bodies in local areas identified in the Action Plan.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the Consultative Forum are to:

- Propose a strategic plan to the governing Board, through the Agency Director
- Make submissions on the implementation of the plan and other issues as appropriate, through the Director, to the governing Board
- Meet with the governing Board at least once yearly
- Advise the Board to enable it to use its influence effectively to achieve the vision of eliminating homelessness in Dublin 2010
- Devise a model of partnership and ensure its application
- Monitor the implementation of the action plans

The Consultative Forum generally meets six times a year, normally the month before a Board meeting, in order to discuss policy issues and plans prior to them being discussed at the Board meeting. At the Board meeting the Chair of the Consultative Forum gives a report on the work of the Consultative Forum over the previous period.

Membership of the Consultative Forum

The Consultative Forum is comprised of representatives of voluntary and statutory providers of services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area. To ensure that the people devising and monitoring the Homeless Agency action plans are in touch with its actual impact on services and practices, the members of the Forum are those individuals who have direct management responsibility for services to homeless people. With the exception of the independent chair of the Forum, a member of the Forum cannot also be a member of the Board. The composition of the Forum is as follows:

The representation from the statutory sector on the Consultative Forum increased in May 2004. Like the Board of the Agency, there are representatives from each of the local authorities in the area (Three from Dublin City and one each from the other three local authorities), and three from the Health Boards (now the Health Service Executive); and one each from Probation and Welfare, VEC, FÁS and the National Drugs Strategy Team.

The voluntary sector representation is made up of nine representatives nominated by the Homeless Network, made up of representatives of the different types of services as follows: three from residential services, three from day services and three from multi services. The voluntary sector therefore makes up 41% of the membership of the Consultative Forum.

It is the responsibility of the members of the Forum to ensure that the activities and plans of the Homeless Agency are clearly communicated to their organisations and nominating body.

The formal decision-making structures of the Board and Consultative Forum are not, however, the only mechanisms for promoting the participation of those involved in the delivery of services to people who are homeless in Dublin. Additional mechanisms are highlighted below:

3. Homeless Agency Networks

To promote effective partnership working and co-ordination between services, the Homeless Agency has established specific networks, as follows:

- Emergency accommodation
- Transitional accommodation
- Outreach
- Settlement
- Children and Families in B&Bs
- Link Users
- Learning and Performance
- Education and Training (being established following the review of the FÁS Access)

In addition, an information and advice network will commence in September 2005. These networks are made up of representatives of agencies involved in the delivery of the relevant services.

There is also a Cornerstone Advisory Group to assist and advise the editor of Cornerstone magazine and a Research Advisory Group was established early this year.

4. Working Groups

The Homeless Agency has commissioned a wide range of research into various aspects of homelessness and the Agency's work. Many of these research projects have involved steering groups. During 2005 there have been steering groups on the following:

- the review of temporary accommodation;
- the needs of children in homeless families;
- care and case management;
- food centres and participation;
- prevention;
- assessment of homelessness and housing need; and
- establishment of unit costs and funding arrangements.

There have also been focus groups, questionnaires and interviews involving a wide range of representatives from the voluntary and statutory sectors, depending on the specific issue. The Agency also, from time-to-time, establishes other time-limited working groups. Recent examples are FÁS Homeless Access (which has led to the creation of the Education and Training Network); the evaluation of services; and the Assessment of Homelessness.

5. Seminars

In addition to the formal structures, networks and working groups, there are regular seminars on particular issues that bring together relevant participants from both statutory and voluntary organisations. These seminars may be designed to impart information from a research project, for example, or to discuss a particular issue, such as those held this year on: the definition of homelessness, tenancy sustainment, data protection and freedom of information.

6. Homeless Network

The Homeless Network has been mentioned various times above as a representative voice of voluntary organisations delivering services for people who are homeless. It is not, however, part of the formal structures of the Homeless Agency. It was established, and is run by, the voluntary sector itself. It includes 24 of the voluntary organisations which provide accommodation and/or services for people who are homeless in the Greater Dublin area. It does not include several of the larger more traditional providers, such as the Iveagh Trust and the Legion of Mary. The Terms of Reference of the Homeless Network (previously described as the “Voluntary Network”) are out-of-date and need to be reviewed.

The Homeless Network has recognised the need to communicate more effectively with other people within its membership by producing a regular newsletter and have recently received two-year funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund to appoint its own co-ordinator, who has recently taken up post, and who will, amongst other functions, promote the communication with the members.

V Evaluations of the Homeless Agency

The most recent evaluation of the Homeless Agency was carried out by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2003/4 at the end of the “*Shaping the Future*” action plan period. The evaluation report recognised that there are clear terms of reference for the Executive, the Board and the Forum. However it suggested that “the role of the different entities does not appear to be clear to all the parties to the different Fora. Neither the type of decisions that should be made at the different Fora nor the communications systems that should exist between them appears clear”.

The evaluation therefore recommended that the role of each of the different Fora should be reviewed and widely communicated. In particular it was suggested there should be stronger ties between the Consultative Forum and the Board.

The evaluation also suggested “there appears to be an under-utilisation of the formal communication structures which seem to be in existence such as:

- The Statutory Authorities are represented on the Board and on the Consultative Forum;
- The Voluntary Network is represented on the Board and on the Consultative Forum;
- The Consultative Forum is represented on the Board.”

The report also suggests that “the Voluntary Network views does not seem to be coordinated. The Voluntary Network is represented at Consultative Forum and at Board level but there is no sense that this representation has been fully utilised”. Following this evaluation the number of voluntary sector representatives on the Board was increased from three to four and the terms of reference of the Board and Consultative Forum were reviewed and disseminated.

vi Views of Stakeholders

In general, the views of key representatives of organisations represented on the Board and Consultative Forum and the members of the Homeless Network are very positive about the current participation structures. They also consider that how the structures work has improved significantly. They feel that the structures give relevant organisations a substantial voice in both the Board and the Consultative Forum, plus other frequent opportunities to contribute to the discussions and work of the Homeless Agency through working groups, networks, seminars, and research. They have the opportunity to get to know the key players from the other sector, which they can make use of outside the context of the Homeless Agency structures; they know what is going on within the Agency and homelessness arena generally; and have the opportunity to influence policies and plans.

Members of the Consultative Forum would be very concerned about any plans to remove the Consultative Forum, which provides a much broader representation than the Board. The introduction of presentations from each of the participating agency on relevant work is welcomed by the members.

Some concerns were mentioned about the participation structures however:

- **Consultative Forum**
 - There have been times when the Consultative Forum has been bypassed and an issue has gone directly to the Board
 - Recent agendas for the Consultative Forum have been large and therefore the meetings tend to be long
 - There have been a substantial number of research reports to consider but little time spent considering the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations
 - In the past agendas were not sent out 10 days in advance of the meeting (although this has improved recently)
 - High staff turnover within the Homeless Agency which has mitigated against effective coordination
- **Networks**
 - There is a lack of clarity about the roles of the specific networks
 - Working groups are not always set up with clear membership and terms of reference from the beginning (eg the working group on FÁS Homeless Access)
- **Local Forums**
 - Although the Homeless Co-ordinators in the relevant local authorities are all members of the Consultative Forum, as are some of the members of the homeless fora, there is no specific formal mechanism for relating to the structures of the Homeless Agency. Voluntary organisation representatives should be there on behalf of the voluntary sector as opposed to only representing their own individual organisation

- Some of the local fora have experienced mixed attendance and involvement from members. They do not all have terms of reference. It is not clear how the local fora within Dublin City will relate to the formal structures of the Homeless Agency
- **Size of the Board and Consultative Forum**
 - The Board and the Consultative Forum are comparatively large (the PriceWaterhouseCoopers evaluation of the Agency in 2003/4 commented on the large size of the Board, see above). However, previous attempts to reduce the size of the Board have floundered, as the various stakeholders are unwilling to lose or reduce their representation
- **Role of Individual Members**
 - There are statements as to the role of the Board and of the Consultative Forum, but not what is expected of the individual members
- **Induction of New Members**
 - The induction of new Board members on the Board and the Consultative Forum is inadequate
- **Time Commitment of Members**
 - Maintaining the level of input required in terms of time in the wide range of Homeless Agency groups, networks and forums, as well the commitment to the Board or Consultative Forum is a significant challenge for many Board/Consultative Forum members, particularly those who have the issue of homelessness as only one part of their job
- **Funding Assessment Panel**
 - The Funding Assessment panel, which decides on grants for the delivery of homeless services in Dublin is made up of statutory funding organisations. The review of funding arrangements has recommended the introduction of an independent member.

vii Summary of Best Practice in Partnership and Participation in Other Areas

The terms of reference for this review included a review of partnership and participation arrangements in other areas. In summary, the impression from published information in England and Wales is that the partnership structures in relation to homelessness are generally not well advanced. The experience that was gathered in Dublin through the Homeless Initiative, which preceded the Homeless Agency, has put the Homeless Agency on a stronger partnership footing than other equivalent areas in England and Wales.

As in Scotland and Northern Ireland, England and Wales have a stronger umbrella structures at national level for voluntary organisations involved in services for people who are homeless, than exist in Ireland.

viii Conclusions

- The Homeless Agency is clearly a partnership body and this is accepted by all the bodies involved in the partnership
- The partnership and participation arrangements put in place by the Homeless Agency reflect a very high level of commitment to involving those organisations delivering services to people who are homeless in the decision-making processes of the Agency. There is shared reflection, decisions and implementation. These arrangements have improved significantly since the previous evaluation of the Homeless Agency and are highly valued by these organisations. Problems in the relationship between these organisations and the Homeless Agency have in the past tended to take place when the agreed structures and processes are bypassed, when there is poor communication, or when there are staffing difficulties in the Agency
- There is a lack of clarity about the role of some of the specific networks of providers. It has also not been clear, in some cases, who was responsible for ensuring that they function effectively and how information from the relevant network is communicated within the Homeless Agency structures. This is currently being addressed by the Agency
- The homelessness fora in the local authorities outside of Dublin City had not been all working as effectively as possible. There had been a lack of a formal mechanism for relating to the Homeless Agency structures, although various members of those fora, including the local authority homeless co-ordinators also sit on the Consultative Forum. Homeless Agency staff are now attending these local fora. The proposed local homelessness fora have potential to improve the development and co-ordination of services to people who are homeless in those local areas, but will require clear terms of reference, effective leadership, and a mechanism for meeting together and feeding in to the Homeless Agency structures
- The capacity of the Homeless Network has, until very recently been very limited, with few resources to carry out its own work, or communicate effectively with its members. Funding for a co-ordinator from the Dormant Accounts Fund is to be welcomed. The development and co-ordination of voluntary networks which relate to each of the local fora should be an important role of the Homeless Network in future. Recruiting and developing the capacity of members from the local authority areas outside Dublin City should also be a key role for the Network
- There is very little participation of homeless people themselves in the participation structures of the Homeless Agency.

ix Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Membership of the Board and Consultative Forum

The Board and Consultative Forum are comparatively large, which can make the meetings cumbersome. However, with the need to involve all four local authorities, and the crucial role of the HSE and the other statutory and voluntary members, it was not clear how it would be feasible or acceptable to reduce the representation. As the restructuring of the Health Service beds down, it would be appropriate in early 2006 to review whether the representation from the HSE could be streamlined. With a reduction in representation from the HSE a similar reduction from Dublin City Council could also be considered.

Recommendation 2: Board and Consultative Forum Meetings

An annual timetable of meetings of the Board and Consultative Forum should be developed with the main planned agenda items highlighted, to ensure that the work of the Agency, (including work by external bodies/consultants) is timed to fit the structure of meetings of the Consultative Forum and Board.

A related timetable for meetings of the various networks, advisory bodies and working groups should be developed in parallel with the timetable for the Consultative Forum and Board.

The Homeless Agency should ensure that the Consultative Forum continues to meet 3–4 weeks prior to each Board meeting and the Consultative Forum is not bypassed. The views of the Consultative Forum on policies and plans should consistently be formally appended to the plans and policies going to the board for decision.

Every effort should be made to ensure that all the papers for both the Consultative Forum and Board are sent out 10 days in advance of the relevant meeting and items are not sent out just before the meeting, or actually tabled at the meeting.

A short briefing on the outcome (decisions and actions) of Consultative Forum and Board meetings should be produced and widely disseminated by email within 3 working days of the relevant meeting.

An annual joint meeting of Board and Consultative Board members should continue in order to reflect on the previous years work and how well the partnership and participation structures have worked, and plan for the year ahead.

Recommendation 3: Dealing with Major Documents

The Consultative Forum needs to both reduce the number of major reports it has to deal with and develop an appropriate mechanism for dealing with major documents, eg research reports, so they do not dominate the Consultative Forum meetings. This might include giving individual members of the Forum the opportunity to comment on substantial draft reports well before meetings, as has been done recently, so they can be amended prior to being sent out with the Consultative Forum papers and/or holding special meetings. Although this requires a high level of commitment from Forum members to actually respond to drafts sent out for consultation.

Recommendation 4: Terms of Reference of the Board and Consultative Forum

The Terms of Reference of the Board and Consultative Forum should be revised.

The changes should include clarifying the following:

- That the roles of the Board include
 - to consult the Consultative Forum on all major strategic and policy issues;
 - to regularly review the performance of the Board to ensure the governance of the Homeless Agency reflects best practice;
 - to regularly assess the risks facing the Agency and take appropriate action to minimise and manage the identified risks
- What if any functions are contracted to Dublin City Council (e.g. there is no reference in the terms of reference to ensuring good employment or health and safety practice)
- That the Consultative Forum's purpose should not primarily be defined as the "Strategic Planning Forum" of the Agency, designed to propose, and monitor the implementation of, Action Plans, although it has been, and should continue to, contribute substantially to the development of, and monitoring of Action Plans, along with the Board
- That the Consultative Forum's roles should include:
 - a consultative mechanism to ensure that all policies and plans that are going forward to the Board have been appropriately discussed (and if necessary amendments suggested) by representatives of relevant public and voluntary sector organisations., with direct knowledge of current delivery of services to people who are homeless.
 - To give advice to the Board on policies and plans.

Recommendation 5: Chair of the Consultative Forum

The chair of the Consultative Forum should continue to be an independent person. Any representative of one of the participating organisations would, if they became chair, be inhibited from contributing their own views and ideas and those of their own agency.

Recommendation 6: Governance Manual

A governance manual should be produced containing the terms of reference and role statements for all the bodies that make up the Homeless Agency.

Recommendation 7: Role of Individual Representatives on the Board and Consultative Forum

Role statements for the individual members of the Board and of the Consultative Forum (which is different from the role of the body as a whole) should be developed and included in the Governance Manual.

A formal process should be put in place for inducting new Board and Consultative Forum members on: the Homeless Agency, the governance structures and the role of the relevant governance body and individual members.

Recommendation 8: Research Steering Groups

Steering groups established to guide commissioned research work should be established at the beginning of the assignment with clear terms of reference, as well as seeing the work to completion. Those who agree to participate in these groups need to see through this commitment.

Recommendation 9: Funding Panel

The Homeless Agency should implement the recommendations of the Review of Funding Arrangements.

Recommendation 10: Networks

The roles and terms of reference of the specific networks (emergency, transitional, outreach and settlement) should be reviewed. The Homeless Agency should clearly designate specific individuals to take responsibility for ensuring that these networks function effectively and information is communicated between the networks and to the various Homeless Agency structures.

Representation on a network or advisory group should be formally mandated in writing by the representative's manager, and clarify who will deputise if the representative is unable to attend.

The Homeless Agency website should include a facility which identifies the members, chairs and contact persons of each of the networks and advisory groups.

Recommendation 11: Local Fora

The terms of reference and the performance of the Homeless Fora in the three local authorities outside Dublin City should be reviewed to: clarify their role (and which of the functions of Homelessness Forum are contracted to the Homeless Agency); ensure consistency across the three authorities; ensure that these local homelessness forums operate effectively; and ensure that effective commitment and arrangements are in place for participation in the structures of the Homeless Agency.

The three local authorities outside Dublin City should consider the appointment of independent chairs for their Homeless Fora. It was agreed at the Joint Board and Consultative Forum meeting on 25th October 2005 that the Homeless Agency should await the Review of Government Strategy in relation to this issue.

Appropriate terms of reference should be developed for the local fora in Dublin City. The appropriate processes for consulting the local fora on relevant strategy and policy developments and how they should share experiences with each other and feed in common ideas and concerns to the Homeless Agency structures, should be explored in 2006 as the local fora develop.

Recommendation 12: Geographical Boundaries

The fact that all the bodies involved in the Homeless Agency have different geographical boundaries makes effective partnership working very difficult. The main statutory bodies should come together to discuss the creation of structures with common boundaries. (This is outside the remit of the Homeless Agency).

Recommendation 13: Homeless Agency Staffing

Every reasonable effort should be made to ensure consistency of staffing within the Agency and the roles of these staff are clearly identified and communicated to members of the Board and Consultative Forum, networks and advisory groups as well as more widely within Homelessness services.

Recommendation 14: Homeless Network

The Homeless Network should consistently meet a few days prior to each Consultative Forum and Board meeting.

The Homeless Agency should be open to an approach from the Homeless Network for funding to strengthen its capacity to communicate with, and develop, its members and to support the development and co-ordination of more local voluntary networks that bring together the relevant voluntary agencies in each of the five local areas in Dublin City and the three Homeless Fora outside Dublin City, after the end of the Defunct Accounts Fund funding.

The Homeless Agency should invite the Homeless Network to put forward a proposal for funding to develop arrangements for enabling people who are homeless to participate in the Homeless Agency's decision-making.

The Homeless Network should review its own Terms of Reference and formalise its legal status. It should continue to meet prior to the Consultative Forum meetings.

A named person from each of the networks and advisory and working groups should provide a brief verbal update at each Homeless Network meeting.

Recommendation 15: Funded Voluntary Organisations

In addition to the role of the Homeless Network, the Homeless Agency should agree a formal schedule of meetings with the voluntary organisations it funds. These may be quarterly for larger complex agencies and six monthly for smaller agencies. These meetings would provide an opportunity to update on developments, share concerns, and discuss progress in achieving agreed objectives and standards in service level agreements, etc.

Recommendation 16: Statutory Forum

Public sector bodies (local authorities and HSE) involved in the Homeless Agency have in the past met together to discuss issues of mutual concern. This informal network has ceased to meet. The statutory representatives on the Board and Consultative Forum should meet together to discuss whether it would be beneficial for there to be a regular meeting of the statutory bodies concerned with homelessness. If it is considered beneficial to meet regularly, clear terms of reference should be established.

The four local authorities should also meet together regularly, particularly once the local fora are in operation. The relevant local authority managers in each local area in Dublin City and the three local authorities outside Dublin City could learn significantly from each other's experience. Because it involves four different organisations it would be legitimate for the meeting to be facilitated by the Homeless Agency.

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