![Northern Ireland Assembly logo]

Research and Information Service
Briefing Paper

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What do we know about homelessness in NI? An overview of some of the evidence-base

1   Introduction

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide an overview of recent research on homelessness in Northern Ireland. It is by no means exhaustive, rather its intention is to provide the Committee for Communities with a flavour of some of the existing and emerging issues.

The paper explores the following:

- The definition of homelessness; reasons why people become homeless; and statutory responsibility for homelessness;

- The extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland; and

- The nature and needs of different groups of people either experiencing or threatened with homelessness (i.e. rough sleepers; homeless people in the private rented sector; youth homelessness; Ex-Armed Forces personnel; Offenders and Ex-Offenders; people from the LGBT community; people with no or limited access to public funds; migrant workers; and people with disabilities).

2   What is homelessness? Why do people become homeless?

A common misconception is that homelessness describes people who are sleeping on the streets (i.e. 'rooflessness'). This is because it is the most visible form of

homelessness often involving 'street culture' activities such as begging and street drinking.

However, a person may also be deemed to be homeless if they are, for example, living in temporary accommodation such as a hostel or bed and breakfast; 'sofa-surfing'; at risk of violence if they remained in the home; living in poor conditions that are damaging to health; or living in a house that is unsuitable for them[1] (e.g. is overcrowded).

The homeless charity Shelter highlights that homelessness is caused by a complex interplay between a person's individual circumstances and adverse 'structural' factors beyond their direct control. Factors contributing to homelessness can include unemployment; poverty; a lack of affordable housing; relationship breakdown; changes to the benefits system; and leaving institutional care (e.g. mental health facilities, prison).

Homelessness is not just a housing issue but is often, in its most extreme form in particular, inextricably linked with complex and chaotic life experiences such as mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependencies and institutional experiences (e.g. prisons, the care system). Research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the root of many people's experience of Multiple Exclusion Homelessness (MEH)[2] in adulthood lay within traumatic childhood experiences e.g. physical, mental and/or sexual abuse; bullying; neglect; witnessing alcohol or substance misuse; and domestic violence in the home[3].

3   Who has statutory responsibility for tackling homelessness in Northern Ireland?

The Department for Communities addresses homelessness via the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Housing Executive has statutory responsibility for responding to homelessness in accordance with the Housing (NI) Order 1988 (as amended). It has a statutory duty to produce a [Homelessness Strategy](#) every five years[4]. The current 2012-17 strategy sets out a range of actions to achieve the vision of *eliminating long term homelessness and rough sleeping in Northern Ireland by 2020*.

The Department chairs an inter-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, the purpose of which is to provide guidance and direction on the strategy and includes representatives from statutory bodies (including the Department of Health and the Department of Justice) and voluntary groups.

According to an answer to an Assembly Question, DSD's annual expenditure on homelessness services in Northern Ireland is over £35m per year, of which approximately £13m is for homelessness services in Belfast. The funding includes

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[1] Northern Ireland Housing Executive www.nihe.gov.uk/index/advice/homelessness_introduction.htm
[2] Multiple Exclusion Homelessness (MEH) is defined as a form of social exclusion involving homelessness, substance misuse, institutional care, and 'street culture' activities e.g. begging and street drinking.
[3] McDonagh, T. (2011) Tackling homelessness and exclusion: understanding complex lives. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[4] Housing Executive. Homeless Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-17.
www.nihe.gov.uk/homelessness_strategy_for_northern_ireland_2012-2017.pdf

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assistance for those in emergency situations, homelessness prevention and housing support services through the Supporting People programme[5].

The Housing Executive is currently piloting a 'Housing Options Model' with a focus on early intervention and prevention of homelessness. It is being piloted in a number of Housing Executive Offices (Belfast, Causeway and South Down). The model examines an individual's circumstances and choices when they seek housing advice to ensure housing solutions are tailored to their specific needs and appropriate support is provided. The Housing Executive plans to roll-out the Housing Options Model across the organisation by March 2017.

Following the recent deaths linked to homelessness, the Minister for Social Development established a Ministerial Sub-Group with ministerial colleagues from the Department of Health and the Department of Justice to explore the issue of street homelessness and identify what action needs to be taken. The first meeting took place on 14 March and was attended by homeless services providers and the Housing Executive[6].

4   What is the extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland?

The NISRA/DSD 'NI Housing Statistics 2014/15' publication, provides data on households *presenting* as homeless to the Housing Executive and households *accepted* as homeless[7]. *[I have requested that the Department for Communities provide statistics for the 2015/16 period if available].* It reveals that a total of **19,621 households *presented* as homeless** to the Housing Executive in 2014/15 which was an increase of 4% (759) from the previous year. As set out in Table 1, the most common reason reported by those *presenting* as homeless was a sharing breakdown/family dispute (3,891)[8] and accommodation not being reasonable (3,663)[9]. Please note that for a significant number of presenters no data on the reason for presentation was available (1,097 in 2014/15).

Table 1: Households *presenting* as homeless by reason 2013-2015[10]

Reason	2013-14	2014/15
Sharing breakdown/family dispute	3,549	3,891
Marital/relationship breakdown	1,789	1,849
Domestic violence	831	956
Loss of rented accommodation	2,568	2,841
No accommodation in Northern Ireland	1,399	1,458

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[5] Assembly Question for Written Answer 55565/11-16. Mr Fearghal McKinney to the Minister for Social Development. Tabled 15 March 2016.

[6] Assembly Question for Written Answer 55565/11-16. Mr Fearghal McKinney to the Minister for Social Development. Tabled 15 March 2016.

[7] NIRSA/DSD statistics on homeless presenters and those households accepted as homeless are calculated from 1 April to 31 March. The figures for 2015/16 have not yet been published. These will be available in the NI Housing Statistics 2015/16 publication. I have inquired as to whether NIHE can provide updated figures for 2015/16.

[8] Note that sharing breakdown/family dispute is a different classification to marital/relationship breakdown.

[9] Please note that for 1,097 cases no data on reason for presentation is available.

[10] DSD/NISRA. NI Housing Statistics 2014-15.

Intimidation	666	590
Accommodation not reasonable	3,173	3,663
Release from prison/hospital/other institution	449	471
Fire/flood/other emergency	62	84
Mortgage default	421	387
Bomb/fire damage (civil disturbance)	29	27
Neighbourhood harassment	1,142	1,516
Other reasons	701	791
No data on reason for presentation	2,083	1,097
Total presenting as homeless	**18,862**	**19,621**

As evident from Table 2, the household types with the highest number of homeless presenters in 2014/15 were single males (35%) and families (32%). For single males the age group with the highest number of presenters was the 26-59 age group. These household types have represented the higher proportion of homeless presenters since 2004-05. There is also a significant number of pensioner households presenting as homeless (2,146 households in 2014/15). This is perhaps attributable to an increase in older people seeking more suitable accommodation.

Table 2: Households presenting as homeless by household type 2013-2015[11]

Household Type		2013-14	2014-15
Single Males	(16-17 yrs)	162	185
	(18-25 yrs)	2,027	2,013
	(26-59 yrs)	4,588	4,663
	Total	**6,777**	**6,861**
Single Females	(16-17 yrs)	179	176
	(18-25 yrs)	1,408	1,436
	(26-59 yrs)	1,792	1,934
	Total	**3,379**	**3,546**
Couples		**868**	**874**
Families		**5,870**	**6,194**
Pensioner Households		**1,968**	**2,146**
TOTAL		**18,862**	**19,621**

In 2014-15, of the 19,621 households presenting as homeless, **11,016 households were *accepted*** by the Housing Executive as Fully Duty Applicants. When the Housing Executive concludes that a household is (i) eligible for homelessness assistance and; (ii) is unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness; and; (iii) is in priority need the household is entitled to full housing duty and is referred to as a Full Duty

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[11] DSD/NISRA. NI Housing Statistics 2014-15.

Applicant (FDA). The Housing Executive shall secure accommodation (either in the social housing or private rented sectors).

As set out in Table 3; 3,117 of the households accepted as Full Duty Applicants attributed their homelessness to accommodation not being reasonable (28% of all FDAs), followed by 1,912 citing sharing breakdowns/family disputes (17% of all FDAs).

Table 3: Households *Accepted* as Full Duty Applicants by Reason 2013-15[12]

Reason	2013-14	2014/15
Sharing breakdown/family dispute	1,673 (17.3%)	1,912 (17.4%)
Marital/relationship breakdown	754 (7.8%)	778 (7.1%)
Domestic violence	721 (7.5%)	832 (7.6%)
Loss of rented accommodation	1,307 (13.6%)	1,479 (13.4%)
No accommodation in Northern Ireland	524 (5.4%)	584 (5.3%)
Intimidation	380 (3.9%)	405 (3.7%)
Accommodation not reasonable	2,782 (28.8%)	3,117 (28.3%)
Release from prison/hospital/other institution	256 (2.7%)	288 (2.6%)
Fire/flood/other emergency	33 (0.3%)	59 (0.5%)
Mortgage default	208 (2.2%)	199 (1.8%)
Bomb/fire damage (civil disturbance)	21 (0.2%)	18 (0.2%)
Neighbourhood harassment	667 (6.9%)	952 (8.6%)
Other reasons	323 (3.4%)	393 (3.6%)
Total	**9,649**	**11,016**

Caveats to the Waiting List Data

It is important to note that there are a number of issues regarding the usage of Waiting List data as a proxy of the true extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive does not claim that these figures are a true reflection of the actual level of homelessness.

For example, the data does not account for the number of 'hidden homeless'. It is difficult to quantify the number of hidden homeless because they are by their very nature 'concealed' households. The Housing Executive figures reflect only the number of people presenting and accepted as homeless by the Housing Executive. They do not account for those who do not approach statutory services for assistance for various reasons e.g. illegal immigrants, people experiencing domestic abuse, "sofa surfers", people living in overcrowded or poor quality accommodation. Research suggests that there is a perception amongst young single people, particularly young single males, that there is no point in applying to the Housing Executive for accommodation as they would have lower priority in what is already a very lengthy Waiting List[13].

Research conducted by Ulster University and the University of Cambridge identified further issues with the Waiting List data. For example, there may be geographical

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[12] DSD/NISRA. NI Housing Statistics 2014-15.

[13] Pleace, N. & Bretherton, J. (2013) Measuring Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

areas where people do not apply for housing as they know that they have little chance of being rehoused yet they may still be in housing need. This demand is currently latent but would become apparent if more houses were available[14].

4 What do we know about nature and needs of different groups of people who are homeless?

It is evident that homelessness is a very complex issue and people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, are not a homogenous group. This section explores recent research on the nature and needs of different groups of homeless people. Please note that an individual or household could fall into several of these categories.

Rough Sleepers/Street Needs Audit

The Housing Executive in conjunction with the Welcome Organisation, Depaul and Belfast City Centre Management published the results of a Belfast Street Needs Audit in January 2016. The purpose of the audit was to identify the extent and nature of 'street activity' (i.e. begging, street drinking and rough sleeping) in Belfast City Centre. The audit took place over a 12-week period between the hours of 10pm and 8am. The audit is to be used to inform future service commissioning by identifying and targeting interventions to assist individuals engaged street activity.

The Committee will receive an update on homelessness from these organisations which may cover the findings of the street audit. However, in advance of this briefing key findings from the audit are as follows:

- Growing levels of street activity (e.g. begging and street drinking) have led to a perception that there is an increase in rough sleeping in Belfast City Centre. Not all street drinkers are rough sleepers or are homeless and a significant number of this group either had their own accommodation or had been placed in temporary accommodation. Some had been excluded from hostels on occasions as a result of excessive alcohol or drug misuse, and some had chosen to 'stay out' to engage in drinking activity.
- The majority of street activity (78%) took place in and around the city centre, particularly Donegall Place, Royal Avenue and High Street.
- There is evidence that there is a different cohort of people begging during the day who are not sleeping rough overnight and that further investigation and a different approach to this is required.
- During the 84-day period of the audit, 361 different individuals were observed engaging in some form of street activity on one or more occasions. Each individual received an assessment to establish whether they had a support programme in place. 166 individuals were assessed on two or more occasions over the 12 week-period.
- Of the 166 individuals, 42 were observed engaging in street activity more than once per week and were referred for case management to the Housing Executive's Housing Solutions Team.

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[14] Gray, P. et al (2013) Research to inform a fundamental review of the social housing allocations policy. Research Commissioned by the Department for Social Development.

- Seven of these 42 individuals were assessed multiple times each week. These individuals were classified as "entrenched" rough sleepers and prioritised for case management.
- Of the 42 individuals who were classified as more 'entrenched' in street activity, the last accommodation for 42% of these individuals was a homeless hostel, 26% was their own home, and 7% had been in prison.
- At the end of each day the Street Audit Team recorded the number of individuals actually sleeping rough. This number ranged from 0 to 19. The average number of rough sleepers per night was six. In all cases the clients were offered advice and assistance.
- In terms of nationality, of the 361 individuals observed, 82% described themselves as either British, Irish or Northern Ireland; 14% were of Eastern European origin; the remaining 4% included people of African or Middle Eastern origin.
- In terms of gender, 85% of the 361 individuals were male and 15% female. The average age was 36 years, 20% were 25 years or younger.
- A number of individuals had multiple needs resulting from substance misuse, mental health and learning disability. Many of the people engaged in street activity were characterised as having chaotic lifestyles and poor health. They were difficult to engage with and often resisted offers of assistance. The Welcome Organisation and DePaul stated that the three main reasons why the individuals identified did not access crisis accommodation were (i) lack of available crisis beds; (ii) exclusion because of previous challenging behaviour (e.g. fighting); (iii) exclusion due access criteria (e.g. presenting as inebriated); and (iv) affordability and/or previous service charge arrears.
- The report made a number of recommendations arising from the findings of the audit including (i) a tailored approach to meeting the needs of 'entrenched' individuals and realignment of existing services (ii) developing an approach to street begging (iii) information sharing protocols between agencies e.g. Housing Executive, Belfast City Council, PSNI etc.
- In answer to an Assembly Question tabled in February 2016, the Minister for Social Development stated that there was not date available to gauge the number of individuals who are homeless and sleeping rough outside of Belfast[15].

Homelessness and Access to Health and Social Services

A recent report published by the Patient and Client Council (2015) revealed the many homeless people, particularly those that are sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation (e.g. hostels), experience barriers accessing health and social care[16].

Key findings are as follows:

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[15] Assembly Question for Written Answer 5456/11-16. Mr Alex Easton to the Minister for Social Development. Tabled 26 February 2016.

[16] Patient Client Council (2015) Issues faced by people who are homeless in accessing health and social care: report of an initial scoping exercise.
www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net/uploads/research/Issues_faced_by_people_who_are_homeless_in_accessing_health_and_social_care_services_-_March_2015.pdf

- Accessing GP services was problematic for people at the most extreme end of the homeless spectrum because (i) they can lack the necessary identification or a permanent address to register with a GP, and (ii) the transient nature of homelessness may mean that they need to re-register with another practice as they move in and out of areas.   Any time-lag in transferring records between practices may lead to delays in the issuing of prescriptions.
- GP services were identified as particularly important given that they are gateways to other services e.g. hospital care and welfare services.
- People who are homeless with addiction problems often have urgent needs but lead chaotic lifestyles. Health and social care services that are appointments based can be difficult for them to access. They may also lack the motivation and social skills necessary and do not view their health as a priority and these can also act as barriers to accessing healthcare. They are also less likely to access services because of a perception or fear of hostility and discrimination.
- The report emphasised that a co-ordinated and consistent approach between health and social care is particularly important for those with a 'dual diagnosis' i.e. have both mental health and addiction problems.
- Some stakeholders reported that there was a lack of long-term respite and end of life care for the homeless population and identified a need for better provision of nursing care services for those who need palliative care or have addiction problems.
- The report acknowledged and cited a number of examples of best practice in health and social care bodies in assisting homeless people to access services. However, it argues that there remained a need to (i) educate professionals on the issue of homelessness and the role that they play in addressing barriers to health and social care; (ii) the need for collaboration between different organisations and statutory agencies; and (iii) leadership from Government Departments.

Homeless People in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

Research commissioned by Housing Rights has identified a number of challenges in seeking to make greater use of the private rented sector to meet the needs of vulnerable homeless people in Northern Ireland. The report focuses on the most vulnerable 'chronic exclusion' homeless clients with complex needs. Some of the key findings were as follows[17]:

- For the serially homeless and those at greatest risk of homelessness, such as those leaving care or ex-offenders, the higher costs involved private sector renting are compounded by issues around mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, financial and social exclusion and a lack of life-skills. From a landlords' perspective such individuals can be undesirable as tenants. Tenancies have in such cases, a high propensity to break-down.

- Caps on benefit entitlement, and the reduction in funding for self-contained accommodation for the under 35s, will be a major barrier to accessing and sustaining

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[17] Ellison, A. (2012) Meeting the housing needs of vulnerable people in the private rented sector in Northern Ireland. Commissioned by Housing Rights.

housing for those at greatest risk of homelessness, who frequently have difficulties with social interactions and are thus likely to struggle in shared accommodation.

- For many people with complex needs housing experience has been a revolving door of temporary placements and serial housing failure, in both social housing and the PRS. The report notes that a significant degree of support is required if the vulnerable homeless are to sustain tenancies.

- Evidence from Europe and the US suggests that the PRS can be used effectively to meet the needs of even the most vulnerable homeless, and create sustainable, long term tenancies. This requires a radically different approach which puts the housing solution first with tailored support then based on core principles which are people-centred and needs led. These solutions, known as the "Housing First" model, take housing as a basic human right and provide a permanent housing solution as a first step in addressing chronic homelessness, with housing entitlement separate from service development and delivery.

Youth Homelessness

A research study by the Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland entitled "Young People Telling It Like It Is" provides an insight into the accommodation and support needs of homeless young people aged 16-21 years[18].

At the time the research was conducted, the young people in the study were largely satisfied with the physical standards of their accommodation. The report suggested young people's immediate and practical needs were largely being met but that there was insufficient evidence to conclude whether the same was true for their longer term specialist needs.

Many of the young people participating in the study had a range of complex needs such as mental health difficulties, a history of self-harm, and had experienced childhood abuse and low self-esteem.

The report highlighted that (i) some young people were unable to recognise or acknowledge their needs and may at times be unwilling to engage with services; (ii) generic services to young people who were homeless were not adequately resourced to deal with the complexity of needs which some young people presented and; (iii) there were significant challenges in seeking to refer young people to external agencies for more in-depth or specialist support.

The report further concluded that *"given the complexity of needs of young people, it can be concluded that either their needs have not been adequately addressed whilst they are living in supported accommodation or that they are not being adequately prepared for, or supported during, periods of independent living".*

An emphasis was placed on ensuring that all young people moving into independent accommodation received support to maintain their tenancies such as a "re-engagement

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[18] Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland (2008) Telling it Like it Is: Research into the accommodation and support needs of homeless 16-21 year olds in Northern Ireland. http://chni.org.uk/YPTILIIs.pdf

plan" and access to crisis intervention services to support them through difficult periods; and support to help young people build local community connections in order to prevent isolation and loneliness.

Research into ending youth homelessness conducted by the University of York and Heriot-Watt University suggests that although much progress has been made in developing services for younger people there remained a need for[19]:

- more support for parents of teenagers including peer support and specialist parenting services;

- the development of "respite" arrangements whereby young people could move into high quality accommodation for short periods to give both them and their families breathing space;

- housing support pathways to allow young people to trial independence with an option to return to previous accommodation if they feel it necessary; and

- capacity building in the private rented sector with accreditation schemes for landlords or agents to assist them in supporting young people in their tenancies.

Ex-Armed Forces Personnel

The Housing Executive holds information on housing and homelessness applications that could potentially identify a former member of the British Armed Forces. This information is held securely and the Minister for Social Development has advised that the information is handled in strict confidence in accordance with Data Protection Act 1998[20].

Research into the issue of homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, amongst single ex-service personnel has emerged in recent years primarily as a result of the Armed Forces Covenant. The vast majority of this research is GB-based and academics in GB tend not to cover Northern Ireland as they see the issue as complicated, sensitive and requires in-depth knowledge of the political situation here[21].

Rough sleeping amongst ex-service personnel is unlikely to be as acute in Northern Ireland in comparison to other areas of the GB because the rate of rough sleeping is significantly lower here (although perhaps there is a degree of hidden homelessness). Nevertheless, a number of inferences may be drawn from the research in relation to the housing and support needs of ex-service personnel in Northern Ireland.

For example, many single veterans can experience housing difficulties similar to other single people who are homeless, i.e. shortage of affordable accommodation, problems sustaining a tenancy, mental health issues. However, some of the problems faced by

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[19] Quilgars, D. et al (2011) Ending youth homelessness: Possibilities, challenges and practical solutions. Centre for Housing Policy, University of York and School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University.

[20] Assembly Question for Written Answer 54800/11-16. Mr Andy Allen to the Minister for Social Development. Tabled 25 February 2016.

[21] Jones, A. et al (2014) Meeting the Housing Needs of Single Veterans in Great Britain. University of York Centre for Housing Policy.

ex-service personnel can be attributed to their experience of service particularly if there has been inadequate transition planning from the Armed Forces e.g. unfamiliarity with civilian life such as housing markets, the welfare system, and budgeting.

Offenders/Ex-Offenders

One of NIACRO's 'Five Key Asks' of the new Assembly mandate is to remove barriers to effective resettlement which includes the provision of sustainable and appropriate housing and housing advice for offenders and ex-offenders[22].

NIACRO's response to the consultation on the draft Homelessness Strategy for NI identified the importance of supported accommodation to address the needs of offenders/ex-offenders[23]. A number of these individuals have complex and multiple problems such as poor mental health, self-harming behaviours and drug and alcohol misuse.

It emphasised the need for early intervention and expediency in Housing Executive decision-making in regards to homelessness applications. Additionally, NIACRO also highlighted the importance of providing housing and welfare advice in prisons and the crucial role played by floating support services in helping people sustain their tenancies.

NIACRO's recommendations to meet the accommodation and housing support needs of offenders and ex-offenders includes the provision of a package of support to private landlords to assist them in addressing problems with tenancies held by offenders and ex-offenders (problems such as anti-social behaviour); and addressing the issue of rough sleeping (as this can impact on a cycle of offending and imprisonment).

The consultation response acknowledged that there are challenges in respect of community views around accommodating sexual and violent offenders in the community. NIACRO believes that there are risks of repeat homelessness amongst this group and that there needed to be investment in tailored accommodation linked to a therapeutic environment.

NIACRO also expressed concerns over the accommodation and support needs of women offenders/ex-offenders including what they perceived to be, at the time the consultation paper was compiled (2011), limited availability of temporary accommodation which impacted upon prospects for bail and also the transition from prison to community.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT)

A study commissioned by the Housing Executive and conducted by the Rainbow Project and Council for the Homeless NI (CHNI) into the housing and homelessness experiences of LGBT people revealed:

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[22] NIACRO Manifesto. Assembly Election: NIACRO's Five Key Policy Asks. www.niacro.co.uk/manifesto-2016
[23] NIACRO (2011) Response to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Draft Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016.

- That family rejection was the most cited reason for homelessness amongst LGBT people followed by relationship breakdown. Family rejection was typically as a result of conflict associated with the respondent's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In some instances, this precipitated an immediate episode of homelessness (an issue more prevalent amongst young LGBT people), in other instances it played an indirect role in later experiences of homelessness as a source of support and accommodation had been removed.

- Trans people were particularly vulnerable to repeat episodes of homelessness and could experience frequent moves in accommodation because of regular and sustained transphobic abuse. Trans respondents reported that they experienced persisted anxiety and fear for their safety.

- There was a concern in accessing support from the Housing Executive that Housing Executive stock was generally in areas that were perceived to be unsafe. For those seeking re-location from current housing as a result of discrimination, there was a reluctance to be placed in a location where they would be exposed to similar problems.

  The report made a number of recommendations including, for example:

  - Sexual orientation and gender identity awareness training for Housing Executive staff relevant to their role, particularly frontline staff.

  - That temporary accommodation providers should develop formal links with LGBT organisations and review organisational policies, procedures and handbooks to determine whether they take into consideration LGBT inclusivity.

  - Develop protocols that enable assessment of LGBT applicants' individual support needs and signposting of vulnerable applicants to appropriate services.

People with no or limited access to public funds

A study published by the Human Rights Commissioned (2009) explored the issue of homelessness amongst people in Northern Ireland who have no or limited access to public funds (e.g. certain categories of non-UK nationals, asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors)[24].

The report cited a number of case studies which illustrated the vulnerabilities of some individuals/households, for example:

- A non-EEA woman was married to a British man and they had one child. She suffered domestic abuse over a lengthy period but was unable to leave the marriage because her husband withheld her documents. After a serious incident she presented to a refuge where she was provided with support and accommodation. When her passport was eventually released by her husband it showed that she had no recourse to public

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[24] Devlin, R. & McKenna, S. (2009) No Home from Home: Homelessness for People with No or Limited Access to Public Funds.

funds. The cost of her accommodation and financial assistance for food and clothing was provided by the refuge at considerable cost to their budget[25].

▪ After a year of living in Belfast, a non-EEA national's home was attacked repeatedly over the course of two nights. He reported this to the PSNI and presented to the Housing Executive for accommodation. The Housing Executive received a report from the PSNI that confirmed the attacks were racially motivated. He provided his passport to the Housing Executive but it was found that he had no recourse to public funds. The Housing Executive confirmed that he was not eligible for accommodation under the homelessness legislation and the case was closed.

The Housing Executive is placed in a very difficult position when a person or household presents as homeless but has no recourse to public funds. Article 22A of the Housing (N.I.) Order 1981 stipulates that the Housing Executive shall not allocate housing accommodation to a person from abroad, if he/she is a person subject to immigration control who is ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation by virtue of the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999[26].

In these cases, it is likely that these individuals or households rely on accommodation and financial support from friends, family and community and voluntary organisations. It is also highly likely that this adds to the problem of "hidden homelessness" in Northern Ireland.

Migrant Workers

Research commissioned by the Housing Executive into migrant workers and the housing market (focusing on Larne and Dungannon district council areas) reveals that[27]:

▪ Migration typically adds to the pressure for private renting and increases housing demand in the short and medium term in some areas and local housing systems are often slow to respond to sharp rises in aggregate demand.

▪ Local community cohesion is often challenged where the pace of change puts an unexpected pressure on existing services and infrastructure e.g. the availability of social housing.

▪ The migrant population is diverse and can have different housing needs. Migrant workers who have been in NI for a longer period of time often seek longer term housing options and often need relatively larger properties for larger family networks. More vulnerable short term migrants often have accommodation tied to their employment. A loss of employment can lead to a loss of accommodation meaning that such people can become homeless at the end of periods of seasonal/temporary work.

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[25] The vulnerability of minority ethnic women who experience domestic abuse but have no or little recourse to public funds is highlighted by research commissioned by NICEM – Isal, S. (2013) The experiences of ethnic minority women in Northern Ireland.

[26] AQW 53175/11-16. Mr David McNarry to the Minister for Social Development. Tabled 20 January 2016.

[27] O'Sullivan, T. et al (2014) Migrant Workers & the Housing Executive: A Report to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

- Dealing with housing or homelessness queries can be time consuming and complex for housing practice and advice workers because of the need to carefully check current regulations and legislation in terms of eligibility for assistance.

- There were issues around temporary accommodation i.e. ensuring people placed in temporary accommodation were eligible for support, whether the accommodation was in a convenient location for them, and disputes over how and who should pay for the accommodation (i.e. the Housing Executive and Social Services).

The report made a number of recommendations including, for example, enhancing the support for social housing to address housing need; increasing the availability of temporary family accommodation close to where the migrant population work; continuing to address the poor quality and landlord practices particularly in respect to HMOs; and enhancing the role of healthcare workers in 'problem spotting'.

Disability

Disability and homelessness is a complex issue. One the one hand, having a disability can lead to homelessness if a disabled person resides in accommodation that is unsuitable for their needs. For example, if a person with an existing disability lives in accommodation that is not suitably adapted to their needs, or if a person with a mental health issues is placed in accommodation with inadequate psychological support.

On the other hand, the consequences of living in unsuitable accommodation can have a serious detrimental impact on physical and mental wellbeing. A recent report for the Housing Executive into 'Delivering sustainable healthy homes and communities' highlights that experiencing fuel poverty, living in isolated housing estates or in areas that lack play and leisure facilities are all factors linked to poor health[28].

Additionally, different groups of disabled people may require different forms of housing or accommodation-based support. For example, the needs of older people with disabilities may be different to that required by children or young people with disabilities. Services for people living rough or in temporary accommodation and who have disabilities may be different to people living in permanent accommodation. In other words, there is no "one size fits all" approach.

Research commissioned by the Housing Executive highlights that changes in demographic trends in Northern Ireland will change the nature of the types of housing that are needed in the future. A number of respondents in the study highlighted that the prevalence of certain conditions over time may change the nature of accommodation required in the future (e.g. dementia in older people; the rates of physical, sensory and learning disabilities amongst the general population; the prevalence of different types of mental health conditions, the numbers of young people leaving care; the number of people involved in drug and alcohol misuse)[29]. These

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[28] Housing Executive, TCPA, Belfast Healthy Cities (2016) Delivering sustainable healthy homes and communities in Northern Ireland.

[29] Paris, C. et al (2014) Demographic Change and Future Housing Need in Northern Ireland. Housing Executive and RSM McClure Watters (Consulting).

factors are likely to impact the level of homelessness in Northern Ireland and will require different housing solutions.