



**DfC**

Department  
for Communities

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# Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan 2019–20

Year 2 Action Plan

# Introduction

1. This Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan has been developed to complement the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy 2017–2022<sup>1</sup>.
2. While the Homelessness Strategy focuses on accommodation based or housing-led solutions to homelessness, this plan focuses on addressing gaps in 'non-accommodation' services beyond the remit of the NI Housing Executive. These are services that have the potential to positively impact on the lives and life chances of people who are homeless and those who are most at risk of homelessness.
3. The Action Plan is a rolling plan that will evolve over the five years of the Homelessness Strategy and will support the delivery of Outcome 8 within the draft Programme for Government – 'We care for others and we help those in need'.
4. The Year 2 Action Plan has been equality screened and the actions included reflect feedback from stakeholders. As detailed in the equality screening form for the Action Plan, individual actions will be subject to screening by the responsible lead Departments in line with their respective Equality Scheme.

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<sup>1</sup> Ending Homelessness Together – Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2017–22 (NIHE)

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# Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan Year 1 – achievements and challenges

5. The first year Action Plan (November 2017 – June 2018) <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/inter-departmental-homelessness-action-plan> included actions and priority areas that were identified by Government Departments and their statutory partners in consultation with stakeholders.
6. Many of the actions concentrated on research activities, benchmarking, mapping service provision and identifying where good practice exists locally. While this work does not immediately produce a tangible outcome for service users, it is vitally important in scoping future actions for the Plan.
7. Research completed by the **Department of Health (DoH)** produced a report identifying barriers faced by people who are Homeless in accessing health and social care services. This work underpins many of the actions that feature in the Year 2 Action Plan.
8. The **Department for Communities (DfC)** led on a mapping project with the charity **MACS**, looking at gaps in current service provision for young homeless people. **MACS Supporting Children and Young People (MACS)** produced a video telling the story of young service users' experiences such as sleeping rough, sofa surfing, hostel living, overcrowding, family breakdown and poor mental health. This video is a very powerful piece of work which has been shared widely and welcomed by statutory agencies and the homelessness sector.
9. **Council for the Homeless NI (CHNI)** also worked with the **DfC** in undertaking a Northern Ireland wide scoping and analysis exercise to map youth homelessness. The results of this exercise identified that there were perceived issues around young people, particularly in the 18–21 year old age group, being able to access various services for help. The reasons for this need to be examined in more depth and will be taken forward by DfC as an action in Year 2.

10. The **Make the Call** team in **Work and Inclusion Group** in DfC led on providing benefit clinics in prisons and offered advice and support to Social Workers on potential benefit entitlements for looked after children and care leavers. Although this action was completed in Year 1, the activity will be taken forward as a business as usual activity by the team.
11. The **Department of Education (DE)** along with the **Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** liaised with partner and other organisations to develop homelessness material and established a database of useful resources and material made available through CCEA website and this was launched in December 2018. This work continues into the second year of the Action Plan.
12. The results of Year 1 are published on the Department for Communities [website](#).

# Feedback on Year 1

13. Feedback from the homelessness provider sector on the Year 1 Action Plan was mixed. On a positive note it was agreed that the Plan was successful in that it brought together, for the first time, homelessness actions from a number of Government Departments into a coherent Action Plan.

14. Partners in the homelessness provider sector, however, felt that the Action Plan needed to do more to make a tangible difference to peoples' lives. The Department accepts that actions should be outcome focused as far as possible and has taken this on board for Year 2. However, by focusing purely on tangible deliverables it may leave a significant gap in exploring emerging trends, identifying gaps in service provision and making the Action Plan as responsive as possible going forward. Some actions around research will, therefore, remain in the Plan.

## Development of the Action Plan

15. A co-production approach has been adopted from the outset to develop the Action Plan. This is in recognition that input from those who are experiencing or who have experienced homelessness during the development, implementation and evaluation of the Action Plan will be essential to its success.
16. To facilitate this approach a working group was set up with Homeless Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) members. HSSG is chaired by the Department for Communities and includes representation from a number of Government Departments, statutory agencies and the voluntary sector. The working group was tasked with giving sector feedback on the first iteration, and providing advice and guidance during the development of the Year 2 Plan. Working Group members included representatives from **Council for the Homeless (CHNI), Welcome Organisation, Depaul, Simon Community, Women's Aid Federation, Extern, Barnardos and Housing Rights**. To ensure that there was appropriate linkage with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's (NIHE) Homelessness Strategy 2017–2022 representatives from the NIHE were also included in the working group discussions.
17. HSSG endorsed the Department's approach on development of the second year Action Plan. The working group met and agreed that the 5 priority areas for action remained the same and that the Year 2 Plan should run to **March 2020**. Feedback was also received on the Year 1 Action Plan and initial discussions were held on what actions should be considered for the second, including highlighting any new areas of concern that needed to be addressed. This session resulted in a list of potential actions and areas of concern for consideration by Government Departments.
18. A number of Bi-lateral meetings were held with the DoH, DE and DoJ to discuss potential actions. Meetings were also held within the DfC, particularly with Work and Inclusion Group and Voluntary and Community Division.
19. Further engagement with the sector, as agreed by HSSG, was held in the form of separate working group sessions with representatives from the DoH and a separate session with representatives from DE, DoJ and DfC. These sessions were very constructive and brought the voice of the sector to each of the Departments.

20. The NIHE Homelessness strategy 2017–22 – launch of the Year 1 Annual Progress Report Conference provided another opportunity for the Department to receive feedback and two workshops were conducted which provided significant responses. The Homelessness and Health Symposium also provided the DoH with feedback during workshop sessions. Feedback was also received from the NIHE local area forums resulting in a number of emerging ideas forming.

21. There followed a period of further consultation with policy owners from relevant Government Departments and statutory agencies to refine and develop the agreed actions. The Year 2 Action Plan for 2019–20 is attached at **Annex A**.

# Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

22. Our focus will be to evaluate how the Action Plan contributes to our overall objective of improving the lives and life chances of those who are homeless and those most at risk of homelessness. The Action Plan will remain a ‘living document’ throughout the lifetime of the Homelessness Strategy so that the Department for Communities (DfC), with input from partner organisations, service providers and service users, can keep it up-to-date and responsive.
23. HSSG will have overall responsibility for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Action Plan. This group, which meets quarterly, also has responsibility for monitoring the overall Homelessness Strategy. The HSSG will review quarterly progress reports on the Action Plan and will also be responsible for signing off an annual progress report and any future iterations of the Action Plan.
24. A responsible owner/policy lead has been allocated for each action within the Action Plan. There will be quarterly meetings of responsible owners/policy leads and quarterly progress reports will then be provided to DfC prior to submission for HSSG review/approval. The quarterly meetings will be attended by NIHE representatives to ensure that there is a continued connection with the Homeless Strategy.
25. To facilitate ongoing stakeholder engagement, an annual conference/workshop will be convened involving Government Departments, statutory agencies, service providers and service users. The objective for this event will be to review the draft annual progress report, and specifically to:
- review the impact of the actions to date;
  - assist in the identification of available data to inform the monitoring and evaluation of impacts;
  - agree any actions that should carry forward to the following year, including any refinement or further development that is necessary; and
  - agree any new actions that should be added to the Action Plan.







26. The annual conference/workshop will be arranged prior to the HSSG's review of the annual progress report to allow stakeholder feedback to be incorporated within the draft annual report.


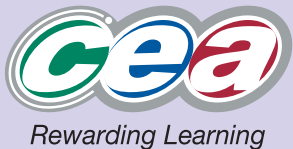
27. Finally, we will seek to ensure that the wide range of mechanisms which are already in existence are utilised to their full potential to promote the maximum impact in sharing learning and good practice and improving communication among and between all interests. The HSSG will assume responsibility for ensuring that learning, best practice and any other relevant lessons or issues are disseminated to the relevant fora, representative groups etc.




# Annex A



## Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan 2019–2020


<b>PRIORITY AREA 1</b> <b>Health and wellbeing, including mental health and substance misuse</b>			
Responsible Owner	No.	Actions	Expected Outcomes and Milestones
	1	<p>Pilot a Homeless Healthcare Hub in Belfast to provide outreach care to those who are sleeping rough or in hostel accommodation.</p> <p>The proposal is to create a multi-disciplinary team hub in Belfast to provide care in the community for people experiencing homelessness, supported by enhanced primary care access.</p> <p>This hub would wrap multi-disciplinary input around the existing BHSCT homeless nursing team, and deliver joined up services in the community including nursing, GP, dental and podiatry.</p> <p>The hub will remove barriers to accessing health care by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-location of staff and services in a location which provides easy access for homeless people;</li> <li>• Providing accessible services to people with a chaotic lifestyle, for example drop in and outreach clinics;</li> <li>• Facilitating multidisciplinary team working.</li> </ul> <p>Outreach will be provided from the hub into hostels, other voluntary settings and on the streets.</p> <p>This prototype hub will allow assessment of feasibility of the service, evaluation and regional learning to inform development of improved care pathways for people experiencing homelessness across Northern Ireland.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b></p> <p>Improved access to health and social care services for people who are homeless.</p> <p>Improved service user experience.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b></p> <p>Subject to availability of funding:</p> <p>By 1 February 2019, begin delivery of additional primary care and Belfast homelessness nursing team services (including additional nursing, podiatry, dental and administration services).</p> <p>By 1 May 2019, open hub premises as base for enhanced services outlined above.</p> <p>By May 2020, complete evaluation of activity, impact and outcomes delivered through pilot.</p>

 <p><b>DoH</b> Department of Health <a href="http://www.health-ni.gov.uk">www.health-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>2</p>	<p>The model for the provision of needle and syringe exchange services will be reviewed and revised to reduce the risk of blood borne viruses and improve accessibility, including for those who are homeless.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b> Reduce the harm related to the use and misuse of drugs and reduce prevalence of blood borne viruses among the people who experience homelessness and the general population.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b> Review to be completed and agreed by end April 2019;</p> <p>Revised service model to be in place by July 2019 (subject to resources)</p>
 <p><b>DoH</b> Department of Health <a href="http://www.health-ni.gov.uk">www.health-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>3</p>	<p>Co-produce an awareness and education plan to meet the needs of staff in the voluntary sector and to raise awareness among HSC staff regarding particular service needs of homeless people.</p> <p>Work with partners ie. Voluntary and community sector and HSC to provide awareness and training on issues effecting homeless health.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b> Improved understanding of health related issues, services and support required by people experiencing homelessness by both statutory and voluntary service providers.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s):</b> Co design with Voluntary Sector and co deliver awareness raising workshop for HSC staff by June 2019;</p> <p>Co design with partners and deliver through CEC training for voluntary sector staff on awareness of health issues including medicines management by October 2019.</p>
 <p><b>DoH</b> Department of Health <a href="http://www.health-ni.gov.uk">www.health-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>4</p>	<p>To develop a practice framework for social workers in NI in relation to homelessness.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b> To develop social workers’ understanding of homelessness. To support social workers to develop best practice in relation to homelessness.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b> Develop Practice Framework document by June 2019.</p>


<b>PRIORITY AREA 2</b> <b>Education and awareness raising – children, young people, schools and providers</b>			
Responsible Owner	No.	Actions	Expected Outcomes and Milestones
 <p>DE Department of Education <a href="http://www.education-ni.gov.uk">www.education-ni.gov.uk</a></p>  <p>CCEA Rewarding Learning</p>	5	<p>By 31 March 2020, to produce resources on preventative strategies within the curriculum, such as financial capability and self-esteem, to address social issues such as homelessness.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b></p> <p>Throughout 2019–2020, CCEA, in collaboration with DE, EA and other children’s authorities, will work to support educational policies with a view to improving the well-being of children and young people as outlined in the Children’s Services Co-operation Act 2015.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b></p> <p>Provided that funding is available to continue Professional Associate work in 2019/20, CCEA has agreed to carry out the following work:</p> <p>By 31 December 2019 Publish resources online in relation to financial capability and wellbeing;</p> <p>By 31 December 2019 Evaluate the use of the Homelessness resources by schools;</p> <p>By 31 March 2020 Provide examples of good practice illustrating how the resources have been used by schools.</p> <p>By 31 March 2020 Make explicit links across the curriculum to homelessness thereby maximising the potential use of the homelessness resources;</p> <p>By 31 March 2020 Ensure effective communication and engagement with schools to raise awareness of the availability of the resources</p>



<b>PRIORITY AREA 3</b> <b>Support for those leaving places of care, including institutional care, children’s residential and foster care, prisons, hospitals, mental health facilities</b>			
Responsible Owner	No.	Actions	Expected Outcomes and Milestones
 <p><b>DoJ</b> Department of Justice <a href="http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk">www.justice-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	6	<p>To commission research to assess the longer term outcomes of an offender’s access and retention of accommodation following release.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b> To establish the effectiveness of resettlement provision, interventions and outcomes over the longer-term.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b> To commission research by September 2019</p>
 <p><b>DfC</b> Department for Communities <a href="http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk">www.communities-ni.gov.uk</a></p>  <p><b>DoH</b> Department of Health <a href="http://www.health-ni.gov.uk">www.health-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	7	<p>Proactively address housing needs of hospital in-patients who are experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>By taking a case study approach, review and make recommendations where necessary for improvement to hospital discharge arrangements for in-patients at risk of or experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>This will include consideration of the roles of HSC and NI Housing Executive, in particular with regards to improving coordination and collaboration between housing and health and social care services for in-patients before and at discharge.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b> People at risk of or experiencing homelessness who are admitted to hospital as an in-patient will experience smoother transition and support between health and housing services on discharge from hospital.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s):</b> By 30 April 2019 establish a joint housing and health task and finish group with representation from homelessness providers to take forward the joint review.</p> <p>By 30 September 2019 review a range of discharge case studies of homeless in-patients, including mental health and acute in-patients identify barriers to smooth transitions.</p> <p>By December 2019 produce a report with findings of case study review with recommendations for improvement.</p> <p>By 31 March 2020 commence implementation of recommendations.</p>

<b>PRIORITY AREA 4</b> <b>Support for families including support for those experiencing domestic violence, and community support mechanisms</b>			
Responsible Owner	No.	Actions	Expected Outcomes and Milestones
	8	To examine the reasons why young homeless persons, particularly in the 18–21 year old age group, have difficulty in accessing help and advice in relation to their homelessness situation. This was highlighted in the research completed by the Council for the Homeless NI which mapped the support needs of young people with a history of homelessness.	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b></p> <p>To identify the key reasons for young people, particularly in the 18–21 age group, having difficulties in successfully accessing help and advice around homelessness issues.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b></p> <p>By 31 October 2019 to have gathered evidence from Youth organisations in order to identify and understand particular difficulties faced by young people in accessing help and advice in relation to their homelessness situation.</p>
	9	To consider the impact of new domestic violence and abuse initiatives, in terms of how these may impact on homelessness levels, and what steps may be taken to address this.	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b></p> <p>Development of a homelessness impact assessment (HIA) template for use during the development and evaluation of domestic violence and abuse policies and initiatives by June 2019;</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To carry out a HIA on all substantive DVA Policy proposals from July 2019;</li> <li>• To provide bi-annual updates on assessments for the Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan and to the Homeless APG on request;</li> </ul>

 <p><b>DoJ</b> Department of Justice <a href="http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk">www.justice-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	10	To review the current systems for accessing accommodation for offenders with service providers and bring forward a revised framework for co-operation by December 2019.	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b></p> <p>To enable the accommodation and associated support needs of those entering and leaving custody to be met.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b></p> <p>By December 2019, to complete review and bring forward a revised framework for co-operation.</p>
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<b>PRIORITY AREA 5</b> <b>Employability, financial capability and access to benefits</b>			
Responsible Owner	No.	Actions	Expected Outcomes and Milestones
 <p><b>DfC</b> Department for Communities <a href="http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk">www.communities-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	11	<p><b>A Housing Rights – Universal Credit and Homelessness pilot Project.</b></p> <p>During the implementation of Universal Credit from October 2018 to April 2019 to empower and train a minimum of 150 key frontline staff to deliver appropriate advice and support to assist vulnerable people in temporary accommodation successfully transition into long term accommodation.</p> <p>The pilot will also provide access to a dedicated helpline support for these staff and a facility to refer individual complex cases where required.</p> <p>Vulnerable/homeless clients of the key workers supported through the pilot will have access to appropriate advice and financial capability support to minimise any adverse impact of Universal Credit (Estimated reach will be gathered)</p> <p>The Department will have access to any emerging policy issues on the impact of roll-out of Universal Credit on homeless people through information gathered by Housing rights during the pilot.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b></p> <p>Increased awareness of the impact of Universal Credit for those leaving temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Increased confidence to provide support to their clients on the housing issues arising from the implementation of Universal Credit.</p> <p>Increased awareness of financial capability and resources to enable them to assist clients to be more financially capable and tenancy ready to move into their new home</p> <p><b>Milestone(s)</b></p> <p>By April 2019 empower and train a minimum of 150 key frontline staff.</p>

 <p><b>DfC</b> Department for Communities <a href="http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk">www.communities-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>12</p>	<p>Labour market activation support for homeless individuals or for those at risk of homelessness</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s)</b> An integrated employability pathway, that connects people to suitable support, for individuals at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s):</b> Connecting the Jobs &amp; Benefits offices with the right support organisations that work directly with individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.</p>
 <p><b>DfC</b> Department for Communities <a href="http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk">www.communities-ni.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>13</p>	<p>Delivery of employability support to ensure tenancy sustainability through Housing Associations in local communities.</p>	<p><b>Outcome(s):</b> Strong partnership working/ referral pathways between Housing Associations, NIHE &amp; the Department in regards to employability to ensure tenants can sustain tenancy.</p> <p><b>Milestone(s):</b> Dedicated contacts and pathways within the Work &amp; Inclusion Group to support Housing Associations tenants.</p> <p>Working with NIHE through the floating support programme to link with employability support.</p>

Available in alternative formats.



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