

# Homeless Taskforce meets to discuss Housing First & enhanced health supports during COVID-19

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The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD and the Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan TD, met this morning with the High Level Homelessness Taskforce to discuss the implementation of the Housing First programme and the enhanced provision of health supports to those experiencing homelessness during Covid-19.

The High Level Homelessness Taskforce is made up of representatives from the Peter McVerry Trust, Dublin Simon Community, Focus Ireland, Threshold, DePaul, CrossCare and the Dublin Region Homelessness Executive and meet regularly by videoconference.

On top of the €218m housing budget for homeless services in 2021 additional funding of €11 million is being provided to meet the health needs of people who are homeless under the HSE Winter Plan. This funding will continue the protective public health measures for the medically vulnerable homeless population, expand GP services for people in emergency accommodation in Dublin and regional centres, and provide continuity of care for those requiring emergency hospital treatment during the winter months.

The Department of Health has also allocated €4m in new funding in 2021 to address the addiction and mental health needs of people who are homeless, including health supports for 218 new tenancies under the Housing First programme and a customised health care plan for 1,300 single people living in emergency accommodation.

The Taskforce also heard this morning that the Housing First Programme has surpassed 500 tenancies and is on track to meet its target of 663 tenancies before the end of the year. The Programme will then be expanded in line with the Programme for Government commitment and new targets will be set. This work to prepare for the expansion of Housing First is already underway.

Commenting following the meeting Minister O'Brien said:

“We are delivering more new homes, but addressing homelessness involves more than building houses. Many people who are homeless, particularly rough sleepers, have complex needs. Co-ordination between agencies is critical, and this has been a priority for me as Minister. I have worked closely with Ministers Donnelly and Feighan and we are committed to a joined-up way of working.

“I am particularly pleased with the progress of the Housing First programme which has now surpassed 500 tenancies. Housing First enables people who may have been homeless and who have high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with integrated wrap-around health and tenancy supports to help them in maintaining a tenancy and optimal physical and mental health. Housing First services are now active in all regions in the country and the funding is in place to expand it further.

Speaking at the meeting Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy Frank Feighan said:

“The recent surge in COVID-19 is a major challenge for homeless services. The enhanced health supports put in place in the HSE winter plan are protecting the most vulnerable at this critical time. In addition, new health funding streams are provided in the HSE national service plan 2021 to support mental health and addiction services for homeless people, and for the Housing First programme.

I am committed to providing enhanced health supports to ensure that people who are homeless are supported to exit homelessness into permanent housing solutions, especially those with complex mental health and addiction needs.”