



An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil  
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government



19 January 2018

Circular: Housing 4/2018

To the Chief Executive and each Director of Housing Services

**Homeless HAP Place Finder Service  
- Options and arrangements for National rollout**

A Chara,

In order to further assist homeless households in exiting emergency accommodation the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government is making the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service available in each of the 31 local authorities from 19 January 2018. The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service operating in the Dublin local authorities, and in Cork City Council, is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than 2,000 households currently being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme. A similar service began operating in Cork City in 2017. The Service was introduced to assist homeless households find accommodation where the high demand and low levels of supply make the rental market very challenging, and where the provision of such a service is justified.

Based on the success and operational development of the service in Dublin and Cork, all local authorities are now being provided with the options to pay deposits and advance rental payments

for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the Housing Assistance Payment scheme. Local authorities may, dependant on local demand, offer Households in emergency accommodation the option to source accommodation themselves or with the assistance of local place finders arrangements.

### **1) Homeless HAP Place Finder Service and Support**

Arising from the positive impact of the HAP Place Finder Service in the Dublin and Cork regions, Mr Eoghan Murphy T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has directed that a similar Place Finder Service be established on a national basis. The nature of the service provided is dependent on the needs in the local authority area, based on the number of homeless households availing of, or presenting to, homeless services. This intervention will be supported by the Department and the HAP Shared Service Centre (SSC) through access to the necessary financial supports generally, and staffing supports where required.

The Place Finder Service will assist households in emergency accommodation primarily by providing access to deposits and advance rental payments. These elements are the core financial supports now being made available nationally. Local authorities have the option to enhance this service, if required, through their homeless services by assigning dedicated staff to provide assistance in:

- seeking out potential properties suitable for households currently identified as homeless;
- liaising with specific households to establish their specific needs;
- establishing relationships with local property agents and landlords; and,
- supporting those homeless households to exit emergency accommodation and secure a tenancy.

In rolling out the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service on a national basis, the Minister is mindful of the importance of ensuring that the additional support available via the HAP Place Finder Service remains targeted at those eligible households that require it. Furthermore that the general HAP scheme can continue to operate successfully for the vast majority of households who can source their own accommodation and meet their own housing needs via HAP and without further assistance. It should be noted that where a local authority decides to enhance the Homeless HAP service beyond the financial assistance outlined, the arrangement, management and oversight of

the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service, including any contractual matters that may arise with relevant third parties, is a matter for each individual local authority.

## **2) Financial arrangements underpinning the operation of the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service**

More than 30,000 households currently supported by HAP accessed those tenancies without the assistance of a Place Finder Service. Households utilising general HAP support can avail of deposits from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), if required. It is also worth noting the more than 20,000 landlords and agents are accepting HAP under the payment in arrears model provided via the HAP SSC. The success of HAP has been in allowing a householder the flexibility to quickly access a housing support that meets their own housing needs and preferences. Recent changes to the HAP scheme have increased this flexibility by allowing HAP households to find accommodation in many other local authority areas under inter-authority movement (Section 4 refers).

However, for households in emergency accommodation the option to provide deposits and advance rental payment can allow them to access private rental accommodation more successfully. In recognition of the additional supports which homeless households, particularly those residing in emergency accommodation, may require in order to access private rented accommodation, it has been agreed that local authorities can pay a deposit equivalent to one month's HAP rental payment, and advance rental payments of up to two months HAP payment, upfront on behalf of an HAP eligible tenant in order to assist homeless households secure appropriate properties.

The three areas of additional support funded under the Place Finder Service, are:

- i. Discretion to exceed the prescribed rent limits by up to 20% (this is already available to local authorities in respect of all households that require the additional support to secure suitable tenancies);**
- ii. Provision of a deposit up to the value of one month's HAP payment; and**
- iii. Payment of up to two months HAP payment in advance in order to secure a tenancy.**

Details of the defined protocol for the payment and recoupment of these costs are detailed below.

### **(i) Discretion of 20%**

Current HAP regulations allow all local authorities to exceed the rent limits for their area by up to 20%. Decision making underpinning the use of this discretion should be in accordance with *Circular: Housing 31/2016*. Evidence to date is that this additional discretion has been managed prudently and has had no impact on rental market inflation.

Recoupment procedure: On-going payment of agreed HAP rent payments continue to be a matter between the relevant local authority and HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) to manage in the context of their individual responsibilities. **No change to current arrangements is required.**

### **(ii) Provision of Deposits:**

Normally, a HAP eligible household can apply to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, as part of the operation of the Exceptional Needs Payment scheme, for financial support for deposits for rental accommodation. This Department has agreed to fund directly the cost of these deposit payments (generally equivalent to one month's HAP payment) for homeless households facilitated by the HAP Place Finder Service. Deposit costs will be recouped to the relevant local authority by this Department, via the HAP Shared Service Centre.

Recoupment Procedure: Following the finalisation of HAP ICT development, all deposit recoupments will be managed via the SSC. In the interim the co-ordination of these recoupments will be managed internally by the HAP Section and Local authorities should initially seek recoupment of deposit and advance HAP payment costs via the HAP Section of this Department- details below. Under these interim arrangements payments by the Department will be made **quarterly**.

In practice local authorities will pay 1 month's deposit to the landlord. Upon first payment of rent to said landlord by the HAP SSC, the local authority will be recouped the cost of the deposit subject to standard criteria in relation to provision of a valid and completed application and related requirements (see (iii) below).

### Ending of Homeless HAP supported tenancies

HAP tenants are advised of their responsibilities at the beginning of their HAP support, including that they should inform the local authority when they have been notified that their tenancy is ending. When the local authority is advised that a Homeless HAP supported tenancy is ending, the

local authority shall write to households supported under these arrangements and their landlords to:

1. Remind them that advance rental payments have been made that the household must receive the benefit of at the end of their tenancy, after the final SSC rental payment has been made, and
2. Advise them that the deposit paid on the tenant's behalf should be treated like any other deposit, and returned to the tenant for their use in securing a subsequent tenancy. This arrangement should be reflected in the tenant rent contribution agreement with the local authority in respect of any subsequent local authority tenancy

It is a matter for the relevant LA to assure itself that the value of both advance rental payment and deposits are realised.

**(iii) Payment of advance HAP rental payments:**

**Under these arrangements Local Authorities can pay up to two months advance HAP rental payments on behalf of a tenant.**

Recoupment Procedure: The Department agrees to recoup to the local authority up to a maximum of 2 months advance rental payments. Recoupment of advance payments will only be made after the period to which the advance period relates has elapsed. It is imperative that the local authority will immediately or as soon as practically possible set up the HAP tenancy with the HAP SSC. Adequate internal administrative arrangements should be put in place to ensure that there is no unavoidable delay in completing these tenancies with the SSC. There is a restriction of two months of rental payment that can be made to a local authority by the Department in this regard.

Upon first payment of rent to said landlord by the HAP SSC, the local authority should seek recoupment of deposit and advance rental payment costs via the HAP Section of this Department. They will be recouped the cost of the advance rental payment that they have made together with the deposit payment at (i) above. As mentioned above, such payments will be made by the Department to the LA on a **quarterly basis**. Any payments made exceeding the two months period defined will be a matter for the local authority to manage from their own resources. Only advance rental costs that result in a tenancy can be recouped under this process. These arrangements will be reviewed after six months and kept under review after that.

### **3) Resourcing of dedicated Homeless HAP Place Finder Service at local authority level**

To assist authorities successfully implement the Place Finder initiative, the Department will consider the provision of an Exchequer funding allowance towards a dedicated officer. An allowance towards the staffing cost of this officer (at Grade 5 level) will be recoupable from the Department via the homeless services ('Section 10') recoupment arrangements i.e. up to 90% of allowable costs. This allowance will be considered separately to any existing funding allowance for 'Category 5' (Housing Authority Homeless Services Provision including Administration) expenditure.

Authorities seeking to utilise Exchequer funding towards such a post must submit a proposal to the Department's Homeless Unit (contact details at end of circular) for consideration before incorporation into the annual homeless programme of homeless services expenditure. Any application for funding should be accompanied by information in relation to the targets which are expected to be achieved by the appointment of a dedicated resource. This should include information on targets in relation to exits from emergency accommodation into newly established HAP tenancies in a calendar year. It will also be expected that the dedicated officer will also play a key role in the assessment of homeless persons' accommodation and support needs and with regard to inter-agency engagement via the local Homeless Action Team.

### **4) Inter-authority movement**

The HAP Place Finders Services may utilise inter-authority movement to house households outside of their local authority area. However, while deposits and advance rental payments may be made, the principles of inter-authority movement continue to operate as per *Circular: Housing 15/2017*. Specifically, the rent agreed must be on the basis of the HAP rent limits and discretion available in the local authority area in which the household is to reside. Furthermore the HAP Place Finder Service or originating local authority must consult with the new local authority area in relation to an appropriate level of rent to be agreed for HAP support.

### **Further Guidance**

Further Recoupment process, ICT, Financial and Regulatory development of the support is ongoing and additional detailed guidance will issue on the national Homeless HAP Place Finder Service during Q1 2018. The operational arrangements, and service delivery options, outlined in this circular apply

immediately. A workshop to assist with the introduction of this support will be also be arranged in Q1 2018. I trust that these arrangements are agreeable.

### **Notification**

If you wish to establish the Service in your area please advise the Department as soon as possible at [Hap@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Hap@housing.gov.ie)

### **Contacts**

If you have any further queries please contact Paula O'Reilly, Housing Assistance Payment & Social Housing Co-ordination Unit (email: [Paula.O'Reilly@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paula.O'Reilly@housing.gov.ie) ) any application for funding for staffing costs should be addressed Mary Quinn, Homelessness & Housing Inclusion Supports Section (email: [Mary.Quinn@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Mary.Quinn@housing.gov.ie) )

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marguerite Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

**Marguerite Ryan**  
**Principal**  
**Housing Assistance Payment and Social Housing Co-Ordination Unit**

c.c. Mr Eoghan Prendergast,  
Director of HAP Shared Services Centre, Limerick City and County Council

Mr Mark Connolly,  
Head of HAP Shared Service Centre, Limerick City and County Council