Tackling the 'homeless deficit': Housing supply, Ring-fencing and targeting.

Ending homelessness by 2030? Are we serious? September 2024

The Background

- Increased housing supply, including increased social housing.

- However, rising homelessness and long-term homelessness

- Driven by falling exits to declining private rental housing without a compensating increase in exits to newly available social housing.

- This is both a current and historical problem

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The Housing Deficit

- The Housing Commission calculates an accumulated housing deficit of around 235,000 homes …

- *in addition* to the supply needed to meet structural demand

- The Commission argues that this requires an additional housing supply which should be front-loaded into a ten year plan.

The Homeless Deficit

- The 'housing deficit' has a human face – the individuals, couple and families that would have been in those homes

- This is manifested in a number of ways: household size, doubling up, adults living with parents

- But the most extreme manifestation is the 14,429 people (just over 8,000 households) in homeless emergency accommodation

- Almost 5,000 of the households homeless for over 6 months

- How can we ensure that tackling the housing deficit reaches the homeless deficit?

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Proposal to tackle accumulated homelessness

Three Pillars

- – Defining a group of people in emergency accommodation
- – Providing active case management, dedicated resources and problem solving
- – Ringfencing a dedicated stream of social housing, shaped to meet their housing needs.

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Defining a group of people in emergency accommodation

– To avoid perverse incentives (real or imagined) we want to define a pre-exiting, closed group

– Including recently homeless people will target resources at people who will exit with their own resources

– So we proposed ring-fencing the long-term homeless for this measure

– In June, 4,791 households who had been homeless for over 6 months

– Comprising 3,473 single person households and 1,318 families

– Households who have been homeless for 6 months in the last year need to be added to this

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Providing active case management, dedicated resources and problem solving

- Case management involves a skilled worker co-ordinating the range of state agencies and supports around the household to solve their homelessness situation

- It is the bedrock of the system for over a decade … and it works

- But only when there are supports to be co-ordinated.

- Active case management would involve a pathway being devised for each of the target group

- And mobilisation of resources by all appropriate agencies to deliver that.

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Ringfencing a dedicated stream of social housing, shaped to meet their housing needs.

– For some of the targeted households a physical home is just about the only support they need.
– For all the households it is an absolutely essential part of the package.
– It won't just happen as a by-product of housing supply
– Even at current levels of social housing supply, dedicating 10% of supply to these long-term homeless families means every one of them could be accommodated by 2030
– With accelerated delivery it should be achieved more quickly

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Priorities within priorities

- Saying 'we will get you out of this in five years' is not sufficient for newly homeless or very long-term homeless household

- The accelerated housing delivery programmes proposed by every party allow scope to give a much shorter time-frame for delivery than outlined here

- Within the constraints of housing type, the 1,443 households that have already been homeless for over 2 years would be a priority (1,039 singles and 404 families)

- Other priorities would emerge from the case management review.

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Challenge 1: Matching

- Simply ring-fencing existing social housing supply won't match the needs of the targeted households – too few single units, too few larger units, wrong places.

- We need to initiate a stream of social housing which is designed to meet the needs of the target group.

- (Of course, all social housing should match the needs of real households but we need to start somewhere)

- Over time this 'pre-dedicated' stream of social housing would replace 'allocation policy' for this group'

- Homes for the ring-fenced households must be pepper-potted into other social housing and integrated into wider communities

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Challenge 2: Fairness

- Priority allocation policies are an essential tool in tackling homelessness but are perceived as 'unfair' and 'creating perverse incentives.'

- The fact that there is little evidence of significant 'queue jumping' does not influence political perception.

- This proposal side-steps this issue by prioritising, in a once-off measure, an existing group of households. No-one can alter their behaviour to gain access to this group.

- The first years will rely on 'allocation' but over time the shift to 'pre-dedication' of housing will reduce conflict at allocation stage.

- Increased supply creates space to clearly mark some housing as redressing the impact of the housing deficit.

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Challenge 3: Let's not do it again

- We need to recognise the scale of pent up demand – not just for housing but for homeless accommodation.

- Little would have been achieved if the on-going housing and homeless system continues to generate new long-term homeless households each month.

- The on-going housing/homeless system needs to be geared up to take advantage of a 'new start'

- The 2030 project must not pull resources (housing supply, case management, attention) away from the on-going system

- Prevention of homelessness needs to be improved.

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Conclusion

- While homelessness could be 'ended' by 2030, given other priorities and needs this is not a realistic goal to set.

- It is possible to meet real and meaningful milestones by 2030 – for instance ending long-term homelessness

- We need to break down what seems like an insolvable problem into solvable elements, where progress can be seen …and felt

- Homelessness *is* a housing problem – but not *just* a housing problem: increased housing supply will not make its way to the most vulnerable without additional measures.

- A programme of targeting and ringfencing the already long-term homeless should provide a crucial element in any serious attempt to tackle the homeless deficit and work towards ending homelessness.

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Thank you!