



Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

Submission on the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government's Statement of Strategy 2015- 2017

3rd November 2014

Introduction

Mental Health Reform (MHR) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government's Statement of Strategy 2015 – 2017. As the national coalition promoting improved mental health services and implementation of the mental health policy *A Vision for Change*, Mental Health Reform, makes this submission with particular reference to individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. It focuses on three key areas in its recommendations, including:

- A commitment to implementing *A Vision for Change* in so far as the policy's recommendations fall within the Department's remit
- A commitment to agreeing with the Department of Health and the HSE on a dedicated funding stream to provide medium and long-term tenancy sustainment support to individuals with long-term mental health difficulties
- A commitment to inter-Departmental and inter-agency collaboration

A commitment to the implementation of a Vision for Change

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department's Statement of Strategy contain a specific commitment to the implementation of the government's 2006 policy *A Vision for Change* in so far as this fits within the Department's remit, and in particular to implementing Recommendations 4.1, 4.7 and 12.4, of the policy.

Recommendation 4.1 states: "All citizens should be treated equally. Access to employment, housing and education for individuals with mental health problems should be on the same basis as every other citizen." Recommendation 4.1 is underpinned by the principle of non-discrimination in the policy, which states that: "Equal opportunities for housing, employment and full participation in society must be accorded to individuals with mental health problems."

Recommendation 4.7 states: "The provision of social housing is the responsibility of the Local Authority. Mental health services should work in liaison with Local Authorities to ensure housing is provided for people with mental health problems who require it. As part of Recommendation 4.7, the Expert Group on mental health stated that: "Local Authorities must fulfil their obligations under the Housing Act to provide housing to people in their area who require it. Mental health services should work in liaison with Local Authorities to ensure service users can access housing that is

appropriate to their needs. Continued support by mental health services of these individuals can help them maintain their tenancy. Flexible provision of housing and other benefits should recognise the changing needs of people with mental health difficulties (see *A Vision for Change* Section 4.7.1).

Recommendation 12.4 sets out that “opportunities for independent housing should be provided by appropriate authorities with flexible tenancy agreements being drawn up in accordance with each service user’s needs. Arrangements that best enable service users to move from high support to low support and independent accommodation need to be considered.”.¹

The Department of Environment has a key role to play in providing adequate housing to individuals with mental health difficulties in order to enhance their recovery process and ultimately promote their social inclusion. As specified in the Government’s policy *A Vision for Change*², local authorities must fulfil their obligations under the Housing Act to provide housing to people in their area who require it. The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission found that: ‘One of the biggest obstacles in the lives of people with mental illness is the absence of adequate, affordable and secure accommodation’.³ People with mental health difficulties are also at a significantly higher risk of becoming homeless. People are ‘at risk’ of homelessness when they have lost security of tenure in any residential setting. Long periods of hospitalisation for treatment of mental health difficulties may compromise tenancy arrangements. Those discharged from mental health care and who lack resources and community ties are also particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

A commitment to agreeing with the Department of Health and the HSE a dedicated stream of tenancy sustainment funding for people with mental health difficulties

Mental Health Reform recommends a commitment in the Department’s Statement of Strategy to agreeing with the Department of Health and the HSE a dedicated funding stream to provide medium and long-term tenancy sustainment support to individuals with long-term mental health difficulties.

The Implementation Framework for the National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities recognises that the HSE will be required to continue to provide health and personal social services for people transitioning from mental health service accommodation.⁴ The interim protocol agreed as part of the Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities states, with regard to people transitioning from institutional settings that: “the appropriate supports from the HSE/Service Provider must be put in place for the individual and any services already being provided by the state should be assessed and continued if appropriate. A protocol will be put in place between the Housing Authority and the HSE/Service Provider to ensure that the appropriate supports are maintained for the individual.”⁵ The HSE’s recently published guidance paper *Addressing the Housing Needs of People using Mental Health Services* illustrates a range of housing and housing support models

¹ Department of Health (2006). *A Vision for Change*. Dublin: The Stationery Office, p.110

² Ibid, p. 39

³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (1993) *Human Rights and Mental Illness: Report of the National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness*, Canberra: Australian Government, cited in Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2011) *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016*, Dublin: DECG, p.99.

⁴ Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016: National Implementation Framework*, p.11.

⁵ Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2013) *Protocol for the Provision of Housing Support to People with Disabilities* (draft).

currently in operation which emphasise and underpin the requirement for tenancy sustainment support for those transitioning from mental health service accommodation. It is important that a dedicated funding stream for tenancy sustainment support is provided for by the Department in collaboration with the Department of Health so that the Government's policy of deinstitutionalisation is not hindered by a gap in housing support in the community.

A commitment to Inter-Departmental and inter-agency collaboration

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department work in collaboration with the Department of Health in implementing *A Vision for Change* principles through the provision of housing and tenancy sustainment initiatives to support the recovery of individuals with mental health difficulties.

A Vision for Change recommends collaboration between Local Authorities and mental health services to ensure that individuals with mental health difficulties can access housing that is appropriate to their needs and to effectively sustain their tenancy. The policy further recommends that the flexible provision of housing and other benefits should recognise the changing needs of people with mental health difficulties. The Department's and its agencies' involvement in collaborative working with the Department of Health and the HSE to implement the Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities has been welcome and is bearing fruit in progressing implementation of the strategy.

Finally, Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department make a specific commitment within its Statement of Strategy to ensure that **its decisions are mental health proofed, that is, that the impact of the decision on the population's mental health should be assessed and reflected in the decision made.**

Conclusion

Mental Health Reform is the national coalition of 48 organisations working to promote improved mental health services and the implementation of the mental health policy *A Vision for Change*.

Mental Health Reform is available to discuss the above recommendations. Please contact Kate Mitchell, Policy and Research Officer at 01 874 9468 or via email at kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie for further information.