

CentreCare Pre-budget Submission, Sept. 2005

Submitted to Dept. of Finance

Introduction

CentreCare was established in 1980 under the auspices of St Mary's Pro-Cathedral and Crosscare, the Dublin Diocese Social Care Agency, to meet the diverse needs of those coming to the Pro-Cathedral seeking assistance. CentreCare operates at two levels;

- provision of a high quality information, advocacy and referral service to vulnerable people, with a view to enabling them to make informed choices about their options and
- use of trends in client queries to inform relevant policy development, with a view to creating a more just and caring society.

Based in Dublin's city centre, CentreCare provides a drop-in information service to people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. CentreCare's clients' queries are mainly relating to housing, homelessness and social welfare. The agency has an open-door policy, responding in a people-centred manner to those contacting the service. CentreCare carries out advocacy and follow-up work on cases of its clients and refers clients to specialist agencies where necessary. CentreCare's outreach information clinics in 8 locations represent its further efforts to reach more people with information needs. CentreCare records its homeless-related queries on Dublin Link (the Homeless Agency's Dublin-wide database) and its non-homeless-related queries on its own database. It uses these records to track trends among service users. It researches the issues underlying the trends and campaigns for problems arising to be appropriately addressed.

Pre-budget submission background

The overall objective of housing policy is to "enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and as far as possible at the tenure of its choice". The general principle underpinning the housing objective is that those who can afford to provide for their housing needs should do so either through home ownership or private rented accommodation and that targeted supports should be available to others with particular health, social and other needs.

The reality is that, for many who are on one of the Local Authority Housing Lists, to secure accommodation they have to look to the Private Rented Sector. Figures from the 2002 census show that there were 141,459 households living in private rented accommodation. Many of these households are living in poor quality, inadequate housing due to low incomes.

CentreCare assists people to secure private rented accommodation. Many of those that we meet through this service are living vulnerably in society.

Issue 1 -

There are limited housing options for those in insecure accommodation or those that are homeless. Availability of affordable accommodation for those on low incomes and those reliant on Rent Supplement is limited, particularly for single people and those parenting alone.

Recommendation –

- Both in relation to local authority schemes and private rented accommodation, a significant increase is necessary in the provision of affordable accommodation of an acceptable standard.
- The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), currently being piloted in a number of Local Authorities, must be implemented in its entirety on a national basis.
- The Government must provide some flexibility in the provision of assistance towards rent payments to those in full time, low paid and part time employment.

Issue 2 -

The first step on the ladder is to register with the local authority and we are aware that the average waiting time for the allocation of accommodation is at least 2 years, but often five years or more. In the case of single people under 55 years the chances of being housed by a local authority are almost non-existent.

Recommendation -

- Local Authorities need to increase their housing stock in view of the realistic profiles of those assessed as having a housing need. This specifically relates to providing more accommodation for single person households.
- That the RAS be established as a viable, long term, sustainable alternative to traditional Local Authority housing nation wide.

Issue 3 -

There is a shortage of landlords willing to accept people as tenants that are in receipt of Rent Supplement. Prospective tenants are often discriminated against because they are dependant on welfare benefits.

Recommendation –

- That the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) be implemented as a matter of urgency in Local Authorities throughout the country.

Issue 4 -

Due to the limited supply of rental stock within the rent cap limits, a significant number of landlords are providing sub standard accommodation. Many tenants in their desperations are accepting this accommodation, particularly single person households.

Recommendation -

- Adequate resources need to be in place to ensure that all rental stock provided in the private sector is of the highest quality. Private rented dwelling standards should be agreed and enforced by relevant local authorities.
- While rent caps have been increased, we recommend that rent caps should reflect the real cost of renting, particularly in large urban areas. This should be done in consultation with organisations dealing directly with those affected, e.g. CentreCare.

Issue 5 -

CentreCare deals regularly with people who are having difficulties obtaining rent supplement and deposits. This is due, in some cases, to red tape and delays in processing applications. It appears that in some areas Community Welfare Officers are under severe pressure and do not have the resources to provide an efficient service. In some cases people have been waiting a number of weeks to have their application processed, and in some situations ended up losing their accommodation as landlords will not wait this long.

Recommendation -

- Provide adequate resources for dealing with Rent Supplement applications, so that people are not waiting for long periods of time to have a decision made on their application.
- Apply the directives issued by the DSFA in the administration of the Rent Supplement Scheme to remove ambiguity around the operation of CWO within individual areas.

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