

## **OUTLINE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **PSI WORKING GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS**

#### **Scope and objectives**

The lack of a regular, stable home environment puts people at risk of social exclusion and brings difficulties in accessing other services. The Department for Social Development (DSD) has the responsibility for developing policies and legislation to deal with the accommodation needs of homeless people. Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has certain statutory duties towards homeless people, and, in meeting its obligations, it engages with a number of other statutory and voluntary agencies.

The Northern Ireland Assembly's Executive agreed that consultation on future priorities to be tackled under the Promoting Social Inclusion element of New TSN should take place in 2001. Responses to the consultation showed that homeless people were considered to be the most deprived/marginalized group.

Within the context of the Promoting Social Inclusion element of New TSN, a Working Group will consider how best to firstly, ensure that the risk of homelessness is reduced and secondly, that the full range of appropriate services is available to those who do find themselves homeless, so that they can make the choices required to play a full part in society.

The outcomes of recent reviews by both the Housing Executive and the Assembly's DSD Committee provide a basis on which to improve existing arrangements for dealing with the needs of the homeless. The Working Group will seek to build further upon the recommendations from these reviews. It will consider factors which cause people to become homeless and at risk of social exclusion and develop a co-ordinated strategy through which relevant agencies will work together to tackle them.

The Working Group will present Ministers with a draft policy and a co-ordinated strategy document for public consultation, setting out clearly defined recommendations as to what preventative and other measures are required, by whom, and within what timescales, and what other mechanisms need to be put in place to evaluate effectiveness and ensure progress. This policy and strategy document will be subject to screening from a Section 75 Equality perspective.

## **Timescales**

Work will begin during 2003. A draft Policy and Strategy document will be delivered within one year of the establishment of the Working Group. A final report will be provided to Ministers within 2 years of the initiation of the work.

## **Membership of Working Group**

The Working Group will be led by a Senior Official in DSD, and will comprise representatives from Departments, the wider Public Sector, the Voluntary Sector and people directly concerned with the issues affecting the homeless. Sub-Groups may be established, the remit, membership and Chairmanship of which will be determined by the Working Group.

## **Methodology**

The Working Group will:

- Use existing research and other evidence, and the advice of the homeless and their representatives, to develop an understanding of, and analyse, the causes of homelessness and the difficulties experienced by the homeless;
- Consider the roles and responsibilities of all statutory, public and voluntary sector bodies in relation to the homeless, including the effectiveness of any existing policies, programmes and structures, with a view to identifying elements which work well and should be developed and those where things could be done differently;
- Identify and examine options for the way forward (this may include examining models of good practice which exist elsewhere), including preventative measures; and
- Make recommendations to Ministers as to what requires to be done, by whom and within what timescale, including performance measures to be put in place to ensure progress and monitor effectiveness.

## **Monitoring and Reporting**

Detailed Terms of Reference, Action Plans and Performance Targets will be developed by the Working Group and agreed with the Equality and Social Needs Steering Group (ESNSG). The Working Group will report to the ESNSG on progress against agreed targets on a regular basis, and will be responsible for preparing a final report to Ministers. Specific targets will be included in new TSN Action Plans and progress will be reported on a regular basis.