

PRESS RELEASE

17 December 2009

SIMON LOOKS FORWARD TO LANDMARK YEAR FOR ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS IN IRELAND

The Homelessness Charity also braces itself for greater numbers turning to its services in 2010

At the launch of its Annual Review 2008 today, the Simon Communities of Ireland welcomed the safeguarding of the homeless budget by the Minister of State with responsibility for Housing and Local Services, Mr Michael Finneran TD, which has been maintained at 2009 levels. However, the Homelessness Charity also voiced its concern that in the current economic climate increasing numbers of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness will turn to the Simon Communities for support in the coming months. Simon also warned that cuts to other budget lines such as social welfare, health and social housing will have implications for its services across the county.

Addressing the event this morning, CEO of the Simon Communities of Ireland, Patrick Burke said: "2010 will be a landmark year for the Simon Communities of Ireland and homeless service providers in Ireland. The Government has committed to ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by the end of the year. We firmly believe that with strong political will and action on the ground these commitments can still be realised, despite the extremely difficult economic landscape we are currently in. It is very significant that the homeless budget was preserved at 2009 levels in Budget 2010 last week. This is confirmation of the Government's commitment to making this pledge a reality in the coming months. We particularly acknowledge the hard work and personal commitment of the Minister of State with responsibility for Housing and Local Services, Mr Michael Finneran TD and his officials in securing this. What we need to see now is these budgetary provisions translated into actual service provision and appropriate long-term solutions.

Mr Burke continued: "Currently many of our services across the country are experiencing pressure in terms of increased numbers of people seeking access to services and supports coupled with uncertainty in terms of statutory and voluntary funding. For example, we know that Cork Simon's Emergency Shelter is full every night (44 beds). In the North East, Dundalk Simon has experienced an increase in those accessing their emergency services, with more intensive support people have been facilitated to move more quickly into appropriate accommodation with the support of the settlement team. The Dublin Simon Rough Sleeper team made contact with over 500 people during the month of October, many of whom were seeking accommodation, referrals, access to other services, and/or the out of hours Needle Exchange and Information Service.

The Simon Communities of Ireland are also concerned about the impact of cuts announced as part of Budget 2010. While acknowledging that there has been some decrease in the cost of living, this decrease is in no way sufficient to offset the impact of some of the measures introduced in Budget 2010, in addition to cuts associated with Budget 2009 and Supplementary Budget 2009. Simon is concerned at the following cuts: Health (down 5%), supports for community and voluntary sector (down 10%) and the drugs initiative (down

11%), basic rate of social welfare (down 4%), low paid public sector workers (down 5%). All of which it is feared will impact on the people who are at risk or are experiencing homelessness, and homeless services such as Simon services around the country. In addition, Simon is alarmed by the proposal to review the maximum rent levels for rent supplement payments. Rent Supplement offers a safety net for people at a time of real crisis preventing them from becoming homeless or indeed returning to homelessness. This payment was already targeted in Budget 2009 and the Supplementary Budget 2009, putting increased financial pressure on people and families on low incomes and increasing their risk homeless.

Mr Burke concluded, "Simon is fully committed to working with the Government and other parties to protect the most vulnerable members of our society and achieve the commitment of ending homelessness in Ireland by the end of 2010."

Jim Farrell, Managing Director Commercial, Roadstone Wood Group said: "CRH is extremely proud to support the Simon Community's excellent work and to support its Annual Report and 2010 Calendar. The types of services that Simon provides are more crucial than ever in these difficult times. We commend Simon for their tireless work on behalf of some of the most vulnerable people in our society and look forward to another successful year of working together."

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Notes for Editors:

About the Simon Communities of Ireland:

The Simon Communities of Ireland is an affiliation of local Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East. In addition, the National Office performs a coordinating role in terms of campaigning in the areas of housing/homeless policy and the wider poverty and social inclusion agenda; best practice in service delivery and working with people who are homeless; and in the area of full time volunteering promoting excellence and providing accredited training.

The Simon Communities throughout Ireland provide the best possible care, accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk. Together, with people who are homeless, we tackle the root causes, promote innovative responses and urge the government to fulfil their commitments. Simon delivers support and service to between 4,500 and 5,000 people who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness on an annual basis.

About the 2010 Commitments:

The Government has committed achieving the following commitments by 2010

- Ending long-term homelessness (the occupation of emergency accommodation for longer than 6 months). This commitment was included in the Towards 2016 Social Partnership Agreement is restated in the new Homeless Strategy 'The Way Home'

published Aug 2008. This commitment was recently confirmed in the renegotiated Programme for Government (Oct 2009).

- Eliminating the need to sleep rough, this commitment is clearly articulated in new Homeless Strategy 'The Way Home' published Aug 2008.

You can download Simon's Annual Review 2008 by going to <http://www.simon.ie/index.php?page=annual-reports>

About the CRH- Simon Partnership:

In July 2008 the Simon Communities of Ireland celebrated the end of the first and the beginning of the second year of its partnership with Cement Roadstone Holdings (CRH). CRH has continued to show its strong commitment to supporting Simon in delivering much-needed services to those experiencing and at risk of homelessness on the island of Ireland.

The CRH Simon Safety Challenge is an all-island initiative that assists Simon's important work of tackling homelessness north and south of the border. For every accident free quarter (3 months) achieved at any CRH company location across the island of Ireland, a sum of money is donated to the Simon Community operating in that region. Company locations that achieve a full accident-free year get to donate an additional 25% bonus payment on top of the four combined quarterly donations. Simon Communities in Dublin, Dundalk, Cork, Galway, the South East, the Midlands, the Northwest and Midwest and Simon Community Northern Ireland all benefit from this Challenge.

The CRH / Simon Safety Challenge generated €777,022 in 2007-2008.

Homeless Agency Rough Sleeper Figures (Dublin only):

A recent count (one specific night in November 2009) found 60 people sleeping rough across the four local authority areas in Dublin. The count takes place in spring and winter of each year, with 98 people reported sleeping rough in April of this year.