

28 October 2009

SIMON WARNS OIREACTHAS COMMITTEE OF IMPACT OF FURTHER CUTS ON THOSE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

The Homelessness Charity stresses the need to protect the most vulnerable against further cuts to members of Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs

The Simon Communities of Ireland today warned of the devastating impact that further cuts to key funding could have on those at risk of homelessness. The warning came during a presentation given by Simon on the issue of homelessness in Ireland and the work of the Simon Communities to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs.

Speaking after the Committee meeting Niamh Randall, National Research and Policy Manager with the Simon Communities of Ireland said: "A delegation from the Simon Communities was invited to address the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs today to inform the Committee members on the current climate in which Simon is operating, and the potential impact of further cuts in Budget 2010 on those currently experiencing or on the verge of homelessness. Social welfare supports provide vital assistance to poor and vulnerable people. For example rent supplement offers support to many of the poorest households in the country by preventing them from becoming homeless and also supporting those who have experienced homelessness in the past to move on to independent living. Rent Supplement has already been cut twice in the past year; this certainly has put more individuals and families at risk of homelessness. We fear that any further cuts to this important support system will cause an increase in the number of people becoming homeless.

During the presentation the Simon delegation outlined how in the current climate the Simon Communities around Ireland are under increasing pressure in terms of funding with reductions in statutory funding across a range of budget lines and uncertainly in terms of voluntary donations.

Ms Randall continued: "The recent economic downturn means that even more people than before are at risk of becoming homeless. In the months ahead the local Simon Communities around Ireland will have more people turning to their services for support, they will meet more people who are at risk of homelessness and more people who have actually become homeless. It defies logic that Simon services should suffer further cut backs at this time and we are calling on the Government to ensure that this does not happen in order to protect the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.

Ms Randall went on further to state: "We used this opportunity to remind those present of the Government's commitments to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness in Ireland by 2010. The Simon Communities of Ireland fully understand the difficult financial times we are all currently living in but this government has stated on many occasions that they are committed to protecting people who are poor and vulnerable, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness definitely fall into this category. We do not want to see a roll back on the significant gains that have been made in this area in recent years. We firmly believe that the 2010 commitments are achievable by the end of next year, but we need to see real action from our political leaders on both sides of the Houses of the Oireachtas in the coming months to make this a reality. We firmly believe that these commitments can still be realised and we are fully committed to working with all parties to make this happen."

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Note 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 South East, the North West and the Mid West. 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 almost 5,000 individuals and families 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.

Download the full presentation at www.simon.ie