

SIMON WARNS THAT TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR GOVERNMENT TO MEET COMMITMENT TO END HOMELESSNESS BY 2010

The homelessness charity holds political briefing as part of Simon Week 2009

8th October 2009 - The Simon Communities of Ireland today warned that time is running out for the Government to meet its commitment to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness in Ireland by 2010. The warning came at a political briefing held today as part of Simon Week 2009, which is proudly supported by EBS Building Society.

Members of the Oireachtas met with representatives from the Simon Communities of Ireland and the eight local Simon Communities from all around Ireland throughout the day to hear about those experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness in their constituency areas. The Simon Community representatives also conveyed the potentially devastating impact of further cuts to funding for homeless services across the country.

Speaking at the event, CEO of the Simon Communities of Ireland Patrick Burke said: "In 2008, as part of the National Homeless Strategy, this Government restated its commitment to end long term homelessness and rough sleeping in Ireland by 2010. We are now less than 15 months away from the time when these commitments should be realised, and it appears they may be in jeopardy. 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 firmly believe that these commitments can still be realised and we are fully committed to working with all parties to make this happen. We take this opportunity today to remind all of these commitments, the clock is ticking; the countdown to 2010 has begun. Political will on all sides of the Houses of the Oireachtas is needed to finally end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness in Ireland.

At today's event, which is part of Simon Week – Seven days of Action of Homeless, Simon presented a briefing document outlining seven things TD's and Senators need to know to help end homelessness in Ireland including: existing governments commitments in relation to homelessness, the pressure on the Simon Communities around the country, and the impact of the current recession. In addition, Simon is asking TD's and Senators to do seven things to support the work of the Simon Communities around the country and to keep homelessness firmly on the political agenda.

Marlene O'Connor, Galway Simon CEO said: "Simon services and other homeless services across the country have had their funding cut significantly over the past two years and it is simply not possible for these services to sustain further cuts to their funding. 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 our 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."

For further information on Simon Week 2009, supported by EBS Building Society, log onto www.simon.ie.

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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 Simon Week 2009:

Simon Week 2009 takes place from 5th to 11th October 2009 with a wide range of activities and events taking place nationally and at local level. Simon Week 2009 is proudly supported by EBS Building Society.

Simon Week represents a unique opportunity for the Simon Communities of Ireland to raise awareness of homelessness, to urge all sections of Irish Society to understand the causes of homelessness in Ireland and to take action to bring homelessness to an end. The Week also celebrates the work of Simon's staff and volunteers throughout the country.

Simon Week aims to:

- Increase awareness of homelessness and associated issues in Ireland
- Create greater awareness of the Simon Communities of Ireland and the work that the Communities engage in
- Remind people that everyone has a role to play in ending homelessness and to encourage people to get involved by volunteering, participating in events and donations

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.

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

About the Simon Communities of Ireland Political Briefing Document:

Synopsis of the briefing doc

Seven things TD's and Senators need to know to help end homelessness in Ireland and to support the work of the Simon Communities around the country

1. The Government has pledged to end rough sleeping and long term homeless by 2010. In addition this Government has consistently repeated its commitment to protect 'poor and vulnerable people'.
2. The Way Home – A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland - offers a blueprint to facilitate the realisation of these key commitments.
3. The Government is cutting funding from essential services working towards these goals. Simon Communities are under increasing pressure around the country.
4. The recession means more people are at risk of homelessness, more people will become homeless and more people will turn to the Simon Communities for support.
5. Housing is important but homelessness is about more than housing; it is also about physical and mental health, it is about drug and alcohol use, and it is often about complex needs.
6. The long-term accommodation and support needs of people who are homeless are not currently being met. The 2010 commitments cannot be met until both accommodation and health and social care needs are addressed.
7. Seven things you can do as a TD or Senator to help end homelessness in Ireland and to support the work of the Simon Communities around the country:
 - I. Bring all you have discussed/read here back to your political party and/or supporters.
 - II. Continue to remind the government of its commitments to end long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by 2010 and 'to protect poor and vulnerable people'.
 - III. Request an adjournment debate on the issue of homelessness and the government commitments.
 - IV. Include the issue of homelessness and the government commitments in your party's manifesto.
 - V. Ask a relevant PQ on the issue of homelessness, future funding for homeless services, the full implementation of the homeless strategy and the 2010 commitments.
 - VI. Keep pressure on in relation to the roll out of the homeless strategy and implementation plan.
 - VII. Ensure there is adequate funding for homeless service now and into the future by including this point in your party's pre budget submission. In addition, it would be useful if you could highlight the importance of responding to long term homelessness, appropriate accommodation and high support needs.

To download the full political briefing doc visit www.simon.ie