

## PRESS RELEASE

From: Simon Communities of Ireland

Date: 20 April 2009

### **Simon welcomes Plan, but warns resources urgently needed to prevent more becoming homeless**

The Simon Communities of Ireland today welcomed the launch of the 'Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan' by the Minister of State with responsibility for Housing, Urban Renewal and Developing Areas, Mr Michael Finneran TD. Simon warned that if the Plan is to succeed, and if the Government is serious about its commitments to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness by 2010, the Plan needs the financial resources already promised by the Government. The risk factors for homelessness are on the increase across the country so it is critical to act now to prevent more people becoming homeless and to meet the needs of those already homeless and in contact with services.

**Patrick Burke, CEO of the Simon Communities of Ireland** said: "The publication of this Implementation Plan is certainly a step in the right direction towards achieving the Government's commitments of ending rough sleeping and long term homelessness by 2010. The Plan represents a move towards making some of the more aspirational goals of the Government's Homeless Strategy a reality, and Simon welcomed the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the Plan.

As part of the Implementation Plan, the Minister of State has announced plans to lease out up to 300 houses around the State for long-term use by people who are homeless in an attempt to reduce the numbers in emergency shelters and B&Bs. Responding to this particular measure **Mr Burke** said: "The Simon Communities of Ireland has always advocated for a menu of 'move-on' options as people who are homeless are not a homogenous group. They have a diverse range of needs, and will require varying levels and types of support when moving on to independent living or into longer term supported housing. This long-term leasing plan is welcome and will undoubtedly benefit some people who are currently homeless, but it is by no means the solution to homelessness in this country. The Simon Communities want to see all aspects of this Implementation Plan rolled out nationally without delay.

"What is essential now is that the Minister confirms that he has the resources available to him to meet all of the commitment contained in the plan. This Government has pledged on many occasions to protect poor and vulnerable people. In October 2008 the Minister announced a 5% increase in funding for homeless services. To date we have not been able to get a breakdown on how this increase will be allocated and what it is to be spent on. In addition, many of Simon services around the country have yet to receive confirmation of their statutory funding allocation for 2009. This Plan must be implemented at national, regional and local levels without delay but without the necessary resources this cannot happen.

**Mr Burke** continued, "The Simon Communities are particularly anxious to see movement on this front as our services across the country are at full capacity and we need to ensure that this situation does not get any worse. Obviously, we are only too aware of the many pressures the Government faces at present. However, in the current climate more and more people are vulnerable to homelessness. It is essential that we don't turn the clock back on the progress that we have achieved working together in addressing homelessness in recent years.

**Mr Burke** said, "Given the severity of this recession and the difficult fundraising environment we are all experiencing, the very least the Government can do is underwrite existing Simon services around the country. It is the only way that we can guarantee support and services will be available to those who need it most. Underwriting existing services will not ensure that the Government's commitments will be achieved, but it is a good start".

## **ENDS**

For further information on this press release please contact

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### **Note for Editors**

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. Simon delivered support and services to almost 5,000 individuals and families who experienced – or were at risk of – homelessness in 2007. 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.

**Simon Communities of Ireland Homeless Strategy Implementation Plan Submission** can be downloaded from our website [www.simon.ie](http://www.simon.ie) Go to the 'Submissions' section of the 'Press and Publications' section or contact Niamh Allen on 087 2645485 or [communications@simoncommunity.com](mailto:communications@simoncommunity.com)

### **The Government's 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.