

Press Release

3rd June 2009

Simon seeks Local Election Candidates Priorities for Action on Homelessness

- Responses highlight need for enhanced engagement at local level

The Simon Communities of Ireland have been asking local election candidates across the country to outline their three priorities for action on homelessness if elected on June 5th. With firm Government commitments to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness by 2010, local councillors will have a key role in making sure that happens. To date, candidates from all the major political parties including Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin, the Greens and a number of Independents have responded.

CEO of the Simon Communities of Ireland, Patrick Burke, said today:

“We welcome the Government’s commitments to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness by 2010. The plans to achieve that will be put together and rolled-out at local authority level across the country. That means local councillors will have an important role to play in making sure that happens and in making sure we achieve the goals.”

The majority of respondents across all political parties identified the need for improvements in the provision of emergency accommodation and an increase in the availability of social housing as two key priority areas.

Patrick Burke said: “That is precisely what we need to end long-term homelessness and rough sleeping. We have too many people staying long-term in emergency accommodation. Making sure the right kind of accommodation with support is available to people to move on to will free up much needed emergency beds. We must ensure we have enough emergency accommodation so that no one will have to sleep rough.”

The Simon Communities of Ireland is concerned that a high proportion of rural candidates indicated that they were not aware of anyone experiencing homelessness in their area.

“Just because you don’t see people sleeping rough, doesn’t mean homelessness is solved”, according to **Patrick Burke**. “People who become homeless in rural areas have nowhere to go but to major urban centres where the services exist. This puts even more pressure on people already experiencing major trauma in their lives and on these services to respond.”

The Government’s plan to tackle homelessness, *The Way Home*, sets out clearly the commitments to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness by 2010. Local Authorities will be responsible for making that happen through the development of Local Action Plans. The Simon Communities of Ireland are worried that only a handful of respondents indicated that this would be a priority area for them if elected on Friday.

Patrick Burke said: “Local responses to specific local needs are a powerful way to tackle homelessness. Local councillors need to know their role in making that happen. We can end rough sleeping. We can end long-term homelessness. We can

do it, but only if the political will is there at both national and local level. We can do it, but only if the Government backs up its solid commitments and its promise to protect poor and vulnerable people, with the proper financial resources.”

The Simon Communities across the country plan to work with the elected councillors following Friday’s poll. The Communities will be maintaining contact with the successful candidates in the coming months to ensure that they are well informed on issues surrounding homelessness in their area, that they are fully briefed on the development of their Local Homeless Action Plan, and that they are committed to ending homelessness in their local area by 2010.

Concluding, **Patrick Burke** said: “The current downturn means more people than before are at risk of homelessness. The uncertainties are impacting most directly on people and families already forced to live in vulnerable situations. The Simon Communities’ projects and services around the country are already operating to full capacity. As increasing numbers of people lose their jobs and their homes, it’s inevitable that more people will be turning to us for help. Now, more than ever, Simon needs to ensure that its services are properly resourced to meet the growing demands of the most vulnerable people.”

ENDS

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Notes 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.

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.