

| <p>Seven things you need to know to help end homelessness in Ireland and to support the work of the Simon Communities around the country</p> <p><i>Synopsis</i></p> | |
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| 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 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. |
| 4 | 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. |
| 5 | The Government is cutting funding from essential services working towards these goals. Simon Communities are under increasing pressure around the country. |
| 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 | <p>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.</p> <p>Keep homelessness on the political agenda</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bring all you have discussed/read here back to your political party and/or supporters. 2. 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'. 3. Request an adjournment debate on the issue of homelessness and the government commitments. 4. Include the issue of homelessness and the government commitments in your party's manifesto. 5. 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. 6. Keep pressure on in relation to the roll out of the homeless strategy and implementation plan. 7. 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. |
| <p>Get informed and keep informed about homelessness in Ireland and the work of the Simon Communities around Ireland by contacting your local Simon Community or visiting www.simon.ie.</p> | |

1. Government Commitments to end rough sleeping and long term homeless by 2010.

The Government has pledged to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness 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 and is restated in the Government's Homeless Strategy 'The Way Home' published Aug 2008.
- Eliminating the need to sleep rough. This commitment is clearly articulated in the Homeless Strategy 'The Way Home'.

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.

The Homeless Strategy with the Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan is a blueprint to achieving the Government's key commitments. This blueprint includes a range of other commitments, including prevention, meeting the long term housing needs of people progressing out of homelessness, ensuring effective service provision and improving funding arrangements. The National Implementation Plan must be updated on an annual basis, tracking activity to date and assigning timelines and departmental/agency responsibility for the delivery of the remaining actions. This process should include all key players, including the voluntary sector. The next version is due in January 2010 and it is essential that this process begin without delay.

3. 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. Homelessness was a serious issue in Ireland before the economic downturn but the current recession is exacerbating this issue. Recession is an immediate crisis for people and for societal systems and structures; it makes people more vulnerable with pressure in terms of jobs, housing and increasing levels of poverty. The link between homelessness, poverty and social exclusion is widely acknowledged nationally and indeed internationally. Homelessness impacts most on people who are on the margins with fewer resources in the first place, people who may have experienced homelessness in that past, people on low incomes, and people with little job or housing security who quickly run out of options.

When people initially find themselves in financial or housing difficulty they do not immediately turn to homeless services for support and assistance. They instead turn to friends and family, borrow money and/or stay with friends or relatives (sofa surf) etc. Furthermore, there are those whose homelessness or risk of same is hidden, they are staying with friends and relatives, borrowing to pay rent or mortgage, they are not in contact with services and supports. But these options inevitably run out. If a person cannot pay the full amount of their rent each month because of unemployment, disability or illness they can apply for help under the Rent Supplement Scheme (RS). Although the RS offers a safety net for some at a time of crisis there are a number of difficulties associated with this scheme. It can be difficult to access and landlords are not always willing to accept RS payments. Sometimes the RS amount is not enough to meet the full cost of renting and many landlords also require tenants to pay an additional (illegal) top up to their personal contribution often from their own limited resources. This often results in people doing without basic necessities such as food to avoid the risk of eviction. Changes in the operation of this scheme as part of budget 2009 and the Supplementary Budget 2009 have put increased financial pressure on people and families on low incomes increasing the risk of homelessness.

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Communities around Ireland are operating services which are at capacity - responding to increased demands and pressures - bracing themselves for an increase in those turning to their services for support in the coming months.

4. 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.

There are many different reasons why a person becomes homeless generally the explanation lies in a combination of structural factors (such as poverty or unemployment) and personal factors (such as family breakdown or health issues). What is clear is that once a person becomes homeless, the deterioration in their physical and mental health is both rapid and debilitating. People who have experienced homelessness die at a younger age. Problematic drug and alcohol use amongst people who are homeless is high. In addition, some people who are homeless have a range of complex (multiple) needs - imagine somebody who is rough sleeping with chronic physical health needs, a mental health issue and also drinks alcohol heavily on a regular basis. Such needs are often interconnected; therefore holistic responses are critical to respond to all these needs simultaneously. It is this group of people – some of whom need high levels of round-the-clock care – that have nowhere else to turn but Simon.

Responding to the needs of this particularly marginalised and vulnerable group of people requires appropriate accommodation, requires high levels of health and social care, requires time and patience. Everyday Simon sees the positive results; people getting back hope, getting back their lives, getting back to their communities. The Government's Homeless Strategy acknowledges that homelessness is a cross cutting issue and that solutions are dependent on coordinated action and intervention across a range of Government departments and agencies.

5. The Government is cutting funding from essential services working towards these goals. Simon Communities are under increasing pressure around the country.

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. Every year Simon delivers support and services to almost 5,000 people and families who experience or who are at risk of homelessness. We are acutely aware of the pressures in the current fiscal crisis and the fact that difficult decisions must be made. However, we wish to highlight a number of issues based on our knowledge and experience in working with people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness across Ireland for almost four decades. We see first hand the devastating impact the current crisis is having on people who were already marginalised and vulnerable. People turning to Simon often have nowhere else to go, they have run out of options; they are sick and isolated, lonely and excluded, many have experienced great trauma in their lives. Their only option is Simon. 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.

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 accommodation and health and social care needs are addressed.

Ideally, emergency accommodation would only ever be used in case of emergency but this is often not the case. Due to a lack of suitable long-term accommodation options, people often spend long periods in emergency accommodation. Fortunately current government policy is seeking to change this. Once a person is ready to move on from an emergency hostel or B&B (private emergency), it is important that there is a suitable and appropriate place for him/her to go and that appropriate support is available. Plans are underway to respond to those who have low to medium support needs both in terms of accommodation and support. However, many of the people who are long term homeless have high levels of need – mental health, physical health, problem drug and alcohol use, fractured family relations, education and training needs – how their long term accommodation and support needs will be addressed remains unclear. Addressing long-term accommodation needs will in turn help to address rough sleeping. The 2010

commitments will not be met until long-term needs and those of people with complex needs are specifically targeted.

To adequately address homelessness a range of responses and options are required including

Social housing: This is housing provided directly by the State through local authorities and voluntary sector housing. The impact of the recent policy shift in towards long term leasing remains to be seen. It is essential that the Government provides the number of social houses it has promised and that all local authorities around the country ensure that a portion of their housing stock, whether owned or leased, are available to people who are moving out of homelessness. As yet it is unclear what the fate of people whose homes are leased by local authorities will be once a lease ends. Security of tenure for all living in any form of social housing is critical to the quality of life of individuals, families and communities

Private Rental Accommodation: This is an option for some people ready to move out of homelessness. It is important that there are flats, apartments and houses with low rents available. As mentioned the Rent Supplement Scheme is an option for some but there are a number of difficulties associated with this scheme as motioned above. In addition, the Rental Accommodation Scheme offers financial assistance to people in the private rented sector who have been receiving rent supplement for more than 18 months. This scheme aims to give people some security in the longer-term. The Supported Living Initiative (SLI) - targets people who are homeless with low to medium support needs, many of whom are living in emergency accommodation, and are ready to move on to independent living

For such schemes to succeed they must be targeted towards the specific needs of people who have experienced homelessness. The necessary social and care supports must be easy to access and must be available for as long as a person needs them in order to return to independent living. In addition, the needs of those with higher support needs who need intensive support over the longer term to live independently must also be addressed.

Supported Housing: For people with high care and support needs, supported living will best suit their needs. Many have long term disabling conditions – they cannot work and they cannot live independently. In many cases this means offering people a home for life. These are often residential homes staffed by care staff and trained volunteers where access to medical and other services are facilitated. Services such as this must be planned for and resourced.

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

Keep homelessness on the political agenda

1. Bring all you have discussed/read here back to your political party and/or supporters.
2. 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'.
3. Request an adjournment debate on the issue of homelessness and the government commitments.
4. Include the issue of homelessness and the government commitments in your parties manifesto.
5. 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.
6. Keep pressure on in relation to the roll out of the homeless strategy and implementation plan.
7. Ensure there is adequate funding for homeless service now and into the future by including this point in your parties 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.

Get informed and keep informed contact your local Simon Community or visit www.simon.ie

If you need any support/information to undertake any of the actions outlined contact

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Simon – the homelessness charity

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 services to almost 5,000 people who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness on an annual basis.