



## Simon Communities of Ireland Pre Budget 2010 Submission

November 2009

### Simon – the homelessness charity

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 service to almost 5,000 people who are homeless – or are at risk of – homelessness every year.

#### **For Further Information Contact**

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<b>Simon's Critical Priorities for Budget 2010</b>
<p><b>In this recession people are losing their jobs, many people risk losing their homes and some people don't have much in the first place; they are already without a place to call home.</b></p> <p><b>Budget 2010 must protect all of these people and must ensure anyone who is homeless has access to the housing and supports they need.</b></p>
<i><b>This Government must honour existing commitments</b></i>
Government commitments to end the need to sleep rough and to end long term homelessness by 2010 must be honoured by:
<p><b>1</b> Fully resourcing and implementing the Homeless Strategy and Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan, to ensure that the numbers becoming and remaining homeless do not rise in these challenging times.</p>
<p><b>2</b> Ensuring there are effective responses to meet the needs of people who are homeless and who have complex needs across the spectrum of accommodation types (see page 4).</p>
<p><b>3</b> Maintaining high support housing services for people who are or have been homeless, and planning and resourcing for future provision.</p>
<p><b>4</b> In acknowledgement of cumulative effect of multi sectoral cuts on homeless services, in particular the Simon Communities, Simon services must be guaranteed the appropriate levels of funding to allow us to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in our society at this critical time.</p>
<i><b>This Government must protect people who are 'poor and vulnerable'</b></i>
<p><b>5</b> Resources must not be diverted away from people who are 'poor and vulnerable', whom this government has pledged to protect. Those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness fall into this category.</p>
<p><b>6</b> Simon works with some of the most vulnerable members of our society, many of whom are dependent on Social Welfare payments. It is vital that current Social Welfare levels are maintained. In particular it is imperative that the Rent Supplement Scheme remains unchanged in this budget<sup>1</sup>.</p>
<i><b>This Government must make the required budgetary commitments</b></i>
<p><b>7</b> This government must make the required budgetary commitments particularly in the following government departments:</p>
<p><b>Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government:</b> It is critical that the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government at the very least maintains its budget for homeless services at 2009 levels at just over €62 million. In addition, we would ask that a portion of Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) <i>special needs</i> funding is also ring fenced for homelessness.</p>

<sup>1</sup> See the Make Room Pre Budget Submission at [www.makeroom.ie](http://www.makeroom.ie). Make Room is the campaign alliance of Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Threshold.

**Social Housing:** An immediate increase social housing output is required to meet the National Development Plan (NDP) targets, restated in the Social Partnership agreement Towards 2016<sup>2</sup> (T16), of meeting the housing need of 60,000 households between 2007-09. A sizable proportion of this output should be allocated to people progressing 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. Furthermore, in the current economic context, with a slow down in purchase in the open property market, the time is ripe for social housing acquisitions.

It is critical that the SLI scheme is rolled out nationally this means that the adequate number of housing units must be made available. The current climate and different initiatives offer viable solutions for obtaining these units. Those that relate to social housing measures include<sup>3</sup>:

- As mentioned above the ring fencing Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) *special needs* funding to build new purpose schemes where there is a specific design requirement and to acquire vacant properties
- Facilitating Housing Associations to deliver units under the leasing initiative paying due cognisance to security of tenure issues.
- Maintaining the delivery of units through the Housing Finance Agency that are already committed through the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme (CLSS)

**Department of Health and Children/Health Service Executive:** The HSE budgets allow for the associated health and social care supports for people who are homeless, particularly those with the most complex set of needs. Monies must be ring-fenced to support this process. The HSE budget for homelessness in both 2007 and 2008 was €33 million despite inflation and increases in the cost of services delivery. During 2009 most of the local Simon Communities around the country suffered cuts in their HSE budgets. Budgets must at the very least be maintained at 2009 levels.

**Department of Community, Rural and Gealtacht Affairs/ Office of the Minister for Drugs:** The new National Drug Strategy 2009 -2016 must be fully resourced. In particular, actions targeting homeless drug and alcohol users and those focussing on the further development of harm reduction services and detoxification, rehabilitation and aftercare services. The implementation of the *Report of the HSE Working Group on Residential Treatment and Rehabilitation (Substance Users<sup>4</sup>)* (2007) is particularly relevant here.

It is critical that the 'Funding Scheme to support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector' is fully maintained so that the Simon Communities of Ireland can continue to recruit and train up to 90 fulltime volunteers each year, promote best practice in service delivery and participate in National Partnership Structures.

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<sup>2</sup> NDP 2007-13 makes provision for €17.057billion of investment in Social Housing Provision and Renewal over the 7 year timeframe, with 9,000 new social housing units to be provided per annum. To meet this target in 2009, it must therefore be assumed that at least one-seventh of this budget must be spent, equating to approximately €2.5billion.

<sup>3</sup> Irish Council for Social Housing

<sup>4</sup> The working group calculated that the following additional beds are required: 104 inpatient unit beds for medical detoxification and stabilisation; 252 residential rehabilitation beds and 141 step-down/halfway house beds (p6).

## Current Context in which the Simon Communities around Ireland are Operating

### **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. 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 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.

### **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, especially those who are already vulnerable and marginalised.**

Homelessness was a serious issue in Ireland before the economic downturn but the current recession is exacerbating this issue. 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 the past, people on low incomes, and people with little job or housing security who quickly run out of options.

### **4. Housing is important but the supports that goes with it are equally important, particularly those focussing on physical and mental health, drug and alcohol use and complex needs.**

There are many different reasons why a person becomes homeless, but 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. 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, and requires time and patience. The HSE budgets are critical to the associated health and social care supports for people who are homeless. These budgets must suffer no further cuts. Everyday Simon sees the positive results; people getting back hope, getting back their lives, getting back to their communities. However, *The Way Home* provides no clarity or real detail on how the needs of this particular group of people will be addressed.

**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 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 without a place to call home, 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 particularly people with the most complex needs. Fortunately current government policy is seeking to change this, as mentioned, 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**

*For such approaches 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.*

**Social housing:** It is essential that the Government provide 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, is available to people who are moving out of homelessness. It is critical that the SLI scheme is ‘rolled out’ nationally this means that the adequate housing units must be made available. The current climate and different initiatives offer viable solutions for obtaining these units. Those that relate to social housing measures include<sup>5</sup>:

- The ring fencing Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) *special needs* funding to build new purpose schemes where there is a specific design requirement and to acquire vacant properties
- Facilitating Housing Associations to deliver units under the leasing initiative paying due cognisance to security of tenure issues.

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<sup>5</sup> Irish Council for Social Housing

- Maintaining the delivery of units through the Housing Finance Agency that are already committed through the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme (CLSS)

The impact of the recent policy shift towards long term leasing remains to be seen. 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 may not suit all particularly those with complex needs. It is important that there are flats, apartments and houses with low rents available.

#### *Rent Supplement Scheme*

This is a supplementary allowance available to those who cannot cover the cost of rental accommodation from their own finances. Rent Supplement offers a safety net for people at a time of real crisis preventing them from becoming homeless or indeed returning to homelessness. There are currently 90,825 households in receipt of rent supplement in the state - an increase of 52% since the end of 2007 (Oct 2009). 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 their risk of becoming homeless

#### *Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)*

RAS generally caters for the accommodation needs of people in receipt of rent supplement, normally for more than 18 months and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need. The roll out of this scheme has been very slow. Latest figures from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government indicate that to date, local authorities have transferred almost 12,000 rent supplement cases to the Rental Accommodation Scheme units. It involves local authorities sourcing accommodation for these households from private and voluntary sector sources. We anxiously await the promised review of this scheme particularly the RAS pilots targeting people who have experienced homelessness.

**Supported Living Initiative (SLI):** We welcome this initiative and the acknowledgment at a policy level that people who have been homeless may need support to move on to independent living. However, this scheme only focuses those who have low to medium support needs and many of those who use the services of the Simon Communities around the country have multiple or complex needs as mentioned above. How the needs of this particular group are going to be met in the longer term remains unclear. There has been much work done in relation to this scheme in the Dublin context. However, outside of Dublin, we are getting little information as to how this, and other schemes, will be rolled out. In addition, such schemes need to be tailored to meet local needs and local demands. We have had no clarity to date in relation to how and when this will happen. (See Social Housing section in relation the provision of units).

**High Support 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 and where access to medical and other services are facilitated. Supported housing is a particularly important solution when working with those with complex needs. There is evidence to suggest that this type of provision is currently under threat or could potentially fall between the two stools of housing on one side and health on the other. Not only must services such as this be maintained; future provision must be planned for and resourced.