



Simon Communities in Ireland Pre-Budget Submission 2014

Date: September 2013

Introduction

The Government has committed to ending long term homelessness by 2016 using a housing led approach. The Simon Communities are very supportive of this commitment and firmly believe that with sufficient resources, political will and national direction this can be achieved. In fact, it must be achieved. The prolonged economic crisis means more people are at risk of homelessness, more people are becoming homeless and more people than ever are turning to the Simon Communities for support. For many, the social welfare safety net is the only thing standing between them and homelessness. Cutbacks to funding for housing support, for health services, probation and welfare services, education and training services etc, all have knock-on effects that contribute to homelessness. This combination of factors can trigger homelessness in the first place, but can also prevent people from moving out of homelessness. Austerity budget measures are not working and are having the biggest impact on people who are most vulnerable in our society. The most recent SILC report published in February 2013 shows the 'at risk poverty rate' increased to 16% in 2011, up from 14.7% in 2010¹.

The current climate gives much cause for concern. The numbers becoming homeless are growing. Despite this the Government has just recently announced major cuts to the budgets for homeless accommodation services that are to take effect in 2013. These new cuts will undermine all of our efforts to reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough and the numbers who are long term homeless. The cuts must end. During 2012, every night on average 1,451 persons stayed in emergency accommodation in the Dublin Region alone (the only official figures available). On average there were 7 new presentations per day compared to just 2.5 people leaving homelessness². The homeless budget must be held at the level of the 2012 allocation if we are to hold the line against the increasing tide of homelessness. If we are to go further and actually achieve the Governments goal of ending long term homelessness by 2016 additional resources will be necessary, in the short term, to allow the policy reorientation and transition to a housing led approach. The reason is simple. We cannot close hostels and shelters until the housing and supports to replace them are in place.

The goal is achievable. The time for political leadership is now, the time to turn rhetoric into meaningful action is now, and the time to make a lasting difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable people across the country – people who are homeless and those at risk - is now.

¹ CSO SILC Report 2011

² <http://www.homelessagency.ie/Media/2013-News/Homeless-Statistics-2012.aspx>

Summary of Simon Communities Priorities for Budget 2014

The Simon Communities call for action on three fronts to achieve the goal of ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough by 2016:

- Access to Housing.
- Access to support in housing.
- Action to prevent homelessness.

1. Access to housing for people who are homeless

Access to housing of adequate quality in areas where other supports are readily available is essential to ensure an effective 'housing-led approach'.

1.1 Homeless Budget

- The Government *are* committed to ending long-term homelessness therefore the Homeless Budget must be restored to 2012 allocation levels with NO further cuts made.
- The government must commit to a short term investment in housing led solutions to ensure that the necessary housing and supports are in place prior to withdrawing funding from emergency accommodation currently a vital part of measures in place to address homelessness.

1.2 Social Housing

- The Government should make a long term commitment, to increase the amount of social housing as a proportion of overall housing from 7% currently to the western European average of 20%. A substantial stock of social housing for single persons needs to be included in this.
- We welcome reports that a €100 million Housing Stimulus Package is being considered. This must include ring fenced, dedicated housing for people moving out of homelessness.
- A proportion of social housing allocations must be ring fenced for people moving out of homelessness.

1.3 Rent Supplement and HAP

- Rent Supplement should be replaced by the proposed Housing Assistance Payment as soon as is possible. The Simon communities support the proposal that people who are homeless should be treated as a special category and that an interim (pilot) arrangement for HAP is rolled out.
- Enhanced Rent Supplement limits should be established to ensure rapid access to good quality private rented accommodation for people who are long term homeless.
- A Poverty Impact Assessment needs to be taken to assess the impact of the revised Rent Supplement limits announced June 2013.
- There should be no further increases to the minimum contribution to rent supplement.

1.4 Housing First Supplement

- The Simon Communities call for the introduction of a Housing-First supplement targeting people who are long term homeless which would facilitate people to move out of homelessness.

1.5 Private Rental Sector

- Tighter legislation is required to protect those living in the Private Rented Sector especially in relation to inspections of rented properties to guarantee good quality housing for all.
- Implementation of a Deposit Protection Scheme.

1.6 NAMA Properties

- We call for urgent action on the NAMA 'social dividend' and recommend that 20% of NAMA units are ring fenced for people moving out of homelessness. The units must be of adequate quality in areas where other supports are readily available to ensure an effective 'housing-led approach'.

1.7 RAS and Long-Term Leasing

- The Simon Communities recommend that the budget for RAS housing at the very least is maintained for 2014 with additional units provided under the scheme.
- We further recommend consideration of a social rental model ('RAS Plus') targeted at people who are long-term homeless and those with complex needs similar to Cork Rentals and Housing Support Partnership³.

2. Access to Support in Housing

Critical to a housing led approach is tackling poor health and wellbeing, loneliness and isolation, problematic drug and/or alcohol use and unemployment. Ensuring the availability of adequate services can help people move out of homelessness and also prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place.

2.1 Developing comprehensive housing supports in housing for people who are homeless

- It is essential that there are no further cuts to the HSE 'social inclusion' budget. This budget has been cut repeatedly since 2008.
- There has been a rapid growth in opiate use amongst people who are homeless, especially outside of Dublin. It is vital that sufficient supports are in place aimed at reducing drug and alcohol related harm and offering pathways to treatment nationwide, and that further cuts to services are avoided.
- The development of Community Mental Health Services needs to be continued. It is vital that the €35 million allocated for 2014 is spent on appropriate posts and that these posts are filled immediately.
- The increase in prescription charges to €1.50 per item in 2013 Budget needs to be reversed. These increased charges impact on the most vulnerable in our society. A report published in 2010 by the *Expert Group on Resource Allocation and Financing in the Health Sector*, recommended that such prescription charges not be imposed on medical card holders as they act as a disincentive to the most vulnerable and elderly people from seeking the medical attention they need⁴.

2.2 Education and Training

- The cuts to education and training in Budget 2014 need to be reversed to ensure people can take up courses or training and that they don't end up in financial hardship or worse off by doing so.
- Reverse the decision from Budget 2013 to discontinue the Back to Education Allowance of €300 and reinstate this allowance.

3. Action to prevent homelessness

Prevention and Early Intervention are critical to prevent homelessness from occurring and to ensure 'at risk' households are supported. Furthermore, this is more cost-effective in the long run.

3.1 Preventative and Early Intervention

- More funding is required to provide 'Information and Advice services' to households struggling to pay bills and remain in their home.
- Early intervention initiatives must be resourced for people who fall into rent arrears with their Local authority. Although there are some measures they are not sufficient for very vulnerable tenants.
- Early intervention is also required for people at risk of eviction due to anti-social behaviour. Local Authorities need to ensure that measures as set out in their 'Anti-Social Behaviour Strategies' are flexible to allow for cases to be treated on a case-by-case basis with a clear supported process.

³ This partnership was established by Cork Simon, Focus Ireland and St. Vincent de Paul aimed at offering people who are currently homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness the opportunity to secure quality and affordable accommodation.

⁴ Social Justice Ireland Budget 2013 Analysis and Critique

<http://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/file/Budget/Budget%202013%20Analysis%20and%20Critique.pdf>

3.2 Basic Social Welfare Payments

- Simon Communities support Social Justice Ireland's ask to increase social welfare payments by €5 to offset the increase in cost of living for people dependent on social welfare payments.
- Jobseekers Benefit/Allowance for those under 25 need to be revised upwards especially for vulnerable people.
- Discretion of CWO/HEO should be allowed to assess each case for under 25 payment on an individual basis.
- We ask that consideration is given to reversing the length of time people are on Jobseekers Benefit or ensure that enough courses/training/employment are available for people at the end of the six or nine months.

3.3 PRSI Allowance

- The abolition of the PRSI-Free Allowance in Budget 2013 was regressive in its application. This decision needs to be either reversed or applied in a more progressive way.

Context

CSO figures released in September 2012 indicated that 3,808 people were either counted in accommodation providing shelter for people who are homeless or sleeping rough on Census Night April 11th 2011, of those 3,808 people, 1,648 or 43% were in emergency accommodation. This is a minimum figure and things have deteriorated significantly since April 2011. In April 2013, Dublin Regional Homeless Executive confirmed 94 people were counted as sleeping rough in Dublin on the night the count took place. This is an increase of 28% from the same time in 2012⁵. The Simon Communities in Ireland work with between 4,500 and 5,000 people annually who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness across the country.

Homeless Risk Factors – what we know

- CSO figures in 2011 indicated that **3,808 people** were counted in accommodation providing shelter for people who are homeless or sleeping rough on census night. This is a minimum figure.
- In April 2013, Dublin Regional Homeless Executive confirmed **94 people** were counted as sleeping rough in Dublin. This is a minimum figure.
- There are **over 100 thousand families and individuals** on the social housing waiting list.
- The **number of properties available to rent has decreased** and **rents have increased** since 2011, with the latest Daft Report for Q2 2013 reporting that rents nationally were 4.2% higher on average than same period in 2012. This was also the fourth quarter of continuous growth in rent. The number of properties available as of the 1st August 2013 are one-third less than this time 2012⁶.
- The number of people who are in receipt of rent supplement remains high at **86, 879** despite changes in eligibility (meaning less people are eligible). Since 2005 the number of people in receipt of Rent Supplement has increased by approximately 50% to the first three months of 2013.
- In 2011, **16% of people in Ireland were at risk of poverty**, this is an increase from 14.7% in 2010⁷.
- There have been increases in deprivation amongst those NOT at risk of poverty⁸. The deprivation rate among this group increased to **21% in 2011 compared to 13.7% in 2009**. Since 2007, this rate has more than doubled.
- There has been a **continued decrease in people's levels of disposable income**. From the beginning of 2011 to end of 2012, there was a 13% increase in the number of people that have nothing left of their income when all essential bills are paid. Mortgage and rent continue to be the most expensive bills for majority of people, with groceries and utilities the next two most expensive.
- The Household Budget Survey for 2009-2010, published in 2012, shows that weekly household expenditure on housing has **increased by 56%** from 2004/05 to 2009/10.
- **Fuel poverty is on the increase** and people are making difficult choices. 41% of adults at some point during 2012 were forced to sacrifice spending on other household items to pay energy bills. Of that 41%, 34% sacrificed spending on food, 13% on utilities, 9% on clothing and 5% on healthcare.⁹
- The number of people who are long-term unemployed is of great concern. This has remained at about **60% throughout 2012 and into 2013**¹⁰.

⁵ <http://www.homelessagency.ie/Media/2013-News/94-persons-confirmed-as-sleeping-rough-in-Dublin.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.daft.ie/report/Daft-Rental-Report-Q2-2013.pdf?v=1>

⁷ CSO SILC Report 2011

⁸ 'At risk of poverty' is an income measurement where deprivation measurements attempts to move beyond monetary indicators and to take better into account the actual standard of living that people enjoy. This measures those who are unable to afford at least two of the 11 items from a list of indicators to warrant a basic standard of living, such as unable to afford two strong pairs of shoes or invite friends or family over for a meal in the past month.

⁹ Irish League of Credit Unions 'What's Left' Tracker for Q4 2012 www.creditunion.ie

Government Commitments

The Simon Pledge

Prior to the Election 2011 the five main political parties in the State; Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, the Labour Party and the Green Party signed the Simon Election Pledge, pledging that if elected to Government that they would ensure that tackling homelessness would be a top priority. The pledge states the following:

We pledge that if elected to Government we will ensure that tackling homelessness will be one of our top priorities. We believe in people and pledge to work with all organizations to ensure that housing, healthcare and other supports are available to everyone at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Programme for Government & Housing Policy Statement

Reflecting this pre election commitment, homelessness was identified as a priority in the *Programme for Government*. In addition, the *Housing Policy Statement 2011* outlines that “Delivering more and better outcomes for vulnerable, disadvantaged and special needs households, while achieving maximum return for the resources invested in these areas (for example through the introduction of the ‘housing first’ approach to homeless services), will be a key priority for the Government”.

Homelessness Policy Statement

The Governments Homelessness Policy Statement launched in Feb 2013 consolidated this commitment endorsing a housing led approach with the main focus being:

- Supply – Availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing along with appropriate facilities and supports.
- Prevention – Effective action to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of homelessness.
- Support – Foster a culture that promotes independent living with supports as appropriate.

In an Irish context, housing-led is about the rapid provision of secure housing, with support as needed to ensure sustainable tenancies’ (Homelessness Policy Statement; 2013; p2).

Commitment to End Long Term Homelessness by 2016

The Homelessness Policy Statement commits to ending Long Term Homelessness by 2016 by using some of the measures already in place, in a more strategic way, and the aforementioned housing led approach. This commitment makes clear, that even in this era of austerity the Government acknowledges that it is unacceptable that people should be homeless.

The Simon Communities are very supportive of the Governments’ Policy Statement and the commitments contained therein. However, we continue to ask the question as to where the housing will come from and ask how the Government intends achieving this target if there are continuous cuts to the homeless budget and to the essential supports required for a housing-led approach to work effectively.

¹⁰ Although the rate of long-term unemployment decreased from 9.2% to 8.1% over the year to Q2 2013, 58.2% of those unemployed are long-term. http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2013/qnhs_q22013.pdf

The Simon Communities Critical Priorities for Budget 2014

1. Access to housing for people who are homeless

The Government has committed to ending long term homelessness by 2016 using a housing-led approach. To achieve this, it is dependent on the availability of suitable housing with support. This remains a very real challenge in the current economic climate. It requires more than just housing, those with higher support needs must have the option of accessing appropriate support as necessary including housing support and health and social care support based on need.

Budget 2013 announced the provision of 5,000 units under different schemes for social housing. This will only meet long term need of approximately .05% of the 111,000 families and individuals on the social housing waiting list¹¹. The Private Rental Sector (PRS) still remains the only housing option for many; however availability continues to decrease especially in major towns and cities. The abolition of bedsits earlier this year, although welcome, has also reduced the supply of accommodation available. Poor quality housing can negatively impact on people's mental and physical health making them more vulnerable to homelessness. In the *Housing Policy Statement 2011*, there are commitments to making the rented sector a stable and attractive housing option for all. The Simon Communities lament the fact that almost four years after the establishment of the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA) the so called 'social dividend' has failed to materialise. Urgent action is required to remedy this. The Government has outlined the important role RAS and leasing would play in the provision of social housing in their *Housing Policy Statement 2011*. However, the rollout and uptake of these schemes is very low. Attention to these schemes differs across Local Authorities for a variety of reasons including staff shortages. 3,000 of the estimated 5,000 units for the provision of social housing in 2013 were expected to come from RAS where the budget was increased by €15 million to €150 million.

New Rent Supplement limits were introduced on 5th June 2013 and came into force from the 17th June. While Simon Communities welcomed the increase in rent supplement in some urban areas, there still continues to be difficulty in sourcing accommodation that meets the minimum standards within these new limits. In addition, there remain concerns about rate in more rural areas. The PRTB published for the first time a rent index for Q1 2013. The results coincided with those of Quarterly rental reports carried out by Daft.ie, that rents were increasing and less properties are available. Although there were slight differences in the figures reported for Q1 2013 in each report, (PRTB reported national rents increased by 2% from the same period last year whereas Daft.ie reported a 2.7% increase in national rents for the same period), this however could be to different methods used in calculating the average rent. The Daft index is based on the rent requested from landlords and PRTB index is based on the actual amount of rent paid by the tenant. This may show that landlords can be open to negotiations on rent. However, this is more likely to be at the higher end of the market where people are better paid and more educated, giving them a stronger position to negotiate compared to vulnerable people who are not in a strong position to negotiate the rent and just accept the asking price. If rents continue to increase people will continue to 'top-up' from very tight budgets often forgoing basic necessities in order to make their rent payments. This will continue to be the case if rent supplement does not reflect genuine market rates.

¹¹ <http://irishe Examiner.com/archives/2013/0816/world/100m-housing-package-proposed-for-budget-240011.html>

Simon Communities Priorities for Budget 2014:

1.1 Homeless Budget

- The Government *are* committed to ending long-term homelessness therefore the Homeless Budget must be restored to 2012 allocation levels with NO further cuts made.
- The government must commit to a short term investment in housing led solutions to ensure that the necessary housing and supports are in place prior to withdrawing funding from emergency accommodation currently a vital part of measures in place to address homelessness.

1.2 Social Housing

- The Government should make a long term commitment, to increase the amount of social housing as a proportion of overall housing from 7% currently to the western European average of 20%. This is in line with what was set out in Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. A substantial stock of social housing for single persons needs to be included in this.
- We welcome reports that a €100 million Housing Stimulus Package is being considered. This must include ring fenced, dedicated housing for people moving out of homelessness.
- A proportion of the overall social housing allocation must be ring fenced for people moving out of homelessness.

1.3 Rent Supplement and HAP

- Rent Supplement should be replaced by the proposed Housing Assistance Payment as soon as is possible. The Simon communities support the proposal that people who are homeless should be treated as a special category and that an interim (pilot) arrangement for HAP is rolled out.
- Enhanced Rent Supplement limits should be established to ensure rapid access to good quality private rented accommodation for people who are long term homeless.
- A Poverty Impact Assessment needs to be taken to assess the impact of the revised Rent Supplement limits announced June 2013.
- There should be no further increases to the minimum contribution to rent supplement. The increase in this contribution has led to a decrease in the number of people eligible for rent supplement but who may still be struggling to pay their rent and are putting them at risk of homelessness.

1.4 Housing First Supplement

- The Simon Communities call for the introduction of a Housing-First supplement targeting people who are long term homeless which would facilitate people to move out of homelessness.

1.5 Private Rental Sector

- Tighter legislation needs to be ensured to protect those who depend on the Private Rented Sector for a home especially in relation to inspections of rented properties to guarantee good quality housing for all.
- Implementation of a Deposit Protection Scheme, to safeguard deposits as the loss of a deposit causes hardship and increases vulnerability putting people t risk of homelessness.

1.6 NAMA Property

- We call for urgent action on the NAMA ‘social dividend’ and recommend that 20% of NAMA units are ring fenced for people moving out of homelessness. The units must be of adequate quality in areas where other supports are readily available to ensure an effective ‘housing-led approach’.

1.7 RAS and Long-Term Leasing

- The Simon Communities recommend that the budget for RAS housing at the very least is maintained for 2014 with additional units provided under the scheme.
- We further recommend that consideration is given to a social rental model ('RAS Plus') targeted at people who are long-term homeless and those with complex needs similar to Cork Rentals and Housing Support Partnership¹², where provision is made for approved housing bodies to take on landlord responsibilities within pay and availability arrangements.

2. Access to Support in Housing

Critical to a housing led approach is tackling poor health and wellbeing, loneliness and isolation, problematic drug and/or alcohol use and unemployment. Ensuring the availability of adequate services can help people move out of homelessness and also prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place. Cuts to funding to the voluntary sector working with people who are homeless must be avoided to ensure effective services are available to the people who are the most vulnerable in our society. Demand for our services continues to rise; we are well beyond the point of being able to do more with less.

Effective solutions to addressing homelessness require that we avoid the pitfalls of a 'one-size fits all' approach. The Simon Communities support an approach to addressing homelessness that offers different types of housing appropriate to each person's needs including:

- Pathways Housing First – involving access to housing and visiting support in the form of intensive community treatment and enhanced case management.
- Communal Housing First/led – involving the provision of housing with supports based on site or nearby for people with high support needs whom visiting support arrangements have proved unsuccessful.
- Housing First light – involving provision visiting (floating) support and case management for people with low to medium support needs.

Housing alone is inadequate to addressing the needs of people long term homeless. Approaches that maximise independence while providing support for as long as is needed offer the most effective approach to ending homelessness.

Even with the challenges in the current economic climate, people who are homeless have been supported to gain qualifications and consequently secure jobs and housing. People under 25 are *on* a lower payment to encourage them to take up labour market training and education courses. However, the cuts to back to education allowances and reduction in the funding for some training courses is making it more difficult for young people to take up courses as doing so may in fact leave them worse off. In addition, the availability of such training/work schemes are not sufficient to meet the number of young people on the live register.

¹² This partnership was established by Cork Simon, Focus Ireland and St. Vincent de Paul aimed at offering people who are currently homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness the opportunity to secure quality and affordable accommodation.

Simon Communities Priorities for Budget 2014:

2.1 Developing comprehensive housing supports in housing for people who are homeless

- It is essential that there are no further cuts to the HSE ‘social inclusion’ budget. This budget has been cut repeatedly since 2008.
- There has been a rapid growth in opiate use amongst people who are homeless, especially outside of Dublin. It is vital that sufficient supports are in place aimed at reducing drug and alcohol related harm and offering pathways to treatment nationwide, and that further cuts to services are avoided.
- The development of Community Mental Health Services needs to be continued. It is vital that the €35 million allocated for 2014 is spent on appropriate posts and that these posts are filled immediately.
- The increase in prescription charges to €1.50 per item in 2013 Budget needs to be reversed. These increased charges impact on the most vulnerable in our society. A report published in 2010 by the *Expert Group on Resource Allocation and Financing in the Health Sector*, recommended that such prescription charges not be imposed on medical card holders as they act as a disincentive to the most vulnerable and elderly people from seeking the medical attention they need¹³.

2.2 Education and Training

- The cuts to education and training in Budget 2013 need to be reversed to ensure people can take up courses or training and that they don’t end up in financial hardship or worse off by doing so.
- Reverse the decision from Budget 2013 to discontinue the Back to Education Allowance of €300 and reinstate this allowance.

3. Action to prevent homelessness

Resources must not be diverted away from people who are ‘poor and vulnerable’, whom this government has consistently pledged to protect; people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness fall into this category. Prevention and Early Intervention are critical to addressing homelessness effectively. In addition, they are also cost-effective.

The Simon Communities work with some of the most vulnerable members of our society, many of whom are dependent on Social Welfare payments. In the current climate with the risk factors for homelessness on the increase it is essential that measures are taken to avoid homelessness occurring in the first instance and early intervention is facilitated working with households deemed to be at risk. Although there may be initial costs involved, these would be minor in comparison to the cost of providing homeless services in the longer-term. Access to housing, to social welfare and to critical support services are essential to prevent people from becoming homeless and to support people to move out of homelessness.

The difficulty in finding accommodation within rent limits along with difficulty in having money for deposit plus one month’s rent in advance is a barrier for people moving out of emergency accommodation and is a barrier for the Government in achieving their goal of ending long-term homelessness by 2016.

Living standards of those reliant on social welfare payments continue to decline as the costs of essential goods and services continue to increase. People on low income spend a higher proportion of their income on

¹³ Social Justice Ireland Budget 2013 Analysis and Critique
<http://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/file/Budget/Budget%202013%20Analysis%20and%20Critique.pdf>

these essentials, which have continued to increase over the last number of months. The increase in carbon tax on solid fuels from May 1st is a regressive tax and has the biggest impact on the incomes of people on social welfare. Consumer Price Index for July 2013 showed that prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 2% in the twelve months. This was mainly due to increases in the price of vegetables and meat¹⁴. The increases in these essentials are leading to the increase of fuel and food poverty¹⁵. The number of people using MABS services has continued to increase since 2008. The average waiting time for face-to-face interviews as of 30th June 2013 varies by location from two weeks to twenty weeks¹⁶.

People on Age-Related Social welfare are finding it extremely difficult to survive on this reduced income and are more at risk of becoming homeless as they are on such a low income and are struggling to pay for basic necessities along with rent.

In Budget 2013, the duration of Jobseeker's Benefit was reduced from 12 months to 9 months for recipients with 260 or more contributions paid and reduced from 9 months to 6 months for recipients with less than 260 contributions paid.

Simon Communities Priorities for Budget 2014:

3.1 Preventative and Early Intervention

- More funding is required to provide 'Information and Advice services' to households struggling to pay bills and remain in their home.
- Early intervention initiatives must be resourced for people who fall into rent arrears with their Local authority. Although there are some measures they are not sufficient for very vulnerable tenants.
- Early intervention is also required for people at risk of eviction due to anti-social behaviour. Local Authorities need to ensure that measures as set out in their 'Anti-Social Behaviour Strategies' are flexible to allow for cases to be treated on a case-by-case basis with a clear supported process.

3.2 Basic Social Welfare Payments

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- Jobseekers Benefit/Allowance for those under 25 need to be revised upwards especially for vulnerable people.
- Discretion of CWO/HEO should be allowed to assess each case for under 25 payment on an individual basis.
- We ask that consideration is given to reversing the length of time people are on Jobseekers Benefit or ensure that enough courses/training/employment are available for people at the end of the six or nine months.

3.3 PRSI Allowance

- The abolition of the PRSI-Free Allowance in Budget 2013 was regressive in its application. This decision needs to be either reversed or applied in a more progressive way.

¹⁴ http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/prices/2013/prices/consumerpriceindex/cpi_jul2013.pdf

¹⁵ Food Poverty is defined as the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and accessibility.

¹⁶

https://www.mabs.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/About_MABS/MABS_Statistics/QTR_2_2013_Client_Waiting_Times_End_of_June_2013.pdf

Conclusion

This Government has pledged to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Since February 2013, the Government have further committed to ending long-term homelessness by 2016. It outlines a real opportunity to finally end long-term homelessness. However this can only realistically be achieved if no further cuts are made to the homeless budget and adequate housing measures and supports are in place so people can move out of emergency accommodation into accommodation they can call their own.

The Government have set out to end long term homelessness by using a 'housing-led' approach. This requires that sufficient supply of housing is available and that sufficient support services are in place so this can work effectively. If there are more cuts to these essential health and social care services in Budget 2014, it will hinder progress towards this target and could put more people at risk of homelessness.

For many people, the social welfare safety net is the only thing standing between them and homelessness. The cost of essential goods and services, such as food and fuel has increased over the past twelve months. This has the biggest impact on people already trying to survive on social welfare payments and low incomes. An increase of €5 in basic social welfare payments is required to ensure a basic standard of living is maintained.

We ask the Government to strongly consider the impact austerity and cuts is having on the most vulnerable people in our society and the points raised in this submission.



Simon Communities in Ireland

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 between 4,500 and 5,000 individuals and families throughout Ireland who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness. The Simon Communities of Ireland is an affiliation of independent Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East.

Services range from

- **Housing provision, tenancy sustainment & settlement services, housing advice & information services** helping people to make the move out of homelessness & working with households at risk;
- **Specialist health & treatment services** addressing some of the issues which may have contributed to homelessness occurring or may be a consequence;
- **Emergency accommodation & support** providing people with a place of welcome, warmth & safety;
- **Soup runs & rough sleeper teams** who are often the first point of contact for people sleeping rough.

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