



Submission to the 'Supplementary Budget 2009'  
from  
the Simon Communities of Ireland

March 2009

### Five Critical Priorities for the 'Supplementary Budget 2009'

The Simon Communities of Ireland have identified five critical priorities for consideration in advance of the development of the 'Supplementary Budget 2009'

1. Resources must not be diverted away from the 'poor and vulnerable', whom this government has pledged to protect. Those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness fall into this category.
2. The gains associated with the economic boom were not experienced equally by all sections of society, in fact during this period the gap between rich and poor grew. It is thus disproportionate to expect that all members of society should equally 'share the pain'. Those who have the resources should pay that bit more and those who have less should pay less, and indeed not at all if such measures will put them at increased risk of poverty and housing insecurity.

To honour its commitments to end the need to sleep rough and long term homelessness by 2010 this government must:

3. Fully implement the Homeless Strategy, and ensure that the numbers becoming and remaining homeless do not rise in these challenging times.
4. Put the appropriate arrangements in place to monitor and assess trends and changes in the causes and scale of homelessness. In addition, there must be the commitment to act on this information particularly in the context of the stated government policy of 'protecting the most vulnerable in our society'. In the current economic climate it is critical - now more than ever - to ensure that services and interventions are targeted, responsive to need and cost effective. Better data collection will facilitate this while also ensuring there is a focus on prevention and the best possible outcomes for those who are currently homeless or at risk.
5. Make the required budgetary commitments.

**A. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Budget:** It is critical that the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government retains the 5% increase, bringing the total budget to just over €62 million, for homelessness services announced as part of the Housing Budget 2009.

**B. Investment in Social Housing and Allocation of 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 (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. Unless there is urgent investment in social housing output the targets will yet again go unmet and a major barrier to progressing out of homelessness will remain in place. In line with the financial allocations set aside to deliver targeted levels of social housing provision and renewal within the Social Inclusion Sub-Programme of the National Development Plan 2007-13, this will require Government investment of at least €2.5 billion in this regard in 2009<sup>1</sup>. 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.

**C. HSE Budget:** The Health Service Executive budgets allow for the associated health and social care supports for people who are homeless. 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. We ask for an increase of a least 5% in budgetary allocation from the DoH&C to the HSE in 2009 for homelessness in order to maintain current levels of service delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> NDP 2007-13 makes provision for €17.057billion of investment in Social Housing Provision ND 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.

## **Introduction**

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.

We, in the Simon Communities of Ireland, are acutely aware of the pressures the current fiscal crisis and the fact that difficult decisions must be made as part of the 'Supplementary Budget 2009'. However, we 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. It must be acknowledged that in this economic climate the risk factors for homelessness are in fact on the increase in Ireland. It is critical that there is no regression in gains that have been made in recent years in the area of homelessness and housing exclusion. In this brief submission we reiterate the necessity of achieving the objectives of ending the need to sleep rough and long term homelessness by 2010. This vision is shared by both the Simon Communities of Ireland and the Government and has been restated in the new Homeless Strategy - The Way Home (Aug 2008). Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that homelessness is about more than housing; it is also about physical and mental health, drug and alcohol use and complex needs.

## **Homelessness in a Time of Recession**

Simon has a vision of society where nobody experiences homeless. We believe this vision is achievable with commitment by Government to address the issues that currently result in people being without a home. However, in this current economic climate it is in fact more important than ever that provision is made for the needs of people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. The link between homeless and poverty and social exclusion is widely acknowledged nationally and indeed internationally (see the homeless strategy). In addition, there is undoubtedly a link between the current recession and increased risk of poverty and insecurity. The economic climate with increasing unemployment and poverty, will mean that more people will turn to homeless services for support, more people will be at risk of homelessness and more people will become homeless. In addition, contracting budgets across the public sector will have a knock on effect on those at risk or already experiencing homelessness.

Initially when people find themselves in financial or housing difficulty they do not turn to homeless services for support and assistance. They instead turn to friends and family

and/or borrow money and/or stay with friends or relatives (sofa surf) etc. In addition, it can take sometime before people define and classify themselves as homeless due to reluctance or lack of knowledge about where to turn for support. Therefore, the impact of the current economic situation will not result in an immediate marked increase in the numbers of people who are homeless but instead must be monitored over the longer term. However, it tends to be those on the margins, with fewer resources in the first place; who may have experienced homelessness in that past, those on low incomes; and those with little job or housing security who quickly run out of options. When they can no longer stay with friends or relatives, or borrow money, they will turn to homeless services.

In addition, it is anticipated that the current economic situation will have an impact on the other causes of homeless. Increased financial hardship and stress can put families and relationships under huge amounts of pressure and unfortunately not all can withstand this. Furthermore, growing levels of stress and distress can have an impact on physical and mental health, and also lead to an increase in the levels of problematic drug and alcohol use. 'Relationship Causes' and 'Personal Causes' such as those outlined can all lead to homelessness. When coupled with the 'Structural Causes' it means the years ahead will be difficult. It is thus critical that the appropriate services are in place with the sufficient flexibility to respond to such needs as they arise, and also that there is continued support for those who are already homeless throughout the country. Moreover, if we are to meet the government's own commitments of ending long term homeless and the need to sleep rough by 2010, thereby ensuring that the numbers becoming and remaining homeless do not rise in these challenging times, we must act now.

#### **Homelessness is about more than Housing**

As mentioned 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. In addition, 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 problem and also an alcohol problem. Such needs are often interconnected therefore holistic responses are critical to respond to all these needs simultaneously.

Solutions to homelessness are about more than bricks and mortar; they are also about health and social care. There must be an acknowledgment of the individuality and range of need amongst people who are homeless. This understanding is essential in determining the appropriate solutions. Critical are cross departmental, cross-sectoral and interagency responses which place people who are homeless, and those at risk of homelessness, firmly

at their centre offering a range of responses appropriate to need. The new Homeless Strategy acknowledged that homelessness is a cross cutting issue and that solutions are dependent on coordinated action and intervention across arrange of Government departments and agencies. Thus, the full implementation of this strategy at a national, regional and local level must happen as a matter of urgency.

#### **Five Critical Priorities for the 'Supplementary Budget 2009'**

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1. Resources must not be diverted away from the 'poor and vulnerable', whom this government has pledged to protect. Those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness fall into this category.
2. The gains associated with the economic boom were not experienced equally by all sections of society, in fact during this period the gap between rich and poor grew. It is thus disproportionate to expect that all members of society should equally 'share the pain'. Those who have the resources should pay that bit more and those who have less should pay less, and indeed not at all if such measures will put them at increased risk of poverty and housing insecurity.

To honour its commitments to end the need to sleep rough and long term homelessness by 2010 this government must:

3. Fully implement the Homeless Strategy, and ensure that the numbers becoming and remaining homeless do not rise in these challenging times.
4. Put the appropriate arrangements in place to monitor and assess trends and changes in the causes and scale of homelessness. In addition, there must be the commitment to act on this information particularly in the context of the stated government policy of 'protecting the most vulnerable in our society'. In the current economic climate it is critical - now more than ever - to ensure that services and interventions are targeted, responsive to need and cost effective. Better data collection will facilitate this while also ensuring there is a focus on prevention and the best possible outcomes for those who are currently homeless or at risk.
5. Make the required budgetary commitments.

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**C. HSE Budget:** The Health Service Executive budgets allow for the associated health and social care supports for people who are homeless. 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. We ask for an increase of a least 5% in budgetary allocation from the DoH&C to the HSE in 2009 for homelessness in order to maintain current levels of service delivery.

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