



**Written Statement to the  
Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness**

**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> May 2016

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Thank you and about the Simon Communities:** Thank you to the Committee and the Chairman for inviting us here today: The Simon Communities are a network of communities, providing local responses to local needs and issues of homelessness all around the country based in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East. This housing and homeless crisis is a nationwide crisis, it is more acute in our urban centres but let's make no mistake it is impacting on every region and community around the country. Responses must be resourced and driven nationally but locally delivered.
- 1.2 Cabinet and Government Commitment to address the crisis urgently:** We welcome that a Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has been appointed but it is critical that Minister Coveney has the authority and resources to address this crisis in a meaningful way. This requires Cabinet and cross departmental support from key Departments including Housing, Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, Social Protection and Health/HSE. It requires cross party support too. There also needs to be quicker more timely responses to proposals and innovative ideas.
- 1.3 Changing expectations:** Clearly we need to learn from past mistakes and to change expectations - we need to expect that people will move on from homelessness quickly to a decent, affordable home of their own. Some may need support. This needs to be the expectation of people who are homeless, this needs to be the expectation of staff and volunteers in homeless services and this needs to be the expectation of our Government - we are told this is the case with the commitment to the housing first approach in the *Homelessness Policy Statement* (2013). We need to agree that every man, woman and child in this State is entitled to affordable, safe and secure home.
- 1.4 Housing provision:** Ireland's approach to the housing provision is disconnected - home ownership, the private rented sector, social housing and homelessness are approached in isolation when in fact they are all interconnected. We need integrated plans across all forms of housing provision to take into account the reality and the fact that a change in one area in relation to housing provision and supply can have the knock on effect on other areas
- 1.5 Increase affordable housing supply across all tenures prioritising those with highest needs**
- Better use of existing stock and voids with target turnaround times with a register.
  - Progressive allocations policies which prioritise people who are homeless and give absolute priority to those who are long term homeless.
  - Role for NAMA in social housing delivery.
  - Mechanisms to get the private market moving and builders and developers building.
  - An external group with experience and expertise to be convened to report in within a tight timeframe and to explore an off balance sheet model to deliver social housing and new/mixed funding models including private finance, state funding and AHB's.
  - Resource and protect the Capital Assistance Scheme as a key mechanism for delivering of social housing to special needs groups especially people who are homeless. Allow for higher housing management costs associated with housing people long term homeless.
  - Local Authorities must explore the potential for providing funding or housing directly to AHB's/ Voluntary Co-Operatives and joint ventures to deliver increased housing for people who are homeless.
  - Part V increase from 10-20%.
  - Expedite introduction of Government site levy ('use it or lose it'). Consider similar levy for properties vacant over the long term

## 2. Housing Rights

**2.1 International Covenants:** Ireland has obligations under no fewer than five international covenants, which have the status of legally binding treaties that refer to the right to housing.

**2.2 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25:** Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, **housing** and medical care and necessary social services.

**2.3 UN – The Right to Adequate Housing:** Adequate housing must provide more than four walls and a roof. A number of conditions must be met before particular forms of shelter can be considered to constitute “adequate housing”. These elements are just as fundamental as the basic supply and availability of housing.

- Security of tenure: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have a degree of tenure security which guarantees legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats.
- Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure.
- Affordability: housing is not adequate if its cost threatens or compromises the occupants’ enjoyment of other human rights.
- Habitability: housing is not adequate if it does not guarantee physical safety or provide adequate space.

**2.4 Implications of the absence of a rights based approach:** The lack of a rights based approach to the provision of housing as described above has facilitated:

- Tenants being given notice to quit because banks are forcing landlords to realise their assets to pay loans or they are unable to keep up with rising rents.
- Landlords leaving RAS schemes because the rates payable are not keeping pace with market rents and have standards attached that are not applicable in the general housing rental market.
- The freezing of Rent Supplement in 2013 resulting in people who are dependent on state housing supports being un able to compete in the Housing Rental market.
- Cuts of 20% over the last 4 years in the HSE Social Inclusion budget and no decision about any reversal as the economy recovers.
- People being housed in overcrowded emergency hostels and hotels.
- Decisions about allocation being increasingly discussed in terms of who deserves allocations.
- As supply dwindles prioritisation of smaller and smaller groups is occurring and discussions about who ‘deserves’ housing.

**2.5 Absence of a rights based approach and homelessness:** Most importantly the lack of a rights based approach has contributed to the ever growing numbers of people ending up homeless. Without explicit rights you are always alone as a supplicant at the table of resources.

## 2. Rough Sleeping and Long Term Homelessness

- 3.1 Emergency accommodation is not a solution to homelessness:** Response to crisis of rough sleeping to date has been the provision of additional shelter beds, often dormitory style. As a strategy this does not address homelessness and in the long run can lead to problems of institutionalisation and dependency.
- 3.2 Housing First – housing plus support:** A broad housing first strategy focussed on people who are long term or repeatedly homeless can substantially reduce the number of shelter beds needed and effectively address rough sleeping and long term homelessness.
- 3.3 Long term homelessness:** Analysis of shelter usage statistics in both Cork and Dublin show that a relatively small proportion of people who become homeless account for the majority of the emergency beds put in place to address the crisis. In Dublin, O'Donoghue-Hynes (2015)<sup>1</sup> found that from 2012 to 2014 7,254 people used emergency accommodation of those just 13% (924) could be considered long stay<sup>2</sup> shelter residents. However this group accounted for 52% of emergency bed nights during this period. Remarkably, Cork Simon's most recent data shows that 12% of residents in its shelter in 2015 met the government's definition of long term homelessness, and this group accounted for 51% of Shelter bed nights. These statistics clearly suggest that a strong focus on housing people who are long term homeless will have the greatest impact on freeing up emergency bed-nights and thus eliminating rough sleeping
- 3.4 Prioritisation of people with complex/multiple needs:** There is a strong and well documented association between the experience of long term homelessness and a range of complex health and related needs. Housing First programmes are internationally considered to represent best practice in housing people who are long term homeless with complex needs. Housing First offers housing without preconditions and offers a range of supports focussed on harm minimisation and supporting recovery and empowerment: Cork Simon runs a Housing First service aimed at people who are long term homeless with complex needs. Thirty-four people were housed via this programme in 2013 and 85 % remain housed more than two years on. If housing and support were available to all long term residents of Cork Simon shelter we could in theory free up 25 beds per night. There are currently an average of 9 people per night sleeping rough in Cork.
- 3.5 Housing First is not Housing Only – the key role of support in housing:** The success of such initiatives depend crucially not just on housing but also on drug and/or alcohol service, mental health services and community integration services being available to tenants who are formerly homeless. However, since 2010 the HSE budget for homelessness has been cut by 20% and the Drugs Initiative budget has seen cuts of up to 37% over the past six years. At the very minimum, it is essential that these cuts are reversed to ensure adequate prevention services are available. These cuts have had an impact on people who are homeless and access to treatment and supports.

---

<sup>1</sup> O'Donoghue Hynes (2015) *Patterns of homeless emergency accommodation use in Dublin: how do we compare?* Paper presented at EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE Families, Housing and Homelessness Dublin, 25th September 2015

<sup>2</sup> Long Stay\* or chronically\* homeless according to typologies developed by \*Aubrey et al (2013) Kahn and & Culhane (2004)

## 4. Prevention and homeless families

### 4.1 A Comprehensive Plan for the Private Rented Sector to include:

- Full Rent Certainty measures with rent linked to the Consumer Price Index.
- RS/HAP limits must be brought in line with market rent.
- Adapt the residential Tenancies Act 2004 to extend length of tenancies, attain long term security and improved quality standards.
- Implement the Rental Deposit Protection Scheme immediately.
- Extend HAP pilot nationally.
- Implement Social Rental Agency model i.e. Cork example.
- Immediate implementation of the Pilot Cost Rental Model.

**4.2 Extension of Section 10 funding to include prevention work:** Provision of funding under Section 10 to provide additional support service to households identified as at risk of becoming homeless.

**4.3 Statutory obligation for the provision of advice and information:** All local authorities should be obliged to provide information and advice for those threatened with or at risk of homelessness.

**4.4 National and Regional Homeless Strategies:** Government and in turn Regional Fora including Dublin should ensure a clear and defined three year Homeless Strategy with clear targets, timelines and resources is in place by the end of this year. To include commitments to end long term homelessness and rough sleeping using a housing first approach; reduction and minimisation of hotel usage over a defined period of time ensuring more adequate 'family supported accommodation' with dedicated HAT resources onsite or in-reach and support single individuals who are homeless to move to appropriate single unit accommodation, eliminating dependency of single bed emergency accommodation.

**4.5 Rapid Build Housing:** Increase availability and effectiveness of modular/rapid housing build in the wider housing and social housing provision and prioritise for homeless families in emergency accommodation. Review learnings from the Dublin experience and quickly implement changes required. Support the roll out in other regions as required.

**4.6 Immediate and Long term investment in Housing First solutions:** Immediate and Long term investment in Housing First solutions need to be in place to ensure adequate housing and supports for homeless households e.g. Wicklow Local Authority's housing led approach prioritises housing with support.

## 5. Conclusion

We would like to thank the committee for meeting with us today. The advent of a new Government in the 32nd Dail and the development of this Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness represents an opportunity to ensure that there will be an end to long term homelessness and rough sleeping by resourcing and implementing a Housing First approach. We can't keep offering people short term solutions with little attention paid to their longer term needs. Almost 6,000 people are trapped in emergency accommodation right now. Families are living in one room trying to go about their lives; cooking, playing, sleeping and doing homework all in the one room. Adults are sleeping in dormitory style accommodation with 20 plus others with no privacy and nowhere to go during the day. These are people that the State are failing who have no option of a home anytime soon. People are entitled to better. The solutions to this crisis involves preventing people from becoming homeless and providing access to affordable, permanent housing with support., as necessary. We know this approach works and we know that it can transform the lives of people who are living in hostels, hotels and B&B. Critical to this is the belief that access to housing is a right and to conclude, we ask this Committee to consider a Dail declaration on a right to housing such that every man, woman and child in Ireland is entitled to a safe, secure and affordable home.

### About Simon

The Simon Communities in Ireland are a network of eight regionally based independent Simon Communities based in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East that share common values and ethos in tackling all forms of homelessness throughout Ireland, supported by a National Office. The Simon Communities have been providing services in Ireland for over 40 years. The Simon Communities deliver support and service to over 7,000 individuals and families throughout Ireland who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness every year. Whatever the issue, for as long as we are needed, Simon's door is always open.

### 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 homeless 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.

**For further information contact**  
**Niamh Randall**  
**Head of Policy and Communications**  
**PH: 085 8588384**  
**E: [niamh@simoncommunity.com](mailto:niamh@simoncommunity.com)**

## Appendix 1: Housing First

The Programme for Government 2011 committed to introducing a Housing First approach to end long term homelessness. This was the first explicit commitment to this approach in the Ireland. This was consolidated in 2013 in the *Homelessness Policy Statement (HPS)*. The HPS committed to a Housing Led approach to end long term homelessness & rough sleeping by 2016 focussing on supply, prevention & support. This involves a shift away from emergency provision towards providing housing with supports as quickly as possible once people become homeless. The adoption of a Housing First approach in Ireland reflected a growing convergence across many European countries that there needed to be a move away from managing homelessness to actually ending homelessness. This is supported by increasing evidence on the effectiveness of Housing First approaches with evaluations of services providing ‘support in housing’ rather than ‘support for housing’ consistently demonstrating superior levels of housing sustainment (O’Sullivan,2012; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013). Prior to the adoption of a Housing First approach in Ireland a ‘staircase model or approach’ dominated (O’Sullivan, 2012) where people, once they had become homeless, had to achieve a number of goals e.g. becoming drug/alcohol free over a period of time to become 'housing ready' before being housed. However, this approach is lengthy, can contribute to long-term homelessness and tie-up much needed emergency accommodation.

With Housing First the goal is to move people out of homelessness as quickly as possible into permanent housing where tailored support services are more effective. These approaches, once properly resourced, improve the outcomes and quality of life for people who are homeless, or at risk in Ireland. Housing First approaches involve three dimensions of support:

Housing supports: The initial intervention of Housing First is to help people obtain and maintain their housing, in a way that takes into account their preferences and needs. Key housing supports include; finding appropriate housing; supporting relations with landlords; applying for and managing rent subsidies; assistance in setting up apartments.

Clinical supports: This recovery-oriented approach to clinical supports is designed to enhance well-being, mitigate the effects of mental health and addictions challenges, and improve quality of life and foster self-sufficiency.

**Supports towards community integration**: These supports are intended to help individuals and families improve their quality of life, integrate into the community and potentially achieve self-sufficiency. They may include: life skills; engagement in meaningful activities, income supports, assistance with employment, training and education, and community (social) engagement.

*Home/Chez Soi study*, the largest ever study examining the effectiveness of the Housing First approach compared with the traditional staircase approach. The study followed more than 2,000 people who were homeless over a two year period across 5 Canadian cities. The findings were very clear: The Housing First intervention was twice as effective as the staircase approach in ending homelessness for people who had been long-term homeless with complex support needs. Furthermore, the intervention led to significant cost savings when compared with traditional interventions<sup>3</sup>. The key to the success of Housing First is its comprehensive model of support for people who are homeless with the highest level of needs. The major challenge right now is access to safe, affordable and secure housing.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014

## Appendix 2: Housing and Homeless Crisis in numbers

- There were 5963 in emergency homeless accommodation nationally in March 2016; 2,684 adults with no dependents in their care and 955 families, made up of 1,285 adults and 1,994 children. (DECLG, 2016).
- On Census Night, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2016, there were 171 people without a place to sleep in Dublin City. This included 102 people sleeping rough and 69 people sheltering at the Nite Café. Unfortunately, Dublin is the only area where an official rough sleeper count takes place, making it difficult to get a countrywide rough sleeping picture. (DRHE 2015).
- Figures from Cork Simon Community indicate that rough sleeping in Cork City increased nine-fold in four years (2011-2015) from 38 people sleeping rough in 2011 to 345 people sleeping rough in 2015.
- Homelessness and housing insecurity are more acute and visible in our cities but the Simon Communities are working at capacity countrywide – in urban and rural areas.
- In December 2015, the Simon Communities reported a 20% increase in the numbers of individuals and families around the country turning to our services in the year. (Simon Communities of Ireland, 2015).
- There are at least 90,000 people on the social housing waiting list. (Housing Agency, 2014).
- Social housing commitments will take two years to begin to deliver housing. This is far too long for the people we work with and those at risk of homelessness. Social housing output for 2015, reached 1,030 new builds and acquisitions. As of the end of 2015 Local Authority new builds only accounted for 75 units. (DECLG, 2016). This is below the Social Housing Strategy target of 18,000 new units for the period 2015-2017.
- Rents increased by 32.2% since April 2012 and the number of properties available to rent has reduced by approximately 77% since 2012 (Daft.ie), with the average national rent now €1,000 (Daft.ie Rental Report Q1 2016)
- *Locked Out of the Market III* (Simon Communities Study) found that 95% of rental properties are beyond the reach for those in receipt of state housing support. Of all the properties available to rent in the eleven regions studied, only one was available for a single person (Jan 2016) see <http://www.simon.ie/Publications/Research.aspx>
- 41.2% of all accounts in mortgage arrears are in arrears of over two years. (Central Bank of Ireland, 2016).
- At the end of December 2015, 23,344 or 17% of buy-to-let mortgages, were in arrears of more than 90 days. (Central Bank of Ireland, 2016).

**Kuhn & Culhane Typology of Homeless by  
Patterns of Shelter Use (1998)**

**Frequency and duration of homeless episodes**

- **Transitionally\*** homeless/temporary\*\*
  - small number of placements/episodes & small number total days
- **Episodically\*** homeless
  - large number of placements/episodes & small number of total days
- **Chronically\*** homeless/long-stay\*\*
  - small number of placements/episodes & large number of total days

\*(Kuhn & Culhane 1998); \*\*(Aubry et al, 2013)

---

**EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE  
Families, Housing and Homelessness  
Dublin, 25th September 2015**



Appendix 4: Slides 17 from O'Donoghue-Hynes (2015 *ibid*) consumption of bed nights when analysed using the Kahn & Culhane typology

## 6. Findings: Dublin Region

### Consumption of bed-nights

	Temporary	Episodic	Long-stay	<i>Total</i>
Sample Size (n)	5,655	675	924	7,254
Average No. of Days	56	177	500	124
Client Days	315,197	119,483	462,350	897,030
<b>Percentage of Client Days</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>100%</b>




**EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE**  
**Families, Housing and Homelessness**  
**Dublin, 25th September 2015**


