Pre-Budget Submission from the Simon Communities of Ireland to the Department of Finance

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Summary of the Submission

Why This Budget Is Important

Simon has a vision of society where noone is homeless. We believe this vision is achievable with a period of concentrated investment and commitment by Government to address the issues that currently result in people being without a home. Budget 2008 presents an ideal opportunity for Government to lay the foundations for an end to homelessness by offering adequate and consistent support for health-related interventions, funding homeless services adequately, increasing investment in social housing and providing the necessary supports to allow people to sustain permanent accommodation. A number of simple steps, consistent with Government policy, can be made as discussed below.

Homelessness is About Health as Well as Housing

There is a need for significant commitment to health-related interventions in order to effectively address homelessness. The HSE can be commended for supporting a number of important initiatives in the past, but this commitment must be consistent across the country with sufficient resources set aside to address the health and care needs of people experiencing homelessness. Interventions must relate to addressing physical health issues as well as those related to mental illness and addiction, as research shows that 90% of people experiencing homelessness suffer one or more physical health complaints. These must be accompanied by much greater clarity in terms of the level of funding that the HSE will allocate in the year ahead and Budget 2008 must specifically provide for resources for addressing homelessness. This commitment must also be made on the condition that more timely and effective allocation systems are introduced by the HSE for dispersal of funding. Decisions are often not communicated until well into the calendar year for which the funding applies and subsequent release of finance once a commitment is made can often be as late as September or October.

Homeless Services Must Be Funded Adequately and Consistently

Investment in homeless service provision must now be forthcoming to meet gaps in both major urban centres and in more rural areas where issues of homelessness have largely been ignored or 'passed on' by local authorities and the HSE. Homeless services must be funded on a full cost recovery basis by both bodies, as many are currently under-staffed and under-resourced, impeding the effectiveness of service delivery. To ensure that adequate funding is delivered in this regard, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the HSE must work together to develop a coordinated funding mechanism that clarifies their respective responsibilities and sets multi-annual budgets for capital and revenue funding. Budget 2008 can begin this process by committing to investment in homeless service provision on a full cost basis, with funding allocated via a coordinated mechanism.

Immediate Investment Needed in Social Housing

Social housing output is lagging far behind that necessary to meet demand, particularly among those people experiencing homelessness. Government failed to reach the initial target for additional social housing provision set in the National Development Plan 2000-06 of 55,600 units, falling over 13,000 short. Social housing output in 2005 and 2006 has been over 5,000 below the level deemed necessary by NESC to meet demand over the period 2005-12.The Government recently reaffirmed its commitment to the NESC targets, while the NDP 2007-13 envisages 9,000 additional units a year. This must however be backed by immediate investment in social housing output otherwise the targets will yet again go unmet and a major barrier to progressing out of homelessness will remain in place.

Supports Needed to Help Sustain Accommodation

Simon recognise however that a comprehensive solution to homelessness needs to go beyond investment in effective homeless services and new social housing stock. Private rented accommodation must serve as a key source of accommodation for people moving out of homelessness. However a number of barriers must be overcome to facilitate such progression. The Rent Supplement scheme needs to be revised, with payments in advance rather than arrears to ensure that accommodation can be sustained. Existing rent caps must be increased to reflect the real cost of renting, as in many locations these significantly restrict access to private rented housing. Community Welfare Officers must support move-on with early payment of deposits as we are finding that many of our clients lose potential accommodation as a result of the delay in payment. There must also be investment in improving access to education, training and employment for people experiencing homelessness as this is a critical factor in sustaining accommodation in the longer-term.

In addressing these issues, Budget 2008 can specify 10 simple commitments that would help to end homelessness in Ireland.

TEN BUDGET 2008 COMMITMENTS THAT WOULD HELP END HOMELESSNESS	
1	Identify exact amount of funding that the HSE will deploy to address homelessness, with managerial responsibility for allocating this funding made clear across all areas of the country, and clear and transparent systems in place for this decision-making process.
2	Provide for a new coordinated funding mechanism that clarifies the funding responsibilities of the HSE and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and sets overall budgets for capital and revenue funding for homeless services moving forward.
3	Commit to more timely and effective financial decision-making and allocation systems by the HSE to support interventions targeting homelessness.
4	Support the delivery of at least 9,125 additional social housing units during the calendar year, with a proportion of social housing output set aside for people progressing out of homelessness and commitment from local authorities to allocate their housing stock to clients of homeless services.
5	Provide for investment in meeting all remaining gaps in emergency service provision during the year.
6	Provide for funding of all homeless services on a full cost recovery basis, subject to adherence to quality standards and output targets defined within service level agreements.
7	Provide for the payment of rent supplement in advance rather than arrears to reduce the risk of homelessness among private rented tenants.
8	Commit to reviewing existing rent caps in order to reflect the real costs of renting and hence maximise the potential for use of the private rented sector for people progressing out of homelessness.
9	Provide for the early payment of rental deposits by Community Welfare Officers to people moving out of homelessness into private rented accommodation.
10	Provide for investment in addressing the barriers to education, training and employment faced by people experiencing homelessness.

Introduction

The Simon Communities of Ireland is a national organisation representing Simon Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the South East and the North West. We have been working with people experiencing homelessness since 1969 and currently provide services to approximately 3,000 individuals per year. Collectively we have 300 staff and 800 volunteers, of whom around 40 volunteer in a full time capacity.

Our mission is to work with people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion in Ireland by:

- Assisting people at risk of becoming homeless.
- Campaigning for legislative and policy changes and resources that will deliver responsive services for people experiencing homelessness.
- Providing quality care, accommodation, projects and services that support people and enables them to acquire and sustain an appropriate home of their own. Services provided include street outreach, emergency accommodation, transitional and supported housing, innovative detox and employment projects, settlement and tenancy sustainment services.

Why Budget 2008 is Important

Simon has a vision of society where noone is homeless. We believe that this vision is achievable with a period of concentrated investment and commitment by Government to address the issues that currently result in people being without a home. By investing in adequate move-on accommodation and providing greater certainty in social housing supply, ensuring that appropriate interventions are funded to meet care and support needs of people experiencing homelessness and provision of adequate welfare support to help sustain an independent living environment, a lasting solution to homelessness is possible.

However this solution is dependent on coordinated action and intervention across Government bodies. The production of national homeless strategies, organisation of cross-department initiatives and legislative change to define specific remits has largely failed to produce such a coordinated Government response. The Budget is a unique opportunity where overall public finance is set for the year ahead. It can thus determine a collective programme of concerted action from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Health Service Executive, the Department of Social and Family

Affairs and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to address homelessness in the coming year.

In this Pre-Budget Submission we outline the key budgetary steps required to make significant progress towards the objective of ending homelessness by 2010 shared by both the Simon Communities of Ireland and Government. The specific recommendations that are required to be pursued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the HSE and the Department of Social and Family Affairs are discussed for each body in turn, while we conclude our submission by drawing these together in a straightforward coordinated step-by-step plan to move towards an end to homelessness in 2008.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

To help end homelessness the Simon Communities of Ireland recommend the following to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with regard to Budget 2008:

- Explicit commitment to supporting the construction of over 9,125 additional social housing units during 2008.
- Allocation of a proportion of social housing output specifically for those people progressing out of homelessness and commitment to fund the provision of support services to help people maintain their tenancies.
- Agreement by local authorities to allocate a fixed number of units of their social housing stock in 2008 to specific homeless service providers for clients ready to progress into independent living, with the onus of these providers to source the balance of accommodation required for all other clients from other housing options.
- Investment in meeting the remaining gaps in emergency accommodation provision, ensuring that no one will have to sleep rough regardless of their location in Ireland.
- Funding of homeless services on a full cost recovery basis, based on adherence to defined quality standards and performance in line with service level agreements.

Investment in Social Housing

A major barrier to ending homelessness is the insufficient supply of social housing for people experiencing homelessness. We have welcomed the setting of significant targets for social housing in recent years, with the Government acknowledging the need to meet the NESC target of 73,000 new units over the period 2005-2012 and setting its own target of 9,000 units per year over the lifetime of the National Development Plan 2007-13.

However, while the targets are encouraging, past experience suggests there is a pressing need for the Budget to reaffirm this commitment by setting aside resources to frontload social housing provision in 2008 and meet obligations in this regard. This is essential as Government has consistently lagged behind in generating targeted social housing output in recent years. For example, the National Development Plan 2000-2006 set an initial target of providing 55,600 additional housing units. By the end of 2006, only 42,541 new social housing units had been acquired or completed by either local authorities or community and voluntary sector providers. Progress against NESC targets also highlights a significant deficit of provision. The table below compares 2005 and 2006 output with recommended provision per annum, assuming that the 73,000 target is split equally between each year of the

overall timeframe (2005-2012). It reveals that in the last 2 calendar years, the number of social housing units delivered has been over 5,000 less than the level deemed necessary by NESC.

Year	2005	2006	2005/2006 Total
Local Authority Acquisitions & Completions	5,253	5,127	10,380
Community & Voluntary Sector Completions	1,240	1,350	2,590
Total Social Housing Output	6,493	6,477	12,970
NESC Target Social Housing Output	9,125	9,125	18,250
Shortfall Against NESC Social Housing Targets	2,632	2,648	5,280
Source: Annual Housing Statistics Bulletins 2005 and 2006, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government			

If the NESC targets of 9,125 new social housing units each year are to remain valid, as Government confirmed in the 'Towards 2016' social partnership framework, there needs to be a significant and immediate increase in social housing output. Budget 2008 therefore must commit to supporting the delivery of at least 9,125 additional social housing units during the calendar year. 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 €2,500million in this regard in 2008[1]. Such a commitment will also be consistent with the desire of the Minister of Finance to see a soft landing for the construction sector by investing more, in the short-term on increasing the output of social and affordable housing.

Social Housing Allocated to People Experiencing Homelessness

Even when social housing is available, it proves very difficult for people experiencing homelessness to access such accommodation. There remains a stigma attached to homelessness that means social housing, whether provided by local authorities or community and voluntary organisations, often concentrates on other target groups, further exacerbating the problem of lack of housing for those attempting to move out of homelessness. The Review of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies by Fitzpatrick Associates in 2006 recommended that local authorities ensure a sufficient proportion of their own and the voluntary sector's housing stock is set aside for people experiencing homelessness. Budget 2008 represents an ideal opportunity to follow-through on this recommendation, by allocating a significant proportion of new social housing output to people progressing out of homelessness.

[1] 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 2008, it must therefore be assumed that at least one-seventh of this budget must be spent, equating to approximately €2.5billion.

Local authority housing should also be allocated to people experiencing homelessness on a more transparent and structured basis. The Simon Communities of Ireland recognise that local authority housing does not, nor should not, provide all of the answers in relation to social housing. It is accepted by our organisations that use must be made of a number of different long-term accommodation options, including other social housing and the private rented sector, in order to help move people out of homelessness. However the effective delivery of positive outcomes from our services would be aided significantly by the establishment of agreements between Councils and homeless service providers to commit to provision of a certain number of local authority accommodation units per annum for clients of that service ready to move-on, with an onus on providers to find alternative solutions to meet remaining move-on accommodation needs. The services would then be able to allocate the different move-on options to appropriate clients based on individual needs.

Equally important to making more housing available is the provision of support services to help people maintain their tenancies, acting as a preventative measure in helping people avoid a return to homelessness. Isolation, coping skills, budgeting, training, education and establishing a support network are key elements in helping people to maintain their tenancies. This support system must be established in tandem with the provision of additional housing.

Close Existing Gaps in Emergency Accommodation

There is an acknowledgement within the most recent review of national homeless policy conducted by Fitzpatrick Associates[2] that addressing existing gaps in emergency accommodation must remain a key priority moving forward. This Review is intended to serve as the basis for new national homeless strategy, published within the next few months. Although progress has been made in emergency accommodation provision in recent years, momentum must not now be lost and this programme must now be seen through to completion. The Government must not neglect the substantial gaps that still exist in emergency services in some areas of the country. Regardless of where in the country a person that becomes homeless presents, they must be able to access appropriate emergency services and progress out of homelessness as soon as possible. Many of our emergency service providers have been forced to turn people away due to a lack of capacity and there is a need to invest further in such accommodation to reduce the incidence of rough sleeping. For example, the shelter operated by Cork Simon Community had 100% occupancy throughout 2006 and thus had to turn away 327 people seeking emergency accommodation during the year, indicating a significant gap in emergency services at present. Account must also be taken of the new challenges that have presented

[2] 'Review of the Implementation of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies', Fitzpatrick Associates, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, February 2006.

themselves in recent years that have placed significant pressure on emergency accommodation providers. A significant base of people seeking emergency services now originate from the EU accession states and are subject to the Habitual Residence Condition, precluding them from access to social welfare services and benefits. Their needs are generally, although not always, short-term and existing emergency accommodation is not designed to address their needs.

It is our belief that if the Government wishes to make a serious commitment to ending homelessness in Ireland, it could meet all remaining gaps in emergency services in 2008 with a programme of concentrated investment. Budget 2008 should set aside resources for this purpose, and the Department must work with local authorities to film the gaps and ensure that noone has to sleep rough anywhere in Ireland.

Funding of Homeless Services on a Full Cost Recovery Basis

It is generally accepted that work to address homelessness is an essential public service and one for which the Government must take full responsibility. However, it is not the case that Government have assumed full responsibility for funding homeless services. In fact there remains a continued reliance on non-statutory sources of funding by community and voluntary organisations in order to operate and sustain homeless services around Ireland due to the lack of public finance available.

This situation is unsustainable. It is not appropriate that any charitable organisation should be expected to deliver a service on behalf of the state, to a quality standard, without full cost recovery. The reality at present is that statutory funding often does not meet the costs for delivering services to an adequate level. Even where initial funding is adequate, the value of funding over a number of years can be eroded by increases in staff costs that rise more quickly than inflation. This issue is particularly acute given that staffing generally accounts for more than 70% of costs attached to the provision of homeless services.

A key additional problem is that funding of services relates only to those costs that involve the actual physical delivery of the service – e.g. the funding of project workers, maintenance of the accommodation, etc. There is often no recognition that in order to deliver a service effectively there exist a range of managerial, administrative, technical and financial functions that must be supported, and typically provider organisations have to find funding to support these functions from alternative sources. This places financial pressure on organisations that can put at risk the efficiency and effectiveness of the services being provided. At present, many projects are under-staffed and under-funded and the continuation of the services will be put at risk without clear commitment to full cost funding by Government in the future.

The difficulties faced by services in meeting the 'full costs' of delivering homeless services was revealed in the research report 'Work Worth Doing: A Review of Staffing in Homeless Services'[3] produced by Simon Brooke in 2005. It found a series of disparities in the extent and nature of the service provided, staff levels, the skills base and wage rates across homeless services. It identified a need for standardisation of remuneration and staffing based on client needs, and a move towards a system of full cost recovery would facilitate this process.

In order to improve the productivity and effectiveness of public service provision in relation to homeless services, it is essential that standard public service funding practice is adopted with support provided on a full cost recovery basis. In this regard, mechanisms should be introduced to ensure that allocation decisions are made on the basis of costs required to deliver a quality service, with invitations to tender based on realistic specifications for services. The Government should no longer rely on community and voluntary organisations to make up any shortfall in the costs of running these services, as this only results in inconsistent patterns of provision and is not sustainable in the longer-term. Budget 2008 should therefore include provision to fund all homeless services on a full cost recovery basis, subject to adherence to quality standards and output targets defined in service level agreements.

[3] 'Work Worth Doing: A review of Staffing in Homeless Services' Simon Brooke, July 2005.

Health Service Executive

To help end homelessness the Simon Communities of Ireland recommend the following to the Health Service Executive with regard to Budget 2008:

- Identification of the exact amount of funding that the HSE will deploy to address homelessness in 2008, with managerial responsibility for allocating this funding made clear across all areas of the country.
- Introduction of a new coordinated funding mechanism that clarifies the funding responsibilities of the HSE and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and sets overall budgets for capital and revenue funding for homeless services moving forward.
- Taking of funding decisions in advance of the calendar year(s) to which they refer, with a consistent system put in place to facilitate multi-annual funding and ensure that committed finance is allocated to services in a more timely manner.

A Clear Budget for HSE Interventions to Address Homelessness

In order to make significant progress towards ending homelessness in Ireland it is essential that high quality care and support interventions are delivered via homeless services. The healthcare needs of people experiencing homelessness are substantial, with the most significant profiling exercise in this regard, commissioned by the National Advisory Committee On Drugs in 2005[4], finding alcohol and drug addiction problems to be highly prevalent. Some 76% of people experiencing homelessness were found to have an alcohol problem with 64% having recently used illicit drugs. Nearly one-half of respondents (48%) reported having concerns regarding their psychiatric health, while 90% reported having one or more physical health complaints. The HSE have played an important role in funding high quality interventions in many areas and their continued and intensified support will be essential moving forward. However there is a need for this commitment to become more consistent across Ireland, as there are areas where the HSE refuses to acknowledge their role in addressing homelessness, despite funding similar services in other parts of the country.

In the restructuring of the HSE its role in continuing to fund and provide services in relation to social inclusion has become highly confusing. In this regard our Communities are finding a lack of clarity and consistency in terms of decision-making across the country. The introduction of 32 local health centres across 4 HSE regions alongside national care groups focusing on specific topics, including one of social inclusion, means that there is a lack of

[4] 'Drug Use Among the Homeless Population in Ireland: A Report for the National Advisory Committee on Drugs' Marie Lawless, Caroline Corr, Merchants Quay Ireland. April, 2005.

structure and transparency as to how the health-related components of homeless services are now funded. This must be clarified, and the budget represents a perfect opportunity to clearly identify the level of HSE funding available to target homelessness and how this will be allocated to providers of homeless services in all areas of Ireland within the HSE's new structures.

A Coordinated Mechanism for Funding Interventions to Address Homelessness

A major challenge exists in provision of appropriate interventions to address homelessness, with most emergency and transitional homeless services involving a combination of accommodation and care support, usually delivered by a community and voluntary organisation. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (via local authorities) and the Health Service Executive are the principal funding agencies for homeless services. Responsibility in this regard was formalised in 'Homelessness: an Integrated Strategy' in 2000, with the Department and local authorities given responsibility for the provision of accommodation for people experiencing homelessness and the Health Boards given responsibility for their health and in-house care needs[5].

Despite this, lack of clarity in the nature of expenditure that each body should support and limited coordination in provision of capital and revenue funding for projects targeting homelessness have impacted negatively on the effectiveness of service provision in recent years. The 'Review of the Implementation of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies', undertaken by Fitzpatrick Associates in February 2006, concluded that there was a need to improve the integration of funding between the two principal sources of finance for the homeless sector, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Health Service Executive. It recommended that revised homeless strategy should establish a coordinated funding mechanism for the disbursement of capital and current accommodation and care related costs.

The establishment of such a coordinated funding mechanism would represent a significant step forward in making public service provision in relation to homelessness more effective. The combination of interventions required to address homelessness have too often been delivered in an inefficient and inconsistent manner as a result of lack of coordination between the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and HSE. Community and voluntary providers can cite many examples in recent years where capital funding has been approved for a project delivering homeless services while support for the ongoing care costs is not secured, and vice versa. This makes planning of services immensely problematic and hinders the ability of service providers to deliver the holistic packages of support that are needed to help clients progress out of homelessness.

[5] The Health Boards were replaced in 2004 with the creation of the Health Service Executive to deliver on their responsibilities.

Budget 2008 offers an opportunity for the Minister of Finance to take a lead by allocating funding to homeless services on the condition that it is allocated via a new coordinated funding mechanism that clarifies the funding responsibilities of the HSE and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and sets overall budgets for capital and revenue funding for homeless services moving forward. The Fitzpatrick Associates review referenced above noted that the Department allocated €51million of current funding to homeless service providers in 2005, yet the HSE allocation remains unclear. From our experience of high quality service delivery to people experiencing homelessness and the nature of interventions required in this regard, it is our belief that a similar level of investment needs to be deployed by the HSE each year, with an explicit budget set that relating to need around the country.

Timely, Multi-Annual HSE Funding of Homeless Services

While there is a need for more consistent and coordinated funding to address homelessness across all HSE areas, it is also critical that better systems are put in place with regard to decision-making and release of finance. It is often the case that decisions are not made on the level of funding being allocated to a community or voluntary organisation to provide a homeless service until well into the calendar year for which this funding is intended to support operations. This makes budget planning immensely difficult for these organisations and places significant pressure on their resources. Alternative sources of funding have to be found to subsidise operational costs while a decision is awaited, and the uncertainty that such a situation creates often makes staff retention difficult.

A further problem is that even when decisions are taken regarding the allocation to be provided to a community and voluntary organisation for provision of a homeless service, there can often be a significant delay prior to that organisation receiving the finance. Our services often receive allocations for the calendar year as late as September and therefore have to find alternative resources to support staff and other costs until this funding arrives. This can prove extremely difficult, with voluntary boards taking unavoidable risks, and this in turn makes planning and development of services extremely problematic.

The effective provision of homeless services in Ireland is placed in further difficulty by a lack of progress in establishing effective multi-annual systems of funding. Although the involvement of the HSE in the creation of multi-annual funding mechanisms by the Homeless Agency in Dublin was a positive step, there is still great uncertainty about levels of HSE funding in most organisations providing homeless services beyond the current year. There is also little indication that a consistent system of allocating funding on a three year basis to provider organisations and releasing that funding in a timely and efficient manner is going to be forthcoming.

The HSE should therefore ensure that decisions on funding are made in advance of the calendar year(s) to which they refer, that a consistent system is put in place that facilitates multi-annual funding, and that committed finance is allocated to services in a more timely manner. Budget 2008 can help to reinforce this by making allocations to the HSE for homeless services conditional on such improved systems being put in place.

Department of Social and Family Affairs

To help end homelessness the Simon Communities of Ireland recommend the following to the Department of Social and Family Affairs with regard to Budget 2008:

- Provision for the payment of rent supplement in advance rather than arrears to reduce the risk of homelessness among private rented tenants.
- Commitment to review existing rent caps in order to reflect the real costs of renting and hence maximise the potential for use of the private rented sector for people progressing out of homelessness.
- Provision for the early payment of rental deposits by Community Welfare Officers to people moving out of homelessness into private rented accommodation.

Payment of Rent Supplement in Advance

There is now widespread acknowledgement that in order to facilitate progression routes out of homelessness options beyond local authority housing stock must be brought into consideration, including private rented sector accommodation. However, for the private rented sector to serve as a sustainable solution for people that have experienced homelessness, there is a need for a number of reforms and interventions. More than 60,000 people in the private rented sector depend on assistance from the rent supplement scheme, yet accessibility to the scheme is often problematic and delays occur that can then result in temporary homelessness, placing avoidable pressure on existing homeless services. The payment of rent supplement in advance rather than arrears would make a significant difference, offering greater security for people at risk of homelessness in helping them sustain tenancies and also the financial means for people experiencing homelessness to access private rented accommodation when available. The current rent supplement payment system as it stands acts as a key barrier that contributes to discrimination against tenants in receipt of such assistance by landlords. Budget 2008 should therefore provide for the payment of rent supplement in advance rather than arrears to circumvent such problems and support independent living.

Review of Existing Rent Caps

In tandem, there must also be a review of existing rent caps in order to reflect the real cost of renting. The rent caps that are currently set are unrealistic given current market rents, with recent research indicating an increase of 12.4% in average rents over the past year. This places most rental properties, particularly in the large urban areas, well out-of-range of anyone receiving rent supplement, with only very poor quality accommodation available within the parameters of the rent caps. A recent trend resulting from such high housing costs in Ireland has also been a significant base of people that are at risk of homelessness

despite being in full-time employment. This 'working poor' phenomenon needs to be taken into account in homeless policy, particularly from a preventative perspective, and it is recommended that rent supplement be extended, on a means tested basis, to people working more than 30 hours a week. Our organisations would also like to see the strategy contain reference to the plans of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for pilot schemes to deliver affordable rented housing to the 'working poor'. Budget 2008 should therefore contain a commitment to review existing rent caps in order to reflect the real costs of renting and hence maximise the potential for use of the private rented sector for people progressing out of homelessness and prevent homelessness occurring from existing private rented tenancies.

Early Payment of Rental Deposits by Community Welfare Officers

The Department of Social and Family Affairs can also address a further key problem in accessing private rented accommodation for people moving out of homelessness. It is often the case that people who are moving on from homeless services experience a delay in sourcing the deposit for private rented accommodation from the Community Welfare Officer that subsequently results in them losing that accommodation. If an organisation, such as the Simon Community has provided the deposit to a client in the interim to ensure that the move-on accommodation is secured that organisation can not then reclaim the money from the Community Welfare Officer as payments cannot be given retrospectively. Suitable and affordable accommodation in the private rented sector is difficult to source as it stands, but this further barrier illustrates the pressing need to ensure early payment of rental deposits moving forward. Budget 2008 should therefore provide for the payment of deposits by Community Welfare Officers in a more timely manner to ensure that people can progress out of homelessness into private rented accommodation.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

To help end homelessness the Simon Communities of Ireland recommend provision is made within Budget 2008 for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to invest in addressing the barriers to education, training and employment faced by people experiencing homelessness.

Although Fás have supported a number of initiatives to improve access to training and employment for people experiencing homelessness, there is a lack of consistency in approach across the country. The Review of Government Homeless Strategies by Fitzpatrick Associates found that very little attention had been given to the issue of education, training and employment in delivery of homeless interventions, with low levels of engagement by Fás and the Vocational Education Committees on Local Homeless Fora. Existing barriers to education, training and employment faced by people experiencing homelessness must be overcome if any permanent accommodation secured is to prove sustainable in the longer-term. There needs to be concerted and consistent Government investment to address such barriers and improve access to education, training and employment for people experiencing homelessness, and a line should be established within the 2008 Fás budget for this purpose.

Ten Simple Steps

In this submission we have outlined a number of simple steps that, if pursued by the Government in 2008, would provide the foundations necessary to work towards an end to homelessness in Ireland. These steps do not conflict with existing Government policy and are relatively straightforward to implement. They simply require commitment by Government to address homelessness, with a focus on consistent health-related interventions, adequate funding of homeless services, provision of sufficient move-on housing options, and the support necessary to sustain tenancies. It is a simple model but one that, if fully implemented, can offer a lasting solution to the issues of homelessness.

TEN BUDGET 2008 COMMITMENTS THAT WOULD HELP END HOMELESSNESS	
1	Identify exact amount of funding that the HSE will deploy to address homelessness, with managerial responsibility for allocating this funding made clear across all areas of the country, and clear and transparent systems in place for this decision-making process.
2	Provide for a new coordinated funding mechanism that clarifies the funding responsibilities of the HSE and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and sets overall budgets for capital and revenue funding for homeless services moving forward.
3	Commit to more timely and effective financial decision-making and allocation systems by the HSE to support interventions targeting homelessness.
4	Support the delivery of at least 9,125 additional social housing units during the calendar year, with a proportion of social housing output set aside for people progressing out of homelessness and commitment from local authorities to allocate their housing stock to clients of homeless services.
5	Provide for investment in meeting all remaining gaps in emergency service provision during the year.
6	Provide for funding of all homeless services on a full cost recovery basis, subject to adherence to quality standards and output targets defined within service level agreements.
7	Provide for the payment of rent supplement in advance rather than arrears to reduce the risk of homelessness among private rented tenants.
8	Commit to reviewing existing rent caps in order to reflect the real costs of renting and hence maximise the potential for use of the private rented sector for people progressing out of homelessness.
9	Provide for the early payment of rental deposits by Community Welfare Officers to people moving out of homelessness into private rented accommodation.
10	Provide for investment in addressing the barriers to education, training and employment faced by people experiencing homelessness.