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Keeping the Homeless Strategy on Track will provide Value for Money

MakeRoom Pre-Budget Submission 2011

Ireland continues to experience difficult financial times and MakeRoom, the campaign alliance of Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Threshold, understands that Government must examine every aspect of public spending in the 2011 budget. However, cutting services and supports to the most vulnerable in society, such as people experiencing homelessness and people at risk of homelessness, will not resolve Ireland's fiscal crisis or secure value for money in public expenditure.

The National Strategy "The Way Home: A Strategy to address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013" remains a unique opportunity to actually tackle homelessness in Ireland in a sustainable way. The Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan sets out the right measures required to end the need to sleep rough, provide long term housing solutions for people who are homeless and prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place. The full implementation of the Homeless Strategy Implementation Plan was also recommended in the 2009 McCarthy Report.¹

However, achieving the goals of the Strategy will fail without the provision of adequate funding. MakeRoom warns that in particular in the areas of housing provision, homeless services and prevention, any funding cuts would be absolutely detrimental to the aim of ending homelessness in Ireland.

Providing adequate move-on options = Reducing long-term use of emergency services

Ending homelessness requires the provision of sufficient and adequate housing for people who are homeless. MakeRoom welcomes the commitment and efforts made by the Government to work towards this goal. However, the number of successful housing allocations urgently needs to be increased if the strategy is to be effective. This will require continued investment in the provision of move on options for people who are homeless, including through voluntary and local authority housing, the Rental Accommodation Scheme and Leasing Scheme. Funding through the Capital Assistance Scheme plays a vital role within this context and must be safeguarded. In addition, MakeRoom calls on the Government to issue a recommendation to all Local Authorities to ring fence a certain proportion of social housing to people who are homeless.

Investment in housing and supports for people experiencing homelessness is well spent as it will help reducing the number of people staying in homeless emergency accommodation as well as transitional services for longer than absolutely necessary.

Keeping the homeless budget = Ensuring that no one is left without support

MakeRoom very much welcomes the recent commitment made by Minister Gormley to protect the homelessness budget.² There is evidence that the economic crisis has increased rather than reduced the risk of homelessness and this trend is likely to prevail over the first signs of economic recovery. In combination with the lack of move on options currently available to people, homeless service providers are expecting an increasing pressure on their services to support all people in need. In this context, any cuts in the homeless

¹ McCarthy Report 2009: Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes, Volume II: Detailed Papers, p. 95. <http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/pressreleases/2009/bl100vol2.pdf>

² Quote by Minister Gormley at the launch of the SAFE Ireland report, 2 June 2010: "Protecting the homelessness budget will continue to be a priority for me".



budget would risk forcing people who are already homeless into even more difficult situations and may result in an increase in rough sleeping. This would be contrary to the Government's commitment to end the need to sleep rough as outlined in the National Homelessness Strategy. In addition, people who are homeless are likely to develop multiple needs that will be more costly to address in the future than to prevent in the first place.

Preventing homelessness = Investing into sustainable solutions

Increasing structural risk factors for homelessness linked to the difficult economic context make it necessary to invest into effective measures that prevent new as well as repeat homelessness. Many people with the previous experience of homelessness have a particularly high risk of repeat homelessness. For some, the provision of appropriate and ongoing housing and tenancy support can be critical to sustain their housing. It also is important to adequately resource the range of additional supports which people may require to move out of homelessness. These may relate to physical and/or mental health issues, drug/alcohol use, dual diagnosis or a combination of these. Evidence from the US³ suggests that in particular for people with complex needs and long-term experience of homelessness, investment into housing with the right form of support is – in the long term – an efficient use of public money as it significantly reduces the use of emergency services, including hospitals and emergency social services.

Priority must also be given to providing adequate health and mental health support to people experiencing homelessness and people at risk of homelessness. This should include access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation as well as harm reduction. What is more, preventing homelessness requires the effective implementation of discharge policies ensuring that people leaving care, health or penal institutions have the support they need and do not become homeless.

Education, training and work can be powerful tools to prevent homelessness or help people to move out of homelessness. MakeRoom therefore calls on the Government to follow through on its commitment to improve access to education, training and work programmes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

MakeRoom welcomes the opportunity to provide our expertise and experience and to further discuss any of the issues outlined above in more detail.

For more information, please contact the MakeRoom Alliance Coordinator Silke Paasche: silke@makerroom.ie or Tel. 087 097 5030

MakeRoom, the campaign alliance of Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Threshold was founded in 2006 with the aim of securing Government and public support for a 2010 deadline for ending homelessness. More information is available on www.makerroom.ie

³ Culhane, D., Metraux, S. (2008) : Re-arranging the deck chairs or re-allocating the lifeboats: Homelessness Assistance and its Alternatives, in: Journal of the American Planning Association, Winter 2008, 47/1, p. 111-121.

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