

Ending homelessness in Northern Ireland



Simon Community NI is calling for the Northern Ireland Executive to prioritise ending homelessness in the next Programme for Government.

Homelessness is a major problem in Northern Ireland but, sadly, the issue only really comes to the fore when the worst happens. The recent news of the deaths of five people who were homeless on the streets of Belfast brought the issue of homelessness, and more particularly street homelessness, into sharp and distressing focus.

These tragic events have elicited a public outcry. Why are people dying on our streets? What are we doing to make sure no one else dies from homelessness? What are our politicians doing about this? As a direct result of the deaths, there has been a groundswell of local volunteers wanting to help those on the streets. This shows that people here really do care about the issue.

However, homelessness is not just about those who sleep rough on our streets. Many of those who are homeless are hidden from view. They are staying in shared emergency accommodation. They are staying temporarily with family and friends. They are spending time in poor quality B&Bs. Some are even sleeping in their car.

The reality is that there are thousands

more homeless people existing out of sight and, therefore, out of mind. We have a growing problem with homelessness in Northern Ireland. Thousands of people present to the Housing Executive as homeless every month and many, many more call our Freephone Helpline – nearly 40,000 calls in the last 12 months - for help and guidance.

Simon Community NI ends homelessness for individuals on a daily basis by supporting them to make the transition to safer and more secure accommodation. But as one person leaves, another will need our help. The problem is not going away.

It doesn't have to be this way. We believe that homelessness can be ended and in the run up to the forthcoming elections, we will be sharing our proposals with government and politicians to ensure that future strategies reflect the complexities of homelessness and the range of issues associated with it.

Simon Community NI is calling on the next Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly to prioritise ending homelessness by including it in the next

Programme for Government, accompanied by measurable, outcome focused actions to ensure that ambition translates into results.

Our three main objectives are:

1. A clear, unambiguous commitment from all politicians to the outcome of ending homelessness;
2. Making the ending of homelessness one of government's top priorities in the Programme for Government; and
3. The production and delivery of a cross-departmental strategy to achieve the end of homelessness by 2021;

Any future strategy should achieve three results:

1. Properly deal with the problem of acute homelessness via accommodation-based support;
2. Stop the problem for those who have already or are currently experiencing homelessness via better housing solutions, ensuring people do not suffer homelessness again; and
3. Prevent homelessness in the future.

We believe that a more strategic approach to end homelessness can succeed. And whilst the buck stops with the government, it is essential that people and communities across Northern Ireland better understand what homelessness is, and how they can prevent it; after all, Simon Community NI research has found that many of us are only one pay cheque away from homelessness.

*Jim Dennison, Chief Executive
Simon Community NI*

*For more information
visit www.simoncommunity.org
or phone 0800 171 2222.*

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