

Doing Things Differently

Simon Community's
Strategy 2024–2029





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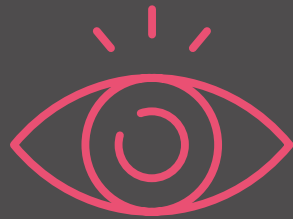
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“Instead of focusing on the circumstances you cannot change, focus strongly and powerfully on the circumstances that you can.”

Joy Page

We are Simon Community

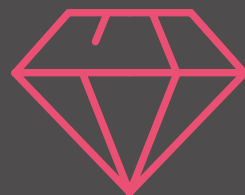
Vision, Mission and Values



Our Vision:
A society where everyone has a home.



Our Mission:
To end homelessness for people who need our help.



Our Values:
These values will inspire and challenge us as an organisation.



Trustworthy:
We are reliable, honest and will always act with integrity



Non-Judgemental:
We treat people with respect



Determined:
We will end homelessness

Introduction Jim Dennison, CEO



As I write this in early 2024, Northern Ireland is in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis. There are currently over 45,000 households on NI's social housing waiting list, three quarters of whom are deemed to be in housing stress or acute housing need. Of these, a staggering 26,000 households are legally classified as homeless, including 4,500 children.

But this crisis is not a new problem. It has not suddenly emerged.

This is a problem that has been building up for over 20 years. The social housing waiting list has almost doubled in that time. The private rental sector is becoming increasingly expensive. Average rents in Northern Ireland have soared by 10% in the past 12 months alone. This is making private rental options inaccessible for those on low incomes, and is pushing more and more people into homelessness.

In 2022/2023, there were over 10,000 placements in Temporary Accommodation sites across Northern Ireland. This is a rise of 206% in just 4 years.

With the current social housing waiting lists and an increasingly inaccessible private rental sector, people experiencing homelessness and in temporary accommodation have nowhere to go.

Unless we do things differently, homelessness in Northern Ireland will only get worse. So the key strategic question for Simon Community is: how will we respond?

In the past five years, and in line with our Strategic Plan 2018-2023, Simon Community has broadened its focus. From predominantly supporting those who are already experiencing homelessness through our temporary accommodation, we have worked to reach people who are at risk of becoming homelessness. We recognise that in order to truly end homelessness we must extend this work further, developing our prevention interventions as well as offering practical housing solutions so that people can move swiftly on from temporary accommodation, thus breaking the cycle of homelessness as quickly as possible.

But we know homelessness is more than just a housing issue. It is a multifaceted series of complex life experiences that culminate in people having nowhere to live. It is caused by poverty, poor mental health, addiction, low educational attainment, lack of job opportunities, relationship breakdown, and domestic abuse.

Homelessness demands our collective attention, empathy and action. It is not just a challenge for those directly affected but a shared responsibility for all of us. In this strategic period, Simon Community will amplify the voices of those we work with. Building partnerships across all sectors of our community, we will create a movement to realise our vision of ending homelessness in Northern Ireland.

The last few years has taught us to be ready for anything. We know the years ahead are likely to be challenging and unpredictable. But we are confident that significant progress can be made if we work together to do things differently.

We often use the terms 'homelessness crisis' and 'homelessness emergency' interchangeably, but they differ.

A crisis is widespread and persistent, caused by weak public policy and lack of housing investment.

An emergency is urgent, resulting from unforeseen events like economic downturns, public health catastrophes, or large-scale migration due to war or political instability.

Unfortunately, Northern Ireland is facing both.

Pursuing Systemic Change

Joe O'Neill, Chair of the Board of Directors



During our strategic planning process, we asked ourselves a variety of fundamental questions.

01 In the coming years, what will our contribution be to ending homelessness?

02 How do we best use our resources to end homelessness for as many people as we possibly can?

These key questions framed our discussions, of which we had many, and those discussions have culminated in our blueprint for the next five years as outlined in this document.

We realise and we understand that to work in the same way that we've always done will not be enough. We have to work differently. We need to encourage others to work differently. And that's what we'll do.

Simon Community will put more time and resources into preventing homelessness. We'll get to people before they lose their homes. We will work better and smarter to help people who find themselves in our temporary accommodation and we will work tirelessly to find solutions to end their homelessness.

We need to help change the narrative around homelessness. We heard very clearly from our clients that they need us to be their voice.

03 How will we work with others to increase service provision?

04 How can we help change the narrative for those experiencing the awful trauma of having nowhere to live?

Underpinning all of these ways of working will be more care for, and development of, our staff colleagues.

Without them, we don't exist. Alongside this, we'll ensure good governance and value for money, which will help us to sustain our ongoing efforts.

We are in the most challenging of times, but we approach the future with hope and ambition. We will work differently, we will work better and we'll end homelessness for more people than ever.

I commend the priorities set out in this document and I look forward to working with you all in the future.



Our Strategic Priorities

Following extensive consultation with the people we help, our staff and our partners, we have established our 5 key strategic priorities for 2024-2029.

1. Prevention of homelessness



To reduce the number of people who are at risk of entering homelessness, we will increase the provision of support to people before they end up in a cycle of homelessness.

Prevention starts with access to information and advice. Our **Homeless Support Line** has evolved into a vital advice and support hub. We will further enhance this telephone support and introduce improved digital communication channels, leveraging our website as a further source of advice, signposting and direct support.

We will extend our **community-based support** so that our teams can offer the right support, advice and interventions while people are still in their own homes.

We will scale up our **Tenancy Sustainment Scheme**, an initiative which provides tenancy deposit support for individuals and families to secure their own private tenancies. We will also develop a pilot initiative to support people who are in employment to cover both their deposit and first month's rent, thereby removing a significant financial barrier associated with the private rental sector.

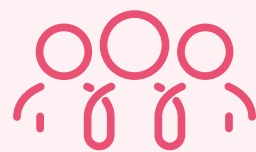
Responding to increased financial pressures and appeals for help, our **emergency financial interventions**, ranging from electricity top-ups, food parcels and direct engagement with landlords, will keep people in their own homes as long as possible. Through careful monitoring and evaluation, we will assess the effectiveness of these interventions in improving tenancy sustainability.

And if we are to see **true systemic change**, we need to change the narrative. As the largest homelessness charity in Northern Ireland, we must use our platform to amplify the voices of those we help. Therefore, we will take a more deliberate and resourced approach to external affairs and public engagement. We must use data and research to create and communicate solutions for lasting change if we are to end homelessness for all.

What we will do:

- Improve the quality and reach of our community engagement activities to support more individuals and families who are at risk of homelessness
- Increase the number, and improve the outcomes for, at-risk individuals and families who are able to maintain stable housing after receiving targeted support
- Through effective lobbying and evidence-based campaigning, achieve systemic change in housing supply, rights and financial support

2. Providing the right support at the right time



Historically, Simon Community’s core focus has been to support people experiencing homelessness through our temporary accommodation services. We currently have 20 adult and youth accommodation projects across Northern Ireland with up to 464 beds available every night.

Not only do these services provide a bed and a roof over someone’s head, they also provide critical wrap-around support for what is often a hugely difficult period in their life.

Our teams provide advice and support on a wide range of issues including mental health and wellbeing, drug and alcohol use, housing points and benefits, female advocacy and community services.

In the coming strategic period, we are committed to ensuring that our temporary accommodation continues to operate at a high-quality standard, driven by trauma-informed and people centred practice.

We already provide bespoke young people’s services, both through accommodation and community support. We will review evidence and assess the need to understand whether tailored services for further groups of clients, including women, should be developed.

What we will do:

- Reduce the average length of stay for people within our temporary accommodation
- Improve the access and quality of our temporary accommodation
- Engage with the people we support to drive service improvement and development

“
I didn’t find Simon Community, Simon Community found me. The staff worked with me at my best and worst but always without judgement. During my time with Simon, I trusted them completely, knowing that any decision they made or suggestion they provided was only done with my best interests in mind. Because of them, I’ve been able to work on goals to help my recovery.”

Keith

3. Offering solutions to end homelessness



While it is a critical service to those in need, we recognise that residing in temporary accommodation is not in and of itself ending homelessness. With the current lack of move-on options and record numbers on the social housing waiting list, people are forced to stay in temporary accommodation for much longer than is good for them. This impacts their wellbeing, family relationships and wider recovery.

Put simply, residing in temporary accommodation for extended periods can lead to more difficulty exiting homelessness.

With significant gaps in housing supply, Simon Community needs to provide solutions for permanent housing if we are to end homelessness for those we help.

As part of our **Creating Homes Programme**, which we launched in 2022, we have begun to buy and manage our own rental properties across Northern Ireland, offering them to people experiencing homelessness.

The impact of each of these homes is life changing. So far we have 19 properties in our portfolio and we have ambitions to scale this up significantly over the next five years. We will purchase further properties and will develop a socially responsible management offering for private landlords.

In the past five years, Simon Community has increased our **Housing First** services for young people. This globally researched and successful model is proven to be at the forefront of ending homelessness and we believe it should be expanded in Northern Ireland. At present, this service is funded across three health trust areas. Our ambition is to extend this programme and offer Housing First services to more people, as well as expanding geographically across Northern Ireland.

Evidence shows that **shared tenancies** for some individuals able to leave temporary accommodation can be a very successful option. This approach makes rent more affordable and helps to combat loneliness. We will explore shared tenancy solutions as an offering for people we support.

What we will do:

- Grow the number of Creating Homes properties (both owned and managed)
- Increase the numbers of individuals and families who have secured and maintained long term housing solutions as a result of our support
- Increase our Housing First provision
- Focus efforts on ending homelessness for young people and women

4. Develop, support and invest in our people



To deliver on our future objectives, we need a skilled, resilient and dedicated workforce to support those who need our help. This requires investment in people: our staff, our clients and our volunteers.

We value and respect our people individually and collectively for who they are, and what they do. We are committed to ensuring all our people are supported, developed and empowered to reach their full potential.

To support the delivery of our new Strategy, a comprehensive **People Plan** will develop robust solutions to meet our current challenges around staff recruitment, retention, leadership development and performance. Through evolving our culture and building on clearer values, we will nurture employee well-being and engagement.

We will continue to support people who live in Simon Community temporary accommodation. This will include **housing-related support** with the introduction of a tenancy ready programme, as well as support around mental health, education, employment and addictive behaviours.

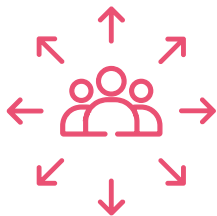
We will improve the identification of need and use of **data in decision making** through our new Client Management System. By engaging with our people meaningfully, we will develop other programmes to help provide the right support at the right time, ultimately ending their homelessness.

We are committed to meaningful engagement at every level of the organisation. The people we help should be central to how we shape our services and our work. To this end, we will develop a five-year plan to ensure that we have **participation of the people we help** at the heart of everything we do.

What we will do:

- Engage with the people we support to drive service improvement and evaluate service delivery
- Ensure we are driving improvements in the recruitment and retention of a skilled, engaged and resilient workforce
- Develop and further evolve a culture of well-being

5. Building a strong organisation for the future



Any future strategic plan will be reliant on - and underpinned by - our commitment to sound governance, organisational effectiveness, financial sustainability and a capacity to deliver.

We must retain **strong internal controls** as well as maintaining a track record of clean audit opinions.

We need to ensure the **ICT infrastructure remains fast and secure** as well as keeping at pace with developments in technology and cyber security to support these ambitions.

Data is key and we need to ensure we have strong information management systems that promote evidence based decision-making across all areas of the organisation. We must continue to manage our information assets effectively and be GDPR compliant.

During the next five years, we will adhere to **sustainable** practices wherever possible. This will include holding our key stakeholders to account and offering the people we help advice on energy efficiencies as their homelessness comes to an end.

The creation of a new Growth & Engagement directorate will safeguard our future sustainability and enable the delivery of the ambitions outlined in our strategy. We

will focus on driving increases in **public awareness and charitable income** through a refreshed brand, a compelling case for support, and diversified fundraising and marketing strategies.

We will be a **voice for change**, challenge misconceptions about homelessness and create a dynamic movement of support towards a future where everybody has a home.

What we will do:

- Ensuring governance to enhance service delivery and optimise resources for the benefit of the people we support
- Mobilise a growing network of supporters, volunteers and partners across Northern Ireland
- Challenge misconceptions and increase awareness and understanding of homelessness issues





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