

**Simon Community submission to
the consultation on the NI
Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy
2025-2035**

September 2025

Who is Simon Community?

Simon Community is Northern Ireland's largest and longest-serving homelessness charity. We are committed to ending homelessness. Operating right across the region and working in partnership with all sectors, we provide preventative services, temporary accommodation and specialised support to address the unique challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness. Our aim is not only to provide immediate assistance but also long-term solutions that end the cycle of poverty and homelessness for good and help to create a society where everyone has a place to call home.

At Simon Community, we see the impact of poverty every day. Alongside providing safe places to stay, we work to give people the support, advice, and practical help they need to withstand financial pressures and avoid losing their home. For example, last year we helped to pay 179 deposits for households through our Tenancy Deposit Service, helping them to access a home in the private rented sector. We also provide emergency financial interventions to support households at risk of homelessness with payments for food, fuel and electricity.

Simon Community response to Anti-Poverty Strategy

Simon Community, along with over 75 organisations, academics and faith leaders – including the members of the Expert Panel and the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group (formally the co-design group) believe that the Northern Ireland Executive's **draft Anti-Poverty 'Strategy' is not fit for purpose and does not meet the criteria of a reasonable strategy.**

Oversight bodies such as the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have previously outlined what they believe are the basic elements of any strategy such as 'properly defined and specific actions', 'an action plan containing clearly defined indicators and targets', time-bound outcomes and specific resources devoted to it.^{i, ii} We believe this draft strategy fails to fulfil these requirements.

While Simon Community agree with the overall vision of the draft strategy to eradicate poverty in Northern Ireland, we **do not believe the current strategy provides a pathway to achieve this vision.**

We are also concerned about the language and framework of the draft strategy, which we believe points to poverty being an individual problem that can be solved by lifestyle changes. This harmful and stigmatising view completely **ignores the widespread,**

systemic causes of poverty which we outline in more detail below in relation to poverty and homelessness.

We are aware that substantial evidence and recommendations on what works to reduce poverty has previously been provided to the Department by the Expert Advisory Panel and the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group. Unfortunately, this does not appear to have been considered when developing the draft strategy.

Simon Community therefore endorses and echoes the view of the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network that the **Department for Communities must urgently undertake a complete re-write of this draft strategy** using the updated evidence-based recommendations from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group. We support these recommendations and have attached a copy of them to our response.

In the rewrite of the draft strategy, it is also vital that the Department adheres to recommendations from its oversight bodies who emphasise that any Anti-Poverty Strategy should have measurable targets, timeframes, funding and an independent oversight body.

Finally, we urge the Department to **meaningfully engage with people experiencing poverty** to ensure that the rewritten strategy is informed by their expertise and insight.

Poverty and Homelessness

Simon Community believes that a safe and secure home is a basic human right. Unfortunately, today in Northern Ireland over 61,000 people are experiencing homelessness and do not have a safe and secure place to live.

Poverty is one of the main drivers of homelessness with rising living costs, stagnating wages and unaffordable rents pushing more households in Northern Ireland into poverty. For many people, the journey to homelessness doesn't start with losing a home, but with the daily struggle to make ends meet. Poverty forces people into impossible choices: heating or eating, paying the rent or keeping the lights on. Over time, that pressure erodes stability until homelessness becomes their reality.

At the same time, experiencing homelessness can exacerbate poverty by limiting people's options and opportunities, straining relationships, and restricting people's ability to plan for the future. For example, living in temporary accommodation for prolonged periods can often drive-up day-to-day costs for people, particularly if they need to travel further distances to school or work or do not have adequate cooking facilities, thereby forcing them deeper into poverty.

Both poverty and homelessness are caused by structural, not individual, failings and require systemic solutions. Simon Community believe **the supply of affordable and social housing is central to breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness**. Social homes are the only type of housing where rents are tied to local incomes, thereby keeping rents affordable and helping to prevent people from being pulled into poverty.

A fair and effective social security system also plays a key role in helping to address both poverty and homelessness. Benefits should support people when they need them most, protect those renting privately and incentivise work when people are ready. Unfortunately, our current system fails to do that. For those living in the private rented sector, freezing housing benefits at a time when rents and living costs are rising only deepens poverty and increases the risk of homelessness. The current system also acts as a disincentive to work for people experiencing homelessness and living in temporary accommodation. We often hear from the people we support about their desire to work longer hours but how, due to the way the current benefits system operates, doing so would leave them worse off financially, making it even more difficult for them to exit homelessness. We must ensure our social security system prevents hardship, helps people sustain tenancies and enables a pathway into employment rather than creating further barriers.

Finally, **a strategic focus on prevention and early intervention is key to addressing poverty and homelessness.** By intervening earlier, giving people more time to access financial help and support, and ensuring all public bodies play a role in identifying those at risk, we can stop rising rents and the cost of living from forcing people into poverty and homelessness.

We believe that tackling poverty is central to preventing homelessness. Both are structural problems which require structural solutions. By boosting the supply of social housing, reforming the benefits system and prioritising upstream interventions, we can loosen poverty's grip and ensure everyone has access to a safe and affordable place to call home.

For further information, please contact Cathy Brolly, Public Affairs and Policy Manager: Cathybrolly@simoncommunity.org

ⁱ NI Audit Office. (2024). *Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*.

ⁱⁱ Public Accounts Committee. (2024). *Report on child poverty in Northern Ireland*.