

Ending homelessness needs to be an outcome in Programme for Government

Three leading charities have come together to call on the NI Executive and Assembly to make a commitment to ending homelessness in the new Programme for Government.

Simon Community Northern Ireland, MACS and Extern support people across different age groups and experiences, all of whom are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.

The call comes as Simon Community, Northern Ireland's largest homeless charity, publishes recommendations emerging from a summit hosted in April, which brought together representatives from a range of sectors and organisations to consider a collective approach to ending homelessness.

The summit and report features contributions from a variety of organisations including MACS, who work in support of vulnerable children and young people, and Extern, who gave insight into the experience of ex-offenders through its multi-disciplinary Homeless Support team, focussing on physical and mental ill health, and addiction support.

Chief Executive of Simon Community NI, Jim Dennison, explained:

“Homelessness is not just about having a roof over your head. People find themselves homeless for a variety of reasons, and so the solution to the problem needs a joined-up approach. Mental health issues, relationship breakdown, lack of tenancy rights, addiction and resettlement after release from prison are just some of the factors which can contribute to homelessness, and so this must be reflected in how government responds to this complex issue.

“Following the tragic deaths of homeless people on the streets of Belfast, Simon Community believes that an outcomes-based approach to ending homelessness is essential, with cross-departmental integration to reflect the complex factors that contribute to it. We believe that a move towards this has huge potential to end homelessness, and therefore its omission in the Programme must be addressed as part of the consultation process. We are calling on politicians to ensure that this is a priority; it cannot simply be shoe-horned in under other outcomes.

“Underpinning this, and as part of the outcomes-based approach, the need to measure the extent of homelessness is central to ending it. This is why we are calling for a specific commitment from government to conduct a baseline study on the extent of the issue across Northern Ireland. Only then can we understand the true extent of the problem, and work towards ending homelessness in Northern Ireland.”

Charlie Mack, Chief Executive of Extern said:

“Homelessness is a huge issue in Northern Ireland. Extern currently provides a range of accommodation and support services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and live with a multiplicity of complex needs.

“Demand for our services has increased by over 50% in the last two years and underlines the fact that homelessness is much more than just a housing issue, and so we welcome the report which reflects the complex issues through which people may find themselves homeless.”

Mary Ryan, Chief Executive of MACS added:

“Many of the young people we work with have become stuck in a rut and are engaged in negative patterns of thinking and behaviour that prevent them from fulfilling their potential and leading the lives that they want to lead, and this sometimes leads to homelessness.

“We know that the causes of homelessness are many and varied, and that is why it is essential that government approach the issue in a way that reflects this.

“MACS fully endorses this report, and we are calling on government to ensure that ending homelessness is given the prominence it deserves in the Programme for Government. Without it, we are facing a generational homeless problem of the future.”

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For media interviews or more information, please contact Anna Mercer on 07703830139, or email anna@Stratagem-ni.com.

Note to Editor:

- Simon Community NI is the *largest homeless charity in NI*, with 22 accommodation-based services across NI.
- Extern meets people at their point of need. In addition to providing specialist assessment in the Housing Executive, they work across the sector, providing professional support to those who have multiple needs. They work alongside 16 different hostels and with outreach teams in Belfast, and provide over 60 homeless hostel beds and help over 2000 people affected by homelessness.
- MACS provide a range of support services for children and young people aged 11-25 years who haven't had a fair deal. Issues they work to address include:
 - homelessness or at risk of homelessness
 - substance abuse
 - mental health difficulties
 - anti-social behaviour
 - leaving care
 - self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts

- marginalised and at risk