

**Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Submission to the Department of Environment,
Community and Local Government's
Statement of Strategy 2011 - 2014**



Introduction

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed welcomes this opportunity to feed into the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government's Statement of Strategy for the next three years. The organisation notes that in the Secretary General's letter that she draws attention to the Programme for Government and its implication for her Department's work over the coming period. In particular the letter notes the issues of fiscal consolidation; economic recovery; public sector reform; the restoration of Ireland's reputation internationally; the pursuit of fairness in the delivery of public services; and political reform. The INOU is keenly aware that to address the economic and social crisis facing the country demands a range of interconnecting responses that require the active participation of a wide range of players. In particular the dynamic participation of local communities and community and voluntary sector organisations will be vital to securing Ireland's future: areas of government which DECLG has increased responsibility.

The organisation was also struck by the following quote from the Programme for Government that *"By the end of our term in Government Ireland will be recognised as a modern, fair, socially inclusive and equal society supported by a productive and prosperous economy."* (p3) The INOU believes that the DECLG has a particular role to play in delivering on this vision and that the Department's Statement of Strategy must spell out how its' work will help to realise this vision.

The following submission will make recommendations under key areas of the Department's responsibility that are of particular concern to the INOU including housing; local and community development; and local government reform.

Housing

The INOU welcomes the statement of Housing Policy given by Minister Willie Penrose in June of this year. In particular the articulation of *"Our vision for the future of the housing sector in Ireland is based on choice, fairness, equity across tenures and on delivering quality outcomes for the resources invested. The overall strategic objective will be to enable all households access good quality housing appropriate to household circumstances and in their*

particular community of choice.” In particular the INOU welcomes the recognition that Rent Supplement has become a long-term social housing support for many families (slightly less than 50,000 people in receipt of Rent Supplement are on a Jobseekers payment) and that the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government will play a bigger part in its on-going development. The INOU has concerns about the quality of much Rent Supplement accommodation and believes the DECLG and the Local Authorities are the appropriate government agents to be addressing such issues.

However, in addressing these issues it is important that unemployed people and other social housing tenants are facilitated to exercise choice and in particular are supported to remain in the community or area they have established as their home.

RAS was introduced to address many of the issues raised about Rent Supplement accommodation and the fact that a short term policy response mechanism has become a long-term one. However, the roll-out of RAS has been painfully slow and inadequate and the underlying issues must be addressed if real progress is to be made. It is also imperative that a mechanism to meet the short-term accommodation needs of people who are in danger of losing their home as result of unemployment is maintained. A whole of government approach is required to ensure that such supports are appropriately provided and do not create further welfare to work barriers for unemployed people seeking to get back to work.

Community and Local development

As a national network a significant number of whose affiliated members are locally based community organisations working on unemployment, community and local development issues, the INOU is keenly aware of the vitally important role such organisations play. Ireland is unusual in the extensive role community and voluntary sector organisations play in the delivery of key public services. Local organisations have a keen insight into what is happening in their area, what has worked to address issues arising, and what needs to happen if local communities dealing with exclusion and disadvantage are not to be further marginalised by the current socio-economic crisis.

To that end it is vital that local and national community organisations are supported in the development of their work. Such work is integral to realising a more inclusive and equitable society: key aspects of the Government’s vision for the future of Ireland. At a time of austerity it can be too easy to equate reform with retraction and value for money with cutting expenditure. However, it is critical to view these challenges from a different perspective, from one of investment. Sustainable communities that are attractive places to live; that have active residents working together to address issues of common concern; communities that are seeking ways of developing their areas socially, environmentally and

economically have an important role to play in restoring Ireland's international reputation and strengthening the conditions for inward investment.

The Local and Community Development Programme now under the remit of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government has an important role to play in this regard and it is important that the funding to local organisations is maintained to further develop their work. The participative realisation of the high level goals of this programme are relevant to the whole area of local government reform:

- To promote awareness, knowledge and uptake of a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community services.
- To increase access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural development activities and resources.
- To increase peoples' work readiness and employment prospects.
- To promote engagement with policy, practice and decision making processes on matters affecting local communities.

Local Government Reform

In the Programme for Government it notes that *"We will merge local enterprise and job support functions of local, regional and national agencies into a single business and enterprise unit within Local Authorities. This will allow streamlining of local job creation and support functions, increased shared knowledge capability and resources while saving on administration costs."* (p27) It is important that such a development identifies from the start how it will link to the work of the proposed new National Employment and Entitlement Service and the new further education and training body SOLAS. This will be particularly important for unemployed people who seek to address their unemployment through self-employment: supports available through the Department of Social Protection will facilitate their initial engagement but access to wider enterprise supports will be required if this is to prove to be a meaningful and sustainable option for unemployed people.

It would also be important to explore the role of Local Authorities in the wider issue of job creation and their role in creating the conditions for local enterprises to flourish: for example, how can they support the work of the IDA; Enterprise Ireland; the County/City Enterprise Board? What role has or should the LA have in marketing the area under its control as a place to do business or has a place that has unmet needs that private or social enterprises could meet?

Social enterprise is often community led and has an important role to play in addressing local needs including job creation. In the Programme for Government it notes that *"The Government will promote the development of a vibrant and effective social enterprise*

sector. We will instruct agencies to view social enterprises as important stakeholders in rejuvenating local economies. We will continue support for social innovation projects for young people through education, community and voluntary structures." (p14) It is important that any reconfiguring of enterprise supports at the local level includes proper supports for the development of social enterprises. One important avenue local government could explore is how it could use local community based enterprises to deliver key services or fulfil certain contracts e.g. retrofitting.

Amongst the issues discussed with regard to local government reform is the identification of local revenues to support the funding of local government. The INOU believes strongly in the principle of those who can, should pay and is concerned at the recent announcement of a flat rate Household Charge. In particular the INOU is concerned that the vast majority of unemployed people will pay this charge out of already limited resources and at a time when many of them have seen a very dramatic drop in their income. It is imperative that over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy that an equitable funding mechanism is established for local government. Flat rate payments are by their very nature inequitable and not conducive to the Government achieving its vision of *"fair, socially inclusive and equitable society"*.

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