

The Society of St Vincent de Paul's
Pre-Budget Submission 2016

JUNE 2015

Investing in What Matters



Society of St Vincent de Paul



Mission Statement

We are involved in a diverse range of activities characterised by:

Support and friendship

Through person-to-person contact, we are committed to respecting the dignity of those we assist and to foster their self-respect. In the provision of material and other support, we assure confidentiality at all times and endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship.

Promoting self-sufficiency

We believe it is not enough to provide short term material support. Those we assist must also be helped to achieve self-sufficiency in the longer term and the sense of self-worth this provides. When the problems we encounter are beyond our competence, we enlist the support of others more specialised.

Working for social justice

We are committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland, and, in solidarity with poor and disadvantaged people, to advocate and work for the changes required to create a more just and caring society.

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Foreword from SVP's National President

This time of year the Society makes its submission to Government in relation to the forthcoming Budget. From the outline already made available by Government indications are that additional funds will be available to support those in need and the vulnerable in our communities. We make our submission based on our interpretation of the needs across the country and the feedback from our members. The challenges faced by people are not getting easier; in many cases the demands on our support are increasing.

Budget 2016 should aim to improve people's wellbeing and opportunities

The purpose of SVP's Pre-Budget submission is to press for:

- Higher levels of health and wellbeing arising from access to quality, affordable and warm homes in mixed, sustainable communities across tenures.

- Enhanced levels of autonomy for all people through an infrastructure of care and development.

- Increased opportunities for children arising from expanded early childhood care and education.

- Greater prospects for all through access to jobs arising from childcare and afterschool care.

SVP recommend sustained public investment in public services

SVP currently provides direct financial assistance to make up for deficiencies in public services, particularly in the areas of health, education and housing. We also indirectly subsidise meeting basic needs like food, because some people have to spend such a large proportion of their income on ever-increasing rents and fuel costs, where affordable rented homes are not available and accommodation is poor in terms of both quality and thermal efficiency. Income increases, through wages or social welfare, are vital, but are insufficient to break the cycle of poverty. Services are necessary for the wellbeing of people and communities and long term sustained public investment is essential if Ireland is serious about tackling inequality, reducing poverty traps and supporting access to employment.

Budget 2016 should articulate our values as a nation

Much is being spoken about 2016 with both an election and the anniversary of the 1916 Rising in the offing. SVP have spoken and written in the past about our values as a nation and the reality that we have not managed to achieve a more equal nation for all of our people. We accept that managing an economy is a complex issue; creating employment is key to achieving a vibrant economy that can provide the services that all sections of the community need and deserve. However, we do not believe there is the political will to make real change in how we allocate resources that will give an equal opportunity to all of our citizens.

It is time for radical thinking to achieve real change

Much discussion has taken place over the past year in regard to ethics and the type of society we should aspire towards. Whilst these discussions have been useful we fear that they are now largely forgotten. We urge the political system to be radical in their thinking over the coming months to put forward real change proposals that will create a more equal and just Ireland. That would be the real 2016 celebration.



Geoff Meagher
National President
The Society of St Vincent de Paul

Summary of SVP's Budget 2016 Priorities

Policy priority	Responsible Departments
Investing in social housing supply and access	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the necessary resources in a timely manner to meet the Government's own target to provide new social housing. • Assess delivery and output in 2015 against the targets set by Q1 2016, and review in light of Social Housing Assessment 2016 results which should be undertaken in Q1. • Provide approved funding to local authorities and voluntary not-for-profit bodies in a timely way in order to meet SH2020 delivery targets. • Increase area-based Rent Supplement limits to realistic levels as a temporary homelessness prevention measure, pending sufficient increases in the provision of social and private rented supply. • Financially incentivise landlords to accept Housing Assistance Payment tenants. 	<p>Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government; Department of Social Protection; Department of Finance; SH 2020 Oversight Group; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; Revenue Commissioners</p>
Addressing home energy costs and improving housing energy efficiency	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widen the eligibility criteria and funding available for the Warmer Homes Scheme and Sustainable Energy Communities Programme to target low income households for energy efficiency improvements to include the needs of occupants of the private rented sector. • Increase funding of the SEAI to return to 2010 levels of funding for retro-fitting projects focusing on initiatives that target low-income households based on wider eligibility criteria. • Pilot innovative schemes employing 'community energy advisors' to advise and inform 'hard to reach' energy users who would most benefit from energy efficiency programmes and energy advice. • Undertake a National House Quality Survey of Ireland. 	<p>Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources; Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government; Department of Social Protection; Department of Finance; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</p>
Investing in early childhood care and education and after school care services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the Community Childcare Subvention scheme to all early years services, both community and private. • Extend the current universal ECCE programme to 3 hours a day, 5 days per week, for 48 weeks per year. • Conduct a mapping exercise of all afterschool care services run by the State, its agencies and private / community providers, and use the information to develop a national strategy. 	<p>Department of Children and Youth Affairs; Department of Social Protection; Department of Finance; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</p>

SVP's Position on Budget 2016

"A functioning society is a fair one, where the fruits of economic growth are shared among all the people."

Mr. Brendan Howlin, T.D, Statement of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Spring 2015 Economic Statement, 28 April 2015¹.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul shares the Minister's sentiment.

SVP has consistently argued that the impact of Ireland's economic crisis has been unfairly shared in Irish society. Ireland experienced disproportional austerity, with people on lower incomes suffering due to the political choice made to pursue this policy. Budget 2016 can begin the process of rectifying past inequities.

Living with the legacy of recent austerity and budgetary choices

We continue to express our concern about, and witness, the cumulative impact on people in Ireland of years of cuts to social protection payments and essential public services, coupled with job losses and pay cuts. These cuts happened within the context of weak public services, with services like health, early years care and education and social housing struggling to provide an adequate safety net for households with ever-reducing incomes. Year-on-year increases in the extent and depth of deprivation² experienced by households in Ireland have led to SVP's spending on assistance to people lacking basic items like food and heating doubling over the recession, reaching €40 million per annum by 2014.

SVP's 11,500 volunteer members gain a unique insight into the lives of people by meeting them in their homes and listening to their stories. The most persistent issues that SVP has witnessed are: inadequate incomes and the high cost of living in Ireland; poor housing supply, affordability and quality; energy poverty; and barriers to accessing the jobs market.

¹ Source: <http://www.per.gov.ie/spring-economic-statement-speech-by-the-minister-for-public-expenditure-and-reform-mr-brendan-howlin-t-d/>

² The proportion of the population experiencing income poverty and deprivation (2013) has doubled since 2008 to 8.2%. It means that 377,000 people in Ireland live below the poverty line and can't afford to buy basic items and activities (Department of Social Protection (2015) Social Inclusion Monitor, 2013. Dublin: DSP)

Budget strategy needs to balance income and public services

Irish social policy is unbalanced in its orientation toward the provision of income, through reduced personal taxes and increased social protection payments, at the ongoing expense of service provision. SVP suggest that a wiser and more socially just option is to correct this balance using the annual Budget process. The historical lack of balance, coupled with a policy of leaving provision of essential services that respond to basic human need such as accommodation, open to the vagaries of the private market, has contributed to our inadequate public infrastructure, impacting on the extent to which people can take up employment, make work pay, and exit or stay out of poverty.

SVP welcomes Ireland's reduced unemployment figures; however increases in the number of jobs in the economy has to be matched with actions that make access to and the retention of jobs more realistic, particularly for families. Right now, early childhood care and education and, afterschool care provision, is totally inadequate and is too expensive for people on lower incomes, particularly for one parent families currently being required by Government to take up employment or increase their hours of work. Private rented housing is incredibly expensive in main urban areas, where most employment is located, both relative to incomes and relative to the wider European experience. Ireland is not close to its policy goal of 'making work pay' for people whose earning potential is relatively low.

Some essential items cost too much to be bought privately by people with lower incomes and poor access to credit – accommodation being the most relevant example in the current environment. Minimal increases in social protection payment levels or reductions in income taxes will not support housing access given the level of crisis we are currently experiencing in the entire housing system. This is one reason for striking a careful balance between income and public service provision. Additionally, when we invest in public services, the result is tangible resources that are available to national and local governments when needed to meet by Irish residents, and, as a long-term investment, continued value for money in the future.

According to the Government, there is room for additional spending in Budget 2016 of between €1.2 and €1.5bn, to be allocated on an equal basis between additional spending and reducing the taxes on low and middle income earners. SVP calls on Government to deliver in Budget 2016 the first of a series of national budgets that lead us to improved outcomes for people and families by way of substantial investment in more and better quality homes and a robust early childhood care and education/afterschool care sector that provides affordable, quality provision.

Long-term sustained public investment is essential if Ireland is serious about tackling inequality, reducing poverty traps, achieving positive health and well-being outcomes for people, and encouraging access to work. We need to invest wisely. We need to invest in what matters.

SVP's Budget 2016 Strategy: A Social Investment Package

The aim of SVP's pre-budget submission is to seek the type and level of investment in social provision that will ensure greater levels of social and economic participation of low-income households in the economic recovery, and break the cycle of poverty and intergenerational disadvantage for the families and people we visit, house and serve.

The outcomes we envisage from our policy approach are:

- Higher levels of health and wellbeing arising from access to quality, affordable and warm homes in mixed, sustainable communities across tenures;
- Enhanced levels of autonomy for all people through an infrastructure of care and development;
- Increased opportunities for children arising from expanded early childhood care and education and afterschool care; and
- Greater opportunity and security for families through an increase in basic public services such as housing and early childhood care and education and afterschool care.

SVP's Pre-Budget Submission 2016 seeks a rebalancing of spending on household incomes with investment in services.

In order to achieve the outcomes set out above, SVP is framing Budget 2016 as year one of a Social Investment Package to 2020, the timescale of several key Government strategies.

Our priorities for Budget 2016 and the Social Investment Package are:

- Investing in social and private rented housing supply and access;
- Addressing energy costs and improving housing energy efficiency; and
- Investing in early childhood care and education (ECCE) (for children aged 0–6) and after school care (ASC) services (for children age 4–12 years).

Investment Package 1:

Social Housing and the Private Rented Sector

Ireland is experiencing yet another housing crisis, demonstrated for the people that SVP assists by the chronic lack of supply of social housing and private rented accommodation, the unaffordability of private rents, and unprecedented family homelessness. The Government's *Social Housing Strategy 2020* (SH2020) was published in December 2014 and was welcomed by SVP. It is the first housing strategy in many years that asserts the role of the State in the direct provision of social housing and it commits to providing new social housing dwellings through Exchequer funding, large-scale private investment and the private rented sector.

Social Housing 2020 delivery targets to be achieved by the end of 2020 include providing 35,000 social housing units through new build, leasing, ownership transfer, re-letting local authority voids; and supporting up to 75,000 households on local authority waiting lists living in the private rented sector through a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the existing Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's (DECLG) own published costing is €3.8bn in Exchequer funding, to be spent from 2015 to 2020 to deliver the 35,000 dwellings. A multi-annual funding approach is planned.

Delivery is divided into two phases: phase 1 (2015-2017) aims to provide 22,882 social housing units through lease, purchase and build as part of the Social Housing Investment Programme by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (voluntary non-profit organisations) at a cost of €1.5 bn, and 32,000 private rented units via HAP and RAS.

SVP has serious concerns about some fundamental elements of SH2020's design, and delivery to date that are relevant to Budget 2016 and subsequent national budgets.

The inadequacy of the scale of investment in social housing supply relative to housing need is striking; at least 90,000 households are in need of social housing³ in Ireland. Housing need is to increase drastically over the coming years due to the acceleration in home repossessions for mortgage arrears and economic eviction due to high rents.

Progress in meeting 2015 delivery targets is slow to date. Some 2015 delivery targets⁴ are at risk of not being met as funding is not being released in a timely manner: bringing 1,000 local authority empty units back into use; leasing 3,000 private homes through long-term leases with investors such as NAMA; finding landlords willing to provide an additional 2,000 RAS units; and funding the provision of 300 units by AHBs. SH2020 is already suffering from an implementation gap.

There is a delivery lag between the planning of over 20,000 units to be bought, leased and built by local authorities, and their eventual delivery. It is unlikely that over 20,000 households will be

3 DECLG (2013) *Social Housing Assessment 2013*. Dublin: DECLG

4 Irish Council for Social Housing (2015) *Social Housing*, Spring 2015, p. 4. Dublin: ICSH

housed by the end of 2017. Additionally, the delivery of new dwellings relies heavily on new funding arrangements, Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs), to encourage private investment in social housing. The design of SPVs by Government is in an early stage and is unlikely to be in a position to fund new social housing build before 2017.

SH2020 is overly-reliant on private landlords to supply housing through the RAS and the HAP. The targets do not represent new housing supply. The private rented sector does not have enough landlords of sufficient scale to adequately deliver the units in a timely way. It is the experience of SVP's volunteers that access to the private rented sector is decreasing for the low income households that the SH2020 aims to house through this tenure due to high rents. The sector is also weak on rent certainty and security of tenure, and is of variable physical quality.

Some landlords are reluctant to participate in HAP as they see no advantage to entering into a long-term lease with a HAP tenant and not be free to take advantage of projected high rent increases (almost 10% annually in Dublin⁵). Additionally, the limits on monthly rents that HAP recipients are allowed to pay are the same as those for Rent Supplement (RS). The limits do not meet market rents, and the gap is causing homelessness⁶. HAP is still only being implemented as a pilot scheme by local authorities; only 1,539 RS recipients were transferred to HAP by 20 April 2015⁷, a long way off the 8,000 target for households to be housed under HAP by the end of 2015.

Budget Priority 1

SVP calls on the DECLG to adopt the following priorities in Budget 2016, and subsequent budgets:

Provide the necessary resources in a timely manner to meet the Government's own target to provide dwellings over the period over 2016 and 2017, i.e., phase 1 of SH2020 implementation.

Cost: no additional funding required

Budget Priority 2

Assess delivery and output in 2015 against the targets set by Q1 2016, and review in light of Social Housing Assessment 2016 results which should be undertaken in Q1. The SH2020 Oversight Group should take responsibility for this action.

Budget Priority 3

Provide approved funding to local authorities and AHBs in a timely way in order to meet SH2020 delivery targets. Approved funding should operate in line with the multi-annual funding objective contained in the Strategy, rolling over from year-to-year.

5 Private Rented Tenancies Board (2015) *Latest Data from PRTB Rent Index*, Press Statement, 26th March 2016

6 The RS rent limit for Dublin excluding Fingal for a family with 3 or more children is €1,000 per month (<https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Maximum-Rent-Limits-by-County.aspx>), while the average rent in Dublin in 2014 was €1,301 for a house.

7 Government of Ireland (2015) *National Reform Programme* – April 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/nrp2015_ireland_en.pdf

While awaiting new supply, the people being assisted by SVP live in the private rented sector, paying for it through income from employment and/or Rent Supplement, administered and funded by the Department of Social Protection (DSP)⁸. Recent rent increases have outstripped RS limits in Dublin and other urban areas, and the hinterlands of urban areas. More than ever, our members are citing case after case of families struggling or unable to afford their rent. Rent increases and RS inadequacy is a pathway into homelessness increasingly being witnessed by our volunteers who visit them in their hotel rooms and B&Bs. The DSP is reluctant to raise the rent limits for fear of setting a new ‘floor’ for private rents. However, SVP contends that rents are rising regardless because of the lack of supply. Amending the RS limits to meet PRTB (Private Residential Tenancies Board) market rents would mean that the RS is following market rents rather than leading them.

Families are suffering because of the lack of investment in social housing by successive Governments. We are in a situation where the RS, however imperfect, is the only immediate policy measure available to support families to keep a roof over their heads.

Budget Priority 4

SVP calls on the Department of Social Protection to:

Increase area-based Rent Supplement limits to realistic levels in areas where it is required, e.g., to PTRB market rates, as a temporary homelessness prevention measure, pending sufficient increases in the provision of additional units of social housing and private rented dwellings.

Budget Priority 5

The Department of Finance and Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government should:

Financially incentivise landlords to accept HAP tenants.

Cost: depends on level and method of incentivisation.

The level of, conditions for, and vehicle for incentivisation requires discussions between the relevant Departments and, possibly, the Revenue Commissioners, should a taxation route be taken to incentivisation.

The conditionality to incentivise HAP acceptance by private landlords could extend to supporting increased housing standards in dwellings housing HAP, RAS and RS recipients, e.g., providing a means of identifying dwellings in the private rented sector that may require energy retrofitting. SVP volunteers visiting people’s privately rented homes identify the huge variety of housing conditions, particularly at the lower end of the sector where many low income households in need of social housing live.

⁸ €339m was spent on Rent Supplement in 2014 to 71,533 households; it was paid to 96,803 households at its height in 2010 costing €516m (Department of Social Protection (2015) *Maximum Rent Limit Analysis and Findings Report*, <https://www.welfare.ie>).

Investment Package 2:

Energy Costs and Housing Energy Efficiency

SVP is an active on-the-ground advocate for affordable energy. We strive to assist people to remain connected to energy supply and to find sustainable ways for households to deal with energy debt. We continue to address the needs of families in energy poverty by providing advice and financial assistance. Our expenditure of over €46m in direct assistance in the years 2009–2013 is testament to the need to provide long-term solutions for households to meet their energy needs.

In 2014 the SVP Commissioned our sister organisation the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice to undertake research on *Minimum Household Energy Need*⁹. The research illustrated that although people on low incomes could potentially significantly reduce their home energy bills through improved energy efficiency, those on the lowest incomes remained in fuel poverty. Furthermore the research found that the value of fuel subsidies have reduced due to budgetary cuts, and can be further devalued by rising energy costs.

Addressing energy poverty has benefits far beyond keeping homes warm. There are financial, health, employment and environmental benefits to people from improved household efficiency and education. These benefits are shared in society through reduced health expenditure, reduced income poverty and increased job creation in the retro-fitting sector. An inter-departmental approach is needed that includes departments and agencies responsible for energy policy, funding and delivery, and those departments to whom the benefits arising from energy efficient accrue, for example the Department of Health and the Department of Jobs and Innovation.

The forthcoming *Affordable Energy Strategy*, led by the Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources, provides a vehicle to address energy poverty and to improve the energy efficiency of homes. Actions that increase the energy efficiency of Irish homes also help Ireland meet the 2020 targets in the *National Energy Efficiency Action Plan*¹⁰.

However, a recent expert policy roundtable hosted by SVP on the subject of energy poverty in Ireland identified that there is insufficient data and research to inform national and local policymaking and to identify specific dwellings with poor energy efficiency levels¹¹.

SVP recognises that households who are most in need of energy awareness, efficiency and targeted retro-fitting programmes that are categorised as being ‘hard to reach’. Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland’s (SEAI) recent research¹² suggests that even if Ireland achieves its 2020 targets, in the absence of government intervention, there will be little take-up of energy efficiency opportunities by less aware consumers beyond 2025. Given SVP’s experience in assisting people in energy poverty, we recommend local programmes that employ energy advisors to interact with hard to reach groups.

9 Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (2015) *Minimum Household Energy Need*. Dublin: SVP.

10 Source: <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/energy/energy/efficiencyandaffordabilitydivision/nationalenergyefficiencyactionplan.htm>.

11 SVP (2015) *PolicyLinks* Issue 1, January 2015, *Energy poverty experienced by one parent families in the Republic of Ireland*, <http://www.svp.ie/getattachment/b4943724-b62c-41b8-be64-cd19c76a1cf0/Policy-Links-Energy-Poverty.aspx>.

12 SEAI (2015) *Unlocking the Energy Efficiency Opportunity*. Dublin: SEAI http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Statistics_Publications/Energy_Modelling_Group_Publications/Unlocking-the-Energy-Efficiency-Opportunity-Summary-for-Policymakers.pdf.

Budget Priority 1

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government should widen the eligibility criteria and funding available for the Warmer Homes Scheme and Sustainable Energy Communities Programme to target low income households for energy efficiency improvements, including tenants in the private rented sector.

This requires a thought-out, staggered approach that does not inconvenience present tenants and should begin with landlords who have benefited from the publically financed expanded Home Renovation Incentive Scheme and properties that are part of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

Budget Priority 2

The DECNR should increase SEAI's funding to its 2010 level and fund retrofitting projects that target low income households, based on wider eligibility criteria than currently prevails.

Cost: €40m

Budget Priority 3

The Department of Social Protection should protect the current fuel subsidy rates of the Fuel Allowance and Households Benefits Package.

Cost: no additional cost

Budget Priority 4

In partnership with the DCENR and the DECLG, the DSP should pilot a scheme combining fuel-related payments and retrofitting measures so that that the pilot group of fuel payment recipients receive sufficient energy efficiency upgrades in their home and therefore do not have to spend more than is reasonable to keep their home comfortably warm in the longer-term.

Cost: Revenue neutral

Budget Priority 5

DENCR should fund the development and piloting of a scheme employing 'community energy advisors' to advise and inform 'hard to reach' energy users who would most benefit from energy efficiency and advice programmes and energy advice.

Cost: €0.25m

Budget Priority 6

DECLG should undertake a National House Quality Survey of Ireland.

Cost: €2.5m per wave, with one wave every 5 years.

Budget Priority 7

DCENR should maintain, co-ordinate and improve Ireland's energy poverty research.

Cost: €0.5m to Budget 2016, and a further €0.5m per annum thereafter.



Investment Package 3:

Investing in Early Childhood Care and Education and After School Care Services

Job creation and facilitating access to employment are important objectives for the Government. Facilitating female participation in the labour market and making a decisive impact on breaking the cycle of disadvantage are hinged on investment in ECCE and ASC policy. However, Irish services have some of the highest costs in the EU, costing up to 40% of parental income, acting as a work deterrent, particularly for the low paid¹³. Quality standards in services can vary.

The Department of Social Protection has reformed the One Parent Family Payment (OFP), requiring over 40,000 lone parents to transfer to Jobseekers payments and move into employment or increase their hours of work. However, this policy is being implemented without the strategy or funding necessary for the required early childhood care and education (ECCE) and afterschool care (ASC)¹⁴.

The first national scheme of universal free ECCE provision commenced in 2012, offering all 3–4 year olds 3 hours of care, 5 days per week, for 38 weeks, for 1 year. The ECCE scheme has a 95% take-up rate, indicating demand amongst parents. It is also the first time in Ireland that the receipt of Exchequer funding by ECCE services has been linked with national quality standards. However, the offer is limited, providing inadequate support for parents seeking employment.

Small-scale subsidies are also available to services providing ECCE and ASC schemes to low-income parents taking up Community Employment (CE) and further education and training. These schemes are very limited (only 500 ASC places are available), and the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme for CE participants can only be availed of by community services. There is also much complexity in the operation of the various schemes; they need to be subsumed, reconfigured and made more user-friendly.

Ireland lags behind European countries in terms of an affordable and quality early years sector and has only residual, uncoordinated, unregulated afterschool care provision. Government needs to articulate a clear pathway and sustainable funding for the supply of care and education.

There are a number of policy options available to the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Investment in Early Years and School Age Care and Education Service, which is to report in summer 2015. Tax credits, the income approach, will address neither quality nor affordability for parents, particularly those on the lowest incomes. It is also unwise from an investment perspective: giving parents a few euro extra per week would make little impact on ECCE costs for them, but would pay for an additional 10-weeks of ECCE for a 3-year-old under the ECCE scheme when provided directly as a free, universal public service.

¹³ EU Commission (2015) *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Ireland*, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015_ireland_en.pdf

¹⁴ SVP (2015) *PolicyLinks Issue 2, April 2015, Supporting pathways to employment for one parent families*, <http://www.svp.ie/getattachment/1e859c0d-3bed-4a57-ba57-4f30e3dac546/Supporting-Pathways-to-Parental-Employment-for-One.aspx>

Government must also deliver on its commitment to extend the universal ECCE scheme. There are various ways they can begin this extension; our suggestion for an initial step is to extend the duration of the current provision.

After-school care and services are underdeveloped and fragmented. All statutory and private services need to be mapped to establish the extent of current provision and to begin to develop an infrastructure which meets the needs of parents. This mapping exercise would support the development by Government of the urgently-needed first national strategy on afterschool services.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs should begin the investment needed by:

Budget Priority 1

Extending the Community Childcare Subvention scheme to all early years services both community and private.

Cost: €50m in 2016.

Budget Priority 2

Extending the current ECCE programme for 3-4 year-olds to 3 hours a day, 5 days per week, for 48 weeks, from 38 weeks.

Cost: €83m in 2016.

Budget Priority 3

Conduct a mapping exercise of all afterschool services run by the State, its agencies and private / community providers.

Cost: €70,000

Irish policy needs to take a medium-term approach and invest in ASC and ECCE in forthcoming Budgets. SVP recommends developing a coherent funding model which links quality provision with improved child outcomes, and includes a reconfiguration of the current universal and targeted childcare and afterschool care schemes. Investment is also required in the existing workforce to bring it up to international levels of qualifications. We also believe that an extension, on a phased basis, of the free, universal ECCE scheme to two-years in duration per child for 48 weeks per year is required.

Given the needs of the families that SVP serves, we ask that an additional budget is allocated to ensure that families with a high level of need referred by GPs, Public Health Nurses or Social Workers, can access ECCE with a 100% public subsidy in community and private provision.

Investing in What Matters in Budget 2016 and Beyond

SVP seeks the type and level of investment in social provision that will ensure greater levels of social and economic participation for low-income households in the economic recovery, and break the cycle of poverty and intergenerational disadvantage for the families and people we visit, house and serve.

SVP recommends a rebalancing of public spending on household incomes with investment in services. VPSJ research (2015) illustrates that in order to be able to afford childcare, a family in the private rented sector, given the high rent levels in Ireland, would have to earn considerably above the National Minimum Wage¹⁵ to ensure that they had a minimum essential standard of living. While having adequate income is central to achieving basic living standards, income alone cannot do all the heavy lifting to move people out of poverty and into opportunity; we also need affordable quality public services, particularly for people on low and average incomes.

A broader strategy and target for Government would be to ensure at all households in Ireland, regardless of their source of income, can access a minimum essential standard of living . The Low Pay Commission provides a valuable opportunity for Government to develop a national policy on income adequacy, and consider the mix of income and services that is required in Ireland to end poverty and to guarantee people, at very least, a minimum essential standard of living.

¹⁵ VPSJ (2015) *Minimum Essential Standard of Living Update 2015*. Dublin: VPSJ

Information on SVP

SVP exists to fight poverty in its various forms. We work for social justice and the creation of a more just, caring nation. Through our wide range of services, from household visitation to premises-based local services, we provide practical support to people in need. Established in 1844, we are the largest, voluntary, charitable organisation in Ireland with 11,500 volunteers and 1,000 staff. SVP is as a volunteer-based, volunteer-led organisation.



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