



Rt Hon Grant Shapps  
Housing Minister  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

12 October 2011

Dear Mr Shapps,

We are members of Homeless Link's Expert Panel – a forum of current and former users of homelessness services in England, who feed into the policy and practice of the organisation.

We are writing now to request a meeting with you to discuss a matter that will become increasingly urgent over the coming months. This relates to funding, but please keep reading because, from our perspective, it is about far more than that.

We realise it might be easy to dismiss a request like this. As individuals, we have been dismissed before, on plenty of occasions – but as a government minister who has done so much to ensure that homelessness is not dismissed from the political agenda (for which we are grateful) we hope you will find some time to listen to us.

Between the members of the Panel we have a considerable depth of experience. We have all been homeless. We have all encountered prejudice and exclusion. We have all experienced frustration at our situations.

But we have all turned our lives around. Many of us now work and volunteer for homelessness services. We have experienced firsthand the positive impact of good work in the sector. We have experienced the negative impact of poor services. We know from experience what people need if they are to be truly supported out of homelessness.

We are all painfully aware that it takes more than a bed to rebuild a life.

And this is where our concerns lie.

Many of the services that have helped us in recent years are no longer able to offer the same support to others. In too many cases, people who only a year ago could have received real life-changing support are now not receiving enough. Perhaps it has become a cliché to say that people are slipping through cracks in provision – but it is true, and it is happening more and more. We are of course referring to the difficulties caused to services by decisions made earlier this year around Supporting People funding. In spite of the best efforts of services, the effect on the people who use them has been devastating.

We accept that in setting budgets, local government *should* know better than central government what services are needed. We *understand* that you feel it is inappropriate to restore the ringfence on Supporting People funding.

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However, we also believe that the outcome is inevitable if you send funding to a local authority and say: “Here is some money to be used for supporting vulnerable adults, but actually you can spend it on anything.” From our perspective, the actions in some areas make a mockery of the term ‘supporting people’ – and it is people who are in genuine need of support who end up bearing the brunt of the joke.

We feel that central government could do more to fulfil its obligation to people whose lives are in such delicate balance that an investment in support for them will mean the difference between addiction and recovery, between a prison sentence and learning new skills, between sleeping rough and a permanent home.

So please meet with us, Mr Shapps. We will share stories with you of what can happen when a person is properly supported out of homelessness. We will share stories with you of what can happen when a person loses that support. We will share our ideas with you on how Supporting People funding can be protected – whether locally or by central government. We can share our thoughts on best practice in services, and how with the right commitment from politicians and funders, what that best practice can achieve for people.

This is not a naïve request from people who know nothing of the way Big Society makes big decisions. It is an informed request from people who know what it takes to change a life. We very much hope we can meet to discuss this further.

To contact us via Homeless Link, please email Claire Burlinson – [claire.burlinson@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:claire.burlinson@homelesslink.org.uk) – or to contact us directly, please email David Ford – [david@davidford.co](mailto:david@davidford.co).

We respectfully await your reply.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Expert Panel:

Tonny Ajoup  
Ronald Cozier  
David Ford  
Dean Johnson  
Terry Makin  
Shaun Pender  
Hazel Walker

Richard Bastian  
Gerry Dickson  
Ranjiv Goonawadana  
Craig Lisle  
Jeff Morgan  
Mike Sanderson  
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