



Dear Councillor

With the announcement of the local authority grant settlement on 13th December 2010, I recognise that you will have many issues demanding your attention. However, I would be very grateful if you could give a little time to consider certain issues that could impact on some of the most vulnerable people in our communities – those who are homeless and need support.

As Grant Shapps, the Minister for Housing and Local Government wrote to you following the Spending Review, “*The Homelessness Grant has been protected, with investment of £400 million and reductions to the Supporting People programme have been minimised, with £6.5bn investment secured over the next four years*”. The lower than average 2.7% reduction in national Supporting People funding for next year reflects the powerful business case, accepted by the Treasury, of the value of supported accommodation in preventing significant public, social and community costs.

These decisions reflected the Spending Review Framework¹ and the national priority to ‘ensure that expenditure is focused on protecting the quality of the key frontline services that are important to the public and that provide support to the worst off in society’ and to ‘make supporting those most in need a priority’. With the maximum cuts to local authorities being set at 8.9%, while still presenting significant challenges, I hope will enable you to do all you can to preserve and sustain services for the most vulnerable in your area.

At this year’s party conferences, I met local councillors and leaders from every party who are working with great dedication to limit the impact on this most vulnerable of groups. However, I am now hearing about proposals to cut homelessness services by very significantly more than the overall reduction to local authorities, rather than less.

The projected increases in unemployment and the changes to Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance are likely to affect many households. Those that are vulnerable with experience of homelessness are least likely to have resilience or alternative ways to cope. We are already seeing a rising number of people flowing onto the streets, with a 20% increase over the last quarter in London, where detailed tracking occurs. Only strenuous and carefully focused activity is limiting the overall number of people who remain there. We all know the long term damage to communities, individuals and the public purse when homelessness rises.

It is absolutely critical that local areas have robust strategies to stop people falling into homelessness and to help people move out of it very speedily. The experience of Canada following deep reductions in public spending, without safety net services, was

¹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/spending_review_framework_080610.pdf

to see homelessness, addiction and criminal offending rise, shown to cost 5 times the preventative programmes that were lost. We have to learn from that example the value of maintaining effective prevention and intervention.

Voluntary sector homelessness services have a strong track record of working in partnership with local government, delivering real change for vulnerable people and the communities they live in.

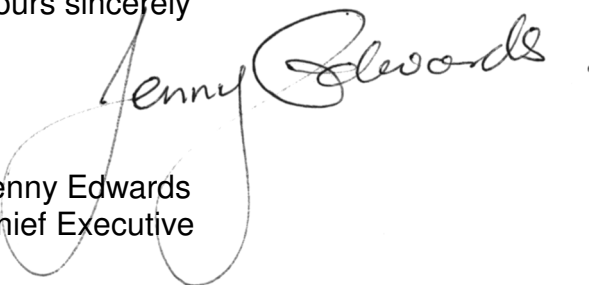
Under the circumstances I would ask you to consider:

- Ensuring that services to homeless people receive funding that matches the intentions of the Spending Review and wherever possible protects services for vulnerable homeless people and as a minimum ensures they receive a better than average outcome.
- Ensuring that there are active discussions between the authority and homelessness charities in your area to help prevent homelessness during any service changes and in the transition to the new Local Housing Allowance arrangements.
- Sharing joint commissioning of services with neighbouring authorities to help preserve and sustain services.
- Extending the length of contracts and reducing monitoring requirements and other demands so that resources can be focused on the delivery of frontline services.

We are developing a national overview of provision and changes and their impact area by area. In the age of localism we are changing to take on the Big Society role of service overview and citizens information, working with our member organisations and their service users. We would welcome information about your local approach and decisions affecting homelessness services for your community, to ensure that our information is accurate and up to date.

We would like to profile the good work of authorities who are taking intelligent steps to protect and enhance support for vulnerable homeless people and to work with you if this applies to your own authority. Please contact me if you would like to discuss this further, provide information directly or to discuss issues with our regional manager.

Yours sincerely



Jenny Edwards
Chief Executive