

BRIEFING:

VISION TO END ROUGH SLEEPING: NO SECOND NIGHT OUT NATIONWIDE FIRST REPORT OF THE MINISTERIAL WORKING GROUP ON TACKLING AND PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

On 6 July Grant Shapps MP, Minister for Housing and Local Government in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched the [first report of the Ministerial Working Group on Preventing and Tackling Homelessness](#).

The Ministerial Working Group brings together eight government departments with the shared aim of preventing and reducing homelessness, and improving the lives of those people who do become homeless. The Working Group acknowledges that homelessness is about more than housing, and therefore addressing homelessness requires cross-Government commitment.

We welcome the first report of the Ministerial Working Group and its focus on rough sleepers and single homeless people 'not in priority need'. We commend the commitment to Government working better together, cross-sector working at a local level and the emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. The aims of the report represent many of the people and issues for which Homeless Link has campaigned. We believe the aims of the report are tough – but achievable.

The Government has set out six priority commitments:

1. Helping People Off the Streets
2. Helping People Access Healthcare
3. Helping people into Work
4. Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens
5. Increasing Local Control Over Investment of Services
6. Devolving Responsibility for Tackling Homelessness

KEY ACTIONS AND THEMES

Within these commitments are a wide range of actions to be undertaken by Government and a range of third sector agencies that have expertise in their respective fields. The report identifies a number of groups who are especially vulnerable to homelessness and thus in need of targeted support, such as care leavers, people with multiple support needs, ex-armed forces staff, people with offending histories, and migrants from EU Accession states. The need for improved cross sector and cross departmental working, at national and local levels, is also central to the report.

No Second Night Out (NSNO)

Homeless Link is gratified to have been tasked with rolling out the principles of NSNO nationally, working with Government and other partners. NSNO aims to ensure that anyone who does spend a night sleeping rough anywhere in the country is immediately helped off the streets. In order to achieve this aim services need to be equipped to provide a swift and effective response. Another key principle of NSNO is the reconnection of clients, where appropriate, to their local community.

Models of delivery will reflect local good practice and needs. Ending rough sleeping is an enormous aspiration, and the NSNO pilot has shown that it is within reach,

Health

We are pleased to see that access to healthcare is one of the priority commitments arising from the Working Group. Of particular interest is the emphasis on the better reflection of the health needs of vulnerable groups in the local needs assessment framework. The National Inclusion Health Board, with whom Homeless Link is already in discussion, will work with local authorities, the NHS and other partners to prevent people being discharged from hospital without accommodation.

The Government has also made a commitment through the introduction of new duties on the NHS Commissioning Board and GP Commissioning Consortia to reduce inequalities in healthcare access and outcomes. Within the healthcare commitments the Government will also highlight the role of dedicated health services for homeless people, and notes the need for specialist dual diagnosis support.

Ex-offenders

The report recognises the importance of the Integrated Offender Management approach in joining up local services and supporting the most chaotic offenders. As homelessness services already know, clients with support needs around offending are over-represented as rough sleepers and in single homeless populations. The Working Group will highlight the findings of recent Homeless Link research into how the criminal justice and homelessness sectors can together better support people to prevent homelessness and reduce reoffending.

Youth homelessness

The Government will promote work that prevents and addresses youth homelessness. In particular, the higher risk of homelessness faced by young people leaving care has been identified as requiring attention. Recent guidance for local authorities highlights the importance of providing housing with support, rather than accommodation alone, for young people experiencing homelessness.

Employment

We support the report's acknowledgement of the multi-sector responsibility to assist people who have experience of homelessness into work. The Working Group has identified access to further education and skills training as a priority, as well as informal adult education as a pathway towards wider learning opportunities. Social enterprises are noted for their ability to deliver training and work opportunities for homeless people. Where clients are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance the Government plans to offer voluntary early access to the Work Programme. The Government will also undertake a review of access to Jobcentre Plus services and employment support for homeless people. Whilst we look forward to the implementation of programmes to assist people into education, training and employment, we are cautious of the ability of the Work Programme as it stands to engage and support those furthest from the labour market.

Migrants

The Government is also committed to addressing homelessness amongst migrants. There are several strands to this, including assisting those local authorities with a significant population of migrants sleeping rough; work with voluntary homelessness services where possible to access

short term accommodation whilst individuals seek work or await reconnection. The Government will also work with voluntary organisations to prepare migrants from EU Accession States before they travel to the UK as part of the prevention strategies. We are greatly encouraged by the decision to provide short term accommodation and that enforcement has been identified as a last resort.

Service User Involvement

We completely support the Working Group's endorsement of the involvement of current and ex-service users. Such involvement may be in many forms, including peer mentoring programmes or through commissioning processes.

Housing Associations

The National Housing Federation is working on a report looking at the role of housing associations in meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable groups, including single homeless people and how this will be developed in the future.

The Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness acknowledges the voluntary and community sector's "excellent track record of delivering innovative solutions" for homeless people. Homeless Link will work with voluntary sector partners to identify and disseminate good practice in helping people off the streets.

Homeless Link July 2011

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