

## **POLICY UPDATE**

### **December 2019**

This update has been prepared by Homeless Link's Policy Team. Please contact Sue Christoforou or Jennie Corbett at [sue.christoforou@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:sue.christoforou@homelesslink.org.uk) [jennie.corbett@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:jennie.corbett@homelesslink.org.uk) for more detail on any item contained within the briefing.

## **1. KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **General Election**

The General Election takes place on Thursday 12 December 2019. Homeless Link is one of the six organisations that have come together to launch the End Homelessness Now campaign (see below).

Upon publication of all the main party manifestos, we have drafted a [roundup](#) of the pledges that the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats have made around ending homelessness and addressing the housing crisis.

Members have been working directly with people experiencing homelessness to help them to register to vote in time for the deadline of 26 November 2019.

## **2. POLICY & CAMPAIGNING UPDATES**

### **End Homelessness Now Manifesto**

Homeless Link has worked alongside five other homelessness organisations to produce a joint Manifesto in advance of the General Election on 12<sup>th</sup> December. The Manifesto comprises five key asks:

1. No one sleeping rough
2. No one living in transient, dangerous or insecure accommodation
3. No one living in temporary forms of accommodation without a plan for rapid rehousing into affordable secure and safe accommodation
4. No one homeless as a result of leaving a state institution such as prison or the care system
5. Everyone at immediate risk of homelessness gets the help that prevents it

The manifesto can be downloaded from <https://endhomelessnessnow.org.uk/our-manifesto/#>

As part of the campaign, Shelter is leading a plan for a hustings event with some members of the campaign along with the National Housing Federation, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). This will be hosted by RIBA, and Homeless Link is a member of the organising group. The event will be live streamed, and at the time of writing Shelter were seeking a media partner and confirming which spokespeople from the parties will attend, as well as sending invitations to a potential chair/moderator, who will be a well-known journalist.

## Homelessness and Housing

### Homelessness Reduction Act Call for Evidence

Homeless Link has responded to the MHCLG Call for Evidence on the HRA. Our response can be found [here](#) alongside a [video we produced with experts by experience](#). We are also taking part in the evaluation commissioned by MHCLG which is being undertaken by IFF Consultancy.

### Repeal of Vagrancy Act

The Scrap the Act campaign led by Crisis will continue following the General Election on 12 December once a new government is formed.

### DWP Operational Stakeholder Group

DWP are piloting a new PRS landlord portal via which landlords can request direct eligible rent payments on the grounds that their tenant has a support need. PRS landlords are not required to evidence their tenants' support need or seek the tenant's permission for direct payment.

The government will allow working-age benefits to rise by inflation next year, ending the benefits freeze.

This month, the maximum rate at which debts could be recovered from universal credit (UC) was reduced from 40% to 30%. This ten percent drop is welcome, yet the reduced rate still means that claimants could lose almost a third of their income in debt repayment every month until those debts are repaid. That translates to a drop in income to just over £220 for claimants aged 25 and over, or a little over £50 a week.

The Salvation Army, Mungo's, as well as DWP Homeless Advisers themselves, have all raised the issue of non-eligible rent no longer being paid directly to landlords as a matter of routine. This has resulted in many clients accruing significant arrears. Mungo's have been advised by DWP that it is unlikely that this issue will be addressed in the next two years, given the number of other UC priorities.

### Domestic Abuse

Along with other partners, Homeless Link signed up to Women's Aid letters to party leaders with key manifesto asks for housing and domestic abuse policy. Key asks included secure funding, housing rights, accessible services for migrants and a 'whole housing' approach.

## MHCLG

### Rough Sleeping Strategy Implementation

Since publication of the Strategy, Homeless Link has continued to sit on the ministerial Task and Finish Group, which in the previous Parliament planned to meet bi-annually to influence the refresh of the strategy, as well as on the Department of Health and Social Care's Rough Sleeping Task and Finish Group which was set up to monitor the health and care related pledges in the Rough Sleeping Strategy. A further set of Task and Finish Groups have been convened by MHCLG on **Legislation, Accountability, Data and Support, Safety on the Streets, Continuous Learning, and Building on Progress.**

## **MHCLG review of supported housing**

IFF Research have been commissioned by MHLG to carry out the review of housing-related support in England, to get an up-to-date picture of current provision. This survey has now closed and we are liaising with MHCLG to try and ascertain early findings from this. Although officials are now in pre-election period, they have asked us for input to their submission for the Spending Review next year to help make the case for continued investment in supported housing. We are also preparing a briefing for new MPs to outline the importance of supported housing and the need for new investment in housing related support.

Last year Homeless Link published research alongside St Mungo's which examined investment in supported housing over the past 10 years, which was carried out by WPI Economics. We are in the process of re-commissioning this to provide an up to date picture of investment going into the sector and help underpin our campaigning on this issue

## **Department of Health and Social Care**

Homeless Link is commissioned by the Department for Health and Social Care to contribute to the work of the Health and Wellbeing Alliance (HW Alliance). As well as proactive core work to engage and develop new pieces of work with system partners (DHSC, Public Health England and NHS England/Improvement) and to share information with the wider voluntary sector on health and homelessness issues, the HW Alliance is currently delivering three pieces of additional work in collaboration with Alliance members on:

- (i) reducing health inequalities for people living with early onset frailty;
- (ii) a new inclusion health audit tool for Primary Care Networks; and
- (iii) a briefing for NHS England/Improvement on multiple disadvantage and the commitments of the Rough Sleeping Strategy with a focus on people leaving the criminal justice system. This last piece of work is being led by Nacro.

Homeless Link is an active member of the HW Alliance's inclusion health sub-group which has delivered influencing work on the Prevention Green Paper and the NHS Long Term Plan.

## **3. HOMELESS LINK HIGHLIGHTS – Update on Homeless Link Projects**

### **Housing First England project**

The research element of the Housing First England project is continuing, looking at how exempt and specified accommodation works in Housing First and how it needs to work, by speaking to policy experts as well as support and accommodation providers. The research team is also planning the creation of an outcomes framework, as a piece of action research with Housing First providers.

On the policy side, we're developing our influencing plan for 2020 with a focus on RSPs and raising the profile of HF in the mental health, criminal justice and drug and alcohol sectors. Scoping reports by experts in each of these sectors have been commissioned and their findings will be the subject of a series of policy roundtable discussions in January 2020. These will be followed by sector-specific summary briefings to make the case for Housing First.

### **Ending Women's Homelessness Grant Programme**

There was a very good response to the call for expressions of interest for the Ending Women's Homelessness grant programme. 29 organisations were awarded funding, the details are [here](#)

### **Youth Homelessness**

We are working with Youth Voice based within St. Basil's in Birmingham on our Young & Homeless research project, with fieldwork due to start in the new year. We have also held 3 more regional youth homelessness networks with practitioners and are working on policy briefings on youth violence and youth services and mental health, for publication in 2020.

### **Making Every Adult Matter – MEAM coalition**

Supported by Homeless Link, MEAM is gearing up on its local policy work, initially working with partners in Redcar and Norwich to develop policy solutions to locally-identified barriers for adults with multiple disadvantage. In Redcar the focus is on alcohol and in Norwich, mental health. MEAM will support local stakeholders to pinpoint issues, develop solutions and a strategy for local change over the first quarter of 2020.

### **Trust for London – UC for single homeless people in London**

Following a capacity hiatus, we are now generating further evidence of the impact of Universal Credit on both single homeless claimants and the workers who support them.

Working in conjunction with the London PLUS team, we are hosting a UC Spotlight event to gather evidence of and solutions to UC issues that impact upon London's homelessness population. Delegates include London-based members, such as SHP, Thames Reach, Look Ahead and the 999 Club. In addition to this, we are running an open survey, sourcing views and experiences from London-based members.

Additional evidence on UC issues and their impact are also being collected from frontline workers and UC claimants themselves and we are developing ideas around digital storytelling, such that these issues have greater traction with key audiences.

We have refreshed the Expert Panel terms of reference, as well as the member and chair role descriptions. We will be recruiting new members, with a focus on people with experience of welfare issues and marginalized groups not currently well represented on the Panel, e.g. women, young people, and migrants, in the New Year.