

POLICY UPDATE

NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

June 2019

This update has been prepared by Homeless Link's Policy Team. Please contact Caroline Bernard at Caroline.Bernard@homelesslink.org.uk for more detail on any item contained within the briefing.

1. KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Prime Minister has announced that she will be stepping down on Friday 7 June 2019. With the possibility of a snap General Election, we have already been working with our larger members on a set of asks that will form the basis of our General Election campaign.

2. POLICY & CAMPAIGNING UPDATES

Homelessness and Housing

Spending Review Inquiry

Homeless Link made a submission to Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee: Local Government Finance and the 2019 Spending Review Inquiry. The response drew on the research commissioned with St Mungo's which shows that overall, more than £5bn less has been spent on homelessness-related activities between 2008/9 and 2017/18 than would have been spent had funding continued at 2008/9 levels. This equates to a reduction of around £590m a year on average since 2008/9 and a reduction of 27% in spending on homelessness services. Our response can be found here:

https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link_HCLG%20spending%20review%20submission.pdf

Repeal of Vagrancy Act

We are working alongside CenterPoint, Shelter, Crisis, and St Mungo's on a campaign calling for repeal of the Vagrancy Act. The campaign has now been launched and you can find resources and information here https://www.crisis.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/scrap-the-vagrancy-act/?utm_source=social&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=scrap_the_act

In June, there will be a cross-party Parliamentary launch of the report, *Scrap the Act: The case for repealing the Vagrancy Act (1824)*, sponsored by Layla Moran MP, Tracey Crouch MP, Rachael Maskell MP and Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP.

MHCLG Consultation: Tackling Homelessness Together

On 21 February 2019 the Government published consultation on *Tackling Homelessness Together: a consultation on structures that support partnership working and accountability in homelessness*. The consultation sought views on how the Government could improve local

The consultation closed on 16 May 2019. Key points raised through the Homeless Link response included:

- Funding cuts have had a cumulative impact on local services being able to work in partnership and on the ability of local authorities and the homelessness sector to effectively tackle homelessness.
- Any new accountability arrangements must facilitate strong local partnership working, embedding outcomes around tackling homelessness across all local strategies. Arrangements should support commissioners, services and people with lived experience to design the best local solutions and ways of measuring success.

- There must be avenues for any accountability structures to hold central government to account for the wider structural causes of homelessness that are outside of the control of local areas. This will be particularly important around changes to local authority funding, access to genuinely affordable housing and on-going changes to the welfare system.
- HWBs, SABs and MARACs should all have a focus on reducing homelessness and disadvantage and enhancing wellbeing of the whole population. They all need to contribute to plans and actions to reduce homelessness and have a focus on prevention.
- In two-tier authorities there should be a clear joint approach between District and County levels, with regional and sub-regional arrangements in place where appropriate.
- For Homelessness Reduction Boards to work effectively they will need to have the power to make decisions and changes. This could work effectively through adequate funding, pooling budgets, and improved guidance.
- Homelessness Reduction Boards will need to be focussed on providing long-term trauma informed housing-led solutions for people experiencing homelessness and housing vulnerability, such as Housing First, and influencing local housing policy, such as local allocation policies for social housing.
- Homelessness Reduction Boards should have specific guidance around who should be involved and all should show a clear commitment to tackling homelessness from a partnership perspective.

Our response can be found at: https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link%20submission_TacklingHomelessnessTogether_May2019.pdf

Affordable Housing Commission

We submitted evidence to the independent Affordable Housing Commission and this can be found at <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link%E2%80%99s%20submission%20to%20the%20Affordable%20Housing%20Commission.pdf>

Welfare Reform

Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry: Universal Credit and Survival Sex

The Work and Pensions Select Committee opened an inquiry in response to ‘the increasing numbers of people—overwhelmingly women— [who] have been getting involved in “survival sex” as a direct result of welfare policy changes.’

Homeless Link made a response to the inquiry based on input from member organisations, and Changing Lives. Key points raised in our submission included:

- The level of income that people receive through Universal Credit (through LHA freeze, 5 week wait and sanctions), and the inaccessibility of making a claim for Universal Credit for some vulnerable people (through reliance on IT, monthly payment schedule) means that some people do not have an income to pay for food, fuel and housing.
- Changing Lives provided Homeless Link with growing evidence of increasing numbers of women involved in ‘survival sex’ as a direct impact of recent welfare policy. When surveying services across five areas of the North East of England, they found that three quarters of services had supported clients who have disclosed involvement in survival sex or sex work as a direct result of Universal Credit. Further, 50% of services have reported an increase in clients disclosing sex work/survival sex as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit.
- Individuals who are at risk of destitution could be considered in turn at a heightened risk of engaging in survival sex. A particular risk factor that has been highlighted to Homeless Link by members would be people leaving prison.
- For Universal Credit to better support claimants, investment will be required so that claimants are able to meet the costs of food, fuel and housing. In particular, this will

mean reviewing the maximum level of LHA, and removing the five week wait for first payment for both new claimants and those migrated onto Universal Credit.

- Further, Universal Credit must be accessible and responsive to the differing requirements of individuals. Of urgency, reform is needed so that Universal Credit supports individuals towards the attainment of IT literacy and money management skills, rather than requiring these skills from the outset.
- Homeless Link recommends that staff within DWP be trained to develop the skills and awareness to avoid stigmatisation and ensure that people are provided with non-judgemental support.
- Given that the experience of trauma is a particular risk factor, Jobcentre Plus should ensure that the built environment is 'psychologically informed,' and that staff are trained in trauma-informed approaches.
- Coordinated approaches, involving working with local Jobcentre Plus and women's services, which are gendered and trauma-informed, are recommended as key to supporting women experiencing multiple disadvantage

Our response can be found here: [https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link UniversalCreditSurvivalSex April2019 FINAL.pdf](https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link%20UniversalCreditSurvivalSex%20April2019%20FINAL.pdf)

Local Housing Allowance Campaign

Homeless Link are supporters of the Crisis #CoverTheCost campaign to bring the Local Housing Allowance in line with the real cost of housing in England. The campaign is calling on Government to invest back into Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and prevent more people from losing their homes. The key ask is for LHA rates to be restored so that they cover at least 30% of local rents in the private rented sector. For more information go to <https://crisis.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/cover-the-cost/>

5 Weeks Too Long

Homeless Link is supporting the Trussell Trust #5WeeksTooLong campaign, representing the experience of people experiencing homelessness. The campaign is asking for an end to the five week wait for Universal Credit payment. To date we have provided a comment for their campaigns page and supported through social media. A homelessness focused week of the campaign is set to take place from 27 June 2019. For more information go to <https://www.trusselltrust.org/five-weeks-too-long/>

Domestic Abuse

Draft Domestic Abuse Bill

This was published on 21 January 2019. This new legislation will:

- introduce the first ever statutory government definition of domestic abuse to specifically include economic abuse and controlling and manipulative non-physical abuse - this will enable everyone, including victims themselves, to understand what constitutes abuse and will encourage more victims to come forward
- establish a Domestic Abuse Commissioner to drive the response to domestic abuse issues
- introduce new Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders to further protect victims and place restrictions on the actions of offenders
- prohibit the cross-examination of victims by their abusers in the family courts
- provide automatic eligibility for special measures to support more victims to give evidence in the criminal courts.

Through our involvement with the APPG on Ending Homelessness and the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group we are supporting influencing work on using this Bill as an opportunity to make fleeing domestic violence an automatic priority need category under the homelessness legislation. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-publishes-landmark-domestic-abuse-bill>

We are named supporters in the APPGEH campaign, 'A Safe Home', which is campaigning to ensure people fleeing domestic abuse have a safe home. We attended the launch of their report in Parliament on 5th June 2019. A copy of the report can be found at https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240459/cr0198_domesticabusebill_appg_report_2019_aw_w_e_b.pdf

3. INFLUENCING

Ministerial and Parliamentary meetings

We had a positive and constructive meeting with Justin Tomlinson MP, who has just been promoted to Minister of State for Disabled People, Health & Work at DWP and also a telephone meeting with his replacement Will Quince MP, Under-Secretary of State for family Support, Housing & Child Maintenance, who was previously the co-Chair of the APPG on Ending Homelessness. We are meeting with Will Quince on the 17th June 2019.

The Homelessness Minister, Heather Wheeler MP spoke at our Rough Sleeping Conference on 27 March 2019.

A series of meetings to share the findings of the "Local authority spending on homelessness report" have taken place during June with Andy Simmons, Research Manager for Helen Hayes MP (Labour), and Mark Prisk MP (Conservative). Meetings have so far been positive, and Parliamentary Questions have been put down asking government for their response to the report, which can be read at

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Local%20authority%20spending%20on%20homelessness%20--%20FULL%20FINAL.pdf>

No. 10

Homeless Link attended a youth homelessness roundtable hosted by one of the PM's Theresa May's Special Advisors, Nero Ughwujabo and celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of Depaul UK. There were senior representatives from youth homelessness charities present along with Heather Wheeler MP, Homelessness Minister and Will Quince MP, DWP Minister. The meetings discussed prevention, the different cohorts of young people who are at risk of homelessness and creating a stronger welfare safety net.

Parliamentary briefings

Universal Credit and Money Management debate

On June 5th there was a Westminster debate on money management and Universal Credit. Homeless Link and St Mungo's sent a briefing to relevant MPs outlining current issues with the system, including

- Waiting 5 weeks for first payment
- Increased deductions from Universal Credit claim
- Low levels of payment
- Monthly payments and housing costs
- Lack of support for claimants

The paper outlines detailed recommendations relating to:

- Reforming Universal Credit so that claimants experiencing homelessness can afford food, fuel and housing without accruing debt
- Ensuring that people experiencing homelessness who are making or managing a Universal Credit claim receive a package of support and payment cycle that is tailored to their individual circumstances.

Government Department Engagement

DWP

Universal Credit Managed Migration Partnership event

Homeless Link has continued to be represented at DWP Managed Migration Partnership events, which look at how the DWP will pilot moving people over to universal Credit from legacy benefits. Homeless Link has raised issues relating to the barriers people experiencing homelessness have faced with Universal Credit, using information gained from member engagements and our work with the Expert Panel.

MHCLG

Rough Sleeping Strategy Implementation

To feed in to the annual refresh of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy in the autumn, MHCLG have convened a new set of task and finish groups to create a forum to provide recommendations, advice and challenge. Homeless Link is represented on each of these groups and these are:

- Safety on the Streets – looking at tackling issues related to street activity, safeguarding and deaths on the street and tents and encampments.
- Legislation, Accountability, Data and Support – this group is taking a holistic look at what local areas need – the structures, tools and how success is measured.
- Continuous Learning – looking at how best to share learning and best practice across areas and sectors, as well as what mixture of interventions and approaches are working, and why.

The Rough Sleeping Advisory Group is set to meet up later in June 2019.

Review of Homelessness Reduction Act

In order to inform MHCLG's review of the Homelessness Reduction Act, Homeless Link are a represented on the working group feeding in to the review. There was a meeting on 22 May 2019, which explored the questions that the review should cover.

MHCLG oversight for supported housing

We have also been attending various workshops with officials, National Housing Federation and the wider sector to feed into the development of the oversight regime. We are also on the advisory group for the research into housing-related support.

Department of Health and Social Care

Homeless Link is a member of the Department of Health and Social Care led Informal Advisory Group on Rough Sleeping which began in August 2018. At the May 2019 meeting, Homeless Link co-delivered a presentation on end of life care and homelessness with Hospice UK, based on the evidence from our Health and Wellbeing Alliance project, Care committed to me.

<https://www.hospiceuk.org/what-we-offer/publications>

4. HOMELESS LINK HIGHLIGHTS – Update on Homeless Link Projects

Housing First England project

The research element of the Housing First work is progressing, with the community impact and support journey research reports currently being finalised. The economic impact report was published in March 2019 and has been well received.

https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20cost%20effectiveness%20of%20Housing%20First%20in%20England_March%202019.pdf

The Housing First evaluation is complete, with the commissioned report published in March 2019

<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Housing%20First%20England%20project%20evaluation%20March%202019.pdf>

The next phase of Housing First research is in the planning stage, with our involvement in the MHCLG evaluation and discussions under way to build links with the social housing sector.

Towards inclusive workplaces

Homeless Link is leading a project involving eight other Alliance members as well as the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA), and Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM). Funded by Public Health England (PHE), the project will produce a microsite Directory to help employers to embed good practice approaches supporting disabled people, people with long-term health conditions and/or people from protected characteristic groups towards, into and to stay in work. As part of the development of the Directory, we issued a Call for Evidence for examples of national and local employment support initiatives and “success stories” helping people towards, into and to stay in work. These calls for evidence were developed into a set of case studies for inclusion in the Directory.

We worked with Claire Ritchie (No one Left Out) to develop a toolkit for employers that focuses on supporting employees using the Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) approach. A number of workshops with employers and people with lived experience took place to inform the toolkit.

The Directory is currently out for testing with a soft launch planned for September 2019.

Ending Women’s Homelessness

Homeless Link has been awarded £2million by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMs) to deliver onward grants to charities working with women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in England. The Ending Women’s Homelessness grant programme aims to provide charities, both large and small, with resources to develop effective gender and trauma-informed services, and encourage cross-sector working between the homelessness and women’s sectors.

There will be two strands of grants:

- Large grants of up to £100,000 – open to all charities, deadline August 2019
- Small grants of up to £30,000 – open to charities with turnover less than £2m, deadline September 2019.

The first grants panel meeting is Tuesday 11th June with the programme due to be formally launched at the end of June 2019. For more information go to

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2019/may/31/ending-women%E2%80%99s-homelessness-homeless-link%E2%80%99s-tampon-tax-fund-grants>

Youth Homelessness

We formally launched our Youth Homelessness project in April 2019 and over the next 5 years we are aiming to increase the national representation of youth homelessness organisations. We want to identify current gaps in knowledge and practice, and support the sector in improving their response to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. You can find more information at <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2019/apr/29/launch-of-new-youth-homelessness-project>