

# POLICY UPDATE

## September 2017

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### 1. KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The timing of the General Election followed by the summer recess means that there has not been a large amount of parliamentary business in the last few months. There are number of announcements we are expecting in the Autumn, including further consultation on the supported housing proposals, details on the statutory guidance on the Homelessness Reduction Act, the Autumn Budget and other publications. We will continue to keep members updated on these developments.

#### Queen's Speech

The Queens Speech took place on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017 and outlined the Government's legislative agenda for the next two years. While legislation related to Brexit will dominate, there were a few relevant announcements to Homeless Link members:

- Ban charging tenants 'letting fees' to improve transparency, affordability and competition in PRS and measures to enforce the ban
- A Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill to update the law around domestic abuse and violence
- Reform of mental health legislation and ensuring that mental health is prioritised in the National Health Service in England
- Work to address the challenges of social care for ageing population, bringing forward proposals for consultation
- The Prison and Courts Bill was mentioned as a courts bill only
- Proposals to ensure more homes are built as outlined in the Housing White Paper

You can read more about the Queen's Speech and what it might mean for people experiencing multiple and complex needs here: <http://meam.org.uk/policy/supporting-the-government-to-improve-the-lives-of-people-with-multiple-needs/>

#### Manifesto commitments

There were also a number of relevant commitments in the Conservative manifesto, many of which do not require legislative change and were therefore not included in the Queen's Speech:

##### *Housing and homelessness*

- Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act – we are expecting the statutory guidance to be published
- Halving rough sleeping over the course of this parliament and eliminating it by 2027
- Establishing a new Homelessness Reduction Taskforce, focused on prevention and affordable housing
- Piloting Housing First projects
- A million homes by the end of 2020 and half a million more by the end of 2022 and greater flexibility to housing associations to increase their housing stock
- Improve protections for those who rent, including looking at increasing security for tenants and encouraging landlords to offer longer tenancies as standard

### *Welfare and employment*

- No plans for further radical welfare reform
- Continued roll-out of Universal Credit
- Incentives for employers to take on people who have found it difficult to get into employment in the past

### *Health and social care*

- Increase NHS spending by at least £8 billion in real terms over the next five years, with a further investment of £1 billion in mental health by 2020/21
- Expected consultation on social care funding

### *Criminal justice*

- Drug and mental health support to prisoners who require it
- Dedicated provision for women in contact with the criminal justice system
- Plans to have Police and Crime Commissioners on health and wellbeing boards, to improve the co-ordination of mental health services with the police and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services

You can read more about these commitments in our post-election blog

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2017/jun/09/what-election-result-means-for-our-sector>

## **2. POLICY UPDATES**

### **Homelessness and housing**

#### **Parliamentary research briefings**

Over the past few months, the House of Commons Library has published a number of relevant briefings:

- Statutory homelessness in England  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01164>
- Households in temporary accommodation  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN02110>
- Private rented sector policies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7955>
- Banning letting agent fees in England  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7955>
- Migrants and housing  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/POST-PN-0560>
- Affordable housing  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7747>

You can find a full list of Commons Library briefings on the Parliament website:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/>

#### **APPG report on ending homelessness**

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (APPGEH) has conducted research into homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. The APPGEH brought together MPs from different political parties, experts from across sectors (including Homeless Link, who sit on the Steering Group alongside other members), front line organisations and people with lived experience together to develop policy solutions.

As overarching recommendations, the APPGEH called for:

- Government to establish a joined up, cross-government strategy to prevent homelessness.

- Departments to work in partnership to audit existing policies and design programmes to specifically support care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence.

Further detailed recommendations include:

- National Government should exempt all care leavers from the Shared Accommodation Rate up to the age of 25.
- Local authorities should use their existing powers to exempt care leavers from council tax until the age of 25.
- National Government should abolish intentionality for care leavers aged 18-25.
- National Government should extend priority need status to all survivors of domestic violence.
- Local authorities should work with local domestic violence support services to obtain alternative solutions to identification and official documents so people fleeing domestic violence can proceed with their homelessness application.
- Local authorities should accept all survivors of domestic violence under the local connection criteria of the homelessness legislation.
- DCLG and the Home Office should provide joint funding for new Housing First models for survivors of domestic violence.
- The Ministry of Justice should obligate prison Governors to introduce integrated transition plans for all prisoners and introduce measurable housing outcomes for Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs).
- We recommend that local authorities and Job Centre Plus develop partnerships with their local prisons to allow for data sharing of prisoner information.

The full report can be found here: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/appg-for-ending-homelessness/all-party-parliamentary-group-for-ending-homelessness-report-2017-pdf/>

### **LGA report on temporary accommodation**

The Local Government Association published *Housing Our Homeless Households*, which explores councils' responses to the increasing demand for temporary accommodation, with recommendations and tools for other councils to replicate activity in their areas. The report is available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/housing-our-homeless-households-full-report>

### **Welfare**

#### **Bank accounts and Universal Credit**

Members have reported to us difficulties in opening bank accounts for people experiencing homelessness. Being un-banked has been a challenge to receiving Universal Credit payments, with Post Office accounts being the traditional alternative option for those without a bank account.

Recently, members have advised that some Job Centre Plus are advising that Post Office accounts are no longer valid and there is no alternative way of getting paid. Further, to make a claim for Universal Credit claimants have to enter details of their bank account before they can proceed.

Homeless Link has been in communications with officials to provide a solution. The Department has now made changes so that it is now clear on the Universal Credit public webpages that 'If you can't open or manage a bank, building society or credit union account - Contact the office that pays your benefit to find out how to get it paid.' Further, we have been advised that 'Internal communications have been issued to Work Coaches to remind them that where a claimant is unable to open or manage a transactional account, DWP can pay Universal Credit in to a Post Office card account.'

Homelessness agencies looking to support people to receive their Universal Credit payment should be aware that Post Office accounts are valid, and should re-iterate this information

where challenged. Homeless Link will be advising officials where we here from members that Post Office accounts are not being accepted.

## Health and social care

### Drug strategy

The Government has released a new Drug Strategy, which has much continuity with the previous strategy. However, there is a focus on the complexity and range of needs that people experience alongside drug harms, recognising links between substance misuse and a range of other issues, particularly mental ill health, homelessness, interpersonal violence and contact with the criminal justice system.

The strategy calls for closer coordination between drug and alcohol treatment services and other key agencies in the homelessness, health care and employment sectors as well as the criminal justice system. There is recognition that women who have experienced physical and sexual violence are more likely to misuse substances, and that there are specific risks faced by women involved in prostitution. There is also a commitment to provide more support to people involved in the criminal justice system who have drug problems, particularly through liaison and diversion and drug rehabilitation requirements.

The strategy states that the government will set out “framework of joint measures, improving outcomes across key domains” including homelessness and housing, crime and offending, mental health and employment. A new Drug Strategy Board will be chaired by the Home Secretary, there is a commitment to local areas involving service users in the design of the response to the strategy and a national recovery champion with lived experience will be appointed.

As part of MEAM we responded to the drug strategy and this can be found at <http://meam.org.uk/policy/meam-agenda-and-ava-respond-to-new-government-drug-strategy/>  
The strategy can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drug-strategy-2017>

## Criminal justice

### NAO report on mental health in prisons

In June, the National Audit Office published its report on mental health in prisons. The report highlighted significant issues around the identification of people who need mental health support, the difficulties prisons face managing people’s wellbeing in light of other pressures and the lack of continuity of care post-release: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Mental-health-in-prisons.pdf>

### Clinks state of the sector report

Clinks released their state of the sector report, which explores how voluntary organisations working in criminal justice are faring. The report highlighted how service user needs are becoming more complex and immediate (80% of organisations agreed or strongly agreed that needs had become more complex, and 79% said they had become more immediate). 61% of organisations support people with mental health needs, 60% support people with problematic substance misuse issues and 45% support people who are homeless.

A range of factors were identified as are impacting on service user need; a reduction in other services (though a few organisations stressed that the needs of their service users hadn’t changed but were being exacerbated as other services were unable to meet their needs), the prison environment (e.g. the use of psychoactive substances and rising violence, suicide and self-harm), and changes to the welfare system (leading to increased anxiety and the ability to access housing). [http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/clinks\\_state-of-the-sector-2017\\_final-web1.pdf](http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/clinks_state-of-the-sector-2017_final-web1.pdf)

### 3. INFLUENCING

#### **New MPs**

Following the election, we contacted all new MPs, relevant ministers, shadow ministers and MPs who had previously spoken about homelessness and supported housing. We highlighted our ongoing concerns about the supported housing proposals and the detrimental impact they would have on other key Government and cross-party priorities, such as ending rough sleeping and promoting independence. You can find a copy of this briefing on our website:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Parliamentary%20Briefing%20-%20supported%20housing%20-%20June%202017.pdf>

#### **Ministerial meetings**

We met Caroline Dinenage, Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance in July, along with St Mungo's, Shelter, Crisis, YMCA England. We raised concerns about the supported housing proposals and the impact of Universal Credit roll-out.

We have a meeting scheduled with Marcus Jones, Minister for Local Government on 6<sup>th</sup> September, and Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

#### **Lord Best meeting**

We met with Lord Best in July alongside St Mungo's, Riverside, Home Group, National Housing Federation, Housing and Care 21 and Hanover. This group has met a few times regarding the supported housing proposals, and this most recent meeting was an opportunity to discuss the recommendations of the joint Select Committee report. Following this meeting, Lord Best has secured a meeting with the chairs Frank Field and Clive Betts to discuss the recommendations in more detail. Riverside has also done some work on the idea of a banded Supported Housing Allowance, as recommended in the report. We will be attending, along with Riverside and Home Group.

#### **Party conference**

We will be attending the Labour and Conservative party conferences and are approaching MPs for meetings in collaboration with St Mungo's. Jo Prestidge, our Housing First England manager, is speaking at a CSJ event on Housing First at both conferences.

#### **Joint briefing on Universal Credit**

Homeless Link, alongside Centrepoin, Crisis, Depaul, Shelter and St Mungo's, are developing a call to Government re: Universal Credit, calling government to address concerns and implement the following recommendations (draft):

- Recommendation 1: A money management package should be developed for individuals identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness at the beginning of a Universal Credit claim. This should include a realistic financial offer to support people through the assessment period and enable them to manage their finances going forward, without falling into debt. It must include removing the 7 day waiting period from people who are homeless, as well as access to reformed advance payments. Advanced payments should become more generous, and their punitive re-payment terms altered to ensure that they can be paid back over at least 12 months in every case.
- Recommendation 2: All individuals identified as homeless should be granted Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs), as standard, from the beginning of their claim. They should automatically be given more frequent payments and, in the case of individuals who receive the housing element of Universal Credit, rent payments direct to their landlord. These APAs should be reviewed regularly and should not be removed without a consultation with the claimant.

**The call will be sent to MPs in time for party Conferences. We are also exploring co-ordinating the call with the Child Poverty Action Group, Citizens Advice Bureau, Residential Landlords Bureau and organisations involved in the Social landlords Trusted Partner pilots.**

## **MEAM asks document**

MEAM have developed a national asks document to influence MPs. The document calls on government to bring about national change to remove barriers faced by people with multiple needs.

Specifically, the coalition is calling on government to take the following steps:

- Show leadership as a government for tackling both the causes and consequences of multiple needs.
  - Publicly commit to support people who are at risk of developing multiple needs and respond effectively to those who are experiencing them.
  - Ensure that government strategies on homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and criminal justice reflect the way these issues combine and reinforce each other
- Take a collaborative approach across government so that every department is working together to address multiple needs, modelling the approach that local areas have shown can work.
  - Come to an agreement at the heart of government on shared outcomes and accountability.
  - Consult with local areas, the voluntary sector and people with lived experience to develop the outcomes we want to see.
- Set the clear expectation to every local area that they must take effective action to support people with multiple needs.
  - Use the learning from MEAM Approach and Fulfilling Lives areas to ensure that every area adopts an approach that brings together different agencies to prevent and respond to multiple needs.
  - Allow commissioners and services to come up with the best solutions to dealing with the problem, and ways of measuring success, drawing on the insights of people with lived experience.
- Make sure flexible funding is available that encourages services to work together and allows them to respond to local needs.
  - Provide secure, long-term funding to address multiple needs rather than tying it to narrow outcomes that prevent local areas from developing a joined-up response.
  - Protect funding to key services that prevent people's needs from escalating, and ensure that a sustainable funding base is available for small voluntary organisations that meet specific needs

The document will initially be shared with MPs at the forthcoming party conferences.

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

### **Housing First**

We have produced two new pieces of guidance for support providers and Registered Social Landlords that were well received. A third piece of guidance for commissioners will be published in early September. The evaluation of the Housing First England project was awarded to CFE Research and is under way.

### **Under One Roof**

Homeless Link's annual conference, Under One Roof, took place 4 and 5 July with full attendance. Delegates engaged with a wide range of keynote speakers such as Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick of Heriot Watt University, and Juha Kakinen, CEO of Y-Foundation in

Finland. Workshops included sessions on the Homelessness Reduction Act, supporting non-EEA migrants, and homeless women.

### **Young and Homeless**

In early September 2017, Homeless Link will be undertaking its annual survey on youth homelessness with homelessness service providers and local authorities across England. Our sixth Young and Homeless Study (jointly funded by Land Aid and Comic Relief), explores how trends in youth homelessness and support provision have changed over time and between different geographical regions. If you work with young people in your service then please do take the time to complete the questionnaire survey. More information can be found at <http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2017/aug/30/researching-youth-homelessness-why-it-matters>

### **Annual Review: Support for Single Homeless People in England 2017**

We are at the stage of analysing the survey data and then will be writing the final report.

### **Data Dive**

The Data Dive 2 day event, sponsored and hosted by Bloomberg and held in partnership with DataKind over the weekend of 29 and 30 July, brought a group of volunteer data scientists together to analyse a range of data from In-Form and StreetLink. Some interesting insights have been captured and we are taking the learning forward immediately.

### **Health and Wellbeing Alliance additional work**

Homeless Link has been successful in securing two pieces of additional work as part of the Health and Wellbeing Alliance. We are jointly leading the development of an audit tool to look at reducing health inequalities amongst inclusion health groups with Friends Families and Travellers, and we are providing expert input to work led by Hospice UK on tackling inequalities in end of life care for minority groups. The second tranche of funding for additional work has just been announced, and Homeless Link is currently speaking to a number of members about a bid for funds to develop a learning resource and toolkit for public health nurses, to reduce health inequalities for homeless families.

### **Good Practice Guidance**

Homeless Link has recently published three new practice guides: "Taking action when someone dies while street homeless"; "Supporting LGBTQ+ people in homelessness services"; and 'Supporting Couples'. These can be found at <http://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources>