

All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness



First evidence session on the APPGEH's inquiry into the Government's progress towards ending rough sleeping in England by 2024

24th May 5pm-6pm Committee Room 19, House of Commons

Attendees:

Bob Blackman MP, APPGEH Co-Chair
Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill, APPGEH Vice-Chair
Lord Lipsey

Parliamentary staff:

Hattie Shoosmith, Office of Bob Blackman MP
Sophie Clarke, Office of Robin Millar MP

Secretariat:

Emily Batchelor, Secretariat to APPGEH

Other:

Serena Smith, Crisis
LaToyah Gill, Crisis
Saskia Neibig, Crisis
Steve Lee, Crisis
Maeve McGoldrick, Crisis
Ciara Devlin, Crisis
Sophie Boobis, Homeless Link
Marika Van Harskamp, New Horizons Youth Centre
Kiran Ramchandani, Crisis
Katy Parker, Connection at St Martin's
Fran Busby, SLAM NHS
Sam Pratt, Shared Health
Carlotta Rauch, Southwark Council
Lizzi Hearn, NHF
Emily Cretch, Centrepoint
Rebecca Pawley, Together Leicester
Lucy Holmes, Groundswell
Eleanor Greenhalgh, Solace Women's Aid
Daphne Power, MyBnk
Rob Anderson, Centre for Homelessness Impact
Hannah Keilloh, CIH
Victor Macauley, the Running Charity
Alex Eagle, the Running Charity

Panellists:

- **Matt Downie**, Chief Executive at Crisis
- **Felix**, New Horizons Youth Centre
- **Councillor Pippa Heylings**, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Deputy Chair of the LGA Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board
- **Hannah**, Together Leicester

Welcome and apologies	
Introductions	
Bob Blackman MP (Chair)	<p>Bob Blackman (BB) welcomed everyone to the session, noting that this is the first of 3 evidence sessions. Under Everyone In, the Government halved rough sleeping but there's still a lot of work to do.</p> <p>Rough sleeping has increased since the easing of restrictions. 300 thousand people are sleeping on sofas at any one time, and "people sofa surfing eventually run out of friends, which means they can end up on the street."</p> <p>Also, 7% of renters are in serious rent arrears. If they end up with more than 8 months of arrears they can be evicted. These are potentially tomorrow's rough sleepers. Government will be posting a new rough sleeping plan soon. Domestic abuse survivors and prison leavers are also main concerns. Too many people stuck in temporary accommodation</p>
Matt Downie, Chief Executive, Crisis	<p>Matt Downie (MD) said that we are unlikely to end rough sleeping by 2024 with the current strategy, but "we've been seeing the best and most important progress on rough sleeping that there's been for years."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are seeing close work between Eddie Hughes and other ministers and departments. EI has contributed to a better understanding of the interlinking of health and homelessness/rough sleeping. EI is a benchmark that's buoying everyone up. - Local authorities want to be left alone to work locally but clarity from central government helps – Everyone In offered that. <p>Going forwards, the DLUHC financial settlement on rough sleeping is good, now they're rewriting the Rough Sleeping Strategy. Matt gets asked "What is the one thing that could be put in the strategy?" but if it's one thing it's not a strategy. There is no silver bullet but prevention is the right approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We know who is sleeping rough and why they become rough sleeper, and who the cohorts are: care leavers, prison leavers, relationship breakdown. Prevention is the number one thing that's needed and it's a cross government piece of work to achieve this. Unless we transform the prison estate, the care system, immigration system, the flow of rough sleeping won't stop. - Cost of living crisis is an emergency. Local housing allowance has been too low for too long. Whether you see LHA as an emergency method or a long term solution it still needs to be change - Rough sleeping numbers have come down, but the number of people rough sleeping with complex needs hasn't. Still too restrictive. Housing first needs to be provided better and until this changes we won't see the housing demand with those of complex needs come down. When you look at Scotland and Wales, the difference is temporary accommodation vs own home housing, this is the major difference for those that require support. For people with complex needs, it's a small cohort and "we can do this, absolutely" <p>For Bob's Homelessness Reduction Act, the rough sleeping priority category was dropped in negotiations. The one thing that still stands is that people are still turned away back to the streets and told they are not a priority.</p>
Bob Blackman MP	<p>BB extended his sympathy to Steve Douglas CBE passing, and welcomed his colleagues and family who are present.</p>
Felix, New Horizons Centre	<p>Felix (F) said the he was here to share his experience and specific challenges. He shared his story:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He moved to London last October, once he'd had an offer from a friend who encouraged him to move. The environment was very unsafe due to the roommate hosting chemsex parties and pressuring him into drugs and sexual activities. He tried to refuse to participate and realised how dangerous the situation was. - He left this environment and moved into another place, where he paid the weekly rent to the other tenant, who was controlling and predatory. Eventually, Felix found out that he hadn't been paying the rent to the landlord, when an eviction notice was served. - Felix approached Westminster council but was turned away several times. The abusive housemate had used Felix in his own homelessness application, and they wouldn't let him apply separately. - London Friends' services offered regular counselling, daily calls and supported him to contact other services: "he made me see I wasn't having to face this alone, and I did matter" - Alexander Kennedy Trust (AKT) helped him by paying for him to stay in backpackers' hostels, but he never felt like he could properly rest there. - The turning point was when he got into the New Horizons emergency accommodation – it was a breathing space. They helped him to move into a rented home. <p>He reflected on homelessness that it can be categorised into a general manner but "the challenges people face will always be unique to the individual." Each story of homelessness is a unique experience so support needs to be personalised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - His homelessness was "mentally draining to an extreme level" and the mental health challenges and traumatic experiences are still with him. "Everyday was a constant mental battle, even for basic hygiene" - He spoke about being highly demotivated: "How did I find the strength to keep going? It came from the support workers – in their eyes I wasn't a burden or a failure." - Having the opportunity to stay in emergency accommodation was a massive part of rebuilding his future. - He said that the stigma of homelessness is part of the problem. We need to tackle the sense of shame and failure. Felix didn't know much about homelessness and more education and support for young people would help, especially for LGBT+ young people. A single mistake can destroy a life. - Everyone has a right to feel valid in their experience and worthy of help, that they're not just a number. - Ultimately, "it's that combined compassion and care that saves lives." Its our duty to share and to show compassion.
Councillor Pippa Heylings	<p>The Councillor (PH) reflected on Felix's contribution to say that it's painful to see a local authority didn't respond the right way. She reflected on what's been done in the last three years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political and financial will at all levels made a real difference during the pandemic. The collaboration of this has allowed these new lower levels of rough sleeping to arise. - Local authorities have really appreciated the funds that have come through the SR. The 3 year settlement is helpful compared to the short-term money during the pandemic. <p>"Under the water, what's looming is the larger iceberg: the wider reasons that someone can end up homeless."</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The lack of social housing is one reason, but not the main reason in her view. - Cost of living crisis: in Cambridge we are now seeing people that have never been in debt before now facing struggles due to the rise of the cost of living including rent rising. - South Cambridge is hosting the highest number of Ukrainian refugees in the country. That's something to be proud of, but, if there is a breakdown between the host and families that's homelessness. PH reflected on F's comments about the stigma people will feel in that kind of situation. - We need to do more preventative work, and think about how that works. - PH said that the Government to urgently deliver on the review of exempt accommodation. - In the pandemic we saw local authorities working with health sector for the first time and it worked because it was a on a national level driving this. - We need a national strategy of those with complex offences like sexual offences and arson. - We need a wrap around strategy for those hosting Ukrainian refugees. - Non-UK nationals make up 25% of rough sleeping, so we need to review NRPF conditions. Ending homelessness needs to be the focus
<p>Hannah, Together Leicester</p>	<p>Hannah (H) thanked everyone for the opportunity to talk, and shared her story of how she ended up homeless. It's been about 3 years, and she's still classed as homeless. She's in emergency temporary accommodation at the moment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her former partner was well off, while she was a primary school teacher. Her partner convinced her to sell her car and quit her job. She later learned the terms financial abuse and coercive control, which described her situation. She was emotionally, physically and financially abused. She had no access to her bank account which was in his name. She had to get out for her health. - She only managed to get out when she received some inheritance, and she managed to rent from a private landlord until her money ran out. Because of the state of her mental health following the relationship, she hadn't found work or claimed benefits. She had no rental agreement so when she stopped paying rent, he changed the locks and threw all of her things in the garden. - She'd been living in the county of Leicestershire, so she went to Leicester city council offices, and told them she had nowhere to live and would be on the street. The council officer was very unsympathetic. She directed Hannah to the only hostel in town, the Dawn Centre. They have a capacity of roughly 40 (2/3 men, 1/3 women), with a queue outside and first come first served entry at 6pm. After waiting until 6 for admission, they refused Hannah entry, but after she broke down and cried, they admitted her. She found it odd that they assessed her admission based on that reaction, rather than vulnerability or need. It was largely based on maintaining the ratio of male to female residents. - After a few nights there, Hannah was directed to another hostel by Action Homelessness, which was mixed accommodation, despite staff knowing about her history of domestic abuse. She was left to cope by herself, and struggled. There was a shared bathroom, but

	<p>“I found some nights I didn’t feel safe enough to leave my room and go to the toilet.” She didn’t feel safe. This was 2 years ago.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In September, she learned how to bid on social housing. You need a computer, internet access and email. It’s taken her two years to get them, and there’s an expected 2-3 year wait until she’ll get something, making a likely total of five years homelessness. <p>H feels that the key things is to identify the core root of homelessness. “Target the root cause, a lot of people get properties but have additions and then they lose it, it's just a revolving door because they can't manage, and they don't have the support they need.” Domestic abuse support and drug and alcohol support are key to this.</p>
<p>Questions to panellists</p>	<p>BB opened up the Q&A session:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BB asked about the need for affordable social housing. What does the government have to do to meet this? <p>PH said that it can't just be a product of market housing, there needs to be provision of affordable social housing. There are unscrupulous non-registered private renters, especially in exempt accommodation. Local authorities are worried about the number of people that offering housing that aren't registered or affordable and able to chuck people onto the street.</p> <p>MD said that affordable housing supply has disappeared, and this is because of all the changes that has been made in the sector. 90,000 social rented units a year is what we need to start catching up. The rules used to deny people assistance is because local authorities don't have enough housing to support people into. Social housing is needed because it's the lowest cost of rent. It can be seen as a ghettoised way of housing people, it's not, it's just cheaper and more affordable for people on lower incomes. Exempt accommodation is like a renting black market where people are able rent to people and charge whatever they like. “It's absolutely scandalous” Bob's select committee are looking at this and the Government seem interested in doing something about it.</p> 2. BB asked F and H what the impact of support was on them? <p>F said that once he knew the eviction was coming, he just spent the week lying in bed counting down the days until he knew there was no option. He assumed he was going to kill himself. He had just kicked his drug addiction, and this news crushed him. In contact with Stonewall and got support from AKT, New Horizons. Without that, he could have struggled to do this – it gave him the motivation to keep going.</p> 3. BB asked F to explain what the level of support he was offered. <p>F said that Stonewall explained local connection tests to him, and said he would need leave London to get help. Someone then did a referral to 18-24 hotel, when I was there that was the biggest support, it was a lot: “I got encouraged to eat food, and that was the level of support that I needed” He was scared when he was going there, and didn't know what to expect. He met the manager and they were nice they told him to relax and they would meet on Monday. He could go to sleep.</p>

H said that in her initial interactions with the council, she felt stigmatised and dismissed because she didn't fit stereotypes. She was given a very basic assessment on arrival at the Dawn Centre, and wasn't given any support until she got to the Action Homelessness hostel. She was given a keyworker, but there's a lot of staff turnover, which she believes is because the staff are overworked and underpaid. It feels chaotic and one person will have 20 cases to support. The people that make the most fuss and noise get the most attention, but she's a quiet person so didn't receive any support. "I hide what I've been through and how it's affected me so I got very basic support.... That personal touch was never there." She was signposted to Inclusion Healthcare. Her GP put her on a waiting list for counselling 2 years ago and she's still on a waiting list. It could be another year.

The only support was people asking her the same invasive questions over and over again: "I just looked like a number once I was homeless. When you become homeless, it's like you become fair game to ask anything, with very private details. You're made to feel very exposed and vulnerable – victimised really."

She found this charity through my own will power and that's how she's managed to get here.

There's a lack of support for women – nothing felt tailored to this experience.

PH said that during Covid in order to work across sectors there was some waving of data-sharing barriers, and that was useful. When there's no data-sharing, you have to ask over and over again and you have to give specific answers to trigger a response, and you can be retraumatised.

H said that it would help, as she's had to repeat it to so many services, council, GP, charities, which has been quite traumatising.

H's support worker highlighted the importance of data being captured correctly before being shared.

PH said that it was done successfully during the pandemic and can be done again. CHAIN is the cross-London system to share data across services, which would help elsewhere.

4. An audience member who is working on developing a cross-London women's strategy for homelessness support asked about women always being left off because there are so many competing priorities. How do we address that?

MD said that he wants this inquiry to ask and answer that question, and that in his view, it comes back to prevention. When approached on homelessness, the state just does the 5 tests, but they don't consider why people might respond differently to those questions.

Homelessness breaks down into specific cohorts and the response needs to be different for each cohort. Housing First has been adapted for women escaping domestic abuse and it's so useful.

Specialisation for each cohort is needed, and every local authority ought to know what each cohort requires, not one size fits all.

H said that services need to provide a physical separate provision for different groups: men, women and LGBT+ people etc.

	<p>Also, listening is part of it. There are no communications between people with lived experiences and councils. They need to seek feedback, and be incentivised to consider lived experienced at a local level. They would identify meaningful improvements that way.</p> <p>BB discussed the homelessness amendment brought to Domestic Abuse Bill, which was really important. Someone who has experienced abuse shouldn't be able to be found by an abusive partner.</p> <p>BB also noted that we still have 12000 Afghan refugees left in hotels For Everyone In, he challenged ministers on the level of data for who is left to support, and there's also no local data on NRPF levels. This poses a challenge.</p>
Bob Blackman MP	BB thanked members of the panel and audience, reminder of two more sessions to submit evidence.
Actions and deadlines	Secretariat to send around minutes to attendees and Chair.