



Crisis' response to the DWP consultation – Supporting people into work: the next stage of Housing Benefit reform

February 2010

Introduction

Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DWP's consultation on Housing Benefit reform. For sometime now, we have been campaigning for reform of the Housing Benefit system which currently causes significant problems for claimants. In particular, Housing Benefit (HB) can have a real impact upon both housing security and people's capacity to move into and sustain work. Housing Benefit is central to housing and welfare to work policy and delivery, yet too often it has not had sufficient focus and has been viewed as "too hard to handle". We are therefore delighted that the Government has now finally delivered on its commitment to review the system of HB and to consult on reforms – it is vital, however, that the opportunity is used to really deliver the bold reform that is needed.

Many of the people we work with have been out of the labour market for some years and so need specialist support, which we provide. However, too many of our clients are frustrated in their efforts to find work by the Housing Benefit system. The system is hugely complex, and overly sensitive to changes in circumstances offering little security to claimants with fluctuating incomes. But perhaps the most disheartening problem with Housing Benefit is the way the steep withdrawal rates confound people's attempts to get themselves out of the unemployment and poverty traps through working.

We also know from our clients the impact problems with Housing Benefit can have on their ability to find suitable housing and to sustain a tenancy and how issues with Housing Benefit can in fact contribute to people's homelessness. In a recent survey of clients in receipt of housing benefit, 24% of those who had experienced shortfalls between their benefit and their rent said it had contributed to them becoming homeless.

With over 13 years experience of working to make the private rented sector (PRS) a viable housing option for homeless and vulnerable people and as the national advisory service for the use of the PRS to house homeless and vulnerable people (working with CLG and the Scottish Government), we are well aware of how Housing Benefit works in this sector and the effect of the switch to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) on both tenants and landlords.

As well as first hand experience of the problems it causes for our clients, we have held a range of consultation events to gauge PRS access schemes' views and experiences of PRS related issues and have undertaken research on how HB and LHA operate in practice¹.

Crisis believes that this consultation on HB reform contains proposals which are to be welcomed. In particular, the move to fixed payments is something we have long been calling for and is a welcome step which will offer claimants greater certainty over their income.

However, we also have real concerns over some elements of the consultation, in particular the suggestion of replacing the current extended payment scheme with a

¹ Crisis (2009) *Local Housing Allowance: One Year On*
Crisis (in press) 2010 Housing Benefit Survey
In 2010 Crisis surveyed over 200 advisers across Great Britain who help people to access the PRS. Crisis also surveyed over 100 of our clients in receipt of HB who use our Skylight education, training and employment centres in London and Newcastle.

Transition into Work payment with a longer out of work qualifying period; the proposal to link direct payments to property standards; the comparison between households in receipt of HB and their working non-eligible 'counterparts' and proposals to reduce LHA rates.

Whilst there is brief mention of longer term reform, we would also have liked to see more serious consideration given to options to bring down marginal deduction rates and thereby ensure that work really does pay.

We also feel that this consultation has missed the opportunity to address some longstanding issues which we know cause real problems for claimants such as non dependent deductions and the Shared Room Rate.

It is also a missed opportunity to address the widely recognised problem of LHA payments going to the tenant rather than landlord and Crisis calls upon the Government to consider reintroducing choice over who receives the payment.

For too long, Housing Benefit has been left in the 'too hard to handle' box. Crisis believes that this consultation presents an opportunity for real and lasting reform to improve housing stability and support people to find and sustain work which must be maximised.

Key recommendations:

- **Ease the transition into work:** Crisis welcomes the proposal of a new three month Transition in Work payment but believes it is important that such a payment is an extension of or in addition to the existing extended payment scheme (whereby housing benefit runs on at the out of work rate for four weeks for claimants who have been out of work for 26 weeks) rather than a replacement of it. The conditions of the existing scheme are already restrictive and we would be very concerned at any proposals which increase the length of time claimants are out of work in order to qualify for a benefit run on.
- **Reduce Housing Benefit's sensitivity:** Crisis strongly supports measures to fix HB payments for six monthly periods but believes there need to be a number of safeguards in place, including a mechanism by which claimants can ask for a recalculation should their income drop, an option for a shorter fixed period of three months for those with very unstable incomes and an option to opt out of fixed payments altogether.
- **Help people to stay in touch with the labour market:** For those who have been out of work for six months, we would like to see the current derisory earnings disregard of £5 increased to £50 disregard so that they could try out work for a limited number of hours and get used to the experience of working without it affecting their benefit.
- **Make work pay:** One of the biggest barriers to claimants moving into work is the very sharp rate at which benefits are withdrawn. Government must look seriously at the different options for bringing down Marginal Deduction Rates, and making sure that work really pays.
- **Ensure LHA levels cover rents:** Any changes to LHA rates or BRMA areas must be carefully modelled and have a mechanism in place to ensure that claimants are able to afford a reasonable range of properties.

- **Address the particular problems faced by young people:** Crisis is concerned that changes to the size criteria may lead to an increase in youth homelessness. Instead, Government should address the long standing problem of the Shared Room Rate.
- **Reinstate choice:** Crisis believes that all LHA claimants should be given a choice over who their benefit payment goes to.
- **Increase supply:** DWP should consider what changes can be made to the HB system to make landlords more willing to let to claimants.

Response to questions

1. Do you agree that a Transition into Work Payment will help to ease the move into work?

Crisis is well aware of the huge barriers that the Housing Benefit (HB) system creates for people who are trying to move into work and welcomes the principle of a Transition into Work Payment.

In a Crisis survey, 94% of advisors that help people to access the private rented sector (PRS) said when thinking about moving into work clients expressed concerns about what will happen to their HB. 72% said the HB system makes the transition into work difficult (including 29% who said it made it very difficult).²

For those who have been out of the labour market for a significant period, adjusting to work is often a difficult and worrying time anyway. People may be facing uncertainty and instability over their income. There are also initial additional costs associated with moving into work (such as clothes, travel etc) which people on limited incomes can find difficult to meet.

Furthermore many face a significant gap between the last payment of their out of work HB entitlement and their first wage coming through. The combination of these factors can lead to people not sustaining jobs and falling into rent arrears and debt.

It is right therefore that the consultation acknowledges the difficulties HB causes for people moving into work and sets out measures to ease this transition. DWP rightly acknowledges the support that Housing Benefit currently provides to those who have been out of work continuously for 26 weeks. This measure has real benefits for claimants and is vital to helping ease the transition.

We are very concerned at suggestions that the new Transition into Work Payment will be funded by cutting the existing scheme and that only those who have been out of work for a longer period will be eligible. People who have been out of work for 26 weeks are already significantly disadvantaged in the labour market and we would not want to see them lose out if the qualifying period was increased. We would therefore like to see the new Transition into Work Payment run alongside the existing run on.

For those who have been out of work for long periods and may well have serious concerns about returning to work, we believe more needs to be done to encourage and enable them to try work and to help them stay in touch with the labour market. We would like to see the introduction of a time limited earnings disregard of £50 for those who've been out of work for 26 weeks. So that claimants can work for a limited number of hours a week and earn up to £50 without it affecting their benefit entitlement for a six month period. The end of this period then becomes a trigger for encouraging people to move into working longer or more regular hours.

This would have the advantages of enabling people to try out work without concerns about the effect it will have on their benefits, to get into the habit of working and would encourage them to stay in touch with the labour market.

² Crisis (in press) 2010 Housing Benefit Survey

2. What would be the main features of such a scheme to secure maximum impact and minimise risk?

Crisis believes that 26 weeks is the maximum period that a claimant need be out of work in order to qualify for a benefit run on. At present those who have been out of work for 26 weeks or more are entitled to a four week run on if their job lasts for at least five weeks. We would like to see these restrictive conditions relaxed so that payments would run on for four weeks regardless of how long the job lasts so that people are encouraged to try out all periods of paid employment not just those which only last a certain length of time.

Additionally those who have been out of work for longer periods (one year or more) are likely to require even greater support when moving into work and we therefore welcome the proposed Transition into Work payment which would see the rate of payment immediately before the claimant moves into work run on for three months.

We believe that these two payments could operate alongside one another and would provide varying levels of support according to the length of time an individual had been away from the labour market. They should not be seen as alternative options for DWP.

We would also like to see transitional payments available to those who may not have had a continuous benefit claim but have clearly been moving in and out of work and have been unable to sustain employment.

3. Should we introduce fixed period Housing Benefit awards for those customers in work?

Crisis is strongly supportive of the introduction of fixed payments awards. It will be important however, that a mechanism is in place to protect claimants who experience a drop in income.

HB is currently overly sensitive and any change in income means a recalculation of entitlement which can create real problems for claimants, particularly for those working fluctuating hours. In a Crisis survey, 88% of advisers that help people to access the PRS said that clients who work fluctuating hours experience difficulties with their HB payments (with 76% saying they had a lot of difficulties)³.

It's not just the effect the small fluctuations in income have on HB entitlement but also the associated uncertainty over income, the hassle of needing to report minor changes in circumstances (the time needed to submit the information required can be time consuming and interfere with work hours) and the delays to payments that can result.

For many people the sensitivity of the HB system can mean it's not worth them taking on extra hours at all. We believe fixed payments will therefore help overcome these issues and provide claimants with some certainty over their income. Fixed payments will also help reduce the administrative costs associated with HB.

It will however, be important to get the details right so that there are safeguards in place to ensure people do not face shortfalls between their benefit and the rent.

³Crisis (in press) 2010 Housing Benefit Survey

It is also important that wider measures are taken to ensure that work always pays. This is particularly important for single people who do not benefit from many of the existing in-work schemes. The withdrawal rate for Housing Benefit is excessively high. When you move into work, 65 pence of Housing Benefit is withdrawn for every extra pound earned. When combined with the Council Tax Benefit taper this goes up to 85 pence.

A further disincentive is the interaction of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit with other benefits and tax credits and also with income tax and National Insurance increases above the taper rates. The effective withdrawal rate can be greater than 90% when entering work, making you less than ten pence better off for every extra pound earned.

It is disappointing that the consultation does not make any serious attempts to consider ways to reduce the very steep tapers and Marginal Deduction rates people face when moving into work or wanting to increase their hours. If the Government is serious about supporting people into work and increasing employment rates, these issues must be addressed.

4. *What would be the main features of such a scheme to secure maximum impact whilst avoiding any perverse incentives and minimising risk to those whose income falls significantly?*

The Housing Benefit system is hugely complex and it is important therefore that any reforms do not add additional layers of complexity to the system. For this reason, we believe the best option is a simple system whereby HB is fixed for six month periods and is unaffected by changes in income or circumstances. However, if a claimant's income drops by a significant amount, they should be able to request a recalculation. At the end of the six month period we agree that there should be a fast streamlined benefit reassessment.

We believe that the other options laid out in the consultation response, such as requirements to only report changes in circumstances rather than income fluctuations or not needing to report changes in income within a certain band, would serve only to make the system harder for claimants to understand.

For those with particularly unstable incomes, including those who undertake seasonal work, we would like to see the option of awards fixed for a shorter period of three months. We also believe that people should be able to opt out of the fixed payment award system altogether if they believe that their income is so unstable that it would not be in their best interests.

The consultation compares the proposed fixed awards to the tax credit system. We understand that the fixed payment HB scheme will not allow for overpayments which claimants may then be required to repay but we would like reassurance on this point.

5. *What is the level of rent above which it would not be reasonable for the taxpayer to offer support?*

The introduction of LHA has been a real improvement in some ways. Despite the fact that there remain problematic areas where the LHA rate is not at the right level, in many areas fewer claimants face shortfalls between their rent and their benefit entitlement. We would urge against introducing changes which will have the impact of increasing shortfalls and causing real hardship for claimants.

Crisis believes that LHA rates must ensure that claimants can access a decent standard of housing in all communities. Whilst there may be a very few cases where very high levels of benefit are paid to support people in particularly expensive properties, we do not believe that a limited number of exceptions should be allowed to drive benefit policy.

It must be acknowledged that rents are increasing, largely due to a lack of supply in the housing market. If we want to continue to ensure that people on very limited incomes are not left facing shortfalls and hardship and remain able to access an adequate number and standard of properties, HB rates must meet market rates.

At Crisis we are only too aware of the devastating impact that shortfalls can have on individuals. In a Crisis survey, over 90% of advisers that help people to access the PRS said that when claimants faced shortfalls it led to them falling behind with the rent. 55% said it led to claimants getting into debt in other areas such as loans and credit cards. A survey of Crisis clients backed this up. Of those who had experienced shortfalls between their rent and their HB, 24% said it had contributed to their homelessness.⁴

If LHA amounts were reduced by just £5/week, 64% of advisers said it would make it more difficult for people to find a property and a further 14% said it would make it nearly impossible. If this reduction increased to £20, almost 70% of respondents said it would be nearly impossible for claimants to find a property.⁵

We know that for under 25 year olds, the situation is already very difficult with the Shared Room Rate causing many financial hardship and impacting upon their ability to find accommodation. There is a real shortage of accommodation which meets the SRR definition available to benefit claimants which means that claimants often face a significant shortfall. We believe there is a very strong case for abolishing the SRR altogether but at the very least we would like to see the definition extended to studios/self contained bedsits, which is in fact where many young people end up.

It is also important to realise that in many instances, particularly new housing developments or specialist or supported housing, the rent is only one aspect of an individual's housing costs as there is also a service charge. It is particularly important for there to be no shortfalls on the rent element otherwise the claimant will face even greater difficulties if also having to pay a large service charge.

6. How should we set benefit rates at an appropriate level so that they reflect the housing choices of other working households not eligible for benefit?

Crisis believes that comparing the choices of working households not eligible for benefits with claimants is an untrue and unfair comparison and not the right way to set benefit rates. Housing benefit claimants do not have a greater purchasing power than those not eligible for benefit. As HB is income based, if a household's income is lower than a benefit claimant's then they have the option to claim HB to make it up.

Low income working tenants make choices and trade offs between their accommodation and their disposable income and they may therefore chose to rent a cheaper property in order to be able to spend more of their limited income on other items.

⁴ Crisis (in press) 2010 Housing Benefit Survey

⁵ *ibid*

There is also an issue about accessibility. There is extensive evidence that non HB households have access to a greater range of properties than claimants. Crisis research has previously found that landlords often stipulate conditions over and above those requested for working tenants.⁶ In a more recent Crisis survey, 68% of advisers that help people access the PRS said landlords were less willing to let to HB claimants than non claimants.⁷ Crisis therefore believes that considering the level of LHA rates in light of the choices of working households is an unhelpful comparison looking at two different markets.

Furthermore, it is important that any comparisons made between groups are fair ones. Many HB households living in the PRS would be eligible to live in social rented housing, with lower rents and greater security of tenure, but are prevented from doing so due to a lack of available properties. They can't therefore be held responsible for claiming LHA for higher rents in the PRS. Housing Benefit cannot be seen in isolation from wider housing policy and we need to see a real increase in the supply of social housing for rent to address long standing and growing demand.

7. How could we set benefit rates to reflect different market conditions in different areas?

Crisis believes that when setting benefit rates it is important that attention is given to the output rather than the process by which it is arrived at. Benefit rates need to take account of market rents and must ensure that claimants are able to afford and access a decent standard of property in each community.

Crisis does not support any of the specific changes proposed in the consultation. Our concern is that the rates are set at a level people can afford.

We urge the DWP to undertake careful modelling to assess the impact of changes to the way in which rates are set. There should also be a mechanism built in which ensures that any changes are checked for affordability.

On a local level it will be important that before publishing LHA rates, rent officers check that there are indeed a sufficient number of affordable properties in the local area that are accessible to claimants.

8. Would excluding the most expensive rents when setting Local Housing Allowance rates result in fairer levels of benefit?

Crisis does not think that a blanket approach of excluding the most expensive properties is the right way to set benefit rates as it could seriously disadvantage some households, particularly those with larger families, and exclude them from renting in many areas.

We acknowledge however, that there are some areas, most notably in parts of London, where there are high concentrations of very expensive properties and that this can distort LHA rates. We acknowledge therefore that there may be a case for a different approach in such areas where there are significant variations in rent levels. We would be concerned however, at the reintroduction of discretion in the rent officer's decisions which can lead to a system which is hard for claimants to understand and lacks transparency.

⁶ Crisis (2009) *Local Housing Allowance: One Year On*

⁷ Crisis (in press) 2010 Housing Benefit Survey

One advantage of LHA is that it has led to increased transparency about the way in which rates are set. Any approach to addressing the issue of areas with large numbers of very expensive properties must ensure that the system remains transparent and easy for claimants to understand.

As outlined above, DWP must also ensure that any changes are carefully modelled.

9. How should we set appropriate Housing Benefit areas?

Crucially, determining areas should bear relation to and consider rent levels. In setting HB areas, the focus must be on ensuring that claimants are able to afford to rent good quality accommodation in every community with access to the full range of services and facilities. It is also important to ensure that claimants are able to access employment opportunities within a reasonable distance.

DWP has extensive data about LHA rates and BRMAs which should be drawn upon to ensure there is a strong evidence base for any changes to how BRMAs are determined. There must be careful modelling of the effect of any changes and we would like to see steps built in which check for affordability.

10. Should the Local Housing Allowance size criteria be adjusted?

We are very concerned at proposals to increase the age at which a young person becomes eligible for their own room from 16 to 18. A lack of space and the pressure this can put on families is a central driver of homelessness amongst young people and there is therefore a real risk that adjusting the size criteria could lead to an increase in homelessness.

This is particularly the case as, if the proposed changes were implemented, at the age when a young person becomes eligible for their own room, the household will be affected by Non Dependent Deductions which will mean a reduction in HB entitlement.

Given that 16 and 17 year olds are considered in 'priority need' on becoming homeless and therefore entitled to social housing, it is difficult to see what the incentive would be for them to remain in the family home. If they do leave the family home, as well as the negative impact this can have on the individual and the increase in homelessness which may ensue, the young person will also be entitled to make their own HB claim which may well end up being more costly to the DWP and the public purse as a whole.

In recent years Government has focussed on the importance of preventing homelessness, particularly amongst young people, and Crisis is concerned that this proposal could work directly against this and actually lead to an increase in homelessness amongst young people.

11. Should Housing Benefit be extended to provide for an extra bedroom where there is an established need for a room for a non-resident carer?

Crisis would support moves to provide an extra bedroom for a non-resident carer.

12. Is there a case for providing for an extra bedroom in the size criteria to help parents who need to care for non-resident children if there is evidence that working households can do so?

Crisis research found that 30% of 'single' homeless women without dependent children did in fact have children but they were being cared for by someone else, with two thirds of these only being temporarily cared for by someone else. Homelessness was a major factor for why these women were separated from their children⁸. In many instances such women can become trapped in a vicious cycle whereby they cannot reunite with their children as they lack sufficient space in their accommodation but without their children being with them, they are often not entitled to this extra space.

It is generally considered to be in the best interests of both parents and children for them to be able to maintain contact. Not having sufficient space can create real barriers to seeing and being granted access to children.

Crisis therefore believes that all possible support should be given to enable parents and children to maintain contact and a relationship. We would therefore like to see the size criteria adjusted to provide for an extra bedroom for those who need to care for non-resident children.

13. Should Housing Benefit entitlement be conditional on the property meeting certain standards?

Whilst it is important to look at how best to improve property standards, Crisis believes HB is a blunt instrument with which to achieve this. We are concerned that if additional conditions are placed on landlords letting to households in receipt of HB, there is a real danger that they will exit this section of the market.

We know that claimants are often already at a disadvantage in the PRS, with landlords less willing to let to them and them therefore having access to a smaller range of properties. The reasons that landlords are less willing to let to claimants are varied but our research has shown that commonly it is because payment goes to the tenant rather than the landlord, there are delays in processing HB, it is paid in arrears and it is not paid monthly.⁹

We are concerned that if greater conditions are placed on landlords, they may simply stop letting to claimants altogether as there is more demand than supply in the PRS and benefit recipients only comprise a small part of the market. If supply to benefit recipients decreases, not only will they face more difficulty in finding a property but it will effectively increase the control of unscrupulous landlords.

What's more, it is hard to fully ascertain the effect of the recession on the supply of private rented accommodation. We know, for example, that many people are letting out properties in order to help make ends meet and this may have temporarily increased supply. As the economy recovers, it is likely that these so-called 'reluctant landlords' may exit the market and further restrict supply. We would therefore caution against introducing measures which are likely to further dissuade landlords from letting to HB claimants.

⁸ Reeve K, Casey R, Goudie R *Homeless Women: Still being failed yet striving to survive* Crisis (2006)

⁹ Crisis (in press) 2010 Housing Benefit Survey

14. Should a direct payment to the landlord be linked to the property meeting a certain quality or energy standard?

Crisis is strongly against proposals to link direct payments to the landlord to a property's quality or energy standard. It is certainly the case that large parts of the PRS are not energy efficient and Crisis would like to see this situation addressed. However, by targeting only the benefit section of the market there is a real danger that claimants will find themselves further disadvantaged as additional conditions around energy efficiency mean landlords become even less willing to let to them. What's more, Crisis does not believe that such measures will be effective in encouraging landlords to invest considerable amounts of resources in upgrading their properties.

We are also concerned that these proposals could lead to an increase in homelessness. As well as restricting supply for prospective tenants and those looking to move, there is a real danger that increasing conditions on landlords letting to claimants may lead landlords to evict existing tenants, which could lead to an increase in homelessness. We would also like clarification over whether when a tenant gets into arrears, there will still be a mechanism to redirect payments to the landlords or whether this would be dependent upon the landlord improving a property's energy efficiency. We would be extremely concerned about the impact on people's housing stability and ability to maintain a tenancy if this safeguarding criteria was dependent upon the landlord undertaking work on the property.

There is also an underlying issue of principle. In introducing payment to the tenant, Government maintained it was doing so in order to empower the tenant. However, there is extensive evidence from Crisis and others that this move has caused real problems – leading to an increase in rent arrears and homelessness and a reduced willingness on the part of landlords to let to claimants¹⁰. We welcome recent changes to the safeguarding criteria but do not believe these go far enough to protect vulnerable tenants and we therefore call upon the Government to reintroduce choice for all tenants.

Proposals that who receives HB be contingent on the landlord's actions rather than a choice on the part of the tenant, suggests that the benefit payment belongs to the landlord rather than the tenant and we feel that this would be a significant step away from the empowerment agenda.

15. We would welcome views on how Housing Benefit can contribute to the delivery of improvements in the standard of private sector housing for tenants.

It is indeed important to improve the quality of property in the PRS. As Julie Rugg highlighted, far too much of the rental stock let to benefit claimants and at the bottom end of the market is poor quality¹¹. The focus, however, must be on basic property standards rather than energy efficiency. The PRS is a significant contributor to our carbon footprint but if we are not able to get young professional renters to encourage

¹⁰ Crisis (2009) Local Housing Allowance: One Year On
Shelter (2009) For whose benefit? A study monitoring the implementation of local housing allowance

National Landlords Association (2009) Local Housing Allowance: NLA Members' Survey

¹¹ Rugg J, Rhodes D (2008) Review of Private Rented Sector Housing, Centre for Housing Policy

their landlords to invest in energy efficiency it is too much to expect HB claimants to do so when they have much less leverage and market power.

The question ultimately is how to improve property standards at the bottom of the market and whether HB has a role in this. The point about HB is that first and foremost it is a payment to the claimant to help them secure suitable housing and it is a payment to the claimant whether it is paid direct or routed via the landlord.

HB has a role to play in ensuring that it is set at a sufficient level for a claimant to be able to afford a property of a suitable standard and to shop around. It is being able to receive sufficient rent that will ensure a landlord invests in property improvements therefore if the Government wants to improve property conditions it is vital to ensure that people receive a level of benefit which enables them to find and afford a property of suitable standard. We would be concerned at the introduction of any proposals which would have the effect of reducing rates.

Secondly, is important that a landlord is not able to overcharge for a property of poor condition. That is achieved by empowering the tenant to shop around like any other tenant and make a trade off between rent and standard - the £15 excess has a key role to play here. If a tenant is being supported into the property by a PRS access scheme or similar, the scheme will, as a matter of good practice, inspect the property and raise any issues of concern with the landlord. At that stage there can be a negotiation between the scheme, landlord and tenant as to repairs that are made for rent charged and HB received. Such practice already happens at a local level and should be encouraged but it cannot be mandated at a national level.

It is also important that in so far as is possible, HB policy tries to level the playing field between claimants and non-claimants and this must include ensuring that HB is paid at a reasonable level, enabling claimants to shop around, and that DWP addresses some of the reasons why landlords are reluctant to let to claimants. DWP should therefore reintroduce choice for tenants, look at the frequency of benefit payments, address the fact that payments are made in arrears and work to further reduce payment delays and administrative errors.

Crisis believes that it is right that we look at how to improve property standards in the private rented sector. However, HB is a blunt tool and the primary drivers of improvement have to lie elsewhere – primarily through property inspections, licensing and environmental health enforcement and ensuring local authorities do not continue to place or direct tenants, particularly those who have been homeless or vulnerable, to properties and landlords which they know are not satisfactory.

It is important that DWP consults closely with CLG to understand the effect any changes to HB will have on housing availability, security and property standards.

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives.

We measure our success and can demonstrate tangible results and value for money.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

We have ambitious plans for the future and are committed to help more people in more places across the UK. We know we won't end homelessness overnight or on our own. But we take a lead, collaborate with others and together make change happen.

Employment

Lack of work is a major cause and consequence of homelessness. Having a job brings self respect and independence. Unemployment is rising with the recession but many of the people we work with have been out of the labour market for some years so need specialist help.

Within our Crisis Skylight centres, we have a dedicated employment team, Crisis Employment Services, which helps people to prepare to find and keep jobs. We also work in partnership with a range of organisations including employers, training providers, colleges and other homeless organisations, matching people to appropriate opportunities and jobs. Our team in London is also leading the Skills for Jobs for Homeless People Consortium – a pan London approach to tackling the disadvantages homeless people face in the job market.

Our popular Crisis Skylight Cafes provide real on the job training and experience. These are social enterprises that offer accredited training in a busy commercial environment.

Crisis Changing Lives, our highly successful national grants scheme, helps homeless people achieve their educational and career goals by awarding grants of up to £2,500 to pay for course fees, work clothes and tools, or to help set up a business.

Crisis and the private rented sector

Not a priority for social housing, the private rented sector is the only solution for many single homeless people. In partnership with CLG and the Scottish Government, Crisis is leading the way to achieve greater access to private rented accommodation for single homeless people. We run a national advisory service providing consultancy advice and support to local authorities and homelessness agencies across England and Scotland.

We work with partners across the UK who deliver Crisis SmartMove, a rent deposit and advice scheme, which has helped over 13,000 people into a new home.

Contact

Katharine Sacks-Jones

Policy Manager

Crisis

66 Commercial Street

London E1 6LT

Tel 020 7426 5668

Email katharine.sacksjones@crisis.org.uk

Website www.crisis.org.uk

www.privaterentedsector.org.uk

Crisis UK (trading as Crisis). Registered Charity Numbers: E&W1082947, SC040094.
Company Number: 4024938