

All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness



Emergency COVID-19 measures – Officers Meeting Minutes

13 July 2020, 10-11.30am, Zoom

Attendees:

Neil Coyle MP, APPG Co-Chair
Bob Blackman MP, APPG Co-Chair
Lord Shipley
Ben Everitt MP
Sally-Ann Hart MP
Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill
Lord Holmes of Richmond
Lord Young of Cookham
Feryal Clark MP

Parliamentary Assistants:

Graeme Smith, Office of Neil Coyle MP
James Sweeney, Office of Matt Western MP
Gail Harris, Office of Shaun Bailey MP
Harriette Drew, Office of Barry Sheerman MP
Tom Leach, Office of Kate Osborne MP
Hannah Cawley, Office of Paul Blomfield MP
Freddie Evans, Office of Geraint Davies MP
Greg Oxley, Office of Eddie Hughes MP
Sarah Doyle, Office of Kim Johnson MP

Secretariat:

Emily Batchelor, Secretariat to APPG

Other:

Jasmine Basran, Crisis
Ruth Jacob, Crisis
Hannah Gousy, Crisis
Disha Bhatt, Crisis
Saskia Neibig, Crisis
Hannah Slater, Crisis
Neil Munslow, Newcastle City Council
Alison Butler, Croydon Council
Chris Coffey, Porchlight
Elisabeth Garratt, University of Sheffield
Tim Sigsworth, AKT
Jo Bhandal, AKT
Anna Yassin, Glass Door
Paul Anders, Public Health England
Marika Van Harskamp, New Horizon Youth Centre
Burcu Borysik, Revolving Doors Agency
Kady Murphy, Just for Kids Law
Emma Cookson, St. Mungo's
Hugh Currie, St. Mungo's

Apologies:

Jason McCartney MP
Steve McCabe MP
Julie Marson MP
Stephen Timms MP
Rosie Duffield MP
Debbie Abrahams MP
Andrew Selous MP
Kevin Hollinrake MP
Nickie Aiken MP
Richard Graham MP
Layla Moran MP
Damian Hinds MP
Tommy Sheppard MP
Peter Dowd MP
Steve Baker MP
Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Panellists:

Matt Downie, Crisis

Liz Davies, Garden Court Chambers

Adrian Berry, Garden Court Chambers

Cllr Kieron William, Southwark Council
Cabinet Member for Housing Management
and Modernisation

Robyn Casey, Policy and Public Affairs
Manager at St. Mungo's

Suzannah Young, National Housing Federation
Katie Earnshaw, Emmaus UK
Ally Routledge, National Housing Federation
Lucy Croxton, National Youth Advocacy Service
Vicky Ball, Phoenix Futures
Pawda Tjoa, New Local Government Network
Connie Muttock, Commonweal
Sophie Francis-Cansfield, Women's Aid
Holly Tippett-Simon, Salvation Army
Zana Khan, NHS
Chris Hallam, GLA Conservatives
Reshima Sharma, Shelter
Stephanie Kleynhans, Shelter
Elizabeth Waind, Administrative Data Research UK
Shayda Kashef, Administrative Data Research UK
David Morris, Noah Enterprise
Stephanie Orr, Surviving Economic Abuse
Rob Payne, Hope Worldwide
Nick Maguire, University of Southampton
Jessie Seal, NACCOM Network
Carla Reeson, University of Nottingham
Dr Caroline Schulman, King's College London
Alex Bax, Pathway
Octavia Aronne, Safer London
Maureen Delahunty
Louisa Steele, Standing Together
Meera Chindooroy, NRLA
Rob Hunter, Midland Heart
Sue Christoforou, Homeless Link
Robin Tyne, Southwark Council
Yoric Irving-Clarke, Chartered Institute of Housing
Jen Harrison, Changing Lives

Welcome and apologies

Introductions

Bob Blackman MP

Bob Blackman MP (BB) opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and briefly outlining the event format.

BB made some opening remarks on the current context during the COVID-19 pandemic. These included comments on:

- The success of the Government's 'Everyone In' initiative with estimates that more than 15,000 people have been provided with a secure roof over their heads during the pandemic.
- The different approaches taken by local authorities in tackling homelessness as emergency lockdown measures ease.
- The win of the APPGEH's A Safe Home campaign, as the Government amended the Domestic Abuse Bill to give people fleeing domestic abuse priority need for housing assistance. There still remains some gaps in the amendment as it stands which the APPGEH will look to address in later parliamentary stages of the Bill.
- The Government's welcome action halting evictions and how they are due to resume in August.
- The need for emergency legislation to ensure that everyone is provided with a safe home during the pandemic.
- The need to build 100,000 social rented homes each year.
- The need to support those who are sofa surfing, estimates putting that number at 300,000 people.
- The need to prevent and protect those at risk of being evicted or newly homeless as lockdown measures ease.

Today's event would focus on the emergency measures needed to ensure the people who were supported under the 'Everyone In' initiative did not return to the rough sleeping.

BB then passed onto Crisis' Director of Policy and External Affairs Matt Downie (MD) to speak a bit more about the Crisis' Home For All campaign and the need for emergency legislation.

Matt Downie, Director of Policy and External Affairs, Crisis

MD said that there was a real opportunity facing the Government to build upon the incredible progress made under the 'Everyone In' initiative.

He spoke about the welcome policy changes during the pandemic, including the uplifting of the Local Housing Allowance rates.

MD said the organising principle of the last few months was to see homelessness as a public health emergency and support people on the basis that if you don't, people will die. Most importantly, this principle has removed legal barriers and enabled the 'Everyone In' initiative to succeed.

	<p>MD explained the need to draft emergency legislation and that it was not an attempt to radically reform the law but to continue to protect those facing homelessness while the public health emergency continues.</p> <p>MD said to remember those who were newly homeless and those who face legal barriers when applying for homelessness assistance.</p>
<p>Liz Davies, Garden Court Chambers</p>	<p>BB introduced the next panellist Liz Davies (LD) as a barrister who specialises in housing law and who worked with Crisis to draft emergency COVID-19 homelessness legislation.</p> <p>LD outlined how this emergency legislation is a temporary measure as the Government guidance from the Everyone In initiative is withdrawn. LD explained how the emergency legislation has three parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new duty to provide emergency accommodation to those who are homeless and not entitled to accommodation under current legislation. This is a free standing duty which will come into effect 12 months after royal assent. It is modelled on existing homelessness duties in Part 7 of the Housing Act, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act. - Temporary prevention of homelessness by giving courts more discretion at the point of possession claims. The current halting of eviction procedures is due to come to an end on 24th August. LD explained the whole sector is warning of a tsunami of evictions with many in the private rented sector occurring under section 21 – no fault evictions – despite the cross-party consensus that these evictions should be abolished. This would ensure the courts have the flexibility to make suspended possession orders. This is based on a draft clause of the HCLG Select Committee. - A temporary suspension of the benefit cap which would last to March 2021. This would give families under financial pressure a chance to stay in their house, pay full rent through benefits and get back on their feet.

<p>Adrian Berry, Garden Court Chambers</p>	<p>BB introduced the next panellist Adrian Berry (AB) as a barrister who specialises in immigration law and who worked with Crisis to draft emergency COVID-19 homelessness legislation.</p> <p>AB described how someone having lawful leave to remain and a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition to their immigration status shuts them out from accessing homelessness assistance and Universal Credit.</p> <p>AB explained how they drafted two clauses in the emergency legislation, one in relation to accommodation and one in relation to access to benefits on a temporary basis. These clauses would suspend the NRPF conditions during the period of this public health emergency period i.e. the 12 months of this Bill. These clauses would ensure that any delay in processing an application for example for asylum support which could create a public health risk is removed, as applicants could access accommodation quickly and locally through their local authority.</p> <p>EU citizens who are exercising a right to reside can also access accommodation under these clauses and the right to reside test as for as it applies in the benefits and tax credits system will also be suspended temporarily for the duration of the Bill. This will allow this group to receive the financial support and keep them in their accommodation.</p>
<p>Robyn Casey, St. Mungo's.</p>	<p>BB introduced the next panellist Robyn Casey (RC) as a Policy and Public Affairs Manager at St. Mungo's. RC outlined how St. Mungo's have been providing support for people accommodated under the Everyone In initiative, across 24 hotel sites and supported nearly 3,000 people both remotely and in person. This includes helping people to self-isolate, to manage health conditions, with immigration support and move-on options as the initiative closes.</p> <p>In the City of London, St. Mungo's has supported over 100 people to access hotel emergency, several of which have been rough sleeping for up to 20 years and have never engaged with support previously.</p> <p>RC described some of the challenges moving people on from emergency accommodation which included comments on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The benefit cap: lots of St. Mungo's clients aren't able to access the level of rent they need due to the benefit cap. - NRPF conditions: the LGA estimate that around 50% of those in hotels in London have NRPF. This means it is hard to move them on as they cannot access welfare to help pay their rent. RC emphasised that unless some changes are made for this group it is unlikely to prevent everyone in this group from returning to rough sleeping and the Government will not meet its manifesto commitment of ending rough sleeping altogether by 2024. <p>RC said there have been reports from outreach teams in London that there has been an uplift of people sleeping rough in the last month, some of which have recently lost work in the hospitality sector. This is likely to increase as unemployment rises and the halt on evictions comes to an end.</p>

	<p>RC outlined the concerns St. Mungo's have on the winter provisions of services, which are largely provided in night shelters, churches etc. - where it is typically very difficult to self-isolate or socially distance. RC says without the duty included in the emergency legislation proposed there are serious concerns about how supporter services in winter will be provided.</p>
<p>Cllr. Kieron Williams, Southwark Council</p>	<p>BB introduced the next panellist Kieron Williams (KW), Labour and Co-operative councillor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Modernisation, Southwark Council.</p> <p>KW outlined Southwark Council's commitment to ending homelessness, including ending the use of B&Bs and focusing increasingly on prevention. In the year leading up to the COVID-19 outbreak the number of rough sleepers was reduced from 91 to 35.</p> <p>KW described the impact of COVID-19 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An estimated 30,000 people furloughed in Southwark. - 500% increase in Universal Credit claimants. - 45% increase in people approaching their housing solutions service. - Housed 323 people facing or experiencing rough sleeping since March. 187 have been supported onto long-term homes. 136 are still being supported. 86 either have NRPF or limited RPF. <p>KW outlined how the average rent for a 2-bedroom flat in Southwark is around £24,000 per year. For those facing unemployment or destitution, these costs are not covered by benefits and indicate the cost of providing temporary accommodation for the local authority in this area.</p> <p>KW emphasised the importance of local authority funding in order to continue to provide assistance to the most vulnerable. Southwark predict their budget for temporary accommodation will increase by 80% this year. Southwark welcome the additional financial support from national Government, but there is still a funding gap up to £20-25 million.</p> <p>KW described how many of the people with NRPF were previously working prior to the pandemic but this work was not secure and thus they are unable to take on a tenancy. Southwark Council is providing emergency accommodation to this group currently. KW said the Government needs to provide clarity on what help councils can provide to this group.</p>
<p>MD</p>	<p>BB informed attendees that the Crisis client, Ellesse who was due to speak on the panel was unwell and unable to attend. MD would be reading her speech in her place.</p> <p>MD outlined how due to COVID-19 Ellesse lost her job and has relied on benefits to pay her bills. Ellesse has received support from Crisis during the pandemic.</p>
<p>Neil Coyle MP</p>	<p>Neil Coyle (NC) MP thanked the panel for their contributions and members of the Crisis team for organising the event.</p> <p>NC outlined the success of the APPGEH's A Safe Home campaign as the Government has amended the Domestic Abuse Bill to extend priority need to domestic abuse survivors.</p>

	<p>NC described the welcome action by the Government in housing 15,000 people under the Everyone in initiative and the achievements of Southwark Council during the pandemic.</p> <p>NC outlined the need for solutions to homelessness post-COVID-19 including scrapping no-fault evictions, suspending the benefit cap and lifting NRPF restrictions. NC said the APPGEH would be continuing to campaign on these issues.</p> <p>NC then opened the Q&A session.</p>
<p>Questions – 1:03</p>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sally-Ann Hart (SAH) MP asked about the lack of social housing and shelter provision available for move-on accommodation, and the potential of a social lettings agency as a solution. SAH outlined the importance of providing funding for wrap-around support and care for people’s mental health, physical health and employment. <p>MD outlined Crisis’ support for the idea of a social lettings agency. MD added that Crisis’ proposal for housing 15,400 people under Everyone In is fully funded.</p> <p>KW said there are 13,000 people on the waiting list for a council home in Southwark and that social lettings is clearly part of the answer. KW outlined the importance of drug and alcohol support and long-term employment support.</p> <p>RC outlined the importance of drug and alcohol support, and the lack of sustained funding for local authorities to ensure the operation of these services.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Rob Payne (RP) from Hope Worldwide asked what has helped Southwark to move people on from emergency accommodation and what barriers are they facing in this process. <p>KW outlined what an enormous challenge it is finding appropriate accommodation in this climate. KW said they were working with people 1-2-1 and making it clear to people that hotel accommodation was temporary. KW also stressed the importance of wider sustained support.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Connie Muttock (CM) from Commonweal Housing asked the panel how we can harness the interest in tackling unemployment as we move out of lockdown and join that up with a focus on homelessness. <p>MD described how many people facing homelessness are desperate to find employment and the common misconception around those with NRPF. MD agreed that it was time to join these things up, and said it was the job of the Home Office, not just the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to tackle homelessness.</p> <p>KW said on EEA nationals and those with NRPF who were at imminent risk of rough sleeping were previously working and had lost accommodation. KW said most of these people do have the right to a long term immigration status that would allow them to access the benefit status but at the moment it is taking</p>

	<p>months and years to get the status settled. This delay is being extended by the lockdown. KW said that the Home Office must speed up claims.</p> <p>NC said that the Home Office must publish the figures of those with NRPF and reinstate legal aid for immigration cases.</p> <p>RC said that the vast majority of those who engage with St. Mungo's want to work but some have high needs which require ongoing support.</p> <p>4. Meera Chindooroy (MC) from the National Landlords Association asked what role there is for the private rented sector to rapidly provide move on accommodation, and whether the panel agreed that a minimum package of support to encourage more landlords to offer such tenancies would be helpful to increase the number of properties available.</p> <p>KW said the vast majority of accommodation Southwark provides is from the private rented sector. KW said that increasing LHA rates and the benefit cap would make a huge difference. KW said the fundamental barrier was the benefit system.</p> <p>MD highlighted the work of Newcastle and Liverpool councils good work in this area. MD said instead of a race to the bottom for financial incentives but he would rather that money went to support offers to landlords.</p> <p>5. Jessica Seal (JS) from NACCOM asked the panel what understanding of NRPF exists on the Conservative benches and what we can do to improve that messaging among MPs.</p> <p>BB said the issue when it comes to NRPF is that there is a lack of education among Conservative MPs and awareness that these individuals have worked in the UK for a number of years. BB said education would change this perception to make sure people understand this reality and increase the willingness to provide help.</p> <p>NC said many families have British born children and imposing NRPF on those with dependants and these examples are particularly powerful.</p>
AOB	
Overview	<p>BB thanked panellists and attendees, asking everyone on the call to pose briefly for a photo-opportunity.</p> <p>BB outlined the reasons why emergency legislation is so desperately needed and the urgency of bringing this forward before summer recess.</p>
Actions and deadlines	<p>Secretariat to send around minutes to attendees and both Chairs.</p>