

# **All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness**



## **Formal Meeting Minutes – How to Get Britain Back on Track to Ending Homelessness Roundtable**

10<sup>th</sup> December 2024, 10am – 12.00pm, Macmillan Room

### **Attendees**

**Parliamentarians;** Baroness Greender, Chris Vince MP, Steve Witherden MP, Baroness Lister, Shockat Adam MP, Harpreet Uppal MP, David Smith MP, Emily Darlington MP, Sean Woodcock MP, Andrew Cooper MP, Paula Barker MP, Jonathan Branch MP, Lee Pitcher MP, Baroness Penn

### **Staff;**

Emily Lowery, Theo Hunt, Damian Bailey, Cello Crompton

### **Speakers;**

Matt Downie, (Chief Executive of Crisis), Chris Hancock (Head of Housing at Hasting Council), Carly (Lived Experience) Sarah Lister (Acting CEO of Oasis), Luke Elton, (Oasis), Expert by Experience and her lead worker Beth Porter (Crisis)

**Steering Group;** Duncan Shrubsole (St Martin's in the Field), Sam Dalton (Emmaus UK), Adam Pemberton-Wickham (Akt), Dr Laura Neilson (Shared Health Foundation), Tyron Julien (Single Homeless Project), Polly Stephens (New Horizon Youth Centre), Charlie Berry (Shelter), Cat Tottie (Homeless Link), Emily Page (Pathway)

### **Secretariat;**

Jasmine Basran (Head of Policy & Campaigns, Crisis), Rosie Perkins (Campaigns Manager, Crisis), Matt Bold (Senior Public Affairs Officer, Crisis)

**Apologies;** Bob Blackman MP Baroness Watkins, Lisa Smart MP, Rachel Blake MP, David Williams MP, Baroness Morgan, Lord Jamieson

## Minutes

<b>Welcome and apologies</b>	
Welcome	<p><b>Paula Barker MP (Co-Chair)</b>, conveyed apologies from the Government for being unable to attend and recapped the steps the Government had taken to begin to implement its pledge to get Britain back on track to ending homelessness.</p> <p>This has included setting up an Inter Ministerial Group, it is welcome that this is Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the setting up of the Expert Panel – which a number of Steering Group members are contributing to.</p> <p>She noted the financial steps that have been taken including, £500 million for the Affordable Housing Programme, £233 million for rough sleeping and homelessness support, the £10 million Winter Pressures Fund, the additional £1.3 billion in Local Authority grant funding as well as the £1 billion to extend the Discretionary Housing Programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set out the three pillars that the APPG Officers have agreed that they think should guide this discussion and an effective cross-government strategy.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Rapidly rehouse people in safe, settled and genuinely affordable homes with appropriate support where needed to end homelessness.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Urgent support to tackle the worst forms of homelessness.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Prevent homelessness before it occurs.</i></li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p>Want to be a critical friend to the Government.</p> <p><b>Key Point;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government has made a good start, but we need to go further to get Britain back on track for ending homelessness and the APPG will support that agenda.</li> </ul>
<b>Pillar 1 – Rapid Rehousing</b>	
Introduction	<p><b>Emily Darlington MP (Vice Chair)</b> introduced the importance of delivering the social homes that people needed. There is a spectrum of need, homes are a foundation for a good life.</p> <p>Social homes are a vital part of the housing mix, the lack of social homes is causing a lot of issues for local authorities.</p> <p>Spoke about her own experience and work as a Cabinet Member in Milton Keynes Council. Took steps to better link local services but even the best local system will struggle without a national system that works.</p>
Main Speakers – Chris	<p><b>Carly</b> spoke about her experience of homelessness. She is a mother of three who had been a victim of domestic abuse. Which left her financially exhausted and vulnerable, her landlord then issued a Section 21 no fault eviction, she could not afford local deposits, and no one she knew met</p>

Hancock and Carly

the income threshold to be a guarantor. This meant she was forced to go to the Council.

The private temporary accommodation that she was in was too small for her children to live in, was so filthy she couldn't put her 9-month-old son on the floor, and the furniture was broken and unsafe.

She felt like she'd failed as a parent despite how she tried to make it feel like a home. These conditions had a severe impact on her and her children's mental health and wellbeing.

Temporary accommodation used to mean a few weeks, now it means months or even years for many people. Can't fault the Council as she knows how few properties they have available.

This year was a game changer because the Council found that they had a social home available for her, her children now have space, she isn't afraid of complaining to a private landlord and getting evicted, and her abusive ex does not know where they live.

**Chris Hancock** outlined the structural challenges facing Hastings Council, but are replicated across the country. Low wage economy reliant on very seasonal work, recent increase in rents suddenly left lots of people behind and struggling to meet their bills this led to an increase in the number of people who needed Temporary Accommodation and financial pressure on the Council.

They have countered this by using capital funding to acquire their own properties to reduce their reliance on private temporary accommodation and try and keep costs down. They used Levelling Up, Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme, Single Homeless Accommodation Programme and LA Housing Fund to fund this. They then set the rent and get it back into the Council funds meaning the properties then effectively pay for themselves.

A key financial difficulty is that the temporary accommodation subsidy is based on 2011 LHA rates, the rest has to be made up by the Council. Hastings would get £1.4 billion more if the subsidy was based on today's levels. This would allow them to buy more long-term homes.

**Key Points;**

- Local authorities are facing dire difficulties and this has a knock-on impact on what they are able to provide, uprating Local Housing Allowance and the temporary accommodation subsidy would allow Councils to spend less money on providing temporary accommodation and more on preventing and ending homelessness.
- Access to a secure social home can be transformative in ensuring someone sustainably ends their homelessness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We need to improve welfare support to make housing more affordable but also reduce welfare spend overall by increasing the number of social homes.</li> <li>- While not settled housing, the temporary accommodation that Hastings Borough Council has been able to acquire has offered a high-quality option for Carly as opposed to her previous offers and has given Carly and her family much more peace of mind. There are better ways to provide temporary accommodation now, thinking about how we should always look to a future where settled housing is the quickest outcome.</li> </ul>
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<b>Pillar 2 – Urgent Support</b>	
Introduction – David Smith MP	<p><b>David Smith MP (Vice Chair)</b>, introduced the second pillar. Urgent support to tackle the worst forms of homelessness. Prevention and rapid rehousing important but some people will always need additional support to sustainably end their homelessness. Introduced Sarah and Luke from Oasis to speak to one effective way of improving urgent support by making it trauma informed.</p>
Main Speakers – Sarah Lister (Acting CEO of Oasis), Luke Elton (Oasis)	<p><b>Sarah Lister</b>, Oasis is a provider of a range of services, outreach, drop-in and supported accommodation which they have been doing for over 40 years in Gateshead and the South East. In that time, they've learned a lot about what works and what's needed.</p> <p>They want to meet people where they are. They conducted staff surveys and surveys of the people they support. The survey of staff found that they cannot solve homelessness if they cannot better address issues around trauma. They then surveyed 115 people who were experiencing homelessness in a range of ways including rough sleeping and being in temporary accommodation. They found that 63% had experienced four or more traumatic experiences, this extended beyond just experiences as a child but well into adulthood, this included abuse as a child, domestic violence, psychological abuse, neglect, bereavement.</p> <p>This led to people being hugely stressed, with strong fears and issues around abandonment, low self-esteem. This makes it much harder to access mainstream support, its retraumatising to recount the experiences you've been through to a stranger who can decide if you're "worthy" of support.</p> <p><b>Luke Elton</b>, Being more trauma informed means focusing on the individuals experience and mitigating the impact of their trauma, specific physical and psychological safety measures for the applicant, housing-led interventions that focus on housing need as first step to recovery, doing things with people not to them. To do all of this, Oasis ensure their staff have small caseloads of 1 - 5 people so that they can develop relationships, a monitoring framework and KPIs that takes trauma into</p>

	<p>account and embeds trauma informed work into service review and design.</p> <p>Getting this right can make a huge difference and ensure people have the resilience they need to keep going even where they have setbacks, because they know that Oasis will still be there for them.</p> <p><b>Key Points;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oasis shows what you can achieve when you listen to practitioners and service users and centre these experiences in solutions.</li> <li>- There is scope to improve services by making them more trauma-informed.</li> <li>- Trauma-informed services take the trauma people have experienced into account when providing, designing and reviewing services.</li> <li>- Access to a stable home is the first step in recovery from trauma and sustainably ending homelessness.</li> </ul>
<b>Pillar 3 – Prevention</b>	
<p>Introduction – Paula Barker MP</p>	<p><b>Paula Barker MP (Co-Chair)</b>, introduced the preventing homelessness before it occurs pillar. Prevention cannot just be the responsibility of MHCLG, it needs to be truly cross-departmental to ensure homelessness doesn't occur when interacting with the state and department's policies aren't directly causing homelessness.</p> <p>Paula highlighted the recent temporary measure that has been introduced by the Home Office to extend the move-on period from Home Office accommodation from 28 to 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act (2018). And that Baroness Lister, who is a member of the APPG, has a Private Members Bill currently before Parliament to put this extension on a permanent statutory footing. Extending the move-on period will allow for more time to prevent homelessness for newly granted refugees.</p>
<p>Expert by Experience and lead worker Beth Porter (Crisis)</p>	<p>Beth spoke about her work at the Single Homeless Prevention Service for refugees in Brent. They work directly with people who are in, or have just left, NASS accommodation to help them find somewhere to stay and prevent homelessness.</p> <p>The recent introduction of the temporary measure to extend the move on period is very welcome. On average it takes the service 58 days to find somewhere to stay and so is more closely aligned. Though it takes longer to find placements for under 35s due to the Shared Accommodation Rate.</p> <p>Since the service went live in August 2023 they have helped to house over 200 people and only one person has ended up having to sleep rough.</p> <p>They have also seen the value of local prevention work. Home Office move-on liaison workers have been placed in hotels. This has allowed</p>

	<p>Brent services to support people from further out because those officers are notifying local services the day people get their decision and the clock starts ticking.</p> <p>A key barrier remains affordability of PRS. Preparedness is also a barrier, people do not know their options. Asylum seekers are very keen to work and do as soon as they can, but they are not allowed until they get their decision.</p> <p><b>The Expert by Experience</b>, then spoke about her experience as a refugee. As a single person she was often told she could not be helped, but often not told who could help her. Better guidance and clear communication would have helped her a lot.</p> <p>But her lead worker at Crisis made her feel safe and welcome, encouraged her to keep going. She has been impressed by Britain's religious toleration. Being here today gives her hope that we can achieve change for refugees.</p> <p><b>Key Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brent shows how focusing on prevention at a key point of transition can achieve results.</li> <li>- Guidance and communication to applicants needs to be clear.</li> <li>- Services need to notify each other to ensure that people can intervene as early as possible.</li> </ul>
Baroness Lister	<p><b>Baroness Lister</b> spoke about how bringing eviction notice periods into line with the Homelessness Reduction Act is common sense. 28 days is not enough time. The temporary extension to 56 days until next June is welcome, but the effect may be undermined by the shift to e-visas. She has been pushing for this since 2016, while the Government is right that the move to fast-track applications has contributed this has always been a problem therefore a temporary fix is not sufficient.</p> <p><b>Key Point;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refugees not having enough time to find a home is not a new problem, we need a change to the law.</li> </ul>
<b>The Opportunity Presented by the Cross Government</b>	
Main Speaker – Matt Downie, CEO of Crisis	<p><b>Matt Downie</b>, We have an unprecedented housing emergency but we have never known more about how to effectively end people's homelessness.</p> <p>Cross-government strategy represents a chance to implement what we know works. OECD have set out that it's important to link homelessness to wider programmes on poverty alleviation and housing strategy. We also need experts by experience.</p>

Homelessness is highly responsive to political ambitions. We saw this in the pandemic, not just the Everyone In scheme but how we stopped evictions and uprated Universal Credit. We similar rapid progress under the last Labour Government.

Currently people are passing the buck, one Housing Options service he is aware of has just closed its doors for a month. We need to flip that so that public services treat ending homelessness like health and safety, they simply consider as part of their day-to-day work.

We need to take a long-term look, the strategy should be a 10-year one like the housing strategy, needs to listen to the Expert Panel. We also need to commit to decommissioning homelessness accommodation over time, we want better and smaller services as we make progress, in Denmark they link funding to ending homelessness.

More social housing alone doesn't end homelessness, it didn't in Ireland, systems need to change. We need to not just think about the need for social housing but what we want it for. The Government's Housing Mission outcome should be that everyone has somewhere to live.

That should mean abolishing legal barriers to accessing support like local connection or priority need, which pit different groups against one another. He met a couple asked to sleep out for 8 nights locally before being eligible for support.

Look at need and match resources to it, what type of housing and support needed to keep homes is required, don't just list what you've done.

Let's be bold. Let Mayors test different approaches locally, Combined Authorities should be places of radical experiments such as treating a Combined Authority as one area for local connection purposes. For example, Liverpool City Region's approach to social housing allocations during Covid.

Audit the policies we already have across Government. Are they driving up homelessness? If they are, change them.

Strategy also represents the chance for identifying and supporting discrete subgroups. For example, hospitals and prisons are discharging people straight into homelessness. Met a man who had his knee replaced and then couldn't get back into hostel. We can provide solutions for these groups.

Early wins in response to urgent need should be demonstrators of success.

We could create a housing provider focused on people experience homelessness through Homes England and the Affordable Housing Programme.

Strategies haven't worked until now and so we owe it to everyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness to be bold.

## General Discussion

**Chris Hancock**, Right to Buy causes problems. Their stock currently is not subject to it as its below 200, but as it develops it will be. This makes it uneconomical for Councils to invest in housing, because they have to sell it at such a discount. They may have to hand the properties to a Housing Association to get around that.

**Jonathan Brash MP**, highlighted the broader effect that PRS has on the local housing sector, really important to raise the proportion of social housing in the local housing market. Highlighted the role that converted empty properties could play.

**Chris & Carly** spoke about the challenges in Hastings, high proportion of PRS due to its history as seaside resort. LHA doesn't cover the rent. Council acquiring properties mean they can charge the LHA rate and cover the costs.

**Sean Woodcock MP**, prevention is really important. There needs to be more pre-tenancy work, tenancies do sometimes fail which may be linked to other issues. Council websites are very hit and miss in making it clear where you can get pre-tenancy support. Highlighted role of a neighbourhood housing officer to get things moving.

**Luke Elton** – Managing transitions really important, there is a role of the neighbourhood housing officer.

**Chris Vince MP**, trauma informed wrap around support is crucial, too often support accommodation is not really supported. Can be a revolving door between supported housing and the street.

**Emily Darlington MP** – But too much inflexibility can impact local support. This can be for a range of reasons, there is no one sized fits all solution.

**Sarah Lister** – People need to be supported all the way out of homelessness, that can take up to two years but long-term thinking is vital.

**David Smith MP** – Welcomes Supported Housing Act, there was a very real need to drive up standards in the sector and ensure operators were genuine.

**Dr Laura Nielsen (Shared Health Foundation)**, biggest cohort is children in TA, the system can incentivise families to stay together and therefore people to stay people in unsafe situations.

**Emily Darlington MP**, highlighted the range of reasons for homelessness including Section 21, domestic violence and family breakdown. There cannot be a one size fits all approach. Homelessness is often an expression of other issues, there is a direct read



across to child poverty and the work of the Child Poverty Unit. Needs to include social care.

**Baroness Lister** – Cited research by the Resolution Foundation, low levels of LHA contribute to child poverty.

**Matt Downie** pointed out that the benefit cap is also an issue and LHA is fourth biggest budget line, social homes the only way to reduce this bill.

**Baroness Grender** raised employer housing schemes such as that provided by Deutsche Bank to house their UK employees.

**Matt Downie** highlighted Crisis' work on the Homelessness Covenant that helps employers prevent homelessness among their own staff. Shows how bad the crisis is, we can tackle from a range of angles

**David Smith** highlighted that if you were designing a system you would not start here throwing money at housing benefit, £20 billion, it's a massive sum of money if we can reduce it and repurpose it.

#### **Key Points;**

- Right to Buy is holding Councils back from investing in social housing.
- Local Housing Allowance is being at the level its at is blocking people leaving homelessness behind.
- Trauma informed support and managing transition points are critical.
- Supported accommodation can be poor, need to raise standards while allowing providers flexibility.
- Ending homelessness can contribute to the child poverty agenda.
- Welfare needs to match need to be effective.
- Effective strategy could get us off the current hamster wheel where we are spending £20 billion on housing benefit going to landlords.
- Strategy needs to be underpinned by and linked to the creation of more social homes, by a range of means.
- Prevention really important.