

APPG for London

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 5 December 2022

Parliamentarians in attendance:

Florence Eshalomi MP
Bob Blackman MP
Ruth Cadbury MP
Catherine West MP
Lord Best
Lord McNicol

Speakers:

Jasmine Basran, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Crisis
Jamie Carswell, Co-Chair of the London Housing Directors' Group
Jacob Quagliozi, Director of England, Housing Justice

Also in attendance:

Officers from the Secretariats at London Councils and Crisis
Media: Evening Standard, Local Government Chronicle
External Attendees from: Centrepoin, NHS, City of London Corporation, Frontline Network at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Glass Door Homeless Charity, Homeless Link, London Borough of Sutton, London Borough of Southwark and London Borough of Tower Hamlets, National Housing Federation, National Residential Landlords Association, New Horizon Youth Centre, Only a Pavement Away, Pathwa, Standing Together, Thames Reach, The Connection, St Martin-in-the-Fields, University of East London, Westminster City Council, Women of Wandsworth

1) Jasmine Basran, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Crisis

- Recent data from CHAIN (a multi-agency database recording information about people sleeping rough and the wider street population in London) suggests there are more than 360,000 homeless people in London. Crisis is worried that these numbers are getting even higher – A 24 per cent rise from the same time last year. Increase in rough sleeping is mainly from people who are newly sleeping rough.
- Rough sleeping is often not the first form of homelessness that people have experienced. 150,000 of which 75,000 are children are living in temporary accommodation in the capital. Many are living in this situation for 2-5 years. Sometimes people are placed in areas far away from their local communities.
- We're building to a pressure cooker situation. Support services aren't there to sustainably end homelessness for people. New Crisis research suggests we could see 300,000 people/families facing homelessness next year.
- Raised particular issue of a lack of support with rent. Housing Benefit has been frozen at 2019 rates despite rents rising at their fastest rate in 16 years.

2) Jamie Carswell, Co-Chair of the London Housing Directors' Group

- Raised the issue of family homelessness. 150,000 adults living in TA. This is 60% of Britain's TA population. TA has been managed precariously through the use of the private rental sector.
- Short term solutions are drying up – Rents are increasing (17%) more expensive year on year, 35% fewer lettings in Q2 this year compared to pre-pandemic baseline.
- There is also competition from other parts of the public sector – e.g. Home Office needing accommodation for asylum seekers etc. The sector is not well joined up.
- Recognises need for a well-functioning private rented sector at affordable Local Housing Allowance rates.
- Acknowledges that the government has published and committed to a long-term approach to rough sleeping through its strategy.
- Emphasis is turning to prevention work which also sits with local authorities, as well as with institutions. Only a third of rough sleepers were known to their council beforehand. What about the other two thirds?
- Homelessness Prevention Grant – Is currently been consulted on and the options are not sustainable. With better collaboration something can be done. But it does need to reach right across health, benefits, asylum.

3) **Jacob Quagliozi, Director of England, Housing Justice**

- Housing Justice's work is the opposite of the 'glamorous end' of the sector if there is such a thing, supporting voluntary groups who provide night-time shelter. The public's expectation is that the church is there as the shelter of last resort. Churches were not able to provide any accommodation in the early roots of the pandemic. An awful lot of progress was made over those two years – The quality of accommodation improved. Very high risk that we go back this year.
- Rough sleeping may have fallen but it's now much more expensive to provide night shelter accommodation. Churches are now in a position where they are trying to find the money to run this accommodation.
- Majority of London beds are in a communal sleeping environment, so public health concerns remain.
- Worth reflecting on how reliant our system is on non-commissioned beds. Still UK nationals in shelters but the majority of people in night shelters tonight, particularly in London, are non-UK nationals. The system doesn't allow these people, often with significant immigration issues, to move through.
- Housing Justice also run their own hosting project - People who are struggling to move on from a night shelter when they close in March. This is often when rough sleepers come into contact with the council.

4) **Q&A and Discussion**

Bob Blackman MP reflected on the good news of the extra DLUCH funding announced earlier that day for the Homelessness Prevention Grant

Question: Ruth Cadbury MP asked the panel if there is any link between the supply of new housing and rents coming down in the private rented sector.

Jasmine Basran said that if we have more social housing, it should take pressure off the PRS as it will absorb demand, but that this is a long-term solution and doesn't address the needs of many people in the short term.

Jamie Carswell added that we collectively need to understand what is going on in the private rented sector and pay more attention to it as a vital part of the system. He suggested the PRS is a public good when there are high standards.

Bob Blackman MP raised concerns about developers selling new properties to overseas investors who then rent them out at extortionate rates. He argued this made properties unaffordable for many and forced people into claiming housing benefit, where in effect British taxpayers are subsidising foreign owners.

Question: An audience member asked whether the panellists knew much about the government's plan to tackle rough sleeping.

Bob Blackman MP said that the problem successive governments have had in the UK is the lack of supply of social housing. He said we need to build at least 90,000 units per year to catch up with where we should be.

Ruth Cadbury MP said that rough sleeping is the visible symbol of a whole load of other services breaking down and shows that the safety nets for people have gone. She said that rough sleeping has grown to be a significant problem in the years since 2010. She spoke of the many families with children, elderly and disabilities which are being housed by councils. She spoke of the reliance on the Private Rented Sector (PRS) to pick up the gap in social rent housing, but that the 'perfect storm' of rising interest rates and Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) licencing mean that many private landlords are simply choosing to sell their homes rather than rent them out, causing a rapid shortage in the PRS.

Bob Blackman MP added that he had concerns around the impact of Airbnb on supply in the PRS in London.

Question/Comment: An audience member welcomed Jacob's assessment of the conundrum facing winter shelter projects challenged by the need for bed spaces and costs of single room occupancy accommodation. She said that Glass Door welcome the Rough Sleeping Immigration Advice Service funded through RSI, and the access to immigration advice and hosting project run by Housing Justice, it will increase access to much needed advice for homeless migrants with unresolved immigration matters. However, need for access to free impartial immigration advice is a long-term challenge.

Question: An audience member raised concerns about the large numbers of young people becoming homeless every day in London. She said that 48% of people sleeping rough in London had a previous experience of homelessness when they were under-25. She wanted to know what we can do for young people so that challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis are less likely to push them into homelessness, which can seriously affect their life chances.

Jamie Carswell spoke of the commissioned services and non-commissioned services (such as civil society and faith groups) which support young people. He suggested we need to think hard about how these different services link into the responsibilities local authorities have to look after people.

He argued we need consistency across local authorities in linking these commissioned and non-commissioned services up.

Question: An audience member asked whether the government did any calculations of the overall cost to the public purse when deciding to freeze local housing allowance (LHA) rates. She suggested that freezing local housing allowance rates is leading to additional costs to the public purse down the line.

Jasmine Basran said Crisis welcomed the government's decision to invest in local housing allowance rates in 2020, and that prior to this they commissioned a cost benefit analysis which clearly showed the benefits would outweigh the cost of the investment in LHA rates. Basran stated that investment in stopping people going homeless or needing to go into temporary accommodation showed a clear cost benefit to the treasury, as many people develop severe support needs after this occurs. Basran also argued that the costs of homelessness to the taxpayer is not viewed cross-departmental. Even though money spent by the Department for Work and Pensions may not come back to the department, it often saves money somewhere else such as the Department for Health and Social Care. Basran said we need to look at this as a whole and there is currently too much giving with one hand taking away with the other.

Question: Several audience members asked health related questions. One asked whether it is ever discussed how much homelessness and rough sleeping is costing the NHS. Another asked how we can connect those who are homeless to services in the NHS, and a third member raised concerns about Integrated Care Systems (ICS) struggling to connect with wider services.

Jamie Carswell said the work of Healthy London Partnership in this area is really important. He argued delayed discharge is definitely the way into these conversations and suggested there needs to be a lot more work in linking in housing teams at a borough level to discharging teams so that people aren't discharged with nowhere to go. He argued ICSs must have a particular focus on health inequalities.

Jasmine Basran said that ICSs need to understand the needs of inclusion health and ensure that they have an understanding of the needs of people who are homelessness or sleeping rough. She also argued that the NICE guidelines recognise these issues and need to be properly funded by government.

The meeting was brought to a close.