

MINISTERIAL WORKING GROUP ON PREVENTING AND TACKLING HOMELESSNESS
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WEDNESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2011 6PM - 7PM
Large Ministerial Room, House of Commons

Attendees

Grant Shapps MP	DCLG (Chair)	Martin Gibb	DH
Lord David Freud	DWP	Geoff Scammell	DWP
Crispin Blunt MP	MOJ	Tracey Vennai	MOD
Tim Loughton MP	DfE	Howard Bines	BIS
		Shirley Trundle	DfE
Jon Bright	DCLG	Roger Wilshaw	DCLG
Suzanne Kochanowski	DCLG		

Also attending for item 4

Athol Halle	Groundswell
John Hynica	Homeless People's Commission
Graham Harrison	Homeless People's Commission

Apologies

Andrew Robathan MP	MOD
Paul Burstow MP	DH
John Hayes MP	BIS
Baroness Angela Browning	HO

Agenda item 1 – Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 The chair welcomed members to the fourth meeting of the Ministerial Working Group. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a potential second report and hear directly from people who had previously slept rough.

Agenda item 2 – Feedback on Launch of the First Report

- 2.1 The chair reported back on the launch of the Working Group's first report "Vision to end Rough Sleeping: No second night out nationwide". The report had been well received by external partners. Homelessness voluntary organisations were already reporting improved access to departments, with support from Ministers to overcome blockages. It would be important to maintain momentum on delivering the commitments in the first report.

Agenda item 3 – Second Homelessness Report: Scoping Paper

- 2.2 The chair explained that many Members had been keen to broaden the scope of the Working Group beyond the focus in the first report on people coming onto the streets. Some had also felt there was a need for a broader homelessness strategy.
- 2.3 Members agreed that the existing Terms of Reference were sufficient to cover the focus of the Working Group on all forms of homelessness.

Members also agreed to produce a broader homelessness strategy as their second report for publication next spring.

2.4 In discussion, the following points were made:

- The second report should focus on the prevention of homelessness, particularly earlier intervention. There are large numbers of people at risk of homelessness who do not access support from housing authorities, or do so only at a late stage, and who therefore do not necessarily appear in statutory homelessness figures, or rough sleeper counts;
- Approaches are needed that are able to successfully turn people's lives around. There is a need to make funding work better, ensuring efficient services, for example through Payment by Results approaches;
- It would be helpful if we could find a way of allowing the sustaining of tenancies for prisoners on short-term sentences so that they were not homeless on;
- Supporting families with multiple problems was an important Government priority, many of whom were at risk of homelessness. Family champions should be encouraged to liaise with housing officers.

2.5 The chair welcomed support for a broader homelessness strategy. As with the first report, this should be a short, focused document with clear practical actions.

Action: Officials to develop a fuller outline for the second report and circulate to Ministers to agree in correspondence.

Agenda item 4 – Homeless People's Commission: How Clients Can Help End Homelessness

- 3.1 The chair welcomed the Homeless People's Commission who had produced an interesting report with recommendations for how to improve policies and services for rough sleepers.
- 3.2 Athol Halle explained that the Homeless People's Commission were a group of former homeless people who had come together to help tackle homelessness and improve services. Involvement in the Commission also helped build the confidence and skills of the participants, supporting them out of homelessness. The Commission shared the Government's vision of ending rough sleeping and having a cross-departmental approach to tackling homelessness.
- 3.3 John Hynica and Graham Harrison outlined the projects that they have been involved in as Commissioners. The Peer Health Advocate Project used peer volunteers to accompany homeless people to health

appointments. This helped to reduce A&E admissions and missed appointments, and increased the likelihood that treatment would be sustained. The Project Assessment Team at Two Saints Housing Association used clients to assess the quality of services and make recommendations for their improvement. Cyrenians in Newcastle used former homeless people on their outreach team and had helped over 100 people off the streets.

3.4 Athol Halle recommended that:

- Each Minister should consider how their department's policies could support the involvement of homeless service users;
- The Ministerial Working Group supports the development of Local Homeless People's Commissions in areas taking forward No Second Night Out nationwide;
- The Homeless People's Commission return to present the findings of their Annual Reports to the Working Group.

3.5 Members congratulated the Commission on their report. In discussion, the following points were made:

- Some people's homelessness cannot necessarily be prevented, for example, if they become addicted to drink or drugs and do not seek help. In contrast, some people seek help from their local authority or an agency but do not have their homelessness successfully prevented;
- The time taken for homeless people to turn their lives around varies. For some who get support through a hostel it can be days; but others can develop drink and drug addictions to mask mental health problems while in a hostel. Most people took around two years;
- Hostels or homeless projects that included training were particularly successful. Training and voluntary work help to build self-esteem and an understanding of a person's contribution to society. The high cost of rents when on Housing Benefit acts as a barrier into work;
- Information in schools, such as through the Ark Project in Hampshire, was important for preventing youth homelessness. This helped to increase awareness of the realities of homelessness and access to mediation services.

Action: Lord Freud to invite the Homeless People's Commission to meet with officials to test out the development of Universal Credit.

Action: The chair to respond in writing on the three recommendations made by the Homeless People's Commission.

**MWG Secretariat
September 2011**