

14 December 2018

Homelessness prevention

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

The Board's 2018/19 work programme contains the objective to 'reduce homelessness by continuing to work with councils and government to ensure that the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act is effective and sustainable; continue to lobby government for reforms reducing homelessness and the pressure on councils and their provision of TA, including adapting welfare reforms to reduce likelihood of homelessness; and influence policy on rough sleeping, particularly in terms of prevention'.

This paper sets out a proposed project for achieving this objective.

Recommendation

That the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board gives direction for LGA policy work on homelessness prevention.

Action

Officers to progress as directed by members.

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Background

1. This paper sets out our proposal for influencing policy on homelessness and rough sleeping, with a focus on a prevention-focused, council-led approach.
2. The scale of the challenge currently facing local authorities makes this piece of work particularly timely: councils are currently providing temporary housing to almost 80,000 households, including 125,000 children¹. The number of people sleeping rough on our streets has more than doubled to 4,751 since 2010² – the highest levels recorded since the years prior to the introduction of the Rough Sleepers' Initiative.
3. As well as a severe human cost, homelessness also carries high and rising financial costs for councils. To stand still and deliver the same homelessness services currently being provided – for which funding has been significantly reduced in recent years – councils would need an additional £113 million by 2019/20³. Beyond this point, there is no clarity over funding levels for councils, hampering meaningful efforts to tackle homelessness.
4. In recent years the Board has successfully influenced homelessness policy and practice in a number of ways. For example, it has successfully lobbied for the adaptation of some welfare reforms, the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy which includes an additional £100 million for initiatives, and for changes to the Homelessness Reduction Act and its subsequent review (now underway). The LGA has also offered a range of support to councils, for instance via the Housing Advisers Programme, and through a range of advice and good practice, for instance on providing temporary accommodation.

Aim

5. There is now a real need and opportunity, in the lead up to a Government homelessness strategy and the 2019 Spending Review, to set out a positive well-evidenced case for enabling councils to end homelessness by preventing it happening in the first place.

¹ MHCLG, *Statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention and relief; Temporary accommodation tables January to March 2018*, Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721296/Temporary_accommodation.xlsx

² MHCLG, *Rough sleeping statistics, England autumn 2017*, Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682006/Tables_1_and_2a_2b_2c_-_revised.xlsx

³ Local Government Association, September 2018, *Moving the conversation on: LGA Autumn Budget Submission to HM Treasury*, Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Moving%20the%20conversation%20on%20-%20LGA%20Autumn%20Budget%20Submission%202018.pdf>

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6. The aim of this project is therefore to produce a case for funding and policy reform that better enables councils to end homelessness. This will be developed via a programme of engagement with councils and partners, the commissioning of further investigation and research where necessary, and presented as a final report outlining a set of asks of central government, evidenced using good practice in local authorities.
7. The LGA already has strong policy propositions for how to address some of the drivers of homelessness, such as increasing the supply of suitable affordable housing and adapting welfare reforms. It is proposed we continue to develop the detail of this argument by, for instance, continuing to make the case for councils to provide affordable homes, and working with the LGA Resources Board to influence the progress of welfare reforms such as the Government's review of the Local Housing Allowance post 2020.
8. Furthermore, our recent engagement with councils has highlighted two other fundamental issues that are not being sufficiently considered by Government or partners in the homelessness sector, and on which the LGA is uniquely placed to develop a strong position. This includes:
 - 8.1. Ensuring councils have financial sustainability and certainty over the long-term in order to prevent and relieve homelessness for all - In the context of significant overall budget reductions and increasing demand for councils, the Government has chosen to invest in homelessness through a proliferation of national schemes with short term funding envelopes, creating fragmentation and uncertainty that is not conducive to tackling homelessness, or to allowing councils to create and deliver a long-term plan for preventing it. Councils are also reporting the inadequacy of funding for the Homelessness Reduction Act.
 - 8.2. Requiring other public sector agencies to play their full role in homelessness prevention and relief - Housing stress and homeless is complex and can create and reinforce other issues, which makes effective cooperation with other services critical for achieving good outcomes for all. While the new Homelessness Reduction Act includes new duties on partners to refer households onto councils, it does not include a duty to cooperate and so risks shunting more pressure onto councils, rather than enabling 'whole-systems' approaches best able to deal with the individual factors which make homelessness likely.

Issues

9. Below we have proposed a framework outlining the areas around which the project might be organised.
10. Defining homelessness prevention: This chapter will set out the framework for the report's analysis, defining what is meant by the different types of homelessness prevention (see point 14, below).

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11. Defining the scale of homelessness: This will involve analysing national and local-authority data to draw conclusions about trends in, and causes of, homelessness in England. It will draw on data which has already published, including government statistics and reports from homelessness providers; we will also conduct fresh analysis using returns from local authorities following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
12. The current policy environment: This chapter will summarise the recent legislative and policy framework for homelessness prevention. It will also set out an analysis of the fragmentation in homelessness prevention funding and services, highlighting inefficiencies such as gaps and duplication.
13. The following chapters will define the different types of homelessness prevention activities, and analyse trends in provision. We will consult local authorities to understand the barriers to prevention, collate evidence – primary and secondary – of best practice in prevention, and set out policy recommendations.
14. Universal prevention – This encompasses measures which reduce the risk of homelessness amongst the general population, e.g. an increase in the supply of affordable housing, poverty reduction measures
15. Targeted prevention – these interventions focus on people at a high potential risk of homelessness because of their characteristics, e.g. care leavers, people who have suffered childhood trauma
16. Crisis prevention – interventions which take place during the 56 day period during which someone is legally considered to be “threatened with homelessness”
17. Emergency prevention – these interventions focus on people who are immediate risk of homelessness, e.g. No First Night Out for people sleeping rough; Nightstop for young homeless people
18. Recovery prevention – here, measures are focused on preventing repeat or chronic homelessness, e.g. rapid rehousing

Implications for Wales

19. This policy area is devolved, and therefore this report’s recommendations will relate only to England.

Financial Implications

20. In the 2018/19 financial year, funding will be taken from the total amount allocated towards housing.

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Next steps

21. To take forward as directed by the Board.