



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

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**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government**

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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
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Dear Sir George

Thank you for your email of 18 August on behalf of a number of your constituents, regarding Crisis 'A Home for All' campaign. I am writing on behalf of the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government to respond to your query.

Nationally, nearly 15,000 vulnerable people have been housed in emergency accommodation, since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown period. This is a truly remarkable achievement, and one which is the result of the hard work of local government, the NHS, agencies and charities across the country, including Crisis.

Our attention must now shift to ensure that as few individuals as possible return to the streets following this initial period of accommodation. This will be supported by the Next Steps Accommodation Programme. This programme is made up of two sources of funding: £161m which will deliver 3,300 units of longer-term move-on accommodation in 2020/21; and £105m of additional funding, which will pay for immediate support and interim accommodation to ensure that people do not return to the streets. £23m will also be provided so that vulnerable individuals experiencing rough sleeping, including those currently in emergency accommodation as a response to COVID-19, can access the specialist help they need for substance dependency issues, in order to rebuild their lives and move towards work and education.

I hope you agree that the above is a vital step towards achieving Government's aim to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. I also note some additional recommendations put forward by Crisis which I will respond to in turn below.

The Government has already implemented significant new legislation. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) is the most ambitious change to homelessness legislation in decades. Local authorities and other public bodies must now work together to actively relieve people of their homelessness or prevent homelessness for people at risk, irrespective of whether they are a family or single person, the reason they are at risk, or if they have a local connection to the area. More people are entitled to support than ever before. Homelessness legislation includes eligibility criteria, consideration of vulnerability and whether someone is intentionally homeless to ensure that resources are prioritised effectively, ensuring accommodation is there for people who need it most.

There are no current plans to change the statutory homelessness duties, beyond the extension of support for domestic abuse victims through the Domestic Abuse Bill. Our focus is to ensure that the new prevention and relief duties are being deployed to provide help to all eligible people, including those who do not have priority need. Since the HRA came into force, over 200,000 households have had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved through securing accommodation for more than 6 months. This Government is committed to fully enforcing the HRA and we have taken steps to continue this work in 2020/2021 by announcing a £63m Homelessness Reduction Grant, along with the £200m Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, which seeks to help local authorities plan and respond to their local homelessness pressures.

We agree that Housing First has an impressive international record in helping people with complex needs to recover and stay off the streets for good, which is why we awarded £28m to pilot it in three urban areas with contrasting challenges (the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region). Since its launch, our expert advisers have been working closely with each of the three pilot regions to closely monitor and support progress. We have commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of the programme, which will run for the duration of the pilots. The Government has committed to expanding Housing First in its latest manifesto and the findings of our evaluation, together with our experiences from the three pilots, will help to inform the next steps and any wider roll-out of the programme.

With regards to ensuring that no one is left without a safe place to stay due to their immigration status, we continue to consider the needs of this group as part of our approach to the recovery stage of the emergency response to COVID-19. However, the rules as to eligibility relating to immigration status, including for those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), have not changed. Local authorities must use their judgment in assessing what support they may lawfully give to each person on an individual basis, considering that person's specific circumstances and support needs. Local authorities already regularly make such judgements on accommodating individuals who might otherwise be ineligible, during extreme weather for example, where there is a risk to life. The Government recognises that these are unprecedented times and expects local authorities to support people who are sleeping rough, and also to minimise unnecessary risks to public health, acting within the law.

The Government brought forward a significant economic response to help support people to continue to pay their living costs. This unprecedented support package includes £9.3bn of additional support through the welfare system put in place quickly and effectively this year. We have also increased Local Housing Allowance rates so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents. This significant investment of almost £1bn ensures over 1m households will see, on average, an increase of £600 per year, helping alleviate affordability challenges facing benefit claimants in the private rented sector.

On 5 June we announced that the suspension of evictions from social or private rented accommodation had been extended by a further two months. This means that no action to evict a tenant will proceed before 24 August 2020. The emergency measures in the Coronavirus Act, which require landlords to give at least three months' notice to evict tenants, are unaffected by this and remain in place until 30 September 2020. We're also providing the biggest cash investment in affordable housing for a decade, through investing an additional £11.5bn for up to 180,000 new affordable homes, so that more households can access the home that's right for them.

May I once again thank you for contacting me on these matters. I would like to reassure you that this remains a key priority for Government. I hope your constituents find this information useful.

LUKE STEPHENS
Head of Ministerial Correspondence