



Frontline agencies in partnership

Robert Griffin
ODPM
Zone 2H1, Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

30 November 2004

Dear Mr Griffin,

Consultation response: Housing and Planning in the Regions

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your consultation paper, *Housing and Planning in the Regions* (September 2004). Homeless Link is the national membership organisation for frontline homelessness agencies in England and Wales. Our mission is to be a catalyst that will help to bring an end to homelessness. Our 500 member organisations provide services through: hostels, day centres, outreach and resettlement agencies, housing advice centres, youth projects, health projects, welfare rights groups, regional and sub-regional homelessness networks, refuges, drug and alcohol services and church groups.

This letter is Homeless Link's response to the consultation.

General

Homelessness is increasing across Britain as fewer and fewer people find it possible to access the housing market. Homeless people are those who emerge as most vulnerable in this situation. Many are struggling to cope with other problems such as mental illness, addiction, poverty or multiple needs. The interconnectedness of the problems relating to homelessness are recognised as requiring 'joined-up' approaches from government at all levels.

Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing to buy or rent, with support for those that need it, is essential to tackling the problem. We therefore welcome the Government's commitment in response to the Barker report of a "step change" in the supply of housing, including social housing. We are committed to working with government at all levels to ensure that the housing needs of homeless people are met. This means the right amount and the right sort of housing gets built in the right place and is made available to those in greatest need - as well as keyworkers and other groups.

We also recognise the need to ensure that the “institutional architecture” is able to meet the challenge of this change across the regions. In general therefore we welcome the proposal to merge the work of the RHBs and RPBs within the regional assemblies outside London and involving the Mayor in London.

Focus on addressing homelessness

Following implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002, all local authorities have formulated strategies to prevent and tackle homelessness based on reviews of the problem in their areas. These strategies are required to be compatible and feed into other local strategies, including local housing strategies and Supporting People strategies. Given the importance of housing supply to the success of these strategies, we believe that the new regional housing and planning bodies should have a duty to examine the findings of these reviews and ensure that the regional housing / spatial strategies contribute to meeting local homelessness strategies through a higher level regional homelessness strategy.

We recommend the regional body should have a duty to produce a regional homelessness strategy alongside and linked to the regional housing and spatial strategies.

We believe these should encourage the development of effective sub-regional approaches to tackling homelessness. The regional strategies should also ensure that ADP capital funding, other streams of investment funding and SP revenue funding are effectively coordinated to enable the development or renewal of supported housing for homeless people where necessary.

Consultation and involvement

While recognising the need for the assemblies to establish consultation mechanisms that suit regional conditions, the new structures should build on existing good practice of participation and engagement with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and the principles of the national Compact. Frontline agencies delivering services to homeless people have valuable experience of advocating for the most socially excluded groups. They also see first hand the effect of gaps in policy, resources and services.

VCS bodies are therefore in a unique position to ensure that the strategies that come from the proposed new structures are built on a real understanding of the situation on the ground. For example, Homeless Link’s London team has been working closely with the RHB through the London Housing Forum to influence the development of the draft London Housing Strategy. This has ensured that the new draft strategy has taken into consideration the important viewpoint of this sector.

We recommend that engagement and consultation with the VCS is built into the new model. In addition, the regional assemblies should actively enhance the capacity of the homelessness VCS to participate through effective representation in their region.

If you would like to discuss anything in this response further please contact Dominic Williamson on dominic.Williamson@homelesslink.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Edwards
Chief Executive