



Frontline agencies in partnership

Ending homelessness

From vision to action plan - a consultation paper

Conference consultation version
5 July 2006

Table of contents

Who is this document for?	2
Introduction.....	3
Arguments against trying to end homelessness.....	4
What is homelessness?	5
Causes and effects of homelessness.....	9
Achieving the vision	10
Accommodation	11
Prevention	14
Support	19
15 year action plan	26
Endnotes and links	27

Who is this document for?

To coincide with the 40th anniversary of *Cathy Come Home* Homeless Link will launch *Ending homelessness - vision to action plan* as a pamphlet in the Houses of Parliament. This document will be used to influence politicians and decision makers in the short term but will also set out our campaigning agenda over the next few years.

To inform this final document we are publishing this draft consultation version to stimulate debate among homelessness agencies and other stakeholders to gather together the best ideas to make our vision a reality. The recommendations and solutions that we have suggested have come from a wide range of sources including the experiences of homeless people and the services that help them. We hope you will read, share and debate the ideas in this consultation version and let us know what you think.

We want to test the assumptions and ideas that we have generated so far so that when we launch the final version we will be able to offer a case for ending homelessness which is not only compelling but also practical and achievable over the next 15 years. We hope that over the summer you will discuss this document with colleagues, service users and other stakeholders.

We have tried to keep this as short as possible and more detailed analysis and backing material will eventually be made available when we launch the final version on our campaign website www.endhomelessness.org.uk .

Please let us know what you think as soon as you can but by **25 August** at the latest.

Please send your comments by email to: dominic.Williamson@homelesslink.org.uk

Or by post to:

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Thank you

Introduction

Homeless Link's vision is an end to homelessness in the UK. We believe this is possible but we do not underestimate the challenges involved. Achieving it will take determination, political leadership, intelligence, commitment and resources. It will also take imagination and new ways of thinking about an old problem.

Much has been achieved in tackling homelessness. But much remains to be done. Too many people still face the reality and consequences of losing their home - families, couples and individuals, old and young. The problem is complex yet we are encouraged to be ambitious when we consider the changes that have already been achieved. Progress on issues such as rough sleeping has made Britain an international beacon of excellence. We believe we now have an opportunity to set an even greater example - by setting out with determination and clarity to end homelessness forever.

Our members' experience of working with homeless people every day not only gives us evidence of the scope and depth of the problem but also offers examples of solutions that point to what needs to change. Equally importantly this frontline experience fuels our sense of urgency to work for change. Homeless people themselves are now at the forefront of identifying problems and solutions. Together we are motivated by the sense of injustice and frustration at a system that still fails to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

This document sets out how we think this goal can be achieved - through ensuring the right accommodation, prevention and support is available and by putting people first.

Why should we bother? We believe that a society as wealthy and resourceful as ours has a moral imperative to help people who face homelessness. Besides, homelessness wastes resources. Public money used in crisis acute interventions is better spent in prevention and supporting people to contribute to communities rather than depend on others. Finally, having a home is a fundamental human right, the absence of which denies access to other rights such as health and education. Whether it is on grounds of morality, cost to the public purse, social justice or basic human rights we believe that ending homelessness should be a top priority for government and for the whole of our society.

We hope that you will be inspired to join us in working to achieve this goal, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is possible. In this pamphlet we set out ideas about how this vision can be achieved.

Please let us know what you think.

Arguments against trying to end homelessness

The proposition of ending homelessness promotes a range of reactions and responses. As well as the positive these often include:

- It's impossible - some people just have too many problems or bring it on themselves.
- What about people that choose to be homeless?
- What about travellers / other lifestyles?
- Measuring homelessness is too difficult so we would never know if we've achieved it.
- Migration - people are always moving to new area
- There will always be people who are homeless at least on a temporary basis.
- What would happen to our work and organisations if there was no more homelessness!

In this pamphlet we hope to address these issues. We hope that by the end you will not only be convinced of the need to end homelessness but will be inspired to play your part in this endeavour.

This pamphlet sets out what we believe needs to happen and how it can be achieved. It shows how everyone, from government ministers to local politicians and officials, staff and volunteers in homelessness services and homeless people themselves all have a crucial part to play.

Consultation question:

What other arguments can be made against attempting to end homelessness?

What is homelessness?

There are different ways of defining homelessness because there are different ways of thinking about the idea of a home. When we talk about a home we are usually referring to one of three elements or some combination of these:

- The physical accommodation.
- The facilities and functioning that are available.
- The emotions and relationships associated with where we live.

Most of us recognise a home as accommodation that:

- meets our physical needs for warmth and shelter
- provides sufficient space for ourselves and the other people we live with
- gives us some choice over who we share with
- offers security and safety
- is in a decent state of repair
- is settled in the sense that we know that we will not have to move at short notice or in the future unless we choose to
- means we can get the support we need from others
- allows us to take part in and benefit from the local community.

Having a home is a human right but also necessary to enjoy other basic human rights to such as privacy, family, education and health.

Defining homelessness

Rough sleeping is the most extreme, visible and damaging form of homelessness. It is also what the public often think of when they think about homelessness. However, the definitions above show that homelessness means much more than not having a roof over your head. The homelessness legislation¹ includes a definition of homelessness that is used by local authorities as part of the assessment of whether they have a duty towards the person applying.

Who is legally classed as homeless?

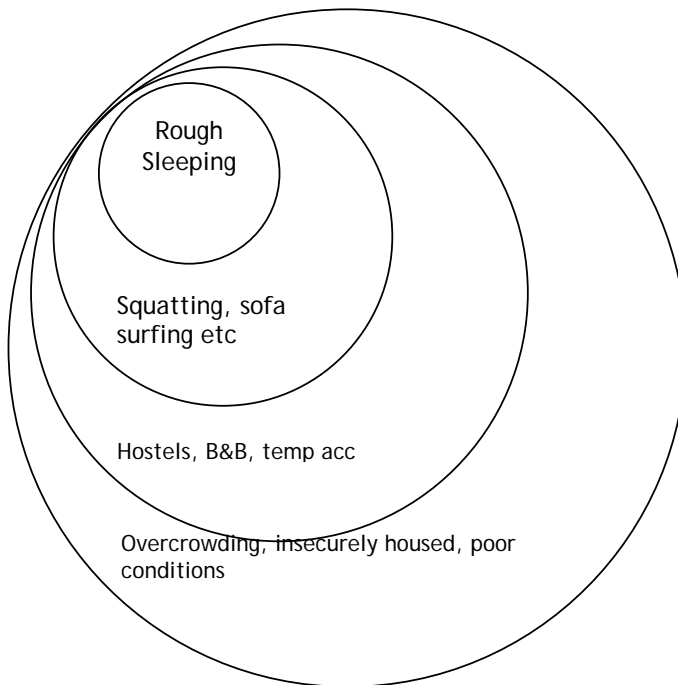
Under the homelessness legislation the council has to look at any accommodation you have access to. You should be considered homeless if:

- you have no home in the UK or anywhere else in the world
- you have no home where you can live together with your immediate family
- you can only stay where you are on a very temporary basis
- you don't have permission to live where you are
- you have been locked out of home and you aren't allowed back

- you can't live at home because of violence or threats of violence which are likely to be carried out against you or someone else in your household
- it isn't reasonable for you to stay in your home for any reason (for example, if your home is in very poor condition)
- you can't afford to stay where you are
- you live in a vehicle or boat and you have nowhere to put it.

From Shelter websiteⁱⁱ

This wider understanding of homelessness overlaps with other sorts of housing needs such as overcrowding. In some cases overcrowding would mean that it is not reasonable for the family to continue to live in the accommodation and they would be considered homeless. Someone living in a squat may consider that they have resolved their own homelessness, but the insecurity of their situation means that they are homeless within our definition.



In this document when we talk about homelessness we are referring to:

- people sleeping rough including people in derelict buildings or abandoned vehicles
- people living in homeless hostels, nightshelters or other forms of temporary accommodation such as B&Bs
- concealed households - families or individual who share insecure accommodation with others because they have no other way of finding a home for themselves.
- people living in squats or who are forced to stay with relations or friends ('sofa surfing') not out of choice but because they are unable to get a home of their own

- people living in overcrowded, insecure or in poor conditions where the conditions are such that they do not feel that they have a real home.

A common issue that arises in talking about homelessness is the divide between family homelessness and what is often called 'single homelessness'. The term 'single homelessness' is often used to refer to people not accepted under the homelessness legislation. However, many are living as couples and are not single. Assuming that 'non-statutory' homeless people are all single has led to many services denying or excluding people who are in relationships. This false divide also disregards the fact that many 'single' people in hostels are actually parents who would like better contact with their children.

Consultation question:

Do you agree with this definition of homelessness and the groups we have included?

The experience of homelessness

In talking about definitions and numbers it is easy to forget that homelessness is about people. Too often this means that people's individuality, identity and personal circumstances, ambitions and needs have not been fully recognised. Often the very system that is meant to help people facing homelessness ends up adding to their frustrations and sense of powerlessness as they are faced with endless forms, assessments, access criteria and requirements to demonstrate their problems rather than what they can do. Homelessness can be stigmatising and alienating and people are increasingly rejecting the homelessness label.

However, there is a growing voice from people who have direct experience of homelessness demanding that their expertise and skills are recognised as crucial to ending homelessness.

Counting homelessness

No one knows how many homeless people there are in Britain. Official statistics focus on three elements:

- Statutory homeless - the 'official' statistics collected by government from local authorities about how many households are assessed under the homelessness legislation each quarter.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation at any one time
- Rough sleeping street counts

We want to see a more comprehensive range of measures and surveys undertaken that give a more complete picture of homelessness. This will be essential to underpin future action and monitor progress.

Consultation questions

What other ways of assessing levels of homelessness are there?
How could we get to a more comprehensive analysis that would be rigorous and would mean that we could accurately assess progress in tackling the issue?

How will we know we've done it?

Is aiming to end homelessness setting ourselves an impossible task, not least because we will not be able to accurately measure it? We believe that it is possible to develop better ways to measure homeless that could be used to show progress. We believe that our approach should be that we would not stop working with individuals, but also to improve the system of prevention and support, until no one has to become homeless.

Even given the measures that exist we can set some medium term and measurable objectives:

By 2010 we want:

- A further reduction in rough sleeping so that the total of the indicative street counts across the country is no more than 185 (10% of the 1998 benchmark figure and less than half of the current figure of 459).
- Evidence that no individual has spent more than 28 days sleeping rough.
- Evidence of significant reductions of the flows onto the streets or other forms of homelessness as a result of successful early preventative approaches.
- Evidence of a reduction in repeat homelessness.
- Increased rates of successful move on of people in temporary accommodation especially hostels and nightshelters.
- Evidence of the long-term outcomes from prevention and housing options work with local authorities.

We know that there is a danger in setting new targets. They can end up creating pressure at the frontline that shifts thinking away from the interests of the individual towards achieving political goals. However they also help focus resources and minds on a problem. We believe that setting new and ambitious targets should be accompanied by robust methods of ensuring that the figures are accurate and approaches do not become driven by targets rather than people.

Consultation questions

Do you agree with these suggested medium-term objectives and targets?
What measures would be necessary to show that we have ended homelessness?

Causes and effects of homelessness

There is a broad consensus that homelessness is the result of the interaction of 'structural' and 'personal' factors. It is also possible to identify 'triggers' - the events that can precipitate someone becoming homeless.

Structural factors include:

- unemployment
- low incomes
- shortage of affordable accommodation
- structure of local housing markets
- welfare benefits system
- migration - e.g. economic migrants from accession states, asylum seekers.

Personal factors include:

- mental and physical health issues
- domestic violence
- harassment
- substance misuse
- relationship breakdown / family breakdown
- a history of being in care as a child (25% of rough sleepersⁱⁱⁱ)
- disrupted childhood or having suffered abuse or violence in the home
- debt
- antisocial behaviour.

Triggers:

- Family / relationship breakdown
- Transitions (moving from one life situation to another) such as:
- Young people leaving home or care
- Leaving institutions (hospital, armed forces, prison)
- Death of a spouse or partner

Homelessness is a form of social exclusion in that causal factors tend to be mutually reinforcing: structural issues interact with personal vulnerability. For example, someone with poor mental health may be less likely to cope with becoming unemployed, which may lead to debt problems and homelessness. It is this complexity that often makes homelessness more difficult to resolve, not least because many public services are organised to help with one problem at a time and fail to help people with a combination of needs.

Consultation questions

Are there other causes of homelessness? What are the main effects of homelessness?

Achieving the vision

We will have achieved our vision of ending homelessness when everyone has decent, settled accommodation that meets their needs at each stage of their life.

Accommodation, prevention and support - putting people first

We have organised what we think needs to happen to achieve our vision under three headings - accommodation, prevention and support.

Throughout these three there is another theme: putting people first. We believe that ending homelessness will require a shift in thinking about the problem from old ways that treat homeless people as a problem to be solved to new ways that focus on increasing choice, dignity, rights and responsibility and which put the expertise of those who have experienced homelessness at the forefront of efforts to resolve it.

We believe that each of these is a necessary but not sufficient part of the solution.

The bigger picture - vision 2020

In developing solutions over the next 15 years we are aware that as a country we are facing considerable changes and our recommendations must take these into account if we are to succeed.

These challenges may include:

- Rapid globalisation - increasing mobility of people, ideas and products and services.
- Economic challenges posed by the growth of China, India and elsewhere
- Demographics - a rapidly aging population and growth in number of households, especially people living on their own.
- Migration flows - increasingly open borders in an expanding Europe.
- Social cohesion - greater integration on one hand but influence of extreme political or cultural movements on the other.
- Growing inequalities and lower social mobility.
- A growing economy and greater wealth among many but a section of the population who are excluded from improving living conditions.
- Changing social attitudes as the 'baby-boomer' generation reach retirement and rising expectations of choice becomes the norm.

These are challenges that governments will grapple with over the next 15 years. Some of these trends could help in tackling homelessness while others will make the task more difficult. However, we believe ending homelessness is a litmus test for the government in tackling social exclusion and deprivation. However, it will take change all levels - national, regional, local and in frontline services themselves.

Accommodation

A fundamental building block of ending homelessness is ensuring that there is sufficient affordable accommodation accessible to everyone. Without this homelessness is inevitable as the most vulnerable in society struggle to compete for a scarce resource.

The context

Today there is a severe shortage of affordable housing. While there are regional variations, there are areas across the country, rural and urban, where people are finding it increasingly difficult to afford a home that meets their needs. The massive backlog of need is reflected in rising house prices and rents, record waiting lists for social housing and the numbers living in temporary accommodation or overcrowded conditions^{iv}. The Government has accepted the need to tackle this problem and has promised a "step change" in housing supply as part of its sustainable communities plan^v.

However, the shortage of housing is only part of the problem. Indeed issues such as empty homes^{vi} and growing levels of ownership of second homes show that the issue is as much about access to accommodation as it is one of supply. Homelessness will continue to occur even where there is sufficient housing unless other issues of access are addressed.

"Famines have occurred even when the supply of food was not significantly lower than during previous years" - Amartya Sen

The move on problem

Many of Homeless Link's members provide hostels for homeless people. Our research in 2004 showed that around 45% of people in hostels were ready to move on but had no suitable housing option available^{vii}. Most did not have a statutory right to be re-housed. Our Move-on Project is highlighting other barriers facing hostel residents restrictive nomination rules set by social landlords such as excluding people with former rent arrears^{viii}.

The private rented sector

The shortage of social housing means that more people on low incomes have little choice but to rent from a private landlord. While this form of housing tenure is suitable for many people, for others the insecurity of short term lets and the high rent levels means that it does not provide a suitable long term settled home. A six-month tenancy cannot be considered sufficient security for a vulnerable person or a family with children. In other European countries a thriving private rented sector provides a much more stable and affordable alternative to social housing but this is achieved through rent controls and enhanced security of tenure. On the other hand positive models of PRS are developing through partnerships between private

landlords and others, such as combining PRS tenancies with floating support and managed lease arrangements.

Hostels

Overall in recent years there have been real improvements in the standard of hostel accommodation for homeless people^{ix}. However, in some places people still have to stay in dormitory style rooms in buildings that are unpleasant, unsafe and run down. The Government's £90m Hostels Capital Improvement Programme is improving this and we would want to see this programme extended^x. The high rents charged in hostels reflect the higher costs involved but create financial disincentives to work.

Specialist accommodation

Most people want their own place where they can live safely with their partner and family. Some however, especially more vulnerable people, want accommodation that can meet their longer term needs. For example, there are older people among the homeless population particularly whose need for support and care is getting more severe as the years go by. As well as a shortage of general needs accommodation there is also a severe shortage of accommodation that meets the needs of this group^{xi}.

Rents and housing benefit

Most government subsidy on housing is paid to landlords via housing benefit. When rents are high this can create a poverty trap. Innovative ways are needed, such as the Working Future^{xii} and the Transitional Spaces^{xiii} projects, to ensure funding for housing creates opportunity not dependency.

The challenge

1. Creating real choice and long term housing options.
2. A severe shortage of affordable housing.
3. Lack of move on for people in hostels.
4. Poor conditions and high rents in some hostels.
5. Problems with nomination restrictions to social housing.
6. Short term lets and high rents in private rented sector.
7. Lack of specialist longer term supported accommodation.
8. Housing benefits and rent system that acts as a disincentive to work.

Vision 2020

- o A convergence of properly measured housing need and supply.
- o A house-building and renovation programme creating a more balanced and fair housing system including bringing empty property into use.
- o More stable house prices and affordability of rents and mortgages.
- o Minimal waiting lists and much shorter stays in temporary accommodation including hostels.
- o Hostel rents allow people to work.

- o Sufficient specialist accommodation for those with higher needs.
- o An allocations system that does not penalise particular groups of homeless people.

The solutions

1. The government should reform housing market assessments so all types of homelessness and housing need are considered and future needs planned for. It should take into account people living in hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation and concealed households and include assess people's support needs to ensure that sufficient specialist supported and care housing is provided. Homeless people should be involved in the formulation of housing strategies.
2. The government should continue to increase investment in social housing and in bringing empty property into use. <Detailed figures to be added in time for spending review>. The regional and local housing and planning mechanisms must ensure new housing developments meet the needs of homeless people as well as other groups. In areas of severe local shortage restrictions should be considered on second home ownership and the right to buy.
3. The National Affordable Housing Programme should ensure adequate investment to meet the need for supported, intermediate and high care housing to meet the needs of the aging population. Alongside this there should be an increase in investment in housing related support through an increased SP pot (see section on support for more detail). More self-build schemes should be encouraged to help homeless people get skills and homes.
4. Social landlords should ensure that nominations mechanisms do not prevent homeless people from accessing social housing. The Housing Corporation should monitor this as part of its regulatory role.
5. The government should consider tax incentives for private landlords who offer a longer-term security of tenure and lower rents and should explore wider reforms of the private rented sector to increase security, conditions and keep rents affordable.
6. The government should extend the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme.
7. The subsidy system for temporary accommodation such as hostels should be reformed to reduce rents and encourage people to work.
8. The government should consider how the interplay between rents, welfare benefits and wages could be reformed to make work pay, especially for people in temporary accommodation.

Consultation questions

Do you agree with these solutions? Which are most important? Have we missed anything out or should we be thinking in an entirely different way?

Prevention

It is better to help someone to avoid becoming homeless than to wait and then try to help him or her pick up the pieces. Early intervention is also much more cost effective than trying to deal with a crisis situation or the effects of homelessness.

The Context

Even with sufficient accommodation some people will always be at risk of homelessness. The second strand of our action plan focuses on preventing homelessness. Effective prevention work shows that if the right support is offered at the right time people can be helped to keep their home or to make a planned move to their next home without falling into the crisis of homelessness.

Prevention approaches must be at five levels:

- Policy
- Transitions
- Early interventions
- Emergency interventions
- An effective safety net

The best people to say what sort of prevention might work are people who have experienced homelessness or people who have found ways to avoid it. Prevention strategies must learn from this experience.

Policy

Government policy can cause as well as prevent homelessness. On the widest scale successful policies that create stable economic growth will help reduce homelessness. However a strong economy is not enough; even when the majority are doing well inequality and social exclusion means that many can be shut out from the benefits of a growing economy and deprivation can become more concentrated. Therefore Government policies that address poverty and social exclusion are crucial to ending homelessness. Policy in the following areas can help prevent homelessness:

- social exclusion
- regeneration
- education and skills
- the benefit system
- the tax and welfare benefit system.

Despite 10 years of focus on this the Government recognises that it has yet to reach many of those suffering from the deepest social exclusion. Public services, usually geared to deal with one problem at a time, still struggle to help people who have more than one need.

Government policy causes homelessness when it forces destitution on people who are unable to provide for themselves. For example, restricting entitlement to welfare benefits or emergency assistance to people who are legally resident in the country.

Transitions

People are particularly vulnerable to homelessness when making transitions from one stage of their lives to another. For example:

- young people leaving home or care
- people leaving public services such as hospital, prison or detox services
- people leaving the armed forces
- refugees leaving NASS accommodation
- older people following the death of a partner.

Often the descent into homelessness can happen when one public service hands over responsibility for the person to another. Examples include:

- Someone being discharged from a hospital after a drug detox without ensuring they have drug-free accommodation to move to^{xiv}
- A person leaving prison or a young person leaving care and being placed in a B&B with no support^{xv}.

The risk of homelessness during such transitions jeopardizes the good work done by public services. Despite this the tendency to 'pass the buck' to another department or service often these problems remain unsolved. Creating pathways that reduce this risk will involve coordination and joint working across public services.

Early interventions

The earlier action is taken the easier it can be to prevent someone from becoming homeless. Local authorities have a duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to draw up a local homelessness strategy. In preparing this they are asked to look at the causes of homelessness in their area and put in place plans that will prevent and tackle it. Local authorities have started to shift the focus of their homelessness services from processing applications to developing services and interventions that prevent homelessness.

But interventions can happen much earlier and local authorities can work proactively with others to do this. Local authorities can work with others, especially social and private landlords, to ensure that people who are at risk of homelessness are identified as early as possible and appropriate services are provided. For example, a landlord who sees a tenant getting into rent arrears could alert the local authority and then support and advice could be offered. This kind of early action can help the tenant resolve the issue, will only save costs later but may well prevent that person spiralling down into debt and homelessness.

For vulnerable people 'floating support' usually funded under the Supporting People programme can make a big difference. This programme has helped thousands of people to maintain their independence and their home by providing personal support to address problems and access the other services they need.

Other effective early preventative services include:

- Housing advice
- Floating support
- Leaving care schemes
- Connexions

Emergency interventions

Local authorities, often in partnership with the voluntary sector, are developing effective emergency preventative approaches that can stop someone becoming homeless or can help him or her make a planned move to their next home. These include:

- County court assistance schemes
- Family mediation services
- Rent deposit services
- Sanctuary schemes

An effective and universal safety net

The current system for protecting people from homelessness builds on legislation first passed by parliament in 1977 and now enshrined in the 1996 Housing Act and the 2002 Homelessness Act. This legislation places certain duties on local authorities to provide settled accommodation to homeless households who are in priority need and not intentionally homeless. The priority needs categories include families with children, some categories of young people and other people who are considered to be vulnerable due to, for example, a mental health condition.

Under this system people who believe that they are homeless or threatened with homelessness can go to their local authority and make an application under the act. However, every year tens of thousands of households are found to be homeless by their local authority but as they are not 'in priority need' they are only entitled to 'advice and assistance' and in reality most get little more than a list of local hostels or landlords. If there is no hostel in their area they may have to move to another city to avoid sleeping rough.

A further anomaly with the system is that people may be found to be in priority need because they are vulnerable but this does not necessarily mean that they will get any support to address any need they may have. As a result vulnerable single people or couples without children may end up in temporary accommodation with no support.

The challenge

- Government policy can lead to destitution and homelessness
- Still need to tackle deep social exclusion
- People often become homeless during transitions
- Too many people evicted
- Young people don't learn how to avoid homelessness
- There is no universal and effective safety net

Vision 2020

- Government has identified and addressed policies that might cause homelessness.
- Managed transitions, effective early prevention work combined with an effective universal safety net means that very few people now face becoming homeless.
- Intervention services have moved 'upstream' and work with people much earlier to help them overcome the problems that might have otherwise led to homelessness.

Solutions

1. The Government should assess how existing or proposed policy might lead to destitution or homelessness and take steps to prevent this.
2. The Government should promote the benefits of effective prevention on homelessness especially the savings that can be made by avoiding the use of acute services and expensive temporary accommodation.
3. When people face the emergency of homelessness there should be a universal and effective safety net. The homelessness legislation should be reformed too so anyone becoming homeless - not just those deemed to be in priority need - have a right at least to temporary accommodation and support to find a new settled home in their area.
4. The DCLG should continue to develop its 'framework for preventing homelessness' identifying how different government departments and regional and local bodies can work together to prevent homelessness.
5. Government and all public services at national, regional and local levels should work together to research and address routes into homelessness. This should be coordinated through a regional homelessness strategy, led by the regional government offices, regional assemblies or mayors and involving the voluntary sector and other partners.
6. Regional and local homelessness strategies should identify the transitions that can lead to homelessness. They should also ensure that all relevant public services have clear pathways between services and accommodation providers, with protocols and tracking to ensure that when someone leaves their care they are not put at risk of homelessness - e.g. hospital discharge protocols^{xvi} and leaving prison schemes.
7. Local authorities and their partners should ensure that there are effective 'early warning systems' and intervention approaches to help anyone at risk of becoming homeless.

8. There should be a national plan to reduce evictions from all forms of accommodation including owner occupation, the private rented sector, social housing and temporary housing.
9. New flows into homelessness must be spotted quickly and steps taken to address them. For example new economic migrants should be helped to find work and settle and provided with a safety net of support when they face difficulties.
10. Schools and colleges should ensure that young people learn about housing and homelessness and the practical skills they will need to look after a home.

Consultation questions

Do you agree with these solutions? Which are most important? Have we missed anything out or should we be thinking in an entirely different way?

Support

We all need support at times in our lives. The more vulnerable we are or the more complex the issues we face, the more support we might need.

The Context

The preventative approaches along with better access to affordable housing described above would greatly reduce the need for emergency homelessness services. However homelessness often follows unpredictable misfortunes so prevention services are unlikely ever to be sufficient on their own. The third necessary element is support.

People who experience homelessness need support to get back on their feet. They may need support to:

- stabilise their lives after a period of chaos and uncertainty
- find and access settled accommodation
- develop the skills they need to become more independent
- overcome any emotional issues that might be holding them back
- build confidence and a sense of worth in themselves
- reconnect to family and friends
- get ready to look for work
- get into training or education
- address their substance addictions
- address health problems
- get used to living on their own and coping with day to day problems
- integrate with their local community
- learn to moderate behaviour that causes problems to themselves or others.

These forms of support are often delivered through:

- outreach services and engagement
- emergency accommodation such as hostels and nightshelters
- day centres
- second stage supported accommodation
- substance misuse services
- resettlement services
- floating support.

Day centres play a crucial role in engaging with isolated homeless people and preventing repeat homelessness by offering a range of services and activities. These include health, learning, cultural and resettlement services. Some offer opportunities for their service users to play sports, record their own music, develop their computer skills, or express themselves through arts, drama or writing.

What is support?

Support takes many forms but most is delivered through a one-to-one relationship between the worker and the service user. In hostels it is often called keyworking. The aim of the support given should be to empower the service user, increasing their capacity to make decisions over their own lives and gaining the information or skills they need. Recent research has suggested that support should focus on helping people to find positive relationships and identity as it is on emotional or practical change.

“We all want to feel proud of ourselves, to have someone to love and to have family and friends around us.”

<http://www.supportactionnet.org.uk>

Most importantly people who have experience of homelessness should be involved in the commissioning, design, improvement and delivery of support services.

A new understanding of effective work with homeless people

“The biggest single factor in clients feeling they have received an effective service was their relationship with agency workers. Continuity of care and an understanding of clients experience were of great importance.”

Being Supported (2006) Groundswell

A clearer understanding of what is effective in supporting homeless people is needed and Homeless Link is leading on this debate. Recent research (Lemos) shows that helping people to find or maintain relationships with friends or a partner should be an integral part of helping homeless people make the journey. Services should recognise that this is a journey from isolation to interdependence. Approaches borrowed from CBT and other places have been shown to be effective.

Supporting People

The Supporting People (SP) is the programme that pays for accommodation-based and floating support services for homeless people and other vulnerable groups. It is a central government fund paid to local authorities that then contract services to meet local need. The programme, which was introduced in 2002, has limitations on the sort of services it can fund and many areas are facing cuts in funding in order to control the overall size of the SP pot.

In 2005 the Government launched a consultation on the future of the programme. In our response we said that the central requirements for future success are:

- Stability of funding for good quality providers that meet the principles the Compact.
- Growth of the national Supporting People budget.
- A national minimum level of provision and outcomes for socially excluded groups in all areas.
- Mechanisms to ensure effective cross boundary and cross sector working.
- Retaining a national strategic approach, guided by outcomes.
- Empowerment and choice for homeless people in determining the services they receive.

For Homeless Link's full response to the Supporting People strategy consultation see:
[http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/consultations/SP%20consultation%20Homeless%20Link%](http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/consultations/SP%20consultation%20Homeless%20Link%20)

Supporting People Plus

Despite its limitations the Supporting People programme does show how an integrated funding stream can help vulnerable people. The model should be built on to create an SP+ scheme targeting the most excluded to ensure they have access to multidimensional support and can access the services they need.

Getting back to work

Most homeless people want to work but are trapped by the no-home-no-job vicious circle. More services are now focusing on helping people overcome the barriers to getting into work including building self-confidence and skills. Social enterprise can offer real opportunities, as can supported employment schemes^{xvii}.

Arts and culture

Arts, cultural activities and sports can all help build skills, confidence and new social networks. Many homeless services are now focusing on these activities to help people get back on their feet^{xviii}.

“The feelings of elation and accomplishment which I felt standing on the stage are something I’ll never forget and played a large part in overcoming my difficulties and starting to put my life back together”
 Participant in Streetwise Opera

The role of the voluntary sector

The voluntary sector delivers most support services to homeless people. Agencies range from small local charities to very large housing associations. Their ability to be flexible to the needs of services users and to innovate means that they have been the source of new and effective approaches.

Supporting People is a major source of funding. However, many services struggle to get the resources they need.

Multiple needs

While many homeless people need only short-term support to get sorted out, there some people, especially among the population of rough sleepers, who have complex, multiple needs.

Having multiple needs makes you more vulnerable, but paradoxically also makes accessing services more difficult to access. Many public services are geared up to respond to one particular 'need' and so people with multiple needs are very often passed from one service to another, ending up getting none of their needs addressed. Many fall back on homeless services.

A definition of multiple needs^{xix}

A typical homeless or ex homeless person with multiple needs will often present with three or more of the following, and will not be in effective contact with services:

- mental health problems
- misuses various substances
- personality disorders
- offending behaviour
- borderline learning difficulties
- disability
- physical health problems
- challenging behaviours
- vulnerability because of age.

If one were to be resolved, the others would still give cause for concern.

People with multiple or complex needs are over represented among the homeless population partly because homelessness itself can is likely to cause additional needs. Around 50% of homeless service users meet the definition above rising to 57% among the population sleeping rough. However, services targeting complex needs in the community can prevent people falling into homelessness.

Despite improvements in access to GPs over the past few years, homelessness services still report that getting help for people with mental health problems is still difficult in many areas, especially if the person also has substance misuse problems.

Rough sleeping

Since the early 1990s concerted efforts have been made to tackle rough sleeping. In 1997 Tony Blair recognised this problem as the most extreme

form of social exclusion and set the Social Exclusion Unit the goal of reducing rough to as close to zero as possible but at least by two thirds in the short term. As a result of this and work by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies over the past nine years levels of rough sleeping across England have been reduced by around 75 per cent (rather less in London). While this has been a real success, without ongoing focus and improvements further progress will be stalled and numbers may start to rise again.

Fantastic homelessness services

Many Homeless Link members provide services that are beacons of good practice. Indeed the three winners of the Housing Corporation's Gold Award for Homelessness are all Homeless Link members^{xx}. The best homelessness services have pioneered effective approaches to engage and involve their service users in improving the services they offer and many recruit former clients as staff.

However, there are still some homelessness services that fall behind that standard of the best. We aim to help these improve so all services for homeless people are no less than fantastic. Our regional and Innovation and Good Practice teams offer bespoke support to homeless services to help them improve the services they offer.

There are still too many barriers to people accessing services. The best services have found ways around these. For example many hostels now accept people with dogs and some provide rooms and work with couples. Much more needs to be done to make these the norm rather than the exception.

Creating change

Homeless Link has developed a strategy to guide our future work to help services improve what they do. This is based on the recognition that excellent services do well under the following headings:

- Service users at the heart of service development and delivery
- Leadership and vision
- A positive impact on the local community
- Effective and strategic partnership working
- Systematic and innovative working practice
- Funding and resources
- Investing in staff

The challenge

- People struggle to get the support and other services they need especially if they have complex or multiple needs.
- Support services often lack the stability of funding they need to recruit, develop and retain high quality workers

- The theoretical framework for working with homeless people is just starting to be established
- People with drug and alcohol support needs, with mental health needs or both find it particularly difficult to get the help they need if they are homeless.

Vision 2020

- Prevention and increased supply and access to affordable housing have significantly reduced the level of homelessness and a new action plan and target on rough sleeping has reduced this to almost zero.
- Services for people with multiple needs work proactively in communities and prevent homelessness but can also act as crisis intervention if anyone slips through the net onto the streets.
- Services are high quality, using evidence-based practice. They are well funded and have removed the barriers that once excluded people.
- Services promote people's human rights, encouraging awareness among service users of their rights and engaging and empowering them to use them. Services are designed to work with the person holistically.

Solutions

1. The Government should renew its focus on rough sleeping and establish a new target and action plan for the period up to 2010.
2. The Government should use the comprehensive spending review to increase investment in the Supporting People programme so it can meet existing and future needs.
3. The Government should consult on and publish a clear definition of deep social exclusion that takes into account multiple needs as a first step to establishing an action plan and funding streams that meet the needs of this group of people. Regional and local authorities and other public bodies such as PCTs should ensure that their strategies and services meet the needs of people within this definition working across professional and geographic boundaries where necessary.
4. Local Area Agreements (LAAs) have the potential to tackle social exclusion within this framework by integrating a range of funding streams and services. These need to come together in a holistic and coordinated way so that personalised services can be offered that address the range of needs that an individual has. The government should introduce a specific block of targets around social exclusion to ensure that homeless people are not missed out. The process of drawing up LAAs must involve VCS organisations working with homeless people and homeless people themselves.
5. The Government should develop a new programme alongside SP, which we are calling 'SP+', that will fund multidimensional support to homeless people and others who face cumulative disadvantage. This should bring in funding from a range of government departments, which will see savings as a result of more effective interventions. This should fund programmes that help get back to work or participate in activities that build self confidence and skills.

6. The welfare system should be reformed to ensure that barrier to work for homeless people are reduced and that homeless people get the help they need to find and keep a job. As part of this the government should consider introducing a subsidy system for temporary accommodation that brings the rents down to an affordable level for people entering the job market.
7. The Government and regional and local bodies such as DAATs should work together to ensure that there are clear integrated housing and treatment pathways for homeless people with drug and alcohol support needs^{xxi}.
8. Procurement and contracting for voluntary sector homelessness services should happen according to the Compact, allowing for stable long term funding of quality services and full cost recovery.
9. Providers of homelessness services should commit themselves to continuous improvement in their services, putting empowerment and involvement of their service users and potential users at the heart of their service delivery services. Interventions with homeless people should be built on evidence-based practice. Staff should have the competencies required and receive support and training.
10. The aim of ending street homelessness should be renewed. A new plan of action and target should be set to re-focus efforts: to reduce the level of rough sleeping to 10% of the original level i.e. to 185 across England by 2010. The plan should focus on following elements: National leadership and funding, clear local leadership and coordination and ensuring that there are the right services locally to prevent or tackle rough sleeping. These should include outreach services, emergency accommodation and move on, resettlement and longer-term support or care for those who need it. There should be a particular focus on people with multiple needs. People who have experience of rough sleeping should be involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

Consultation questions

Do you agree with these solutions? Which are most important? Have we missed anything out or should we be thinking in an entirely different way?

15 year action plan

2006 - 2011

- ❑ Top level commitment from leaders in all parties to the goal of ending homelessness.
- ❑ Building public support for the approach using the Cathy Come Home anniversary as a launch.
- ❑ A new commitment and action plan to further reduce rough sleeping.
- ❑ A national move on strategy to help unblock hostels linked to investment in social housing and improvements in PRS.
- ❑ Government homelessness strategy linked to other areas of policy.
- ❑ Regional homelessness strategies bring together preventative approaches.
- ❑ Comprehensive spending review - increased investment in housing and support.
- ❑ Local homelessness strategies strengthened to include wider preventative and support agendas.
- ❑ Increasing leadership and political will at local level under the well being agenda.
- ❑ Assessing need and commissioning services to meet need. Building on homelessness and Supporting People strategies. Sub-regional and regional commissioning?
- ❑ All political parties commit to goal of ending homelessness in manifestos.
- ❑ Homelessness services involving and recruiting people with experience of homelessness.
- ❑ Check against all main recommendations.

2011 - 2016

- ❑ New government renews commitment to goal.
- ❑ Progress being monitored through enhanced range of indicators.
- ❑ Homelessness services adjusting to move upstream and away from crisis interventions as levels of rough sleeping fall and hostels begin to empty.
- ❑ Advances in policy are defended when economic or other changes threaten levels of funding.

2016 - 2020

- ❑ To be determined.

Consultation questions

How can we build public and political support for ending homelessness?
What is the role of the homelessness sector over the next 15 years in achieving this goal?

Endnotes and links

ⁱ The Housing (homeless persons) Act 1977 as amended and now incorporated in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 <CHECK>

ⁱⁱ <http://england.shelter.org.uk/advice/advice-153.cfm#wipLive-12859-1>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1150033>

^{iv} Overcrowding reference

^v Sustainable Communities: Building for the future. See:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1139871

^{vi} <http://www.emptyhomes.com/index.html>

^{vii} www.homeless.org.uk/Files/Homeless%20Link%20No%20room%20to%20move.pdf

^{viii} <http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/rehousing>

^{ix} For example see:

http://www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/policy/londons_hostels_report_for_website.pdf

^x <http://www.homeless.org.uk/developyourservice/servicetype/hostels/hcip>

^{xi} <http://www.homeless.org.uk/test/Olderhomelessness/intro>

^{xii} <http://www.workingfuture.org.uk/>

^{xiii} <http://www.osw.org.uk/news/news.asp>

^{xiv} Homeless Link Clean Break project

^{xv} SEU report on Young People transitions

^{xvi} Refer to Homeless Link work on hospital discharge protocols and DCLG guidance

^{xvii} For examples of services and more information see

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/ete/employment>

^{xviii} <http://www.homeless.org.uk/developyourservice/moving/meaning/briefing>

^{xix}

http://www.homeless.org.uk/regionalNational/cymru/Homelesslink_multipleneedsgoodpracticebriefing.pdf/

^{xx} <http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/conWebDoc.3887>

^{xxi} Learn about Clean Break, Homeless Link's research project on integrated pathways at our website.