The question is not whether homelessness can end. It is what you could do in government to make it happen.

Let’s make the difference

A manifesto to end homelessness
We all need a place to call home
This manifesto, based on the views of people who have experienced homelessness in England and those who support them, sets out priority actions the next government can take to make the greatest difference to homelessness.

A home gives us stability, helps us remain healthy, and provides the space from where we can work, achieve our aspirations and build relationships in our communities.

Successive governments have invested in support to help people who face homelessness. Local authorities, charities and other agencies across England have worked hard to make sure the right support is there for people when they need it.

Yet there are still thousands of people who don’t have the right accommodation and support to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Demand for affordable places to live is rising; more people are seeking help with their housing; and the number of people sleeping on our streets is the highest it’s been for the past four years.

The task of ending homelessness is not finished.

Why it matters

Not having a home damages people’s lives and is costly for the public purse, so the challenges and opportunities for the next government are clear. Unless a commitment is made to end homelessness for good, we are only building up the costs and problems associated with it for tomorrow.

Across all political parties there is a desire for healthier and more productive communities to thrive in the years to come. Unless homelessness is dealt with, this cannot happen.

Make the difference

We call on the next government to:
1. Commit to end rough sleeping.
2. Ensure better support for people to find and keep a job, and an effective welfare safety net.
3. Ensure more homes and stronger rights for tenants.
4. Secure a better deal for people with the most complex problems.
5. Put in place a long-term homelessness strategy and the investment to deliver it.
Commit to end rough sleeping
It is unacceptable that anyone has to sleep rough on the streets of Britain today. It is damaging to individuals and to communities. It is essential that tackling the issue remains at the heart of efforts to combat homelessness.

We know from experience that having a national strategy and commitment to end rough sleeping results in positive change.

The Conservative government’s Rough Sleeping Initiative in the 1990s was followed by the Labour Party cross-government strategy ‘No One Left Out - Communities ending rough sleeping.’ Both initiatives resulted in new efforts to bring down numbers of people sleeping rough across England.

At the last general election candidates across the political spectrum pledged their support to end rough sleeping. The current coalition government’s ‘Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide’ provided new investment and tools to help people off the streets more quickly.

This approach has made a difference. In areas that adopted a No Second Night Out approach 67% of people were helped off the street after one night, and 78% of these did not return.¹

But as further changes to the welfare and support system are implemented, and disinvestment in local homelessness services continues, the efforts to help people sleeping rough are at risk.

Too many people who have never slept rough before are still ending up on the streets. This means we are failing to put adequate measures in place to prevent problems early, before they turn into a crisis.

All too often people are returning to the streets after being helped off them. Without enough support to help people address the issues that led them to sleep rough in the first place, we risk an endless cycle of repeat homelessness, which no government can afford to allow.

We know that sleeping rough can have a devastating impact on people’s health and wellbeing. The longer someone sleeps out, the worse their problems will become and the more costly to resolve once they are supported off the streets.

The next government has the opportunity to turn this around.
The case for change

**2,414** people are estimated to sleep rough on any one night in England.²

The estimated number of people sleeping rough is up **37%** since 2010.³

73% of people sleeping rough said better advice could have helped,⁴ 84% have a physical health need and 87% report a mental health problem.⁵

34% of people who sleep rough in London have been in prison, 12% in care services, 8% in the armed forces. 55% are non-UK nationals.⁶
How you can make the difference

We call on the next government to take the commitment to end rough sleeping even further, so that it prevents more people arriving on the streets and breaks the cycle of repeat homelessness.

In practice, this means...

1. Ensuring the right support is available in every area so that no one has to live on our streets. This can be achieved by working to four basic principles:
   - **No one arrives on the streets** – where the right support is available early on to prevent rough sleeping before it begins.
   - **No second night out** – where anyone who ends up on the streets should get help so they don’t spend a second night out.
   - **No one returns to the streets** – where people get the support they need to stay in their accommodation and move on with their lives for good.
   - **No one lives on the streets** – where we see an end to entrenched homelessness and nobody calls the street their home.

2. Promoting a prevention first approach, incorporating adequate investment and a ‘duty to prevent’ for the NHS, prisons, and other statutory services, with robust monitoring of whether this is effective.

3. Working with the homelessness sector to develop effective housing resettlement so that we can better understand how to help someone sustain a life away from the street, and put in place measures to stop the wasteful and harmful cycle of repeat homelessness.

4. Improving the recording of homelessness prevention and interventions, both in terms of the people seeking help and evidence about what works to keep people off the streets.

What our members say...

“Any area with a street homeless population needs to adopt the No Second Night Out approach.”
Better support to find and keep a job, and an effective welfare safety net.
A decent job can be a major route out of homelessness, so it is not acceptable that only 10% of people who are homeless are in work and only 23% are in education or training programmes.\(^7\)

The prospect of a job, and the training and support to help someone attain and keep employment, has the power to transform lives. However, current welfare-to-work programmes are not helping people achieve their potential.

There is strong evidence, including from the Work and Pensions Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, that the employment support on offer is failing those who are vulnerable and furthest from employment. Welfare-to-work programmes need to do more to identify and recognise the barriers to employment faced by many people experiencing homelessness.

Alongside this, the conditions for accessing welfare benefits are getting tougher, putting disproportionate pressures on the most vulnerable people.

For people with the most complex needs, a job might not yet be possible. Our welfare system needs to recognise this, providing an effective safety net whose benefit and employment systems focus on supporting, not punishing, vulnerable people.

An effective welfare system needs to:
- Prevent homelessness
- Help individuals to get back on their feet
- Avoid disadvantaging vulnerable people
- Work with homelessness charities to provide the best support possible.

Future employment programmes need to recognise aspirations, inspire people to develop their skills, and support those who are furthest away from getting a job.

At the same time, there needs to be adequate protection and income for people who are not able to work, or whose journey back towards employment will take longer than current programmes recognise.
The case for change

- **80%** of people experiencing homelessness want to work, but only **10%** are in employment.⁸
- Many people experiencing homelessness face barriers to work: **28%** have complex needs; over **70%** have mental health problems, and around **a third** have needs around substance misuse.⁹
- **51%** lack the basic literacy skills needed for everyday life.¹⁰
- Evidence from current welfare to work programmes shows they fail the most vulnerable people. For people experiencing homelessness on the Work Programme **58%** said that their barriers to employment were not identified by their advisor and less than **a third** felt optimistic about their chance of finding work.¹¹
- Less than **1/5** of homelessness agencies report sanctions motivate their clients to find work. Only **7%** said they improve engagement with Job Centre Plus.¹²
- People who become homeless are disproportionately sanctioned compared to other claimants, exacerbating mental health problems, causing food poverty, and pushing some into ‘survival crime’, such as shoplifting.¹³ There is little evidence that sanctions lead to an increased likelihood of finding work.
How you can make the difference

We call on the next government to help people who become homeless to achieve their job aspirations, and to ensure an adequate income is in place for those unable to work.

In practice, this means...

1. Working with the homelessness sector to develop effective welfare-to-work programmes for the most vulnerable people, which reward progress towards employment, not just the job at the end of this journey. We need:
   - New financial and assessment models to identify people’s needs, and more staggered progress payments for providers
   - Better quality specialist employment support to reach those in the greatest need
   - Greater integration between skills and employment programmes and funding.

2. Designing a benefits system where conditionality is realistic and proportionate. We need to stop unfair sanctions being applied to people experiencing homelessness, and reform assessments so they adequately identify people’s vulnerabilities.

3. Ensuring the welfare safety net covers actual housing costs for those without an adequate income to afford accommodation.

4. Investing in pre- and post-employment support programmes to improve opportunities for people to find work, and also sustain it.

5. Providing specialist employment support and advice for every young person experiencing homelessness, including flexible training opportunities, apprenticeships and tailored job coaching.

What our members say...

“For work to really help me out of homelessness I need to be paid a living wage.”
More homes and stronger rights for tenants
The shortage of low cost housing is a major barrier to tackling homelessness effectively.

Without truly affordable places to live, a route out of homelessness is not achievable, meaning people are stuck in temporary accommodation far longer than necessary.

Successive governments have struggled to respond to the country’s changing needs and demographics. Population growth, smaller household sizes and easier access to credit have all contributed to an increase in housing demand with which supply has not kept pace.

The costs of housing - mortgages, deposits, social and private rents, and service charges - are all rising more rapidly than incomes. Having a real choice about where to live has disappeared for many, as more people are housed miles away from work and their social networks.

All the main political parties have committed to increase housing supply so that there is a better mix of places for people to live, enabling them to play a full role in community life.

However, the next government needs to ensure that new housing covers all forms of tenure, including a balance between homes for rent, houses for sale and affordable social homes.

We also need stronger action to make sure this housing is accessible to all those who need it. Today’s definition of affordable (up to 80% of market rents) is well beyond the reach of far too many.

But increasing supply is only part of the solution. People at the lowest end of the housing market are usually left with the poorest quality accommodation and little option but to take it.

Private rented accommodation is often unregulated and can be poorly maintained, and for many vulnerable people the prospect of insecure tenancies and unclear rights can easily push them towards - or back into - homelessness.

The housing market is simply not working for too many people, particularly the poorest in our society. We need tougher measures to redress this.
The case for change

Nearly 1/3 of people living in a homelessness service are waiting to move on, but cannot as there is no affordable or suitable accommodation available.\(^\text{14}\)

There has been a 37% increase in the cost of renting a home privately in the last five years. Private rents are forecast to rise by 90% by 2040, more than twice as fast as income.\(^\text{15}\)

If social rents are set closer to market rents an estimated 1.3m more people will be living in poverty by 2040.\(^\text{16}\)

Working households claiming housing benefit doubled from 11% in November 2008 to 22.5% in May 2014, showing that people need help with housing costs as well as earnings.\(^\text{17}\)

1/3 of private rented homes fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard.\(^\text{18}\)

Insecurity in the private rented sector is an increasing cause of homelessness. Termination of private tenancies accounts for 29% of households becoming homeless, doubling since 2010.\(^\text{19}\)
How you can make the difference

We call on the next government to ensure there are housing options for everyone, where having a decent place to live is not beyond the reach of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

In practice, this means...

1. Backing the Homes for Britain campaign to end the housing crisis within a generation and publishing a long-term plan for achieving this within one year of taking office.

2. A stronger commitment in all future house-building programmes to increase sub-market level housing supply across all tenures.

3. Improving the quality and security of tenure in the private rented sector, with stronger expectations for landlords, adequate housing advice for tenants, and use of accreditation and selective licensing schemes. In addition, tenancy lengths must be extended, to help achieve housing stability.

4. Provide leadership and resources to Local Authorities and the voluntary sector so they can develop new ways to invest in accommodation, such as Housing First for people moving off the streets and shared living options for young people.

What our members say...


"You need to sort out the private rented sector!"
A better deal for people with the most complex problems
There are an estimated 60,000 adults in England facing a combination of problems including homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill health and offending behaviour. Unless services work better together, this group won’t get the support they need.

People struggling with more than one complex problem are routinely failed by services, which tend to deal with one problem at a time.

As a result they can end up excluded from the help they need, with no single service able to meet their needs at a considerable cost to themselves, communities and the taxpayer.

A robust plan to tackle multiple needs is vital to ending homelessness.

Over the next term of government, continued pressures on the public purse will increase the need for cost-effective solutions to local problems. Radical new changes to our criminal justice and social care systems will also be well underway.

So the need for truly integrated services that support people with all the issues they face will be greater than ever.

Evidence has shown that better coordinated interventions from statutory and voluntary agencies can reduce the cost of wider service use for people with multiple and complex needs by over a quarter.

Yet while ‘troubled families’ have received the attention of government, this group of individuals, until recently, has not.

In the context of continuing reductions in public spending, a new national focus on this group could help minimise the impact on people living on the margins of our communities.

A national focus doesn’t require a top-down approach. By exploring the accountability, financial and outcome-based levers at its disposal, government can incentivise and support local areas to take co-ordinated action. The best elements of programmes such as Troubled Families, the Better Care Fund and Total Place could be combined to create the vehicle for achieving this.

Delivery of the programme should be at the local level, with the voluntary sector fully involved in planning and implementation.
The case for change

28% of people using homelessness services have complex needs alongside their housing problem.22

‘Complex needs’ means a combination of needs relating to mental health, substance use and offending.

Savings of up to 26% (£958 per client, per month) can be achieved through more co-ordinated local services, yet these approaches are not widespread.23

Intensive support for people with complex needs saves money and improves wellbeing.

42% of agencies working with people with complex needs think commissioners are more aware of the issue locally.24

Evidence suggests that this local awareness does not always result in investment for people with complex needs.
We call on the next government to develop a new national focus on multiple needs that can support local areas to act.

In practice, this means...

1. Making local areas accountable for delivering effective, joined-up services for people with multiple complex needs, including the development of multiple needs strategies in each local area.

2. Developing a new national focus based on the best elements of existing programmes that can support, incentivise and fund local areas to act.

3. Listening and acting on the voices of people with multiple needs, and the frontline staff who support them.

What our members say...

“Services for the most vulnerable people must be protected. In a practical sense when you don’t support them, all of society pays the price – crime, addiction, anti-social behaviour, prison – lives are wasted and it all costs.”
A long-term homelessness strategy and the investment to deliver it
There is widespread public support for tackling homelessness. To really make a difference to homelessness the next government needs to take a longer term strategic approach.

There is no single reason why someone becomes homeless. Bereavement, traumatic past experiences, health problems, evictions, poverty and unemployment can all play their part.

This is why a whole range of agencies play a role in somebody’s recovery. At the heart of this is the support and accommodation that enables people to address and tackle all the issues that are going on in their lives.

Accommodation and support services have helped hundreds of thousands of people leave homelessness behind, and prevented many more losing their home in the first place. However the local funding upon which these services rely is increasingly under pressure.

Investment for single homelessness is now absorbed into the general grant a local authority has to spend in its area, and there are no safeguards to ensure it is spent on the people it is intended for, nor any accountability if this does not happen. There is a need for the new government to provide a national overview and accountability for homelessness.

Cycles of short-term investment are also making it harder for local areas to take an efficient and strategic approach to ending homelessness, which by its nature is rarely something one local area can tackle on its own.

Looking ahead over the next decade, if homelessness services are to continue helping people transform their lives, a more secure funding base for support is needed.

Addressing homelessness prevents wider social costs and disproportionately greater spending on NHS, police and other statutory services.

We need the joint investment to back up future action to tackle this for good.
The case for change

76% of the public agree that tackling homelessness is beneficial to their community.²⁶

Spending on the Supporting People programme,²⁷ housing support and advice for vulnerable people fell, on average, by 45% between 2010-11 and 2013-14.²⁸

38% of frontline homelessness services had seen a fall in funding, by an average of 20% in 2013. 48% of these needed to reduce frontline staff.²⁹

Only 8% of accommodation-based services receive funding from the NHS and criminal justice, despite work by homelessness projects to reduce reoffending and address people’s health.³⁰

Innovation has led to new models of support, with Housing First and Social Impact Bonds just some of the ways being used...

...yet securing revenue funding for these and other ways of delivering support in the long term is a major concern for 72% of the homelessness sector.³¹
How you can make the difference

We call on the next government to develop a long-term strategy for investing in support for single people who become homeless and ensuring national and local accountability.

In practice, this means...

1. An ambitious cross-government, national framework to guide, champion and set expectations for investment in services that support people away from homelessness. This should work across the full range of statutory services that play a part in supporting people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including the NHS and criminal justice system.

2. Prevent the homelessness of tomorrow by taking an ‘early action’ approach to future plans. This means taking a longer term view of the investment needed to tackle the causes of homelessness. It also requires undertaking a ‘ten year test’ on new policy or spending decisions to ensure they do not add to homeless numbers.

3. Ensuring the homelessness prevention grant is sustained in line with levels of need, and remains a visible funding stream. Spending should be centrally reported to help ensure this money is spent on the people it is intended for.

4. Developing, in partnership with the voluntary sector, a plan for supported accommodation which fully considers the level of need and how to meet this within the future welfare and social care systems. Accountability for this should be included in the brief of the minister with responsibility for homelessness.

What our members say...

“The government must make a clear commitment to funding for specialist accommodation.”
When someone becomes homeless, what makes the biggest difference for them is to make sure the right services are in place to help.

To get to a point where everyone can have a place to call home, we need to act faster to stop homelessness before it starts.

We need to ensure that if you do lose your home, it is for the shortest period possible.

This requires having the right services in place, which can prevent homelessness and support individuals to realise their potential.

The priorities outlined in this manifesto will, if adopted by the next government, help achieve this.

Our offer

Our offer is to work with you to implement these priorities, finding solutions together to close the door on homelessness.

Talk to us

To learn more and to help us achieve our vision of a country free of homelessness, please email: thedifference2015@homelesslink.org.uk
Thank you

We would like to thank the hundreds of homelessness professionals and those who have experienced homelessness whose views and ideas have shaped this manifesto.

We are particularly grateful to our network of Champion groups and Expert Advisory Panel for taking the time to take part.
References

3. Ibid.
6. Data analysed from The Unhealthy State of Homelessness (Homeless Link 2014), collected from local audits across England.
13. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
19. Live tables on homelessness, Department for Communities and Local Government.
20. Through changes made in the Care Act 2014 and Transforming Rehabilitation programme.
21. The Autumn Statement 2014 included a commitment to develop and extend the principles of the Troubled Families programme to other groups of people with complex needs from the next Spending Review.
24. Evidence from the Frontline: how policy changes are affecting those with multiple needs, An interim report from Voices from the Frontline, Making Every Adult Matter coalition (2014).
25. Based on projects and bedspaces on Homeless UK. Figures relate to 2010-2014.
27. The Supporting People programme was a government programme for funding, planning and monitoring housing related support services for vulnerable people.
30. Ibid.
32. Early action is described as an investment in society that not only promotes well-being but also reduces needs and helps everyone contribute their best. The approach is advocated by the ‘Early Action Taskforce’, a group of leaders from across the sectors and chaired by Community Links. See Towards Effective Prevention: Practical steps for the next Government (2014).
What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let’s end homelessness together

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