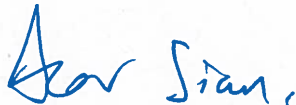


MAYOR OF LONDON

Sian Berry AM
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

Our ref: MGLA280917-8791

Date: 18 JAN 2018



Re: Housing Committee report – Hidden Homelessness in London

Thank you for your letter of 27 September 2017 outlining the findings and recommendations of the Housing Committee's report into hidden homelessness in London. I welcome the attention that you and other members of the committee have drawn to the range of different sorts of homelessness that affect such a shocking number of Londoners.

I have set out my responses to your report's specific recommendations in the appendix to this letter. As I said when we discussed the issue at Mayor's Question Time on 14 December, it is clear that to a great extent all forms of homelessness – including hidden homelessness – result from London's shortage of affordable housing. I am committed to doing all I can to tackle the problem of affordability; my draft London Housing Strategy and draft London Plan outline how I intend to significantly increase the number of new homes delivered in London, and in particular genuinely affordable homes.

Furthermore, my draft London Housing Strategy sets out how I intend to do all I can to help prevent homelessness and ensure that those who find themselves without a home receive the help and support they need. For example, I want to press Government to provide adequate funding for councils to fulfil their new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act, and I am helping boroughs to more closely collaborate in seeking temporary accommodation. With Transport for London, I am funding dedicated outreach provision for rough sleepers on the night transport network to locate and assist those who might not otherwise be identified. And I hope that you have by now seen my winter campaign, which encourages Londoners to help rough sleepers by using StreetLink and donating to our new coalition of 18 homelessness charities.

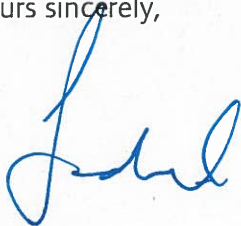
However, although I am doing all I can to help those who face homelessness, as I made clear at Mayor's Question Time, any sustained reduction in different forms of homelessness needs wide-ranging action from Government. Insecurity for private sector tenants means that two-fifths of the homeless households who London boroughs assist have lost their accommodation because a private landlord ends a tenancy, making it the biggest single cause of homelessness in the capital. At the same time, welfare reform over recent years has left a yawning gap between private sector rent levels and the maximum benefit tenants can claim in many areas of London. The insecurity of private sector tenancies and welfare reform combine perniciously, as private landlords resort to evicting tenants whose benefits no longer cover their rent. I am clear that Government must fundamentally rethink both the welfare benefits available to help with private tenants' housing costs and way that tenancies in the sector operate.

MAYOR OF LONDON

We also need Government to invest more in the delivery of new homes – particularly homes based on social rent levels - and to secure arrangements for future funding of supported accommodation that recognise the vital role such accommodation plays for a whole range of vulnerable groups who might otherwise face homelessness. I am concerned that Government's most recent proposals for supported housing fail to afford sufficient protection for various groups, including rough sleepers, those fleeing violence against women and girls, and young people, including care leavers. I will use the opportunity to respond to the Government's current consultations on these issues to push for more secure provision in this area.

Thank you again for your work in investigating these issues.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Appx.

Cc: Lorraine Ford, Scrutiny Team Manager

Appendix: Mayoral response to recommendations in *Hidden Homelessness in London*

Recommendation 1: The Government should recognise the acute nature of homelessness in London and keep under review the funding to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act for London local authorities, to ensure that boroughs have sufficient resources to relieve and prevent homelessness.

My draft London Housing Strategy urges Government to meet its commitment to fully cover the costs to local authorities of implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. My Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development, James Murray, reiterated this point in a recent response to the Government's consultation on its draft Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities. It is of real concern that the amount of funding Government has allocated to local authorities to cover the cost of meeting new obligations is only 15 per cent of what London boroughs assess implementation will cost them – and that Government is only making funding available for three years.

As we know, it is very hard for London local authorities to secure accommodation for those who are facing homelessness or have become homeless, thanks to a shortage of affordable housing, insecurity in the private rented sector, and the pressures exerted by welfare reform. Any sustained reduction in homelessness needs a strategic response from across Government that tackles these underlying issues.

Recommendation 2: The Mayor should lobby London local authorities to record the protected characteristics of those presenting at housing options services, following comprehensive training of staff about the sensitivity required in collection, and the purpose of such monitoring. This would create better understanding of London's homeless population.

Government has recently reviewed what data it will ask local authorities to record, as part of preparation for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. I am pleased to see that this includes more thorough recording of the equality characteristics of those facing and experiencing homelessness than the previous data collection regime.

Recommendation 3: The Mayor should review the assessment of 'vulnerability', and advice given to non-priority need applicants across London to create best practice guidelines for local authorities and homelessness charities. This should make particular reference to advice and support for young and LGBT persons, as well as supporting vulnerable people. He should add this to the agenda for his No Nights Sleeping Rough Task Force.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is intended to ensure that those who are not in priority need, as defined in law, receive better help than they have to date. Definitions already exist in statute, case law, and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities (which Government is updating to reflect the duties created by the Act). My view is that seeking to create some London-specific guidance could complicate the issue at this stage.

My No Nights Sleeping Rough taskforce has already considered the implications of the Act and will continue to do so. To be clear, however, they have only considered its implications insofar as they relate to rough sleeping, as the Terms of Reference for the taskforce define its remit very specifically to that form of homelessness.

Recommendation 4: The Government should rewrite the guidance around evidence required to reach an assessment of ‘vulnerability’ for those who have experienced domestic violence and abuse to make it easier for authorities to identify victims accurately. They should ensure that staff know that police crime reference or risk assessment numbers are not required in order to validate an application.

My draft London Housing Strategy makes clear that I recognise the importance of appropriate housing support in tackling domestic violence and abuse. I was encouraged to see that the needs of those who have suffered domestic violence and abuse are covered in a designated chapter of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities on which the Government recently consulted.

Recommendation 5: In light of the Homelessness Reduction Act’s introduction, and new data gained from prevention services, the Government should look to review the list of those who meet the criteria for ‘vulnerability’ under the legislation.

The Homelessness Reduction Act is designed to ensure that those who may have some support needs but do not necessarily meet the statutory threshold of “vulnerability” receive the help they need – something I very much welcome. Further changes in the statutory definition would require legislation – something that seems unlikely in the current political context. But it is clearly important that Government keeps implementation of the Act under close review, to assess whether the Act is delivering its intended impacts.

Recommendation 6: The Mayor should promote the use of existing homelessness advice and support services using the London.gov.uk website and TfL advertising space.

I will help promote existing homelessness advice and support services offered by local authorities and the voluntary sector, though I believe it is only appropriate to do when they have indicated they would welcome it and have the capacity to respond to anticipated enquiries. I have previously helped publicise individual services in response to requests from them, for example, Centrepoin’s Young and Homeless Helpline.

The position is different in relation to rough sleeping, because I commission pan-London services that help this group off the streets. I will be publicising the help available to rough sleepers over the winter period, using both the London.gov.uk website and advertising space on the public transport network.

Recommendation 7: The Government should ensure that any future legislation on domestic violence and abuse gives survivors of domestic violence and abuse priority in tenancy law. This would mean that survivors are able to remain in their homes following an incident of abuse, if they wish, rather than the perpetrator. Legislation should seek to formalise the use of reciprocal housing agreements between local authorities (and housing associations) to ensure that people who experience domestic violence and abuse can maintain their housing eligibility band across London.

I wholeheartedly agree that survivors of domestic violence and abuse should be able to remain in safe and secure accommodation. I think we are unlikely to see legislation that enshrines this in the immediate future, but the draft London Housing Strategy highlights positive steps we can take without waiting for legislation, including by:

- Making clear that housing providers should seek to identify and support those who suffer domestic abuse – and highlighting the value of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance’s National Domestic Abuse Service Standards in helping them to do so;

- Indicating my support for the Pan-London Reciprocal Agreement, which is administered by Safer London and designed to facilitate reciprocal housing agreements; and
- Explaining how I will play my part in enabling survivors of domestic abuse to move without surrendering a social housing tenancy, by giving them priority for my Housing Moves scheme.