

Do you want to end
homelessness?





A 10-point manifesto for the next government

Summary

The next government should:

1 A right to a home

Commit to the goal of ending homelessness in the UK within three terms of government. Reform homelessness law to ensure that all homeless people, including former rough sleepers, are entitled to a decent settled home.

2 Housing supply and allocation

Invest to meet housing need in full, especially the need for settled accommodation for people in hostels, B&B hotels and other forms of temporary accommodation. Ensure that homeless people receive a fair share of affordable housing.

3 Working together to prevent homelessness

Make sure government departments at all levels work together effectively and with the voluntary sector to prevent homelessness. Protect and enhance the Supporting People funding programme to allow flexibility in preventing and tackling homelessness.

4 Health

Ensure that health strategies at all levels recognise the needs of homeless people. Direct all NHS trusts to ensure that homeless people can access health care and are never discharged from hospitals onto the streets.

5 Full citizenship

Ensure that homeless people benefit from the full range of citizens' rights offered through involvement, consultation and democratic participation. Introduce a 'service passport' for homeless people so they can continue to receive services wherever they move.

6 Focus on multiple needs

Promote effective integrated services for homeless people who have multiple needs, especially for former entrenched rough sleepers and those who are still sleeping rough.

7 Welfare benefits, work and training

Reform the benefits system to end the poverty trap. Introduce a New Deal for homeless people to support their efforts towards independence through study, volunteering, training, work or enterprise.

8 Drugs and alcohol

Create integrated housing and treatment pathways for homeless people who are dependent on drugs and/or alcohol.

9 Cultural rights

Recognise that homeless people have the same talents, creative potential, expressive power and right to take part in cultural life as any citizen. Invest in cultural programmes that help people to overcome trauma, rediscover self-esteem, co-operate with others and reintegrate with society.

10 Refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers

Improve homelessness services for asylum seekers and refugees so that no one is roofless. Ensure that refugees can access the housing and support they need to build new secure lives. Improve advice and help to access accommodation for homeless people from the EU accession states.

Introduction

A general election is around the corner and housing is higher on the agenda than it has been for many years. But while the parties argue over extending the right to buy or helping first time buyers, we are in danger of forgetting the very people whose need and social justice itself require should be at the centre of this debate: homeless people.

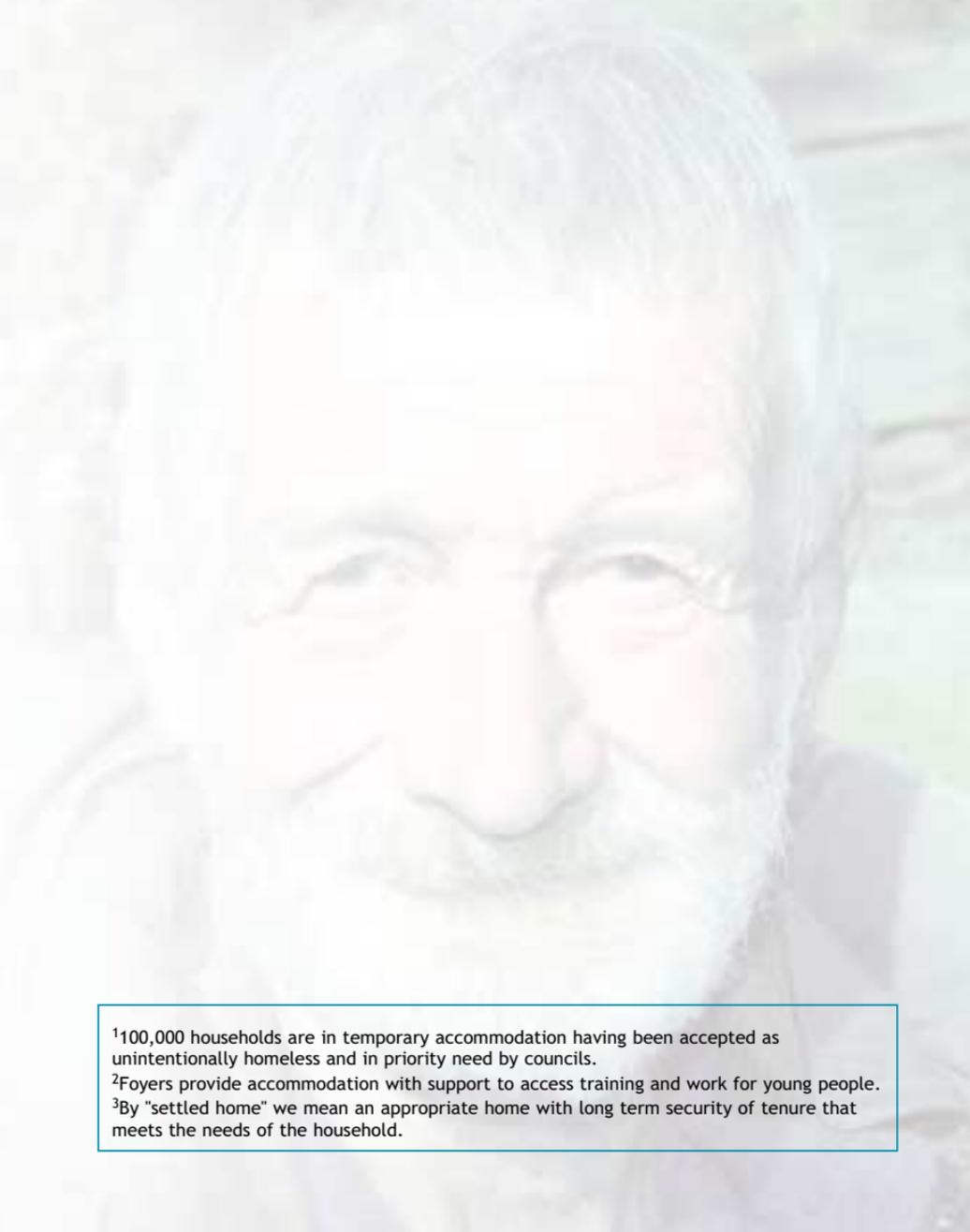
The truth is that any of us could become homeless. Our members, frontline homelessness agencies across England and Wales, work with people from all walks of life. But it is the most vulnerable people in our society that are most at risk: young people from disturbed backgrounds, the elderly, the unemployed, people with mental illness or addiction, people with frayed social networks and no financial security to fall back on.

At the moment too many people still do not get the help they need at the time they need it, and end up homeless. Too many still end up sleeping rough on the streets.

Homeless families with children and some vulnerable single people can have a legal right to housing through their local authority. Even then, they can face long periods in expensive temporary accommodation¹ or B&B hotels, often with no help to address their other needs. Other people may manage to find a place in a hostel or specialist project such as a Foyer², where they get support but then discover they have little prospect of moving to a settled home³.

It needn't be like this.

Homelessness is a complex problem but we now know a lot about what works and what is needed to prevent and tackle it. Homeless people themselves are finding a voice and demanding to be heard. Any solutions should be grounded in their experience.



¹100,000 households are in temporary accommodation having been accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need by councils.

²Foyers provide accommodation with support to access training and work for young people.

³By "settled home" we mean an appropriate home with long term security of tenure that meets the needs of the household.

Significant progress has been made. The numbers sleeping rough have been significantly reduced⁴. There are many fewer families with children in B&B hotels, and each council now has a homelessness strategy. These successes happened because politicians responded to what homeless people and the charities that support them were saying and provided leadership and resources to tackle the issue.

Now in many parts of the country there are innovative services providing advice and support to prevent homelessness; advice and tenancy sustainment services to help people keep their home; outreach to contact those on the street; hostels providing the essential first steps off the streets; day centres offering cultural, training and employment projects; and supported housing. But the gaps between these services are far too wide. A determined push is needed to ensure that the right services are easily available when they are needed in all parts of the country.

This 10-point manifesto was developed in response to the concerns and suggestions of our members and in consultation with national and local homelessness agencies. It sets out what we think the next government should do and reinforces much of what was said on tackling homelessness by the ODPM Select Committee.

We call on the next government to commit to the ambitious but essential goal of eradicating homelessness. We will work with government and all people of good will to make this a reality.

Jenny Edwards
Chief Executive



⁴Latest indicative counts find around 500 people sleeping rough compared to around 2000 in the same areas in 1998. The actual number sleeping rough is higher than this but is impossible to establish accurately. Over a year it is estimated that around ten times this number experience rough sleeping for a night or more.

1 A right to a home

Commit to the goal of ending homelessness in the UK within three terms of government. Reform homelessness law to ensure that all homeless people, including former rough sleepers, are entitled to a decent settled home.

The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes the universal right for everyone to 'an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing.'

Since 1977 homelessness law has helped hundreds of thousands of homeless people by placing a duty on local authorities to find a home for those with 'priority need' - families with children and certain people who are vulnerable - unless they are deemed to be 'intentionally homeless'. In 2002 the law was reformed to cover more people. However this still leaves thousands of homeless people with no legal right to housing. Nor is there any legal right to help to tackle related support needs. This can lead to repeat episodes of homelessness, in particular for those who have spent time sleeping rough. Many single homeless people never approach their local authority as they expect rejection and therefore do not figure in the official statistics on homelessness.

The next government should:

- Commit itself to the goal of ending homelessness within the next three terms of government.
- Set out a reform and investment programme to achieve this goal.
- Reform the Homelessness Act to include all categories of homeless people by 2012, based on the approach taken in Scotland (possibly with phasing to address different housing pressures in some regions).
- Make sure assessment of housing and support needs is brought together, leading to a package of coherent support for homeless people.
- Identify people at risk of homelessness and provide early help.
- Ensure all homeless people in hostels receive an early assessment under homelessness law as well as for support needs. Define priority need to encompass a history of rough sleeping and all older homeless people.

2 Housing supply and allocation

Invest to meet housing need in full, especially the need for settled accommodation for people in hostels, B&B hotels and other forms of temporary accommodation. Ensure that homeless people receive a fair share of affordable housing.

More than 100,000 households, the highest number ever, now live in temporary accommodation after being accepted by a local authority as priority homeless. The Government plans to halve this figure. But tens of thousands of other homeless people are missed in these 'official' statistics. These include people in hostels⁵ rough sleepers and those with no option but to stay with friends or family, in squats or in other overcrowded or insecure situations⁶. We found that just under half of all people in homelessness hostels are ready to move on but have no settled home to go to⁷. This frustrates a person's attempts to escape homelessness, damages their motivation and well-being and also wastes public money. The Government has started to increase investment in housing. But there is a chronic shortage of affordable social housing in many parts of the country following the loss of council homes through right to buy and years of under-investment. Current plans for new 'affordable' homes tend to target keyworkers and first time buyers, and not to meet need where homelessness is high.

⁵Around 30,000 people

⁶Estimates vary - Crisis estimate the figure at around 380,000 people

⁷No Room To Move - Homeless Link 2004



The next government should:

- Include all homeless people in assessing housing need, not just those who are accepted as homeless by the local authority.
- Invest resources to meet this need in full.
- Ensure regional assemblies draw up regional homelessness and Supporting People (SP) strategies.
- Ensure regional and local housing and SP strategies have targets to enable move-on from the hostels in their area, and identify sufficient move-on accommodation.
- Promote the stronger powers to allow local authorities to bring empty homes into use and review their impact in each area.
- Encourage self-build and self-renovation schemes that provide homes and training for homeless people.

3 Working together to prevent homelessness

Make sure government departments at all levels work together effectively and with the voluntary sector to prevent homelessness. Protect and enhance the Supporting People funding programme to allow flexibility in preventing and tackling homelessness.

Solving homelessness will involve real cross-government working at all levels including comprehensive joined up strategies and commissioning. It will also involve a mature partnership between the public and voluntary sectors and reliable funding at a level that can deliver the high impact services that are needed. Homelessness agencies must have adequate and reliable funding to retain skilled staff.

The Supporting People (SP) programme, launched in 2003, consolidates earlier streams of funding to help vulnerable people to live more independently. While welcome in many ways, homelessness agencies report serious difficulties with its implementation. The total SP pot is set to reduce over the next few years threatening many agencies that receive most of their income from this source. There are problems for people moving between local authority areas. And there are difficulties in matching capital and revenue funding for new supported housing. The definition of 'housing-related support' prevents its use for more flexible support initiatives that could tackle or prevent homelessness.



The next government should:

- Ensure the Supporting People (SP) programme provides an adequate level of funding for services that reach vulnerable people.
- Complement this with a coherent single funding pot.
- Use these to enable day services delivered through outreach, day centres and more generally, to tackle and prevent homelessness.
- Make sure that housing capital investment and SP revenue can work together to develop new supported housing for vulnerable people.
- Provide 'Invest to Save' funds enabling earlier intervention to prevent homelessness.
- Stop old rent arrears from barring homeless people from a settled home forever by insuring housing providers against the financial risks of accepting vulnerable people as tenants.

4 Health

Ensure that health strategies at all levels recognise the needs of homeless people. Direct all NHS trusts to ensure that homeless people can access health care and are never discharged from hospitals onto the streets.

Homeless people suffer much worse health than many people. They also find it harder to get the health care they need. Lack of a regular address, frequent moving and stigma often make health services unwelcoming for homeless people. Serious health problems like TB and hepatitis are increasing among the homeless population. The next government must take serious measures to eliminate the health inequalities experienced by homeless people.

Good partnership working improves health access for homeless people. Sometimes specialist services are the answer. More often access to mainstream services can be improved through outreach and advocacy. Special funding arrangements can help primary health services to address their more complex needs.

The Government has issued guidance on 'shared outcomes on health and homelessness' but it is not statutory, resulting in patchy implementation.



The next government should:

- Require all NHS trusts to nominate a senior person to draw up a Health and Homelessness Action Plan.
- Ensure homeless people are involved in drawing up, monitoring and reviewing these plans.
- Ensure these mesh with local homelessness and Supporting People strategies.
- Require all NHS hospital trusts to meet hospital discharge standards to ensure that no homeless people are discharged onto the streets or any place where their health needs will not be met.
- Strengthen the statutory status of the Government's guidance, *Achieving positive shared outcomes in health and homelessness*.

5 Full citizenship

Ensure that homeless people benefit from the full range of citizens' rights offered through involvement, consultation and democratic participation. Introduce a 'service passport' for homeless people so they can continue to receive services wherever they move.

If you are homeless you can find yourself excluded from services that should be your basic right as a citizen. These include social services, education as well as health and housing. Children in temporary accommodation often miss out on schooling⁹. Many services depend on your having a permanent address. This means that the most vulnerable people can be excluded from services they need more than anyone. Stereotypes and stigma play a part. For example homeless people are much more likely to be victims of violence¹⁰ but often do not get the response from the police that other citizens expect.

People without a permanent home have to move frequently across the boundaries of public services and this adds to the problem. This means that they end up having to prove over and over again that they need a service and keep falling to the bottom of the waiting list.

⁹Toying with their future Shelter 2004

¹⁰Crisis 2005



The next government should:

- Ensure that homeless people are involved and consulted in the development and evaluation of public services.
- Help homeless people to exercise their right to vote.
- Ensure frontline staff in public services understand the particular needs of and deliver good customer care to homeless people.
- Develop a 'service passport' approach to ensure that the necessary support continues if a homeless person moves.
- Ensure children's services such as Sure Start services target children in homeless households.
- Ensure that homeless people are protected against violence and other criminal behaviour.
- Take measures to ensure that antisocial behaviour measures protect homeless people and never reinforce their social exclusion.

6 Focus on multiple needs

Promote effective integrated services for homeless people who have multiple needs, especially for former entrenched rough sleepers and those who are still sleeping rough.

Some homeless people, especially those who have slept rough for any time, have very complex or multiple needs. These may result from their age, alcohol or drug use, institutionalisation from long periods in prison or the armed forces, chaotic or difficult behaviour, learning disability, physical ill health, mental ill health, personality disorder or dual diagnosis. The coexistence of a number of needs makes it much harder to get help. And the longer someone is homeless the more complex his or her needs will become. Services often focus on one issue and fail those who do not fit neatly in the box.

It is not cheap to provide the intensive support that can successfully tackle complex and multiple needs, but neglect or failure to do so costs society far more. Without help the individual concerned is likely to end up requiring the long term care of the health services or in prison. There are examples of excellent services making a difference for this group but they are few and far between.

¹¹Focus Futures Multiple Needs Unit, Birmingham; Elmore Team, Oxford; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy model, Southampton



The next government should:

- Establish a system of pooled budgets for specialist services for homeless people with multiple needs.
- Replicate existing models of successful services focused on this group of people¹¹.
- Require local authorities to assess fully the needs of this group in homelessness and Supporting People strategies and to ensure the partnerships and funding are available to provide the services needed.

7 Welfare benefits, work and training

Reform the benefits system to end the poverty trap. Introduce a New Deal for homeless people to support their efforts towards independence through study, volunteering, training, work or enterprise.

The benefits system can trap people in poverty rather helping them towards independence. The high rents in temporary accommodation make this a particular problem for homeless people. The '16-hour rule' and the single room rate for young people add to obstacles that block the way to work. Poor administration and delays in benefits and complications in claiming can even create homelessness. Homeless people often need help to gain their confidence, skills and knowledge for work, paid or voluntary. Developing learning and skills is an essential element in helping homeless people resettle.



The next government should:

- Reform welfare benefits and tax credits to support homeless people into training, education, voluntary or paid work.
- Abolish the '16-hour' rule, which impedes people going into education and end the 'single room rate' restriction for young adults.
- Reduce rents in temporary accommodation through payments direct to social landlords.
- Strengthen safeguards against rent arrears caused by poor administration of housing benefit.
- Introduce a New Deal for homeless people building on successful approaches such as those by OSW¹².
- Establish a national rent deposit scheme to help people access the private rented sector.
- Encourage and advise homeless people wishing to establish their own social enterprises through public business support agencies.

8 Drugs and alcohol

Create integrated housing and treatment pathways for homeless people who are dependent on drugs and/ or alcohol.

Misuse of drugs, alcohol and solvents can lead to homelessness or can be a response to the stresses of becoming homeless. Research suggests that many young people use drugs as a way of coping with the trauma of homelessness. Whether cause or result, substance misuse and addiction make escaping homelessness even harder. Current approaches are still failing this group. There is very little support to help homeless people end alcohol misuse. Homelessness agencies report long waiting times to get into treatment. And when someone manages to get into an in-patient detox service, say from a hostel, the lack of housing options means they end up having to come back when they are clean. Too often a successful detox is undermined and wasted by failure to find a suitable place to move to afterwards.

Initiatives used in other countries such as 'safer injecting facilities' should be piloted here to see if they could make a contribution to helping homeless drug users.



The next government should:

- Ensure that local Drug and Alcohol Action Teams, health trusts and housing organisations develop clear, shared strategies to provide integrated housing and substance misuse treatment services.
- Ensure that the legal framework helps rather than hinders services working with active drug users.
- Encourage law enforcement agencies (including Community Safety Teams) to work in close partnership with providers of services to homeless people.
- Improve services and approaches for people with dual diagnosis.

9 Cultural rights

Recognise that homeless people have the same talents, creative potential, expressive power and right to take part in cultural life as any citizen. Invest in cultural programmes that help people to overcome trauma, rediscover self-esteem, co-operate with others and reintegrate with society.

People who lose their homes can lose their jobs, friends, family, self-esteem, confidence and even their sense of themselves. Often the traumas that have led to homelessness leave their mark. Sometimes a childhood has been troubled and damaging.

People who take part in cultural and sports programmes in hostels, day centres and other venues around the country show the power of these experiences to motivate and transform lives. Specialist companies that include homeless people such as Cardboard Citizens, Streetwise Opera, Streets Alive, ABC Tales Talecatchers and the Street Football League build bridges of understanding to other parts of society. Yet there is a long way to go before homeless people have the same opportunity as other citizens to enjoy and take part in the arts, sports, libraries and museums. Over recent years participation of the most excluded people in society has declined¹³. We believe this must be reversed.

¹³TGI statistics



The next government should:

- Ensure that cultural and sports programmes can be provided as part of the interventions that support homeless people and help them to rebuild their lives.
- Encourage cultural and sports bodies that receive public or lottery funds to develop partnerships with services for homeless people.
- Ensure cultural and sports programmes are part of the Sustainable Communities agenda.
- Support the showcasing of the talent of homeless people and related social enterprise initiatives.

10 Refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers

Improve homelessness services for asylum seekers and refugees so that no one is roofless. Ensure that refugees can access the housing and support they need to build new secure lives. Improve advice and help to access accommodation for homeless people from the EU accession states.

Recent research shows that one in five residents of central London hostels are refugees or asylum seekers, the vast majority refugees¹⁴. Refugees and asylum seekers are also being contacted by street outreach teams and accessing services at day centres. This suggests that the current support system for refugees needs review. People who have received a favourable decision need support to find a home before they can begin the process of building a new independent life.

A recently identified problem has emerged in some areas of London where citizens of the states which have recently joined the European Union arrive seeking work, have no right to benefits and may have no accommodation.

¹⁴ Survey of homelessness sector services provided to asylum seeker and refugee clients by Broadway and the Refugee Council October 2004



The next government should:

- Strengthen housing advice and support provided to refugees granted leave to remain to prevent a fall into homelessness.
- Ensure that failed asylum seekers awaiting safe passage are not left without decent accommodation.
- Work with the EU and the recent accession states to help ensure that their citizens seeking work in the UK do not end up sleeping rough.

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 two goals are:

- To raise standards in the services that support homeless people and tackle homelessness.
- To influence the development of policy, strategy and investment at all levels of government.

Homeless Link's 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.

We work in close collaboration with our members, partners and with national, regional and local government:

- To combat the causes of homelessness.
- To provide high quality and innovative services to help people move on to settled accommodation and.
- To work to reduce the risk of new people falling into homelessness.

We currently have a staff team of 25 based in offices in London and Cardiff.

For further information visit www.homeless.org.uk

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