



Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: Children in Temporary Accommodation and Rough Sleeping, HC 338 & 339

Tuesday 21 January 2025

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Members present: Florence Eshalomi (Chair); Lewis Cocking; Chris Curtis; Maya Ellis; Mr Will Forster; Naushabah Khan; Joe Powell; Sarah Smith.

Questions 48 - 108

Witnesses

I: Rushanara Ali MP, Minister for Homelessness and Democracy, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; Penny Hobman, Director for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rushanara Ali and Penny Hobman.

Chair: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee. In today's evidence session, we will be looking at the issue of rough sleeping and temporary accommodation. It is really good to have the Minister and the director from MHCLG before us. I will ask Committee members to introduce themselves, please, and state any declarable interests.

Joe Powell: I am Joe Powell, Kensington and Bayswater.

Chris Curtis: I am Chris Curtis, Milton Keynes North.

Maya Ellis: I am Maya Ellis, Ribble Valley.

Naushabah Khan: I am Naushabah Khan, Gillingham and Rainham.

Chair: I am Florence Eshalomi, Vauxhall and Camberwell Green.

Sarah Smith: I am Sarah Smith, Hyndburn.



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Mr Forster: I am Will Forster, Woking.

Lewis Cocking: I am Lewis Cocking, Broxbourne. I am a local councillor as well.

Q48 **Chair:** Can I get our two witnesses to introduce themselves, please?

Rushanara Ali: I am Rushanara Ali, Minister for Homelessness and Democracy.

Penny Hobman: I am Penny Hobman, director for homelessness and rough sleeping at MHCLG.

Q49 **Chair:** Thank you for coming this morning. This is a key issue that continues to be in the media and something that we, as MPs, receive in our inbox. It is good to see that we have the Minister in front of us this morning looking at this. We know that earlier last year the Deputy Prime Minister outlined the first government inter-departmental taskforce on homelessness and rough sleeping. We understand that this group has met once. It will be great to know what the outcome of that first meeting was, who attended and anything else you are willing to share with us about that first inter-ministerial group.

Rushanara Ali: Good morning, Chair. To the Committee, I want to start with saying how delighted I am to be here in front of this Committee and at the fact that this Committee is looking at homelessness and rough sleeping, which I know is a subject close to all our hearts, given the challenges we face. For me, since I joined the team with the Deputy Prime Minister, I have seen an absolute commitment to get us back on track to ending homelessness. There is the manifesto commitment in the Labour Party's election manifesto.

We have already held the first meeting in November last year. The next one is next week. As part of the inter-ministerial group, we have an expert group of mayors, council leaders and other key stakeholders. Alongside that, we are working to ensure that the voices of those who are affected directly, through forums, are included. That is then underpinned by the experience of many of the Ministers, Cabinet Ministers as well as other Ministers who are members of the inter-ministerial taskforce, across Government, who bring a great deal of experience and expertise, as you do, on this really important agenda.

Q50 **Chair:** On that, the Government have not published any terms of reference for the taskforce. There are no minutes for that first meeting. We are not even sure which Ministers sit on that taskforce. Are you able to share any of that information with us?

Rushanara Ali: Our aim is to work across Government and make sure that those underlying issues that drive homelessness and rough sleeping are owned by the relevant Departments. That is a feature of a number of cross-governmental groups, for instance the violence against women



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inter-ministerial group, the child poverty inter-ministerial group and others. We aim to publish a strategy in due course.

To give you an idea of the Departments involved, the Ministers involved are from the Department for Education, given that it has a very strong interest in the number of children. It is scandalous that we have over 159,000 children who are in temporary accommodation. That is driving child poverty, which is a very important part of its agenda. The Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Justice, MOD, given the veterans homelessness issues, Treasury and others are involved. We are making sure that that happens.

This is an internal government inter-ministerial group, but we look forward to publishing a report. Another thing I am keen to do, and I have already done that with colleagues across Parliament, is to engage directly with colleagues, along with this Committee. We look forward to looking at the recommendations that this Committee makes, because it is really important that we make that collective effort across the different sectors, across national Government, regional government, local government and organisations, to integrate the thinking and expertise that is there and that is needed to tackle this really challenging agenda.

Q51 Lewis Cocking: Your response sounds like it is a talking shop. What were the outcomes from the meeting? What was agreed to be delivered by the next meeting in February?

Rushanara Ali: Each Department has lead responsibility. To give you an example, this is not a talking shop. We have been taking action in terms of my Department. The first thing we did is that the Chancellor, as you know, increased the funding for homelessness by £233 million, bringing the total to £1 billion, which we announced the allocation of at the end of last year.

In terms of the work the Department for Education is doing, we have been working closely to get an amendment in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to disapply the intentional homelessness test for young care leavers. That is really important because they are vulnerable but, if you are between 18 and 25, you could find yourself being deemed intentionally homeless.

We have worked closely with the Home Office Minister, Angela Eagle, to extend the move-on period for asylum accommodation to 56 days. That gives local authorities and refugees more time to secure accommodation, enabling them to find their own way when they get refugee status. We hope that that will reduce the pressure and the number of those who end up homeless. We will see in the coming months how that progresses.

DWP is investing £1 billion in extending the housing support fund. The Department of Health and Social Care, with my Department, has announced £58.7 million on the rough sleeping drug and alcohol treatment grant for 2025-26. The MoJ has work underway on extending



the Community Accommodation Service. I could go on. MOD has also made announcements in terms of £3.5 million funding to extend the reducing veteran homelessness programme until March 2026.

Q52 **Chair:** In response to Lewis's question, is there any way that you are able to follow up to the Committee on what was discussed at the first meeting in terms of maybe writing to us as a Committee?

Rushanara Ali: We can follow up, but this is an initial meeting, setting out and agreeing the themes. Then, as I say, we have another meeting coming up. To reassure you all, we are not waiting for a strategy to develop. We have taken action in terms of legislative programmes in my Department, as you know. We can go on to it later. There is a legislative programme that will impact on this agenda, but also funding across Whitehall. Then we are looking at areas where we can reduce some of the pressures and barriers immediately, wherever possible, including those examples I have given you.

Q53 **Chair:** You said that there is another meeting next week. Is there a timeline for the group's work? You also mentioned the strategy. Is there a timeline for when that will be published?

Rushanara Ali: We expect to publish the strategy following the conclusion of phase 2 of the spending review. I would not want to get into specifics, but that is just to reassure you. We can continue the conversation as we make progress, as we do in Parliament. Obviously, it is not just this session. There will be other opportunities as well for us to keep you updated.

Q54 **Chair:** There will be an opportunity for us as a Committee to have sight of that maybe before it is published. Is that something you are willing to share in confidence with the Committee?

Rushanara Ali: It is an internal government report. We are at the early stages of looking at working across Government, but we are certainly keen to engage this Committee. When the report of this inquiry comes out, we would be keen to draw on the insights that you have. I have looked very carefully at the written evidence that was submitted for this inquiry, which is really powerful. Already, you are gathering evidence that it is going to be important to us.

Q55 **Chair:** Essentially, everything is going to be detailed in the strategy when it is published before the spending review.

Rushanara Ali: There will be a strategy that will be available after phase 2 of the spending review.

Q56 **Chair:** Before then we will not have any terms of reference or minutes, or know who is attending, but everything should be contained in the strategy, so that is what we should wait for.

Rushanara Ali: I will just bring in Penny if she wanted to add anything.



Penny Hobman: That is right. As the Minister said, the strategy will be published after the spending review. That will then set out the Government's plans going forward.

Q57 **Naushabah Khan:** Thank you, Minister. It was really good to hear some of the work that is going on with the taskforce and with the strategy that will be developed as a result. We have obviously previously seen a number of strategies that have come out of Government. The previous Government had quite big intentions around ending homelessness, which they never met.

I wanted to get an understanding of why this will be different, but also how you are taking into consideration some of the work that has already happened in this sphere, for example the Kerslake commission's report, which came out not that long ago and looked at how we tackle homelessness and get to the root causes, as well as lessons from *Think Place*[10.11.30] and Everyone In, which happened during the covid pandemic. How is some of that feeding into what you are developing here so we are not just recreating the wheel?

Rushanara Ali: I could not agree more. To reassure you, we have some great examples. You mentioned some of that. In terms of policy, the previous Labour Government cut rough sleeping by two-thirds. We have a really good evidence base on what worked historically and where things can go wrong. We need to learn from success as well as failure, and there have been major failures in recent periods.

On Everyone In, I have asked officials to go back. In fact, Penny was very involved. She led on that policy, so we are lucky to have officials who have that expertise. The Mayor of London and his team, and local authorities, worked very closely with national Government there. One major issue that came out of that is about the wrap-around support for those who face complex needs and who are sleeping rough. It is important to really invest and work on those. Also, on accommodation availability, obviously there was more supply during lockdown of hotel and other forms of accommodation. There are lessons to learn on what worked and what did not in the past.

We are also looking at previous reports and work that this Committee and other committees have done, but also the work of NGOs, policy experts and those who are gathering evidence. I come from a policy background. It is really important that we draw on that background. I hope that you can see that we are not hanging around. We are working across Government. I have had bilaterals with ministerial colleagues in another number of Departments already, as I say, and I sit on a number of cross-departmental groups, alongside the Deputy Prime Minister, or sometimes sit on her behalf on a number of inter-departmental groups that speak to this agenda. We cannot tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in isolation. There are the child poverty and violence against women agendas that the Home Office is leading on. A range of those agendas are going to be really important.



Q58 **Chair:** Everyone will be waiting for that strategy. London councils are spending £4 million a day. Essentially, a number of councils are going to face bankruptcy if this issue is not resolved.

Rushanara Ali: To reassure you, in parallel we are doing work around supporting local authorities in terms of funding, but also there are the homelessness advisers in the Department who work with those who are facing particular challenges. We also have a series of Government programmes and pilots, such as the Housing First pilot and others. I will go on to those as we progress.

Chair: We will come on to that.

Q59 **Joe Powell:** Thanks, Minister. To move on to standards in temporary accommodation, you referenced in your introduction that horrendous statistic of 160,000 children in temporary accommodation. It is one in 21 children in London. I had a constituent who had been in temporary accommodation for 14 years come to me before Christmas, so obviously the quality of the temporary accommodation is really important. Could you tell us how the Department monitors whether local authorities are adhering to the temporary accommodation code of guidance?

Rushanara Ali: As an MP representing a constituency in London, I know how devastating it is. I have, as I know other colleagues have, dealt with life and death situations with constituents because of these sorts of issues and challenges in terms of shortage but also the sorts of examples you have given. Damp and mould, if it is not tackled, whether it is in social housing or private housing, can be existential for families. Indeed, that is the sort of case I have had to deal with, so I am absolutely determined that we address this.

The homelessness code of guidance sets out how local authorities should exercise their homelessness functions according to the 2017 Act. As you know, councils are responsible for ensuring that temporary accommodation is suitable and in line with the statutory framework that was set. Housing authorities, as a minimum, need to ensure that accommodation is free of category 1 hazards, as identified by their housing health and safety rating system.

You will know, in terms of the legislative programme that my ministerial colleague, Matthew Pennycook, is leading on, that there is a raft of measures being introduced through the Renters' Rights Bill to bring homes up to the decent standards. That includes extending it to the private sector, following consultation. I do not know whether, Penny, you wanted to add anything.

Penny Hobman: I could explain a little bit, if that is useful, about the work of my team, the homelessness advice and support team. It is a team of civil servants within the Department who are recruited from local authority backgrounds with great experience of delivering these services. We work very closely with local authorities to provide a support and



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challenge role and to share good practice and innovation to try to help them improve standards and make better use of supply of TA as well as prevention.

Q60 **Joe Powell:** The National Audit Office said that the Department does not routinely collect data on standards. Do you think that should change?

Penny Hobman: As the Minister said, the code of guidance is very clear about the standards that we expect local authorities to adhere to.

Q61 **Chair:** On that, Penny, it is "expect" not "require".

Penny Hobman: There are statutory requirements, as set out in the legislation and in the code of guidance, about the suitability of temporary accommodation. We work very closely with local authorities to help them achieve that.

Rushanara Ali: The legislative programme is really important in what we are doing as a Government now. There is a wider issue around improvement, regulation and the regulators, because the numbers are concerning. The English Housing Survey data is concerning in terms of the private rented sector, but also in the social rented. It is about 10% of dwellings and 21% in the private sector. You will know the figures. Baroness Taylor, for instance, is responsible for the housing regulator. We need to make sure that the existing regulations are properly enforced. There is the opportunity for the local ombudsman to engage and I saw the report that the ombudsman has provided in submission to this Committee, which we will look closely at.

The programme of legislation this Government are introducing is going to be really important, alongside ensuring that the statutory obligations are fulfilled. We look very closely, and we will continue to look closely, at those. I look forward to hearing the findings of this inquiry. If there are major gaps, those are ones that the inter-ministerial departmental group will need to look at.

Q62 **Joe Powell:** One that we took evidence on, and you referenced it, is evidence of category 1 hazards for children in current temporary accommodation. To push a bit more on this relationship with local authorities, do you think that they are doing enough at the moment to monitor the quality and safety of their temporary accommodation?

Rushanara Ali: We know from our own individual experiences in constituencies that there are huge pressures on local authorities. They have had 14 years of cuts in funding. There are pressures. This Government have already increased the funding and support to local authorities. We want to work closely with local authorities to identify where the challenges are, but this has to be a partnership approach, because just saying to local authorities, "You have to do this" is not going to be enough. It is about making sure they have the right support.



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Where there are gaps, we will need to look at how we address that strategically. That is why I am very pleased that there is already legislation underway, on top of what is already there, to look at some of the underlying causes. The private rented sector is key in terms of the amendments that are being made in the Renters' Rights Bill to ensure that temporary accommodation in that sector is brought up to the right standard.

Q63 Joe Powell: In terms of that collaborative approach, some councils are keen to do more, either buybacks or acquisitions, to have their own temporary accommodation that they can keep to a higher standard. We hope that the decent homes standard will extend to private rented in time. Is that something the Department is looking at supporting councils with, in terms of increasing their own stock of temporary accommodation?

Rushanara Ali: Immediate action that the Chancellor has taken is to provide £500 million to the affordable homes programme to get 5,000 affordable homes available as quickly as possible, built or provided for, in terms of social housing. There is the £450 million that was announced just after the general election for schemes like that. That is really important.

Our housebuilding programme is absolutely critical. The 1.5 million homes are going to be vital to addressing the supply side. We know that, if we want to bear down on the costs to society, as well as of course the costs to those who are suffering from living in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough, we have to make sure we have got enough social and affordable housing and to ensure that that happens as quickly as possible. You will appreciate that housebuilding is not going to happen overnight. That is why the affordable homes programme and the other interventions, such as the ones you have mentioned, are really important.

Penny Hobman: The £450 million the Minister mentioned, which is for the local authority housing fund, is for acquisition.

Q64 Joe Powell: Obviously buybacks can happen more quickly than newbuilds.

Penny Hobman: Yes, it is for acquisition of temporary accommodation and accommodation for resettlement programmes.

Rushanara Ali: Yes, and of course the capital receipts that can be used from right to buy, which is something that we have announced in this Government, is an additional resource allocation that is now available to local authorities.

Q65 Joe Powell: This is the final question from me. I obviously support the collaborative approach, but there may be times when some sort of sanction or oversight is needed from the Department. You have some powers to do that around B&B, for example. Can you give us any latest



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analysis of the Department's approach to using that? Have you had to use it since coming into Government? Do you anticipate using it to ensure that councils have appropriate plans in place?

Rushanara Ali: It is really important that we get to a point where we do not have to use emergency accommodation for homeless families and we eliminate the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The condition and the circumstances in which children and families find themselves, with inappropriate cooking facilities and all sorts of issues, are well documented. You know this. I have seen that. I have visited families who are living in those circumstances.

We need to tackle that. The Department is already working with 20 local authorities with the highest number of bed-and-breakfast homeless families, which includes Birmingham, Ealing and Leicester, to support them to develop pilots through a £5 million programme of emergency accommodation reduction pilots.

Q66 **Chair:** Are all those 20 you are working with breaking their six-week limit on how long they keep families in B&Bs?

Rushanara Ali: These are the ones with the highest. Penny, do you want to add anything on that?

Penny Hobman: They are identified by data.

Q67 **Chair:** So, yes, they are all breaking the six-week limits.

Penny Hobman: Yes, and we publish quarterly H-CLIC homelessness data. We review that quarterly. A condition of the homelessness prevention grant funding is that any local authority that has more than five families in B&B over the six-week limit has to develop a B&B elimination plan, which the Department has to agree.

Q68 **Chair:** It develops a plan but does not face any sanctions, yet those families are living in those conditions, which they should not be legally. Is that correct?

Rushanara Ali: There are things that can be done. The first step is to support local authorities to get out of that situation. That means working closely with the homelessness advisory teams and developing plans. I have seen evidence, including in my own local authority, where actually they have gone down to zero in terms of intervention. When the Department works with local authorities—and we are seeing that—you can tackle these issues. You will appreciate that, as London MPs, we feel it very strongly, in terms of local authorities not having enough accommodation and often, as a last resort, having to house people in bed and breakfasts.

Q69 **Chair:** Do you not feel that there is a culture that has developed? Because local authorities know that the Department does not collect the data, there is no monitoring and there are no sanctions, they will flout this and continue to do so. Yes, we all understand and appreciate the



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pressures our councils are facing, but we have situations where we are now in 2025 and the data suggests that 50 young children have died as a result of the conditions linked to their temporary accommodation. While local authorities do not face any penalties, they will continue to place vulnerable families in the same accommodation.

Rushanara Ali: You are absolutely right. As I say, as an MP dealing with constituents who are placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, for me, it is an absolute must that we bring down and eliminate the number of people who are in bed and breakfast. We are working with local authorities. We are seeing the impact of the work that is being done by the Department and I want to see that hands-on approach. It is saving lives when preventing the risk to life. It is devastating seeing the number of children who have died. I am determined, working with the Deputy Prime Minister, that we do everything we can to tackle this.

As we have seen in some of the case studies, dealing with these issues also brings a cost saving. That is why our focus on prevention is key, making sure local authorities have the flexibility to take action and put resources in to help families, before local authorities find themselves having to get people into temporary accommodation. You made the point about getting accommodation ready for families, so that they are not put in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

As a last resort, the Secretary of State, has the powers to intervene through the best value legislation of 1999. That requires not just one; it would have to be multiple themes that a local authority is breaching, but there are powers in extremities for national Government to intervene.

Q70 **Mr Forster:** In my constituency of Woking, 40 households are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at any one time. Over half of them are children and that is on top of the over 200 households we have in temporary accommodation. This is in Surrey, where you would think, compared to London, we would be more on top of it, but it is an overwhelming problem. Do you believe that the regulations that place a six-week limit on families living in B&B and temporary accommodation are fit for purpose?

I particularly ask because the average time in my constituency that is spent in B&Bs is 11 weeks, so way over the supposed deadline, but the range is quite shocking. It has ranged from one night to one at 44 weeks. What work is the Department doing to address the rise in families living in B&Bs over that six-week period?

Rushanara Ali: We inherited a really difficult set of circumstances in terms of the number of people who are homeless in our country. I know that we will come on to rough sleeping. Between June 2023 and 2024, there was a 50% increase in the number of households with children staying in B&Bs. It is not acceptable, but that is what we have inherited. We are determined to take action to address those issues. That is why



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the Secretary of State has made clear that she wants a focus on prevention, as well as, of course, providing the support to respond.

The emergency accommodation reduction pilots are really key. We hope to make sure, alongside the existing provisions with the advisers who are working closely with local authorities, that we support local authorities. We are determined to make sure that, where things are going wrong, we work with them to tackle those issues. You are absolutely right that this is a problem that needs to be addressed. We are tackling it with the funding that is being allocated as well as the interventions that are needed—pretty hands-on intervention—alongside policy changes.

Q71 Mr Forster: I agree that action is needed. I suppose that the Committee is concerned that we have the homelessness strategy later. We are waiting for that to judge that action. You have talked about the emergency accommodation reduction pilots. Are they able to run and be assessed, and then a decision be made on whether to roll them out nationally as part of the strategy?

Coming back to the supposed six-week limit, is that six-week limit something the Government are considering making enforceable, rather than, as it is at the moment, a guideline? We have received some evidence that some hostels are not covered by the six-week limit. Whereas B&Bs, we believe, are, some hostels are not. Should hostels be included in that limit? What about the wider issue of whether that should be enforceable?

Rushanara Ali: To take the last one first, the statutory six-week limit applies to privately managed B&B accommodation. That includes shared accommodation. Councils have no control over who else is placed in that kind of accommodation and we know that that can put families in a vulnerable position. That is why the first priority is to reduce the number of people and, ultimately, eliminate the use of B&B.

Secondly, we do not have plans to amend the regulations to remove family hostels and assessment centres, but we are going to continue to take a close interest in and look at this. The broader point is key, which is increasing the supply of social and affordable housing. We have to do that as quickly as possible in order to enable local authorities to house people in much better, suitable accommodation and not have to resort to bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Unless we get to a point where local authorities have the available supply to house people not in bed and breakfast, we are going to be putting plasters on a wound, and I am not interested in that.

Unfortunately, we are in a situation where we have to stabilise the current situation while we try to get to the prevention agenda. As we see the housebuilding programme coming on stream and the increase in social and affordable housing, which is really crucial, we will be able to unlock some of these issues. You will appreciate that at the immediate stage, just over six months into a new Government, we are not going to



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be able to resolve those issues straight away, but I am determined that we do everything we can right now.

That is the approach we have taken. We are making those interventions that we can make to relieve some of the pressures. We are also working with local authorities and mayors, as well as the charitable sector, to ensure that, collectively, we can reduce some of the immediate barriers that are there where we are able to, without the bigger interventions that will take longer.

Q72 Chair: You said that, on hostels, you are going to monitor but not review them. What do you mean by that?

Rushanara Ali: That is the position of the Department.

Q73 Chair: In terms of making sure families are not placed, going back to some of the earlier questions from Joe, do you not feel that this is why there should be an inspection of where local authorities are placing families, so that we do not find ourselves in this situation for the families? There is no clear guidance that local authorities must and clearly a number of local authorities are not. Would you not agree that that is why we have this vicious cycle of families being placed?

Rushanara Ali: Local authorities have safeguarding duties. They have a wide range of statutory duties, including for vulnerable children and families. This links to out-of-area placements as well for those who are vulnerable.

Chair: We are going to come on to those.

Rushanara Ali: There are a number of existing requirements and provisions that local authorities need to follow, be that in relation to standards, safeguarding and so on, making sure that, where they are placing, including bed-and-breakfast accommodation, those they have a duty and responsibility over, they follow those obligations.

Q74 Naushabah Khan: Thank you, Minister. On out-of-borough placements, this links to some of the conversation we had previously around temporary accommodation and standards. Given that quite a lot of out-of-borough placements are now happening in areas that are already deprived, do you think that there needs to be a reform of the legislation around this to give local authorities the ability to have those proper discussions about who is being placed in their borough?

We see, in places such as Medway, a huge influx of people being placed from boroughs, often in London, that are struggling, as we have already discussed, but the communication is not there between those authorities, so nobody is aware that this has happened. It places huge amounts of pressure on already stretched services. Then the conditions of those properties, as we have been discussing, can often be substandard, but who has that oversight? Do you think we need to be reviewing out-of-borough placements at this point in time?



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Rushanara Ali: The legislation is very clear that councils should place families, those they are responsible for, within their local area in the first instance. You will appreciate that, going back to the housing pressures, that is not always possible. I recognise that it is a growing problem. The Deputy Prime Minister recognises that it is a growing problem. The underlying issue, which is more longer term, is housing supply, which we are focused on.

In terms of immediate action, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to local authorities. I responded to a debate in Parliament on these very issues, because colleagues are concerned for different reasons about out-of-area placements. The Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all local authorities in England, reminding them of their duties for accommodation placements outside of their own localities. That includes temporary housing and offers to end homelessness duty. We need to make sure that this is happening as a last resort. There needs to be better communication between the boroughs that are placing families out of borough. They have that duty and we will continue to monitor the situation.

As a London MP, I am conscious that London boroughs have a high number who are being placed outside. A sizeable number are out-of-borough placements from one borough to another within the city. The pressure in London on accommodation availability is what is causing it, which goes back to the point about making sure that we provide resources, as we have done with the £1 billion that has been invested in a combination of funding for prevention as well as response on a number of agendas. That is really key so that local and regional government has the support it needs to provide the accommodation.

The final thing I would say is that, once again, it is going to be absolutely crucial to get the housebuilding agenda going. Unless we do that and get the housing on stream, through both the affordable homes programme and the wider government objective to build 1.5 million homes, some of these issues are not going to be able to be addressed. We are determined to provide support as much as possible and increase the co-operation between local authorities, but supply is key.

Q75 **Naushabah Khan:** Thank you very much. That is really helpful, Minister. However, the key point there is around communication. That is, at the minute, not happening. There are plenty of examples where local authorities are not communicating with each other when this is the case and they are placing out of borough. At the minute, the legislation says that, in order to place out of borough, you need to communicate this at the point that you have placed the individuals in the host borough. At this point, it is quite late to be able to have any meaningful conversation around what the challenges might be. For example, are there enough school places for children in those areas?

Secondly, there are lots of examples where management companies are buying up properties, often in quite deprived boroughs, and then leasing them to London at double the price they would lease to the host



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authority. That is artificially driving up market values in quite deprived areas, pricing out local councils that also need that accommodation for temporary use. In some ways, we are just pushing the problem around the country.

Is there anything that can be done in the immediate term around improving that communication between authorities? The guidance is there, but it is not necessarily being met. How do we reinforce that better, because that is the piece that is missing, and make sure that we are not just creating problems by taking something, for example, outside of the capital and pushing it further out to a more deprived area?

Rushanara Ali: As I say, the Deputy Prime Minister has already contacted local authorities, making clear what their responsibilities are.

Q76 **Naushabah Khan:** Do you think that that is enough, though, or do you think that there should be more disincentives?

Rushanara Ali: We will continue to monitor the situation. I know that there is strong interest here in Parliament. As a London MP, I do not want to speak for other colleagues, but I do not want my constituents to be placed far away. Indeed, in my own constituency there was a big campaign locally to stop the local council from placing people out of borough, a long way from home.

Q77 **Chair:** On that, none of us wants our constituents placed out of borough, but why does the Department not require local authorities to submit that data on how far they have placed families? At the moment, there is no requirement and they are not doing that. Do you think that, to help address that, the Department should be asking local authorities to submit that data?

Rushanara Ali: We want to see local authorities prioritising keeping people in their localities. That is the message that has been made very clear by the Deputy Prime Minister. I am making that clear today. However, we also recognise that, in certain circumstances, because of a shortage, local authorities do not have the option of housing people locally. That is why we have to deal with the supply-side issues. We are very clear that local authorities have the duty to ensure that they provide that information to the area that they are placing people in, and they have safeguarding duties and other duties that they must abide by. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Q78 **Lewis Cocking:** You have outlined on a number of occasions that there is a shortage of housing in London, so why is London's housing target being slashed?

Rushanara Ali: My colleague attended the committee hearings.

Chair: That is Minister Pennycook.

Q79 **Lewis Cocking:** You keep telling us that there is not enough housing in London and you have slashed the target.



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Rushanara Ali: There is not enough housing because there was not enough housebuilding. That is the legacy we have inherited. We are not going to be able to fix this overnight, but we are determined to address it. London has huge housing pressures. If you look at the temporary accommodation numbers, you will see that they are significantly higher than other parts of the country. With the greatest of respect, the demand for housing in London is much greater. The pressures there are greater. Greater Manchester also has pressures.

The fact is that we have inherited a scandalous situation with homelessness and rough sleeping. Therefore, we intend to build the homes that this country needs to tackle this problem. After 14 years of underinvestment in housing, including social housing, we have a situation that is completely unacceptable. We are determined to tackle it, but let us be clear: this is not going to be solved overnight.

We are working with the mayors, including the Mayor of London, and local authorities. The Deputy Prime Minister has given evidence, setting out her plans for the housebuilding agenda across the country. We are determined to do that, but let us be clear how we ended up here. It is because of chronic underinvestment, a chronic housing shortage and a lack of focus on social and affordable housing in this country in the previous Government. Let us remind ourselves that the last Labour Government cut rough sleeping and homelessness. It went in the opposite direction. We are determined to correct it, but that is the mess that has been left for us to clear up. I am determined to do it, but I am not going to take lectures about what has happened.

Chair: We will stick to our issue of temporary accommodation and rough sleeping. We are going to look at safeguarding, which is an issue that you have mentioned.

Q80 **Maya Ellis:** I am going to pick up on a few questions on immediate safeguarding risks. We have heard evidence in previous sessions where local authorities have placed families in temporary accommodation with vulnerable single adults. Are you concerned about the current safeguarding risks that these situations present?

Rushanara Ali: We know that safeguarding is absolutely paramount. We have seen evidence of the consequences where the quality of housing and condition of housing, if it is in poor condition, can be fatal. That is why the changes that are being made in the Renters' Rights Bill, in terms of the quality of housing, tackling damp and poor conditions, and decent home standards, are going to be vital to make sure that where children and families are placed is safe. Then, of course, you have the safeguarding duties that local authorities have. We have to make sure that the quality of housing is fit for purpose and habitation, and the two go hand in hand.

Q81 **Maya Ellis:** Some of the concerns raised were more about, in the temporary accommodation, the fact that there were instances where you



had families, often young parents with children, being placed in accommodation alongside single men or single vulnerable adults. That often would restrict things for those young parents, who maybe needed the support networks to support them, but often the temporary accommodation was locking down visitors because it was a chaotic mix of a lot of different tenants. I am interested more in that side of things and whether, potentially, you think the code of guidance could be strengthened, for example, to ensure children's safeguarding specifically in that temporary accommodation.

Rushanara Ali: These are really important points. As you were speaking, I was thinking about the work we are doing on supported housing, for instance, where we have seen well-documented cases of the women fleeing domestic violence ending up being placed in particular kinds of housing with children and then along with others, and it is not suitable. That is why, for instance, we have work underway on that, including consultation and ensuring that we have the appropriate regulations for local authorities to make sure the quality is appropriate to address those sorts of issues. We are also putting in funding to support domestic abuse victims through the safe accommodation programme, with an uplift of £30 million taking it to about £160 million in the next financial year. That is just one example.

It goes back to the point around dealing with the underlying factors that drive people into the situation where local authorities are placing them in accommodation that they, frankly, should not be in, but they end up between a rock and a hard place because of the shortage and the issues around quality and standards. We have to get the quality and standards right in terms of the general supply of accommodation as well as temporary accommodation, while it is being used, as well as supported accommodation and housing. We need to deal with the supply side as well.

Of course, we will continue to keep an eye on it and work with colleagues across Government on areas where there may be gaps, because we do not want to see that happen, and ensure that the relevant agencies are taking action. Not all of it is for national Government. Some of it will be for regulators and some of it will be for other Government Departments. That is why the inter-ministerial taskforce is really important. While it is focused on a long-term strategy, there are emerging immediate issues that come up, which we work bilaterally with Departments to address wherever possible as quickly as possible.

Q82 **Maya Ellis:** That is really helpful. As a principle to reiterate, do you feel that you, as a Department, are able to put immediate extra pressure on those local services to ensure that separation, so that that does not happen as much? That is what seems to be happening at the moment. There are instances where those groups are mixing and where that is not appropriate. Are there things that you could be doing immediately to ensure that that is not happening right now?



Rushanara Ali: This is where the Department's approach of us working with mayors and council leaders and officials working with their counterparts is really important. Having the strategic discussions through the inter-ministerial group and these expert groups is really helpful, because I often raise issues as we go along. I am not just focused on developing the strategy; I am focused on what we can do here and now. How do we use every ounce of influence we have to tackle these issues?

We come from a campaigning background. If you spent 14 years in opposition, you are a campaigner on a number of issues. That approach has not changed. Wherever we have issues that we need to tackle, whether it is by talking to colleagues in other Government Departments or working with the relevant organisations and agencies, we do that. That is the approach we are taking. That is the approach the Department is taking and I am encouraging officials to do that.

I do not know whether you wanted to add anything.

Penny Hobman: As you say, the legislation is clear. Bed-and-breakfast accommodation is accommodation where there are shared facilities and families might be sharing with other people. That is why it is not suitable. That is absolutely clear. As we discussed earlier in this session, it should not be used for families. If it has to be used as a last resort, it should not be used beyond six weeks, but, as we discussed, we are aware that that six-week limit is being breached more and more often by local authorities.

All the things the Minister has run through earlier are the measures we are taking to help local authorities get out of using that B&B accommodation, so the additional funding next year into the homelessness prevention grant, the local government financial settlement and the local authority housing fund, so that local authorities can acquire their own stock of better TA and not have to dip into this market. The emergency accommodation reduction pilots work specifically with those local authorities that have the highest number of breaches of that six-week limit. Then there are the B&B elimination plans and the ongoing work between the Department and those local authorities. The aim of all that is to help find solutions and get local authorities out of having to use that unsuitable accommodation. As you say, and as the Minister said, we agree that it is not suitable for those families.

Q83 **Maya Ellis:** Quickly, on the wider support of those children who are in temporary accommodation, we have had a number of bits of evidence that suggest that a formal notification system going to schools and GPs would be really helpful to help monitor those children and make sure they are supported. Do you support that? Have you considered introducing that? Where do you sit on that at the moment?

Rushanara Ali: We have seen some examples. I think that Rochdale Borough Council is doing that. I know that there is a campaign here in Parliament with colleagues looking at that. Anything that can be done to



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ensure that there is proper communication and information sharing between councils needs to happen. I will look closely at that example.

Penny Hobman: Within a council, the code of guidance sets out the safeguarding duties. Housing authorities have a duty to safeguard children under the Children Act. There is a duty to co-operate with children's services within the local authority and share appropriate information. There is inter-agency statutory guidance about those parts of the authority working together. That is all set out in the code of guidance. We expect local authorities to meet what is in that code of guidance. It is statutory guidance.

Q84 **Chair:** A lot of our written submissions have argued for that code of guidance to be strengthened so that it clearly sets out the safeguarding duties for local authorities when placing families in temporary accommodation. Is that something that you would support and agree with?

Penny Hobman: We think that the code of guidance is really clear, but I am sure that the Minister will be interested to hear what the Committee has heard.

Rushanara Ali: Yes, absolutely. Local authorities should not be hanging around for changes. There is existing provision and they need to follow it. If there are gaps, I am sure that this Committee will make sure that the inter-ministerial group takes those points on board. I am very happy to feed that in to the Deputy Prime Minister and others, as we will do with other suggestions that this Committee comes up with.

Q85 **Chris Curtis:** Thank you, Minister. You have talked a lot about the importance of prevention. You have also talked a lot about the importance of increasing that supply of homes. Clearly, the best way of ensuring that everyone has a home to live in is ensuring that we build enough homes for people to live in. In your opinion, is there a link between the local housing allowance rates and homelessness prevention?

Rushanara Ali: We inherited a really challenging set of circumstances post election and the Chancellor announced a substantial increase in the funding that my Department received on the homelessness agenda, with an additional £233 million bringing the total to £1 billion. As you know, other funding has also been made available across Government into the public services that have been stretched over recent years. That is the context in which we are operating.

In looking at the longer-term issues as part of the inter-ministerial strategy, we are looking at some of the broader policy challenges. At the moment, some £32 billion goes into housing benefit costs and housing-related costs. There are also other costs, so there needs to be really careful thinking about how we reduce those sorts of costs so that we can redirect investment into the things that are needed. Those challenges cannot be addressed overnight, but we recognise the



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pressures and the costs to local authorities and that is why we have allocated the funding.

Q86 Chris Curtis: That is the key point as well. As I alluded to in the first question, the reason we are having to spend so much on this is that this country has not been building enough houses and it has driven up the cost of housing. If we accept that that is true and that, as you have just said, that problem is not going to be solved overnight—it is going to take us quite some time, many years, for that extra supply of housing to come online—is it not therefore going to cause a big problem for local housing allowance rates to be frozen, as is currently planned for the next financial year?

Rushanara Ali: I do not think there is more to add beyond that we have a difficult inheritance. There is a £22 billion black hole that the Chancellor and this Government have had to address. Public services are under massive pressure. We have invested some £25 billion in the healthcare system that was underfunded. Of course, intervention in healthcare is important in terms of those groups that we are concerned about here that are facing rough sleeping and homelessness. That is the context in which we are operating.

As a Department, we are determined to do everything we can to alleviate the pressures in terms of longer-term supply, but also the action we are taking. On rough sleeping, which we will come on to, we have increased funding, as well as on the homelessness prevention side.

Chair: On that, we know that the LHA rates are not set by MHCLG. It is the Department for Work and Pensions. Do you not feel that, by DWP maybe not discussing and consulting with colleagues in MHCLG, it will be undoing all the good work that you are trying to do on this agenda?

Q87 Chris Curtis: Do you mind if I add to that as well? You have this taskforce for ending homelessness, which is going to be working cross-Department. Will that taskforce be looking into this alongside your colleagues in that other Department? On that strategy note that you discussed with us earlier, will you release your findings after you have looked into this, if you do look into it?

Rushanara Ali: On your point about LHA and other policies, this is an internal government inter-departmental group that will publish a strategy. That is the format. In terms of discussions we will have with Ministers across Government, that is why it is really important that DWP, Treasury and other Ministers are involved. Just to reassure you, there is a lot of good will and commitment across Government on tackling this issue. I very much hope that we will look at these issues carefully, but it is not in my gift to get beyond what was set out in the Budget.

Of course, we recognise that these are big challenges. To meet those longer-term challenges, we will need to look at these wider policy issues collectively as a Government and then identify what should happen. Chair, you mentioned the point about the good work being undone. At



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this stage of Government, the way I would frame it is that we have these immediate challenges we need to address and we have been very focused on making sure that—

Q88 Chair: Would you agree that those challenges have been exacerbated by the freeze in the LHA rates?

Rushanara Ali: The challenges have been exacerbated by long-term issues, going back a decade or more. We are not going to be able to resolve these issues immediately, not least because there is a massive challenge around the financial environment that we have inherited. That said, what is really encouraging is that additional funding has been made available, recognising the fiscal climate. We just have to be realistic about the fact that some of these changes will require us to look deeper into what those policy challenges are.

In terms of wider resources that have been made available, of course, there are a number of funds for those who are homeless and rough sleeping. Those financial interventions will be really important. I mentioned domestic violence safe accommodation. There is also drugs and alcohol treatment funding in relation to those who are sleeping rough, where there is higher prevalence of need for that kind of support. There are a range of other funding streams that are critical to support people who are facing homelessness or rough sleeping.

Q89 Chair: Just on the data, Penny, will your Department continue to monitor the number of children in temporary accommodation as a result of the freeze on LHA rates?

Penny Hobman: We have statutory data collection, the H-CLIC data collection, which collects data on the number of households in temporary accommodation, broken down by the number with children. We will continue to collect and publish that data.

Q90 Chair: Do you think that the number of children in temporary accommodation will increase as a result of that freeze?

Penny Hobman: As we spoke about earlier, there are lots of factors that drive homelessness. It is a complex picture and household income is one of those factors, but there are a number of things that affect household income: employment and wages, as well as welfare decisions. It is an extremely complex set of drivers that drive homelessness. There are both national factors and lots of individual-level factors. It is very hard to isolate particular drivers.

Q91 Sarah Smith: It would be good, Minister, if you could lay out the actions that you are taking to tackle rough sleeping and specifically the rough sleeping emergency. Could you please also talk about the actions you will take that are not just about the current emergency, but also about tackling this and ending this for good?



Rushanara Ali: The funding that we have allocated is £283.2 million for three of our rough sleeping grants for 2025-26. Before Christmas, we announced £10 million for winter pressures and yesterday I announced a further £20 million to support local authorities for rough sleeping winter pressures. We recognise that this is a really challenging agenda. Again, the numbers have been rising, going in the wrong direction. We are determined to do everything we can to support local areas.

I just want to say how grateful I am to local partners and charities for the work they do, particularly during the winter, but all year round. It is phenomenal. I am also grateful to those who fund them, in both the public and the philanthropic sector. We have had the opportunity to see the work that they do across the country and it is incredibly powerful.

I mentioned the drug and alcohol treatment grant. You will know from the evidence that those who are sleeping rough have complex needs. That is £58.7 million that has been allocated. Women experience rough sleeping in quite complex ways. They could be fleeing violence or modern slavery. A whole range of factors can drive them into sleeping rough and I have met women who have been in these sorts of circumstances. We have provided an uplift to the domestic abuse and safe accommodation grant of £30 million, bringing it to £160 million for 2025-25.

That is really key. For many years, many of us have campaigned for more support for women fleeing violence, who can end up homeless and, in the worst case scenario, on the streets. I have heard absolute horror stories of sexual violence and rape that can then happen when they are on the streets. Those interventions, in terms of providing funding and support to local areas, to the partners that local authorities work with, is key.

Then, in terms of the inter-ministerial group, of course, we are working closely with other Departments. There are programmes such as Changing Futures, which is a cross-government programme led by MHCLG and supported by a number of Departments. That has shown really positive results in terms of the support that is provided to those with complex needs.

What is important is then to look at how we continue those programmes. We have put in some additional funding to continue programmes like that and there will be other examples like that as part of the work we do, working with local partners, with charities and with other partners. The important thing is that I am keen and hope that the IMG will identify good interventions that are effective and look at how we can encourage local areas to develop and adapt those programmes and innovations that are working.

The funding that we have already provided provides them flexibility, particularly around the prevention funding, to apply new models or models that they find are working.

Q92 **Sarah Smith:** You spoke about the pilots that are currently being



undertaken to look at solutions and how to tackle this. I know that in east Lancashire and Blackburn they have been piloting pods for rough sleepers and have had some very encouraging early responses and evidence of how that is helping to tackling this. What is your timeframe for analysing some of these pilots and starting to make sure that those most effective and impactful options are rolled out more widely?

Rushanara Ali: We published the evaluation of the Changing Futures pilot before Christmas and the results were really encouraging. One of the examples, which I often share, is of someone who has received support from different agencies over a period of, I think, 13 to 15 years, thousands of interventions, costing something in the order of £1 million to the state.

That is an example of how a lack of joining up and person-focused interventions means it is more costly. The evaluation shows the savings that could be made. For instance, one of the key findings from that evaluation is that having an individual caseworker who helps somebody who is very vulnerable, with complex needs, navigate through the system, often through a complex web of public services and so on, can dramatically change the outcomes.

Taking an outcomes-focused, results-focused approach is going to be absolutely critical. Otherwise, it takes up a lot of public service resource with sub-optimal outcomes. That is not good enough. In this sphere of complex needs, the Department of Health and the relevant health agencies, as well as housing and other relevant Departments, locally as well as nationally, are key.

Penny Hobman: One thing that we have done for 2025-26 is to consolidate some of the rough sleeping funding into one overall rough sleeping prevention and recovery grant. That is designed to give local authorities more flexibility to deliver the services that are needed in their area, which they have proven to work. There is the example you mentioned of pods, but there will be other areas of good practice throughout the country that we want local authorities to be able to continue.

Q93 Joe Powell: Could I just ask a quick follow-up question on this? Investing in prevention totally makes sense, but we know, historically, some councils have spent up to 80% of their rough sleeping money on temporary accommodation, just because of the current need. I believe in this new grant you have indicated 49% needs to be spent on prevention.

I did ask this question of the Deputy Prime Minister as well, but have you looked at the unintended consequences in the short run? Could that actually mean less money to deal with the emergency for some councils, even while we need to invest in prevention for the long term?

Penny Hobman: The 49% ringfencing prevention is on the homelessness prevention grant, rather than on the rough sleeping grants. I am sure the Minister will want to answer as well, but the aim there is to



start to shift back into prevention first, which evidence and experience show is much better in terms of managing the costs of homelessness, but also the outcomes for individuals.

Rushanara Ali: You are alluding to the challenge some authorities are facing. London Councils has contacted me and I will be meeting with the chair and deputy chair of London Councils, Councillor Holland and Councillor Williams. It is really crucial that we do both. We have to focus on prevention. It picks up on the wider points we made earlier.

In terms of the local government settlement, there is an increase in funding to local authorities. It is just over 3.5% in real terms. We are already working nationally to do what we can to prevent the increase in homelessness. That is why I gave you the examples earlier around the work we have done with the Home Office, for instance, so that the pressures local authorities face are reduced.

Likewise, there is other work that national Government can do to reduce the pressures. For instance, if those who are leaving the criminal justice system, those who are released from prison, end up homeless, that can undo the work that local areas are doing. Likewise, in relation to other—

Chair: I am conscious of time, Minister. We just need to wrap up and be more succinct in our replies.

Q94 **Sarah Smith:** We will move on now to the issue of local authorities sometimes gatekeeping. We have, again, heard evidence about the impact of this. I am interested in what steps you intend to take to discourage local authorities from those gatekeeping practices, such as using the idea of intentional homelessness to withhold or withdraw support from people who need it.

Rushanara Ali: Intentional homelessness, did you say?

Sarah Smith: This is the issue of local authorities using the idea of somebody intentionally making themselves homeless in order to prevent them accessing the support that they need or withdrawing support that they might otherwise be entitled to.

Penny Hobman: As we said earlier, the code of guidance is really clear about the legislative framework around intentional homelessness, for example. It is up to local authorities to make their own judgments on a case-by-case basis about those things, but there is the legislative framework that is set out.

Rushanara Ali: They have particular duties that they need to abide by. Are you referring to stringent or overzealous cases?

Q95 **Sarah Smith:** Yes. I would ask the question of whether you think people actually intentionally make themselves homeless. The framing of even suggesting that vulnerable people are taking steps to make themselves homeless is quite a challenging statement to make within itself. It seems



to be that there is practice within local authorities whereby they are using the guidance to prioritise and to say, “This person is less worthy of support than another person”.

We hear time and time again that homeless people come with really complex trauma, backgrounds and needs, and all need to be treated with respect. They all need support in order to move forward with their lives. Coming back to the question, what steps would you take to discourage local authorities from that sort of practice?

Rushanara Ali: Just to reassure you, where we have seen an issue such as care leavers, for instance, where intentionality has been used in a detrimental way, the state, as a corporate parent, has a duty of care to them. We have worked with the Department for Education and supported it on that amendment. That is a good example of where, on a case-by-case basis, there are specific injustices and issues that are addressed.

To the broader point, there are statutory responsibilities that local authorities have, which need to be addressed. In terms of rough sleeping, you are absolutely right. There are complex issues. That is why it is important to get the right services available and make sure that there are not unintended consequences in terms of actions that any agency—particularly a local authority, but others as well—takes. That is where we have found partnership working between charities and local organisations, local authorities and regional government, to be really key.

Q96 **Naushabah Khan:** I just wanted to come back on the point that was made there and unpick that slightly further. There have been examples of how this is interpreted. I appreciate that the guidance is set by the Department and then it comes down to interpretation, but is there any review of how it is being interpreted across authorities?

For example, there are cases where local authorities will say to people, “You have to stay in your property, even though you have received an eviction notice, until bailiffs knock on the door. Otherwise, you are intentionally homeless”. That puts people in a really difficult situation. The process of supporting them with potentially becoming homeless could start a lot earlier.

Rushanara Ali: We have all heard stories like that. That is more from my experience as a constituency MP. We hear stories of local council officials, again, being stuck between a rock and a hard place. We want to make sure that there is staff support. For instance, in the way that funding is allocated, we have to provide flexibility so that councils can get the right support in place. These are extremely vulnerable people.

Just as we are doing in terms of employment—colleagues in DWP are looking at how you reform the employment system, in terms of job centres and so on—it is really important that local authorities and frontline service providers in local agencies and local authorities get the support they need in order to work sensitively with those who are vulnerable or at risk of homelessness. As MPs, we see in our surgeries



the trauma that can be caused to children and families if they are, first of all, facing homelessness and are then put in that situation.

I am really determined that, as part of our work on developing the strategy, frontline workers' voices and experiences of what is going on at that end are fed in. Also, we are already feeding in the experiences of Members of Parliament. Often, Members of Parliament and councillors in their surgeries get those stories and insights, which need to be fed in to ensure that there is proper support for those in homeless persons units who are talking to those who face homelessness.

Q97 Naushabah Khan: Moving on to Housing First, you mentioned this at the start, when we began this conversation. I appreciate that the Department has a positive evaluation of the Housing First programme. I want to understand what the plans are to support its wider rollout across England.

Rushanara Ali: The evaluation that was published in October found that the large majority of Housing First clients were in long-term accommodation a year after entering the programme and that tenancies were sustainable for 80% to 90%. That is really powerful evidence. I am really pleased about that. It shows that there is good value for money. To see the benefits will take some time, but we expect the savings to be just over £15,000 per person per year. Interventions like that are really encouraging to see.

In terms of what happens next, there has been funding allocated. For 2025-26, £185.6 million has been allocated through the rough sleeping prevention and recovery grant. Rollout is a matter for the spending review, but we are really encouraged by this programme and the data and impact. There will be others like that where, if the evidence base is strong, that is really valuable for us. It allows us to look at what we do further to support local areas to develop not just this initiative but others. I mentioned Changing Futures as well.

Q98 Naushabah Khan: Housing First has been looked at in other countries as well and it is seen as a model that works. Our own pilot is showing those positive results, which is great to see.

I appreciate what you said about the spending review but, given that some authorities are already trialling this and using it in certain capacities, are there any conversations happening at this point with local authorities about how they could perhaps bolster that and ensure they have the resources and stock in place to be able to do this in the right way, outside of the spending review?

It is actually a solution that could work, not quickly, but it could certainly get the ball rolling quickly.

Rushanara Ali: Penny might want to come back to it, but I will just say that local authorities now have much more flexibility in terms of funding.



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We hope that they will be able to use that flexibility in a way they see fit, to pick up on your point.

Penny Hobman: As well as the Housing First pilots at scale in the three regional authorities that Government supported over recent years, many other local authorities have been funding Housing First provision through what was formerly the rough sleeping initiative, but next year will become the rough sleeping prevention and recovery grant. The extra flexibility of the funding next year allows them to carry on doing those things that are working.

Q99 **Naushabah Khan:** Is there any work happening to ensure, where this is already happening, that they are being allowed to scale that up and that Government are providing the support needed in order for them to do this in the right way? I really want to understand how we are going to use the pilot that we have done.

Rushanara Ali: Greater Manchester, Liverpool and west midlands are the areas with the Housing First pilots. It is really valuable to have those pilots and to make sure that there is learning. On the winter pressures funding we did, the Department held a webinar with 1,000 attendees over a couple of sessions. There is a lot of interest among frontline workers. Among those who are leading the pilots, there are the discussions we have in terms of our expert group. Those are important forums. They have their own as well, in terms of sharing good practice, and we want to see more of that.

Q100 **Chair:** Lastly on that, Minister, we have talked about the vicious cycle of homelessness. There was a positive response to the programme, but 34% of individuals who left the programme cited limited supply of appropriate, affordable properties. In essence, they could end up back in that cycle of rough sleeping. Are you and colleagues looking at the long-term sustainability of affordable properties?

Rushanara Ali: The cost of private accommodation is much higher than social housing. The Deputy Prime Minister is determined to make sure that we have an increase in social and affordable housing as we focus our attention on the housebuilding programme. It goes back to the point about affordability and supply, as well as the Renters Reform Bill and some of the changes being made there.

Chair: There is also the freeze in the LHA rates, which is having an impact on availability.

Rushanara Ali: There is the Renters Reform Bill and the ending of section 21. We know from the evidence that it is well over 20,000 people who end up homeless because of that particular provision, which is going to be ended. Again, we are taking action to prevent particular policies having unintended consequences or adverse effects. That is really important as well.

Q101 **Lewis Cocking:** Minister, I want to talk about joined-up services. We



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have been talking today about very important and complex issues. Some people who are rough sleeping have very complex needs. What are the Government, and particularly your Department, doing around joining up those services? That is particularly important with the health service. It is often very challenging to get them around the table. Could you just give us a bit of a flavour around how we are doing that?

Rushanara Ali: You are absolutely right. That is why the work we do nationally, the strategy and the work we are doing in the inter-ministerial taskforce is really key, in terms of having those relevant Departments and Ministers in the inter-departmental group.

On the funding side, there has been an investment from the Department of Health of over £25 billion into opening new mental health crisis centres. You can imagine that, for people who are at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, there are mental health dimensions to the complex needs they have. Those interventions are really important.

I mentioned the drug and alcohol treatment. That is a joint MHCLG and Department of Health and Social Care fund of over £58.7 million. There is also the disabled facilities grant, where the Secretary of State for Health announced in January £86 million for 2024-25 and then an additional £86 million of investment for 2025-26, which brings the total to £711 million. That is really important as well, because we have seen examples of people who are sleeping rough who need stepdown care to leave hospital and the arrangements are not appropriate.

I have seen first hand really great examples at the Mildmay Hospital, in my own constituency, working with the NHS to provide care. That facility is there but, in terms of housing, the disabled facilities grant is really important to support those who need it. That is a significant investment. The housing support fund is really key as well. That is obviously not the Department of Health and Social Care.

Joined-up working is really key. I have given you examples of other Departments and work we have been doing, such as education for care leavers and work with the Home Office. We are really keen to work in that way. We have to look at the needs of the individual affected. If they are sleeping rough, how do we get them off the streets and into the support services that they need, in order to make sure there is not this cycle?

The evidence that we are seeing through some work we are doing with linked data across Government—a report on which will be published—is really powerful in showing repeat rough sleeping. It is key that we understand better how to prevent repeat rough sleeping. Departments being able to share data is going to be really key. That is the approach we are taking: making sure these grants and funds are used appropriately to support the individual, thinking about their holistic needs.



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Q102 **Lewis Cocking:** I am really conscious of time. Since you have been in post, have you had a meeting with your counterpart in the Department of Health and Social Care where rough sleeping has been on the agenda?

Rushanara Ali: I have had a meeting with my counterpart where homelessness and rough sleeping have been on the agenda, yes.

Q103 **Chair:** Lastly, Minister, you mentioned the linked report on data. Is that something that you are able to share with us as a Committee?

Rushanara Ali: Yes. It should be published imminently.

Q104 **Chair:** Just on data, we know that the collection of that data is quite patchy. The figures highlighted every year on the number of people sleeping rough is only a snapshot. How do you plan to improve on collection and monitoring of the data of people sleeping rough by local authority?

Penny Hobman: There are two types of collection. There is the annual rough sleeping snapshot, which is really useful as a time series and allows you to see change over time. That has been collected in that way since 2010. We recognised that that gives you a single night snapshot and does not capture the complexity and nuance of rough sleeping across the course of a month or a year.

We have developed over recent years the rough sleeping data framework, which is a set of eight indicators mapped against the definition of ending rough sleeping, it being prevented where possible and, otherwise, rare, brief and non-recurrent. Those indicators then map across prevention, rare, brief and non-recurrent and allow local authorities to have a much more detailed picture of what is happening in their area. Then they can adapt their services to tackle whatever is going on in their particular place. If it is a lot of repeat rough sleeping in a particular area, that requires a different type of intervention than new flow.

We publish that data quarterly in the interests of transparency, but local authorities can also look at that data and compare it against other local authorities to see what is different in their place or where they are similar to others. Again, then they can collaborate and share good practice.

Q105 **Chair:** You do those interim frameworks. Is there a permanent move to change the annual snapshot, if it is so incorrect?

Penny Hobman: I would not characterise it as incorrect, but it is measuring a different thing. It is a single-night measure. It is more robustly verified. We have an independent verification by Homeless Link. It is a very robust measure, but what it is measuring is a single-night snapshot. It is useful. It gives you that time series. You can see change over time, but the data indicators give local authorities a richness of monthly data that show a lot more about the types of rough sleeping in the area. They are useful for different purposes.



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Q106 **Chair:** Are there any changes being made to collect demographic information of rough sleepers, which currently is not recorded as part of that estimate?

Penny Hobman: The annual snapshot collects basic demographic information, such as gender and country of origin, but, as we talked a little bit about earlier, we recognise that there is concern among stakeholders that women's rough sleeping is often more hidden, for reasons of safety and others. We are very supportive of work in the sector to do the women's census and to understand more about that.

Q107 **Chair:** A big issue is the number of people who are rough sleeping due to leaving their accommodation linked to Home Office asylum or refugee accommodation. Are there any plans to incorporate data from the Home Office in the data that you are collecting for the snapshot?

Penny Hobman: The H-CLIC data, which is the homelessness collection, does record people who are homeless upon leaving the asylum estate. That data is collected and published.

Q108 **Chair:** It is collected as part of rough sleeping.

Penny Hobman: It is collected as part of homelessness data, which covers homelessness in its broadest form, but there is also specific policy.

Rushanara Ali: As I mentioned at the beginning, we started to work immediately, straight after the election, with the Home Office to provide some transition time once status is determined. If people have refugee status, there is the spectre of this short period of time. That has been extended. That is really important, in order to help people make that transition, get into accommodation and arrange accommodation for themselves. Usually, if they have enough time, they can find their way into accommodation, whereas this short period creates more challenges for local areas.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming this morning, Minister. We appreciate the responses to the questions. I will bring the meeting to a close.