



Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 1353 Email hclgcom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk

The Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP
Minister of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

8 July 2020

Dear Christopher,

IMPACT OF COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) ON HOMELESSNESS AND THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Thank you for responding quickly to the Committee's report into the *Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on homelessness and the private rented sector*. Given the urgency of these matters, your support for the Committee's work is welcome.

In our report, we said that the *Everyone In* programme presented a golden opportunity to end rough sleeping in England once and for all and we called on the Government to ensure that that rough sleepers do not end up back on the streets due to a lack of suitable housing. We welcome, therefore, the Government's announcement on 24 June 2020 of an additional £85 million for local authorities to support the transition of rough sleepers from emergency accommodation to permanent housing. We will continue to monitor the Government's work in this area over the coming months, to ensure that the opportunity of this moment is not missed.

The Committee was disappointed, however, with the Government's lack of engagement with our proposals for a firmer legislative underpinning to a future Pre-Action Protocol for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector. Our view remains that, unless the Government amends existing housing legislation, its plans to introduce a pre-action protocol to the private rented sector will be toothless and will fail to prevent a cliff edge of evictions once the moratorium on possession cases ends. This view was supported by both Shelter and Generation Rent in our evidence session on 29 June 2020.

We ask that the Government gives greater consideration to our proposal to amend the 1985 and 1988 Housing Acts to allow judges to use discretion where a tenant is in rent arrears due to the coronavirus crisis over the next year. If the Government does not intend to proceed with supporting legislation (a template for which we included as an Annex in our report), please could you provide a more thorough explanation of how you believe the Pre-Action Protocol will be effective in practice, especially where a landlord uses a 'no fault' section 21 application or a mandatory ground section 8 application, given that a judge cannot exercise discretion and must give possession in such cases, assuming the normal requirements have been satisfied.

I look forward to your response.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts'.

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee