

Ms Rona Topaz – Written Evidence (LBC0115)

How to build back better

If Covid-19 has any positive outcomes, it should be a reimagining of how to restructure society in a way that is more fair, equitable, compassionate and humane. We have seen signs of this since lockdown in March-the proliferation of mutual aid groups, the housing of homeless rough sleepers, the furlough schemes, and so on. But there is much more that can and should be done.

Covid-19 is set to cause the UK to sink into the worst economic depression since before the Second World War. What needs to happen is not a return to austerity measures, which, compounded by our leaving the European Union, will exacerbate homelessness, poverty and destitution to an almost unprecedented amount, but what is desperately needed is a paradigm shift: in our social security system, in the establishment of a guaranteed basic income for all post 16 schools leavers, with a pension rate of a minimum £250 per week for men and women over the age of 60, and a suspension of sanctions and work conditionality for all disabled claimants of Universal Credit.

In housing especially, much work is needed. This has been exacerbated by government's refusal to invest in new social housing schemes for the past decade, resulting in an increase in homelessness of 174% BEFORE the pandemic started. With support given to landlords and homeowners post lockdown, renters have had little more than a one month stay of execution from evictions until mid September. Rent amnesty/forgiveness, in the face of devastating job losses, is crucial to stave off increases in homelessness and penury.

There is sufficient economic evidence based on the current climate to necessitate extending the ban on evictions for at least another year. Section 21 needs to be reformed considerably to be fairer to tenants, or banned outright. A "fair rent" policy can be looked at-which will reduce landlord profit margins and bring rents to within the budget constraints of renters.

Historically, landlords have made a considerable profit from owning a number of properties whilst people are forced into unsafe, unsuitable accommodation or rough sleeping. What is desperately needed post Covid are rent controls and limits on how many properties landlords are permitted to own at any one time.

Finally, the practices that led to the proliferation of the virus-the delay in locking down, the underfunding of the NHS, the lack of track and trace services-should be rectified prior to a second or third wave of the virus.

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