

## Written evidence submitted by Philippa Rousell at Changing Lives

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Changing Lives welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Justice Committee's inquiry into the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- 1.2. Changing Lives is a national charity, helping thousands of people change their lives for the better each year. We have around 100 projects in England, supporting people in the most challenging of circumstances including homelessness, addiction, contact with the criminal justice system, sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, long-term unemployment and more.
- 1.3. We deliver accommodation and community-based homelessness services across England.
  - 1.3.1. Our accommodation offer includes emergency access accommodation; supported accommodation; specialist support for veterans, young people, people with experience of domestic abuse and women in recovery; and Housing First initiatives.
  - 1.3.2. Our community-based services include tenancy sustainment, rough sleeper outreach services, modern day slavery services, domestic abuse and veterans' community outreach services.
- 1.4. We share the Committee's concerns that not enough progress is being made to end rough sleeping. We recommend that:
  - 1.4.1. DLUHC should maintain the political will and impetus gained during the pandemic and ensure that rough sleeping is prioritised within the levelling up agenda
  - 1.4.2. The way in which wraparound support for people experiencing rough sleeping is funded should be improved to ensure that this support is long-term, centred around the person rather than their deficits and gives the necessary flexibility for innovation and a strengths-based approach.
  - 1.4.3. DLUHC should commit to maintaining Local Housing Allowance at at least 30 per cent of rents in a Broad Rental Market Area.
  - 1.4.4. Provision of social housing stock should be increased as a matter of urgency, particularly in areas with high private rental costs.
  - 1.4.5. DLUHC should promote and fund housing-led and dispersed accommodation solutions that include but go beyond Housing First, to ensure that everyone is

offered their own home with their own front door at the earliest opportunity, rather than having to prove themselves to be 'housing ready' first.

## **2. The response to rough sleeping during the pandemic**

- 2.1. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that, where there is political will and strong leadership, it is possible to end rough sleeping. It would be a failure of government and others if we do not learn from what has been made possible throughout the pandemic and prioritise homelessness within the levelling up agenda. Rough sleeping is a huge social injustice that will affect the lives of so many and we must build on what we have learned and achieved.
- 2.2. The pandemic brought about some excellent practice for people sleeping rough that likely would not have otherwise happened. The removal of 'red tape', such as restrictions on rent arrears and previous criminal behaviour, meant that those who would previously not have been considered for housing were able to obtain their own home and successfully sustain their tenancies. This challenges the presumption that someone needs to be 'housing ready' before they are given their own home.
- 2.3. To give an example, in Newcastle, our usual bidding process for accommodation was suspended during the pandemic and instead we were asked by Your Homes Newcastle (responsible for managing council properties on behalf of Newcastle City Council) to identify individuals within our services who would be able to sustain a tenancy. By matching people to these properties, we were able to free up valuable space within our emergency and dispersed accommodation, while also enabling people to move on from homelessness for good.

## **3. The importance of wraparound support**

- 3.1. We will discuss the need for increased affordable housing stock in the following section but, in our experience, an area often neglected in public funding of housing and homelessness services is the ongoing wraparound support needed to address people's wider needs, such as trauma, addiction, unemployment, mental and physical health. Addressing homelessness and rough sleeping is not just about putting a roof over people's heads, but also about addressing the reasons that they faced homelessness in the first place and struggle to break out of the cycle of rough sleeping.
- 3.2. Without this support, investment in housing stock will not create value for money as people are likely to continue moving in and out of accommodation and rough sleeping.
- 3.3. **Strengths-based support**
  - 3.3.1. A disproportionately high number of people who are rough sleeping have experiences of local authority care, contact with the criminal justice system, addiction and poor mental health. Whilst support focused on these areas is crucial, we have found that a deficit-based approach, which focuses on people's problems, is less effective than an approach that focuses on people's strengths and how they can use these strengths to address and overcome the challenges they are experiencing.
    - 3.3.1.1. Since 2017, Changing Lives has had a team of Asset Coaches who complement the other housing and homelessness services we deliver by

encouraging people to become active, co-producers of their own outcomes. This approach has proved effective in supporting people to achieve positive change in their lives.

3.3.2. Where funding is available for wraparound support, it often does not lend itself to a strengths-based approach. Funding is often attached to specific needs rather than individual people – e.g. drug and alcohol services, domestic abuse services. We would advocate for more flexibility in funding models so that people can receive the right support when they need it.

3.3.2.1. To give an example, Changing Lives was involved in a Social Investment Bond (SIB) project in Newcastle and Gateshead which ran from October 2017 to March 2021 as part of the government's Homelessness Prevention Programme. This project was aimed at supporting people who were rough sleeping and/or experiencing entrenched homelessness and crucially gave staff the freedom to do whatever was needed to enable people to move forward with their lives.

3.3.2.2. Of the 116 clients, 36 (30%) sustained accommodation from entry right through to the 24 month milestone. Bear in mind that this was a cohort experiencing entrenched homelessness where other support had not adequately addressed their needs.

3.3.2.3. What worked so well about this project was the freedom that staff were given to take a person-centred, strengths-based approach. We are not advocating for greater use of SIBs – if anything, we feel that the project was successful in spite of being a SIB, not because of being a SIB. The payment-by-results mechanism was not fit for purpose, and the financial risk was high. However, funding that allows freedom to innovate and take a person-centred approach will be more effective than funding categorised by the deficits that a person may face.

#### 3.4. **The need for long-term sustainable funding**

3.4.1. One of the challenges for providers of wraparound support is that funding is often inconsistent and short-term. This is an issue that predates the pandemic, but continued to present problems throughout.

3.4.2. For example, MHCLG's Next Steps Accommodation Programme committed to providing thousands of units of accommodation, but this was not matched by an appropriate level of funding for support. This approach risks making it difficult for people to move into their own home and sustain their tenancies. Capital investment in housing stock is vital, but it must be aligned with revenue funding for support alongside it.

3.4.3. Short-term funding has several negative impacts on the ability of services to address rough sleeping:

3.4.3.1. It incentivises competition rather than collaboration. In some areas the short-term nature of funding and competition to win contracts risks limiting opportunities for collaboration between organisations who would work most effectively in close partnership.

3.4.3.2. It is difficult to recruit and retain skilled staff when we can only offer short-term contracts.

- 3.4.3.3. It makes it harder to integrate projects into the wider housing and homelessness system.
- 3.4.3.4. We have found that, with the right support, people who are facing challenging times will engage with services, but the inconsistency produced by short-term funding models makes it harder to build trusting relationships and sustain that engagement, and many disengage during times of transition when services are decommissioned. Others will be reluctant to engage in the first place because they are aware of the short-term nature of the support – our staff report people accessing their services asking “So how long are you going to work with me?”. This was found in the SIB project – the number of people signing up for support was lower than expected because service fatigue hampered initial engagement.
- 3.4.3.5. Prescriptive funding outcomes and short funding timescales are not appropriate for people who are facing complex challenges. This not only means that their care and support may be passed onto a different provider should contracts change hands, disrupting their progress, but also means that providers may be seen to be at fault for not providing the impossible.

#### **4. Availability of affordable housing**

- 4.1. Whilst we strongly advocate for providing wraparound support rather than just giving someone a roof over their head, the fact remains that in parts of the country it is incredibly difficult to secure affordable housing.
- 4.2. In many of the areas we work, particularly in the North East, it is relatively easy to secure affordable housing. Indeed during Everyone In, there were relatively few people housed in hotels as it was possible to find alternative accommodation. However there are areas we work such as York where the housing market is a real challenge due to high market rents and a saturated private rented market.
- 4.3. We welcome the readjustment of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to genuinely cover 30 per cent of rents in a Broad Rental Market Area. The freeze in LHA rates had meant that rates were not actually reflective of the actual rents in each area. It should not have taken this long to bring LHA rates back in line, and we seek reassurance that DLUHC will not allow the gap to grow again.
- 4.4. We also echo the call of many other organisations to urge the government to increase social housing stock, particularly in areas where private rents are unaffordable to people on low incomes. We urge the Committee to scrutinise DLUHC’s lack of progress or urgency in this area.

#### **5. Dispersed accommodation: Giving people their own front door**

- 5.1. In order to end rough sleeping it is not just about how much money is invested, but how that money is spent. At Changing Lives we have been testing a ‘Front Door’ model which moves away from larger shared accommodation and instead offers dispersed accommodation at the earliest point – self-contained accommodation located in the community where everyone is given their own front door.
- 5.2. Our current system for people experiencing homelessness often involves people being placed in large hostels which are not conducive to helping people move on into permanent accommodation and address the reasons they have experienced homelessness. Such accommodation is often mixed-sex, chaotic and far too large for staff to effectively and safely manage. It is often assumed that this is the only option

for people who need more intensive support and are not yet ready to manage a tenancy on their own.

- 5.3. People often become stuck in hostels until they can prove themselves to be 'housing ready'. They will only be moved into their own permanent accommodation once they have jumped through multiple hoops such as engaging with treatment services, no active offending, and proving themselves as a 'good tenant' based on their behaviour within the temporary accommodation.
- 5.4. However, despite the best efforts of homelessness services contending with ten years of austerity, hostels often do not have the right resources to be trauma-informed environments. People trying to move away from substance use or crime may find themselves housed next door to someone using drugs. Women who have been sexually abused or exploited may find themselves in mixed-gender hostels and vulnerable to further exploitation. Some find or fear that the hostel environment is so unsafe that they choose to remain on the streets over staying there.
- 5.5. People who walk through our doors at Changing Lives have often experienced trauma, deprivation and discrimination. When faced with environments which are not designed or equipped to deal with trauma, they may display troubled and troubling behaviours. Despite the fact that these are very normal responses to what has happened to them, they are labelled as "anti-social" or "challenging", and are less likely to secure permanent accommodation.
- 5.6. The alternative to this is what is known as a 'housing-led approach' to homelessness and rough sleeping, which prioritises giving someone their own home above addressing other needs such as addiction, mental ill health or unemployment. The best known example of this is Housing First, which is a successful housing-led initiative which offers housing and intensive support to people experiencing multiple disadvantage and is aimed at people with a long history of rough sleeping who face the biggest barriers when required to prove themselves in order to obtain housing. In developing our 'Front Door' model we looked at the success of Housing First and asked ourselves why wait until people are at crisis point before providing them with a safe space to call home? We therefore committed to moving away from a hostel-based model towards a model that offers everyone who needs it their own front door.
- 5.7. What this looks like in practice is a range of housing solutions depending on the level of support needs a person has, all of which give someone their own space to call home:
  - 5.7.1. Self-contained units situated in a single purpose building with on-site staffing. This offers the more intensive support seen in traditional hostel models, but gives people their own space, autonomy and dignity.
  - 5.7.2. Multiple self-contained units within close proximity of staff offices. This allows people to still access support but gives greater anonymity to the supported accommodation units, thus reducing stigma.
  - 5.7.3. Individual properties dispersed across the community with less frequent contact with staff. This can give total anonymity of supported accommodation, again reducing stigma, but continues to offer support to those who are not ready for full independence but do not require the intensive support of a hostel model. This model is particularly beneficial for those who might be ineligible for other forms of accommodation – e.g. male victims of domestic abuse, women at risk of exploitation.

- 5.8. As an example of a specific project, Changing Lives has redeveloped a large-scale 52 bed hostel in Newcastle to a new block of 36 individual self-contained units named Bentinck Terrace. This redevelopment came about following conversations with the residents of the hostel, who told us things like “I’d like to be able to use the kitchen in the middle of the night”, “I’d like to not be disrupted by other people’s comings and goings”, and “I’d like a space that I can make my own”. This was made possible with the support of Newcastle City Council and £2.2m funding from Homes England, but alongside our own significant investment. Opening in June 2021, each resident now has their own living space, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom whilst still being able to access on-site support around employability, skills, job training and tenancy management.
- 5.9. We have conducted analysis of our services in Newcastle, comparing outcomes for people given their own front door to people living in hostels or HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) and giving the following outcomes:
- 5.9.1. People are **three times more likely to move into a permanent home** (e.g. a private or social rented tenancy) if they have had their own front door – that’s 28% of people compared to 9% of people living in hostels or an HMO.
  - 5.9.2. People are **spending less time in our services before moving onto a permanent home** – people who have successfully ‘moved on’ into their own home having had their own front door spend an average of 133 nights with our services, compared to an average of 327 nights for those who have not experienced their own space – a reduction of 70%.
  - 5.9.3. People are **three times less likely to experience an unplanned exit** (which often results in people back on the streets or in insecure accommodation) – that’s 8% of those who have had their own front door compared to 30% of those who haven’t.
- 5.10. It is widely acknowledged within the homelessness sector that the traditional hostel model is not working well in moving people on from rough sleeping into permanent, stable accommodation. However many providers do not have the support or financial capacity to change their approach. More support – both financial and political – needs to be given by government to encourage provision of housing-led support and we would urge the committee to explore this with DLUHC to ensure that people are able to move on from homelessness for good.

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