

Written evidence submitted by Homeless Link (COR0012)

Introduction

1. Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness agencies and the wider housing with health, care and support sector in England. With over 750 members, we work to improve services and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness and ensure that everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.
2. We are a member of the Making Every Adult Matter Coalition (MEAM), alongside Clinks and Mind, formed to improve policy and services for people facing multiple needs. Together the charities represent over 1,300 frontline organisations that have an interest in the criminal justice, substance misuse, homelessness and mental health sectors. We support partnerships across the country to develop effective, coordinated approaches to multiple needs that can increase wellbeing, reduce costs to public services and improve people's lives.
3. Homeless Link would be glad to elaborate further on any of the information provided. For any questions about this submission.

All eviction must be suspended

4. No one should face evictions while this pandemic is ongoing. Asylum seekers must be given the same protection against eviction as the wider population. Therefore, Home Office should ensure that providers of asylum accommodation **suspend all evictions** for at least the next three months, including the evictions of people who are appeals rights exhausted and of those who have recently been granted their refugee status. No notices to quit should be issued for as long as the COVID19 pandemic lasts. There must also be potential to extend this for longer if needed. This must be legislated for immediately.
5. The services that refugees need to access to be able to claim benefits and find housing are already under increased pressure, as more people are lose employment and need to claim Universal Credit (UC) and local authorities seek to find suitable accommodation for people who are rough sleeping. Additionally, most support is now available online or by phone only and so much more difficult to access. This leaves new refugees in an incredibly vulnerable position and heightens their risk of becoming homeless.

All those who have applied for asylum must be supported financially

6. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic it is impossible for asylum seekers who have had their appeal denied or have exhausted their appeal rights. Therefore, they must be provided with financial support. All applicants for section 95, section 4 or schedule 10 support should be automatically and appropriately accommodated within the Home Office asylum support system while applications are being processed. Any decision that someone is not, in fact, eligible for support should not be actioned until after the current health emergency has passed.

No recourse to public funds conditions should be suspended

7. Many non-UK nationals who are living and working here are not eligible for many statutory support services, including statutory homelessness support from their local authority and Universal Credit, due to a condition of no recourse to public funds (NRPF). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic many businesses have closed in the UK and many of those who are self-employed are unable to work and will be losing earnings. People with NRPF are not eligible for statutory support through the benefits system so are left facing homelessness and destitution when they can no longer afford to pay their rent.

Suspend the right to rent policy

8. Current global travel restrictions mean no one can be expected to return to another country while the pandemic is ongoing. For this reason, it is vital to ensure that everyone living in the UK can access support while this situation is ongoing. No one should be deterred from seeking support or prevented from accessing essential services because of hostile or compliant environment measures.
9. The right to rent scheme requires private landlords and letting agents in England to check that tenants have a right to rent. If they rent their property to someone who does not have the right to rent, they will face criminal charges and may get an unlimited fine or a prison sentence. Increasing numbers of people may find that they are unable to leave the country or to renew their visa as a result of COVID-19 and they should not face eviction from their home as a result of this.

Suspend all NHS charges and communicate this effectively to the public and NHS staff

10. Whilst Government has made the welcome announcement that no one will be charged for COVID-19 testing or treatment, this will only be the case up until the point at which a person tests negative for the virus. Additionally, many of the people who this will affect will not come forward for care if they become ill because of fears of charging. Effective communication of the suspension of charging is critical.

Confirm that NHS data will not be shared with the Home Office and used for immigration enforcement

11. The Department of Health and Social Care has also given no assurance that NHS data will not be shared with the Home Office and used for immigration enforcement. For non-UK nationals who have any concerns about their immigration status, fear of their data being shared with immigration enforcement will deter them from accessing health services.

Extend the deadline for the EU Settlement Scheme

12. EU citizens living in the UK and who are without a home, face significant barriers to accessing the scheme and getting the status they are entitled to. Lack of ID and proof of time spent in the UK are significant barriers for people who are homeless, which makes it much more difficult for the people our members work with to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. Access to the technology needed to complete the application is also an issue for

many. This is combination with EU Settlement Scheme Settlement Resolution Centre call centre closure, limiting access the Resolution Centre to online only, may mean that increased numbers of vulnerable people are likely to be unable to submit their application by the 30 June 2021 deadline.

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