# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Response to the report and recommendations from the Homelessness Action Group** |
| **DATE** | **15 October 2019** |
| **BY** | **Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government** |

I commissioned an expert action group in July this year to consider the actions we need to take as a nation to create a new policy landscape to achieve our goal of ending homelessness.

The group, chaired by Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive of Crisis, has been tasked to work over a 9 month period, producing a number of reports during this time. The first report has now been received, it focuses on the actions required to tackle rough sleeping this winter and prevent it in the longer term.

I am extremely grateful to the Homelessness Action Group for this first report. The group has worked at remarkable pace to deliver recommendations focused on addressing rough sleeping, I want to thank everyone involved for their hard work, energy and enthusiasm.

It is now incumbent on Welsh Government to match that pace and energy in our response. With that in mind whilst the report looks not only at short term measures which can have a real impact on rough sleeping this winter but also at the longer term measure to prevent rough sleeping, I am focusing my response in the first instance on those things that the report recommends we do immediately. I will then give further consideration to the longer term measures, alongside the other reports the group will be producing over the next few months and respond accordingly.

The report, and responses from those with lived experience rightly identify that unless we tackle the issue of sufficiency of affordable accommodation we will not be able to achieve our ambition of preventing homelessness. This government is committed to building social housing at scale and pace, we are also committed to helping those who need it find suitable, affordable homes and supporting them to sustain them.

However, housing supply is not a short term fix and as my recently published strategic policy statement on homelessness prevention describes we need actions that not only shift

our resources and efforts to primary and secondary prevention but also address the acute needs of those who are facing crisis right now. Those who are rough sleeping are our most vulnerable and that is why I am accepting and plan to act on all of the Action Group’s 5 recommendations for immediate action in this area.

Whilst I appreciate that rough sleeping is an issue across all areas of Wales I accept the report’s suggestion that we should focus on the four areas where rough sleeping numbers are at the highest, whilst not excluding or ignoring the needs of other parts of Wales. I also recognise that in all areas there is good practice and some of the approaches that the report recommends are already in place; we do not intend to duplicate or displace, rather we will seek to work with each area to identify how we can work together to build on existing good practice, enhance existing provision, fill in any gaps and make a really significant positive impact in a short period of time.

The report highlights the key role of high quality assertive outreach and the availability of suitable emergency accommodation, of different types to meet the differing needs of those who find themselves on the streets. It is clear that these need to form the core of our response.

In immediate response to this report Welsh Government will;

* Facilitate and fund **joint training** for all those who provide and support outreach services in Wales, but particularly in the four focus areas. This training will support the development of a better shared understanding of **assertive outreach** approaches. Training will be provided on an area basis in the four focus areas. Further training will be provided on a pan Wales basis.
* **Publish clear guidance**, written by those with experience of delivering assertive outreach, on what constitutes a genuinely assertive outreach approach.
* Work with the four focus areas to **identify mentors** for those who undertake outreach work. The mentors will be able to offer support and guidance to help ensure all outreach is purposeful and has impact.
* Provide funding, where needed, to facilitate the appointment of an **outreach coordinator** and **rough sleeper case manager** in each of the four focus areas. The coordinator’s role will be to ensure that outreach provided by the range of organisations that operate across the areas is well coordinated and most effective. The case manager’s role will be to make the necessary links to other agencies to support effective development and implementation of **personal rapid rehousing plans** for each individual engaged.
* Support a **daily ‘case conference’** approach in each of the four focus areas to review and progress individualised plans focussed on supporting individuals to move away from rough sleeping.
* Facilitate conversations designed to ensure appropriate **multi-agency engagement** with the daily case conferences to ensure urgent referral to services where they are key to moving individuals off the street.
* Work with front line workers **to identify and address barriers** to accessing support. This might include clarification on the **application of legislation and policy** and the potential for use of **personal budgets** to empower front line workers to be able to respond immediately to individual needs.
* Identify **emergency provision** within the four focus areas making available a small fund to ensure provision is of suitable **quality and variety** to meet the differing needs of rough sleeping populations.
* Bring together housing providers in the four focus areas to identify potential temporary and long term housing that can help address the rehousing needs of rough sleepers.
* Work with key stakeholders to agree and share a **common set of messages** about homelessness and to issue clear messages to the general public about how to help people who are homeless and rough sleeping including how to contact services.
* **Evaluate** the activity undertaken this winter to identify what has worked most effectively and ensure our long term plans incorporate good practice identified.

Welsh Government will make available the necessary funding to support the implementation of these actions.

I firmly believe that these actions, consistently implemented with the support of all partners can make a very real impact on rough sleeping this winter. My vision is that we can work with individuals to agree rapid rehousing plans and find appropriate routes to help them off the street and into long term stable accommodation with the right support to ensure they can sustain their housing in the future.

Although much of the action is targeted at the four focus areas that should not and will not preclude other areas who wish to adopting the approaches set out above. Where this is the case Welsh Government will work with them to identify the actions and resource needed to do so.

I recognise that rough sleeping is only one, albeit the most acute, type of homelessness. I also recognise that these action address only the first five recommendations from the Action Group. I am happy to accept in principle the other recommendations the report makes and recognise that the actions set out here will necessarily run parallel to other work. I will respond shortly to the other recommendations in the Action Group’s first report and look forward to receiving further reports on their continuing work, to establish the long term approaches needed to prevent homelessness and where it cannot be prevented ensure it is rare, brief and not repeated.

A copy of the first action group report can be found at the following link: [https://gov.wales/homelessness-action-group-report-october-2019](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fhomelessness-action-group-report-october-2019&data=02%7C01%7CMark.Price%40gov.wales%7C1b53e36357c24d467a4308d750ae3751%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637066581487581234&sdata=zke9UC9MzeMBr0eRdwAIqn9ocakIrQJD047dBcsVd7I%3D&reserved=0)