

Rebecca Evans AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio
Minister for Housing and Regeneration

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Equality, Local Government
and Communities Committee
ELGC(5)-05-18 Papur 15 / Paper 15

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-790
Ein cyf/Our ref RE/05161/17

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions committee.
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9 January 2018

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 12 December regarding petition P-05-790 Tackle Rough Sleeping. The petitioner has suggested a number of possible actions which they believe are needed to address the apparent increase in rough sleeping.

We believe that no person should need to sleep rough. Recent increases in rough sleeping are a concern for both myself and for my Government colleagues, and addressing this issue is a priority. The causes of rough sleeping involve personal and structural factors, which often interact. Employment and welfare benefit problems can make the context very difficult for people on low incomes. These issues are often compounded by personal problems such as ill health, substance misuse and criminal behaviour.

Outreach and other services for rough sleepers have increased over recent years, but access to emergency accommodation remains inconsistent. My officials are working with partners in local authorities and the voluntary sector to target areas where there are shortages of services. The draft budget highlights our commitment to tackle this issue. We know that some rough sleepers become entrenched in sleeping rough, and may become unwilling to try better alternatives for a number of complex reasons.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We agree there is a need for better monitoring data and have funded the Wallich to develop a national continuous monitoring system. We are also funding a rough sleeper network co-ordinator post to design and roll out the new system and share best practice across Wales. This new system will provide quantitative data and information regarding a person's use of services over time.

I also agree that services should be tailored to meet individual's needs, and this can only be achieved by listening and understanding an individual's experience and future aspirations. Research being undertaken by Shelter Cymru to understand the reasons why people are finding themselves with no accommodation is supported by Welsh Government. The primary objective of the project is to learn about the experiences of people on the streets and their opinions of what would have prevented their homelessness. This research is being carried out in Wrexham, Cardiff and Swansea. I expect to receive the findings of this research in April 2018.

The petitioner has proposed a 'no rough sleeping policy'. Our policy position is that no one should need to sleep rough. I support the petitioner's suggestion on long term accommodation. The Welsh Government is supporting 'Housing First' projects across a number of areas, including Cardiff, which will help rough sleepers move into settled accommodation and ensure support is available to help them maintain their tenancy. We will monitor closely the progress and impact of these projects.

I do not support the assertion that our legal reforms are not helping homeless people in general. The duties owed to an individual within the Housing Act (Wales) 2014, for homeless people and those threatened with homelessness are consistent. Local Authorities must take reasonable steps to help to prevent homelessness and to secure accommodation where needed. This enables most people to avoid homelessness and the need to sleep rough. However, I recognise that practice at a local level does vary, and may not meet the complex needs of many rough sleepers. The petitioner raises excellent points regarding austerity and welfare cuts. These areas are non-devolved. We recognise the shortage of affordable housing and we have committed to delivering 20,000 affordable homes over the Assembly term.

I am aware of concerns over conditions in some emergency accommodation. In the summer of 2017, the former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced an additional £2.6 million to tackle homelessness. This funding has been allocated to local authorities who are using it to fund a range of initiatives, including capital investment to improve the quality of emergency provision in Newport, Cardiff and Wrexham. As previously mentioned, we are also committing revenue funding to further develop Housing First style approaches to help rough sleepers into settled accommodation.

In addition to the work we are undertaking we are also planning for the future. Officials are working with partners to develop a national action plan to tackle rough sleeping which will address the issues raised by the petitioner. This action plan will be based on the recommendations of the Rough Sleepers Working Group. I expect this plan to be published during February and to outline developments taking us into January 2020. The Rough Sleeper Action plan will be forwarded on to the committee once finalised.

This information evidences our firm commitment to tackling rough sleeping.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans." The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

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