



Eich cyf/Your ref: MA/P/JJ/1827/19

22 May 2019

Dear John

ELGC Committee Inquiry – Rough Sleeping

Thank you for your letter of 23 April following my appearance at the ELGC Committee on 21 March, where I provided an update on the Welsh Government's actions to tackle rough sleeping. I was grateful for the opportunity to discuss this important issue with the Committee and for your continuing interest in this area.

The Welsh Government remains committed to preventing all forms of homelessness, including rough sleeping. Our goal is to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent. This includes removing the need for anyone to sleep rough in Wales. I recognise and agree with the Committee's sense of urgency to solving this issue. However, if we are to truly prevent all forms of homelessness, then we have to take a whole system and evidence based approach to ensure we get this right. I do not therefore agree with setting an arbitrary target date for achieving this goal, without clear data and evidence to support such a target. This is why we are working with others across the UK, such as the Centre for Homelessness Impact, to seek to improve the evidence base of what works, to better inform service interventions and help achieve our goal quicker.

As I set out in my evidence to the Committee, I agree there is much more to be done, but it is important to acknowledge the context in which we are working and the progress we are already making. The figures for households presenting as at risk of homeless demonstrate only too sharply that we are battling against a rising tide, some 12% increase in numbers compared to a year ago. We therefore need to acknowledge and commend local authorities for maintaining their prevention rates, whilst also recognising the need for new approaches both to prevention and to support for those for whom we have been unable to prevent homelessness.

I have already set out my intention to revise the Rough Sleeping Action Plan to better reflect the focus of activity and also to provide clarity on timescales and ownership of actions. Rough sleeping is one form of homelessness, the most acute form, and it is vital that

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Gohebiaeth.Julie.James@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.Wales

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.

actions to tackle it are part of a wider whole-systems approach to homelessness prevention. The revision of the action plan therefore provides an opportunity to ensure actions are part of a single, whole-system strategic approach.

As well as ensuring we use effective interventions, it is also vital we better understand the scale of the problem. This is precisely why we are supporting a feasibility study led by Cardiff University, to assess the potential use of individualised data. This, and the work taken forward by the Wallich on the SHIN project, are vital components to better understand need. As I set out in Committee, Welsh Government is committed to the overall objectives of the SHIN project, of improving real time data to support front line workers and better inform policy makers. This is an important area of work but we need to recognise the challenges presented when working with very sensitive personal information. The risks of failing to ensure robust legal and data sharing requirements are in place should not be underestimated.

Welsh Government recently commissioned an independent review of the project to assess its current status and help inform the next stages. The review team were impressed with the level of support for the project's objectives but also made a number of recommendations. My officials are working closely with the Wallich to support a limited pilot, which will be subject to independent evaluation, in order to inform next steps. It is vital we get this right and put the correct legal and governance arrangements around this project if we want to ensure successful national roll out.

I acknowledge there have been delays in the revision of the Code of Guidance and the publication of some best practice guides. In respect of the Code of Guidance, it is evident that an overhaul of the Code is required to fully address the issues raised in recent research reports and evidence from your Committee. As we discussed during the evidence session, it is unfortunate this has been delayed by the continuing uncertainty around immigration issues arising from Brexit, and as there is no clear date as to when these will be resolved, we will press on with revising as much of the code as possible. It is vital stakeholders are engaged in this process and my officials will be discussing the proposed revisions with them over the coming months, with a view to publishing a revised Code for formal consultation in the Autumn. In terms of the best practice guides, these are currently being translated and will be published in the next couple of weeks. I will write to the Committee once they have been published.

Since my appearance at Committee, Cardiff University has been awarded the contract for the independent review of priority need. As the Committee will appreciate, this is a complex piece of research which is vital in building the evidence base as to how priority need works at present and fully understanding the implications of making potential changes to it. The research has been commissioned in accordance with Welsh Government procurement processes and the timetable reflects the complexity of the work involved.

The legislation is of course just one piece of the system. Another vital component is the supply of affordable housing, and is why we are committed to building social housing at pace and scale. If we are to achieve our goal of making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent then we have to have suitable, long term housing solutions. Our focus has to be primarily on prevention, and when homelessness cannot be avoided, on rapid re-housing for individuals and households in long term suitable homes. We need to move away from temporary housing solutions to more sustainable solutions. This requires whole system change, which will not take place overnight, but one which I am committed to working with the public and third sector to achieve. Housing First is a significant component of a rapid re-housing approach, but it has to sit as part of a wider approach if we are to achieve our goal.

I thank the Committee for your continued input into progressing our shared agenda of ending homelessness.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Julie" and the last name "James" written in a single continuous line.

Julie James AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government