

MAYOR OF LONDON

Darren Johnson AM

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

Our ref: MGLA050814-3403

Date: 10 OCT 2014

Dear Darren

Thank you for your letter of 31 July regarding the Housing Committee's report *No Going Back: Breaking the cycle of rough sleeping and homelessness* and for your hard work on the report. As requested, I have responded to each of your ten recommendations in turn below.

Recommendation 1: The Government should amend the priority need conditions to entitle single homeless people in England to settled accommodation. This should not affect boroughs' ability to manage their housing allocations, though they may wish to review them as appropriate, taking into account local circumstances.

Response: I am keen to ensure that boroughs' housing options and homelessness services provide robust advice and assistance to those who may not have a statutory entitlement to assistance under the homelessness legislation. For this reason, I recently made available £80,000 from my rough sleeping budget for a No First Night Out pilot that will support local authorities' work to prevent and minimise rough sleeping.

However, it is important to recognise the pressures on local authorities and in a context where resources for providing both temporary and secure accommodation for homeless households are limited, it is right that local authorities prioritise households that include children and/or the most vulnerable adults. It is also important to recognise that many of those who sleep rough would be ineligible for assistance under the homelessness legislation, and significant numbers of entrenched rough sleepers remain on the streets because they reject offers of accommodation.

Recommendation 2: The Mayor should monitor and report on boroughs' contributions to GLA-funded homelessness programmes such as No Second Night Out to encourage active participation in this pan-London challenge.

Response: No Second Night Out (NSNO) and other GLA-funded services already monitor and report on how local authorities are using and supporting their services. There is a very positive engagement between the boroughs and NSNO. My Rough Sleeping Group recently recommended a review of the information that NSNO shares with local authorities, helping local authorities identify what factors have contributed to NSNO users connected to their areas overstaying in NSNO assessment hubs.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Recommendation 3: The Mayor should begin discussions with the Government and London Councils to establish pan-London and sub-regional commissioning arrangements for services supporting single homeless people and rough sleepers. The Mayor should be responsible for these arrangements. This will ensure that rough sleepers have access to a properly coordinated suite of services to help them stabilise their lives.

Response: I already commission a wide range of pan-London services to identify, assess and help single people who have slept rough. Their contract values total almost £9m a year.

Recommendation 4: The London Health Commission should assess how health services can be made to join up with and complement other services which support rough sleepers and single homeless people, including whether the Mayor needs a statutory responsibility and power to achieve this.

Response: The London Health Commission is already exploring the scope to build on collaborative approaches. There are a number of excellent examples of joint working between homelessness and health services intended to ensure that rough sleepers have access to the health care they need. These include services I part-fund, such as the hospital discharge project being developed by Pathway and Groundswell's peer advocacy project.

Recommendation 5: The Mayor should write to the Ministerial Working Group on Rough Sleeping to highlight the need for greater flexibility in the design of JobCentre Plus and NHS systems, for example, to enable homeless people to participate in and realise full benefit from them.

The Mayor should also lobby the Department for Work and Pensions to broaden the easement to the Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) Amendment Regulations 2014 so that it covers all homeless claimants, not just those who are newly homeless, and for the duration of their hostel stay, not just the first four weeks, so that vulnerable people without stable accommodation are best supported to acquire and sustain accommodation and employment.

And the Mayor should lobby Government to maintain welfare assistance payments (the former Social Fund) and to be allocated a tranche of these funds which would help support access to the PRS for single homeless people across London.

Response: The Ministerial Working Group on Rough Sleeping, which the GLA is a member of, already includes DWP and Public Health ministers and there is positive work between rough sleeping, health and welfare services throughout the sector.

On the Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) Amendment Regulations 2014, these go a long way in recognising the specific difficulties that may face the newly homeless when claiming benefits. Part of the function of hostel accommodation is to help rough sleepers get their lives back on track, including managing benefits and pursuing training or employment. In view of this and given that anyone claiming Job Seeker's Allowance is required to be "willing and able" to take up employment and actively seeking work, there does not seem to be a strong case for the Government to relax the conditionality that is rightly central to its programme of welfare reform for those who are staying in a hostel over time.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Recommendation 6: The Mayor should continue to make the case with the boroughs for a Living Wage procurement standard, emphasising the positive impacts the Living Wage would have on keyworkers as well as the longer-term cost savings effective keyworker support offers to the boroughs and other public service budgets.

He should also write to the Ministerial Working Group on this issue.

Response: I encourage London employers to pay staff the London Living Wage. I want the London Living Wage to become the norm for employers in the city by 2020. The contracts for all rough sleeping services commissioned by the GLA make clear that providers should pay employees the London Living Wage or more.

Recommendation 7: The Mayor should press hard for at least a proportionate share of Department of Health hostel funding for London which has by far the largest number of rough sleepers and single homeless people in the country. He should also press DCLG to clarify urgently what revenue funding will be available to support homelessness projects in London for 2015-16 and beyond.

Response: I have agreed with the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that London will receive £15.5m of a national funding stream.

For the Homelessness Change and Platform for Life programmes, I will add £15m from the 2015-18 affordable housing programme to this allocation, in recognition of the importance to tackling rough sleeping of both hostel accommodation, and accommodation for young people.

DCLG has confirmed in principle that GLA will receive funding to deliver pan-London rough sleeping services during 2015/16.

Recommendation 8: The Mayor should monitor and report on the availability and location of different types of hostel accommodation in London over time to enable a strategic view to be taken on what provision is needed and where. As part of this he should assess whether the Arlington model, of low-support housing and training facilities combined with social enterprise space, could usefully be replicated in each sub-region.

Response: Homeless Link already monitors the number and type of available hostel spaces. It is for local authority commissioners to ensure that the appropriate amount and kind of hostel accommodation is available in their area to meet local need, collaborating with neighbouring authorities where appropriate. I expect to see evidence of strategic assessment of and planning for local need when allocating funding for the development or refurbishment of hostel accommodation.

Recommendation 9: As indicated in our April 2013 report *Assessing the Consequences of Welfare Reform*, the Government should ensure Local Housing Allowance rates are regularly reviewed and properly take account of the higher rental costs in London than elsewhere in the country.

Response: Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates already take some account of London's high rents, as the baseline from which LHA rates increase each year was originally determined with reference to local market rents, as well as by caps on awards where the 30th centile of market rents exceeds what it is reasonable for the public purse to pay for someone's accommodation. However, the Government, in line with cross party support for limiting overall benefit expenditure, has set

MAYOR OF LONDON

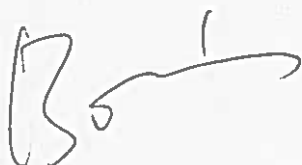
the annual increase in LHA rates for a three year period in the 2012 Autumn Statement at 1 per cent. This will keep expenditure on Housing Benefit for private sector tenants in check.

The Government has introduced Targeted Affordability Funding, using the savings resulting from changes to LHA to support increases in rates of more than 1 per cent in such areas. However, there is a risk of exaggerating the extent of increases in private sector rents in London. The Office of National Statistics' rental index indicates that, across the capital, private sector rents have consistently shown below inflation rent increases over the last ten years. Given this, I would be wary of measures that may counter one of the original stated aims of reducing LHA rates, that is, to exert downward pressure on rent levels, in contrast to the inflationary effect we witnessed when Local Housing Allowance was first introduced in 2008 and landlords increased rents to match LHA levels.

Recommendation 10: The Mayor should work with the boroughs and London Councils to establish what needs to happen to make the achievement of the homelessness 'gold standard' a reality.

Response: My Rough Sleeping Group has been working with local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and others, including a member of the Government's 'Gold Standard' team, to support the work of local authorities to prevent and minimise rough sleeping. As mentioned in my response to your first recommendation, I have made available up to £80,000 to support housing options services' work. This is being allocated to complement the Help for Single Homeless funding offered by the Government.

Yours ever,



Boris Johnson
Mayor of London