

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queens Walk
London
SE1 2AA

10th June 2019

Dear Sadiq,

Housing Committee investigation – Housing First in London

In April 2019, the London Assembly Housing Committee examined the Housing First model of homelessness service in London. We spoke to representatives from services who deliver Housing First projects in London – The Single Homeless Project, and SPEAR. We also spoke to the Policy and Public Affairs Manager at Crisis and the Rough Sleeping Lead Manager from GLA Housing and Land.

In this letter we set out some of our findings from the session, together with some recommendations as to how Housing First in London could be better supported. A request for data is also made at the end of the letter.

Richmond and Wandsworth Housing First grant

The Committee heard from Stuart Nevill, the CEO of SPEAR, which is the only organisation to receive a grant from you for a Housing First project. We understand that the grant of £37,000 over two years was used to fund a worker with a small caseload who worked with chronically homeless people with complex needs. Mr Nevill informed us that this project was considered a success, delivering high levels of tenancy sustainment and engagement with mental health services.

A pan-London Housing First service

In the Rough Sleeping Plan of Action 2018 you announced plans to establish a pan-London Housing First service, with money from the Government. The representatives from the Single Homeless Project and Crisis were overwhelmingly supportive of this proposal. They considered that this approach would ensure consistency in Housing First service delivery, and lead to a high-fidelity approach (i.e. one which is rigorously and consistently in line with Housing First principles) being delivered across the whole of London. However, Stuart Nevill highlighted that local connection is especially important to chronically homeless people and that there is a risk that a pan-London service may not recognise this.

Short-term funding streams

Current funding streams for commissioning homelessness services are relatively short-term. For example, your Rough Sleeping Innovation Fund gives grants for a maximum of two years. This arguably stands at odds with the fact that a Housing First tenancy is supposed to be for life, and the wrap-around support is supposed to be provided indefinitely. It was suggested in the meeting that this may deter Housing First service providers from applying for these grants, as they do not guarantee long-term funding.

Recommendation 1

That you establish a longer-term funding stream specifically for Housing First projects.

Sourcing accommodation

The difficulties around sourcing suitable accommodation were cited by Housing First service providers as one of the main barriers to delivering Housing First in London. Local Housing Allowance rates are set at levels which make it difficult to find suitable accommodation which is affordable for service users. We also heard that often homeless service providers (including Housing First providers) are in competition for private rented sector properties with local councils seeking to house people to whom they owe a statutory homeless duty.¹

The Committee understands that the Capital Letters Project is currently sourcing accommodation in the private rented sector for temporary accommodation.

Recommendation 2

That you establish a pan-London lettings agency, similar to Capital Letters, to source accommodation for chronically homeless people. Although operating across London, the agency should ensure that service users are housed locally, so they can retain their local connections.

In your 2018 Rough Sleeping Plan of Action, you identify the need for further government funding to establish a pan-London Housing First service. The Committee is writing to the Housing Minister in support of this.

At the time of the meeting the latest round of bidding for the Rough Sleeping Innovation Fund had just closed, and so David Eastwood could not give us confirmation on whether any applications for Housing First services had been submitted, or whether any had been successful. Please could you provide us this detail now?

¹ We did find a positive example of a council working with a Housing First service to provide them with accommodation. The London Borough of Islington gives five social housing units to the Single Homeless Project to accommodate Housing First service users.

LONDONASSEMBLY
Housing Committee

I would be grateful to receive a response to our findings and recommendations within three months from the date of this letter. Please could you send your response to Lorraine Ford, Senior Policy Adviser for the Housing Committee, (Lorraine.ford@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sian Berry', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sian Berry AM
Former Chair of the Housing Committee