

## **P-05-790 Tackle Rough Sleeping- Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 03.10.18**

Dear Committee Members,

My passion is helping people and being the voice of the voiceless. I believe the march of 1 million starts with 1 person, so I am always willing to tackle social injustices head-on. I believe every human being has a right to have a home, access to quality education and work opportunities. Access to such rights is essential for people to be able to live with dignity and be genuine and active citizens in society. Therefore, on 29 September 2017 I raised my petition with the National Assembly for Wales calling for the Welsh government to "Tackle Rough Sleeping in Wales." I filed my petition despite an Assembly Member telling me that my petition would be rejected because it can only be dealt with by the British Parliament. I submitted my petition anyway and National Assembly for Wales agreed to consider it. My family member, Cardiff University students and employees and people I have not even met supported my petition. I would like to thank the **Petitions** Committee Chamber and Committee Service for their ongoing support and David J Rowlands AM (UKIP Wales South Wales East). When I submitted my petition along with my reply to the Welsh Government he told me that the committee he told me that the committee with put my comments forward to the Welsh Government. His encouragement gave me hope that change is possible. In my petition I clearly stated:

The Housing Act (Wales) 2014 required all councils in Wales to help anyone at risk of becoming homelessness within 56 days does not solve the problem of individuals who are already homeless and sleeping in the streets. We need to address rough sleeping now!

The report on 'Life on the Streets: preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales' has shown that my concern was well founded and I am happy that the Minister has acknowledged this fact in the report. I am also impressed by the human rights approach to housing right highlighted in this report because as I stated in my petition a devolved government is a "government closer to the people," all the people! I am also extremely happy that the committee has recommended the launch of a public campaign (recommendation 25) to tackle rough sleeping because as I mentioned in my petition there are those who genuinely believe that individuals sleeping rough want to be homeless. If you ask any child what he wants to be when

he grows up no one will say 'to be homeless and sleep rough' and I am happy that this report acknowledged the need to change public perception.

I believe homeless people have been forgotten for so long because many people have been led to believe that people choose to be homeless. This is not true and we need a campaign that changes public opinion so we can gain their support to find permanent accommodations for rough sleepers so they can rebuild their lives. Many people and institutions in Britain were happy to open their homes to refugees they did not know but not many would be willing to do the same for rough sleepers as a result of negative perceptions. I believe if rough sleepers can go through a proper rehabilitation program we can persuade our communities to offer rough sleepers the same support that they were willing to offer to refugees i.e. room to stay in to rebuild their lives.

In my opinion homelessness is like statelessness. If you are homeless and the government does not care about you your wellbeing or tries to help you to rebuild your life, then your British citizenship practically means nothing. Therefore, I am extremely happy that the National Assembly for Wales has supported my petition and taken an active approach in this report to tackle rough sleeping in Wales. By tackling rough sleeping we are tackling injustice and inequality in our society. As long as we have people living in the street we will be living as unequal equals. Therefore, I support the recommendation made by the report which calls upon local authorities to housing first as a default approach to rough sleepers (recommendation 18).

I agree that we need multi service intervention (186) and rapid access to treatment with an emphasis on working with the health sector (207) and social service (209) and a trauma based approach to meeting peoples housing and support needs (214). In point 179 barriers to securing accommodation for rough sleepers has been identified. I believe now it is time to act by creating a systematic conveyer belt that has clear steps to support rough sleepers to secure accommodation and the necessary support. I also agree that the human cost of homelessness places a duty on the Welsh Government to Review the Code of Guidance along with the 2014 Act, provide stronger statutory guidance under the 2014 Act and make rough sleeping needs a priority category. I am also happy that the Minister has agreed to take on board my recommendation to work cross sectors to tackle the problem.

Please find below my comments and recommendations on specific points mentioned in the report:

1. I was pleased that the committee incorporated the title of my commission in the title of the report because our aim as a society and a government should be to 'tackle rough sleeping' by getting people off the street, helping them get into permanent accommodation and provide them with access to all the necessary support (mental, physical, life skills, training, career development, job opportunities) so they can rebuild their lives, fulfil their full potential and become active citizens is key to preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales .
2. I was impressed that the committee used a front picture that represented the tragedy of homeless. I cried when I saw the picture but at the same time I was happy that committee understood the true nature of homelessness and that the report was conducted with the intention to understand 'why people end up on the street and how government and service provider can do more and be more effective in preventing and dealing with rough sleeping.' Here, I must note that tackling rough sleeping should mean ending permanently the phenomenon of rough sleeping. No body should be left to sleep in the street seeing their lives, dignity, hopes and dreams disappear in front of them while other humans are going on with their normal lives.
3. The forward by AM John Griffith (Committee Chair, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee) rightly refers to the fact that the UK is the 6<sup>th</sup> biggest economy in the world. In 2016, the UK spend £13.4 billion on overseas aid. This money is taken from tax payers' money from all over the UK. While I support helping countries that need aid I believe that politicians who are voted into government by UK citizens in Wales have a responsibility to prevent and tackle rough sleeping in Wales. I also believe that our tax money should first be used to aid the most vulnerable people in our society. The £13.4 billion that was allocated to overseas aid prove that in the UK we have money to tackle many of our social problems in Wales and the UK as a whole we just need to set our priorities right and make sure that our tax money is used to aid rough sleeper in wales and offer them the necessary support so they can rebuild their lives get a job and become tax payers so they can also be in a position to help others in Wales.
4. Recommendation 4: I agree with the need to re-establish the Prisoner, Accommodation and Resettlement Group
5. Recommendation 5: I agree that the automatic priority need should be reinstated for prison leavers in order to eliminate the incentive to reoffend in order for them to secure a warm roof over their head, security and a clean meal in prison. Here, I must note that I believe that all rough sleepers should

be considered a priority need to protect them from the dangers that come with living in the street.

6. Comment on recommendation 8: I agree that the Welsh Government should monitor local authorities' use of local connection and reconnection services. I also believe that the Welsh Government must monitor how local councils are dealing with tackling rough sleeping.
7. Comment on recommendation 9: I believe the Welsh Government should make it compulsory on third sector organizations and local authorities to engage with SHIN Project. The Welsh Government is funding the SHIN project and we need to make sure that third sector organizations and local government work together to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. I do not want to see several organizations spending money doing the same thing over and over when they can all use the SHIN project.
8. Comment recommendation 10: I support the recommendation for the Welsh Government to consider seeking powers over the administration of Universal Credit. UK funding cuts for Wales will have a negative impact on people in Wales therefore we need to be in a position to deal with these problems swiftly to avoid having people become homeless.
9. Comment on recommendation 12: Improving access to private rented sector is extremely important. I agree that incentives should be given to landlords. Many landlords fear that rough sleeper will destroy their homes and that they will create social havoc. **I believe it is important to establish a working group with estate agents and private landlord to find out from them what kind of incentives and assurances the local council needs to give them in order for them to be willing to accommodate rough sleepers.** I personally believe that if the local council agrees to manage the properties and/or rent the properties for over 2 years and guarantee that they will fix up the place after the tenant leaves this might give private landlord the incentive to participate in the project. You could also create networking events were private landlords can meet with rehabilitated rough sleepers. Here, I must also note that rent should be paid directly to private landlords but only after the tenant confirms that the landlord is fulfilling their responsibility (in the event the property is managed by the landlord). Note private rented accommodation could be used as emergency accommodation if the local council rents out the property for a long period. Then individuals can be moved to an affordable social housing accommodation. This is an important recommendation because the report has identified that only 2% of private accommodation is affordable under the LHA rate so we cannot rely on private accommodation

but we need to secure the 2% affordable accommodation to deal with the problem (point 120).

10. Comment on recommendation 15: I agree that the Rough Sleeping Action Plan must set out clearly how partners will implement the move-on-from emergency accommodation

11. Comment Recommendation 16: A quarterly report should be published on the Rough Sleeping Action to hold everyone involved accountable

12. Comment on Recommendation 17: I agree that the responsibility of the Rough Action Plan should be shared jointly between the Minister of Housing and Regeneration and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social services because in order to help people sleeping rough to move into permanent accommodation and support them to rebuilt their live we need to make sure that they get support in term of their menta health, physical health and access to necessarily social services:

13. Comment on recommendation 18:

I agree that the Welsh Government needs to Revise the Rough sleeping Action Plan by drawing clear links to the Well-Being of the future Generation (Wales) Act 2015.

Students including university students are also at risk of becoming homeless. I am particularly concerned by the fact that after university some graduates become homeless because they cannot find a job and they are not even aware that they can apply for support from the Job centre. I believe it is important that when university students graduate (particularly those who received student loans) should be informed by the university/ student loan company that they should register with the Job centre. The job centre staff must also deal with graduates in an appropriate manner. This means trying first to help them find a job that matches their skills and educational background. They should be financially supported while attending relevant training/internship.

14. Comment on recommendation 21

I agree that an assertive outreach approach is the right approach to tackle rough sleeping. In order for the approach to succeed we need to make sure that those approaching rough sleepers offer actual solutions and are willing to take the rough sleepers to the appropriate place to get them the help they need and that means a secure place to stay.

15. Comment recommendation 23

I am of the opinion that PATH Training should be compulsory

## 2. Effectiveness of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Section 8: I am happy that the majority of respondent agreed with me that 2014 Act has had limited impact on rough sleepers

Point 12. I agree that we need a very person centred approach

Point 16: Rough sleeping should be a priority needs status

Point 17: Dr. Mackie statements rough sleepers are unlikely to be found a priority need needs to be investigated

Point 20: I agree with Shelter Cymri that changes should be made to the code of guidance “to improve the consistency around priority need decision’

Point 28: I am concerned that local government representatives and Powy Council were concerned that abolishing priority need will “significantly increase in in expenditure on homeless services.” This concern needs to be tackled if we are going to ensure that councils are willing to tackle rough sleeping. It seems to me that they are currently more concerned about the financial implications than the human life of rough sleepers. While they are taking a practical approach by considering the financial implications I believe it is important to address their financial concerns but at the same time to make sure that our approach to tackling rough sleeping is led by a human rights approach. The lack of money does not justify the ongoing tragedy of rough sleeping. We have a problem and our responsibility is to find the money and necessary support to tackle the problem.

Point37: We need to investigate why the National Pathway is not being fully implemented (prisoners)

Point 41: Reconnection in my view should take into account that individual might have a well founded reason and/or fear for not being willing to return to their original location. Also reconnection means a social worker must be allocated for you and accommodation must have been secured before your transfer.

Point 53. On the issue of prison leaver The Minister stated that in regard to prison leavers certain improvement do not need legislative and policy changes and suggested that discussions with Her Majesty’ Prison and Probation Service could be enough. I do not agree with this suggestion. **If changes in legislation are not going to be pursued, then we cannot simply rely on discussions. We need a clear plan with a clear set of objectives and everyone involved must be**

**held accountable. I am of the opinion that no prisoner should leave prison and find himself/herself in the street.**

I am concerned by the fact that although the Minister acknowledged that the National Pathway is not being “consistently or widely well implemented” the Minister suggested that building relation and good dialogue between relevant authorities will address this problem. I find this suggestion on its own absolute unacceptable. **The National Pathway must be implemented in a consistence manner everywhere and if it is not those responsible for the failure must be held responsible.** All the authorities involved must receive appropriate training and they must be monitored and problems and/or challenge must be addressed swiftly because we are taking about the lives of human beings and not numbers on paper.

Point 62: I agree with the motion calling on the government to consider abolishing priority need and replacing it with a duty to provide an offer of suitable accommodation for all homeless people. But I want to make sure that refusing an unreasonable offer does not lead someone to be considered making oneself intentionally homeless.

Comment on recommendation 1: Agree

Comment on recommendation 72: Agree

### 3.1 Evaluation of Current data collection nationwide

Comment on point 85: It seems to me that while gathering current data for the National Rough sleeping Count Cardiff Council and Third sector partner repeat the same exercises. I suggest formulating a plan that saves time and money and does not require the same job to be repeated.

Point of 126. Minister noted that the Welsh Government is funding a research by helter Cymry looking at the causes of rough sleeping. While I commend the project I believe our priority should be to get people off the street and then we can ask them what led them to become homeless. We do not want rough sleepers to continue to be the subject of research we need funding and action to tackle rough sleeping now. On this point I agree with the view of the committee in point 130.

## 5.1. Emergency and Temporary Accommodation

Point on 144. I agree with the salvation army that emergency accommodation should provide a safe place to stay and facilitate moving to a permanent accommodation –In order to do so action must be taken to tackle drug use, bullying and criminal activity in emergency accommodation. Social workers, health workers and the police must be involved.

Point 147: Time restriction must be addressed and

Point 148: couples and individuals with pets must not be excluded– also those who are unable or unwilling to comply with no alcohol or no substance misuse rules must be offered rehab

Independence and sustaining their lives

Point 152: accommodation must come with support to prepare rough sleepers to obtain and sustain accommodation.

Point 159. Cardiff Bus 98 success rate of getting people into emergency accommodation means that other third sector organizations and local councils must learn from this model and implement across different organizations dealing with rough sleepers

Point 168. I agree with the Minister that securing tenancies using Housing First approach is a better long term solution.

Point 170. I also agree with the Minister that services funded by the Welsh Government are expected to be proactive in helping rough sleepers into accommodation”

Point 171. The Minister mentions funding charities and training a number of times. I am concerned that £2.6 million is being allocated to training purposes instead of tackling the actual problem. I want the money to be spent directly on getting people off the street into secure and safe accommodation and get proper support.

Point 173– Emergency support services should be expected to provide or sign post homeless people to housing support services

**I agree with the committee that Front line services entrusted for taking forward Government Rough sleeping Action Plan must be held accountable and monitored**

Comment on recommendation 21: I am of the opinion that Housing First and the assertive outreach services must work hand in hand.

Comment on Recommendation 26– We need full consultation not just with the homeless sector but with homeless people and those who were formally homeless. We need them to lead the initiative because they know more than us what they need!!!!

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