

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND STRATEGY GROUP (HPSG)

28 March 2018, HELD AT THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Attendees:

Kevin Stewart MSP (Minister for Local Government and Housing, co-Chair)
Cllr Elena Whitham (Community Wellbeing Spokesperson, COSLA, co-Chair)
Jon Sparkes (Crisis UK),
David Duke (Street Soccer)
Lorraine McGrath (Simon Community/Streetwork)
John Mills (ALACHO)
Janice Stevenson (LGBT Youth Scotland)
Neil Hamlet (NHS Health Scotland)
Zhan McIntyre (SFHA)
Gavin Yates (Homeless Action Scotland)
Adam Lang (Shelter Scotland)
Dave Signorini (Deputy Director, SG Better Homes Division),
Catriona MacKean (Head of SG Homelessness Unit)
Hazel Bartels (SG Homelessness Unit)
Lynsey McKean (SG Homelessness Unit)
Nicola Dickie (COSLA)

Apologies: Peter Barry (SOLACE)

1. Introductions: The Minister welcomed everyone to the re-invigorated Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group (HPSG). The Minister spoke about the significant opportunity but also the challenges ahead for the group to eradicate rough sleeping and end homelessness. He explained the focus of the group will be about action rather than discussion and that there is an expectation activity will take place in the intervening period between meetings.

2. Draft Terms of Reference: The Minister explained the aim of the Terms of Reference is to bind everyone to a common purpose and to gain an explicit commitment from the whole Group around taking actions and individual and group ownership of problem and solution. There was general agreement, with Group members keen to emphasise their commitment to taking and sustaining action.

The Group questioned whether or not to bring in other representatives for example, from health, local government, SPS, criminal justice and service users, and the Minister responded that in the interests of ensuring the Group could be effective he was keen to draw in the appropriate expertise as and when required rather than add to the standing membership. Members agreed to this, and to considering on a meeting by meeting basis whether or not the right people were being invited.

In particular, the Group agreed on the importance of connecting effectively with the Housing Options Hubs, bringing them into Group discussions as appropriate. The Minister spoke about the need for ideas on how to export best practice between Hubs and local authorities, and explained his intention to hold a meeting with Heads of Service to communicate the current work of the Government around homelessness and to gain their expert views on the most effect ways of cultivating senior official and political buy-in across local authorities.

On attendance, the Minister stated he was happy for people to send deputies rather than have nobody attend at all from a particular organisation, but that he wanted to ensure that senior figures were actively engaged in disseminating messages and communicating the work of the Group.

There was a discussion on how the Group will hold action owners to account. The Minister acknowledged that the bulk of actions would need to be taken by the Scottish Government and local authorities, represented by himself and his co-Chair Cllr Elena Whitham. As well as the formal scrutiny function of ministerial committees of the Parliament, the Minister expressly invited the Group to undertake an active scrutiny role of himself, as the Scottish Government representative, and of his co-Chair Cllr Elena Whitham representing COSLA. The majority of actions will fall to central and local government and this dual responsibility for action is mirrored in the dual responsibility for chairing the Group. He expected those around the table to use HPSG meetings to undertake face to face scrutiny of progress to end rough sleeping and homelessness, both of standing members and of invited representatives of other organisations where that is relevant.

A question was raised as to whether the Terms of Reference should include any timings. The Minister acknowledged the value of deadlines, but also said we were not yet in a position to set out a detailed timeline – a work plan is being developed and this can be used to communicate dates and deadlines in due course.

The Group agreed it would be help to have a standing agenda item on relevant activity taking place across the public sector – officials to develop.

The Terms of Reference were AGREED.

It was AGREED that deputies should attend rather than have key organisations unrepresented on the Group, provided they are appropriately empowered to speak on behalf of their organisations and can deliver the appropriate senior buy in and messaging.

Action 1: Secretariat officials to include a standing agenda item on wider relevant activity

3. Immediate Priorities

The Group discussed the immediate priorities with a view to identifying where immediate activity should focus. The following were identified:

- Communicate the work to date and explain the plan to keep the momentum - right message, right person, right time.
- Develop and implement pathways for the groups who are predictably at highest risk of rough sleeping similar to the SHORE standards for prisoners, focusing on implementing these effectively.
- Empower the frontline, learning from the winter actions and developing a clear idea of what a good outreach service looks like.
- Consider how to embed multi-agency working
- Work with local authorities to transition to rapid rehousing by default, providing necessary support to them from the centre

- Explore the need for legislative change, looking at local connection, intentionality, and a prevention duty in particular
- Explore a data collection and management system
- Update the Code of Guidance

In particular, the Group felt now was the appropriate moment to focus on communicating the successful winter interventions and explain what the Government is doing to implement the newest sets of recommendations from HARSAG and LGCC. The HARSAG Group members and the Minister noted that the winter interventions were just drawing to a close and that now is the appropriate moment to draw together the learning and share how success was generated with such a small amount of funding. Officials commented that analysis of the winter actions was in progress and that they will work with agencies involved to develop case studies for use in communications.

There was a general discussion about the importance of communication in particular to Council leaders and Housing Convenors, with a view to inspiring leadership and action. The winter actions analysis is one strand of this, but there is a wider question about what messages we want people to be aware of in this policy space and how to make sure the right people hear them. Catriona MacKean advised members that a new member of staff was being recruited to focus on exactly this issue. The Minister explained his intention to blog about the meeting and his hope that Cllr Whitham, as co-chair, will blog about meetings she chairs. He asked attendees to share this blog and their own thoughts via social media channels, to maintain the conversation with stakeholders between set piece announcements.

Action 2: Consulting with relevant group members, officials (SG and COSLA) will develop and implement an initial communication strategy, updating the Group at the next meeting. In particular, the Minister asked officials to document and share some of the key anecdotes from the winter interventions to raise awareness of the powerful impacts of some minor changes.

Action 3: Officials to provide Group members with links to the HPSG blog; Group members to consider how to use their own channels including social media to disseminate HPSG blogs and foster discussion with their stakeholder communities.

Action 4: SG officials to re-vamp the HPSG area of the Scottish Government website and make it an appropriate repository for the refreshed work of the Group.

4. Draft workplan

The Group discussed a number of concerns and issues related to how the identified early actions might be progressed. It was agreed the draft workplan should be re-examined in the light of this and brought back to the next meeting for fuller discussion.

Action 5: SG officials to draft a new workplan drawing together the thoughts expressed during the meeting.

Action 6: Secretariat officials to provide meeting dates for the rest of the year.

The Minister was asked to provide an update on his intentions for spending the Ending Homelessness Together Fund monies. Mr Stewart stated he was clear the money will not be

for existing services and will be allocated towards outcome focused projects. These in turn will be subject to scrutiny to ensure the funds are spent in the most effective way and interventions are evaluated and disseminated appropriately. More detail will be forthcoming in due course, likely to be discussed at future meetings.