

Local Government Association Briefing

Homelessness Reduction Bill

House of Commons Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 14 December 2016



KEY MESSAGES

- Councils want to end homelessness and are already doing everything they can within existing resources to prevent and tackle it, but there is no silver bullet and councils alone cannot tackle rising homelessness.
- It is crucial that councils are fully funded for delivering all aspects of the Bill into the future, to ensure the legislation to achieve its objectives.
- The Homelessness Reduction Bill is in far more workable than the original draft following productive engagement of councils and the LGA by Bob Blackman MP and the Bill's supporters in its development. The LGA supports the intent of many of the amendments proposed by MPs, which seek to ensure the legislation is workable and delivers on our collective ambitions to better prevent and resolve homelessness. In doing so we are not seeking to obstruct the passage of the Bill through Parliament.
- **We support Amendment 11**, tabled by Andy Slaughter MP, and **Amendment 2**, tabled by Clive Betts MP which relate to Clause 10. These amendments seek to ensure that where a public authority makes a referral to a housing authority in respect of a person who is at risk of homelessness the public authority is under a duty to cooperate with the housing authority. It is important that all public services work in partnership to take action to help prevent or relieve homelessness for households facing varied circumstances.
- **We support the intent behind Amendments 7 and 8** tabled by Andy Slaughter MP, which relate to Clause 5. We would welcome assurances that legislation takes into account the points these amendments are seeking to address.
- **We support the intent behind Amendment 12** tabled by Andy Slaughter MP. We have concerns with how Clause 1 would operate in practice. In our view local housing authorities should have maximum flexibilities to engage with landlords and tenants to reach a solution best suited to each circumstance.
- **We support the intent behind New Clause 2** tabled by Andy Slaughter MP. This would prevent applicants from refusing assistance and then reapplying to the local authority when the circumstances of their case have not materially changed. We would welcome assurances that legislation takes into account the points this amendment is seeking to address.
- **We support the intent behind New Clause 3** tabled by Andy Slaughter MP. This would remove an administrative burden on local authorities and would ensure that information is provided in a simple and accessible manner. We would welcome assurances that legislation takes into account the points this amendment is seeking to address.

Briefing

- **We support the intent behind New Clauses 4 and 5** which relate to the funding and impact of the new duties in the Bill. Local government wants to make a success of any new legislation. At this stage it is difficult to predict the impact of the legislation and the costs for local housing authorities in meeting duties, therefore it will be important to assess how the new duties are operating into the future and ensuring local housing authorities are sufficiently funded.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Councils want to end homelessness and are already doing everything they can within existing resources to prevent and tackle it, but there is no silver bullet and councils alone cannot tackle rising homelessness.

The LGA has been clear from the outset that all new duties proposed in the Bill must be fully funded into the future if they are to achieve the outcomes we all want to see. We welcomed the Government's commitment to fully funding the new duties under the New Burdens Doctrine when the Bill received its Second Reading last month.

Beyond the direct implications of the Bill, local government continues to press the wider case for sufficient funding, flexibilities and powers from the Government in order to successfully deliver its wider homelessness and housing responsibilities over the coming years. Crucially this will mean building more genuinely affordable homes, and addressing the rising gap between housing costs and household incomes.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON KEY CLAUSES

We support Amendment 11, tabled by Andy Slaughter MP, and Amendment 2, tabled by Clive Betts MP which relate to Clause 10:

These amendments seek to ensure that where a public authority makes a referral to a housing authority in respect of a person who is at risk of homelessness the public authority is under a duty to cooperate with the housing authority.

Homelessness is complex and often reflects other vulnerabilities or circumstances related to health, justice or social services. It is important that all public services work in partnership to take action to help prevent or relieve homelessness for households facing varied circumstances. The new duties in Clause 10 should not incentivise other stretched public services to 'pass on' vulnerable households to local authorities without having a responsibility to work with councils to meet their overall needs.

We support the intent behind Amendments 7 and 8 tabled by Andy Slaughter MP which relate to Clause 5. We would welcome assurances that legislation takes into account the points these amendments are seeking to address:

Amendment 7 seeks to ensure on the face of the Bill that it is not the intention of Clause 5 to require local authorities to provide accommodation for non-priority need applicants. **Amendment 8** to Clause 5 would allow a local authority to end an interim duty before the end of the 56 day requirement if an applicant is found not to be in apparent priority need.

We support the intent behind Amendment 12 tabled by Andy Slaughter MP:

Amendment 12 seeks to remove Clause 1. We have concerns with how Clause 1

would operate in practice. In our view local housing authorities should have maximum flexibilities to engage with landlords and tenants to reach a solution best suited to each circumstance.

We support the intent behind New Clauses 2, 3, 4 and 5 tabled by Andy Slaughter MP. We would welcome assurances that legislation takes into account the points these amendments are seeking to address:

New Clause 2 would prevent applicants from refusing assistance and then reapplying to the local authority when new facts emerge. The clause would ensure that applicants can only re-apply if their circumstances have materially changed or if there is new information that materially affects the assessment. We would welcome assurances that the legislation takes into account the ambitions set out in the amendment.

New Clause 3 would enable the Secretary of State to produce a standard form, advising applicants of their rights at each stage of review and appeal. This would remove an administrative burden on local authorities and would also ensure that information is provided in a simple and accessible manner. We support the intent behind this amendment as it is important to take measures that reduce the administrative burden on local authorities.

New Clauses 4 and 5 detail measures that relate to the funding and impact of the new duties in the Bill, **New Clause 4** seeks a guarantee of funding for five years before legislation is enacted, and **New Clause 5** seeks a review of the bills impact and funding for local housing authorities. Local government wants to make a success of any new legislation. At this stage it is difficult to predict the impact of the legislation and the costs for local housing authorities in meeting duties, therefore it will be important to assess how the new duties are operating into the future and ensuring local housing authorities are sufficiently funded.