**All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness**

**How to Prevent Prison Leavers from Becoming Homeless –**

**Officers Meeting Minutes**

25 January 2017, 15.00-16.30, House of Commons, Committee Room 17

**Attendees:**

**Apologies:**

Sam Gyimah MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Prisons and Probation

David Burrowes MP, APPG Secretary

Dr Paul Monaghan MP, Vice-chair

Neil Coyle MP, APPG Treasurer

Heidi Allen MP

Caroline Ansell MP

Flick Drummond MP

Lord Kennedy

Lord Listowel

David Mackintosh, Chairman

Will Quince MP, APPG Officer

Michael Tomlinson MP, APPG Officer

Mary Robinson MP

Baroness Bakewell

Lord Best

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top

Bishop of Rochester

**Parliamentary Assistants:**

Ryan Baldry, Office of David Mackintosh MP

Assistant to Richard Burgeon MP

**Secretariat:**

Matt Downie, Secretariat to APPG

Rachel Greaves Secretariat to APPG

**Other:**

Tim Sigsworth, Albert Kennedy Trust

Simon Gordon, RLA

Mick Clark, The Passage

Paul Anders, Revolving Door Agency

Christina Marriott, Revolving Doors Agency

Marc Francis, Z2K

Matt Wall, Community Chaplaincy Association

Christopher Stacey, Unlock

Claire Cain, Women in Prison

Sofia Gullberg, Women in Prison

Bianca Hutchinson, DePaul

Ruth O'Sullivan, Centerpoint

Colin Ross, Emmaus

Cat Glew, St Mungos

Sam Cowie, St Mungos

Sara Turner, St Mungos

Nicola Drinkwater, Clinks

Jay Grech, Changing Lives

**Witnesses:**

Sally Hill, Deputy Governor HMP Highdown

Cllr Emma Morse, Portfolio Holder for Customer Access including homelessness, Exeter City Council

Karen, Emmaus ‘Companion’

Mike, Chair of Nacro Community Voice Council

Dezlee Dennis, London CRC

Katherine Milne, Caritas Social Action Network

Jo Beck, St Basils

Alison Gelder, Housing Justice

Chris James, Housing Justice

Rachel Annison, Nacro

Jay Grech, Changing Lives

Mohamad Ellis-Francis, London CRC/St Mungos

Helen Woods, Perry Richards

Nicola Forsdyke, Exeter City Council

Alex Eagle, The Running Charity

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| **Welcome and apologies** |
| Questions to witness from APPG Officers  |
| Overview  | David Mackintosh (DM) began the session by asking the witnesses how much of an issue is homelessness among prison leavers.The witnesses all agreed it was a rising problem with various factors and current figures aren’t representative. Local authorities do not record people who become homeless immediately after leaving prison and we do not know the scale of prison leavers who are hidden homeless. All agreed that demand on beds is significant. Sally Hill (SH) said her staff team has 100 less officers than she needs and the prison population is the highest it’s ever been at over 90,000. Due to lack of resource and staff, SH said that her prisoners only get let out 45 minutes per day, leaving no time for training or interventions. This includes providing housing support.Michael Tomlinson (MT) asked the witnesses of their experiences contacting local authorities and presenting as homeless and ordinarily, how a prison leaver has their housing needs assessed.SH said that CRCs (Community Rehabilitation Companies) are responsible for that early intervention work 12 weeks prior to release and each prisoner should have an assessment. Issues arise if you are on a shorter sentence and or, get moved to a lower category prison.All agreed that local authorities very rarely assess prison leavers as priority cases for rehousing and that they threshold is getting higher with dual issues/dependencies such as mental health diagnoses and substance addictions a bare minimum for people to be considered a priority. Mike (M) told the inquiry that getting help from a local authority is particularly difficult for a prison leaver as many have problems reading and writing and are generally not supported through that process. He said this creates added stress and embarrassment for a prison leaver. All agreed that being able to claim local connection in a new area would help prison leavers start a new life and would help their rehabilitation as they are away from the area they committed their crime. All gave examples of people who have been turned away from their local authority and recommit crime so they either don’t sleep rough, or have to go back to the areas where they developed additions or committed their original crime.Will Quince (WQ) spoke about the Colchester Military Training Facility and what lessons could be learnt. The inquiry then heard some examples of best practise. SH said 6 years ago there were more rehabilitation services being delivered in prisons, including training and family work and despite positive outcomes these have now been cut. SH also commended a project called stepping stones and said there needs to be better use of ROTL (Release on temporary licence). All agreed that learning skills inside, such as tenancy training or how to maintain a job was integral. EM described a local initiative which brings together all local services, including health and women's services so a person only tells their story once. All agreed that it was important to talk to the right person before someone leaves the gate but disconnected working within the prison system, as well as between DCLG and DWP, makes this more difficult.The Bishop of Rochester (BR) asked about practical solutions. All agreed that prison staff should be upskilled so they can better assist prisoners when they have housing related questions and that there needs to be conversations taking place far sooner.Emma Morse (EM) said Exeter was awarded some funding and have put a member of staff in the local prison and are looking to upskill the CRC staff too. However, they feel information from prisons doesn’t come within the 12 weeks that they need it and it often doesn’t include all information needed, such as prisoner additions, behaviours or support needs. Karen (K) believes the key is to assess someone's housing needs on the first day in prison, she only got help two days before release on one of her sentences.Mary Robinson (MR) asked about how this could be improved in the new devolved areas, such as Greater Manchester. She also asked about how the prison system and local authorities work with charities.EM said they were piloting a new commissioning programme, working with all partners to ensure people have a better experience and care is integrated. They have also created a new rough sleeping strategy to go alongside this and they brought in local charities to help develop it. All agreed that the third sector plays a crucial part in a person’s rehabilitation and homelessness prevention, but knowledge must be shared. SH said that homelessness is a consequence of a range of issues and some charities deal with the wider problems a person may have, thus inadvertently preventing homelessness.DM said part of the Homelessness Reduction Bill is a duty to refer, which puts an onus on local agencies to disseminate information but there will also be greater training opportunities as there has been in Wales, which recently changed its homeless legislation. |
| Actions and deadlines | Secretariat to request an evaluation of Stepping StonesSecretariat to gather more information on Exeter COLAB |
| Sector interventions and questions |
| Overview | Lord Best (LB) asked about Crisis’ campaign to make it easier for homeless and vulnerable people to access the Private Rented Sector (PRS). Rachel Greaves (RG) explained that Crisis is calling on the Government for funding for Help to Rent Schemes which are small organisations which work with both a tenant and landlord to help someone access and maintain a tenancy. They are also calling for a national rent deposit scheme, as we have Help to Buy, it’s only fair to have Help to Rent for those who could never buy a property.Alison Gelder (AG) spoke about the benefits of befriending schemes and how mentoring schemes can be used to offer housing advice. AG also spoke about ethical letting agencies and how these can help ex-offenders access the PRS. Sam Cowie (SC) spoke about her involvement with London CRC, she works for St Mungos and is commissioned by the CRC. They are based in all London's 14 prisons to address risk of homelessness and assess peoples housing needs. SW said it is becoming increasingly difficult to help people as there is an increased use of remand, lack of resource and inmates are not able to begin applications as they have no access to computers. Additionally, they struggle with data protection as local authorities do not have secure email addresses so they can’t email over prisoner information.Helen Woods (HW) spoke about her experience setting up Housing First models, one in particular in Greater Manchester which supports female offenders. A Housing First model puts the housing need first for an individual and then person centred wrap around support comes after and continues for as long as a person needs it. This has had positive outcomes and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recently added the Housing First model to their list of recommendations in their Poverty Agenda.Baroness Armstrong (BA) spoke in her capacity as Chair of the Changing Lives Board. She said Changing Lives also uses the Housing First model, which has better outcomes than hostel use and gets people out of the dry/wet hostel cycle. Although she said the tenancy and support had to be right. BA is now concerned that funding cuts and the changes to Supporting People funding has meant 3 services have been closed in Newcastle, with more to follow.   |
| AOB |
| Overview | DM thanked the witnesses and all other attendees for coming and said the evidence heard was extremely compelling. The APPGEH’s recommendations on the subject would be published in the wider APPG report. He will pass on the minutes to the Minister as he was unable to attend. |
| Actions and deadlines | Secretariat to send around minutes to witnesses and Chair |