

PREVENTION REVIEW GROUP – 11 June 2020

Minute of meeting

Present:

Members: Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick (Heriot Watt University, Chair), Cllr Elena Whitham (East Ayrshire Council / COSLA), John Mills (Fife Council / ALACHO), Ruth Whatling (Scottish Government), Matt Downie (Crisis), Professor Tom Mullen (University of Glasgow).

In attendance: Lorna Wilson (SFHA), Jess Husband (Shelter Scotland), Beth Reid (Crisis), Judith Chisholm (Crisis)

Apologies: Susanne Millar (Glasgow City HSCP), Callum Chomczuk (CIH), Maggie Brunjes (Homeless Network Scotland), Stephen O'Connor (Scottish Government), Gordon MacRae (Shelter Scotland), Sally Thomas (SFHA), COSLA.

1. Welcome and introductions

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Implications of COVID 19 for the work of the group (timescales and task)

The Chair invited members of the Group to reflect on the work of the Group and how they think it should proceed given the impact of COVID-19.

John Mills referred to the “rapid prevention” agenda that is emerging from the work of the (temporarily) reconvened Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group. In his view that means that the work of the Prevention Review Group needs to continue at pace. Elena Whitham agreed. In her opinion COVID-19 has reinforced how important the work of the Prevention Review Group is. The impact of COVID-19 is going to put huge pressures on many people who would not have been at risk of homelessness previously. Elena Whitham thinks that there is now (even more of) a spotlight on the work of the Group and we need to work at pace.

3. Draft recommendations – progress so far (slides)

Beth Reid referred to the slides on progress so far that had been circulated to the Prevention Review Group in advance of the meeting (attached).

- The presentation formalises the thinking of the Group so far
- It proposes that a new prevention duty requires local authorities to act to prevent homelessness for any household at risk within the next 6 months
- There would be a single housing and support assessment process for those at risk and those already homeless
- That there would be a framework for the minimum provision local authorities should have available to prevent homelessness
- Steps local authorities take to resolve individual cases would be set out in a personal housing plan
- Discharge of prevention and accommodation duties would be via “maximal housing options” which must be “settled” (available for at least 12 months) and “suitable” (tailored to the household’s specific needs, defined in regulations and guidance)
- Prevention duties on wider public bodies would be based on three principles: to **ask** about housing situation whether there is a risk of homelessness; to **act**, specified to each public

body but including referral to the local authority; and a duty **not to discharge / evict into homelessness**, i.e. must have somewhere else to go

- Local authorities would have a duty to respond to referrals from other public bodies
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The Group then discussed their initial views on progress so far.

- a) Jess Husbands asked if Shelter's legal team could have time to review the slides on progress so far and feedback pre-July meeting. The Chair confirmed that happy for them to do that but it would be good to have advance notice if they have any concerns. It was noted here that as previously agreed the Group would seek to commission independent expert legal advice to draft legislative proposals and an initial meeting had been arranged for 12 June. The Chair will keep the Group updated on this but to note at this point that there will be an opportunity for Shelter legal colleagues to feedback on the draft Bill and associated explanatory note produced from that process too. JH asked whether the proposals take into account the diversity of practice by local authorities on prevention activity. BR responded that the proposals create a new legal framework for prevention practice to set a national minimum standard.
- b) Matt Downie suggested to the Group that it would be good to place the recommendations from the Group in the context of HRSAG (Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group) perhaps by some form of note of intent with the key principles. The Chair, John Mills and Elena Whitham agreed. Ruth Whatling confirmed that the Scottish Government support that approach. **ACTION: the Chair will send formal submission to HARSAG in reply to their request for consultation responses.**
- c) John Mills confirmed that he was happy with the slides on progress so far, in particular the six month time period for prevention. John Mills had consulted with ALACHO on the progress so far and they had no substantive concerns. He stressed the need for "rapid prevention" and highlighted that local authorities are in the process of revising RRTPs. While he is keen that the work of the Group should proceed at pace he noted that even then it has to allow proper consultation and reflection too. He noted that all of the stakeholder meetings that the Group had hosted to date had been good and inclusive and important that continues to happen.
- d) Elena Whitham noted that key to this value of the PRG work, and what should be fed into HARSAG, is not just rapid prevention but also the concept of maximal housing options for resolving homelessness, particularly in light of the anticipated spike in cases post the COVID-19 lockdown.
- e) Ruth Whatling outlined that the work of CIH and SWA domestic abuse pathway has been accelerated and there is likely to soon be primary legislation relating to joint tenancies and other areas relating to domestic abuse. Ruth Whatling will keep the Group updated.

4. Revising timescales, meeting schedule and format

The Chair invited comments from the Group on the process, timescales and substantive topics that the Group needs to discuss.

Following discussion it was agreed that:

- a) the Group would aim to have completed substantive discussions by the end of August with a view to drafting and finalising the Report in the autumn with publication in November.
- b) the Group will aim to have four meetings before end of August, each of them for two hours
- c) topics to be covered are domestic abuse; landlords; children, families and young people; people with complex needs – case management approach; and strategic planning, monitoring and enforcement. Those do not necessarily need a meeting each. **ACTION:** Beth Reid to prepare meeting schedule proposal.
- d) the children, families and young people stakeholder meeting still needs to take place.
- e) above timescales need to factor in the work of the Prevention Commission (lived and frontline experience). **ACTION:** Beth Reid to contact Maggie Brunjes to discuss and agree next steps.

The Chair noted that the initial meeting to discuss with Adrian Stalker is taking place on 12 June 2020 and the Chair will keep the Group updated.

5. Next steps:

ACTION: Crisis to send round suggested dates and times for future meetings. Crisis to circulate note of legal drafting meeting.