



Homeless Action Scotland

Work, Health & Disability
Green paper
Improving Lives

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Consultation Funding for Supported Housing Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper Response

Introduction

Homeless Action Scotland is the membership body for organisations and individuals in Scotland working to prevent and tackle homelessness. Our members include local authorities, housing associations, voluntary organisations and individuals.

There are substantial overlaps between those with long term health conditions and disabilities and those who experience or are at risk of homelessness. In their 2015/16 report on homelessness in Scotland, the Scottish Government state:

Of the 28,226 households assessed as homeless in 2015/16, 11,960 (42%) cited having one or more support needs. This proportion has increased by eight percentage points since 2012/13 (when this was 34%) (Table 15) 41% specified a mental health problem as a support need (indicated 4,867 times) and 26% cited drug or alcohol dependency¹.

Learning disabilities were cited in 6% of applications, physical disabilities in 10% and medical conditions in 18%. It is clear that decisions about support for those with long term medical conditions or disabilities must take into account an individual's housing situation if those decisions are to be truly holistic and person centred.

Homeless Action Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Green Paper, we have restricted our comments to our specialist areas of knowledge.

General Comments

1. Homeless Action Scotland welcomes the broad action areas included in the green paper. We particularly applaud the emphasis on linking the areas of work, health, social care and welfare and the commitment to place mental and physical health on an equal footing.
2. The focus on working across all government departments, local authorities and the NHS in England is a vital component of the Green Paper but we would strongly encourage greater thought to be given to how this work will be taken forward in the devolved nations and how reserved benefits will interact with devolved employability programmes and disability

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00508824.pdf>

benefits. A commitment to work within the devolution system will require careful strategic planning to ensure that no one is left to fall between the gaps.

3. Although the paper recognises the importance of holistic, person centred care, we believe it is important to be clear that not all people who have a long term health condition or a disability will face the same barriers to support, welfare, employability and employment. Other factors such as gender, age, work experience, qualifications, location, ethnicity, domestic and caring responsibilities, social circumstances and background, health and mobility all influence the employability needs of individuals and the barriers they face.
4. Unemployment is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Housing stability and suitability are key factors in ensuring that an individual is able to engage effectively with employability support or employment. We would welcome recognition that housing is a key component in sustainable employment.
5. We would also welcome a detailed timeline and commitments, showing how the government is planning to meet its commitment to halve the disability employment gap. We must be able to measure success and distance travelled. This should take into account the reality of devolution in order to ensure that the needs of those with long term health conditions or disabilities are met across the whole of the UK.

Section 2: Supporting people into work

Building work coach capability

6. We welcome the recognition of the importance of supporting work coaches to be able to engage effectively with their clients. We have been working closely with DWP in Scotland to ensure that training on homelessness and homelessness easement is being delivered in every Jobcentre in Scotland. We also recognise the importance of the role of DWP staff being pointed as homelessness leads – giving work coaches an internal named contact with greater knowledge on complex issues that affect their clients.
7. In order for this approach to work it is important that training is ongoing to refresh knowledge and reach new staff, that staff is able and encouraged to identify when they need additional support or advice and that the DWP resists the temptation to adopt a ‘tick box approach’ where one session of training on a topic is seen as enough.

Improving access to employment support

8. Systems should be client led; access to local support services of all kinds should be open and available to those in the Support Group and referrals and signposting should be supported through contact with the Jobcentre.

9. Employment support to individuals in the Support Group, and the Universal Credit equivalent should tie into this, also being led by the needs of the client, rather than a broad brush approach that will be applicable to all.
10. For people who are unable to work due to disability or a long term health condition, the process of claiming ESA or UC can be stressful. It is important that not all welfare is seen as being tied to work. Health support should of course be offered but should not be tied to, or be perceived to be tied to, social security entitlement.

Section 3: Assessments for benefits for people with welfare conditions

11. It is important that all assessment processes are seen as necessary by both the client and the person conducting the interview (i.e. not formalistic or rote). These processes are often very stressful for clients. Therefore, clear expectations of what to expect should be laid out prior to the assessment, and then met; where someone is expecting to be assessed for 30 minutes, this assessment should take in the region of 30 minutes, with a clear introduction of what will be happening, how, for what purpose and what will happen after the assessment has taken place.
12. It should be made clear to people accessing employability services that such assessments are a way of ensuring their needs are met and as such we welcome the separation from any assessment which dictates benefit payments or amounts.
13. Any fair and impartial assessment of employability support needs will inevitably find that some people are not in a position to engage with employability services at a particular time due to their life circumstances. It is important that a) the assessment has the option of this being an outcome (i.e. not making all possible outcomes employability focused) and b) the assessment is used to link that person into any support that they need and want. For people with a long term health condition or a disability who are also homeless or at risk of homelessness, this would include links to housing support in addition to support in meeting their employability and health needs.

Section 4: Supporting employers to recruit with confidence and create healthy workplaces

14. It is absolutely vital that work is done to engage national and local employers in the employability process generally. This is particularly essential when it comes to increasing the employability of those who face additional barriers. Employer engagement should focus on encouraging employers to recognise the advantages of engaging with a diverse range of potential workers who are at a distance from the job market. In order for this to work, first there needs to be awareness raising and training in order to help overcome prejudices about people with disabilities or long term health conditions. Second, employers have to feel

confident that they will acquire effective and reliable workers that meet their needs. Third, they need to know what support and incentives they will be offered to engage with these perceived high risk groups.

15. Homeless Action Scotland believes that DWP and Job centres should be working with employers (not just the larger companies) at a local level, discussing and demonstrating that there is a good business case for long-term investment in people facing multiple disadvantages. Training people at a distance from the labour market may provide a more secure supply of workers to meet the recruitment demands of a labour market in a country with an aging population where writing off large sections of the working age population is unrealistic in the long term. Funding should therefore be easily accessed to allow for this, as well as covering any initial set up costs that may be required, in particular for smaller companies.
16. It is important that employability services focus on building transferable, useful, real life skills that will help people in their local labour market. Generic activities or skills that are limited to certain opportunities are not a long term solution. For example, the development of CV writing skills remains a core part of many employability programmes yet increasingly employers are demanding that all applications are made through their own forms and processes. Broader online application skills may be the more modern transferable skill.

Homeless Action Scotland gives full permission for this submission to be published.

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