

## The Homelessness Reduction Bill

The Homelessness Reduction Bill is a Private Member's Bill introduced to Parliament on 29th June 2016 by Bob Blackman, backbench Conservative MP for Harrow East. On the same day, figures published by the Greater London Authority showed a seven per cent rise in rough sleeping in London during 2015-16. The Bill, which is based upon recommendations contained in a report commissioned by the charity Crisis, aims to amend Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to make further provision about measures for reducing homelessness.

Focusing on advice, information and prevention, the Bill aims to set out more clearly the types of housing advice and information local authorities must provide to people before they become homeless or are threatened with homelessness and this new duty would apply to all eligible households irrespective of priority need and intentional homelessness. The onus would be on local authorities to demonstrate that they are taking reasonable steps to prevent homelessness.

Section 175 of the 1996 Act defines "homelessness and threatened homelessness". Currently a person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days. The Bill proposes to extend that period to 56 days to enable local authorities to respond to the threat of homelessness at a much earlier point, and providing help such as mediation with landlord, payment by way of grant or loan, or debt management support. It will further provide that local authorities will have to accept a valid notice to quit or equivalent as evidence that the tenant is threatened with homelessness, overturning the rule laid down in *Sacupima v Newham LBC* [2001] 1 W.L.R. 563 that tenants do not become homeless until physically evicted from their properties.

The Bill further proposes to introduce a new relief duty for all eligible homeless people who have a local connection, so local authorities must take reasonable steps to secure accommodation regardless of priority need status. If the authority is unable to prevent an applicant's homelessness, they should help to secure alternative accommodation, for example, by providing a grant or loan, or advice and advocacy to help secure a tenancy in the private rented sector. This duty would last for a period of 56 days after which, if not accommodated, the applicant would be assessed to see if he is eligible for the main homelessness duty.

The Bill also proposes a new duty to provide emergency accommodation for homeless people with nowhere safe to stay, for up to 28 days so they are not forced to sleep rough. Applicants would only be able to access emergency interim accommodation under this duty for a maximum of 56 days and on no more than one occasion every six months.

In return for these new obligations, the onus would be on applicants to cooperate with local authorities' efforts to help them. Local authorities would be permitted to discharge their prevent and relief duties if an applicant unreasonably refuses to cooperate with the course of action that they have agreed to undertake.

Many of these suggested changes draw on the Welsh Government's 2014 Housing Act.

The Bill is expected to have its second reading debate on Friday 28th October 2016.

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