

Felicity Buchan MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Homelessness
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

cc. Sarah Dines MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding
Home Office

cc. Maria Caulfield MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy
Department of Health and Social Care

31st January 2023

Dear Felicity Buchan MP,

We write as members of the Women's Rough Sleeping sub-group of the London-wide Life off the Streets programme, which includes representation from leading homelessness, housing, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and health organisations and services. The Life off the Streets Executive Board, jointly chaired by the Deputy Mayor for Housing and by London Councils, brings together key partners to tackle rough sleeping in London, and the women's sub-group of the programme has been established to determine, drive and manage activities intended to ensure that rough sleeping is prevented for women – and where that fails, that rough sleeping is a rare, brief and non-recurrent experience. This letter has the support of the National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group, a cross sector coalition of organisations working to influence policy and practice on domestic abuse and housing in England.

Women who sleep rough are at constant high risk of trauma, violence and abuse, and severe, complex health needs. No woman should have to sleep rough and endure these devastating consequences. Your predecessor, Andrew Stephenson MP, attended the launch of the first Pan-London women's rough sleeping census in October 2022, and we would welcome your continued support in addressing the systemic inequalities that prevent women who rough sleep from accessing the support and accommodation they so desperately need. We welcome the Government's wider ambitions to end rough sleeping for good, and to be able to achieve this there requires a response that recognises the urgent and distinct problems faced by women who are rough sleeping.

We welcome the Government's new Rough Sleeping Strategy and are encouraged by the Government's investment in the new Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme. However, we urge you to ensure that the strategy's recognition that "women who sleep rough also tend to make themselves less visible in order to stay safe...This reinforces the need for tailored, specific interventions" is translated in to actions that local authorities can put in to practice.

A new report, 'Making women count' by social research consultancy Praxis Collab, which outlines the process and findings of the women's rough sleeping census, highlights this inequality, stating that *"rough sleeping is not currently defined in a way that incorporates how women experience rough sleeping."* The census, delivered by a coalition of leading homelessness and VAWG charities and supported by London Councils and the GLA, used an innovative methodology to capture data on women's rough sleeping in a way that has not previously been achieved. The report emphasises that women's rough sleeping is often transient, intermittent and hidden, meaning that they are often not represented in official statistics and, crucially, are often precluded from accessing support and housing. The effects of this inequality of access are severe: experiences of violence and abuse are

“near universal” for women who sleep rough, and the average age of death is just 43 years old, even younger than their male counterparts.

We urge the Government to take action and provide the leadership, guidance and resources to implement the following recommendations, based on the report’s findings:

- The Government should require local authorities to deliver an annual Women’s Rough Sleeping Census and report on their findings.
- The Government should produce guidance to support local authorities to improve access to rough sleeping services for women, including:
 - Reducing access requirements/barriers to support and accommodation services for women, including the need to be a ‘verified’ rough sleeper.
 - Ensuring outreach practices encompass women’s experiences.

No woman should experience rough sleeping and the devastating associated risks. We look forward to working with you to ensure that every woman experiencing rough sleeping has access to targeted, gender informed outreach support, and clear pathways into safe and secure housing. We would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss the findings and recommendations of the census report in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

The following organisations have given their signature to this letter. Signatories include members of the Life Off the Streets Ending and Preventing Women’s Rough Sleeping Sub-Group, members of the National Housing and Domestic Policy and Practice Group, and associated organisations.

**Single Homeless Project
Solace Women’s Aid
The Connection at St Martin’s
St Mungo’s
Caritas Bakhita House
Employers’ Initiative on Domestic Abuse
Transformation Partners in Health and Care
(TPHC)**

**Glass Door
National Housing and Domestic Policy and
Practice Group*
Pathway
Public Interest Law Centre
St Giles**

***National Housing and Domestic Policy and Practice Group signed members:**

**Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)
Agenda
Birmingham & Solihull Women’s Aid
Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
Commonweal Housing
Crisis
Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)
The DRIVE partnership
Galop
Generation Rent
Gentoo Housing Association
Imkaan
Latin American Women’s Rights Service**

**National Housing Federation
National Federation of ALMOs
Peabody Housing Association
Refuge
Resolve ASB
Respect
SafeLives
Shelter
Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse
Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA)
Women’s Aid Federation of England
(Women’s Aid)**