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Bob Doris MSP
Convener
Local Government and Communities Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
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Dear Bob

I am writing to advise the Local Government and Communities Committee of recommendations on actions to minimise rough sleeping this winter from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, announced today.

The First Minister outlined our clear intention to eradicate rough sleeping and end homelessness in announcing Programme for Government on 5th September, including the creation of the Action Group and the creation of the £50 million Ending Homelessness Together Fund over five years.

Since then, the Action Group, chaired by Jon Sparkes of Crisis, has worked quickly to provide the Scottish Government with recommendations before the end of November to address the Group's first objective, of minimising rough sleeping this winter, in light of the urgency of the situation. The Scottish Government are committed to implementing these recommendations and to do so working with our partners.

The Action Group has prioritised actions on the basis of the ability to implement at speed; and potential for rapid, direct impact this winter. I am committed to rapid implementation of these measures and the Scottish Government are providing an additional £262,000 this winter for this purpose. The Action Group have considered a wide range of potential responses for this Winter, but have prioritised actions in the following areas on the basis of the ability to implement at speed; and the potential for rapid, direct impact:

- Increase capacity in temporary and emergency accommodation in Edinburgh
- Increase outreach capacity in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen and further explore any need for additional capacity in Dundee

- Maximise use of Nightstop in Edinburgh and undertake discussion with statutory sector in Glasgow to agree how we implement Nightstop there by January 2018
- Maximise effectiveness of existing and additional outreach capacity by boosting multi-agency partnership working; adopting 'by name lists' approach and empowering front line workers through direct access to services and dedicated accommodation
- Making personal budgets and/or flexible emergency funding available for front line staff to employ where maximum flexibility is required to meet an individual's immediate housing needs – as a last resort where other interventions have failed
- At times of extreme weather, ensure flexible provision is available in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen for anyone who will not use winter night shelters, despite all efforts
- Engaging with people who are currently homeless and people who have experience of homelessness

In light of the visibility and particular challenges of numbers rough sleeping in our main cities, the focus and particular challenges of these recommendations is on those areas of the country. However, the Action Group has already begun to explore its objectives of eradicating rough sleeping and transforming temporary accommodation longer term, which will require the active participation of a range of partners across Scotland and, crucially, of people that have lived experience of homelessness. The Action Group will make recommendations on these broader objectives in the New Year.

However, we are now focussed on the actions we must take to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those who may be rough sleeping this winter and I would welcome your contribution and views in ensuring the Action Group's recommendations make a real and positive difference to the lives of individuals facing the prospect of rough sleeping in the coming weeks and months.

I hope this information is helpful to the Local Government and Communities Committee as part of its inquiry into homelessness in Scotland and you will join me in supporting the actions proposed.

Kind regards

KEVIN STEWART