## Summary of the main points from GMHAN and the GMCA separate submissions to Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness and the private rented sector.

### **GMHAN Submission Main Points**

Coronavirus has exaggerated existing societal inequalities and exacerbated the challenges that were already being faced by the homelessness sector in Greater Manchester.

The full submission describes the issues frontline services and people who are homeless are facing, highlights the initiatives made possible by working collaboratively in an emergency situation, and proposes workable solutions for the future. More matters are outlined with detail and case study examples in the full submission, but the main points from the GMHAN are:

* **Inadequate local authority funding.** The funding provided to local authorities has been inadequate to meet the scale of people who are experiencing all forms of homelessness in GM – particularly in Manchester.
* **Unethical separation of homelessness.** The needs of people who are homeless were looked at separately from the response for anyone else with the same needs who were not homeless.
* **Sustainability of new provisions.** As homeless charities resume their usual services, they will see an increased demand and the needs relating to new Covid-19 specific provisions will also continue. This will become very quickly unsustainable.
* **Scarcity of accommodation.** As local authorities look at move on options for people who are staying in hotels, the availability of suitable accommodation (particularly for people with multiple complex needs and for families) remains the biggest challenge.
* **Eligibility criteria.** The impact of reintroducing eligibility barriers and practices could be the disintegration of the networked support which is keeping ‘Everybody In’ at present.
* **Issues of** ‘**hidden homelessness**’ **exacerbated.** People in unsupported or temporary accommodation are facing greater isolation and are in some cases, completely reliant on the support of charities to receive food, cleaning supplies and health information.
* **Local procurement.** Opening up procurement and tender processes beneficial in allowing a coordinated response to complex issues.
* **HRA duty to refer.** Frontline charities saw a marked increase of people leaving prison and hospitals who were being discharged onto the streets. Earlier connection to new processes and systems would have been beneficial.
* **Methods of engagement.** Flexibility is required in the system to make sure charities are resourced and have the right channels to work with people without using processes which create barriers to engagement.
* **Wellbeing.** Now that basic needs have mainly been met for people who are homeless more efforts are needed to address social isolation and to reduce the chance of reversing progress made around mental health and/or substance use.
* **Positive impacts have included:**
* Longer term positive impacts on people’s livelihoods from ‘coming inside’.
* Stronger partnerships, we have the opportunity to use the experiences of people who have been homeless and the knowledge of frontline charities to make joint improvements.

**GMCA Submission Summary**

* Within Greater Manchester, we are looking at recovery in three phases: 1 Lifting lockdown (0-2 months), 2 Living with COVID-19 (2-12 months), 3 Building back better (12 months+). While our immediate focus is now mainly on stages 1 and 2, we also need to consider the longer term implications of the decisions and actions we take now and in the next 12 months.
* We have real concerns about the next few weeks and months. Having worked so hard to get ‘Everyone In’ it is wholly wrong to take a step back and put people at heightened risk once more. In the short to medium term COVID-19 will not be going away, so we need policy that helps us live with it. The people we have housed and those who continue to rough sleep remain extremely vulnerable and a high risk in public health terms.
* We are working as hard as possible to ensure step down and move on from hotels into settled or sustainable temporary accommodation. However, without further funding and a continued ‘Everyone In’ policy, this will result in an increase in rough sleeping and return to unsafe living conditions that threaten the lives of people at risk from fatal infection.
* In that context, we would see a set of minimum asks of Government as follows:

1. Government’s Rough Sleeper Initiative should be immediately boosted to recognise the increasing role of outreach to provide lifesaving advice and guidance. It should be enhanced to prevent an increased flow onto the streets, and ensure that those who rough sleep have access to essential services via advocacy and support
2. The Everyone In policy needs to be maintained along the lines of A Bed Every Night with ongoing support to Local Authorities to provide accommodation and support for anyone who is rough sleeping or at imminent risk of rough sleeping; this must include funding to procure and sustain supported accommodation for this group
3. Expansion of Housing Benefit budgets and further increases in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to enable expansion of temporary accommodation estate to meet these requirements in a more sustainable way once hotels and other short-term solutions begin to return to their long-term uses
4. A package of humanitarian support for people with No Recourse to Public Funds to meet the minimum public health requirement that everyone has self-contained accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic
5. Rapid expansion and longer term funding for Housing First pilots to provide a realistic and supported route to accommodation for the most complex and excluded people experiencing homelessness.

* We should use this opportunity, though it comes to us as a result of crisis, to address the wider drivers of homelessness and rough sleeping, their links to the welfare system, the labour market, the operation of the criminal justice system, and the rights to housing that we enshrine in legislation. We need to think systematically about how we live with COVID-19 and at the same time help those individuals most at risk in a more coherent way. We would welcome a Scottish style review of housing legislation in particular the application of ‘Priority Need’ and Rapid Re-housing approach.
* We should begin from two shared objectives - that no one will be left homeless as a result of COVID-19, and that as we recover we can ‘build back better’. We would urge Government:

1. To honour the pledge made to cover the additional costs to local authorities of the necessary and continuing steps taken to deal with the COVID-19 emergency, including the extraordinary measures put in place to bring ‘Everyone In’
2. To bring in extra protection for private renters and landlords, combining increased welfare support, greater protection for tenants who fall into arrears, systems to reduce the risk of mounting arrears arising as a result of COVID-19, and the urgent scrapping of “no fault” evictions
3. To invest further in accelerating the delivery of additional truly affordable housing, both to add to the limited supply of new lettings for those unable to afford market housing, and to directly contribute to the economic recovery including through the adoption of modern methods of construction to provide high quality, low carbon homes for the future
4. To suspend the Right to Buy to protect those social housing assets we have available to deal with this unprecedented crisis.