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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

End rough sleeping for £110 million, urges CSJ

The Government is considering a major shake-up of its housing policy to end rough sleeping permanently following recommendations laid out by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ).

The think tank, which was set up by former Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith in 2004, has published a report into tackling the scourge of homelessness in the UK.

The CSJ is urging the Government to adopt the Finnish model of addressing rough sleeping, known as Housing First. The system provides individuals with a stable independent home, combined with personalised support to gain access to mental health services, drug and alcohol support, in addition to training for employment when and if they are ready.

Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, will be travelling to Finland to learn how the scheme has been successfully implemented there.

Mr Javid commented: "I warmly welcome this report from the Centre for Social Justice and their ideas for ending rough sleeping once and for all. My department will be studying the recommendations closely, as this is a cause close to my heart. I'm particularly interested in Housing First as a means to ending chronic homelessness. I intend to travel to Finland to learn more about the approach."

Andy Cook, Chief Executive of the CSJ, commented: "Home is the secure base for the whole of life. Without this people are unable to lead settled lives, maintain employment or provide an environment that will help their children escape poverty.

"For the past decade, the CSJ has sought to tackle the root causes of poverty in England: worklessness; educational failure; family breakdown; addiction; and severe personal debt. Homelessness is a devastating experience that no one should ever have to go through.

"Housing First echoes the CSJ's guiding principles by addressing the causes of homelessness and not just treating the symptoms. The scheme offers a long term solution for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. It is a smart upfront investment that will save the Government money and, more importantly, save lives."

The number of people experiencing homelessness in England has rocketed over the last six years. The number of rough sleepers has soared by over 130 per cent from 1,800 in 2010 to over 4,000 in 2016 on any given night. Each year around 34,500 people sleep rough in England.

Rough sleeping costs the Government £1bn every year in health, drug rehabilitation and criminal justice spending. The plan to introduce Housing First in the UK would cost the Government £110 million a year, but would pay for itself within three years.

Theresa May has already indicated a strong interest in tackling homelessness, announcing a £40 million programme as one of her first initiatives as Prime Minister. The Government has also given its support for Bob Blackman MP's Homelessness Reduction Bill, which would increase the state's responsibility for homeless people.

Housing First has been piloted in parts of the UK including Manchester, Glasgow and Camden. In Manchester, a Housing First project helped to reduce the number of offences carried out by women using the service. One serial recidivist convicted for 140 offences prior to her experience at Housing First has committed not a single offence since being admitted to the scheme.

Overall, the Manchester project achieved up to 80 per cent sustained tenancies with minimal reports of anti-social behaviour. It has saved the local authority £2.51 for every £1 invested.

Housing First works on the basis that a more personalised approach with a higher upfront investment will yield much better results in the long run. It rents housing from private landlords, giving participants a great choice of location and type of accommodation, providing them with a better sense of community integration and helping avoid stigmatisation.

It also advocates less conditionality in the process of qualification for permanent accommodation. Unlike the current system in place in the UK, Housing First does not require participants to prove they undertaken work to reduce their drug and alcohol intake to access permanent housing.

Forcing people to tackle their addictions before they are offered stable accommodation has been found to make their lives even more chaotic rather than acting as an incentive to change.

In its report, the CSJ urges the Government to set up a national Housing First programme, as well as increasing the supply of low cost rental accommodation across the UK.

Chair of the working group for the report, Brooks Newmark, commented: "Homelessness remains a blight on our society. Although there has been a significant jump in the numbers since 2010, and in particular rough sleeping, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is still relatively small.

"Over the years, I have spent time as a volunteer in the homelessness sector, initially in Braintree, where I was an MP for ten years, supporting organisations including Braintree Foyer and New Directions and more recently at Crisis at Christmas and a soup kitchen in central London.

"Many of the rough sleepers I have met have complex needs. On the streets, these problems only get worse. Most people I have met want a home. Finding somewhere to live is the first step on their road to recovery. Yet we have not tackled this problem effectively enough. The problem is not unsurmountable. It is just a question of political will."

ENDS

Notes to editors

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About the Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) exists to put social justice at the heart of British politics. Advancing social justice is about identifying the root causes of poverty and providing a way out to those it affects. Established in 2004, the CSJ is an independent think tank that studies the root causes of poverty and aims to address them through practical policy interventions.

The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantage and injustice, every possible opportunity to reach their full potential. The principles behind this vision are:

- A mandate for the whole of the UK, not just isolated areas;
- A focus on the bottom 20 per cent and those who, without external intervention, may never fulfil their potential;
- An agenda that is evidence-based, targeted towards long-term solutions, and harnesses the best grass-roots practice;
- A commitment to providing a route out of poverty via a hand-up, not a hand-out;
- A commitment to the transformation of lives, not just alleviating symptoms.