

Speech: Crisis 50th anniversary

Introduction

Thank you. I am grateful to Dame Louise Casey for that warm introduction.

I am very honoured to be here with you this morning to mark Crisis' 50th year.

As I've recently discovered, turning 50 can also bring with it a whole range of emotions and sometimes some unexpected challenges.

That's why I'm particularly pleased to be here today. It comes with a sense of pride, perhaps a feeling of accomplishment, yes.

But also a restless determination that comes from knowing there is so much more to do.

But as John Sparkes has rightly said, Crisis' 50th anniversary cannot truly be a celebration.

Half a century later we are still grappling with the challenges of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Too many people still live without the security of a home.

Too many people still lack the simple comfort of a warm bed at the end of a hard day.

Too many people are still living out on the street.

It puts in clear focus what still needs to be done whilst recognising the huge contribution you have made.

And I am in no doubt as to the priority we need to give to bring about change.

Now, my first direct contact with Crisis was as a newly elected many years ago MP – visiting the then centre of operations in the Docklands for the Crisis at Christmas campaign.

I saw first-hand the incredible compassion and commitment you show and heard some of the challenges, barriers and prejudice faced by people forced to live rough on the street.

It's truly impressive that Crisis at Christmas is now the largest volunteer led event in the UK.

It's an example of how communities can come together to show compassion and change lives.

Crisis – campaigns

But I know your work is all year round.

And few charities can claim to have had such an impact on our collective consciousness.

You've led the way when it comes to campaigning for change.

You've put homelessness and rough sleeping at the heart of public debate.

You've helped ensure we never forget that these are people with their own stories, hopes and aspirations.

And as so many of these individuals will say: "I never thought it would be me. I never thought I'd be homeless".

A life of homelessness or rough sleeping is not predestined for anyone.

This was something well understood by Bill Shearman and Ian McLeod.

When they established Crisis, they also recognised that the challenges of homelessness and rough sleeping were too serious to be party political.

That they could only be tackled with cross-party support and powerful coalitions of charities and other organizations.

I couldn't agree more.

Fast-forward 50 years and the [2017 Homelessness Reduction Act](#) is a perfect example of this.

This ambitious legal reform was achieved by working together, bridging political divides to help break the cycle of homelessness.

Crisis – front line

And alongside your tireless campaigning, you also deliver services that help people find their way out of homelessness.

Whether on warm June days like today, or during the coldest depths of winter.

Initiatives like Skylight Centres, as one example, tackle complex homelessness challenges by adapting to local circumstances.

You are arming people with knowledge and skills, helping to meet their aspirations to build better lives for themselves.

And your evidence based approach, through world-class research, such as the Homelessness Monitor, has rightly won respect across the sector. Not least in my department.

These are huge achievements of which you can be rightly proud.

Evolving challenges

But as your report today shows, the challenge is far from over. The very name Crisis reminds us we should never lose a sense of urgency when it comes to tackling homelessness.

While levels of statutory homelessness acceptances are well below the 2003 peak, we cannot deny the numbers have been rising in recent years.

And the challenge has evolved.

Compared to 50 years ago, today's rough sleeping populations are younger, with more women and more foreign nationals.

Half have mental health issues and many more have alcohol and substance abuse problems.

Perhaps most shocking is the average age of death: just 47 years old.

This is simply unacceptable and does not reflect the country we should be and why dealing with it is a key priority for me.

We share your ambition

That is why this government is committed not just to managing or reducing the impact of rough sleeping, but ending it for good.

We are the first government to make such a commitment.

A commitment to halve rough sleeping in this Parliament and eliminate it entirely by 2027.

And to do this we need to tackle the underlying issues.

Fixing the broken housing market

Clearly that starts with secure and affordable housing.

We need to build more homes to meet people's aspirations for a place of their own.

Successive governments have not built enough and the result is a broken housing market and a generation of people held back through no fault of their own.

But we are starting to change this.

Since 2010, we've delivered more than a million homes, including 357,000 affordable homes and 257,000 homes for rent.

Last year, we saw the biggest increase in housing supply in England for almost a decade: over 217,000 new homes.

We are taking bold steps to crack down on rogue landlords, making renting fairer and more secure and giving housing associations greater certainty over their rental income until 2025.

We will put money into schemes that make it easier for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to access or sustain tenancies in the private sector.

This will make a real difference when it comes to supporting people out of temporary accommodation.

But I am in no doubt that we have to do more to deliver the 300,000 new homes a year we will need by the middle of the next decade.

To that end, we are investing £9 billion in affordable housing.

This includes a new generation of council housing.

We are giving £1 billion of funding flexibility to help ambitious councils borrow more to build more.

This will support families struggling to pay their rent, because we recognize that people need greater security in their homes.

And none more so than those at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping.

Housing First

One of my very first actions as Secretary of State was to award £28 million of funding to Housing First.

It has an impressive international track record of helping people with complex needs recover, and I think offers real promise.

I pay tribute to Crisis' pivotal role as an early champion for Housing First, helping to bring this innovative scheme into the heart of conversations around rough sleeping.

The new pilot projects for Greater Manchester, the Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands Combined Authority will be an important step that supports around 1000 people.

But I recognise that this is a nationwide problem and I am looking forward to seeing the difference these projects make and assessing the case for a national roll-out thereafter.

Action across government

These pilot programmes expand on steps we are already taking to tackle homelessness.

Firstly, on funding, we've allocated over a billion pounds to reduce and prevent homelessness.

This includes more upfront funding available for local authorities to encourage them to be more proactive – in preventing someone from becoming homeless rather than picking up the pieces after it has happened.

Earlier intervention and prevention are also very much the focus for the Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force in April.

These important reforms are transforming the way that homeless services are delivered.

For the first time, putting prevention at the heart of our response to homelessness...

...by making sure councils, public services and the voluntary sector work together to actively prevent homelessness for a broader range of people...

... regardless of whether they're a family or a single person, what has put them at risk or if they have a local connection to the area.

Local authorities are getting support from a team of specialist advisors to carry out these new duties.

This is the kind of joined-up approach that will ensure people get the help they need before they face losing their home.

Rough sleeping

And yes, we've redoubled our focus on rough sleeping, through the new Rough Sleeping Initiative.

At its heart is a £30 million fund, targeted at local authorities with high levels of rough sleeping.

In recent months they have been developing targeted plans to achieve reductions in rough sleeping in each of their areas.

And I'm pleased to confirm how this fund will be allocated.

We will fund local areas to hire more than 500 new staff, whose job will be solely focused on rough sleeping.

This will include more outreach workers to connect with people on the streets, specialist mental health and substance misuse workers and dedicated co-ordinators to drive down rough sleeping numbers.

It will also provide for over 1700 new bed spaces, including both emergency and settled accommodation.

And in each area, funds will be put to use where they are most needed.

For example, here in Westminster we will deliver new Housing First units, bed spaces for women and couples and extend existing night shelter provision.

Or in Southend, where there will be specialist outreach workers for those who have experienced domestic abuse and accommodation to cater for their older population.

Or in Manchester, where funds will be directed towards staff working with those leaving prison and young people.

Equally as importantly, the Rough Sleeping Initiative Team – a team of experts from across regional and local government, agencies and charities – will support this work and ensure that resources are applied effectively.

This team will continue to work in partnership with staff in each area to support local authorities, their voluntary sector partners and others to see that this work delivers the real change we need.

They will also be holding local authorities to account and see that this investment will help people escape rough sleeping – for good.

Jeremy Swain

And today, I am also pleased to announce that the Rough Sleeping Initiative will be led by Jeremy Swain.

Jeremy is an outstanding candidate for this position and he brings with him 30 years of invaluable front-line experience.

Jeremy will take up his post in July when we will also publish our Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The strategy – informed by the valuable contributions of our rough sleeping advisory panel, and I know many of you in this room have been working on that, and building on the work of the Rough Sleeping Initiative...

...will set out our ambitions to move towards a housing-led system that intervenes quickly and prioritises finding people a home at the earliest possible stage.

While I will be setting out further details in July, what I can tell you is that our focus will be in three core areas: prevention, intervention and recovery – so that by 2027, nobody should have to sleep on our streets.

Beyond that, I will continue to work with you to respond to the broader challenges of homelessness highlighted by the [Crisis report](#) published today and turning the vision of a place you can call home into a reality.

Grenfell

As we meet today, my thoughts are also with another community in this city.

One that has suffered beyond our imagination.

The survivors of and those grievously affected by profound personal loss from

the Grenfell Tower fire.

Later this afternoon I will make a statement to the House of Commons as we prepare to mark one year since this horrific and avoidable tragedy.

This is an extremely painful time for a community that has suffered so much.

The public inquiry has laid bare the terrible human cost through the extraordinary tributes paid by families and friends.

They remind us that the decisions we take, the work we do are about individual people, individual lives.

We will not shrink from our commitments to them, the justice they seek and ensuring that the lessons learned from this disaster are applied.

Conclusion

In closing, I wanted to start where I began.

In commending Crisis in marking your 50th year.

In underlining the huge difference you have made.

In acknowledging work that remains incomplete.

But I am in no doubt that the passion, the drive, the utter commitment that you have shown over so many years will remain.

Challenging government yes, but working with government too.

To deliver the changes we need for some of our most vulnerable.

To provide them with the stability and safety of a home.

That mission remains and is one we must all support.

I wish you all success for the remainder of today's conference and all the amazing work you do.

Thank you very much.