

Breaking Down Barriers

Unlocking Society's Full Potential

Changing Lives
May 2024



Our manifesto for change

As the country heads to the polls, we have set out a manifesto for how the next government could break down barriers for those facing multiple disadvantage and social exclusion and ensure that everyone in society realises their full potential.

Who we are

At Changing Lives, we believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to reach their potential. We are experts in working with people experiencing the most challenging of circumstances, providing holistic support to help people to go on to lead happy, fulfilling lives. We work across multiple – often interconnected – themes to address the most common causes of social exclusion and long-term deprivation including homelessness, addiction, abuse and exploitation, unemployment, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Our expertise is drawn from working with over 15,000 people a year in frontline services that provide a variety of support including accommodation, outreach, treatment, therapeutic group and one to one work, community integration, and access to benefits, training and employment. Our support is centred around the person, focusing on their aspirations and building on their strengths, advocating for people, and working in partnership with other agencies.

Our vision for society

We believe that people should not be defined by what has happened to them but that, with the right support and the right systems in place, everyone has the potential to live a flourishing life.

As a charity delivering frontline services, we hear firsthand from those affected by government policies and we seek to amplify the voices of those not often heard by those in positions of power. People have told us about their hopes and ambitions, but also about the barriers that they face to moving on from their difficult experiences.

Society's wellbeing is interconnected with the wellbeing of every individual within it. By tackling the root causes of disadvantage and the systems that keep people trapped in poverty, addiction and trauma, we can create a society where everyone is able to realise their full potential. Together we can find solutions to the thorny problems faced by our communities and ensure equitable treatment of all members of society.

Priorities for the next government

We have identified four key priorities that we believe should be at the forefront of any political agenda to create a flourishing society.

Prevention

Too often people only become eligible for support when they reach crisis point – both a traumatic experience for the individuals and at great cost to the public purse. We need to embed a preventative mindset in policy and practice to address challenges people face before they escalate and people find themselves embedded in cycles and systems that are hard to move on from.

Resilience

Many public services that our society relies upon are reaching breaking point and urgent action is needed to bring stability and resilience to essential services. This includes the voluntary sector who play an essential role in supporting people when times are tough.

Support

People experiencing challenging times and associated social exclusion are in difficult situations even when the economy is flourishing. When times are hard nationally, they are disproportionately affected and need additional support to bring stability to their lives. We need a support system that prioritises building trusted relationships and empowering people to build their own way out of exclusion.

Equality

Too many of our systems are designed with the needs of men in mind, leaving services inaccessible to women. It is vital that we move away from a one-size-fits-all mentality and take a gender-informed approach to policy and commissioning.

We therefore ask all parliamentary candidates to commit to the following pledges:

- **Prevention:** Prioritise tackling the challenges that people face before they escalate.
- **Resilience:** Ensure that people can access stable and resilient public services, including those delivered by the third sector.
- **Support:** Consider the needs of and empower those experiencing the greatest levels of disadvantage and social exclusion.
- **Equality:** Ensure that the gender-specific needs of women are considered across government policy.

Taking action

Commitment to these priorities will require action, therefore we have also developed a series of proposed solutions to challenges that will be faced by the next government.

We would like to see:

Short-term measures to ensure that people are not left destitute under Universal Credit, alongside long-term reforms to the welfare system.

Reforms to commissioning processes to ensure public money is spent most effectively, including long-term, sustainable funding for public services that reflects the actual cost of delivery.

Ambitious targets for building new social homes and other affordable housing options.

Commitment to a housing-led approach that prioritises giving people their own home with their own front door at the earliest opportunity, alongside more intensive supported housing options for those who need and want it.

Continued funding for specialist support for people with multiple barriers to work, including ongoing support to help people settle into and maintain new jobs.

An ambition to reduce the number of people in prison and clear plan for delivery, including more consistent provision of pre-court diversion and investment in the probation service and commissioned service providers.

Increased access to safe, gender-specific accommodation for women fleeing abuse and exploitation.

A strategic approach to adult sexual exploitation addressed through an updated modern slavery strategy.

Commitment to the full implementation of the funding recommendations made in the Dame Carol Black review and revision of success measures to focus on quality of service over numbers in treatment.

Policy solutions by theme

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The challenges and solutions have all been developed based on what we see and hear in our services and feedback from staff and the people we support.



Reforms to the Welfare System

The rising cost of living has had a devastating impact on people with existing vulnerabilities, many of whom were already deeply affected by experiences of poverty and disadvantage. Our current welfare system is not providing a sufficient safety net to avoid people falling into poverty and destitution.

Challenges to be addressed:

The welfare system should act as a safety net when people face hard times and provide a foundation for those who are able to seek employment, but it is failing at both of these goals.

We have seen increasing numbers of people who are unable to make ends meet and incurring unsustainable levels of debt. Our [Priced Out](#) report, published in August 2022, found that over 80% of our services have seen an increase in the number of people who are no longer able to make ends meet and over 75% of our services have seen an increase in the number of people incurring unsustainable levels of debt. This in turn is having negative impacts on people's mental and physical health and can put people at increased risk of abuse and exploitation.

Young people aged under 25 are among the most affected. Despite often having the same financial commitments as over 25s they are only eligible for a lower level of Universal Credit. Our calculations in 2022 estimated that a young person living in self-contained supported accommodation will be faced by a deficit of almost £150 per month after paying for food and utilities. The increase in Universal Credit rates introduced in April 2024 will barely scratch the surface of this deficit.



Several features of the Universal Credit system further entrench poverty. Many people receiving the full amount that they are entitled to are struggling to make ends meet, so it is even harder for those subject to deductions. This includes people who rely on advance payment loans while they wait five weeks for their first payment, immediately putting them into debt.

The punitive nature of sanctions often acts as a hindrance rather than a motivation to those seeking employment. Sanctions have people constantly on edge rather than motivating them, which can have a spiralling effect on mental health and wellbeing. People receiving Universal Credit are often required to attend multiple courses and training programmes or risk being sanctioned, however our staff report that they see better results when people engage in our employment services voluntarily, and when staff are given the time to focus on what is right for the person, rather than everything being motivated by avoiding sanctions and box-ticking.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see short-term measures to address the immediate issues with the Universal Credit system which are leaving people destitute, as well as long-term reform to the welfare system so that it supports people out of poverty rather than entrenching people further into poverty.

There is public support for ensuring that everyone can afford the essentials, including those on benefits. A [YouGov survey](#) in August 2023 found that around 3 in 4 people believe that even people on out of work benefits should be able to afford utilities and food that allows them and their children to eat a balanced and healthy diet. Additionally, the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) found that 66% of the public think the basic rate of Universal Credit is too low.

Short-term measures to ensure that people are not left destitute under Universal Credit:

- Increase both Universal Credit rates and the benefit cap to take into account current living costs and ensure that they are regularly updated in line with inflation.
- Increase rates for people under 25 to the same level as those 25 or over.
- Replace advance payments for Universal Credit with a non-repayable grant.
- Restrict the amount that can be deducted from the Universal Credit Standard Allowance to 5% until rates are increased to reflect the high cost of living.
- Increase the Local Housing Allowance to 50% of market rates and update it annually.

Long-term reforms to the welfare system:

We would like to see a welfare system that is incentive-based rather than sanction-based, and that ensures that people's ability to afford the basics is not dependent on their work-related activity.

Such a system would end sanctions for failing to attend appointments or engage in sufficient work-related activity, and instead provide incentives to work without driving people into poverty if they do not engage. This could be achieved by providing two levels of benefits:

- A guaranteed basic level of benefits for everyone regardless of how much work-related activity they do – this should be enough to cover the basics (food, rent, utilities etc.).
- An enhanced level of benefits for those who either cannot work or who are engaging in work-related activities.

To prevent deductions causing financial hardship, an independent body would determine a basic level of income, similar to the Low Pay Commission who set the minimum wage. Deductions on benefits would not be able to take a person below this level.

Alongside this, all benefits claimants would be provided with employment and financial management support to help people overcome barriers to work; ensuring that they are accessing the correct benefits in the meantime and providing training in financial planning and literacy. This should include specialist support which could be outsourced to specialist organisations – e.g. people with multiple barriers to work; people facing digital exclusion.

The removal of sanctions would allow people to build a positive trusting relationship with the coach providing this support as their role would be solely to assist without simultaneously threatening people with financial hardship. In order to maintain full separation of benefits decisions from employment support, the coach would not be responsible for decisions on which level of benefits a person would be getting but would provide evidence that someone should get an enhanced level of benefits and advocate on their behalf.



Funding and Commissioning

The voluntary sector plays an essential frontline role in supporting people when times are tough, but are facing increasing funding challenges, meaning services are having to close their doors.

Challenges to be addressed:

There is a pervasive idea that all charities are made up of volunteers who give their time freely to make cups of tea and offer a listening ear or maybe a package of food or other essentials. A warm, rosy picture of people doing good for their fellow citizens, funded by benevolent philanthropists.

However, many charities, such as Changing Lives, are made up of skilled professionals who deliver vital public services. Accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, refuge for women fleeing domestic abuse, support and advocacy for people who have been subject to sexual violence and exploitation, recovery services for people experiencing addiction, and support to ensure that people who have committed crimes do not reoffend.

These services are core parts of our public infrastructure that are funded by local and national government. Yet charities are being left on the brink due to years of under-funding. At Changing Lives, many of our public service contracts have remained at the same value for years. Just below 40% of our income base has remained static for the past 6 years, with some contracts remaining static for even longer. Others have even decreased in value.

The real-terms cut in our contract value comes alongside additional costs to our services. Demand is increasing in many areas as poverty deepens. When other services close their doors, people come to us. The costs of rent and utilities have increased, as have our staffing costs. Our staff turnover has almost tripled over the past seven years and, of the staff who remain, many are having to take on second jobs.

We recognise the need for the next government to be fiscally prudent therefore, while a blanket increase in funding would be welcomed, we acknowledge that it may not be realistic until the economy recovers. However, there are changes within the funding and commissioning space that could be made without large increases in public spending.

The mechanisms by which services are funded are not fit for purpose and result in public money being spent inefficiently. Local authorities are often themselves having to compete for funding, with limited capacity to do so, or are only given short-term funding allocations, so contracts are then short-term and under-funded. Charities must put a lot of resources into applying

for grants and competing for tenders, which is especially difficult for smaller organisations, and diverts resources from frontline services. These processes often have completely unrealistic timelines. Providers are regularly expected to put together funding bids, recruit staff, mobilise services and deliver quality provision within the space of a few months, or sometimes even a few weeks.

Short-term funding is an inefficient use of public money. By the time a service is fully set up and beginning to deliver quality provision, providers must begin thinking about the end of the funding period and what will happen to the people they support. The regular risk of redundancy means skilled staff are leaving the sector for more stable jobs. Charities find themselves constantly recruiting and training new staff, or even struggling to fill vacancies, stifling their potential for innovation. Furthermore, the people we support, many of whom struggle to build trusting relationships, lose the connections they have developed when staff leave.

Finally, competition for contracts can create a 'race to the bottom' where providers compete based on how cheaply they can deliver services rather than the quality of the service provided. This creates a space where some providers making unrealistic commitments and promising to deliver services on the cheap can outbid quality providers.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see reforms to commissioning processes to ensure public money is spent most effectively, including long-term, sustainable funding for public services that reflects the actual cost of delivery.

These reforms could include:

- Setting an ambition for government contracts for delivery of public services to be a minimum of 3 years, with a target of at least 5 years. This would allow more time for services to be properly implemented and allow space for innovation.
- Ensuring that all government contracts are uprated annually in line with inflation and that local authorities are allocated sufficient funding to do the same with their contracts.
- Removing financial weighting from tenders – rather than asking who can deliver for the cheapest, assign a set amount of funding and ask for tenders to spell out what providers would do with that money.
- Ensuring that government tenders have realistic timescales for both submissions and mobilisation of services. This may vary depending on the nature of the services and current recruitment and training challenges in the relevant sector.

Housing

Every person needs a stable home to reach their full potential, but shortages of affordable housing stand as a barrier to flourishing communities.

Challenges to be addressed:

Across the country there is insufficient affordable housing, both in social housing and private rentals. This puts people at risk of homelessness and means that people in homelessness services find themselves unable to move on into permanent accommodation, at great expense to the public purse.

The shortage of houses for social rent means many people accessing our homelessness services are forced to seek private rentals. However, the high levels of competition for private rentals in many parts of the country is driving up rent prices. Local Housing Allowance was returned to the 30th percentile of local rents in April 2024, but no commitment has been made to uprate this each year. Furthermore, affordable rent levels are benchmarked against market rent levels rather than average local earnings, meaning that even 'affordable' rates are not actually affordable for people on low incomes.

Many policies and interventions are simply a sticking plaster over the wider problem which is the lack of affordable housing. Rough sleeping outreach, targeted support for people leaving prison, supported temporary accommodation – all of these things are important and worthwhile but will ultimately be unsuccessful in addressing long-term homelessness if there is nowhere to move people onto.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see ambitious targets for building new social homes and other affordable housing options.

Our asks of government are simple, albeit complex to deliver. We are asking the next government to set ambitious targets for building new social homes and to remove barriers to affordable housebuilding.



Homelessness

Tackling homelessness in all its forms lacks strategic oversight within government. Despite being a major public health emergency, it does not receive sufficient attention or funding from public health.

Challenges to be addressed:

In recent years the government has focused primarily on rough sleeping, at the expense of other forms of homelessness and those in homelessness services who face barriers to securing permanent accommodation. This disproportionately affects women who are more likely to experience hidden homelessness (e.g. sofa surfing) and exploitation that takes advantage of their housing situation.

Many people find themselves stuck in the homelessness system and unable to secure their own home until they have proved themselves 'housing ready', despite the environment of many large hostels in particular not being conducive to this recovery from trauma, deprivation and discrimination.

Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for people to obtain employment whilst living in supported exempt accommodation. Exempt accommodation providers are able to charge higher rents to cover the additional costs of providing supported housing. This is typically covered by an enhanced level of housing benefit while individuals are unemployed but, if they get a job, they become responsible for paying the higher rents themselves, which are generally unaffordable for people on low wages. This means people cannot get a job before moving out, but they also find themselves unable to secure alternative housing before they have a job as they are likely to fail affordability assessments on Universal Credit alone.

Homelessness services are also struggling to keep their doors open and are not always able to provide the full range of support needed to help people move on from homelessness. Current tendering processes with high financial weightings are creating an environment where providers could win contracts by



promising to deliver unrealistic commitments at a lower cost. A quality service requires sufficient investment and we are concerned that services run at lower and lower costs could be unsuitable and unsafe.

It has become increasingly common over recent years for commissioned funding to only cover housing management costs. This means that support organisations are becoming increasingly dependent on enhanced housing benefit revenue to provide this additional support addressing the reasons people are experiencing homelessness or where they may need help to sustain a tenancy.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see a commitment to a housing-led approach that prioritises giving people their own home with their own front door at the earliest opportunity, alongside more intensive supported housing options for those who need and want it.

We believe that the key to tackling homelessness in a person-centred way is ensuring that there are options available that give people the right support at the right time. Where possible, we want to avoid people becoming institutionalised and trapped in a system, but there are also challenges associated with a dispersed housing approach which gives people their own tenancy to manage independently.

Homelessness pathways need to be developed which allow people to step up into greater independence when they're ready, but also step down into more intensive support if circumstances change or they find that they're not as ready as they thought they were. Moving from independent living back into a hostel should be an accepted part of the process that acknowledges a person's needs at the time, rather than being seen as a failure.

This will mean investing in a range of property types, including dispersed properties that are not all located in the most deprived parts of town, and multi-occupancy sites for those who need more intensive support. This needs to include single-sex provision as women are often vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in mixed-sex buildings.

People also need opportunities to flourish regardless of where they are in the system, which includes breaking down barriers to meaningful work. We therefore recommend the introduction of a transitional period of two months to enable people who secure employment whilst living in supported exempt accommodation to find a place to live before their housing benefit entitlement is removed.



Employment

The right job at the right time with the right support can be transformational to people and communities.

Challenges to be addressed:

We know that the right job can be transformational to someone's wellbeing. The value of good work is clear on both a personal and economical level, but there needs to be a change in the government's approach to moving those who can work into employment.

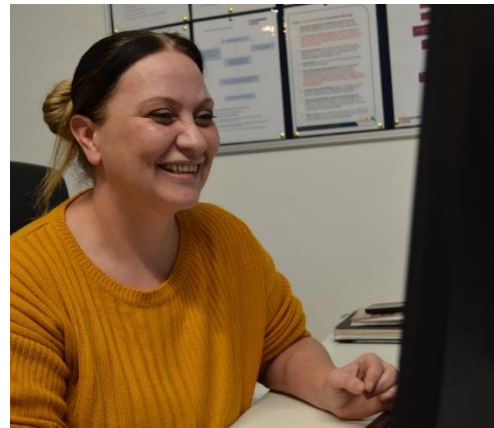
Employment is not always the first thing that people need or want to address. Despite this, it is often seen as a priority by government over other areas of people's lives. For example, there has been a big push to get people into employment after leaving prison, despite the fact that many may not feel ready for employment until they have secured stable housing and have their addiction well managed.

Many people supported by Changing Lives who have experience of multiple disadvantage and trauma need additional support to access work. Despite record job vacancies, many people we support lack the skills and confidence to apply for, obtain and sustain employment, or have histories that reduce the likelihood of being offered a job. With the right support they can overcome these barriers to work and we welcome the additional funding and programmes introduced over the past year, but we are also concerned about proposed measures that would penalise those who do not yet have access to this support.



Furthermore, we have observed a growing trend in people with poor health, particularly mental ill health, being pushed towards jobs that they may not feel ready for, or in a way that exacerbates their mental health condition(s). More work needs to be done to ensure that employers are ready to take on people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. The punitive nature of sanctions can be particularly distressing for people with mental ill health, leaving them constantly on edge rather than motivating them towards employment.

Funding for employment support often only covers support up to the point when someone gets a job and does not include in-work support. Many people who access Changing Lives' services need ongoing support in the early days of a job to help them sustain employment, and the offer of this support can be key to encouraging employers to take on riskier candidates. There has been a shift towards more in-work support through Individual Placement and Support (IPS) schemes, but there is still a cliff edge in support for many people taking on new jobs.



Finally, in-work poverty is becoming increasingly common. While we welcome measures to support people into higher paying jobs if that is their ambition, the reality is that there will always be a need for people in lower paid jobs and indeed many people find great fulfilment in these jobs. Employment should pay enough for people to stay out of poverty.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see continued funding for specialist support for people with multiple barriers to work, including ongoing support to help people settle into and maintain new jobs.

We have already discussed the complete overhaul of the welfare system that we believe is necessary to encourage people into work while ensuring they have enough income to afford the basics. As part of this system, employment should be the end goal, not the primary goal. We would like to see an acknowledgement from the next government that services should focus on the foundations for employment first (e.g. housing, recovery) and a commitment to greater cross department collaboration to achieve these foundations.

Support rather than sanctions need to be at the heart of our welfare and employment systems. This needs to include specialist support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage and complex barriers to work.

Crime and Justice

Everyone deserves to live a life safe from crime but, with our prisons overflowing, is the current approach working?

Challenges to be addressed:

Our prisons are currently overflowing and the predominant narrative has been one of giving people tougher sentences and sending them to prison for longer, despite evidence from the [Sentencing Council](#) indicating that using more severe sentences does not have a significant deterrent effect on the person sentenced or the general population.

Diversion at an early stage is key to reducing reoffending but there is not always something to divert people to, so we are setting them up to fail. There is currently a postcode lottery with regard to both police diversionary practices and the level of support available to people, meaning people are not being given fair access to justice across the country. We are concerned that the new out of court disposals (OOCs) introduced through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 will drive people further into the criminal justice system if support is not provided to help them comply with conditions.

There are still several gaps in support available for people, even in areas where there are well-funded OOC or diversion schemes, including when a person is released under investigation or on bail; when a person is awaiting trial and/or sentencing; when a person has received a discharge or fine at court; and when a person completes mandatory probation supervision. This means that if someone either cannot access a diversion scheme or reoffends after completion of such a scheme, they may not receive support again until their offending has reached sufficient severity to receive a community, suspended or custodial sentence.

Women require a gender-specific approach and many of the commitments in the Female Offender Strategy were supported by the VCSE sector, but progress has been slow and many recent government announcements have been contrary to what was in the strategy. We are still seeing too many women imprisoned for low-level offences, many of whom have been victims of crime far more severe than those they were imprisoned for.

Community sentences allow the opportunity for people to address the reasons for their offending without the disruption to their lives and cost to the public purse caused by prison, however community sentence requirements are not always meaningful or realistic and are delivered by an immensely overstretched probation service.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see an ambition to reduce the number of people in prison and clear plan for delivery, including more consistent provision of pre-court diversion and investment in the probation service and commissioned service providers.

We need to radically re-think what we mean by 'justice' – it is not entirely 'just' to hold a person 100% responsible for their actions when a whole host of injustices have led them to this point. Overly punitive measures may right the injustice of the crime, but only add to wider injustices and do nothing to address the underlying societal issues. Government policy and outcome measurements should see a person ending up in prison for a low-level offence not as an indicator of justice being served, but rather an indicator of failures earlier in the system.

To achieve an ambition of a reduction in the prison population, the next government needs to tackle the postcode lottery of pre-court diversion and out of court disposal schemes where people are able to address their offending behaviour in the community and ideally in safe, trauma-informed, gender-specific spaces.

Such schemes should be part of a properly funded, trauma-informed whole system approach to offending. Alongside mandatory engagement requirements, support should also be available for people to voluntarily engage with regardless of where they are on their criminal justice journey. Ideally the same support worker should be able to support people at all stages prior to, or even beyond, custody to ensure continuity of support.

As the support offer improves, there will also need to be targeted efforts to ensure community sentence requirements make the most of the available options, rather than operating as box-ticking exercises. This could be done by increasing magistrates' and judges' awareness of support provided by probation and VCSE providers.

Violence Against Women and Girls

We have seen great progress made in awareness and responsiveness to violence against women and girls over the last few years but there is still more to be done, particularly for women seen as too 'complex' for mainstream services.

Challenges to be addressed:

Since the tragic case of Sarah Everard brought violence against women and girls (VAWG) to the forefront of public attention we have seen much progress made, particularly around domestic abuse and rape, but there is still much to be done.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced requirements for local authorities to provide a range of refuge options for people fleeing domestic abuse but given funding pressures this has been difficult for councils to deliver. This tends to result in support systems which are inaccessible to those seen as 'too complex'. Extremely vulnerable women are denied refuge provision and instead housed in mainstream supported accommodation, which is often mixed-sex and lacks availability of therapeutic interventions. It is even worse for those whose abuse and exploitation happens outside of an intimate relationship, as they are not entitled to the same level of support as those fleeing domestic abuse (e.g. they cannot apply for social housing outside of their local authority area).



The consequences of not addressing violence against women and girls can be fatal. Women in the North East are more likely to die prematurely and spend more of their lives in poor health compared to the rest of the country¹. There have been several deaths of women in Changing Lives' services who had experienced horrendous abuse but whose deaths were not officially considered to be a result of abuse, meaning that no reviews (e.g. Domestic Homicide Reviews) were conducted.



Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see increased access to safe, gender-specific accommodation for women fleeing abuse and exploitation.

It is not enough to simply place duties on local authorities to house people fleeing abuse without considering whether they have the ability to fulfil these duties. With many local authorities in financial crisis, urgent investment from national government is needed to provide suitable refuge provision across the country, including both dispersed and multi-occupancy options.

The next government must also take action to break down barriers to social housing for people who have experienced abuse and exploitation. This includes extending the rights offered to victim of domestic abuse through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (such as right to apply for social housing outside of their local area) to all victims of exploitation.

¹ [TSWF Final Report \(agendaalliance.org\)](https://agendaalliance.org/)

Adult Sexual Exploitation

When we take action to address people's vulnerabilities, we also reduce their risk of exploitation.

Challenges to be addressed:

The media often gives a narrow view of exploitation – focusing on smuggling people on small boats or County Lines – but modern day slavery and exploitation has a varied picture. People who are subject to exploitation often experience multiple types of exploitation – criminal, sexual etc. – but both public and professional understanding is often limited to the most stereotypical cases.

Changing Lives supports many women who have experienced adult sexual exploitation (ASE), a form of sexual abuse and modern day slavery that is poorly understood and often overlooked. This lack of recognition means that support often drops off once someone turns 18 and women are seen as 'making poor choices' rather than being subject to abuse and exploitation. Victims of ASE are often seen by the police to have consented to their abuse due to a lack of understanding of the way that grooming and coercion impacts on a person's ability to consent to sex.

It is not enough to simply prosecute perpetrators. People who have experienced exploitation are often dependent on their exploiter for things like money, accommodation and food. Simply prosecuting and convicting the perpetrator(s) leaves people just as vulnerable to future exploitation, and many feel they cannot report their experience to the police because they fear losing the ability to meet their physical and emotional needs.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see a strategic approach to adult sexual exploitation addressed through an updated modern slavery strategy.

As a starting point, the next government should introduce a statutory definition of adult sexual exploitation and guidance on how to identify and address this horrific form of abuse. This is the necessary foundation for other measures such as improved data collection to better understand the prevalence of ASE.

Addiction and recovery

People experiencing addiction face ongoing stigma and exclusion from services.

Challenges to be addressed:

The government's 2021 drug strategy *From Harm to Hope* has some excellent commitments for people experiencing addiction but some concerns remain, including the fact that drug policy is primarily seen as a criminal



justice issue and the lack of gender-specific responses. The government had only committed funding for three years, despite the recommendations in Dame Carol Black's review setting out the need for increased funding over the next five years and beyond. This leaves services unable to conduct long-term planning and facing ongoing recruitment challenges.

The strategy also focuses on both numbers in treatment and delivering 'world class treatment services'. In practice, we are seeing a much bigger emphasis on the numbers in treatment at the expense of the quality of the services. Higher numbers in treatment without also increasing service capacity means that providers are unable to provide more intensive treatment options and the quality of service is reduced.

Our proposed solutions:

We would like to see commitment to the full implementation of the funding recommendations made in the Dame Carol Black review and revision of success measures to focus on quality of service over numbers in treatment.

The work has already been done by Dame Carol Black to identify what is needed to enable the recovery sector to support people into flourishing lives – the onus is now on the next government to implement the funding recommendations.

Alongside this, there are some changes that we would like to see to the way that the government approaches addiction and recovery policy. Firstly, we recommend that the next government position drug policy within health

rather than criminal justice, including moving the Joint Combatting Drugs Unit under the leadership of a health minister.

Secondly, there need to be changes to how success is measured in addiction and recovery services. Quality of addiction services, measured by successful completions and achievement of personal goals, should be seen as a priority over numbers in treatment. It makes little economic sense to push so many into treatment that caseloads are unmanageable and fewer people move on from the service. Instead, allowing service providers the space to offer a quality service will ensure that, in the long run, more are able to move into treatment because space has been created by those who have successfully achieved recovery.

Finally, the gender-specific needs of women need to be addressed. We recommend a follow-up to the Dame Carol Black review that focuses specifically on women's experiences of addiction and access to recovery services.





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