

I am speaking to you on behalf of Julian House, a local charity providing life-changing and life-saving support for vulnerable people in B&NES; and as Chair of the B&NES homelessness partnership. All the organisations in the partnership, including Julian House, will be impacted by proposed funding cuts.

We are deeply concerned about the disproportionate 34% cut to the housing-related support budget that has been proposed. We know that the council's funding settlement was not adequate. But such a drastic reduction would be akin to pulling the rug out from under the most vulnerable people in our community – those without a place to call home. Its consequences would be profound, far-reaching, and ultimately counter-productive.

The 3rd sector contracted services that are delivered in B&NES are already drastically underfunded. With no uplift to some of the contracts for nearly a decade, we are already subsidising services now. This is entirely unsustainable, and means that any cuts to funding are likely to result in services closing at a time when levels of homelessness are soaring and people need them most.

We know, from years of experience, that investing in housing-related support saves money in the long run. Every person helped off the streets is one less critical case for the B&NES Housing Options Team, Adult social care, emergency services, the criminal justice system, and health to name a few.

A 34% cut would be a false economy, leading to a rise in those very costs to the local authority. The local authorities' temporary accommodation spend would significantly rise without some of the 178 beds 'off the streets' and supported housing beds currently available to homeless people.

National campaigning organising Crisis has found that people sleeping on the street are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence.

More than one in three people sleeping rough have been deliberately hit or kicked or experienced some other form of violence whilst homeless.

Homeless people are over nine times more likely to take their own life than the general population. The average age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 46 for men and 42 for women.

These are not just statistics: these are local people accessing local services. They are your constituents of Bath and North East Somerset.

We believe and practice collaboration, in finding solutions together. The pandemic showed us the strength of our relationships and ability to work efficiently together. With resources from B&NES Council, over a few days, we worked together and got 'Everyone In', meeting the governments directive and leaving a lasting legacy on the supported housing pathway.

It is positive that we have more time, that you have listened to this part of our request, however we have heard no change to the devastating 34% proposed cut to funding and we urge you to reconsider.

Together, the B&NES Homeless Partnership will develop a strategic plan with B&NES Council officers that minimises harm and maximises efficiency – but we need the funding to do this effectively.

Providers were only informed of the specific, in-scope housing-related support contracts for these proposed cuts on the 3rd January and yet 8 working days later we were able to provide detailed and thoughtful responses to your consultation – including input from our service users.

We submitted our own organisational responses and have started to explore alternatives that will best meet the needs of the most vulnerable. But we cannot bring the level of expertise, specialisms and added social and economic value that is delivered every day in B&NES, for free.

I urge you to reconsider the proposed 34% cut to housing-related support funding. The cuts would strip away crucial resources, leaving the most vulnerable dangerously exposed and without a safety net, costing more in the long run and hindering our collective efforts to create a Bath and North East Somerset where everyone has a safe and secure place to call home.

My words alone cannot capture the true impact of this decision. Today, I have the pleasure of introducing two individuals who live this reality every day: Julian House service users Henry and Becki. They will share

their experiences and perspectives – a powerful reminder of why we must work together to find solutions that truly lift people up, not further marginalise and exclude.