

Speech by Andy Burnham

Mayor of Greater Manchester

A HOMELESSNESS EMERGENCY

The Mustard Tree

Manchester

8th May 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Last week Parliament voted, rightly, to declare a Climate Change Emergency.

But it left me thinking: when is the declaration of a Homelessness Emergency?

Surely, when hundreds are dying every year on British streets, that is exactly what is needed.

People in doorways is in danger of being accepted as just an inevitable and unchangeable fact of modern life.

This complacency must be challenged.

Just one night out damages health, physical and mental.

This is a humanitarian crisis of our own making - and entirely fixable.

We need to approach it with a new mindset and a new urgency and that's why I wanted to make this speech today.

I frequently receive letters from young people upset by what they see on the streets where they live.

They cannot understand why it can be allowed to happen. They are crying out for more to be done to help people.

So what do we tell them?

That we can't afford to solve it?

Or that it is too complicated and we can't focus on it when we are also dealing with Brexit?

Neither is remotely true and that needs saying.

Frankly, I am fed up of Brexit being used as a convenient excuse for inaction on a range of issues. Issues that can literally be life-and-death for our fellow citizens.

It is outrageous that, almost two years after the Grenfell fire, there are people living in fear in this city every day in buildings with dangerous cladding.

And it is a source of national shame that at least 449 people died last year on British streets for want of a home.

We are in danger of sinking into a national malaise where nothing gets fixed and everything drifts.

It's time to snap out of it.

So today I call on Parliament to act immediately to end the cladding scandal.

It should also declare a Homelessness Emergency.

In effect, that is what we have done in Greater Manchester.

Since November last year, we have been running emergency provision on an on-going basis through our A Bed Every Night scheme.

This is on top of what is provided day-in, day-out by so many dedicated people in our city-region.

We are the first part of the country to do this.

Today I want to share what we have learned so far and set out what comes next.

I believe our early analysis of A Bed Every Night is a game-changer for the homelessness debate in this country. It suggests that it could cost almost the same to do the right thing as it does to do nothing.

It blows apart the argument that we can't afford to act on rough sleeping.

It also shows that real change can be achieved quickly, and lives saved, if the same scheme is adopted across the country.

What is absolutely certain is that the Government's target of ending rough sleeping by 2027 is nowhere near good enough and urgently needs to be reviewed.

So I am offering to work with the Government to share our experience to help change the national debate and to demonstrate that it makes financial as well as moral sense to do the right thing.

The journey so far

But first let me describe how we arrived at this point.

It is two years to the day since I did my first walk-around the city centre on my first day in office.

I have been out again today and I can say with genuine confidence that we are making progress.

Back in 2017, there was already a huge amount of good work going on through the Manchester Homelessness Partnership, the Big Change Fund, and organisations in every one of our ten boroughs.

But in the last two years, that has intensified and people have increasingly begun to pull in the same direction.

The power of that simple change alone is awesome.

Greater Manchester is on a journey towards a better understanding of the homelessness crisis and, hopefully, better solutions to it.

We are not there yet but we are getting there.

Through the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network, we have built a strong partnership between our ten councils, public services and the voluntary, faith and business sectors.

We have developed a clear strategy based around the four Rs – reduction, respite, recovery and reconnection – and are bringing forward new policies under each heading.

I have no doubt that it can still be improved. But this is a prime example of doing politics differently - developing policy with people rather than dropping it on them - and it is stronger for that.

The A Bed Every Night scheme began as a call from our voluntary and faith sectors following the winter of 2017/18. Greater Manchester had provided an enhanced level of support from the statutory minimum, opening provision every night when the temperature was below freezing, but the clear feedback was it didn't work.

Opening one night only to close the next was confusing and did not give people stability.

It was only when the 'Beast from the East' arrived, and people were in the same place for two weeks, that things began to change.

Support workers got to know those using the service, built a relationship and helped some into fixed accommodation.

So the question rightly arose: could we open every night through the winter of 18/19?

This was debated at the July meeting of the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network and it was felt to be the right thing to try to do.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority agreed to provide the main up-front funding with our 10 councils agreeing to commit funding that would be spent through the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

Charitable donations raised through the Mayor's Homelessness Fund – particularly through Vincent Kompany's Tackle4Mcr - providing back-up and crucial confidence to proceed.

In truth, A Bed Every Night was pulled together very quickly during the latter part of last year.

It has not been perfect, I know that. The nature of the provision and referral processes have varied across GM.

We have tried to take feedback on board as we have gone along.

But it is undeniable that, in the six months it has been running, it has made a positive difference.

Overall, 1423 separate individuals have been accommodated through A Bed Every Night.

Of those, 480 people – over a third – have moved on to a more suitable housing solution.

For a new public policy initiative that has only been running for six months, that is a significant achievement.

It is testimony to the commitment of literally hundreds of staff and volunteers across Greater Manchester and today I want to recognise that and thank people for it.

One of the reasons it has worked is because of the simple principle that, once accommodated, people can stay in the same place.

It is a simple fact of life that, when people are settled in one place and their basic needs are being met, they can start to move forward again.

I have long felt that an effective respite service could pay for itself in part or even in full by reducing the call on other public services.

If we can prove that, it would be a game-changer in the homelessness debate.

Crisis have estimated that, if one person is left to sleep rough for a year, it can cost public services over £20,128.

At £32 per person per night, it costs £11,680 for someone to stay for a year in A Bed Every Night.

When you face up to the fact that it costs public bodies a lot of public money to do nothing about rough sleeping, it creates a moral imperative for more urgent action.

We need a society that picks people up as soon as they fall rather than picks up the pieces after they have been left shattered for months.

One-year pilot

So the question arises of where we go from here, knowing what we now know about what a service like A Bed Every Night can achieve.

The reason why I call for the declaration of a homelessness emergency to tackle rough sleeping is that it would give a clear signal to public bodies everywhere to prioritise this issue and start acting preventatively.

There is no reason at all why other areas can't set up a similar service.

Devolution has made it easier for us to focus but it is not a prerequisite.

There is some evidence that a small percentage of people have come to Greater Manchester because of the higher level of provision compared to other areas.

The answer to that is not to scale back what we are doing but for other places to do the same.

But, whatever happens nationally or in other places, here in Greater Manchester we face a more immediate decision about the future of A Bed Every Night.

It fills a gap in provision that otherwise would not be addressed by individual public bodies or the voluntary and community sector alone.

It could not possibly be right to dismantle it.

So I am determined to extend ABEN for a second phase, to run for 12 months from June this year.

We will continue to fund it on the existing basis for the rest of this month.

Because of the work we are doing, the Institute of Global Homelessness has declared Greater Manchester one of its 'vanguard cities'.

Dame Louise Casey, who chairs the Institute, recently visited us to provide feedback on A Bed Every Night

In line with the advice that Dame Louise gave us, and from what we have heard from people on the ground, this second phase will be different from the initial scheme.

We need to build on our learning from last winter, improve our offer, its quality and consistency, and continue to build the pathways that support individuals from the street and into a home, a job and a future.

We can't accommodate residents from other parts of the country on an on-going basis so we will be tightening our eligibility criteria. We won't leave anyone on the street but we will move quickly to reconnect people with their place of origin.

The second phase will involve more people and a broader range of organisations, both GM-based and national, who have a stake in homelessness.

For instance, positive negotiations are well advanced with the Ministry of Justice.

I have raised my concern with them about number of people I have met on my early morning walk-about who have been released from prison straight to the streets.

Just this morning I met somebody on Market Street in that same, unacceptable, position.

Whilst the proposal awaits final sign off, the Ministry of Justice are looking to allow the Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company to directly fund A Bed Every Night places for those in the Criminal Justice System who are sleeping rough, either directly on release from prison or whilst on a community order, to reduce the risk of reoffending. I am grateful to them for their positive approach to discussions.

Phase two of A Bed Every Night will also see us strengthen our partnership with the NHS.

We have already put in place a homelessness and health programme which has delivered: a unique commitment not to discharge anyone

from hospital onto the street; enhanced mental health support with parts of Greater Manchester now offering checks, assessments, screening and counselling to people in temporary accommodation; and improved access to sexual health screening, immunisations, dental care and smoking cessation and substance misuse services.

Support is being provided by NHS colleagues on a voluntary basis and I want to make particular mention of Dr Zahid Chauhan from Oldham who launched a new social enterprise 'Homeless Friendly' which helps services become just that; Urban Village Medical Practice for their ground-breaking outreach work and who have around 850 registered homeless patients; and the multi-disciplinary Homeless Alliance Response Team in Rochdale who volunteer their time to run services out of a soup kitchen there.

We will independently evaluate progress over the 12-month period and further refine our response to the eradication of rough-sleeping through this iterative approach.

Given its potential impact on health costs, I am pleased to say that The King's Fund have agreed to work in partnership with us to prepare the Cost Benefit Analysis for the homelessness policy framework we are developing in GM.

This extension of A Bed Every Night is a significant statement of intent and a reflection that all parts of our public service increasingly see homelessness as a shared problem.

Too often our systems contribute to homelessness and stop us from preventing it. Doing something meaningful about it has become the test-case for whether devolution in Greater Manchester can make a difference and whether we are truly prepared to do things differently here as we like to claim.

A Bed Every Night offers a step up for those on the streets but also provides a safety net for those who are at risk of falling onto them.

That is why it needs to become embedded as part of our whole-system approach.

It needs to be that immediate emergency provision that enables us to identify the next steps and the pathways to health services and accommodation to meet the needs of each individual.

It is not a replacement for the many excellent services that already exist across Greater Manchester. But it can be an effective gateway to them.

But A Bed Every Night was always predominantly about only one of our four Rs – respite. It is not a solution on its own.

It now needs to be backed up with a range of other interventions to create a system-wide response to homelessness.

To paraphrase what Dame Louise told us: currently, we are only bailing out the bath tub while the taps are still running.

To get towards a more durable solution, we need to turn off the taps. And that means having better answers on the other three Rs – reduction, recovery and reconnection.

So let me take each in turn.

First, reduction.

There are two issues which the Government must urgently review if we are to reduce the size of the challenge.

The first is the roll-out of Universal Credit which continues to cause great hardship and is contributing to the crisis.

The second is the Home Office policy of leaving individuals with “no recourse to public funds”.

This policy legitimises destitution and is not defensible. It is also dishonest. Because as long as it remains in place, Ministers will not be able to eradicate rough-sleeping in England.

It also penalises an area like Greater Manchester for doing the right thing and helping the Government with its asylum dispersal policy.

So it needs to be scrapped. And we also need the Government to recognise the full cost of being one of the main areas for asylum dispersal, particularly on council budgets.

So I repeat this call on Ministers: if we are to continue to play a role in the dispersal process at anything like the current level, we require funding to support our homelessness services.

Of course, a big part of reducing levels of homelessness in the long-term is to build more homes for social rent. Paul Dennett, City Mayor of Salford, has developed a plan to build 30,000 across Greater Manchester over the coming decade.

To help us make progress, we need the Government to relax the rules further on councils building homes for social rent so that we can get on with the job.

But that can't provide a solution in the short-term.

What is more likely to achieve that is a concerted drive to improve standards in the private-rented sector and taking action against unscrupulous landlords.

In fairness to the Government, they have announced that they will ban Section 21 notices or 'no fault evictions' – currently the biggest cause of homelessness in GM.

We need a clear timetable for that change.

While we wait for it, we will bring forward two significant interventions into the private-rented market.

I can announce today that the Greater Manchester Housing Providers, supported by GMCA, will soon set up a GM-wide Ethical Lettings Agency.

It will work alongside landlords to improve management standards and transfer the social landlord ethos to the private-rented sector, focusing on sustainable tenancies and not profit.

The purpose is to open up the private-rented sector to those who are excluded for reasons such as low income, high up-front costs, benefits or poor credit history. It will give our 10 councils new options in addressing housing waiting lists by acquiring 800 units across GM in its first two years.

The second intervention is the GM-wide Good Landlord scheme.

We will develop this working in partnership with landlords, tenants and others. Our aim is that landlords will be accredited as a GM Good Landlord if they maintain their properties to a decent, safe standard and treat residents fairly when it comes to rents, deposits, length of tenancies and evictions.

Let me turn to the recovery strand of our policy.

A Bed Every Night will only work if we have sufficient supported housing options for onward referral.

I am grateful to everyone who has helped establish our successful Social Impact Bond, which has provided accommodation and support for 298 people who have been on the streets the longest.

I am also pleased to say that our Housing First pilot, which aims to provide around 400 supported places, is now up and running and has placed its first person into accommodation.

I have thanked the Government for the £8 million support for Housing First and also the support for the Social Impact Bond. The SIB has shown both the need for this type of support and that it can be successfully provided. Our scheme is the most successful in the country, directly because it is delivered in partnership.

The time has come to move from pilots to permanent schemes and I call on the Government to recognise this in the spending review.

I also call on them to deepen devolution to Greater Manchester by developing a partnership similar to the one we have with health with the Department of Work and Pensions.

Devolution is allowing us to break down the silos between policy areas and move from an institutionalised approach to people-centred public services – where we focus on names not numbers.

This Greater Manchester Model would be strengthened if social security spending was brought into the mix.

Through our Working Well programme, we have already shown that we can get much better results for people and taxpayers by moving away from the top-down, tick-box regime of 'I, Daniel Blake' and towards a more supportive approach, that prioritises mental health.

If we had more flexibility over the implementation of DWP policy in Greater Manchester, we would have much greater ability to prevent homelessness.

Reconnection

So we now have a strong story to tell on reduction, respite and recovery.

The area where we need to do more work is on reconnection.

For me, this is about enabling people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

For them not to be seen as “other” nor defined by the homeless label for the rest of their lives.

The truth is it could happen to any of us, such is the insecurity of modern life.

So we need to work harder to put in place the ladders back to the life that people once had, such as a bank account, or being able to vote.

Lloyds Bank on Market Street have become the first bank in the country to provide bank accounts to people with no fixed address.

They have worked with Barnabus and the Booth Centre to secure ID for people and accounts which enable the holder to secure accommodation.

Financial exclusion makes it harder to escape homelessness. This initiative has so far authorised over 200 accounts. We are now working with Lloyds to extend the scheme across the whole of GM.

Alongside this, we need to create more supported employment opportunities.

I will continue to work with Tim Heatley, Chair of our Business Network, to establish a group of employers who are prepared to offer supported roles to people who are or who have been homeless.

For instance, this year will see the Skullfades Foundation open a community barber shop in the city centre. It will be staffed entirely by people at risk of, or who have experienced, homelessness. We are keen to support this and other initiatives like it.

Lastly, we need to be clear that Greater Manchester is not a place where people are criminalised simply because they have nowhere to go or punished for sleeping rough.

I have agreed with the Chief Constable that we will always start with the presumption of a supportive approach towards people who are genuinely homeless, signposting them to the support that is out there and an enforcement approach would only be considered where it is justified in the circumstances.

Before I conclude, it is important for me to acknowledge that one of the main reasons we have made progress in the last two years is the sheer number of people who have been prepared to step forward to help and, of course, the generosity of the Greater Manchester public.

The truth is we don't have all the public money we need to achieve our ambitions.

To run A Bed Every Night for a year, we will continue to have to raise money via charitable donations.

I remain indebted to Vincent Kompany for the magnificent support he has provided through Tackle4Mcr and to all those involved in the Raise the Roof event which will take place later this month.

Football and music are the two great forces in this city and it is amazing to see them rallying to the cause. It is a clear illustration of how the drive against homelessness is now a whole-society campaign.

We will work with colleagues in the football and music industries to continue to build the Tackle4Mcr and Raise the Roof brands.

Given the need to continue to raise funds for our work, and the need for full accountability, my final announcement is that what was the Mayor's Homelessness Fund is in the process of transferring to The Greater Manchester Mayor's registered charity.

This independent Charity has a board of trustees, many of whom are here today, and I am grateful to Tim Heatley for agreeing to serve as Chair.

This charity will in future be available to anyone who serves as Mayor. The Board of Trustees have agreed that its immediate focus will be on ending rough sleeping and supporting A Bed Every Night and, from now on, via the Charity's website which launches today, it will be the recipient of the monthly donation from my salary.

Conclusion

I am often asked: "will you meet your Manifesto pledge of ending rough sleeping?"

The honest answer is I don't know.

But, by running A Bed Every Night until the middle of 2020, we have a chance to get close.

What I can say without any doubt today is that it has been right to try.

It was right to make a rallying cry with an ambitious timetable because it has helped galvanise action.

It has led to the first fall in the number of people sleeping rough here in eight years.

And Greater Manchester is changing the national homelessness debate by showing that doing the right thing, and providing shelter, might actually cost the same as doing nothing.

I am proud that Dame Louise Casey has described Greater Manchester as “a torch in the darkness”.

But I saw for myself this morning that, while there has been undoubted progress in the two years, more is needed.

My manifesto for next year’s election will include a commitment to make A Bed Every Night permanent, if the evaluation supports it, as well as continuing the 15% donation from my own salary throughout my second term as Mayor if I am to get one.

In the end, this crisis will be solved by everyone challenging themselves to do more.

While Greater Manchester might be able to end the need for rough sleeping, we can't end homelessness on our own.

For me, good housing is as fundamental to life as good healthcare.

So I will continue to call on all of the political parties to make access to a good home a basic human right enshrined in UK law.

But I am also ready to be held to account myself at next year's Mayoral Election.

I know I haven't been able to move fast enough for some while others doubt the sincerity of my efforts.

Some people claim I have done nothing. As I hope this speech shows today, that is simply not true.

By making it today, on my two-year anniversary in office, I hope people are getting the message that this isn't a passing fad or PR stunt but a personal journey for me.

You are here because you are all part of it and I am so grateful to you and so privileged to have been able to learn so much from so many people along the way.

I am in this for the long haul. I know you are too. And we haven't come this far to fail.

We will end rough sleeping in Greater Manchester, whatever it takes.

ENDS