

Contact: Mark Parry
Communications and Press Officer
T: 01227 813196
M: 07734 595308
E: markparry@porchlight.org.uk



PRESS RELEASE: 02/02/2011

PRIVATE-RENTED ACCOMMODATION IN THE COUNTY SET TO REDUCE BY 20% WARNS CHARITY

Kent-based homelessness charity Porchlight has expressed its concern over figures released by the Department for Work and Pensions showing the availability of private-rented accommodation in the county will reduce by an average of almost 20% over the next year.

The government announced changes to the Local Housing Allowance in the Emergency Budget last year stating that the measures will "...provide a fairer and more sustainable Housing Benefit scheme." Chief Executive of Porchlight, Mike Barrett says that the opposite is a more accurate description: "The problem the changes create is two-fold. On the one-hand there will be reduced housing stock for us to move our clients into and the other hand there is an increased demand for our services. This creates a bottle neck in the system where we can't move people on who are ready to live independently in order to free up services for those who desperately need help."

The impact report also shows that 50% of people in receipt of Housing Benefit in the South East will be worse-off or "losers" under the new proposals.

Mr Barrett suggests this double blow could be the trigger for a sharp rise in homelessness in the county, particularly in rural areas: "We are already seeing increased demand for our service across the county. Such a major reduction in benefits will hit those already vulnerable to homelessness hard. With the addition of blows to the fragile economy such as the closure of Pfizer we have the ingredients for the perfect storm."

The charity's concerns are supported by figures released by the National Housing Federation which show a 25% increase in the last year of people accepted as homeless in rural areas nationwide. This is compared to an 11% increase for urban areas. The federation itself has warned that the problem could get even worse as the supply of affordable homes fails to keep up with huge waiting lists in rural areas.

###

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

1. Data from "Impacts of Housing Benefit proposals: Changes to the Local Housing Allowance to be introduced in 2011-12" (DWP 2010)

Availability of Accommodation

Availability of accommodation: Broad Rental Market Area	Current average estimate of availability of PRS accommodation	Post-reform average availability of PRS accommodation
Dover - Shepway	55%	33%
Maidstone	52%	33%
Thanet	53%	36%
Canterbury	51%	39%

Source: Based on April 2009 market evidence dataset information.

Impact of Housing Benefit Cuts

	Analysis based on an LHA caseload of :	Average maximum HB (March 2010), £/week	Estimate of number of losers	Estimate of percent of losers	Average loss per loser, £/week
South East	123,000	138	61,810	50	-12

- Source: Estimates based on the March 2010 Single Housing Benefit Extract.

- PCGC: Pension Credit Guarantee Credit; IS: income support; ESA(IR): income-related Employment and Support Allowance; JSA(IB): income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/local-housing-allowance/impact-of-changes.shtml>

3. National Housing Federation statistics:

<http://www.housing.org.uk/default.aspx?tabid=212&mid=828&ctl=Details&ArticleID=3652>

4. Porchlight, established in 1974, is a Kent wide independent local charity that works to support single, vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. In 2009-10 Porchlight helped more than 1,900 vulnerable people.

5. Porchlight provides three main support services:

Kent Outreach Service

The service supports rough sleepers and people in unsuitable temporary accommodation to find long term housing solutions. Support is offered through street outreach, local drop-in sessions and a 24 free phone helpline 0800 567 7699

Supported Accommodation

Porchlight has supported accommodation projects in Canterbury, Dover, Ashford and Ramsgate. The accommodation ranges from medium to high support. There is specific accommodation for young people aged 16-21 years old and for people suffering enduring mental ill health.

Porchlight also has several managed and shared houses which provide move-on accommodation when people are ready to live more independently.

Residents at Porchlight accommodation have a dedicated key worker that works with them to address any issues preventing the person from achieving an independent lifestyle.

Homelessness prevention

The charity works to prevent homelessness through a floating support service, which is offered to vulnerable people living in their own accommodation. We provide one to one support to people at risk of

homelessness. A floating support worker makes home visits and works with the individual to address the issues affecting their housing security.

4. Porchlight has been named as an Ending Rough Sleeping Champion as part of the government's 'No One Left Out' strategy to end rough sleeping in England by 2012

5. Porchlight is committed to involving our service users throughout all the activities of the charity. They are actively encouraged to become involved in education, employment, volunteering and service user involvement opportunities.