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Dear Mr Sharp

### **Access to Healthcare for People Experiencing Homelessness**

Thank you for your letter about the health issues affecting rough sleepers in West Berkshire and across the UK. This is something close to my heart, as someone who used to work in the homelessness sector.

NHS England has undertaken a range of work to help support the delivery of appropriate and responsive services to meet the needs of homeless people. As a result of the work carried out last year, the GP operating principles reinforced the principle that homeless people can be registered with a GP without proof of address. A leaflet was developed with the voluntary and community sector to encourage GP registration for vulnerable communities, including homeless people.

There are a number of programmes of work being delivered at a local level with the aim of supporting homeless people across Primary Care services. For example, the Healthy London Partnership has been working together with people experiencing homelessness to improve accessibility and provision of health services to ensure they are appropriate and effective in meeting this community's needs.

Currently NHS England is working with The Government Statistical Service harmonisation team who are looking to create a fully UK harmonised definition for homelessness. The UK Statistics Authority published a report recently and one of the findings was that there isn't a harmonised homelessness definition across government, and there is a lack of guidance on which data is comparable. As a response, the harmonisation team have set up a topic group to begin developing this definition. The topic group

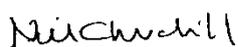
will be formed of government departments and the devolved administrations to look at the differences in homelessness definitions. Although there is not a strict deadline for the work this has been recognised as a priority over the next year.

As part of our Digital programme we have identified 66% of the population now own a smartphone and 75% go online for information about their health. However, certain demographics may be left behind as services increasingly move online. There is a very strong link between digital exclusion and social exclusion. In response to this, the Widening Digital Participation (WDP) programme was set up to provide patients with the skills and confidence to access and benefit from digital health technologies – particularly the most excluded and hardest to reach. During 2018/19, WDP will publish 6 evidenced-based digital inclusion models from previous pathfinder projects during 2017/18. They include models to improve digital health inclusion for homeless people.

There are a number of other work streams emerging across the wider health system; we are working closely with the Department of Health on the development of their strategy to eliminate street homelessness by 2027; following engagement with *Pathway* we are exploring opportunities around potentially developing a monitoring standard for homeless people; and the Primary Care and Hospital discharge team in NHS England are currently exploring work programmes to offer better access and care to homeless people.

I want to thank Healthwatch West Berkshire for your valuable contribution to our understanding of this important issue and would welcome wider engagement with the Healthwatch community on ways we can improve the consistency of support given to homeless people.

Yours sincerely



Neil Churchill  
Director for Participation and Experience  
NHS England