# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Establishing an Expert Review Panel for homelessness legislation in Wales** |
| **DATE**  | **30 March 2022** |
| **BY** | **Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change** |

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has radically reformed homelessness services in Wales. The emphasis it places on preventing and relieving homelessness - giving councils more flexibility in how they intervene and promoting a person-centred approach to supporting people who find themselves homeless – has been a ‘game-changer’, influencing policy and legislation in the rest of the UK. The Welsh Government is proud of the impact the 2014 Act has had in Wales and wants to drive forward our approach to homelessness, ensuring there is no going back.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to *reform housing law and implement the Homelessness Action Group’s recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.* This work is being taken forward with Plaid Cymru as part of the Cooperation Agreement.

In order to deliver on this, we are committed to reforming relevant housing law. Our Ending Homelessness Action Plan reflects these commitments through an action to develop and publish a Green Paper examining required legislative reform. We intend to bring forward that Green Paper later this year, and in doing so, scrutiny and evidence will be vital to ensure our reforms are meaningful, intelligible, clear and predictable.

To help us identify where changes are needed, we are establishing an Expert Review Panel whose role it will be to develop proposals and advice to the Welsh Government, consistent with direction provided by our Action Plan. This will help to ensure our laws in Wales prevent homelessness and where homelessness is experienced provide rapid access to help or housing, whichever is needed most.

I am delighted that Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Professor of Housing and Social Policy and Director of the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research at Heriot-Watt University has agreed to Chair the Legal Reform Panel. Professor Fitzpatrick has developed an outstanding reputation, working with the Scottish Government on reforms to their homelessness prevention legislation and will bring valuable experience and knowledge to this work.

I expect the Panel to work at pace, convening in the coming weeks and examining a range of issues before producing a report with recommendations for the Welsh Government within 12 months from when its work begins.

The Panel will be representative of key sectors and include skills that will allow for effective consideration of any necessary reforms. This will include partners from local government, housing associations, third sector homelessness and equality organisations and experts from academic and legal fields. In addition, I am particularly keen for those most affected by homeless services, those with lived experience of homelessness, to have a voice in this process. The Panel will be expected to ensure their voices are reflected in its work.

The Welsh Government, working with its partners in local government and the third sector, has made significant progress to end homelessness in Wales. During the pandemic it has been possible to engage with people experiencing homelessness who were previously hidden from sight. I want to grasp the opportunity presented by our ‘no one left outside’ policy to build on that success. I want to ensure the statutory architecture that shapes the way homelessness services are organised and delivered provides the foundation for ending homelessness in Wales. The Panel will play a vital role in making this happen.