

Press release

Thu 20th December 2018

Better access to post is key to ending homelessness catch-22

Citizens Advice has revealed an unnecessary catch-22 that is stopping homeless people accessing public services because they don't have a fixed postal address.

Failure to receive important correspondence from public services including banks, healthcare, Jobcentres, courts and housing services can have serious consequences. For example, homeless people could have their benefits sanctioned, drop down waiting lists and even miss out on offers of housing.

Citizens Advice is the statutory consumer watchdog for postal services. It wants Royal Mail and the Post Office to take the initiative to allow an estimated 450 homeless people a year in Oxfordshire to access postal services.

New Citizens Advice research found 8 in 10 of their advisers said homeless people always or frequently experienced difficulty accessing benefits because they don't have a fixed address. Opening a bank account was also a challenge, according to 7 in 10 advisers.

The majority (54%) of MPs surveyed by Citizens Advice said people in their constituency have struggled to access essential services because they don't have a fixed address.

Citizens Advice is recommending two potential solutions, which build on existing systems:

- A free PO box-type system should be established for homeless people. This would give them an address to put on applications and allow them to pick up their post from one of Royal Mail's 1,350 delivery offices.
- An adjusted form of Poste Restante - a system that allows you to have your post sent to and collected from one of the country's 11,500 post office branches - for homeless people. At the moment, the Post Office requires proof of address to sign up, but Citizens Advice is calling for the ID requirements to be relaxed for homeless people.

The homeless people and support workers Citizens Advice spoke to were supportive of the recommendations. In addition, 7 in 10 MPs agreed with at least one of the

proposals (72% with a free PO Box service, and 75% with an adjusted form of Poste Restante.)

Citizens Advice is also calling on the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the lead department for postal policy, to carry out a review of homeless people's access to post and how it can be improved.

Teresa Archer, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, said:

"With Christmas almost upon us, many people will be eagerly awaiting post and presents from loved ones. However, if you're homeless receiving your post can mean much more - it can be the difference between sleeping rough or receiving long-awaited accommodation.

"Our recommendations provide a simple solution to this unnecessary and damaging cycle, and homeless people, their support staff, and 4 in 5 MPs agree addressing it is important. We'd like to see Royal Mail and Post Office trial our recommendations and work with them to end this catch-22 and help homeless people get back on their feet."

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Notes to editors:

1. Shelter reports there are an [estimated 320,000 homeless people in Britain](#).
2. Citizens Advice carried out 23 face-to-face in-depth interviews between 14 and 29 2018 with homeless people and support workers at 7 different day centres across England.
3. Citizens Advice surveyed over 300 advisors, volunteers and other people working at local Citizens Advice offices across May 2018 to understand the issues our homeless clients face accessing services without a fixed address.
4. ComRes interviewed 151 MPs (79 Labour, 51 Conservative, 12 SNP, 9 other) online or by self-completion paper survey between 4 and 31 October 2018 to understand their experience of homeless constituents' access to post, and thoughts on our proposed recommendations. Data were weighted by party and region to be representative of the House of Commons. ComRes is a

member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables are available at

www.comresglobal.com

5. Citizens Advice is made up of the national charity Citizens Advice; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.
6. Together we help people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice and by influencing policymakers.
7. Citizens Advice is the statutory consumer advocate for energy and postal markets. We provide supplier performance information to consumers and policy analysis to decision makers.
8. The Citizens Advice Witness Service provides free and independent support for both prosecution and defence witnesses in every criminal court in England and Wales.
9. Citizens Advice also offers Pension Wise appointments at 500 locations across England and Wales.
10. The advice provided by the Citizens Advice service is free, independent, confidential and impartial, and available to everyone regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age or nationality.
11. To get advice online or find your local Citizens Advice in England and Wales, visit citizensadvice.org.uk
12. You can get consumer advice from the Citizens Advice consumer service on 03454 04 05 06 or 03454 04 05 05 for Welsh language speakers.
13. We helped 2.6 million people face to face, over the phone, by email and webchat in 2017-18. For full service statistics see [our monthly publication Advice trends](#).

Citizens Advice service staff are supported by more than 23,000 trained volunteers, working at over 2,500 service outlets across England and Wales

We're here for everyone. We provide free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems.

We work to fix the underlying causes of these problems. We are a voice for people on the issues that matter to them.

www.caox.org.uk



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