

Grandmother left homeless by rent rise challenges MPs to change law

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A GRANDMOTHER made homeless after rents soared in east London is demanding the Government pass legislation to help single people at risk.

Alongside 200 people who have experienced life on the streets or been at risk of homelessness, Kelly Abnett challenged MPs in Parliament to take up her cause. She is working with charity Crisis to tear up rules that stop councils from housing people not classed as a "priority". Women with children, people with health problems and the vulnerable are housed first, but there is little support for those who are single.

Ms Abnett, 53, said: "I felt quite ashamed of myself. I'd always had a property and supported my five children, then suddenly I had nothing.

"Councils don't want to help single adults whatsoever – and they've got it all wrong. They need to help anybody who is homeless. I know people now that live on the streets and it's so sad."

After eight years renting privately on the Carpenter's Estate in Stratford, out-of-work Ms Abnett was evicted when her rent increased by £240 a month. Her housing benefit would not match the cost and none of her children had space to take her in.

Council rules also state that they cannot help until a person is made physically homeless. Ms Abnett took her eviction letter to her local housing office but was told she was not vulnerable enough for help.

After two weeks in a bed and breakfast funded by the council, and three months sofa-surfing, she was housed by Caritas Anchor House, a rare facility that helps those on their own. She said: "This place has saved my life. There's so much help here and there needs to be more places like this in London."

On Friday next week Harrow East MP

Bob Blackman will present his Homeless Reduction Bill for its second reading. It would rewrite the rules so that councils must help whether or not someone is deemed "priority need".

The Private Member's Bill could also introduce a 56-day period before someone is made homeless in which they can ask for assistance from a council.

Crisis chief executive Jon Sparkes, who backs the Bill, said: "Sadly, the law as it stands means that homeless people who approach their council for help

can be turned away to sleep on the street – cold, lonely and forgotten."

Mr Blackman said his Bill "will reverse 40 years of rationing of local authority help. It's an absolute disgrace that at a time when we have record number of people in work we still have people sleeping on the streets."

Newham council say they funded bed and breakfast accommodation for Ms Abnett for a month and referred her to Caritas Anchor House straight away. It took several months for a room to become available there.



"I had nothing": evicted Kelly Abnett

