

This blog is written by a member of the independent Commission. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Archbishops' or the Church of England.

The vice-chair of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Housing Commission, the Right Revd Dr Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington, has joined other



Members of the Cabinet, including the Secretary of State for Housing, Robert Jenrick MP. You can read the letter

An Open Letter re: the COVID-19 Rough Sleeping Taskforce

Dear Secretary of State

We welcome the Everybody In initiative which has had so much impact in providing safe harbour for some of the most vulnerable in society during this pandemic. We also welcome the establishment of a Taskforce spearheading the government's response to rough sleeping during the pandemic and particularly the involvement of Dame Louise Casey. It is all too clear from the different approaches taken in other countries, that the Everybody In initiative has saved lives and provides a once in a generation opportunity to change lives for the better.

As you know churches in London are already involved in huge efforts to provide food, shelter and compassion to those in need. Prior to the pandemic, faith run winter night shelters in London provided around 800 beds to more than 2000 people last winter, a figure comparable with the largest homeless services. It is clear, as the Archbishop of Canterbury has said, that they will play a key role.

We want to highlight the particular vulnerability of some migrants in London, particularly those without recourse to public funds. Research from Housing Justice, the network for winter night shelters prior, shows that prior to the pandemic in London more than half of those using faith and community night shelters are migrants. And almost two thirds of those decanted from night shelters to hotels were non-UK nationals. Our concern is that the admirable and far-reaching measures taken to date and planned for, will not be enough to help this vulnerable group and many some will find themselves returning to the streets in the autumn, with the potential for risk to health that brings.

There are of course no easy answers to this most complicated and at times controversial of subjects. Many churches, faith groups and charities stand ready to assist through befriending services, hosting schemes, advice services and more, but without specific measures from central government this group of people on the margins will be pushed back out in to the cold in the autumn.

We look forward to playing our part in a strategy that takes into account this key priority.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Revd Sarah Mullally, Bishop of London

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark

The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Fulham

The Rt Revd Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden

The Rt Revd Dr Joanne Grenfell, Bishop of Stepney

The Rt Revd Ric Thorpe, Bishop of Islington

The Rt Revd Dr Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington

The Rt Revd Rob Wickham, Bishop of Edmonton

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