

The General Synod has backed a call today for the Church of England to work closely with charities and other groups to tackle homelessness.

Members voted in favour of a Private Member's Motion calling upon the Archbishops' Council to enable the formation of a Church of England-led task force on homelessness.

Andrew Gray, a General Synod member from the Diocese of Norwich, moving the motion, spoke of the 'proud history' of the Church in helping homeless people.

"There is much of which we can be proud – but we can and must do more," he said.

He added: "In this age of political disenchantment, we must hold high the light of hope. In this age of bad news and fake news we must be the Good News."

His call was supported after a series of speeches from General Synod members who described their work in churches to help rough sleepers and vulnerably housed people.

Millie Cork, from the Diocese of Leeds, spoke of how she had worked at a church plant in St George's Crypt in Leeds, one of the biggest homeless shelters in the north of England.

She said: "As part of this ministry I came across many who were homeless, rough sleepers, sofa surfers and those who were in emergency accommodation. I would welcome this task force as a concerted effort to implement change."

Rev Lisa Battye, from the Diocese of Manchester, emphasised the importance of local collaboration and schemes to tackle homelessness.

"I have walked the streets of Manchester city centre as a street pastor, I have seen the growth in the number of rough sleepers, I know how important this is," she said.

"I have also slept out overnight with hundreds of Christians in the rain raising funds for the Booth Centre which has a fabulous record of serving homeless people."

Mark Sheard, chair of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council, said the level of homelessness in Britain was 'nothing short of a national scandal'.

He added that the task force would be energetic and agile and would deliver effective and rapid solutions in response to the urgency of the issue.

He said the evidence from successful projects in parishes was the local context was all important.

He said: "Churches have long been at the forefront of the public and charitable response to the needs of homeless people. Many members today are very close to some of the excellent work going on in over 70% of our parishes, as the Church in Action survey reports. We have heard some

of their wonderful testimony. Of course, there is a need for that excellent work to be expanded and deepened.”

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