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Charlie Arbuthnot, chair of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, Church and Community, writes about a visit by Commission



le directly affected by the housing crisis and those working to tackle

The housing crisis is one of the most urgent issues affecting the country. It's why the Archbishop of Canterbury set up the Commission on Housing, Church and Community, following the publication of his book "Reimagining Britain – Foundations for Hope."

The Commission has ten members, each appointed to bring specific areas of expertise. Divided into four streams of work, it seeks to develop an authentically Christian framework for understanding housing and community-building issues, propose areas for action by the Church of England nationally and locally, and to offer proposals to shape the trajectory of future national housing policy.

Since launch in April this year, in addition to looking at what the academic and policy research tells us, we have sought to listen to people with direct experience of housing issues and to hear from local churches and dioceses around the country, with experience of tackling these issues in their community, putting their direct experience at the heart of our work.

As part of this process, I and three other Commissioners, spent a day recently seeing what the housing crisis actually looks like in the London Borough of Newham; an area in which over 5,000 households are in temporary accommodation, the highest in London.

This is the first of several study days which will inform our work. We will also visit Bristol, North Kensington, Stockport and a number of locations in the North East. The visits are a chance to talk to people who are living at the sharp end of the crisis and those seeking to provide solutions. Through these visits, we aim to combine the theological thinking and the expertise of Commissioners, and consultant experts, with the voices of those who most need to be heard. In Newham we were able to get behind the statistics and the theories and see the reality of the housing crisis first hand.

We met two families, both in cramped and damp flats, one with serious health consequences. They have been on the social housing register for six and two years respectively. We were all struck, nonetheless, by the warm welcome we were given, by the professionalism with which each had logged all their NHS, housing and Council conversations and by the determinedly positive outlook that they chose to adopt. Later, we met people from local churches, community groups and schools who told us their own stories of housing difficulty and the ways in which they are together seeking to find solutions.

We visited the site of a new housing development in Newham, where the council will be providing 50% affordable rented homes for local people. This is their commendable target on all sites that they own - and the extent of land owned by them suggests that, over time, they can make a significant difference. We were encouraged to hear that they welcomed support from all sides, and definitely from faith groups.

Although it is too early to begin to talk about what recommendations the Commission may have when it draws together its work in October 2020, the visit made clear again the role that the local church needs to play as part of the solution. It has the capacity to draw together different stakeholders, to champion the cause of the disadvantaged in practical ways and to offer hope. But we also saw that some issues need national

policy changes and we will continue to listen to these local stories and engage with them seriously through the course of our work to provide practical, effective answers wherever we can.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury himself said when the Commission was launched, it will consider what else we could and should be doing, as a Church and as a nation, to tackle the housing crisis. We, as a Commission, are determined to play our part in finding creative solutions to the housing crisis, and remain passionately committed to reclaiming the very purpose of housing – as the basis for community, and a foundation for human flourishing.

More information on the Commission can be found [here](#).

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