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Dame Louise Casey  
Chair, Taskforce on Rough Sleeping  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Sent by email only.

22 June 2020

Dear Dame Louise

**Re: Contribution of church groups to tackling rough sleeping**

I'm writing to you on behalf of the Catholic Union and several church groups involved in helping the homeless in London.

They include a number of parishes and social action groups within the Catholic Diocese of Westminster – Caritas, and Justice and Peace – who have been working with the London Passage and the Jesuit Refugee Service UK.

Representatives from Caritas Westminster and Westminster Justice and Peace would welcome the opportunity to brief you on the work they are doing, the challenges they face, and the help they can provide, in finding a long-term solution to ending rough sleeping.

The Catholic Union is the leading representative group for lay Catholics in Britain. We seek to promote the views and interests of the 4.5 million Catholics in this country.

The Catholic Church has a rich history of helping those in need, particularly at times of crisis, including the homeless, and has been the principal provider of emergency food and pastoral care for the homeless during the lockdown as all the usual day and night shelters have been closed.

We welcome the work of your taskforce in looking at the causes of rough sleeping and producing recommendations to Government on ending homelessness. This work has clearly been given greater importance and urgency in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

The extra funding given to councils to support rough sleepers during this crisis has been a step in the right direction. The “everyone in” scheme has helped to get thousands of people off our streets and into secure accommodation. This has been a fantastic example of good co-operation between local and central government, charities and the private sector.

The Catholic Church, along with other volunteer groups, has played its part by helping local authorities get rough sleepers housed during this crisis and looking after those still on our streets with an enormous feeding programme through our parishes' contact with large London hotels who have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on this operation.

However, there are concerns about what will happen when existing funding for the “everyone in” scheme comes to an end. The policies below would make a huge difference in tackling homelessness once and for all.

- 1. A guarantee that the Government will extend housing support for all those currently in hotels, to support their move to new homes where this cannot be provided by local authorities.**

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*The Catholic Union of Great Britain: The Voice of Catholics in Public Life*

President: Sir Edward Leigh, MP

Vice-Presidents: Mike Kane MP, Baroness Hooper, Baroness Morris of Bolton OBE, Lord Clarke of Hampstead CBE, KSG, Mr Robert Ffello, Professor John Haldane, Baroness Hollins, Dr Terence Morris, Mr John Deighan KSG, Dr Anthony Cole KCSG, Mr John Barrie KCSG, Mr Michael Henderson KCHS

2. **A temporary reprieve for all those with no recourse to public funds in relation to support available to help the homeless, this would be in line with existing discretion with regard to destitution (section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999). This should include those who have exhausted their rights or have no current legal status.**
3. **Access to free legal advice concerning the rights of individuals to seek and receive help if they are homeless.**

We sincerely hope your taskforce will consider these points and make recommendations on them when you report to the Communities Secretary and Prime Minister.

Church groups stand ready to be part of the long-term solution and can help get support to some of the most vulnerable people in society – people that government services often struggle to reach.

The leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, recently commented: "In 2020 no person should be faced with the indignity of being compelled to sleep on the street or the dangers and challenges associated with doing so... Only by working together can we find just and permanent solutions for the people who are homeless. I hope and pray that the new momentum found during this crisis can be sustained and will be successful."

The Catholic Union would be delighted to help arrange a meeting with you to discuss the contribution of church groups in London to tackling homelessness. A meeting need not take long, but it might help provide a useful insight at this crucial time for the work of your taskforce.

If this is of interest, I would be pleased to discuss details with your office.

Let's use this moment to end rough sleeping once and for all in this country.

I look forward to hearing from you.



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