

Dear Chief Executive and Council Leader / Elected Mayor

RE: Support for non-UK nationals experiencing homelessness this winter

We are writing to you as a group of organisations supporting destitute migrants, to ask you to make public your plans for supporting homeless non-UK nationals in your area over the winter of 2020/21.

It emerged last week that the Home Office plans to make rough sleeping a ground on which to refuse or cancel non-UK nationals' permission to be in the UK. This follows [news](#) that the Home Office has begun to evict asylum seekers from temporary accommodation. As winter approaches, homeless migrants face a 'perfect storm': a [second wave](#) of Covid-19; [winter night shelters](#) operating at a much reduced capacity, if at all; and the threat of deportation simply for being homeless.

Yet we have received no firm assurances from Local Authorities in England regarding their plan to support homeless migrants through this winter.

We therefore urge you to publish in detail your plans for local winter homelessness provision, with specific attention to the services and support that will be provided to homeless non-UK nationals, regardless of immigration status. We are also asking you to outline the efforts you have made in terms of advocacy with central government, for a change in national policies, including the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) regime, that continue to condemn many non-UK nationals to homelessness during a public health emergency.

We make this request following Shelter's report that Black people are [more likely](#) to face homelessness than any other ethnic group in England. In London 32.1% of applicants in 2019/20, who were "owed a prevention or relief duty" by the Council were Black - compared to 12.4% of the capital's population overall. If Local Authorities are serious about anti-racist policy and practice, they must put in place a clear plan to support all people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness this winter.

Context

In June 2020, we [wrote](#) to Local Authorities in England, requesting their commitment to supporting non-UK nationals experiencing homelessness throughout the pandemic. We received 18 replies from Local Authorities.

We welcomed:

- Cambridge Council's commitment that 'homeless people's data will never be shared with the Home Office without their informed consent and that nobody will be offered 'voluntary return' or 'reconnection' to their country of origin".
- The Mayor of London's proposal that 'non-UK nationals are able to access specialist independent immigration advice, which will maximise the chances of them achieving clear and secure immigration status'. We want to see this actioned.

However, we we were disappointed that:

- Many Local Authorities replied to our letter indicating that support for migrants with NRPF would be contingent and time-limited. For example, the Mayor of Tower Hamlets Council, John Biggs, stated: “Without a change in legislation, the council will not be able to accommodate NRPF cases indefinitely.”
- Many Local Authorities’ replies were vague and non-committal, despite the scale of the crisis at hand.

Action:

We appreciate the financial constraints under which local authorities are operating. It is nonetheless a moral imperative for councils to address the needs of their residents whose immigration status limits their entitlement to statutory support.

Local Authorities must put in place plans to ensure that:

1. Those currently residing in local authority-supported emergency accommodation, including migrants with NRPF, are accommodated throughout winter and supported to find a route out of homelessness.
2. Good quality immigration advice is made available to migrants with a view to them regularising their status and accessing long-term accommodation support.
3. Those who are homeless this winter will be supported and accommodated, regardless of immigration status
4. Shelter’s [call](#) for an end to systemic racism in housing is put into action through Local Authorities taking over empty buildings / housing stock to provide more social housing.
5. Migrants in Local Authority-sourced accommodation receive a good standard of food, healthcare and clothing throughout the pandemic.

Given the urgency of the winter crisis, we request for this information to be made public no later than **12 November 2020**.

Yours faithfully,

Haringey Migrant Support Centre
Public Interest Law Centre
Museum of Homelessness
Streets Kitchen
Labour Homelessness Campaign
Paper Cup Project
The Outside Project
Wandsworth Homelessness Campaign

cc GLA; London Councils; NRPF Network and LGA