

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

CC: Luke Hall MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing)
Will Quince MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Welfare Delivery)
Dame Louise Casey, Head of the COVID-19 Rough Sleeping Taskforce

7 July 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

We are writing to ask you to take the urgent action needed to ensure restrictions on some European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and on people who have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) do not undermine our collective effort to end rough sleeping in Britain.

Our national success in providing homes for people with no safe place to stay during the COVID-19 pandemic has been truly remarkable. By working together across local authorities, the voluntary and faith sector, NHS and central government we have brought 15,000 people in from the street.

We have been proud to play our part in London. Through our partnerships across our city and in our boroughs, London has found homes for over 5,000 people who would otherwise have been sleeping rough. Having achieved so much we now stand united in our ambition to support all those we have accommodated into long-term homes and to prevent new people taking their place on our streets.

There are many factors that have made this progress possible. In response to this national emergency we have all – government, councils and charities – diverted substantial additional resources to ensure no one is on our streets. The unique situation of COVID-19 has made it possible to house longstanding rough sleepers who were previously reluctant to engage with our support. We have seized every opportunity to secure the additional accommodation needed. Importantly, as part of the national 'Everyone In' programme, the Government has allowed councils to provide accommodation to those EEA nationals and people with NRPF who are normally legally prevented from accessing this support.

This progress is to be celebrated. However, as a nation we also have to be honest and acknowledge that as things stand restrictions on the support that can be provided to some people make it unclear how our collective ambition to end rough sleeping for good can be achieved. Specifically, legal limits on the benefits, housing and related support that public bodies can provide to some EEA nationals and to people who have an immigration status with 'no recourse to public funds' make it almost impossible to secure long-term homes for many rough sleepers.

We welcome the Government's partial suspension of these restrictions for work-ready EEA rough sleepers, which has allowed local authorities to offer them up to three months' basic emergency accommodation and support. We also welcome the Government's indication that some NRPF restrictions on the support councils can provide to people who are sleeping rough or at imminent risk of doing so will not be enforced at this time.

However, these limited changes do not provide a full or long-term answer. Key restrictions are still being enforced, including those that prevent access to Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. As it stands all restrictions are due to come back into force in the near future, creating a cliff edge beyond which councils will once again be prevented from providing many rough sleepers with the housing and other support they need.

Without urgent action to address these issues we risk facing the unthinkable tragedy of rough sleeping going back up even while the threat of COVID-19 remains. Locally in our boroughs and across our city we are determined to do all we can to make sure that does not happen. However, the restrictions on some EEA nationals and people with NRPF are not ones that can be overcome at a local level.

We therefore ask you to take the following urgent action needed to ensure no one has to sleep on the street during this pandemic and that all those we have accommodated since the beginning of this national emergency can be supported into long-term homes:

- 1. Formally suspend all restrictions on rough sleepers' recourse to public funds until community transmission of COVID-19 has been eradicated:** The acute detrimental impact on health that comes with sleeping on the street means rough sleepers are at high risk from COVID-19, many also have existing health conditions that place them on the national shielded list. People living on the street are also not able to safely maintain social distance or to self-isolate and are therefore at high risk of both contracting and passing on the virus. Whilst the infection rate has thankfully fallen it is still substantial and the risk of a second wave remains very real. It is therefore essential that public bodies are fully able to support all people who are sleeping rough or at imminent risk of doing so during this pandemic, including all EEA and non-EEA nationals.
- 2. Remove restrictions on recourse to Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for all rough sleepers accommodated during COVID-19:** The impact of COVID-19 on the jobs market means that even where EEA and NRPF rough sleepers are ready and able to work, in the absence of a social security net, few have the financial security needed to take on a tenancy. For those who are not able to work due to their health or immigration status this situation is even more acute. This leaves many people with no route to secure a long-term home. As an interim measure local authorities have stepped in to provide temporary accommodation. However, temporary accommodation is by its very nature not a long-term solution and the cost of providing it is not sustainable for councils. Conversely, granting all people who have been accommodated by local authorities to prevent them having to sleep rough during this pandemic access to Universal Credit and Housing Benefit would have negligible impact on the national benefit bill, as the number of people affected would be a fraction of a percent of the claimant count, but would make it possible to help them off the street for good.
- 3. Accelerate immigration claims by rough sleepers:** In a large proportion of cases rough sleepers who face restrictions on their access to public funds are entitled to an immigration status that will give them full rights to access benefits and housing support. Across London we are working to ensure people in this situation can access the specialist independent, immigration advice they need. However, even with this support, applications can take many months or years. This has been further slowed by the suspension of the Home Office's work in this area during lockdown. We therefore ask you to take urgent action to speed up applications by people who are on the street or in emergency or temporary accommodation, working with immigration advisers to fast-track applications by people in this situation so they can secure the immigration rights they are entitled to and move on to long-term homes.

Beyond these immediate urgent actions, it is also time that we as a nation re-evaluated the impact of our immigration policies on rough sleeping. As the world's sixth wealthiest country we should not be in a situation where anyone has to sleep on our streets. Yet our current rules for some EEA nationals and for people who have 'no recourse to public funds' have left hundreds of people with no alternative.

Over the last few weeks our national response to COVID-19 has shown that where there is a will there is a way to end rough sleeping. Your government's manifesto commitment to end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament is now within reach. However, we will only be able to get there when everyone who is sleeping rough or at imminent risk of doing so can access the housing, support and benefits they need to keep them off the street.

We urge you to be bold, to put people's lives first and to call an end to the NRPf and EEA restrictions that have for too long trapped people on our country's streets.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Kieron Williams
Cabinet member for Housing Management
& Modernisation
London Borough of Southwark

Tom Copley
Deputy Mayor for Housing & Residential
Development
Greater London Authority

Jon Sparkes
Chief Executive
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Bill Tidnam
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Cllr Rebecca Rennison
Deputy Mayor & Cabinet Member for Finance,
Housing Needs & Supply
Hackney Council

Cllr Jayne McCoy
Deputy Leader & Chair of the Housing, Economy
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London Borough of Sutton

Dominic Williamson
Executive Director of Strategy and Policy
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Cllr Jennifer Brathwaite
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London Borough of Lambeth

Cllr Alison Butler
Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Homes
& Gateway Services
Croydon Council

Mike Thiedke
CEO
Depaul UK

Mick Clarke
Chief Executive
The Passage

Cllr Sirajul Islam
Deputy Mayor & Cabinet Member for Housing
Tower Hamlets Council

Cllr Paul Bell
Cabinet Member for Housing
Lewisham Council

Jeremy Gray
Chief Executive
Evolve Housing + Support

Kathy Mohan
Chief Executive
Housing Justice

Cllr Gina Needs
Cabinet Member for Social Housing
Enfield Council

Cllr Meric Apak
Cabinet member for Better Homes
London Borough of Camden

Lieut-Colonel Dr Dean Pallant
The Salvation Army

The Very Revd Andrew Nunn
Dean of Southwark

Continued...

Cllr Diarmaid Ward
Executive Member for Housing & Development
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Chief Executive
Caritas Anchor House

Cllr Emily Davey
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Liz Rutherford
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Cllr Cameron Geddes
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London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Tim Fallon
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SPEAR

Cllr Peter Mason
Member for Housing, Planning & Transformation
London Borough of Ealing

Cllr Lily Bath
Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing
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London Borough of Hounslow

Cllr Phillip O'Dell
Housing Portfolio Holder
Harrow Council

Sally Causer
Director
Southwark Law Centre

Cllr Anthony Okereke
Cabinet Member for Housing
The Royal Borough of Greenwich

John Bier
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Homeless Action in Barnet

Cllr Martin Whelton
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing
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Merton Council

Matthew Bolton
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Cllr Eleanor Southwood
Lead Member for Housing & Welfare Reform
Brent Council

Cllr Louise Mitchell
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