



Ministry of Housing,
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Dear Sir George

Thank you for your email of 22 May to Rt. Hon Michael Gove about homelessness and rough sleeping during Covid-19. I am writing on behalf of the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government to respond to your query.

The Government is grateful for St Mungo's work in helping more than 1,600 people isolate safely in hotels. Nationally, nearly 15,000 vulnerable people have been housed in emergency accommodation, including hotels, since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown period, according to returns from local authorities to MHCLG. This includes people coming in directly from the streets, people previously housed in shared night shelters and people who have become vulnerable to rough sleeping during the pandemic. This is a truly remarkable achievement, and one which is the result of the hard work of local government, the NHS, agencies and charities across the country.

To support this, we provided £3.2 million in emergency funding for local authorities to help vulnerable rough sleepers. As the pandemic progressed, we provided councils across England with £3.2 billion to manage the impacts of COVID-19, including supporting homeless people.

St Mungo's have highlighted the need to ensure there is enough safe and secure housing for women and survivors of abuse. When providing accommodation for people sleeping rough during the crisis, local authorities have considered a range of needs, including gender, and where appropriate found separate arrangements. Furthermore, on 2 May the Government announced that it will bring forward legislation so that those fleeing domestic abuse and facing homelessness as a result will be automatically considered as priority need by their council for settled housing – ensuring more survivors of domestic abuse have access to a safe home.

It is now right that we focus on ensuring accommodation arrangements can continue to be managed safely to protect the most vulnerable, assessing individuals' needs in order to support people off the streets in the longer term and planning for moving people away from rough sleeping at the end of this crisis.

Building on the considerable success so far, we announced that Dame Louise Casey will spearhead a Taskforce to lead the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during this pandemic. Working hand in hand with local authorities and agencies from across the homelessness sector, the taskforce will develop and lead on the next steps of the Government's response to rough sleeping during the Covid-19 pandemic – ensuring

as many people as possible who have been brought in off the streets in this pandemic do not return to the streets.

Part of the work of the Taskforce will be to work in partnership with Homes England, who have pledged to work hand-in-hand with leading Housing Associations and local authorities to fast-track thousands of units of longer-term accommodation for rough sleepers.

We recognise the need for effective support alongside accommodation provision. On 24 May, the Secretary of State announced plans for thousands of long-term, safe homes to support many of the vulnerable rough sleepers who have been supported during the Covid-19 pandemic. This will mean that vulnerable rough sleepers that were taken off the streets during the pandemic can get the specialist support they need to rebuild their lives.

This unprecedented commitment – the biggest of its kind since the Government’s Rough Sleeping Initiative began – will be backed by £160 million in 20/21 to inject 3,300 new units of accommodation this year, part of 6,000 in total. In addition to accelerating this capital spend for investment in housing stock, the government is also increasing the revenue support of the total programme by 37% (£53m) over the four-year lifetime of the programme to make sure that the rough sleepers have the support they need to stay off the streets for good.

We have put in place £606 million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over 2020/21. This marks a £238 million, or 65% increase in funding from the previous year. As part of this, £112m was allocated this year for the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) £112m, an increase of £26m on 2019/20 funding. Our specialist advisers are working closely with local authorities to understand the impact of Covid-19 on their ability to deliver critical services for rough sleepers and identify how these might be adapted or adjusted to reflect the current challenge.

We also received significant funding at budget for substance misuse support (£262m over 4 years) and we are exploring how best to now use that funding to build on the work done through the Covid-19 response.

Furthermore, we are supporting pilots of the Housing First model across three areas - Greater Manchester (GMCA), West Midlands (WMCA) and Liverpool City Region (LCRCA) - underpinned by £28m of MHCLG funding. Since its launch, our expert advisers have been working closely with each of the three pilot regions to closely monitor and support progress. The government committed to expanding Housing First in its latest manifesto and we will use the outcomes from our three pilots to inform next steps for the programme.

The Chancellor recently announced that for 2020/21, we will increase the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents. In lifting LHA rates to the 30th percentile we are clearly demonstrating that we have listened to our stakeholders who have been telling us that this is the best way to target support and maintain work incentives. We have also increased the national caps to ensure people in inner and central London where the caps apply will also see an increase in their housing support. This is an important policy that will benefit 1.6 million people.

The Government is aware of concerns about those with no recourse to public funds experiencing homelessness during the Covid-19 crisis. The legal position on those with no recourse to public funds has not been amended. Local authorities already regularly make decisions on accommodating individuals who might otherwise be ineligible, where there is a

risk to life, for example during extreme weather. Local authorities may also provide basic safety net support if it is established that there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example, where there are community care needs, migrants with serious health problems or family cases where the wellbeing of a child is in question. The Government recognises that these are unprecedented times. Local authorities should use the funding they have been provided to support people who are sleeping rough and also to minimise unnecessary risks to public health, acting within the law.

May I once again thank you for contacting me on these matters, and for your concern for rough sleepers. I would like to reassure you that this remains a key priority for Government. I hope you and your constituent finds this information useful.

LUKE STEPHENS
Head of Ministerial Correspondence