

Dame Louise Casey calls on community partners to help with COVID-19 rough sleeping crisis

- Dame Louise Casey calls on all parts of society, including communities, businesses, charities and faith groups, to join forces and help new Rough Sleeping Taskforce
- Call backed by Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster, with Comic Relief committing support
- Business in the Community and the Prince's Trust to partner with the Taskforce to help with employment and training support. YHA, YMCA and universities have also already pledged beds for temporary accommodation

Businesses, faith groups and local communities are being urged to join forces with the government, councils and charities' efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to help house rough sleepers and turn their lives around.

Nearly 15,000 rough sleepers have been housed in emergency accommodation such as hotels since the beginning of the crisis in order to ensure their safety.

This has presented what Dame Louise Casey – the head of the COVID-19 rough sleeping taskforce – has called an 'extraordinary opportunity' to get them to engage with services and rebuild their lives so that they don't have to return to the streets.

Many businesses, faith groups and charities from across the country have already stepped forward to play their part in this national effort. The YHA, YMCA and universities have already offered temporary accommodation for people as they leave the hotels and move towards more permanent housing.

And today more partners are committing their support including:

- Business in the Community, The Prince's Responsible Business Network, bringing together private sector partners to support rough sleepers
- Both the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, highlighting the role that churches and faith groups will play
- The Prince's Trust exploring how best to provide long-term employment and training support to help young rough sleepers into work
- Comic Relief pledging to support the crucial work of charities and frontline workers through Crisis and Homeless Link
- St Martin-in-the-Fields charity putting £1 million into a support package for people moving to longer term accommodation
- Housing Justice joining forces with The Passage's 'Home for Good' scheme to mobilise its network of churches and other faith and community groups

Dame Louise Casey said she wanted to build on these commitments to bring more partners to the table. Dame Louise said:

It has been an incredible achievement to bring almost 15,000 homeless people into emergency accommodation. I am truly grateful to the council staff, charity workers and others that made that happen.

However this terrible crisis has also given us an extraordinary opportunity to build on the success of bringing 'everyone in' and to try to make sure they don't go back to the streets.

While government, councils and frontline charities are all doing what they can, it's clear that we will need the whole of society to help too, whether that is youth hostels offering rooms, businesses providing employment opportunities, or faith and community groups reaching out the hand of friendship.

We have seen the best of the British public and civil society already in response to this crisis and we need to keep that spirit going as we continue to help the most vulnerable former rough sleepers stay safe inside.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said:

Rough sleeping is a tragedy that ought to belong in the past. Everyone deserves access to safe and stable housing; it is vital for human dignity, equality and justice.

I am enormously proud of and grateful for the amazing contribution churches across the country make in supporting those who experience rough sleeping and homelessness. I commend efforts to ensure that as we slowly emerge from lockdown no one has to return to rough sleeping and pray that they are successful.

Archbishop of Westminster Cardinal Vincent Nichols said:

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. I commend and celebrate the work undertaken by our faith communities and civil society.

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.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP said:

Thousands of lives have been protected as a result of the shared commitment to protect the most vulnerable in our society throughout

this national emergency, with accommodation offered to over 90% of known rough sleepers.

Looking forwards, we have now made £433 million of government funding available to provide 6,000 safe and sustainable homes for rough sleepers. As we move towards the next steps in this process, support for community partners will be vital in helping our new taskforce. I can think of nobody better than Dame Louise Casey to lead in and make the most of this extraordinary opportunity to transform the lives of rough sleepers.

Jonathan Townsend, UK Chief Executive of The Prince's Trust, said:

We know that getting a young person a job can help break the cycle of poverty, homelessness and disadvantage. The Prince's Trust has been helping young people into employment, education and training since 1976, and now this work is more crucial than ever.

Sadly, it is in times of crisis such as these that the vulnerable in our communities become even more vulnerable – which is why it is vital that government, charities, employers and individuals work together, not only to create a safety net for those most in need, but to drive the recovery of society and our economy as a whole.

Amanda Mackenzie, Chief Executive of Business in the Community, the Prince's Responsible Business Network, said:

One thing which this pandemic has taught us is that when government works in partnership with business and charities, we can achieve things which we thought were impossible.

Through the National Business Response Network – our new, UK-wide service matching community needs to business support – we can help the taskforce to make sure that nobody has to go back onto the streets. Together, we can end rough sleeping, once and for all.

Ruth Davison, Chief Executive of Comic Relief, said:

No one should face sleeping on our streets and it is vitally important that we all work together to ensure the rough sleepers being temporarily housed during the pandemic are not forgotten. I welcome the fast action of the Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce in bringing together different organisations to help people into long term accommodation.

Comic Relief is prioritising funding for Crisis and Homeless Link who are providing both emergency and urgent supplies, but also

looking at the next stage of support. These on-going programmes will help people stay off the streets once the hotels and accommodation they are using revert back to their original use.

Mick Clarke, Chief Executive of The Passage, said:

The Passage is proud of our work, in collaboration with many other agencies, helping people off the streets and into temporary accommodation. As the focus moves to helping people stay off the streets, we are also proud to work in partnership with Housing Justice volunteers on our 'Home for Good' scheme nationally.

Everyone deserves to have a place they can call home. Every one of us can play our part to help those coming off the streets sustain that home; 'Home for Good' is one way that those who care can get involved and do just that.

Last month the Communities Secretary appointed [Dame Louise Casey to spearhead a specialist taskforce](#) to lead the next phase of the government's support for rough sleepers during the pandemic.

The taskforce will work with local government, charities, businesses, faith and community groups, and other public sector partners across the country on plans to ensure rough sleepers can move into safe accommodation once the immediate crisis is over.

The taskforce will also ensure the thousands of rough sleepers now in accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need over the coming weeks and months.

Almost 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.

On 24 May, the Secretary of State announced [funding for 6,000 new long-term housing units](#) along with increased government funding for support services for rough sleepers.