

# Dame Louise Casey to spearhead government taskforce on rough sleeping during pandemic

- New taskforce to advise Government on next steps of emergency response to support vulnerable rough sleepers during the pandemic;
- Team of experts to advise councils on plans to support rough sleepers into long-term, safe accommodation once lockdown is lifted – preventing the vulnerable from returning to the streets;
- Over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils at the beginning of the crisis have now been offered accommodation where they can self-isolate.

A specialist taskforce has been created to lead the next phase of the Government's support for rough sleepers during the pandemic.

Spearheaded by Dame Louise Casey, the taskforce will work hand-in-hand with councils across the country on plans to ensure rough sleepers can move into long-term, safe accommodation once the immediate crisis is over – ensuring as few people as possible return to life on the streets.

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 while they continue to self-isolate from the virus.

Over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils at the beginning of the crisis have now been offered accommodation where they can remain safe during the crisis – helping protect themselves and others from contracting the virus.

This has been backed by £3.2 million in targeted funding to help councils get as many people off the streets as possible, with a further £3.2 billion additional funding for councils to help them continue to respond to the pandemic and support their communities – including their vital work helping those sleeping rough.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

By working closely with councils, charities, faith groups and health providers, we have offered accommodation to over 5,400 people who were sleeping rough at the beginning of the crisis: that's over 90% of known rough sleepers.

This national effort has potentially helped to protect thousands of lives.

As the country prepares for the next phase of the battle against coronavirus, Dame Louise Casey will spearhead a taskforce to

provide us with expert advice and knowledge to put in place a long-term plan to stop as many vulnerable people as possible from returning to life on the streets.

Dame Louise Casey said:

The storm of Covid-19 has affected us all in many, varied and sometimes deeply tragic ways – we know that it is a virus that does not discriminate. Due to the incredible efforts by people in local councils, charities, hotel staff and the public, many rough sleepers have been brought in and off the streets.

Much has been done, and there is much still to do. We have all had to respond to this crisis with a deep resolve but also innovation – in bringing people inside, there is now a real opportunity to address the health and social needs of these individuals and if we can stop them going back to the streets. This, like so much over the last few weeks, will take a huge national effort and I'm pleased to be able to be part of that.

Dame Louise Casey will report to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on this work.

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## **E3 and Netherlands Foreign Ministers Statement on World Press Freedom Day**

Press release

Joint Statement by Dutch Foreign Minister Blok, French Foreign Minister Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Maas and British Foreign Secretary Raab ahead of tomorrow's World Press Freedom Day.



Today, we celebrate the crucial role journalists play around the world. This year's theme "Journalism without fear or favour" emphasises the importance of taking action to secure independent journalism as a prerequisite for a functioning democracy.

World Press Freedom Day is the opportunity to voice our support for journalists to continue providing the public with reliable, quality information – a task that has not only become more important but also much more difficult since the COVID-19 outbreak.

We must oppose all attempts by any state to use the pandemic to adopt restrictions on press freedom, silence debate, abuse journalists or spread misinformation. It is deeply concerning to see that across the world, publications are contracting and closing and journalists being made redundant because of falling revenues.

Especially in these times, we depend on independent, fact-based and reliable journalism. A free press is crucial for a comprehensive response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Only by keeping the public informed can we prevent a further spread of COVID-19.

We therefore support the UN Secretary-General's call on governments, as well as media and technology companies to counter misinformation with free, accurate, clear and evidence-based information and to avoid excessive efforts that could result in censorship of protected speech. We reiterate our support for the Information and Democracy Partnership and the Media Freedom Coalition.

We urge governments not to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to restrict press freedom and to protect journalists from harassment, threats, detention or censorship so that information can be disseminated without suppression.

We commend journalists for their important work and will continue to stand up for them and campaign for world press freedom.

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## [Top-up to local business grant funds scheme](#)

News story

A discretionary fund has been set up to accommodate certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme.



The Business Secretary Alok Sharma and Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, Simon Clarke spoke to local authorities in England yesterday to set out that up to £617 million would be made available.

This is an additional 5% uplift to the £12.33 billion funding previously announced for the Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund (RHLGF), so up to £617 million. We will confirm the exact amount for each local authority next week.

This additional fund is aimed at small businesses with ongoing fixed property-related costs. We are asking local authorities to prioritise businesses in shared spaces, regular market traders, small charity properties that would meet the criteria for Small Business Rates Relief, and bed and breakfasts that pay council tax rather than business rates. But local authorities may choose to make payments to other businesses based on local economic need. The allocation of funding will be at the discretion of local authorities.

Businesses must be small, under 50 employees, and they must also be able to demonstrate that they have seen a significant drop of income due to Coronavirus restriction measures.

There will be three levels of grant payments. The maximum will be £25,000. There will also be grants of £10,000. local authorities will have discretion to make payments of any amount under £10,000. It will be for councils to adapt this approach to local circumstances.

Further guidance for local authorities will be set out shortly.

As of 27 April, over £7.5 billion has been paid out to over 614,000 business properties via the SBGF and RHLGF schemes. This is over 61% of the grant funding allocated to local authorities.

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## [Bounce Back Loan Scheme: letter from the Chancellor to lenders](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

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## [Charter flight from Jamaica for British travellers seeking to return to the UK](#)

News story

Around 140 British travellers will be able to get home from Jamaica on a charter flight organised by the Government in partnership with the travel company TUI.



Around 140 British travellers will be able to get home from Jamaica on a charter flight organised by the Government in partnership with the travel company TUI.

The UK chartered TUI Airways flight will depart from Kingston Norman Manley International airport, to London Heathrow on 7 May 2020.

British travellers in Jamaica wishing to return on this flight should visit FC0 Travel Advice Jamaica Return to the UK page for further information on

how to register. Priority is initially being given to vulnerable passengers including those over 70 and others who have medical requirements. Where possible, the FCO will bring back Jamaicans who have Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK and who have lived in the UK in the last year.

**Minister for the Caribbean, Baroness Sugg said:**

This is our latest flight from the Caribbean. By partnering with TUI Airways, we are going to get around 140 British travellers home from Jamaica to be with their families at this challenging time. Our staff in Jamaica will continue to make sure any Brits not on these flights get the support they need.

**Asif Ahmad, High Commissioner to Jamaica, said:**

This flight will help British travellers stuck in Jamaica to get back to the UK. I encourage all those with an interest to register now as it is unlikely that there will be any further charter flights. I'd also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Jamaican authorities for enabling us to get people home during this crisis.

This follows UK Government flights announced from the Bahamas, Cuba, and Guyana. British missions in the Caribbean have now helped over 11,000 British travellers return to the UK via commercial routes, including over 4,000 from Jamaica.

The flight is being organised in partnership with TUI who are using the outbound leg from the UK to Jamaica to help crew from their cruise ships to get back to the Caribbean. This is enabling us to offer a cost-effective approach to get more British travellers home.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 30 March – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

- The charter flights are for British travellers who normally reside in the UK, as well as their direct dependents. Jamaican citizens with appropriate residency rights will be included. A number of seats will be reserved for those deemed vulnerable.
- To book flights and register their details, British travellers should check the [FCO Travel Advice pages](#).
- Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed.
- Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be

available on the booking portal.

- The British High Commission continues to provide consular support to any British travellers who remain in Jamaica.
- Guidance on how to book onto a government charter flight back to the UK can be found [here](#).

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