11th December 2023

Dear Ministers,

We write to you on behalf of our faith and belief institutions across London who are working to care for and support newly recognised refugees.

We welcome the prospect that the backlog of those waiting for their asylum claim to be decided will reduce, so that refugees can start moving on with their lives. We support the need to move people away from hotels, which are not the most ideal residences for those waiting for asylum or for the local communities in which they are placed.

However, we are concerned at the number who, on receiving their leave to remain, are becoming street homeless.

Many faith and belief organisations work together with those of all faiths, beliefs and none to support refugees and asylum seekers in a number of ways. Across London, churches, mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues and temples open their doors to receive asylum seekers and refugees. We are seeing demand for this support grow, overwhelmingly with the need to help those with new refugee status find accommodation.

Since August we know that in practice refugees are having much less notice that their asylum support will end than the stated policy of 28 days. Some are given seven days or less to leave their accommodation. Many have been in asylum accommodation for months or even years, with no opportunity to work or build networks. They are now being given only days to navigate the various systems and authorities necessary to plan their next steps.
Through relationships with our local councils, we are seeing the unbearable pressures they are facing, with insufficient resources to find emergency accommodation before these people are on the streets. The result is widespread and growing street homelessness.

Homelessness is a huge barrier for a new refugee to seek work, make an application for any benefit, or start to settle in the UK. No-one can build their life like this. We urge that the move to new accommodation needs to be done with careful planning, consultation with civil society partners and local authorities, and over a longer period than a few days.

As faith and belief leaders we want to promote and encourage the integration into society that you have said is vital for those with refugee status.

In the short-term, we call on you to:

- Re-examine Home Office practice, and work to ensure that all refugees have a minimum of 28 days from receiving their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) before they are required to leave their asylum accommodation in line with Home Office policy.

- Urgently inform all councils and other relevant institutions that the notice of decision for the asylum claim is sufficient evidence for refugees to apply for housing and other support. An eviction letter is not required at this stage.

- Move to extend the eviction notice period to 56 days, given that the 28 day move-on period is incompatible with the application processing time for Universal Credit and other areas of government policy and does not give newly recognised refugees the time to complete either of these processes.

As faith and belief leaders representing communities of faith and belief across our city, we believe that allowing refugees to begin life in the UK sleeping on the streets deeply undermines the core values of welcome, respect and responsibility which characterise our society at its best. We believe that refugees can thrive in and contribute to our communities; most are resourceful and resilient with skills and experience which will benefit the UK.

We urge you to rectify this failure in practice to uphold a 28-day move on period, with the intention of moving to a 56-day period as soon as this is achievable.

Yours sincerely,

+ Sarah_Mullally

The Rt Revd & Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE
Bishop of London

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark
The Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford

1 Councils have to support anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness within 56 days (the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed new duties on English councils within 56 days to provide support to anyone who is either homeless or is at risk of becoming homeless). Applying for Universal Credit takes 35 days at minimum from application to first payment, and requires a fixed address.
The Rt Revd Dr J R Gibbs, Bishop of Rochester
His Eminence Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster
His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos OBE, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London and Papal Legate to the United Kingdom
His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of the Holy Greek Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain
The Rt Revd Dr Joanne Grenfell, Bishop of Stepney
The Rt Revd Dr Emma Ineson, Bishop of Kensington
The Rt Revd Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy, Bishop of Willesden
The Rt Revd Dr Ric Thorpe, Bishop of Islington
The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Fulham
The Rt Revd Dr. Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon
The Rt Revd Dr Martin Gainsborough, Bishop of Kingston
The Rt Revd Lynne Cullens, Bishop of Barking
The Rt Revd Simon Burton-Jones, Bishop of Tonbridge
Rt. Rev. Paul McAleenan, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster
Fr Dominic Robinson SJ Chair of Justice and Peace, Roman Catholic Dioceses of Westminster
Fr Dominic Howarth Episcopal Vicar for Youth Ministry and Pastoral Care, Roman Catholic Diocese of Brentwood
Major Stephen White and Major Amanda White, Divisional Leaders for the London Division of The Salvation Army
The Revd Phil Bernard, Regional Leader of the London Baptists
The Revd George D Watt, Moderator of Thames North Synod of the United Reformed Church
Fred Ashmore and Leasa Lambert Co Clerks, London Quakers
Fred Ashmore on behalf of the Steering Group of Quaker Asylum Seeker and Refugee Network (QARN)
Bishop Tedroy Powell, National Presiding Bishop, Church of God of Prophecy Trust (U.K.)
The Revd Canon Les Isaac OBE (President of Ascension Trust)
The Reverend Jonathan Aptin Samadi, The Leader of Persian Anglican Community of London
Rabbi Baroness Julia Neuberger, Senior Rabbi Emerita, West London Synagogue
Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, Senior Rabbi, Masorti Judaism
Rabbi Dr Helen Freeman, Co-Senior Rabbi, West London Synagogue of British Jews
Rabbi David Mitchell, Co-Senior Rabbi, West London Synagogue of British Jews
Alexandra Wright, Senior Rabbi at The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, London
Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE, Director Network of Sikh Organisations UK
Harmeet Singh Gill, General Secretary of Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall
Mr Jasvir Singh CBE, City Sikhs
Zara Mohammed, Secretary-General, Muslim Council of Britain
Sh Dr Faid Mohammed Said, Imam of London Central Mosque, Secretary General of the Commission of Fatwa and Sharia Affairs
Mohammed Kozbar, Chairman, Finsbury Park Mosque
Sufia Alam, Head of Programmes and Maryam Centre, East London Mosque and Chair of Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum
Bibi Khan MBE DL, President of London Islamic Cultural Society, Chair of the North London Council of Mosques
Rajnish Kashyap, General Secretary/Director of the Hindu Council UK
Dr Deesha Chadha OBE, Co-chair Faiths Forum for London, National Executive Committee member Hindu Forum of Britain
Maureen Goodman, Programme Director, Brahma Kumaris, UK
Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala, Head of the London Buddhist Vihara & Chief Sangha Nayaka of Great Britain
Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK
Malcolm M Deboo, President Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe