



14th April 2020

Dear Chief Executive and Council Leader,

Re: Supporting migrant communities during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

On March 20th 2020 we and over fifty other organisations [wrote](#) to you asking for urgent steps be taken to protect and support vulnerable migrants, particularly those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

On March 26th 2020 the homelessness minister [wrote to local authorities](#) directing them to 'bring everyone in'. The letter directs councils to 'urgently procur[e] accommodation for people on the streets' and 'get [...] the social care basics such as food, and clinician care to people who need it in [...] self-contained accommodation.'

Luke Hall's letter makes clear that councils should assist '[those] who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate.'

We are aware that many local authorities have taken steps to provide accommodation to 'verified' rough sleepers in their area. We are delighted that some councils have indicated that this accommodation will be provided regardless of immigration status.

We are, however, concerned that many vulnerable migrants are still not receiving the basic assistance they need during this crisis.

Among the issues that have been reported to us are:

- Local authorities offering hotel accommodation only to 'verified' rough sleepers, with the result that many migrant homeless people (e.g. DV survivors, those who squat or sleep on buses) are being excluded from provision
- Housing officers telling destitute migrants that accommodation 'can only be provided to people with recourse to public funds'
- Homeless migrants being placed in hotels far from their networks, with no/inadequate provision being made for their subsistence
- Homeless migrants being placed in hotels but given no contact details for key workers/housing officers.
- Migrant rough sleepers being asked to share rooms and even beds

- Increased ‘gatekeeping’ of support provided to destitute migrant families under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989
- Threats of data-sharing by local authorities with the Home Office

We are calling on you to adopt the measures called for in our letter of 20th March 2020. **But we are now asking you to take a number of additional steps in response to the practice issues reported by frontline organisations across the country.**

Local authorities must:

- Urgently direct all frontline staff, including housing officers, social services departments and commissioned service providers, to offer non-statutory accommodation and support to all people ‘who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, [as well as] those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate’
- Make clear to all frontline staff, including housing officers, social services departments and commissioned service providers, that this support must be provided regardless of immigration status, and that standard legal tests for the provision of statutory support (proof of homelessness, eligibility, priority need, intentionality, local connection) are to be disregarded
- End all ‘gatekeeping’ of support for vulnerable migrants. If changes have been made to the working hours and practices of housing departments, social services departments or commissioned outreach providers as a result of the pandemic, these changes must be clearly and promptly communicated to voluntary-sector organisations working with vulnerable migrants and clearly visible on your websites. Local authorities must maintain clear and accessible pathways for access to support for all vulnerable migrants.
- Ensure that all homeless people accommodated through the pandemic response are able to meet their basic needs for food, hygiene and travel (where appropriate e.g. for medical reasons). In terms of food provision, this means ensuring the provision, without charge, of three adequate meals a day that meet the dietary requirements of those accommodated. All basic-needs provision must be made regardless of immigration status
- Communicate clearly (i.e. in writing in a language they can understand) to all homeless people accommodated through the pandemic response about where, why, by whom and for how long they are being accommodated; and whom they can contact for support in an emergency
- Make language-appropriate provision for people with disabilities, mental-health and substance-misuse issues, and other support needs
- Make a public statement to the effect that all of the above support will be provided to all who need it regardless of immigration status; and that information will never be shared for immigration-enforcement purposes

We appreciate that local authorities are dealing with exceptionally high pressure on resources during the pandemic and that much of the additional funding promised by government will be needed to maintain the functioning of existing services.

We are also conscious that MHCLG has failed to provide detailed guidance on how local authorities should provide support to people with insecure immigration status. There is a clear and urgent need for central government to take steps to make it easier for local authorities to provide support, including by amending the Housing Act 1996 and accompanying guidance and removing immigration-status based eligibility criteria for access to welfare benefits.

However the local-authority practice issues raised in this letter are crucial to the welfare, safety and wellbeing of migrant communities in your area. The ongoing failure to provide appropriate support to all those who need it regardless of immigration status is not only a moral failure and a breach of local authorities' Public Sector Equality Duty. It also poses a serious public health risk, leaving vulnerable migrants unable to socially distance and, where needed, self-isolate.

We are once again asking you to respond urgently by email to benjamin.morgan@pilc.org.uk detailing the actions your local authority has or will be taking to address the concerns raised.

Yours sincerely

Migrants' Rights Network
Project 17
Public Interest Law Centre