

Re: Protecting everyone from homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

Dear Charlie Adan, Julie Dore and Paul Wood

As organisations working for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Sheffield, we are writing to request your support in calling for greater protections against homelessness for people who have sought sanctuary in the UK.

We are extremely concerned about the Home Office's recent decision to [resume eviction proceedings for those who have been refused asylum](#). Without immediate action, people across our communities could be forced into street homelessness and destitution in a matter of days and weeks. This would not be acceptable under normal circumstances, but in the context of rising COVID infection rates across the UK, it is clearly unsafe and irresponsible.

Unlike those who have been granted asylum, people who have been refused asylum have no recourse to public funds and are left with very few options. Through our work in Sheffield and the surrounding areas, we have seen the terrible impact of enforced destitution and homelessness. One ASSIST client recalls that:

'After I was refused, I returned [to my accommodation] to see the locks had been changed. I couldn't believe it. I was in total disbelief. The inhumanity of it- this is the response I get to my story. Where do they expect me to go? I was really confused. I didn't know what to do. I was roaming around all evening and then I went to the shopping centre and went to sleep outside there. It is an experience I will never forget. It was the lowest point in my life.'

This is an experience shared by many. That people are now facing this situation in the midst of a public health crisis is profoundly dangerous.

We know this isn't the only option. In response to the threat of coronavirus, the UK and devolved governments, and local authorities made important changes to prevent homelessness. These included the suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation and the directive to provide homeless people with emergency accommodation, including those with NRPF. In Sheffield specifically, the provision of accommodation for refused asylum seekers with NRPF has been hugely successful and we hope this will continue for as long as required to ensure the safety of everyone. We recognise and value the efforts made by Sheffield City Council to keep all members of their communities, regardless of immigration status, safe and housed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having made this vital progress, we cannot now return to a business as usual in which people routinely face homelessness and destitution. **As an urgent measure, the Home Office must halt their plans to resume evictions for people who have been refused asylum.** In light of rising COVID infection rates, and at a time when voluntary and statutory services are under intense

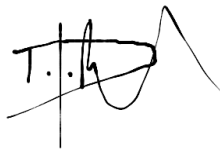
and increasing strain, it is clear that this is the only sensible course of action in the interests of the safety of people seeking asylum and public health.

We are therefore requesting that Sheffield writes urgently to the Home Secretary Priti Patel MP, copying in the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Robert Jenrick MP, to ask them to immediately halt their plans to resume evictions from asylum accommodation.

Sheffield is rightly proud of being the first City of Sanctuary in the UK - it is times like these that we are called to live up to that name and stand strong for people seeking sanctuary here. We urge you to recognise the critical need to suspend evictions into homelessness from asylum accommodation, and hope that you will take the action outlined above.

Please let us know if you have any questions, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Martin', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Thomas Martin, Director, City of Sanctuary Sheffield

On behalf of:

City of Sanctuary Sheffield

ASSIST

South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice

Solace

Migration Matters Festival

Development and Empowerment for Women's Advancement (DEWA)

Learn for Life Enterprise

Children and Young People's Empowerment Project (CHILYPEP)

Hope and Dignity Hearth

Right to Remain

Voices for Voiceless Immigration Detainees Yorkshire