

Thames Valley
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10 June 2020

Dear Mr Mitchell,

Re: Next phase of support for people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) housed by Oxford City Council due to the Covid-19 crisis

We are writing in regard to the letter sent by the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness, Luke Hall, MP to all local authorities in England on 28 May 2020 regarding the next phase of support for rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of the *next steps plan* that Oxford City Council have been asked to put in place, we request a commitment that this plan will be developed and delivered in partnership with local agencies, and that it supports people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) you are currently accommodating under public health powers, to find sustainable housing options as the government relaxes its lockdown measures.

We welcome the steps that have been taken in recent months to provide rough sleepers with accommodation, in particular those with NRPF. We recognise the challenges local authorities face in procuring alternative accommodation at such short notice and thank Oxford City Council for accommodating a number of people with NRPF since the beginning of the lockdown, which will have contributed to protecting the NHS and saving lives.

We understand that Local Authorities may require additional resources to ensure that people who cannot access public funds and mainstream homelessness services are not returning to rough-sleeping as the lock-down measures ease. We



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have also written to Luke Hall, Minister for Housing and Local Government to request that Local Authorities are supported to ensure that no-one is forced to return to rough sleeping, including people with NRPF.

We are now looking to Oxford City Council to lead the way with an effective next steps strategy for people with NRPF, and to include this in the action plan. Specifically, we ask that the plan:

- 1. Works in partnership with relevant local actors to ensure that everyone receives relevant independent advice and support to secure suitable longer-term accommodation and sustainable outcomes**

The plan should include the provision of independent legal advice to allow those with no recourse to public funds to explore their options and connected alternative support pathways. For example, you will be aware that following the judgement in *R v Secretary of State for the Home Department & Anor* [2020] EWHC 1299, the Home Office has updated its guidance on considering grants of leave on family life, private life or exceptional circumstances to clarify how Home Office decision makers should respond to applications to remove NRPF. There are organisations in Oxfordshire, such as the British Red Cross and Asylum Welcome who have expertise in providing advice and support to people with NRPF and are ready to support you in developing next steps.

- 2. Upholds the best interests of people who are medically shielding and enables them to remain in local authority accommodation**

Many people with NRPF often face difficulties accessing services including primary health care. This can be due to fear or lack of knowledge of their rights and entitlements. It is imperative that those with significant medical conditions are given the right advice and are safeguarded from homelessness or unnecessary travel whilst Covid-19 is still a threat to their lives.

- 3. Ensures that no-one is evicted without a move-on option and provides people with NRPF as much reasonable notice as possible (at least 12 weeks) to vacate local authority accommodation**

As we continue to face this national emergency, we stand ready to work with you to support people with no recourse to public funds to secure sustainable, long-term outcomes and ensure no-one is forced to return to rough-sleeping.

Yours sincerely,

British Red Cross
Asylum Welcome