

Catholic charity rough sleeper project facing axe after local council withdraws backing

By Paul Donovan

A Catholic homeless charity is being forced to close down its rough sleeper centre because of a lack of support from the London Borough of Newham.

East London-based [Anchor House](#) had used £150,000 to help set up an assessment centre in Stratford that took rough sleepers off the streets. The centre provided support, accommodation at its hostel in nearby Canning Town and help with education and employment training.

But the service is now facing the axe after the Government decided to channel funding for such projects through the local authorities and Newham Council failed to support the project.

Director of [Anchor House](#) Keith Fernett said it had taken 200 people off the streets in the last year and described how many were now living and working in the community. "Surely if you have a high performance outfit outdoing performance targets you should use it," said Mr Fernett. "At present we are funding the assessment centre out of the reserves but that can only go on till March. We need continuity funding or it will close down."

There has been further frustration for [Anchor House](#) over the local authority's refusal to fund a bond scheme that enables homeless centres to rehouse single homeless

people in the private rented sector. The bond covers the deposit and one month's rent and without it landlords are unlikely to take in single homeless people. "Newham have said they won't do the scheme. We had a landlord who said he had 19 flats for single homeless people but Newham would not fund their places, so the London Borough of Harrow came in and housed their homeless in the flats," said Mr Fernett. These new arrivals "are likely to add to the demand on hospitals, doctors and the police in Newham – the second most deprived area in the country."

While Newham refuses to house its own single homeless in its own borough, Mr Fernett believes there are at least 1,000 properties within the authority being used by other neighbouring London boroughs to house their own homeless, placing further pressure on Newham services.

Newham has been hit hard by Government cuts to local authority funding with its social investment budgets – which include housing – slashed by 60 per cent, but Mr Fernett said that he still needed answers: "Society has to consider how those front line services that Caritas [Anchor House](#) delivers can be maintained. The local authority and statutory services referred nearly 600 people to Caritas [Anchor House](#) in the last year. They are wondering what the future holds."

