

Keith Fernett says the new British Government under Theresa May must strive to tackle social injustice

Can we become one nation?

RUNNING A VITAL service in an area of acute deprivation is becoming increasingly difficult.

Caritas Anchor House, a residential and life skills centre for homeless people in east London, has had to respond to the changing external landscape, including the growing housing crisis and closure of services.

We have seen an increased demand on our services and, last year alone, received 598 referrals for our 118 rooms. Those referred to our services have increasingly complex histories, and therefore require additional and specialist support.

Despite the external pressures, we continue to act as a beacon of positivity for those we help.

In the last year we offered a home and support to 213 homeless people, helped 66 into independent living and 38 of those into employment – double the homeless sector average. We also developed new and existing partnerships to ensure that the people who now call Caritas Anchor House home receive the best possible support to achieve and sustain independent living.

Earlier this year, Iain Duncan Smith, the then Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, visited Caritas Anchor House and met with our residents. Mr Duncan Smith commended our transformative work with homeless and disadvantaged people, and said: "Caritas Anchor House is more comprehensive than other homeless charities I have seen. They do more than just offer someone a stable base – they address the reasons why they are there, which is very important, and their service provision covers the majority of elements that can lead to homelessness.

"Caritas Anchor House is intent on positively changing lives, not just sus-

taining them as they are."

Mr Duncan Smith discussed the government's strategy to improve the life chances of the poorest people in Britain. For a charity that provides services for those at the wrong end of most statistical tables – from life expectancy, poverty, education and employment – this was very encouraging to hear.

Since then, the political landscape has changed dramatically. We are now set to leave the European Union, have a new Prime Minister and a reshuffled Cabinet. Looking ahead to the future, I wondered how all of this political change and shifting agendas would affect the people who Caritas Anchor House supports.

When Theresa May took office, her speech outside Downing Street focused on being a 'one nation' government and illustrated a determination to tackle inequalities in life expectancy and provide better life chances for those suffering from mental illness.

Perhaps the most interesting was when Theresa May acknowledged that the life of a working class family is much harder than many people in Westminster realise, and stated her government will be one driven not by the interests of the privileged few, but by ordinary people.

Vulnerable people experience great difficulty in accessing services that are vital to improve their life chances, because of demand and tardy decision making. To become the 'one nation' that the Prime Minister strives for, we need to focus on making it easier for organisations to best support those in need.

As chief executive of an organisation supporting hundreds of homeless individuals each year, I am calling for more investment in and greater consideration of the social care sector.

Simon Stevens, chief executive of the



Prime Minister Theresa May.

Photo: Tom Evans/Crown copyright

NHS, echoes my views and has publicly said: "I think there is a strong argument that were extra funding to be available, frankly we should be arguing that it should be going to social care," to ensure the NHS and wider care sector can continue to respond to the needs of their communities.

Society must recognise the needs and requirements of the social care sector, but perhaps more importantly, recognise the sector's ability to achieve.

A report by Oxford Economics found that Caritas Anchor House provides £3.98 in benefits to society for every £1 invested in its operations – a social return on investment of 398 per cent. Over the next 12 months, we will be able to support more people than ever before, as we expand our facilities and service provision.

Caritas Anchor House recognised that to continue our transformational work with the disadvantaged, meet the increasing demand for our services and the needs of the local community, we would need to re-develop our organisation, expand our accommodation and the services we provide.

Our Home and Hope Appeal has seen

the refurbishment of the accommodation completed, and saw the rooms transformed into individual learning zones, which help facilitate study and personal development.

In November this year, the construction of 25 independent studio flats on our site will be completed, which will allow us to support an additional 50 homeless people each year, and help them to achieve a sustainable transition back into independent living.

Once complete, the final phase of the development will begin – the expansion of training and educational facilities. This will include a workshop for vocational courses, learning zones and a training kitchen to provide amenities for people to gain catering qualifications.

We don't want to be a revolving door outfit. We want people to move out of homelessness for good, equipped with the life skills and abilities to sustain independent living – and to achieve that, we have had to act innovatively.

Caritas Anchor House is supporting an initiative using technology which has the potential to transform the lives of the most vulnerable in our society.

The Global Noticeboard (GNB) is a

humanitarian online marketplace, where people can help those in need through buying and selling, creating communities and sharing information. It's also a social enterprise; commercial profits from income generating activities will be used to tackle some of the biggest social injustices of our time, including homelessness.

The number of people sleeping rough on any one night in England is estimated to be 3,569. This figure has increased by 30 per cent in the last year and has doubled since 2010. Consequently there is a substantial demand for overnight accommodation that greatly exceeds supply.

The 2016 Budget committed to spending £100million to provide 2,000 accommodation places for rough sleepers who are ready to move on from crisis hotels. However, while welcome, this will be insufficient to address the extent of homelessness in England.

It will also limit the number of people that can be helped by government to the total number of additional hostel places secured.

The GNB has the technology to increase the throughput of rough sleepers

Theresa May used her speech upon becoming Prime Minister to promise to fight the social injustices of our times.

"That means fighting against the burning injustice that if you're born poor you will die on average nine years earlier than others. If you're black you are treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white... If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand. If you're young you will find it harder than ever before to own your own home.

"But the mission to make Britain a country that works for everyone means more than fighting these injustices. If you're from an ordinary working class family, life is much harder than many people in Westminster realise. You have a job but you don't always have job security. You have your own home, but you worry about paying a mortgage. You can just about manage but you worry about the cost of living and getting your kids into a good school...

"We will make Britain a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us."

Theresa May, 13 July 2016

through homelessness charities and services by ten per cent. It is expected that this development could assist 3,850 people (10 per cent of the 38,500 homelessness housing stock) through access to the vital provision of accommodation, employment and training opportunities.

Coupled with the Government's investment in 2,000 accommodation places, this could ensure that around 5,850 of the most vulnerable people in society are given a lifeline and the opportunity to improve their life chances and reach their full potential.

The times are radically changing, but they can change for the better. I believe our new Government should be looking at new ways to combat social injustice, and an investment in the social care sector and technology could help us to become a 'one nation' society. **JM**

For more information about Caritas Anchor House and its services, please visit www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk, or to see the Global Noticeboard, visit www.globalnoticeboard.com Keith Fernett is chief executive of homelessness charity Caritas Anchor House