

Urgent plea to back Bill to reduce homelessness

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

ON 28th October, MPs will debate the Homelessness Reduction Bill. The Bill represents a very important opportunity to reform homelessness legislation in England.

As a Catholic charity working on the front line of homelessness, Caritas Anchor House fully supports the Bill, and to ensure a fair hearing, we are calling on everyone to write to their MP and ask them to attend the debate and back the Bill.

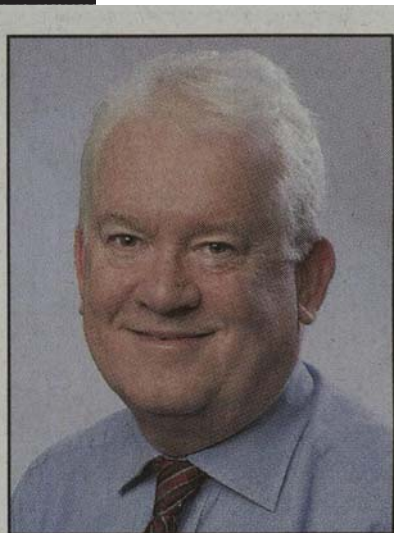
Caritas Anchor House is a residential and life skills centre for single homeless adults based in Newham, one of the most deprived boroughs in the UK.

Each year, we offer a home and support to up to 220 homeless people, and work to ensure that those who walk through our doors grow in confidence and move towards leading independent, self-fulfilling lives by providing education, guidance and personal rehabilitation.

In recent years, we have seen a dramatic increase in demand for our services, as homelessness in London and the country continues to rise at a worrying rate.

In the year to March 2016 alone, Caritas Anchor House received 598 referrals for our 118 rooms, an increase of 13.5 per cent from the previous year.

Meanwhile, the latest figures from the Department of Communities and Local Government show the number of people sleeping rough in England on any one night is 3,569 – a 30 per



'Step change' – Keith Fernet

cent increase from last year and double that of 2010.

A further estimated 400,000 'hidden homeless' people, live in hostels, squatting, sofa surfing and more.

It is unacceptable that so many people are abandoned by society and left to sleep rough. Homelessness cannot be ignored any longer and the 'hidden homeless' crisis, which MPs have recently warned about, is unfortunately all too real.

We need a step change to tackle homelessness, and that is why Caritas Anchor House and countless other homeless charities, organisations, MPs

and celebrities are supporting the Homelessness Reduction Bill.

Under current homelessness legislation, people who do not fit into restrictive 'priority need' categories, or who are found to have made themselves 'intentionally' homeless, often receive little or no help when they approach their local authority. In 2015/16, 114,790 people applied to a local authority for help under current homelessness legislation.

Only half of those (50.3 per cent) were considered to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless. This can cause undue anxiety and pressure on the individual or families concerned, in what is an already stressful time.

While additional funding announced by the government in the 2016 Budget to support rough sleepers off the street is welcome, it is not sufficient to deliver long term changes needed to reduce homelessness across England.

The Homelessness Reduction Bill aims to change this. It will make sure that councils have a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness regardless of priority need, extend the time that households are considered at risk of homelessness from 28 to 56 days, and provide emergency accommodation for people with nowhere safe to stay.

If we intervened earlier, for example soon after someone is faced with eviction and homelessness, we would be able to prevent further suffering



and save our already strained public services time and money.

If the legislation was to change, Caritas Anchor House should receive fewer and more appropriate referrals, allowing our staff to deal with enquiries and service delivery more efficiently.

The Homelessness Reduction Bill has been tabled by Bob Blackman MP and co-sponsored by members of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee from across the House.

It is vitally important the Bill gets a fair hearing when it is debated on 28th October – for this to happen 100 MPs need to attend the debate. If fewer than 100 MPs attend, parliamentary rules mean that just one opponent will be able to stop the Bill and it could be scrapped without even going to a vote.

That's why I urge you all to write to your MPs and ask them to attend the debate and back the Bill. This is our moment to change the way we support homeless people for the better, and we cannot afford for this opportunity to slip away.

■ **To contact your MP, visit:**
www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk/hrb
or for more information on the
Homelessness Reduction Bill e-mail:
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