

## **Briefing for NACCOM members:** **Support for people at risk of street homelessness with no recourse to public funds during the Covid-19 pandemic**

This briefing was published on 11.12.20. We will endeavor to update as the situation develops. For the latest summary of the #StopAsylumEvictions campaign, see [our joint policy briefing with Asylum Matters](#).

### **1. Funding and policy approach in England- summary of recent developments and ongoing concerns**

In March 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched 'Everyone In', an initiative that [instructed and funded English Local Authorities \(LAs\) to](#) ensure people rough sleeping or staying in hotels/hostels could self-isolate. Further funding was announced in [May](#), [June](#) and July, when the [Next Steps Accommodation Programme](#) was launched (allocated to [274 councils](#) in September). In October, a [Cold Weather Fund](#) was launched alongside the [Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund](#). In November, MHCLG [announced the 'Protect' programme](#), targeted at councils with significant rough sleeping pressures. **Whilst funding efforts are welcomed, there remain major gaps in support with some of the people most at risk being those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). There are also concerns about a funding cliff-edge in March 2021 when some support is due to end.**

Throughout the pandemic, voices from across society including [charities](#), [MPs](#), [Local Government](#), [Housing federations](#), [faith leaders](#) and [Mayors](#) **have called for the NRPF condition to be lifted**. The government has thus far refused to do so, and [no detailed guidance](#) has been published on how councils can fund support for people with NRPF. In May, the Housing Communities & Local Government Committee [called for compensation for councils supporting people with NRPF, and for greater clarity on which powers can be utilised to provide such support](#). Aside from the welcome [temporary policy change announced in June](#) to support European Economic Area (EEA) migrants, Ministers provided [no such clarity](#). In November, [Crisis published findings](#) on experiences of homelessness during the pandemic, and found that *'homelessness among people with No Recourse to Public Funds has been a continued issue throughout the... pandemic'*.

Despite the difficulties, some councils have maintained support for people with NRPF, with examples of 'powers' utilised including the Localism Act, Severe Weather Emergency Protocols and Care Act. Such efforts have [undoubtedly saved lives](#), with [MHCLG data from May indicating that approx. 2,500 people](#) were supported during the initial response period who would not otherwise have been eligible. However, the [well evidenced disparity](#) in support for people with NRPF remains of great concern as the pandemic continues into the winter. This is of particular significance when considering the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on [people facing homelessness](#), people from [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic \(BAME\) communities](#), people in [deprived communities](#) and [people in the Immigration system](#).

**The lack of options available to people with NRPF if councils do not provide either direct or indirect support for people with NRPF are starker now than ever before.** In 2019-20, [approx. 1,849 people had to be turned away from NACCOM members](#) due to a lack of provision, with accommodation providers in the network now reporting even greater gaps in capacity due to the pandemic. Meanwhile, published [guidance on night shelter provision in England](#) confirms that communal shelters remain unsafe. Under the new tiered system in England, government advice restricts [indoor gatherings and travel, including overnight stays, in many areas](#), which has a direct impact on people who might otherwise be forced to use [night buses or sofa surf](#) to stay off the streets.

### **2. UK wide developments relating to changes in Immigration rules and the Withdrawal from the EU**

[Recently introduced changes to the Immigration Rules](#) mean that 'permission to stay' in the UK can be refused or even cancelled on the basis of rough sleeping. As [PILC explain](#), this means *'Some non-UK nationals could have their visas cancelled if they sleep rough. If they are applying for a visa, their application could be refused on this basis'*. Campaigns launched by [anti-slavery](#) and [homelessness charities](#) are unanimous in their calls for a reversal of these changes.

Also of concern is the risk that, as the UK leaves the European Union, a significant number of people could become subject to NRPF condition for the first time. This could happen if, [as a recent NRPF Network briefing describes](#), people fail to apply in time to the EU Settlement Scheme, or see their applications refused. Recent government figures indicate [29,000 people have been refused status so far](#).

### 3. Funding and policy approach in Scotland- summary of recent developments

- The Scottish government has committed to supporting people with NRPF throughout the pandemic, both directly and [through grants \(such as the Communities Funding Package\)](#) to accommodation and support/advice providers.
- In the early stages of the pandemic, the Scottish Strategic Migration Partnership (COSLA) published [guidance on how Local Authorities can support people with NRPF](#).
- In October, the government updated their 'Ending Homelessness Together' [Action Plan](#), building on [recommendations of the](#) Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG). In this, they committed to publishing an anti-destitution strategy, funding legal advice for people with NRPF and developing alternative pathways to accommodate people with NRPF alongside pressing the UK government for reform. In November the government published an [equality paper](#) relating to these actions.

### 4. Funding and policy approach in Wales- summary of recent developments

- In June, the Welsh government committed to [support those who have been housed during the pandemic](#) and in August published a [feasibility study](#) into accommodation models for people with NRPF with a [commitment to implement its recommendations](#).
- In November, a Ministerial statement reiterated the commitment to accommodate individuals with NRPF with advice on how Local Authorities can access additional funding to '[support this inclusive approach](#)'.
- The [NRPF Network](#) have been commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver training to Local Authority staff on NRPF conditions and places on this training have been made available to members of the Welsh Refugee Coalition.

### 5. Funding and policy approach in Northern Ireland- summary of recent developments

- The Northern Ireland Housing Executive issued a [Covid rough sleeping housing policy](#) in November which commits to '*supporting all people experiencing homelessness... including those ineligible for housing assistance*'. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been developed with Departments for Communities and Health to assist people who were otherwise ineligible with accommodation until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

Members- can you tell us about the recent funding allocations in your Local Authority and if/how people with NRPF are included? Is your LA still supporting people with NRPF directly/indirectly? Are you seeing a rise in referrals for people with NRPF who are rough sleeping? Email [lucy@naccom.org.uk](mailto:lucy@naccom.org.uk) with further information.

#### **Voluntary sector organisations and councils working together to prevent homelessness**

Within the NACCOM network there are several examples of councils and member organisations working together to support people with NRPF. These examples are funded through the [Next Steps Accommodation Programme](#):

- Hope Housing in Bradford have employed two migrant outreach workers to help move people out of destitution and are engaged in regular 'Everyone In' council meeting to help move people with NRPF out of B&Bs into longer term housing, whilst BEACON (also in Bradford) have been funded to support people seeking asylum to access holistic support and assistance including legal advice to regularise their status and/or support to engage with the Voluntary Returns Scheme (for those who want to consider this option).
- Bristol Hospitality Network [are working with the Local Authority to move people on from hostel accommodation](#) who would not ordinarily be eligible for support, and to do so have been given funding to accommodate a number of people with NRPF through their hosting scheme.
- Action Foundation in Newcastle have received funding for up to 15 bedspaces and legal support for people with NRPF. This includes EEA migrants and people who have been refused asylum.