



Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care

25 January 2021

Dear Robert and Matt,

PRIORITY VACCINATION FOR FRONT-LINE HOMELESSNESS STAFF

On Monday 18 January we took evidence from Baroness Casey of Blackstock, most recently the Chair of the Government's Rough Sleeping Taskforce, as part of our ongoing inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 into homelessness and the private rented sector.

As part of the session, we asked about vaccination priorities. Baroness Casey expressed her concerns about the health of front-line staff from homelessness charities:

I am more worried about getting vaccinations for people in these hotels who are staff, who are putting themselves so at risk. People in care homes should have those vaccinations, but they are sitting in a chair or in a bed. They are compliant. They are not people who are banging off the walls, refusing to self-isolate. We are putting workers in harm's way at the moment by not getting those people high enough up the queue for vaccinations.

Front-line homelessness staff have worked tirelessly in hotels and other emergency accommodation to look after those taken in from the streets. This has included offering access to health services, providing food, and much more. Much like those working in care homes, these front-line staff have put themselves at risk to care for a vulnerable population. Alongside these important efforts, staff have also resumed day time outreach and other regular services, all the time working with people with complex needs who often refuse help or reject advice.

They deserve to be vaccinated as soon as possible. On Wednesday 20 January, the Prime Minister was asked about the prioritisation of "all those whose essential daily work brings them into contact with other people", and he told the House that he wanted to see those groups vaccinated "as soon as possible".

We know that conversations about how to ensure front-line workers are vaccinated are happening in Government, and we want to ensure that the people who have been working with people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping are part of that conversation. Their work often goes unnoticed by the public and the media. National narratives around the heroes of the pandemic rarely, if ever, mention homelessness services. It is crucial they are rewarded for their key role in protecting people during the pandemic.

The people they protect have higher rates of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart problems and strokes. People with no home have on average seven long-term health conditions, more than people in their 90s. They are at a high risk of harm from Covid-19. Staff are therefore at increased personal risk of exposure to infection and of transmitting that infection the vulnerable

cohort they work with.

We ask that you consider how to treat staff working with people experiencing homelessness as front-line social care workers, who are in the priority 2 cohort. The guidance for the vaccine deployment programme defines such workers as:

All frontline social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to COVID19 who need care and support irrespective of where they work (for example in people's own homes, day centres, care homes for working age adults or supported housing); whether they care for clinically vulnerable adults or children ; or who they are employed by (for example local government, NHS private sector or third sector employees)

As the guidance sets out, it is up to local authorities to define who should be captured within this group, and specifically notes on page 6 that such roles might include "homeless services and support". We ask that you make it clear to local authorities that this means that staff working with people experiencing homelessness should be offered the vaccine as part of the priority 2 cohort, given the vulnerability of the people they are caring for and the risks they are taking.

Where these staff are not vaccinated as part of the priority 2 cohort due to local decisions, we ask that you treat these staff more explicitly as a priority occupation for vaccination as we move into the rollout's next phase. Given the urgency, we would appreciate a response to this letter by Friday 29 January.

I am copying this letter to the Association of Directors of Public Health, who can communicate this priority to Directors of Public Health across the country and ensure that front-line homelessness staff are being considered as front-line social care workers for the purposes of vaccination.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts', with a stylized flourish above the name.

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee