



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair, Petitions Committee

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities
and Local Government*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and
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Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your letter of 30 March about the issues that members of the public have raised through e-petitions on the Government's response to Covid-19.

The Government is taking unprecedented steps to tackle this pandemic and to mitigate its impact on people's lives. To do this we have mobilised every part of central and local government at great speed.

Support for Homeless People

Our priority has been to bring people inside so they can self-isolate and stop the virus spreading. As a first step we announced a £3.2 million flexible fund for local authorities to help rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough to self-isolate. This funding will assist local authorities with providing accommodation and support to vulnerable people who are at risk of, or who have been diagnosed with, coronavirus. We also provided £1.6 billion of additional funding for local authorities to enable them to respond to other Covid-19 pressures across the services they deliver, including providing support for those who are homeless. The Homelessness Minister and my Department have worked intensively with Dame Louise Casey, our independent adviser on rough sleeping, local councils and the sector to get people who are sleeping rough off the streets and into appropriate accommodation.

With regard to whether staff running essential community services such as hostels for the homeless are counted as key workers, I can confirm that they are. A full list of key workers is available on the gov.uk website and it includes reference to 'charities and workers delivering key frontline services', as well as 'occupations...delivering essential public services such as payment of benefits'. This includes staff delivering statutory homelessness services (housing options, temporary accommodation etc.) as well as staff delivering outreach, supported housing and other key frontline services for those who are homeless.

You mention concerns which have been raised around drug-dependent clients in hostels for whom self-isolation is impossible. We are aware of the challenges involved and have been working with Public Health England on this matter. However, the law is very clear. The Government does not condone people taking illegal drugs and encourages people to seek support in order not to do so.

Shielding and Volunteering

We have made significant progress on the shielding programme. We have developed a local support system across government, delivered in partnership with local authorities, Local Resilience Forums and the private sector. This will meet the essential needs of those who have been identified clinically as extremely vulnerable, self-isolating and without the social networks to support them. A website and contact line have been set up for people to register whether or not they need support and we have now seen over a million registrations. Over 150 bulk deliveries of emergency supplies have already been made to local authority hubs and over 70,000 food packages delivered direct to people's doorsteps.

Volunteers are essential to many local services and even more so in the Covid-19 response. The NHS has had a fantastic response to its NHS Volunteer Responders Scheme, with 750,000 people having signed up to support vulnerable people through this programme. It is important that we direct volunteers to where they can be most useful and to help sustain strong cohorts of local volunteers, which will help local authorities in their community efforts at this time. That is why I wrote to all local authorities on 3 April to let them know that the NHS Volunteer Responders resource will be available to them, working alongside other important local groups, to complement the support that authorities and health partners are already giving to people in local areas. This applies to those in the shielding category as well those who are vulnerable for wider reasons including frailty, disability, pregnancy or social vulnerability.

Support for Local Community Organisations

The measures already announced by the Government will support many charities and social enterprises to manage the financial challenges presented by the current emergency, including the Job Retention Scheme announced by the Chancellor.

The Chancellor and the Culture Secretary yesterday announced an additional £750 million to support frontline charities. This will ensure they can meet increased demand as a result of the virus as well as continuing their day-to-day activities supporting those in need. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is engaging with the sector on the impact of Covid-19. These are unprecedented times and I appreciate the concern and uncertainty this brings. Further information will be released on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and the Office for Civil Society webpage as and when it is available.

Council Tax

The Government recognises the impact of coronavirus beyond public health and has put in place an unprecedented package of support to help the economy, supporting businesses and households.

The Government has moved rapidly to provide a £500 million hardship fund to local authorities in England. Our expectation is that local authorities will use the majority of this fund to provide council tax reductions to vulnerable individuals and households in receipt of working age Council Tax Support who are particularly at risk to fluctuations in their income.

We know that many councils are also applying a degree of local discretion in their approach to council tax collection, including the opportunity for individuals to set up alternative payment plans. These hardship funds should be made available for the most serious cases of hardship. Individuals whose income has been affected by Covid-19 can check their eligibility for support from their local council, including whether they might be entitled to Local Council Tax Support.

Council tax continues to play a vital role in funding the local services, including social care for the elderly, which stand at the very forefront of the covid-19 response.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick." The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath the name.

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP