**Re: Protecting everyone from homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.**

Dear Cllr Judith Blake and Cllr Deborah Coupar,

We are a group of organisations who work with people seeking asylum in Leeds who are concerned that the people we support are facing eviction into homelessness at this time of public health crisis. We are writing to request your support in calling for greater protections against homelessness for people who have sought sanctuary in the UK.

We are extremely concerned about the Home Office’s recent decision to [resume eviction proceedings for those who have been refused asylum](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylum-seekers-evictions-home-office-coronavirus-second-wave-b486062.html). Without immediate action, people across our communities could be forced into street homelessness and destitution in a matter of days and weeks. This would not be acceptable under normal circumstances, but in the context of rising COVID infection rates across the UK, it is clearly unsafe and irresponsible.

Unlike those who have been granted asylum, people who have been refused asylum have no recourse to public funds and are left with very few options. Through the work of our organisations in Leeds, we have seen the terrible impact of enforced destitution and homelessness. That people are now facing this situation in the midst of a public health crisis is profoundly dangerous.

We know this isn’t the only option. In response to the threat of coronavirus, the UK and devolved governments, and local authorities made important changes to prevent homelessness. These included the suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation and the directive to provide homeless people with emergency accommodation, including those with NRPF. We recognise and value Leeds City Council’s efforts to keep all members of their communities, regardless of immigration status, safe and housed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having made this vital progress, we cannot now return to a business as usual in which people routinely face homelessness and destitution. **As an urgent measure, the Home Office must halt their plans to resume evictions for people who have been refused asylum**. In light of rising COVID infection rates, at a time when voluntary and statutory services remain under intense, increasing strain, it is clear that this is the only sensible course of action in the interests of the safety of people seeking asylum and wider public health. Many of our services remain closed and unable to cope with a homelessness crisis; we are asking for the support of our local authority to raise these deep concerns for the welfare of our city’s residents.

**We are therefore requesting that Leeds City Council writes urgently to the Home Secretary Priti Patel MP, copying in the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Robert Jenrick MP, to ask them to immediately halt their plans to resume evictions from asylum accommodation.**

**We also ask that Leeds City Council join other local authorities in making a public statement opposing evictions into homelessness during the public health emergency.**

As we move forward, we are keen to continue working with you to meet the challenges facing our communities and address the longer-term measures and solutions needed to protect everyone from the threat of homelessness and COVID-19.

However, for now, we urge you to recognise the critical need to suspend evictions into homelessness from asylum accommodation, and hope that you will take the actions outlined above.

Please let us know if you have any questions, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,