

# **Responding to the Housing and Homelessness Crisis**



**Report to Spring Synods 2019**



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## Executive Summary

There is a growing housing and homelessness crisis in this country. Rough sleeping has risen by 169% over the past decade, whilst the lack of affordable housing has contributed to the hidden homeless population. Today, there are an estimated 320,000 homeless people in Britain. Many more people are badly housed or over-crowded. Recent welfare reforms – such as the benefit cap, spare room subsidy, and the introduction of Universal Credit – have exacerbated the housing crisis and increased the risk of rent arrears.

Around the country, Methodists and Methodist churches are helping people who are homeless or in housing need, responding to Our Calling to be a good neighbour to people in need and challenge injustice.

This report results from the call at last year's Methodist Conference for more action to be taken. It gathers just some examples of current practice, from churches and associated charities.

There are churches responding in faith and making a meaningful difference in their local communities, providing food banks, shower and washing machine facilities, internet and computer use, offering assistance with administrative tasks, distributing toiletries, and cooking hot meals. Some churches are involved with winter night shelters, providing volunteers and opening up their buildings for rough sleepers to stay during the coldest months of the year. Others have developed their property to provide affordable housing. Many other examples exist throughout the Connexion.

The need is immense. The Church is not trying to put a sticking plaster on a growing problem. Instead it is proposed that a holistic response is needed:

**Reduction:** tackling the causes of homelessness. This includes practical and political actions.

**Respite:** providing a safe place for people off the street.

**Recovery:** managing issues, stabilising individuals and working towards independence through support, wellbeing, life skills and steps towards employment, volunteering, training and education.

**Reconnection:** enabling individuals to lead meaningful lives with choice and agency in our community.



What more can the Methodist Church do, working with others, to confront the crisis of housing and homelessness? How can we – together – offer a holistic response?

Below are some questions aimed at gathering a more detailed picture about what is happening throughout the Connexion.

**Questions for discussion at Synods:**

1. What housing and homelessness needs do you face in your local area?
2. Are you aware of churches in your District trying to meet these needs? If so, please give details and describe what they are doing.
3. What practical actions or support from the Methodist Church or others would help your churches respond more effectively to the needs in your area?
4. Are there ways in which your churches might provide affordable housing, perhaps by redeveloping redundant buildings or excess land?

Please send your responses to [nom206@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:nom206@methodistchurch.org.uk), or Will Fremont-Barnes, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.



## Background

### Where did this report come from?

At last year's Conference, the Methodist Church was challenged to respond to the growing housing and homelessness crisis. Notice of Motion 2018/206 acknowledged the considerable rise in rough sleeping over the last decade – 169% since 2010 – and called for the Church to use the knowledge it has of communities across the country, and its political influence, to make a difference.

The President and Vice-President urged the Government to accelerate its current commitment to eliminate rough sleeping by 2027, and to increase its support for rough sleepers with the most complex needs.

In addition, the Notice of Motion encouraged giving greater powers and funding to local authorities to build more affordable housing. The increasingly commercial culture around house building offers few incentives to build the genuinely affordable housing necessary to cope with the current shortage.

The Notice of Motion also called on the Church to take practical action. Members of the group which proposed the resolution gathered evidence for this report showing the responses of Methodist churches and affiliated charities across the country, ranging from providing respite to people experiencing homelessness to larger projects where Methodists have partnered with local authorities and housing providers to move people into secure and permanent accommodation.

This report is now shared with Synods to gather a wider picture and help districts and synods to look at how they might respond further to the crisis of housing and homelessness. It is hoped that this process will allow the Church to begin an exploration and discussion of best practice, one that will allow churches across the Connexion to take action as appropriate given their resources and the needs of their area.

### What is being done by Methodist churches?

In the autumn of 2018, each District was asked to outline the work of their churches in tackling homelessness. The information we received from churches provides only a snapshot of what Methodist churches are doing around the country.

We received feedback from churches offering respite to people experiencing homelessness by offering showering and washing machine facilities, computer use and assistance with administrative tasks, distributing toiletries, providing hot meals, among other services. Some churches offer support to charities and organisations with greater means to carry out this important work.



Others partner with Christian denominations and other groups to host night shelters, providing volunteers and opening up their buildings for rough sleepers to stay during the coldest months of the year. With the support of local authorities, guests receive the assistance they need to access employment, accommodation and benefits.

The feedback, which can be found in the appendix of this report, demonstrates the possibilities for churches to make a difference in various ways regardless of their size and resources. Ultimately, moving people on from rough sleeping into accommodation where they can realise their potential requires a holistic approach that ensures the underlying causes and consequences of homelessness are addressed appropriately.



## A Holistic Model: Reduction, Respite, Recovery, Reconnection

The Homelessness Action Network in Greater Manchester has proposed a four-step approach to dealing with the homelessness crisis: reduction, respite, recovery and reconnection.

**Reduction:** tackling the causes of homelessness. This includes practical and political actions

**Respite:** providing a safe place for people off the street.

**Recovery:** managing issues, stabilising individuals and working towards independence through support, wellbeing, life skills and steps towards employment, volunteering, training and education.

**Reconnection:** enabling individuals to lead meaningful lives with choice and agency in our community.

This approach, which recognises the need to integrate people into sustainable and flourishing communities, is a useful model as we consider how the Church might adopt a coherent homelessness strategy across the Connexion.

Methodist churches cannot provide housing for every rough sleeper, nor does every church have the means to embark on a large-scale project to tackle homelessness. However, this four-point model provides a helpful challenge to ensure that we are not focusing solely on respite for homeless people, but on a holistic approach that meets their needs and offers them the chance to flourish.

### The call to engage

The Church's engagement with the housing and homelessness crisis is rooted in Our Calling to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and live out our discipleship in worship and mission. The good news, which we are called to share, means none of us can ignore the needs of people to have a place to live that is safe and secure.

Every single person is created, known and loved by God. Therefore, all people must be treated with the respect and dignity that flows from being created in the image of God. We are all God's children, members of one family, and we are all diminished when members of our family sleep rough or do not have a place to call home.

People must be able to flourish and reach their God-given potential. The current crisis of inadequate housing and homelessness often leads to poor mental and physical health, places immense pressure on family life, whilst unaffordable rents confront people with stark and unacceptable choices, such as between paying for food and paying for shelter.

Addressing a person's housing needs does not simply require putting a roof over their head, but ensuring that they are well-equipped to participate as fully as they are able in their community. The Church has an important and distinctive role to play in tackling the housing and homelessness crisis with an approach that places people and relationships at the very centre of everything we do.



## What Next?

The appendix to this report shows that many Methodists are already committed to helping homeless and badly housed people. Below are a number of steps that churches and districts might take. The research also prompts the question of how our church response can be holistic and be supported strategically.

### Focus on the causes of the crisis

For some churches, a response might be to focus on the causes of the crisis, and campaign for policies that will make housing in this country genuinely affordable by encouraging members to write to their MP. The housing crisis would be greatly reduced if more houses were built at affordable prices. The Joint Public Issues Team ([jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://jointpublicissues.org.uk)) continues to provide resources in this area and will be relaunching the publication “More than Bricks and Mortar” this summer.

### Local community plans

Local authorities develop local community plans that affect the provision of affordable housing. What is going on in your local area, and how can churches, and church members, get involved?

### Opportunities to work ecumenically

For other churches, where work is already being done in the area, there may be opportunities to work ecumenically or with other agencies. Partnering with other churches and local charities by starting a winter night shelter is an effective way of tackling rough sleeping, and gives people the basis from which to move on either into supported accommodation or into a more permanent place of residency. These can receive financial support from local authorities, but very often they can raise money through private donations and by partnering with businesses. Housing Justice ([www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk)) offers support for setting up new shelters.

### Mission Plans

The Connexional Property Strategy 2018-20 calls for Circuits and Districts to develop, adopt and implement effective mission plans, making clear how its use of property will support and facilitate mission and ministry. Does addressing the housing crisis feature in your Church / Circuit / District Mission Plan?



## Considering Redundant buildings

Some churches are considering redundant buildings. A church could convert a building it no longer uses into affordable housing, or rent or sell a property and use the money to provide affordable homes. The Methodist Council can authorise the sale of property to a wholly charitable housing association. Therefore, churches can make land available to a housing association knowing that the accommodation made available would be affordable, helping people who cannot afford to rent privately and/or face long waits for social housing. The Property Strategy states that the sale of a property should only be undertaken after trustees have demonstrated that all other uses for the property have been exhausted. The Church has committed to prioritising social outcomes over maximising financial returns, so property can be set aside below market rates to allow conversion into affordable housing.



## Questions for Synods

A scoping day on housing took place in January 2019, bringing together Methodists from across the country tackling housing and homelessness problems, and began the process of considering what a **Connexion-wide response** to the crisis might look like. Local authorities and housing associations will be more willing to partner with individual churches if they are acting as part of a national strategy endorsed by the Methodist Church. This work will continue, informed by what is learned from churches acting on the ground.

**Districts, District Policy Committees and others are invited to discuss this report, focusing on the questions below, and feedback any answers by the beginning of May if possible.**

### Questions for discussion at Synods:

1. What housing and homelessness needs do you face in your local area?
2. Are you aware of churches in your District trying to meet these needs? If so, please list them and provide details.
3. What practical actions or support from the Methodist Church connexionally or others would help your churches or District respond more effectively to the needs in your area?
4. Are there ways in which your churches might provide affordable housing, perhaps by redeveloping redundant buildings or excess land?

“ Filling jobs in the church is hard work; filling the night shelter rota is more a case of giving everyone a chance, such is the desire to enable change for people in challenging circumstances. ”

West London Mission



## Appendix

### Some of the case studies gathered through the call to evidence.

Thanks to all those who provided evidence of work being done in and through Methodist Churches. The following are just a selection of those who responded. They are arranged to illustrate the Reduction-Respite-Recovery-Reconnection model, though obviously many of them do more than one thing.

## I. REDUCTION

### Community Land Trusts

The Social Responsibility Commission (SRC) in the Synod of the London District has been looking at how the church could get involved in the housing and homelessness crisis. Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are a way of providing genuinely and permanently affordable home ownership, offering up one model to address the growing gap in the housing market between people who qualify for a council property and people who can afford to buy their own home. Affordable housing is no longer affordable for many people on modest incomes. London CLT is developing housing across London based on what people earn locally.

The idea is that a family should not have to spend more than a third of their income on housing. The attraction of the CLT model is that these homes will be affordable not just at the point of sale but remain affordable in perpetuity. They cannot be sold on the open market, so the price is protected by London CLT.

In Community Land Trusts, the community is involved throughout the process in the most important aspects of the project, such as who the housing is provided for, where it is provided, and for whom. As churches at the heart of our communities, filled with people who know the needs of their area, they are well placed to make a contribution through CLTs.

### Involvement in campaigning for affordable housing

The Shelter Commission came together after the Grenfell Tower fire to set out how to build a better future for social housing. The Minister at Notting Hill Methodist Church, Rev. Dr. Mike Long, was Chair of the Commission.

The commission recommend a historic renewal of social housing, with a 20-year programme to deliver 3.1 million more social homes. This would allow the benefits of social housing to be offered much more widely – providing both security for those in need and a step up for young families trying to get on and save for their future.



And it called for a stronger voice for tenants, and a new regulator working across social and private renting to protect residents and enforce standards.

## 2. RESPITE

### Peterborough Winter Night Shelter

The Peterborough Winter Night Shelter is in its fourth winter, running for eighteen consecutive weeks between the end of November and the beginning of April. It is coordinated by Light Project Peterborough, an organisation that works with churches to train volunteers, organise logistics, and assess and identify people at its day centre who need and would benefit from the support of the night shelter. Thirteen churches are involved, of which four are Methodist. There are representatives from twenty-eight churches in the city.

The night shelter is not just a place to get a bed for the night, but also to receive practical support and the love and hope of the volunteers. The night shelter works in partnership with the local authority and with a housing provider to find accommodation quickly for guests who are ready to be moved on, rather than placing them in expensive supported accommodation. Last year, twenty-two of the forty-two people who went through the night shelter were moved into accommodation.

### Wolverhampton Church Shelter

The ecumenical Wolverhampton Church Shelter began in February 2016 as a pilot project following the death of a rough sleeper. A Facebook page was created and £6000 had been donated and over 30 volunteers recruited and trained. It encourages a 'Pathway of Hope', offering guests a personal and recognised route back into accommodation and employment, which is supported by those best placed to do so from a variety of agencies in Wolverhampton. Homelessness agencies found that clients who were staying in the shelter engaged far more readily than before, and were now often able to move on into accommodation and employment. The project is funded primarily by a mixture of private donations and support from the local business community, as well as some money from Homelessness Services at the City Council.

“ the shelter gave me a base, something to hold on to and co-ordinate everything else around to get back up and running. ”

Guest at West London Churches Nightshelter



### **3. RECOVERY**

#### **Ogof Adullam**

Based at Brunswick Methodist Church in the centre of Swansea with up to 60 guests attending, Ogof Adullam is a place of sanctuary to rough sleepers and those with addiction issues. The circuit is looking at expanding this project into a recovery housing programme. An ecumenical night shelter takes place for three months in Swansea for up to 12 homeless people who have been referred by various agencies. The volunteers come mainly from churches in the city.

#### **West London Mission**

For more than 130 years, the West London Mission (WLM) has put its faith into action by enabling transformative care and support to people affected by homelessness, poverty and trauma. Westminster is the borough with the greatest number of rough sleepers in the UK – more than 8,000 last year – while the council budget for homelessness was halved from £8 million to £4 million in the same year. WLM responds to this crisis through professional services and church projects.

One of its projects, WLM Seymour Place, is a centre where homeless people can directly access services from the street. The intention is not just to offer excellent food, showers and nursing care, but also to work with homeless people to find ways to move on and live less chaotic lives. Around 20-30 people are helped into accommodation each month.

A homeless client of WLM Seymour Place said recently she feels like this is the only place where her stress lifts for a few hours, and made to feel welcome and at ease. A refugee used the project last year. She was helped to get her documents sorted out, got into the winter night shelter, then into permanent housing and onto a beauty therapy course. She is thriving at that and has started running beauty therapy sessions for homeless women and loves giving back having “received so much help”.



## 4. RECONNECTION

### Whitechapel Mission



The Whitechapel Mission has been helping Londoners to help homeless people since 1876, meeting the specific needs of each man and woman who walks through our doors. They first meet immediate needs, food, shelter, clothing, and medical care, then advice and recovery programmes which address deeper needs for life-skills and job skills training, and addiction recovery. The tenancy support work enables people to sustain their tenancy and live in a community. They also have 13 self-contained flats for key workers.

Notably the Whitechapel Mission measures progress against four criteria, which indicate to them that a life has been transformed from homelessness to hope: connection to family, commitment to sobriety, a job and a place to live, and a plan for the future.



## Methodist Action North West

Methodist Action North West aims to enable people: To Live, To Stay, To Grow.

The Charity operates through two arms, a hostel for 20 homeless men, and *A Place to Live*. The latter programme addresses two fundamental questions: how do we support the men who leave Fox Street as they follow independent living pathways and, crucially, how do we, and other referring agents, stop people from becoming homeless in the first instance? The clients we work with experience difficulties with the private sector. MANW is effectively the city's Social Lettings Agency.

MANW has renovated more than 100 derelict or damaged properties to a proper standard. The ownership of the property remains with the landlord but we now have agreements with over 200 landlords that we will 'take the risk' on behalf of problematic service users. MANW supports more than 350 people, a quarter of whom are under the age of 25, many of whom are single parents, and most of whom are characterised by more than one pressing need.

## A Bed Every Night

Methodists in Manchester are part of *A Bed Every Night* - a commitment to provide a bed, welcome, hot meal and support for anyone sleeping rough in the ten Boroughs of Greater Manchester. It is the first stage of a new systematic approach to end homelessness. The staff in the provision are working proactively with individuals, referring agencies, accommodation providers and other services to find suitable move-on options and reconnection.

The innovation in this project is that it is the whole region working together: the public sector, voluntary sector, faith sector, grassroots groups, businesses and citizens. The key is to have a whole-society, cross-sector approach, with spaces designed in conjunction with those who have experienced rough sleeping.

The Steering Group of *A Bed Every Night* is developing extra Move On Accommodation including a Social Impact Bond, a Housing First Pilot, the formation of an Ethical Lettings Agency and the use of redundant properties in the faith sector and the public sector.

The Homelessness Faith Network is also developing *Alternative Housing Models* (referred to in the Notice of Motion at Conference) with four strands to this work namely:

- (i) Investment innovation
- (ii) Affordable accommodation for young people
- (iii) Support to sustain tenancies
- (iv) Faith communities building properties/refurbishing properties/making redundant properties available

Further details will be provided as the Models become Pilot Schemes and then projects that can be replicated elsewhere in the Connexion.



*This report was compiled by Revd Ian Rutherford, City Centre Minister at Methodist Central Hall, Manchester, proposer of the original Notice of Motion, and Will Fremont-Barnes, ONE Intern.*

Any responses to [nom206@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:nom206@methodistchurch.org.uk), or posted to Will Fremont-Barnes, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR.

