

About Housing Justice

Housing Justice is the national voice of Christian action in the field of housing and homelessness. We exist because we believe that human dignity is challenged by the lack of decent housing.

We support night shelters, drop-ins and hundreds of practical projects nationwide by providing advice and training for churches and other community groups who work with homeless people.

We provide a range of supportive forums which we facilitate to ensure people feel free to express their views in a positive environment and their opinions are heard.

We work to unite Christians and churches of all denominations across the country to work for change. We embrace partnerships with people of all faiths (and none) who share our values of social justice and compassion.

Our work

Responding to the homelessness crisis

Housing Justice supports churches and other groups to set up, run and develop winter night shelters for homeless people. Typically, a shelter is open from November to March and operates from a different church each night of the week. Guests are provided with a cooked evening meal, somewhere to sleep, and breakfast before they leave in the morning. Most shelters have a referral procedure and aim to help guests find accommodation and step back into settled society.

Delivering Affordable Housing

Through our Faith in Affordable Housing project, we work with churches of all denominations in England and Wales to release surplus land or buildings for affordable housing. This means providing hands-on practical support and advice to help churches make the right decision before disposing of surplus assets. We link churches with local housing associations and facilitate discussions on selling or leasing land for affordable homes.

There is great need for more affordable housing in all areas of England and Wales and we believe the church can be part of the solution to housing need. We also help churches benefit from improved facilities through partnership working with affordable housing developers.

We help churches balance the desire to make a difference to communities, with being good stewards of church assets. We help churches ensure good governance by complying with the requirements of Charity Law if selling land or buildings for charitable purposes.

Faith on the frontline of the Housing Crisis

Faith groups are on the front line of London's homelessness crisis, delivering vital accommodation services to guests who have nowhere else to go. Our annual shelter data impact report shows that Church and Community shelters have seen an average of more than 200 volunteers per night shelter contributing 60 hours per volunteer. This astonishing level of social capital is estimated to be worth more than £4m in London alone annually.

On 19th December 2016 Housing Justice will publish its latest Shelter Impact Report, comprising data from the overwhelming majority of night shelters in the capital. While the data is still being verified at the time of writing this submission, approximately 1400 guests used 25 night shelters in the capital in 2015/16. It is also important to recognise these are largely guests who are not included in

either the CHAIN and street count numbers. The bed occupancy rate is also expected to be at or very close to capacity.

With need increasing significantly in London, the number of shelters has also grown with Housing Justice providing start up support for record numbers of new shelters in the capital over recent years. There are now Church and Community Night Shelters operating in all but three London Boroughs (Richmond –upon Thames, City of London and Sutton).

Shelters often operate in highly difficult circumstances, often straddling the threshold between order and chaos; as shelters grow and more faith groups become involved in delivering crisis services, there is an increasing need for a benchmarking of best practice as delivered by the Housing Justice Shelter Quality Mark and regular monitoring and re-appraisal of the services provided.

However, the relationship between shelters and statutory services can always be improved and greater partnership working should be encouraged. The example of the Westminster Homelessness Action Together initiative should be highlighted as an example of partnership working best practice, with local authority, charity organisations, faith based organisations, supra-national organisations coming together to meet the challenges of homelessness together.

Indeed, Westminster Council should be applauded for the latest draft Rough Sleeping strategy produced, as there was a clear shift in emphasis and realisation of the benefit of collaborative working practices, with both faith and charity groups alongside the work of the council.

On top of this, faith groups should have a voice at the table when discussions of future interventions and solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness take place. It is disappointing therefore that there was no voice for Christian and Community Night Shelters at the No Nights Sleeping Rough taskforce.

Faith as part of future solutions

Housing Justice agrees with the Mayor's view that meeting the challenges of housing demand in London will be a complicated challenge. There is no single solution and the suite of solutions across tenures, financial products, construction techniques, land supply, labour sources and planning control can have significant lag times.

However, Housing Justice is passionate that faith in the capital has an important role to play in meeting some of those challenges and in particular the challenge of land supply.

Housing Justice welcomes the focus of the Mayor on influencing public sector bodies such as National Rail and central government departments to develop housing wherever possible (p32). In a similar way we view church land as another important part of the land mix that could make a significant contribution to land supply and delivery of affordable housing in the capital.

Churches are significant land owners in the capital, in addition to consecrated buildings and worship spaces, various denominations also control numerous ancillary buildings attached to or associated with churches, including a good deal of clergy housing. Some of these ancillary buildings are in need of redevelopment or surplus to the requirements of a modern church. Our project in Wales shows the huge impact that facilitating joint working between churches and housing associations can have with 30 units delivered since the conception of the project in Wales and a pipeline of more than 150 units.

While the GLA is already engaging with the London Churches Property Forum facilitated by Housing Justice, bringing together the various denominations to filter in to the London Plan, there is space for further facilitation and joint working. This should include supporting a Housing Justice London

event in 2017 to increase awareness at parish level among congregations, which seeks to increase links between housing associations and Churches, working through potential obstacles to development in some of these areas and recognising the role churches can play in meeting housing demand while actively engaging with denominations in order to facilitate them to develop affordable housing.