

Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, Church and Community

What is the Commission for?

In March 2018, the Archbishop of Canterbury published Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope. Building on a key chapter, 'Housing – the Architecture of Community', the Commission will seek to bring a distinctively Christian contribution to the debate, on how to ensure people are well-housed, how local community life is fostered and in particular, how housing policy is directed to building well-functioning communities, evidenced by action among churches and the National Church Institutions.

Who will sit on it?

The Commission is made up of members appointed to bring specific areas of expertise and personal experience in this area, including a mix of theologians and experts in housing policy. The Commission will be chaired by Charlie Arbuthnot, and the Lead Bishop will be The Right Reverend Dr Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington.

Charlie Arbuthnot	Chair
The Rt Revd Dr Graham Tomlin	Bishop of Kensington
Cym D'Souza	Arawak Walton Housing Association
Stephen Backhouse	Westminster Theological Centre
Sir Robert Devereux	Former Permanent Secretary, DWP
Professor Christine Whitehead	London School of Economics
Chris Beales	Durham University
Lynne Cullens	National Estate Churches Network
Gill Payne	National Housing Federation
Marvin Rees	Mayor of Bristol

Why was Mayor Rees Approached?

As Mayor of Bristol Marvin and his administration have been very consistently and publicly committed to tackling the challenges of the housing crisis in Bristol. The Commission was keen to work not just with individual Parishes and Dioceses but to also engage with the political and city challenge and learn how the church can work to support the wider needs and strategy of the city. The complexity and breadth of that challenge is significant; new housing supply, affordability, regeneration of deprived areas, homelessness, social justice issues connected to lack of sufficient housing stock etc. In addition, Marvin has been keen to make the point that the success of the city is not just down to the City Council but is achieved through the collective response of all its key stakeholders (One City Plan). The church in Bristol is a key stakeholder and the opportunity to partner with the church in seeking the welfare of the city by examining how it can provide practical support to help tackle Bristol's housing challenge and enable healthy communities is important. The focus of the Commission in Bristol will not just be on discussion but will be developing a practical response as an exemplar for the Commission to share and learn from.

What Will be The Outcome in Bristol?

The Commission has been split into several streams of work and Marvin has agreed to work within the 'Local Church and Community Work Plan'. The intent and ambition behind that is that it gives scope and opportunity to engage with the City Council's partnership with the Bristol Housing Festival and the scope to develop and trial new housing on church land. The Commission is then able to use those exemplars to share and learn how other sites can benefit from that learning in those first schemes.

How long will it be operational for?

It is expected that the Commission will arrange its work so that it is brought to completion in 18 months' time. Fruits of the Commission's work will have a much longer life span.

How is it being funded?

Funding for the Archbishop's Commission is from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Discretionary fund.

What are its aims?

The Commission seeks to:

- a) To develop an authentically Christian theological framework for understanding housing and community-building issues.
- b) To propose areas for action by the Church of England, in parishes and dioceses maximising the church's contribution to alleviating the suffering attributable to the current housing crisis and the church's contribution to building better communities.
- c) To offer to Government, Whitehall, the housing industry, housing charities and others in the sector, proposals to shape the trajectory of future housing policy.

What exactly is it going to do?

The Commission will be meeting regularly over the coming 18 months, engaging with many of the key issues related to housing, church and community from a Christian perspective. In addition to looking at what the academic and policy research tells us, the Commission will be listening to people with direct experience of housing issues to inform its work and hearing from local churches and dioceses with experience of tackling these issues in their community. Regarding output, it will seek to produce actions as well as words; proposing areas for action by the Church of England and offering Government, Whitehall, the housing industry, housing charities and others in the sector, proposals to shape the trajectory of future housing policy. Wherever possible, we will seek to work in partnership with other public, private and voluntary organisations that share this vision.

Is it party political? What links does it have to government?

The Commission is not party political. It will simply be looking at what the academic and policy research tells us, and listening to people with direct experience of housing issues to inform its work. We will seek to work constructively with government and other key stakeholders, highlighting good policy and practice where possible, but being a critical voice when challenge is necessary.

How involved will the Archbishop be?

In March 2018, the Archbishop of Canterbury published Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope. The Commission will seek to build on a key chapter, 'Housing – the Architecture of Community', to bring a distinctively Christian contribution to the debate. Archbishop Justin has asked the Commissioners to be mindful of the values and themes explored in

this book as they carry out their 18-month review and will be taking a close interest in the Commission's work as it progresses.

What government policies do you want to see changed/introduced?

The Commission aims to offer a vision for housing, informed by the Christian faith, and propose changes which could shape the future of housing policy, as well as recommending areas for action by the Church of England itself – at local, regional and national level. There are many important issues the Commission will be considering through the course of its work. We cannot pre-empt the conclusions we will come to nor recommendations we will make.

Why aren't churches opening their doors to homeless people? Surely that would solve the housing crisis...

It is a tragedy that today so many people in the United Kingdom are homeless, leaving too many women, men and children vulnerable on our streets or in temporary and/or inadequate accommodation. Many churches are already supporting people who are homeless, befriending them and providing a listening ear, as well as offering food, night shelters and other practical help, which we must recognise and encourage, whilst also seeking long-term solutions. We want to recognise this good work and encourage more churches to do the same.

In the aftermath of Grenfell, do you have a view on standards of housing and how housing should be maintained?

The Grenfell Tower disaster was a stark reminder of how we have marginalised whole sections of the population in sub-standard housing; this urgently needs addressing. But it also brought to the surface the resilience and power of local communities in responding to this tragic event. In seeking solutions to the broader housing crisis, we must listen more closely to people with direct experience of housing issues.

What's your policy on environmental/sustainability concerns related to housing?

Climate change is a clear and present danger to the world and the greatest challenge facing future generations. The Commission will be mindful of the responsibility we have to care for God's creation through the course of its work, and its findings and its recommendations.

What about the Church Commissioners, what are they doing with all of their land and financial assets to help solve the housing crisis?

We recognise the work the Church Commissioners are already doing in this area, with their long history of contributing towards housing provision in England. As well as offering recommendations to Government, Whitehall, the housing industry, housing charities and others in the sector, the Commission will also propose areas for action by the Church of England - in parishes, dioceses and national institutions, including the Church Commissioners - maximising their contribution to alleviating the suffering attributable to the current housing crisis and to building better communities.

You say the Commission will listen to people. How?

We have started as we mean to carry on, by inviting local church leaders and members from across the country to the Commission launch to talk about the housing issues they see in their community and how they are tackling them. This includes people with direct experience of housing problems, as well as people who are actively involved in responding

to the need. Going forwards, we want to expand this listening and action network, making use of the Church of England's presence in every community.

There are some non-Christians on this Housing Commission. How will this bring a distinctly Christian contribution to the debate?

We welcome and value the range of views, perspectives and expertise the Commissioners will bring to the work of the Housing Commission. The Commission's work will draw upon this, whilst being regularly weighed against the work of a dedicated theology stream.