



Churches Update

April 2022

GOVERNMENT FAILING TO DELIVER FAITH FUND

Faith groups facing long delays in obtaining grants via the Faith New Deal pilot fund

Ministers have been criticised over delays in issuing grants as part of the Government's Faith New Deal pilot fund.

The fund was announced last September by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The accompanying press release trumpeted a *"new deal between faith groups and government"* which would *"look to capitalise on efforts to help communities...thanks to a new £1 million fund."*

Faith groups were set a tight deadline in September for applying. Applicants had to demonstrate how they would support one or more Covid-19 recovery objectives: mental well-being and loneliness; debt advice; employability; food poverty; and increasing community engagement through volunteering.

They could bid for grants up to £200,000. Bids up to £125,000 had to have an in-kind match; larger bids required a match donation from a philanthropic funder. The bidding process closed in October. Results were expected within weeks. So far, not a single group has been informed of the outcome of their application.

In December, Ian Mearns, the Labour MP for Gateshead, asked the DLUHC Secretary of State, Michael Gove, when applicants to the fund would find out if their application had been successful.



He was told by the Faiths Minister, Kemi Badenoch, that DLUHC had received a large number of applications for the fund which were in the process of being assessed and moderated. She told Ian that results would be announced *"in due course"*. The Minister went on to encourage applicants to monitor the Government's website for further updates. Yet, according to *Gov.uk* the Faiths New Deal page has not been updated since 23 September 2021.

Speaking to Churches Update, Labour's Shadow Faith Minister, Sarah Owen (above) said: *"I know of a number of faith groups who have applied to the Faith New Deal fund. It is incredibly frustrating that they are still waiting to find out if they have been successful. Many of them provided valuable support to our communities during the pandemic. The Government owes them better than this."*

GOVERNMENT "SLANDERS" ARCHBISHOP

Fall-out continues over controversial plans to fly immigrants to Rwanda

The Prime Minister has ignored calls to apologise to the Archbishop of Canterbury following comments made in a meeting with backbenchers.

During his Easter Sunday sermon, Archbishop Welby accused the Government of *"subcontracting our responsibilities"* over its plans to send immigrants to Rwanda. He said the idea was *"opposite to the nature of God."*

In response, sources close to the Prime Minister accused the Archbishop of being *"less vociferous"* in his condemnation of Russia than he was in his attack on the policy. This was despite the fact he had publicly condemned Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine as an *"act of great evil."*

The Church of England's head of news, John Bingham, said if the reports of Mr Johnson's behind-closed-doors comment were true, then it was a *"disgraceful slur."*



During PMQs, the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, offered the Prime Minister an opportunity to apologise to the Archbishop. However, Boris Johnson refused to do so.

Lambeth Palace later issued a statement, saying they will continue to condemn the move on *"moral and ethical grounds"*.

The Rev Richard Coles added that those who questioned the Archbishops' right to criticise the scheme *"need to acquaint themselves with the most basic rudiments of Christianity."*

PRIME MINISTER URGED TO "REFLECT" ON WORDS

The leader of the group Christians in Politics, Andy Flanagan, has urged MPs to reflect on the words they use in light of recent political controversies.

Andy was speaking after Boris Johnson refused to apologise for suggesting Keir Starmer had failed to prosecute Jimmy Savile whilst he was Director of Public Prosecutions.

Shortly after, the Labour leader was mobbed by protesters in Westminster.

Speaking about the incident, Andy said: *"One of the things we have been saying for a long time at Christians for Politics is the importance of our words and that it is important to have integrity in politics."* He continued *"...there is space needed for reflection and perhaps the Prime Minister would be able to take that time to reflect because actually it is really difficult being in the public eye, in the eye of the storm."*

Downing Street has said that Boris Johnson has no intention of apologising.

CHURCH MUST ACT ON SLAVERY

The Labour Peer, Paul Boateng, has said the Church of England has a "moral imperative" to review the presence of statues and memorials linked to slavery.

Paul was appointed to lead the Archbishops' Racial Justice Commission last July. As part of his work he was asked to scrutinise Church policies and root out systematic racism.

In an address to Bishops, Paul - who became the UK's first black Cabinet minister in 2002 - said: *"...[slavery] throws up questions around the wealth of the Church and how that wealth came into being and what we need to do today in order to heal some of the legacy of that monumental injustice that slavery represents and the importance of finding the resource to do that."*



He went on to challenge senior figures in the Church, warning them not to dismiss race issues when thinking about its wider work in the UK: *"...all the measures Synod takes - decisions about budgets, change in governance - must reflect Christ's inclusivity and passion for racial justice,"* he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Chancellor failing low income families

The charity Christians Against Poverty has joined Labour MPs in criticising the Chancellor's Spring Statement.

Labour's Shadow Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, told MPs that Rishi Sunak had made clear that he did not understand the scale of the challenge.

Rachel's comments were echoed by CAP's Director of External Affairs, Gareth McNab, who said: *"There was so much the Chancellor could've done but didn't...[he] ignored people in the toughest situations - people unable to work because of disability or ill-health, people with caring responsibilities and renters."*

Bishop condemns Johnson's failure to resign

A Church of England Bishop has spoken out about Boris Johnson and his refusal to resign after being found to have broken the law on Covid restrictions.

The Prime Minister said it did not occur to him that a gathering in the Cabinet room, when he was given a birthday cake, was against the rules.

In an interview with the Church Times, the Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, said: *"If breaking the laws you have made, and then lying about it, does not require resignation, then what does? Our public life and discourse are being corrupted. Integrity is essential to public life."*



NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS

A message from Stephen Timms MP, Labour's Faith Envoy

I chair the Work and Pensions Select Committee in Parliament. Just before Easter, we published a report on the experiences of children living in families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

As a condition of their visa, most categories of migrants in the UK have NRPF. This means they are unable to claim benefits such as Universal Credit and Child Benefit. During the pandemic, many couldn't work, and couldn't access social security either.

A study by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants found the NRPF policy had *"pushed working families into abject poverty, forcing them into unsustainable debt and into homelessness."*

The Home Office does not publish data on how many the restriction affects, but estimates from the Migration Observatory at Oxford University and The Children's Society put the

number at more than a million, including almost 180,000 children - some of whom were born in the UK and are British citizens.

In 2020 the High Court ruled the NRPF policy breached Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, preventing inhuman or degrading treatment. And in April last year, the High Court again ruled the policy was unlawful.

Last month - following pressure from my Committee and others - the Department for Education announced that free school meals will be permanently extended to all families affected by NRPF. This is very welcome news.

Our report called for families with children to have a maximum period of five years on NRPF. At the moment, many spend ten years - the bulk of someone's childhood - with the condition. We also argue that, where the children are UK citizens, their parents should be able to claim Child Benefit for them. We now await the Government's response.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

More than ever, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in the churches. We realise that many will not commit to supporting any particular political party, and we respect that, but we are interested to hear what you have to say. There are a few things you can do to help us in this work:

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party, 105 Victoria Street, Westminster, London SW1E 6QT. Alternatively, email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.
- 3. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leader if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so others can read about what Labour is doing.