

Press Release

23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011 – For immediate release

**Archbishop says cutbacks are disproportionately hitting the most vulnerable.**

In his speech today to Ministers, MPs, Peers, and member of the Caritas Social Action Network, the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, highlighted the importance of conversation between those who make the decisions in Parliament and those who witness their effects.

At the Caritas Social Action Network parliamentary reception, he highlighted the key areas of social security, health and criminal justice, and the need for decisions to be shaped by *“practical recognition of the needs of and really influenced by the experience of those on the front line of this work.”*

In the current climate where challenges include; the effect of cutbacks which are disproportionately hitting the most vulnerable; the repercussions of the summer disturbances; and the growing economic and social pressures upon families and young people; the Archbishop praised the work of member organisations of the Caritas network in helping those who are marginalised in society.

The Archbishop asked the MPs and Peers to *“utilise the wealth of knowledge and creativity”* of those who are working in social action.

The reception comes at a time when Welfare Reform Bill amendments to protect benefit claimants are being discussed in the House of Lords. Caritas Social Action Network has worked with Baroness Hollins in her tabling of an amendment, which aims to protect benefit claimants from being penalised as a result of administration errors.

Kevin Flanagan, Director of the St Anthony’s Centre for Church and Industry warns *“If the present [Welfare Reform Bill] proposals go through, I am gravely concerned that a number of people who are receiving benefits could, through no fault of their own, be placed in debt and face other far reaching consequences for matters which are beyond their control.”*

A further amendment concerning sanctions will also be debated at the same time.

Both amendments are designed to protect benefit claimants from errors and sanctions which can push vulnerable people further into poverty

Archbishop Vincent Nichols’ speech echoes the address of Pope Benedict XVI in Westminster last year, where the Holy Father emphasised *“the duty of civil authority to foster the common good.”*

**ENDS**

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Notes to editors:

Caritas Social Action Network is the social action agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, and an umbrella organisation of charities with a Catholic ethos.

The Parliamentary Reception took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> of November at the Houses of Parliament and gives Caritas members an opportunity to meet ministers, MPs and peers and to raise concerns over current legislation.

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