

Acting Tough on Sleeping Rough: How the Welfare State has Failed its Homeless

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“Anyone can become homeless” – this is how Streetlink, the primary NGO that contacts and guides rough sleepers to appropriate services, introduces us to the realities of rough sleeping. With over 8,000 rough sleepers in London alone, the problem seems to be increasing without any solutions in sight.

Currently, homelessness duty is only owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless, and falls within a priority need group. This encompasses a very narrow group of residents, resulting in many being ineligible and without a roof over their head. Furthermore, without adequate alternatives the state has failed to provide for its homeless citizens. By shifting the burden of homelessness provision

to the third sector and turning a blind eye to rising requests for funding and hostel spaces by charities, the government is effectively punishing its citizens further for being homeless. Recently, with the introduction of new powers such as the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), rough sleepers are liable to and have been subject to punitive measures instead of supportive assistance through threats of court action and fines of up to £1,000 for sleeping in public space.

Where the provision of a basic human need for shelter is being neglected by the welfare state and squalor is rampant, this research work calls to action the community to step up voluntary action to help fellow society members and pressurise government into action.