



Crisis' response to Westminster Council's good rule and government byelaw consultation

January 2012

Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people, welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the introduction of new byelaws in Westminster.

We recognise that the Byelaws are designed to target protest camps such as the one in Parliament Square. However, we have some concerns that they may have an impact on rough sleepers in the area and could be counter-productive in the effort to end rough sleeping. The byelaws could potentially be used to penalise people who have little choice but to sleep rough within the designated area and could set back their progress in moving off the streets.

Rough sleeping is a significant issue in Westminster. Official rough sleeping statistics for 2010 place the number of rough sleepers in Westminster at 147 – the highest of all 70 Local Authorities that took part in the street counts.¹ It is therefore imperative that the council seriously consider how the byelaws can be prevented from affecting affect rough sleepers in the area.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of Byelaws 3, 6 and 8 under which anyone found to be using sleeping equipment within a designated area can be directed not to do so, constables and officers will be able to seize and retain any sleeping equipment and those convicted of an offence may be liable of a fine of up to £500.

The enforcement of byelaw 3 could result in rough sleepers being moved on to another location without any support. We fear they may be moved out of sight and away from services. It would not help them to resolve their homelessness, nor would it be a constructive way to encourage them to engage with services.

The enforcement of byelaw 6 could lead to rough sleepers having their sleeping equipment seized and retained with no guarantee of getting it back, leaving them without any source of shelter from the cold.

We are concerned that under byelaw 8 a rough sleeper could find themselves with a fine of up to £500 that they are unlikely to be able to pay and a criminal record that could put further barriers in the way of them breaking out of homelessness.

Efforts to tackle rough sleeping in London have made great progress in recent years. However, there is still a long way to go and the most recent CHAIN figures show an increase in the number of people seen sleeping rough.² This, combined with the fact that the Borough of Westminster consistently contains well over half of all the rough sleepers in London, means that Westminster Council's continued participation in positive, joint working to end rough sleeping is essential. We recognise that it is not Westminster Council's intention to target homeless people; however the byelaws

¹ 'Rough Sleeping England – Total Street Count 2010' Department for Communities and Local Government (July 2010)

² CHAIN, Street to Home Bulletin, 2009-10

ANNEX E – RESPONSE OF CRISIS

may have unintended consequences and steps should be taken to prevent any impact on rough sleepers.

In 2011, Westminster Council consulted on byelaws which would have criminalised rough sleeping within the Victoria area. Crisis was strongly opposed to this proposal, and we very much welcomed the council's decision not to proceed. Having recognised the damaging effect that this would have had, we urge the council to now consider how best to ensure that these byelaws do not adversely affect rough sleepers.

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help people to transform their lives.

As well as delivering services, we are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience. Crisis has ambitious plans for the future and we are committed to help more people in more places across the UK. We know we won't end homelessness overnight or on our own but we take a lead, collaborate with others and, together, make change happen.



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