



Home Office

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Minister of State for Crime,
Policing and Fire

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29 April 2024

Dear Huw,

Thank you for your letter of 19 March to the Home Secretary following the Legislation, Justice and Constitution committee considering a joint letter from homelessness charities in Wales about their concerns on the nuisance rough sleeping measures in the Criminal Justice Bill. I am replying as the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire and I am sorry for the delay in responding to your letter.

The UK Government agrees nobody should be criminalised for simply being destitute or sleeping rough. That is why we are committed to bringing into force the repeal of the outdated Vagrancy Act 1824. We have made the unprecedented commitment to end rough sleeping within this Parliament and have embarked on a strategy to shift the focus to prevention and move vulnerable individuals into multi-agency support. I know the Welsh Government shares this aim and have produced the Ending Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2026 and Home Office officials continue to engage closely with officials from the Welsh Government on these measures.

Rough sleeping is a complex issue requiring a multi-agency approach with appropriate wrap around support required to help address the complex vulnerabilities people sleeping rough can have. As such, the relevant provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill will be supported by guidance highlighting that local authority outreach and engagement remain as the first step in getting people away from sleeping on the streets. These tools support a staggered, multi-agency approach to enforcement where that is necessary, as per the principles set out in the joint National Police Chiefs' Council and Crisis guidance at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/245310/from-enforcement-to-ending-homelessness-full-guide.pdf>.

There is already a lot of good practice between local authorities, police and other partners in addressing begging and rough sleeping in both England and Wales that can be built on. However, we also recognise that everyone has the right to go about their business without being unduly impeded and that communities have the right to feel safe.

Some instances of rough sleeping are linked to nuisance behaviours such as causing damage, disruption and distress. Where these anti-social behaviours occur, we must consider the rights of other members of the community and ensure local authorities and the police are able to appropriately intervene to address the issue, prevent or stop the nuisance caused and can also help direct the individual, where appropriate, into relevant

support services. Local authorities and police have told us that where a person refuses appropriate offers of support that enforcement can encourage people into accepting the help available.

We continue to look at ways to improve the drafting of these provisions, to ensure that they are tightly and narrowly drawn and to be clear that engagement and support is first and criminal sanctions are a final resort.

I do hope this provides some reassurance that our intention has never been to criminalise rough sleeping and we remain committed to ensuring these provisions are properly targeted and can both protect the public and help direct rough sleepers into relevant support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP