

## Petitions Briefing

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 5 Mawrth 2019

Petitions Committee | 5 March 2019

### Research briefing: Ban the use of 'hostile architecture'

Petition number: P-05-864

Petition title: Ban the use of 'hostile architecture'

Petition topic: We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to ban the use of "Hostile Architecture" by organisations to deter homeless people from seeking shelter and any other street structures designed to impede or hide the homeless.

#### Hostile architecture

The term 'hostile architecture' describes the various features used in the design of buildings or public spaces that aim to discourage people from touching, climbing or sitting on them. These features are either intended to avoid damage to the space, or to stop spaces being used for a purpose that is different to the specific purpose intended by the owner (such as rough sleeping).

Hostile architecture features can be categorised as:

- **Physical deterrents** – studs embedded in flat surfaces to make rough sleeping uncomfortable, sloped window sills to stop people sitting, curved or segregated benches to stop people lying on them, and gated doorways to deter rough sleeping.
- **'Wetting down'** – spraying and hosing down doorways and alleyways with water or cleaning products to stop rough sleepers using the space, or installing water sprinklers that come on intermittently to stop rough sleeping.
- **Noise pollution** – sounds, such as loud music, are projected through speakers to deter rough sleepers.

The measures described above do not incur legal penalties or sanctions, but the use of such measures has been controversial, with some such [measures being removed](#) following public criticism.

The national homelessness charity Crisis has identified widespread use of such deterrent measures. A [Crisis survey of more than 450 rough sleepers in England and Wales](#) in the summer of 2016 found that:

- 35% had found it difficult to find anywhere to sleep or rest in the previous 12 months because of defensive architecture;
- 20% had experienced noise pollution in the previous 12 months effecting their ability to sleep and rest; and
- 21% had experienced the street cleansing or ‘wetting down’ of sleeping areas in the previous 12 months.

## Attempts to ban hostile architecture

In November 2017, the Irish political party, Solidarity, proposed a private member’s Bill – [The Planning and Development \(Amendment\) Bill 2017](#). The Bill aimed to amend the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2016, to ensure that any development which had the object or effect of deterring homeless people from obtaining shelter from a structure, land or building would not be an exempted development, and would therefore, be subject to planning permission.

Following a [debate in the Dáil Éireann](#), this private member’s legislation was rejected by 98 votes to 40.

## Welsh Government response

The Welsh Government’s response to the Chair of the Petitions Committee noted that the issues faced by homeless people should not be compounded by the design of new developments, and emphasised the role of placemaking:

In December [2018] we published Edition 10 of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) which puts placemaking at the heart of national planning policy. It requires developers and local planning authorities to think about the well-being of people in the design of their schemes and seeks, through the planning system, to create development which feels safe and inclusive and to create places where people want to be and interact with others.

The Welsh Government explained that it is the responsibility of local planning authorities to determine planning applications in their area according to policies in their local development plans, but that PPW is a material consideration in this process. PPW should also be used as a guiding document when local authorities design new areas of public realm. The Welsh Government emphasised that as many ‘hostile architecture’ features could be installed at the post-construction phase, they may not be subject to any planning controls.

The Welsh Government also emphasised the work it is undertaking to ensure that homeless people do not need to seek refuge within or around buildings at all. Its letter noted that tackling

all forms of homelessness is a priority for the Welsh Government and it is investing £30 million in the current, and the next, financial year to tackle homelessness. This funding includes both the additional funding awarded to each local authority to help them support rough sleepers during the winter months, and the additional revenue support grant to local authorities to help continue to meet their statutory obligations in homelessness prevention and improve their trauma-informed practice in Wales.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information in this briefing is correct at the time of its publication. Readers should be aware that these briefing papers are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.