

News Release: For immediate release
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RED TAPE LEAVES HOMELESS IN SUB ZERO COLD

A survey by homeless charity Simon Community showed that up to HALF of rough sleepers had not been offered emergency cold weather shelter in consistent sub zero temperatures.

Local authorities need to urgently take action and step up to their humanitarian responsibilities seriously if deaths are to be avoided...

In a regular survey of 90 people that use its services it became apparent that many were not being reached by the 'Severe Weather Emergency Protocol' measures which swing into operation when temperatures are forecast to fall below zero for three consecutive nights.

Guidance for local authorities states that: *'It will be important to take all possible steps to avoid unnecessary deaths on the streets and take prompt action to ensure all rough sleepers have access to shelter if someone is at risk due to sleeping rough during the extreme cold weather'*. Evidence from this emergency survey suggests that action by Local Authorities is failing to reach people and putting lives at risk.

Simon Community trustee Dave Clark said 'We should be putting the red tape to one side as we try to give every person who needs it the chance to get off the street in these life threatening conditions. We've seen evidence of poor coordination, of unclear messages about who is entitled and unnecessary bureaucracy. What we should be seeing instead is a major humanitarian effort to get people, no matter their background, in out of the cold.'

Unable to access the shelters, people are having to brave the cold in sleeping bags and on a thin layer of cardboard.

The survey also highlighted that, when offered a place, 31% still choose to stay outside even in freezing weather. Many have felt that emergency shelters would be too busy or have problems with drink or drugs. However, those that have used the shelters report a broadly positive experience despite concerns about the numbers using them.

Simon Community has opened its own cold weather shelter and continues to work with rough sleepers in London, providing hot food, shelter, advice and friendship. It will soon enter an intensive period of work over the Christmas period.

Ends

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Information for editors

1. The Simon Community has been in operation since 1963 living and working with homeless people in London. It currently runs services in the streets of London 365 days a year making contact with an average of 150 people every day. We are intimately connected to the lives of people sleeping rough and homeless in the capital through regular outreach work, our house of hospitality and our residential house. The Simon Community model has inspired innovation in others since its inception and we continue to pride ourselves on our independent and pioneering way of working.
2. Guidance for local authorities is available at http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/SWEP%20good%20practice%20note%202010_0.pdf
3. The survey was carried out over the week commencing 29th November. 90 people in total answered questions including an emergency questionnaire carried out on the night of Friday 3rd December when temperatures reached -5C. Questions were asked between the hours of 8 - 10 PM in the borough of Westminster. 51% of those surveyed stated that they had spent the previous night sleeping rough.

www.simoncommunity.org.uk

Registered Charity number: 283938