

Simon Community response to the government's consultation on the proposed criminalisation of squatting

Introduction:

The Simon Community has been living and working with homeless people in London since 1963. We are a group of homeless people and volunteers working together to provide individual support, direct services, access to other services and an independent campaigning voice.

Our concerns:

We are concerned about the negative effect on homelessness that the proposed legislation would have if it were adopted. We are concerned that the proposals outlined in the consultation are not evidence based and that any resulting legislation would result in a dramatic increase in homelessness and a shocking and unjustifiable restriction of civil liberties. Squatting is often the last recourse of homeless people. There is very little evidence on the numbers of squatters or the numbers of homeless people as many of them are hidden in temporary, unsafe or otherwise unsuitable accommodation.

Our position:

The position of the Simon Community is that squatting is not a problem in London. The problem is the enormous number of properties which are deliberately left empty at a time of acute housing crisis. The vast majority of homeless people who squat empty buildings – that is buildings which are not being used, are responsible people keen to bring housing stock back into use. Squatters are more aware than most people of the importance of housing and have no reason to make others homeless; in fact squatting for many is a moral and political choice. Homeless people come from all walks of life and many are vulnerable people with protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010

Views on current squatting laws:

Enforcement of the law is also adequate, but there is room for improvement. It would be very helpful if there were a greater understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all concerned. The police are often put in a difficult position and do not always have a thorough knowledge of the legislation. The public is often misinformed by the press about the true nature of squatting. It would be useful to mount a public awareness campaign to inform citizens of the position of squatting in our history and its relevance in today's housing crisis. There are many organisations who would be keen to contribute to such an innovation.

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