

Coronavirus: Protecting rough sleepers

Protect rough sleepers from prosecution or penalties during lockdown

Context

As of Monday 23th March, the UK government has announced 'lockdown' measures to delay the spread of coronavirus: The public are being instructed to stay at home, only allowed to go outside to buy food or medication, exercise alone once a day, or travel to work if they are a key worker. Police will have powers to enforce these rules, including issuing fines. Shelter Scotland welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government's emergency coronavirus legislation exempts any person who is homeless from the restrictions on movement.

However, given the recent actions of a number of police forces in the UK who have had to be warned against overreaching their lockdown enforcement powers¹, as well as the existing mistrust of the police among many of our service users, Shelter Scotland remain concerned that homeless individuals may be targeted as a result of the 'lockdown' measures.

What and why we are calling for this

Shelter Scotland is calling for assurances that anyone who does not have a home is not penalised by the coronavirus lockdown measures.

While we have no doubt that the measures announced in response to the pandemic are not designed to target people experiencing homelessness, and we thoroughly welcome the emergency legislation that clarifies that the restrictions do not apply to people who are homeless, we seek reassurance that policing practice will reflect this. We also seek reassurance that police will support homeless individuals to access appropriate services.

Solution

Police Scotland should ensure that no one who is rough sleeping is targeted by any new emergency powers. Anyone who is currently statutory homeless or facing destitution should be supported to contact their local authority homelessness team, who should arrange appropriate accommodation for them, where they can safely follow official rules around lockdown measures.

We ask that this message urgently be cascaded within Police Scotland to ensure they are fully aware of this exemption and the importance of supporting people to access appropriate services.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/30/uk-police-guidelines-coronavirus-lockdown-enforcement-powers-following-criticism-lord-sumption>