

PRESS RELEASE

SIMON COMMUNITY'S ROUGH GUIDE TO COUNTING ROUGH SLEEPERS

The Government has issued new guidelines to count homeless people on our street more accurately. But having criticized in opposition are they now botching the job in government. . . .?

London's ONLY independent homeless charity, Simon Community welcomes Government plans to revamp guidelines on how to accurately count people who sleep rough in the UK however massive changes are still needed if rough sleepers numbers are to be accurately collated.

Currently the system is so flawed, vast numbers of homeless people are missed or ignored. Last year at least 800 people were completely overlooked from official numbers.

Dave Clark, Trustee for the Simon Community said: 'The emphasis should be on an honest appraisal of what people need and what works in the long term. We cannot afford to see the issue become a political football in the run up to the 2012 target and the Olympic games.

'Letting councils estimate numbers and not enforcing a single count for the whole of London leaves room for mistakes and massaging. This is so disappointing as the government called from the other side of the benches for clarity and honesty.

Here is a run down of the main changes and what SC thinks about them....

Conducting street counts to be a choice for individual local authorities.

This could cause massive potential problems. It leaves councils the options of NOT counting at all.

Local authorities should submit an estimate of the number of people rough sleeping on a typical night.

Estimates will make any figures inaccurate. This is common sense and a more robust system should be put in place.

The definition of rough sleeper to be expanded.

A welcome change. This is common sense.

To encourage neighbouring local authorities to count on the same night.

This needs to be much stronger and be enforced particularly in London. One on-going issue is homeless people being 'moved on' just before counts. One borough's reduction could become its neighbour's rise under this guidance.

This is also a real opportunity for central government to rule out police and Local Authority agency tactics of moving people on before a count is done.

To move the recommended starting time to 2am.

We support this recommendation too. It gives a truer picture as most rough sleepers have bedded down for the night by this time.

However, the rights of rough sleepers must be also seriously considered. The guidance also refers to waking people who are rough sleeping in 'order to get information from them that may be helpful.' Any information about where people are sleeping should be gathered from voluntary agencies and outreach workers prior to the count. Waking up a rough sleeper is not fair and inhumane.

SC is also aware of the timings of the counts. Only counting during the Autumn gives a limited view. Regular counts should take place through-out the year and regular research about which services are working and which aren't is the only way in which rough sleepers can get help they need.

Notes to editor:

About the Simon Community¹

The Simon Community has been in operation since 1963 living and working with homeless people in London. It currently runs services almost every day of the year making contact with over 180 people on an almost daily basis. 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. We have carried out regular counts of people rough sleeping in central London as an independent verification of the issue.

As we approach our 47th anniversary we continue to see a need for our services and voice which meets a need where no other provision exists.

WWW.SIMONCOMMUNITY.ORG.UK

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT DAVE CLARKE ON: 07817 029 824

ends.

¹ Simon Community is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. Registered charity number 283938.