

Ending rough sleeping

The government has announced its wish to make big inroads into rough sleeping with a view in due course to eliminating it. I am sure all agree that would be a welcome development, as no-one likes to see people out in the cold and wet trying to shelter in a doorway or under an arch as the rest of the world scurries by. We ought to be able to help more of them to a better life.

The latest proposal from the government is an initiative called "Somewhere safe to stay". Anyone seen out at night will be offered a place in a refuge, where there would also be assessment made of their needs and how they might be helped into a more normal life with a job and a tenancy for a roof over their heads. Where people need medical attention or help with getting off drink or drugs, that too could be sorted out.

This is a development of the rapid assessment hubs currently used for the "No second night out" approach. It is important that there is a place where the homeless can be directed where they can receive immediate assistance and the longer term help they may require. The government runs a system of supported lettings and works with local agencies to try to find accommodation for an individual and the means to pay for it. In the high stress parts of the country overnight accommodation is available and people go out and tell the homeless of what is available.

There is in place a network of hostels and assistance from benefits offices and Housing departments. People out on the streets should be offered these facilities, as good Councils seek to do. People sleeping out cannot be compelled to take up offers made.