

### **On soup runs**

St Mungo's is supportive of steps to restrict soup runs in the area designated; understands the council's desire to show it means business by having a byelaw; and hopes it never has to use it to arrest anyone, as it will then seem a sledgehammer has been taken to crack a nut.

St Mungo's has led the sector in developing services that benefit our clients without impacting negatively (and often impacting positively) on the communities in which these services exist.

As providers of outreach services in Westminster, St Mungo's is aware of the number of Soup Runs into this area and the length of time people congregate before, during and after each 'run'. St Mungo's does not feel that this disturbance to local residents' lives is warranted.

We do recognise the goodwill and generosity which can characterise soup runs. Indeed, St Mungo's itself started as a soup run more than 40 years ago. What was made very clear, however, was that soup was not an end in itself. The soup run was understood as "a means of communication" through which those on the periphery of the crowd could be engaged, with a view to helping them indoors. In our view, the wide availability of outreach services in Westminster means that that justification for soup runs no longer applies.

There is an argument that taking basic services to the streets helps keep people there, and that what should instead happen is that essential services should be available inside easily-accessible buildings.

We would therefore urge Westminster to return to working with partners on implementing the recommendations set out in the LSE research into soup runs in Westminster and in particular the efforts facilitated by Crisis, the Passage and others to encourage soup runs to reform, to come inside and to instead support efforts to tackle homelessness in their own home areas.

### **On making rough sleeping illegal**

We cannot understand the logic behind this proposal.

We don't believe that criminalising the act of rough sleeping will be positive for the clients involved, for the local community or society at large.

Through our extensive experience of working with this client group, in Westminster and elsewhere, we believe assertive, intensive outreach backed by current mental health and enforcement legislation achieves the best results. We believe in getting to people early, never giving up, assessing well and moving them off the streets with a sustainable, well-planned offer.

This includes utilising current enforcement powers in partnership with the police and other agencies, something we have delivered through our BBS teams and Street Population Outreach team in Westminster.

And so we feel such a law risks

- giving vulnerable people criminal records that limit further their chance to recover
- driving individuals away from positive engagement with services
- displacing individuals and issues
- not allowing for real needs to be understood and for an offer and holistic package of care to be delivered.

St Mungo's Response to Westminster Council's Byelaw Consultation  
March 2011

The police, and the local authority, already have extensive powers to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour. If this is such an issue, use them. But is it really an issue? Rough sleeping has generally reduced over the past few years.

We also object to the kind of mind-set which sees a problem and assumes that the best response is to ban it. This is mean-spirited and unjust. We particularly object to any view of vulnerability as "a lifestyle choice", to use a cliché.

We oppose this proposal strongly and entirely, and hope that the council will not proceed with it.

### **On the process**

Apart from the specifics of the byelaws, St Mungo's is concerned that Westminster had not communicated the possibility of these legislative changes to the London Delivery Board. Westminster City Council and St Mungo's, along with a number of other agencies, sit together on the LDB - the Mayor's primary strategic vehicle for tackling rough sleeping in the capital. That these substantial and serious proposals were not mentioned at the LDB meetings troubles us as it undermines the collective approach to tackling rough sleeping that is needed to meet our 2012 targets.

We now have some polarised and obstructive views that are taking up time that could better be spent helping clients come off the streets for good.

*St Mungo's  
March 2011*