

RS08

Ymchwiliad i gysgu ar y stryd yng Nghymru

Inquiry into rough sleeping in Wales

Ymateb gan: Heddlu De Cymru

Response from: South Wales Police

Whilst no specific data is held by Policing across Wales regarding the extent of the problems associated with homelessness, Police Forces across Wales recognise that homelessness, crime and disorder and vulnerability can often overlap and are underpinned by complex social problems. Policing is sensitive to the fact that coercive policing powers cannot be seen as the route to addressing homelessness and as a consequence policing activity is designed to protect the vulnerable and, more often than not, make referrals to partner agencies.

Our priority is to work with and assist partners in tackling these issues, with the focus being on avoiding criminalising those who find themselves in these circumstances.

In order to respond to the complex risks associated with homelessness, the Police Service is committed to:

- Keeping people safe
- Working in partnership to protect the most vulnerable people in society;
- Working in partnership to reduce anti-social behaviour;
- Working in partnership to prevent and detect crime using the appropriate legislation proportionately;
- Signposting individuals whilst referring persons resorting to begging to relevant support agencies.

Naturally, whilst underpinned by the same ethos the specific response to homelessness varies from force to force across Wales. This will depend on the extent and scale of the problem as it relates to calls and demand for policing services associated with crime and disorder or concerns for public safety.

For example Cardiff, Newport and Swansea have all developed similar processes to equip police officers and police and community support officers to respond to and deal with individuals who are apparently homeless, with a view to ensuring that the appropriate interventions are put in place to both deal with any criminality and also support those in need.

Often police forces are required to deal with street drinking, drug taking, anti-social behaviour, thefts, and aggressive begging and assaults.

Typical interventions can include using legislation such as the Vagrancy Act 1824 and Section 34 and 35 Dispersal Powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

Importantly, proportionality and necessity are tests which are applied by all police officers before coercive action is taken, providing contact details for outreach services and making referrals to partner agencies are often the primary response of both police officers and police and community support officers.

Police officers are public servants and are deeply concerned about people who are affected by rough sleeping across Wales. The majority of those sleeping rough are doing so as a result of challenging personal circumstances and are amongst the most vulnerable within our community. In many cases they need the protection of the police and other agencies.

If a person, for whatever the reason, is taken into police custody the level of welfare support and care offered to them is substantial and comes under significant scrutiny. Nurses for example are employed within police custody suites across Wales and the Independent Office for Police Conduct scrutinises police actions should any harm come to individuals upon their release from the custody suite.

The majority of policing interactions with members of the homeless community are underpinned by dignity and compassion, focussing on the provision of support and outreach services.

Each police officer across Wales has attested to the fact that they will serve with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and according equal respect to all people. The police service is required to keep the peace whilst seeking to prevent all offences against people and property. This at times requires the use of legal powers, but as described above this is not the single response of policing to the challenges posed by homelessness in Wales.