



Crispin Blunt MP
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

30th June 2011

Dear Mr Blunt,

We are aware that concerns have been raised about the issue of squatting and that in response you will be consulting on a range of proposals including potentially criminalising squatting. As some of the country's leading homelessness organisations, we therefore felt it important to draw your attention to the fact that amongst the people who squat are many vulnerable homeless people. As a member of the Ministerial Working Group on homelessness, we know you will appreciate the importance of not making the situation worse for some of society's most vulnerable people by criminalising them.

You will no doubt appreciate that many single homeless people find themselves forced to squat as they can find no alternative accommodation. According to recent research by Sheffield Hallam for Crisis, squatting is not a marginal tenure for homeless people, with 39% having squatted at some point (compared with 32% who have lived in a private rented tenancy and 36% who have lived in a social tenancy). Homeless people who squat are often amongst the most vulnerable people in society – 37% have mental health problems and 20% are alcohol dependent. We are concerned that to criminalise this group would be both wrong and counter productive.

We think it is also important to highlight the reality of squatting for the majority of homeless people who are often desperate people in very real need, using empty or derelict buildings which offer only marginal protection against the elements and differ little from sleeping rough. Conditions in squats can be appalling with no utilities, unsanitary conditions and vermin - all of which can cause or exacerbate health problems. Many homeless people who squat also report fearing for their personal safety.

As you are aware, there are already a range of legal protections available to property owners and we would question whether new ones are needed. Criminalising and prosecuting such vulnerable people cannot be the right approach, carries significant cost implications and does nothing to tackle the problems that cause homeless people to squat in the first place. Instead, we believe the Government should dramatically increase housing supply, continue its work to bring empty homes back into use and must improve the services and support available to homeless people.

Homelessness is already on the rise and with significant cuts to welfare and homelessness services on the horizon; this situation is only set to get worse. More people are likely to face homelessness and we would not want to see them faced

with the impossible choice between sleeping on the streets or risking being criminalised simply for trying to put a roof over their head.

We enclose a copy of the research referred to above which highlights the extent and experience of squatting amongst homeless people. We would urge you to keep this in mind when considering potential options to address concerns around squatting, , including considering alternative measures for people with limited options who are currently squatting, and would be happy to meet with you to discuss this further. We are also copying this letter to Grant Shapps, given his obvious interest as Minister for Housing.

We look forward to hearing your response.


Yours Sincerely,




Stephen Robertson
Chief Executive
Big Issue Foundation



Howard Sinclair
Chief Executive
Broadway



Leslie Morphy
Chief Executive
Crisis



Stephen Bell
Chief Executive
The Cyrenians



Jane Slowey
Chief Executive
Foyer Federation



Jenny Edwards
Chief Executive
Homeless Link



Alison Gelder
Chief Executive
Housing Justice



Charles Fraser
Chief Executive
St Mungos



Rob Owen
Chief Executive
St Giles Trust



Matt Peacock
Chief Executive
Streetwise Opera



Jeremy Swain
Chief Executive
Thames Reach

Contact details

Stephen Robertson, Big Issue, 1-5 Wandsworth Road, London, SW8 2LN
Howard Sinclair, Broadway, 15 Half Moon Court, Bartholomew Close, London, EC1A 7HF
Leslie Morphy, Crisis, 66 Commercial Street, London, E1 6LT
Stephen Bell, The Cyrenians, Architectural House, Plummer Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 7AB
Jane Slowey, The Foyer Federation, 3rd Floor, 5-9 Hatton Wall, London, EC1N 8HX
Jenny Edwards, Homeless Link, Gateway House, Milverton Street, London, SE11 4AP.
Alison Gelder, Housing Justice, 22-25 Finsbury Square, London, EC2A 1DX
Rob Owen, St Giles Trust, Georgian House, 64/68 Camberwell Church Street, London SE5 8JB
Charles Fraser, St Mungo's, Griffin House, 161 Hammersmith Road, London W6 8BS
Matt Peacock, Streetwise Opera, 18 Grosvenor Street, London, W1K 4QQ
Jeremy Swain, Thames Reach, Gem House, 122-126 Backchurch Lane, London, E1 1ND