

The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP  
Secretary of State for the Home  
Department

**Councillor Bethia Thomas**  
**Leader of the Council**

Via email

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Dear Mr Cleverly,

### **Current proposals regarding rough sleepers**

I am writing on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council to express my concern that the Government's proposals on rough sleeping, as set out in the Criminal Justice Bill, will make tackling rough sleeping more difficult, and lead to poorer outcomes for rough sleepers and our communities.

We have a strong track record in preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the Vale of White Horse – a result of our dedicated proactive and targeted approach. However, the economic and housing environment has led to increased demands upon our housing services. Reducing rough sleeping and homelessness has become more challenging due to factors including the cost-of-living crisis, high private rental costs, and the lack of genuinely affordable housing.

Whilst we recognise the Government has taken measures to address rough sleeping, we are deeply concerned that the proposals to fine and potentially imprison "nuisance" rough sleepers will be counter-productive in ending rough sleeping.

We therefore implore the Government to reconsider its current plans that focus on criminalising rough sleeping, and instead focus on a more constructive and collaborative approach to tackling, and ultimately achieving, our shared goal of ending rough sleeping.

The Criminal Justice Bill as it currently stands provides a broad definition of "nuisance" rough sleeping that potentially includes people who appear to be rough sleeping, or intending to rough sleep, as well as those engaged in begging or anti-social behaviour.

My concerns primarily lie with the Government's plans for The Criminal Justice Bill to replace the Vagrancy Act 1824 and create new powers for the police and local authorities to respond to begging and rough sleeping where it "causes a nuisance to the public". The definition of nuisance within this is simply far too broad and arbitrary and does not reflect the underlying causes of rough sleeping, nor will it help address rough sleeping.

Adopting a punitive approach to rough sleeping would not be compatible with our successful approach in the Vale of White Horse. Our highly successful team seek to provide care and support to rough sleepers, with our initial focus being on doing all we can to support individuals to secure a safe housing environment away from the streets.

The risk of unreasonable and unnecessary punishment, that proposals within The Criminal Justice Bill represent, could mean that rough sleepers would be much less likely to engage with the support services we offer. Instead of reducing rough sleeping as we assume is the intention, the approach being proposed will almost certainly lead to an increase in both the number of incidents and duration of rough sleeping.

We remain committed to doing everything we can to help prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in our district. We would ask that you urgently reconsider your proposals.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Bethia Thomas  
Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council