

# Rough sleepers hounded off streets

Kaya Burgess, Sean O'Neill  
Gabriella Swerling

Rough sleepers are being deported, threatened with fines or moved on from the streets in a nationwide crack-down on homelessness.

Council officials, police and immigration officers are patrolling towns and cities penalising begging, loitering and rough sleeping while rounding up eastern European citizens.

Despite a government pledge to halve street homelessness by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027, the numbers are rising sharply.

The Chain database, a charity-run homelessness information network that records rough sleepers in London, showed there were 8,108 homeless people in 2016-17 compared with 3,017 in 2007-08. The data indicates that the number of UK citizens sleeping rough is rising while the number of eastern Europeans, who made up a fifth of the total last year, is falling.

The scale of homelessness and associated begging, drug and alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour has led to public concern which the authorities say has prompted increased enforcement action. Councils say they are also trying to house the homeless but need more financial help from Westminster.

Operation Gopik, which targets east European rough sleepers, began in London in 2015 and became national policy last year. The Home Office refuses to say how many people have been removed as a result.

The Times has identified 11 councils that have imposed or are considering "public space protection orders" to threaten homeless people sleeping in



PAUL COUSANS FOR THE TIMES

Manchester is in the midst of a Spice crisis. Many homeless people use the drug as a way to self-medicate and numb themselves to the bitter cold

week. "One guy was sleeping in a basement of a block and had his shirts hanging up. He worked in the City in accounts. He hadn't been homeless for a huge amount of time and was trying to work his way out of it."

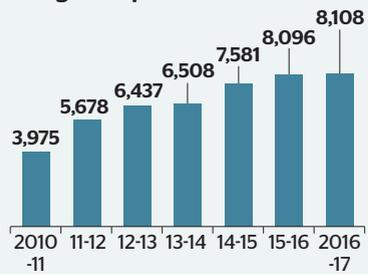
By contrast, rough sleepers in Manchester that trade in Spice, the former legal high, was drawing more homeless people to the city. It has become known as Britain's Spice capital, with a large number of those on the street struggling with addiction despite attempts by police to crack down on its use.

One rough sleeper said: "It's a hotspot. People are staying on the streets so they can get Spice all the time." Cheryl, 37, said people used it to "self-medicate", adding: "You can't sleep at the best of times. Last night I was crying, it was that cold."

Liam, 33, a chef who worked for restaurants owned by Gordon Ramsay and Jamie Oliver, has been sleeping rough for five weeks in a tent in Chinatown and has a heroin addiction and depression. "Manchester is known as the capital for Spice," he said, adding that there was a "constant flow" of hundreds of rough sleepers. He added: "I know a few professional people rough sleeping: lawyers, doctors, a police officer, pub owners."

Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, said that Spice had caused "chaos" on the city's streets and that homeless people and rough sleepers were particularly vulnerable to the dangerous strains in circulation. He called for government funding to help to crack down on the manufacture and distribution of the drug.

Rough sleepers in London



cars, tents, parks and doorways with instant fines of £100 rising to £1,000 if left unpaid. The Manifesto Club, a campaign group which has catalogued the spread of the orders, said that 28 local authorities were using them to ban loitering while 19 had orders stopping or restricting begging. Sunderland has a prohibition on "bin raking".

The powers, introduced in 2014, allow councils to tackle activities they deem detrimental to "the quality of life of those in the locality".

Stoke-on-Trent council abandoned a proposal to fine people sleeping in tents after a public outcry but others, including Luton, Brighton & Hove, Colchester, Hemel Hempstead and Poole, are using or considering similar orders.

Doncaster council says it has public support for its ban on rough sleepers using tents or sleeping overnight in the town. In Rushcliffe, Nottinghamshire, and Shepway, Kent, the homeless can be fined for sleeping in the open. In Poole the council is considering banning sleeping in doorways.

Landlords in Glasgow have used loudspeaker messages to deter people seeking shelter in doorways.

Josie Appleton of the Manifesto Club said there had been "a phenomenal increase in harassment by the authorities over the past three years". She added: "These crackdowns are often about urban sanitisation, removing people

## 'I still work, but it doesn't pay enough'

Alan is 51 and has a biology degree from the University of Glasgow. He works full-time as a teaching assistant in a London school. And he is homeless (Kaya Burgess and Gabriella Swerling write).

Stories like his are becoming increasingly common as charity workers in London warn they are seeing more people who are holding down jobs while

homeless, working shifts each day before returning to night shelters or the streets as the coldest winter in five years approaches.

The Times met Alan in a night shelter in west London, where he was staying with his wife, Irina, 60, a graduate of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture in Kiev. They asked not to give their real names.

The well-dressed couple, he in a blazer, she in a stylish floral jacket, sat

together round a trestle table in the St Dionis church hall in Parsons Green as soup and pasta was served by volunteers. Alan had a suitcase and Irina a portfolio of intricate pencil drawings.

They have been homeless for a month after they were kicked out with three days' notice by a friend who was subletting her flat. They have since relied on night shelters run by the Diocese of London, which has launched an appeal for the homeless.

Alan, born in Scotland, worked as a teacher in Ukraine and now works five days a week as a learning support assistant in a school. "They know about my housing situation," he

said. "They offered me a room to keep my suitcase and have a shower. We move about from day to day, staying in churches in the Fulham area. I work as a learning support assistant, but it doesn't pay enough."

"We are seeing more working people," said Melissa Kerschen of the Glass Door charity, which runs the shelter. "It's often jobs like construction or street cleaning or delivery, but we have had professionals who lost a job, including a man who ran a successful aviation business and went bankrupt."

"I have seen more people on the streets holding down jobs," said Jamie Shoblin of Thames Reach charity during a night shift this

who are seen as 'messy' from tourist brochure towns."

Liberty, the human rights group, is to complain to the European Commission about the deportation programme.

The Local Government Association said councils were doing their best to help the homeless, a wider category that includes rough sleepers as well as households that local authorities have a statutory duty to house. "Homelessness is spreading across the whole country and causing a huge challenge for councils, which are having to house the equivalent of an extra secondary school's worth of homeless children in temporary accommodation every month," it said. "The net cost for councils of funding temporary accommodation has tripled in the last three years."

The government has established a rough sleeping advisory panel and is to spend £1 billion by 2020 to cut numbers. **Leading article, page 33**

## Charities at odds over deportations

Sean O'Neill, Kaya Burgess

Two of Britain's best known homelessness charities are at odds over the government rounding up and deporting rough sleepers from eastern Europe.

Crisis, known for its support for rough sleepers at Christmas, has called on ministers to stop the policy, which is being challenged in the High Court by three people affected by it. However, other charities, including St Mungo's, have been accused by migrant rights campaigners of "collaborating" with the authorities by sending their outreach workers on enforcement raids to ensure the rights of rough sleepers are being respected.

Matthew Downie, director of policy at Crisis, said that detention and depor-

tation was "leading to terrible circumstances and in some cases tragic outcomes. He added: "The Home Office has not been able to tell us the scale or impact of this... Rounding people up to be deported takes no account of their vulnerability and why they might have been here in the first place. We think it constitutes an abuse of state power."

St Mungo's denied that it aids the deportation policy, but said: "Some local authorities that also commission our outreach services engage enforcement agencies to take action against individuals or groups of non-UK nationals who are sleeping rough or engaged in antisocial street activity."

"Our outreach workers may need to be present during this action to ensure that the needs of vulnerable individuals

are taken into account." A ruling is expected next week in the case of three homeless men, two Polish and one Latvian, who claim Amber Rudd, the home secretary, was acting illegally in ordering their detention and removal. The men, represented by the Public Interest Law Unit, argue that the policy is discriminatory and illegal.

Documents in the case say councils have had government funding. James Eadie, QC, for Ms Rudd, said "intentional rough sleeping", which was in breach of European treaty rights to reside in other EU countries, was targeted. He said the number of Romanians sleeping out in London rose to 1,545 in 2015-16 with many "walking straight from Victoria Coach Station along Park Lane and bedding down immediately".