

Charities work with UK Home Office to deport rough sleepers

Tom Pearce
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At least three homeless charities and a number of local authorities in the UK have colluded with the Home Office in the deportation of people who are sleeping rough and whom they deem to be in the country illegally.

This was first established last year by the Corporate Watch group through freedom of information (FOI) requests to London councils.

Among these is St. Mungo's, which has one of the largest homeless outreach services in the UK with more than 15 teams across the south of the England. Its web site explains, "We work to prevent homelessness and support people at every step of their recovery from homelessness."

This seems not to apply if you are deemed to be an "illegal" immigrant.

Last month, the charity admitted cooperating with the Home Office's compliance and enforcement teams (ICE) when the latter goes searching for rough sleepers deemed to be in the UK illegally.

The latest revelations came to light in a September 2016 Home Office training document obtained by the *Guardian* last month. The St. Mungo's logo was featured on the document, which read: "This teamwork which sees both the charity referring eligible people to immigration enforcement [IE] for help with voluntary returns and IE referring people to St. Mungo's has already proved beneficial for both bodies."

Questioned about its work with the Home Office, St. Mungo's said some of its contracts with local authorities specified that it should work with ICE teams. "I get why that can be seen as strange and unpopular for some people," said Petra Salva, the charity's director of rough sleeping services. "It's a difficult climate we're operating in."

If this weren't enough to demonstrate the pernicious role played by the charity, Salva confirmed that Home Office enforcement teams are "go[ing] up to individuals

sleeping in sleeping bags and interviewing them [and] end up arresting them."

Despite Salva's claim, "We don't believe our outreach staff have accompanied ICE teams this year," the *Guardian* reported, "It continues to work with the Home Office by passing on details of people from other countries who wish to return home."

In 2017, the rough sleeping rate in London (per 1,000 households) showed an 18 percent rise since 2016, with 59 percent of rough sleepers in the capital being non-UK nationals.

Corporate Watch found that the practice of homeless charities collaborating with the Home Office is rife. Its devastating March 2017 exposure established that "Outreach teams from charities, Thames Reach, and Change, Grow, Live (CGL) conduct regular joint 'visits' with Immigration Enforcement officers, as often as fortnightly in central [London] boroughs."

It found that the charities were persuading non-UK rough sleepers to leave "voluntarily." However, the figures uncovered showed "that detention and enforced deportation is more common" and that "in any case, so-called 'voluntary' departures are carried out under the threat of force."

Corporate Watch found a routine practice of Outreach teams pass[ing] "on locations of non-UK rough sleepers to ICE, including through the London-wide CHAIN database, and through local co-operation agreements." This also had the approval of Conservative-run Westminster council, which consistently lobbied for a tougher policy on migrant rough sleepers, with the policy "encouraged by the 'Mayor's Rough Sleeping Group,' which included senior charity managers from St Mungo's, Thames Reach, and Homeless Link."

Its research found that the rights of people from the European Economic Area (EEA) have been eroded by loopholes in the law since 2016. People from EEA

countries should be allowed to stay for three months without condition as part of exercising their “treaty rights,” which includes being, “employed or self-employed, seeking work, studying” or being “self-sufficient.” However, since 2016, the Home Office has changed the guidance and classified rough sleepers as “abusing their treaty rights,” even if they were working or have been in the country for less than three months.

ICE has the power to deport people immediately. Although the wording has since been changed to include the word “proportionality,” it means that a member of ICE can decide if removing a rough sleeper is correct due to circumstances. This is where the outreach charities pass their information on to ensure the process goes smoothly.

The callous nature of the work being carried out by the charities was revealed in an FOI request from Hammersmith and Fulham council. Corporate Watch noted that the council disclosed a “local protocol” produced by St. Mungo’s for its homeless outreach teams. Its report notes: “According to this document...St. Mungo’s outreach workers should assess the nationality of all rough sleepers they encounter and, if they are European citizens, also assess whether they are ‘exercising their treaty rights’: for example, seeking employment or education. The St. Mungo’s document states in bold type the procedure to be followed if a rough sleeper is judged to ‘not exercise their treaty rights’ over a period of time.”

The document continues: “These individuals’ details will be passed on to the ICE by the outreach team. Following this a joint shift will be agreed with outreach, ICE, Parks Police to target/tackle these individuals.”

Corporate Watch noted the scale of persecution of the homeless in these operations. “Outreach teams from charities St. Mungo’s, Thames Reach, and Change, Grow, Live (CGL) conduct regular joint ‘visits’ with Immigration Enforcement officers, as often as fortnightly in central boroughs. Freedom of Information (FOI) responses show 141 such patrols organised by the GLA and 12 London boroughs last year. This figure does not include Westminster, the biggest concentration of London homelessness, where patrols are likely to be even more frequent.

“Joint visits in just eight of these areas led to 133 rough sleepers being detained, while 127 people were deported in under a year in Westminster alone.”

Collaboration between homeless charities and the state has increased over the past four years with the creation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB),

where providers are paid on a payment-by-results basis for their effectiveness in assisting rough sleepers. In February 2017, Labour Party London Mayor Sadiq Khan approved the decision to continue with £4.2 million in SIB funding.

He was forced to suspend ICE patrols in response to the revelations that have emerged. Despite these temporary changes, the scheme continues and there is no indication that the Khan will end the SIB. The main beneficiaries are St. Mungo’s and Thames Reach, which were both contracted with delivering “services to half of a cohort of 831 entrenched rough sleepers.”

In November 2017, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government released a report: “London homelessness social impact bond evaluation.” It hailed the success of the payment-by-results approach and the profiting from the removing of rough sleepers, saying it “had stimulated providers to develop an innovative and effective delivery model.”

Charities tailoring their work to the requirements of the capitalist state are the result of the drive by successive governments to hand over responsibility for public health and safety provision to the so-called “Third Sector.” This outsourcing of responsibilities to charities and voluntary organisations has been an integral part of the privatisation of vital services.

The revealing of the intimate relationship between St. Mungo’s and the repressive apparatus of the state follows the exposure last year that the Shelter housing charity had trustees that were connected to corporations involved in the Grenfell fire.

One of Shelter’s board, Tony Rice, was forced to resign when it was revealed that he was—and remains—the chairman of Xerxes Equity, a construction industry investment group that is the sole shareholder in Omniss Exteriors. This is the company that sold the flammable cladding to contractors hired by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation—who managed Grenfell Tower on behalf of Kensington and Chelsea council—for the “refurbishment” of the tower.”



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