

# Homeless tent camp broken up by Labour-run Manchester council

Dennis Moore  
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Labour Party-run Manchester City Council (MCC) has broken up and forcefully removed a homeless camp of dozens of people set up in the city's St Peter's Square. The camp faced constant persecution from the authorities, having been forced to move into the square from its initial rain-protected spot a few yards away, within the arches of the Town Hall extension.

Known as the "red tent camp", it was first set up in the spring of 2024. It became a place for homeless people to stay, with many saying they felt safer there in a large public square. The camp was broken up on February 26 in a dawn raid, with its residents handed plastic bags for their possessions and told to leave. Tents MCC claimed had been vacated and other belongings were thrown into a bin lorry.

The majority who occupied the camp are refugees from war-torn Sudan and Eritrea, who had been granted the legal right to remain in the UK, which meant having to leave their Home Office accommodation provided while their cases were being looked into.

No doubt a factor in the removal of the camp was an attempt by the Labour council to appeal to anti-immigrant sentiment among Reform UK voters ahead of local elections in May.

Following the February eviction, some of the tents moved onto nearby Lower Moseley Street. A new encampment, including a large homemade banner reading "Manchester Homeless Camp", was then established a short distance away, below one of the statues in a corner of Albert Square. The majority of the square is sealed off for refurbishment, along with the main Manchester Town Hall building.

The eviction order issued against the St Peter's Square camp followed a court hearing on February 11 in which Judge Nigel Bird ruled against the Greater Manchester Law Centre (GMLC), which represented

one of the defendants against the MCC.

GMLC's case revolved around the legal duty of the council to offer emergency accommodation; a duty that should be based on reasoning that a person may be homeless, eligible and in priority need. This includes any rough sleeper who has recourse to public funds in the UK and who may be unwell enough to be considered in priority need.

If a council is not sure whether that person is vulnerable, it should make further enquiries and house them until it determines whether they are owed a full duty to rehouse them.

Following conversations with camp occupants, GMLC concluded that the above processes to prevent rough sleeping had not been followed. A number of people reported that they had not received offers of accommodation from other support services.

At the initial possession hearing on January 13 this year, a judge decided that MCC had not sufficiently demonstrated that it had complied with the rules of service in the case of all the defendants. It should have provided paperwork to defendants affected, aiding them in seeking legal advice or defending the case themselves.

MCC was ordered to re-serve the documents relating to the claim and have them made clearly available near the camp in five languages.

Between the January 13 and February 11 hearings, GMLC made representations for 18 of the homeless people that had been sleeping in St Peter's Square, leading to 15 offers of accommodation. Many had not been found accommodation come February 11, however; GMLC argued that MCC had not complied with its statutory duties under homelessness law and that it should not be able to seek possession until those people had been accommodated.

Ermias had been living in the camp for the last six months and told online news site *Mancunian Matters* he felt he was being treated like an animal, having received no support from the council. One of the refugees had told the court “It’s not something we chose or have the option [to end], so everyone is going through hell”.

Breaking up the encampment has obviously done nothing to address the underlying problem of a complete lack of accessible, secure and affordable accommodation for those in need. The refugees and others evicted still have nowhere to live.

Jade MacDonald of the Greater Manchester Tenants Union said the ruling to clear the site had “done nothing to fix the issue of homelessness” in the city. “This just feeds into the council’s attempts to make the problem less visible. Manchester is in desperate need of more social housing.”

The lack of any policy by the MCC council and the Greater Manchester Mayor’s office (both run by the Labour Party) to address the long-term needs of the homeless on Manchester’s streets compounds years of underinvestment in house building. As the numbers of rough sleepers on the streets swell, increasing numbers are having to live in often inadequate temporary accommodation.

Greater Manchester includes two large cities and 10 towns with a total population of over 3 million. Figures published last September by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority showed that in March 2024 there were 5,649 households living in temporary accommodation, including 7,679 children. This figure had shot up by 71 percent over the previous four years—compared to the national average of 21 percent in England—with demand for social housing outstripping supply by 260 percent.

In 2022/23 there were 13,551 social housing lettings in Greater Manchester, half as many as 10 years previously. A staggering 86,595 households bid for these properties, of which 35,177 were considered to be in a priority group for social housing.

The bill for temporary accommodation in Greater Manchester just for the period between January and March 2024 came to £18.6 million. It is estimated that by the end of 2024 the councils will have spent £75 million on temporary accommodation. They are only able to recover 42 percent of that from government

through a housing benefit subsidy (a net loss of £43 million).

While MCC goes to court to persecute the homeless, it waves through every development for luxury apartments within the city centre. The population of the city centre, which fell to just 500 people by the late 1980s—due to the city’s de-industrialisation and huge job losses—is now projected to reach 100,000 within a few years. Just in the years between 2018 and 2024, 27 skyscrapers were built accommodating more than 60,000 people. A further 20 are under construction and another 51 at the planning stage.

The rate of rough sleepers in England increased from 6.8 per 100,000 in 2023 to 8.1 last year. This January, homelessness charity Shelter reported that 57 percent “of people with housing costs and experiencing housing pressures in England have been kept awake at night over the past year due to worries including high rents, poor conditions and the risk of eviction”—11 million people.



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