Rebalancing the Rhetoric?
Normative stances regarding enforcement in street homelessness policy in England

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CHANGING PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICES.
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FEANTSA members deplore the use of coercive measures ... Even in those situations where effective services and choices are in place, the ‘high risk’ nature of coercive policy approaches makes them questionable as effective policy instruments and they raise serious questions about respect for human rights and dignity. FEANTSA calls on policy makers to adopt integrated strategies to progressively reduce and end homelessness rather than criminalising homeless people and exacerbating their exclusion.

(FEANTSA, 2012, p.78)
### Mapping Normative Stances

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Justifications - 1

- Central/Local Government emphasise **contractual, mutualistic** and **utilitarian** justifications
  - Public have a right to expect hostel places etc. to be taken up
  - Public intimidation by rough sleepers, beggars and street drinkers
  - Street culture a ‘blight’; damages business and tourism
We will continue to commission services to ensure that everyone has a route off the streets. People who are sleeping rough will, quite simply, not have a good reason to be there.

(Westminster City Council, 2013, p.16)

It’s tragic that in this day and age, and in a country like the UK, we still have vulnerable people living rough … However, my sympathy for rough sleepers ends when their behaviour results in people feeling intimidated and unsafe. The people living at Montague Road car park used it like a public toilet. There is absolutely no excuse for people to behave like animals – whatever their circumstances.

(Foote, cited in Cumber, 2016)
There are people that [are] homeless that go into closes [entrances to tenements] and they leave syringes or what-not lying about. I actually don’t blame people for … being angry at that. I would want somebody moved if I was living somewhere and they were urinating or whatever.

(Homeless person)

Unfortunately the reality is that when people drink in the way that most people drink on the street … it often leads to people not feeling safe… They can be verbally aggressive, physically aggressive… I think people are right not to want that on their doorstep.

(Frontline practitioner)
Justifications

- **Paternalistic** and/or **social justice** justifications by govt. and some service providers focus on the damaging impacts of street lifestyles:
  - Street population disproportionately represented in drug-related deaths
  - Rough sleepers vulnerable to attack, extreme ill health etc.
  - Addiction/ mental ill health impairs ability to judge what’s in best interests
  - Evidence that enforcement can ‘work’ in some circumstances (acts as ‘crisis point’ prompting change)
[I think] we’re letting people down by leaving them to vegetate on the street… There will be those who will say that they’re making a lifestyle choice and that by urging them to move inside we are misguidedy foisting our values on them… [But] I recall once trying to explain the doctrine of lifestyle choice to the children of a rough sleeper at his funeral. They listened politely, but I could guess what they were thinking and that was that if it had been your dad sleeping in that shop doorway, a greater humanity would have trumped your belief in lifestyle choice.

(Homelessness service provider)
Actually for a lot of people that are caught up in a street lifestyle, that have traumatised backgrounds, that have mental health issues or addictions … there's a question mark over their capacity to make appropriate choices about their future. Actually the system needs to be ambitious for them until they're able to be ambitious for themselves again.

(Homelessness service provider)

If it wasn't for them [the police], I wouldn't be sitting here … I was going to drink myself to death … I didn't really want any help in that sense … If it hadn't been for those police saying … ‘No you can’t sleep here … there’s a hostel down the road’, I probably … would have been dead.

(Homeless person)
Oppositions - 1

**Contractual**: inadequate supply/quality of emergency accommodation and addiction/mental health treatment facilities

*It's not good enough to say that they have all the services available to them and so the next step must be to penalise and criminalise them. Our starting point is, well, what are the services? Have they been effective? Are we dealing with people who are service resistant or dealing with services that are ineffective?*

*(Campaigning organisation representative)*
Oppositions - 2

**Paternalistic**: contravenes the ‘right’ to sleep rough / live an alternative lifestyle

*People have rights to sleep on the streets if they wish to … So I don't think there should be an order to move people out of the street.* (Frontline practitioner)

*That [street drinking] is his choice of lifestyle. That's not for us to make a judgement call on.* (Frontline practitioner)
Utilitarian: prioritises interests of the privileged while presenting unacceptably high risk of negative consequences for an already vulnerable group

Homeless people … offend people's aesthetics, and that's why members of the community complain and services get involved. (Frontline practitioner)

For some people, a more persuasive approach to move on with sanctions works and, for those it works for, it works very well for but, for those it doesn't work for, it's an absolute disaster. (Campaigning organisation representative)
Mutualistic: Vulnerability of targeted individuals is insufficiently recognised

I don’t think it’s fair [to arrest rough sleepers] because it’s not necessarily a person’s fault that they’ve ended up that way … I’ve got issues that [have] led me to sleep rough. I was brought up in care, I was sexually abused, I think people forget that … It wasn’t an aspiration for me to be an alcoholic at school, you know, but I am. (Homeless person)
Social Justice: evidence that enforcement does NOT ‘work’ in all circumstances and can in fact undermine welfare

I went somewhere else. I was very cold and where they dispersed us from was very warm, so I spent the night freezing (Homeless person)

It hasn't affected their drinking, but it makes them... less likely to trust us as workers. Because you know, they've been moved on from a different area, so it's harder for us to… engage with them. (Frontline practitioner)
Ambivalence and Irresolution

*It's never black and white, and you have to have the best interest of the client at heart. I think it is a fine balance between giving people the freedoms that they are entitled to and neglecting them. It's not completely clear to me, even, when one ends and the other one starts, you know?*

*(Frontline practitioner)*
Concluding Remarks

- Stance largely dependent on nature and extent of trade-offs made between ‘welfare’ vis-à-vis ‘liberty’
- High levels of ambivalence and irresolution expressed, including by homeless people
- Highlights need to rebalance (academic and policy) rhetoric re enforcement
- Potential for framework to facilitate more constructive (if still ‘difficult’) dialogue re enforcement in other contexts and welfare areas?