# Angela Rayner’s call to scrap Vagrancy Act reignites heated homelessness debate



Angela Rayner's recent proposal to abolish the 200-year-old Vagrancy Act has sparked fierce debate and concern regarding its implications for homelessness in the UK. Critics have branded the idea as dangerously naïve, suggesting that it could lead to the proliferation of tent encampments in urban areas, resembling conditions in some of the world's most impoverished regions. Detractors argue that scrapping the Act could pave the way for an “open season” on public spaces, transforming parks and pavements into makeshift living quarters for the homeless. This, they contend, would inevitably attract criminal activity and socio-economic disruption.

Rayner, the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, has framed her proposal as an effort to “draw a line under two centuries of injustice,” asserting that no one should be criminalised for sleeping rough. However, critics remind us that many provisions of the Vagrancy Act have already been repealed, and from their perspective, the existing legal framework does not routinely result in the prosecution of individuals for homelessness. Activists argue instead that the fundamental issue lies not in legal penalties but in the chronic shortage of accessible housing.

The current homelessness crisis has only worsened in recent years, with reports indicating that the number of rough sleepers in London has surged by 44% since 2022. St Mungo’s charity highlighted that nearly 12,000 individuals were counted as rough sleepers in the capital for 2023/24, prompting calls for immediate intervention and systemic change. This includes investment in social housing, where experts emphasise that the problem is often rooted in unstable living situations rather than mere addiction issues as commonly perceived.

Financial strains faced by local councils have led to spending on emergency housing skyrocketing, with expenses revealing a dramatic 80% increase to £732 million through March 2024. This shift is attributed to a profound shortage of social housing and welfare inadequacies, highlighting the urgency for effective policies to combat homelessness. Meanwhile, as councils face daily expenses of up to £4 million on temporary accommodation, local authorities are urged to devise comprehensive strategies to alleviate this burden.

Moreover, grassroots movements such as the Reclaim Croydon collective have begun repurposing abandoned properties into homes for the homeless, addressing the immediate needs within their communities. Advocates argue that transforming empty buildings into habitable spaces could significantly mitigate the housing crisis exacerbated by rising rents and insufficient government support. In contrast, broader governmental assurances of new funding programs and housing initiatives often seem insufficient given the constraints communities currently face.

While Rayner’s intentions are rooted in a compassionate approach to homelessness, critics question whether decriminalising rough sleeping is truly aligned with effective solutions. Many agree that the real challenge lies in providing stable accommodation and support systems to ensure that vulnerable populations are not left to navigate such treacherous circumstances alone. It remains clear that without a substantial commitment to creating inclusive housing policies and societal supports, the cycle of homelessness will continue to perpetuate.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2068404/angela-rayner-labour-intelligence), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/68ba72e3-08fa-465e-ab61-cfa94a58382c)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2068404/angela-rayner-labour-intelligence), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/a1ec4f19-ff00-4675-bbaa-e42f6b0f3846), [[7]](https://www.mungos.org/rough-sleeping-in-london-has-now-increased-by-a-massive-44-since-2022/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4605b3f9-165a-4d20-bc4d-951e7a548d31), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/squatters-take-londons-housing-crisis-into-their-own-hands-2024-06-28/), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/d5251579-ed4e-4959-872e-5c8fb647073e)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2068404/angela-rayner-labour-intelligence> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/4605b3f9-165a-4d20-bc4d-951e7a548d31> - This article argues that preventing homelessness is more cost-effective than addressing it after it occurs. It highlights a significant increase in homelessness-related spending in the UK, from £1.3 billion in 2010-11 to £3.1 billion in 2023-24, yet homelessness continues to rise. The piece advocates for systemic changes, including earlier interventions like rent subsidies, legal aid, and transitional support, alongside robust social safety nets, to effectively tackle homelessness and reduce long-term costs.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/squatters-take-londons-housing-crisis-into-their-own-hands-2024-06-28/> - In Croydon, South London, the Reclaim Croydon squatters collective is converting abandoned commercial buildings into homes for the homeless, addressing a housing market crisis exacerbated by rising rents and insufficient government welfare. Members argue that many empty properties should be repurposed into habitable homes, criticising political choices that perpetuate homelessness. The article highlights the urgent need for effective housing policies to combat homelessness in the UK.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/68ba72e3-08fa-465e-ab61-cfa94a58382c> - London is experiencing its most severe downturn in affordable housing supply in decades due to factors such as inflation, high interest rates, and building safety costs. Housing associations face significant financial pressures, leading to an 88% drop in affordable housing starts within a year. This shortage has exacerbated homelessness and increased pressure on local councils, which spent £4 million daily on temporary accommodation. The article warns that the crisis will worsen before any improvement, despite government promises for additional support and new funding programs.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/a1ec4f19-ff00-4675-bbaa-e42f6b0f3846> - Homelessness in London has reached alarming levels, with 4,068 rough sleepers counted between July and September, a record outside a pandemic. The article highlights that most homelessness is not primarily due to addiction but rather unsafe home environments, family breakdowns, or lack of support for asylum seekers and care leavers. It advocates for building social housing, providing treatment and counselling, and improving support systems to prevent homelessness, emphasising that the problem is solvable through systemic change.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/d5251579-ed4e-4959-872e-5c8fb647073e> - Spending by councils in England on emergency housing surged by almost 80% to £732 million in the year leading up to March 2024, highlighting the severe homelessness crisis. The article reveals that the number of homeless families grew by 24% to 56,000, with root causes including a shortage of social housing and insufficient welfare benefits. Government responses include Labour's pledge for a new cross-government strategy and the current administration's commitment to affordable housing projects and abolishing 'no fault' evictions.
7. <https://www.mungos.org/rough-sleeping-in-london-has-now-increased-by-a-massive-44-since-2022/> - St Mungo’s reports a 44% increase in rough sleeping in London since 2022, with 11,993 people sleeping rough in the capital in 2023/24. The charity urges the next government to treat homelessness as an emergency and prioritise it in their first 100 days. The article highlights the need for systemic changes, including earlier interventions and investment in the right approaches, to effectively tackle homelessness and reduce long-term costs.