

# Simon Community says rough sleeping has doubled in last three months

The number of people sleeping on Edinburgh streets is now back to what it was before the pandemic five years ago. Simon Community Scotland is calling for urgent action to be taken to tackle the homelessness emergency this Christmas.

The charity reports that the number of people sleeping rough in the capital has risen to 103 – double the figure recorded in September when CEO Lorraine McGrath declared a “people emergency” following the release of the latest Scottish homelessness statistics.

Simon Community fears that numbers will continue to escalate despite the vast amount of direct and partnership work being delivered.

The charity, which has a street team and support hub on Holyrood Road working seven days a week in addition to emergency accommodation services, outreach teams, a Streetreads library and its own SCS homes, will have supported more than 10,000 people through 2024.

Lorraine McGrath, CEO at Simon Community Scotland, said: “Anyone working or socialising in Edinburgh cannot fail to see the needs of people who are at the very extreme end of homelessness. We are doing all we can to help and at present this means that our teams are having to give emergency and life essential support and materials to people every day.

“We need to see long term change, but immediately, we need the assistance of the people of Edinburgh to help us offer safe places, support and hope to everyone experiencing homelessness in the city.”

Simon Community says that staff at its support hub in Holyrood Road have noted visitors accessing their services increasing by 300% to 400 per week in recent months. Exhausted workers are struggling to cope with demand from people who are looking for help from the service which provides a range of information, advice, support and care to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Fiona Williamson, Head of Service for Simon Community Scotland in Edinburgh, said: "It's the perfect storm – people are facing cost of living impacts and now the Council is extremely limited in where people can be accommodated, that is driving people towards rough sleeping and we are still to face the worst of the winter. In previous years when the mercury hit zero, the Council would fund accommodation in hotels and B&Bs, but we believe that may not be possible this year due to legal restrictions.

"This is not just a housing emergency – it is a human emergency, 103 people are currently rough sleeping in Edinburgh. This number is more than a statistic, it represents 103 individuals without the safety, warmth, and dignity of a home. At Simon Community Scotland, we know that homelessness is solvable, but it requires all of us to act.

"No one should have to face a night on the streets. Together, we can ensure everyone has a safe place to call home."

"Our street team connect with rough sleepers across the capital every day and are supplying on average 30 sleeping bags a day to those in need and working with a wide range of partners with support from City of Edinburgh Council to do as much as we can for as many as we can."

Fiona added: "In the past we would never have given out sleeping bags as we knew we could find some kind of emergency accommodation for people who needed it. Things have now got so bad we are having to offer them as a sticking plaster to

provide some degree of comfort and safety. We've reached a point where our focus is on keeping people safe from the weather and safe from harm, but we must also consider the long-term impact that sleeping rough has on their physical and mental health."

The charity's Chief Executive Lorraine McGrath said despite the current emergency, there is hope. She said: "The situation is not hopeless though – we know that numbers of rough sleepers were drastically reduced during the pandemic in Edinburgh, so it is possible. We need the support of everyone, nationally and locally, and we need the public to help as well – we all share responsibility for solving this situation.

"Whether through donations, volunteering, or advocating for systemic change, we can all work together to bring that number down. We can make a difference, because everyone deserves a safe place to live and access to the support they need. Everyone deserves hope."

To meet the immediate need for emergency support on the streets, Simon Community Scotland has launched a new Street Change Edinburgh Just Giving page <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/streetworkedinburgh> to allow people to make donations that will go directly towards helping people on the streets.

The charity is also encouraging Edinburgh businesses to reach out to partner or support its work by emailing [hello@simonscotland.org](mailto:hello@simonscotland.org) to arrange a conversation.

