



# **NEW CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT FOR POLICE OFFICERS**

Crisis' response to the Home Office consultation

May 2006

## **New Code of Professional Standards for Police Officers**

A new Code of Professional Standards has been drawn up by a working party of the Police Advisory Board to replace the current Code of Conduct. The Home Office is currently consulting on this new Code of Conduct and Guidance.

In responding to this consultation Crisis offers specific recommendations against the following questions:

- Does the Code and the Guidance reflect the standards that you expect of police officers? If not, please say why.
- Is there anything that should be added or removed from the Code or the Guidance?
- Does the Code and Guidance achieve its aim of enshrining the values of fairness and equality in policing? If not, please say why.

In so doing we have drawn upon our extensive research exploring the relationship between the police and homeless people.

## **CRISIS**

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people.

We have a vision of social integration and work year-round to help vulnerable and marginalised people get through the crisis of homelessness, fulfil their potential and transform their lives.

We develop innovative services which enable homeless people to progress through education and creativity and we campaign for a more inclusive society.

We run services directly or in partnership with organisations across the UK, building on their grass roots knowledge, local enthusiasm and sense of community. We also regularly commission and publish research and organise events to raise awareness about the causes and nature of homelessness, to find innovative and integrated solutions and share good practice.

Crisis relies almost entirely on donations from non-government organisations and the public to fund its vital work. Last year we directly helped around 8000 people, and we also campaigned to improve the lives of all 380,000 hidden homeless people.

Much of our work would not be possible without the support of over 5000 volunteers.

Crisis was founded in 1967 and has been changing the lives of homeless people for 39 years.

## SINGLE HOMELESSNESS, VIOLENCE AND VICTIMISATION

In 2005 100,170 households were accepted in England and Wales as being homeless and in priority need<sup>1</sup>. These figures only tell part of the story. In addition to those who are accepted as homeless by local authorities there are others whose homelessness is unaccounted for. The vast majority are single people without dependent children living in hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, squats and derelict buildings and sleeping on the floors of friends and family. Research suggests that there may be as many as 380,000 single homeless people in the UK<sup>2</sup>.

Research conducted by the Mannheim Centre for Criminology at LSE into the levels of violence and victimisation in the lives of single homeless people found the following<sup>3</sup>:

- Homeless people are 13 times more likely to be the victim of violence than the general public;
- They are 47 times more likely to be victims of thefts;
- Almost one in ten are sexually assaulted each year;
- One in five will be the victim of burglary.

The general public are found to be the most common perpetrator of crimes against homeless people, committing 32% of violent acts, 24% of thefts and 3% of sexual assaults. Alarming, many of these crimes go unreported with homeless people reporting just 20% of crimes committed against them compared to around 50% of the general population<sup>4</sup>. This is due in part, so suggests the research, to a difficult relationship between homeless people and the police.

There is, however, a very positive, frontline role for the police to play in helping homeless people particularly as eight out of ten street homeless people have regular contact with the police<sup>5</sup>. Police officers have themselves expressed a desire to move beyond enforcement<sup>6</sup>, with a senior police officer commenting that it is pointless to arrest people for street offences such as begging unless an alternative lifestyle can be offered<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, some homeless people have welcomed the introduction of Community Support Officers believe they will have more time to understand the homeless lifestyle<sup>8</sup>.

Homeless people suffer high levels of violence and victimisation and have a seemingly problematic relationship with the police. Yet, there is both potential and desire for a new positive engagement between police and homeless people. Crisis believes the new Code must reflect this potential and desire by addressing the vulnerability of homeless people specifically and recognising that homeless people need targeted measures to receive protection equal to that of the general public.

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<sup>1</sup> ODPM (2006) *Quarterly statutory homelessness statistical release*

<sup>2</sup> Kenway, P & Palmer, G (2003) *How Many, How Much?*, Crisis

<sup>3</sup> Mannheim Centre for Criminology (2005) *Living in Fear: Violence and Victimisation in the Lives of Single Homeless People*, Crisis

<sup>4</sup> Ballintyne, S (1999) *Unsafe Streets-Street Homelessness and Crime* - IPPR

<sup>5</sup> Ballintyne, S (1999) *Unsafe Streets-Street Homelessness and Crime* - IPPR

<sup>6</sup> Revolving Doors Agency (2000) *Mental Health, multiple needs and the Police-Findings from the Revolving Doors Agency Link Worker Scheme*

<sup>7</sup> Research and Information Services (soon to be published) *Steps off the street: solutions to street homelessness*

<sup>8</sup> Mannheim Centre for Criminology (2005) *Living in Fear: Violence and Victimisation in the Lives of Single Homeless People*, Crisis

## CRISIS RECOMMENDATIONS

Crisis recommends that the new Code reflects the need to reduce crime and victimisation of the homeless which is 'a major barrier to people leaving the streets'<sup>9</sup> and enables people to fulfil their potential and transform their lives. In particular we recommend that:

- **Officers are trained to deal with and understand the problems of homelessness.** The code should ensure that the training of police officers reflects an understanding of homeless people's experiences of crime and victimisation, as the police have successfully done with other groups, such as victims of domestic abuse, hate crimes and those with learning disabilities. This new understanding of homelessness could help officers address issues, such as begging, in a more productive way. Police officers currently raise concerns that a policy of arresting homeless beggars is a waste of time with no long-term benefits<sup>10</sup>
- **Homeless liaison officers are established in each force.** A study by the Revolving Door Agency demonstrated that many homeless people have multiple needs and have fallen through the net of health, housing and social care. Often they have more contact with the police than any other public service. Given the problem of homelessness is one which the police come face to face with on a daily basis, Crisis recommends that liaison officers trained to deal specifically with homeless people and respond to their needs be established in every force who will work alongside other agencies to help people overcome homelessness, addiction and other disadvantage.
- **Work is actively undertaken to counter stereotypes.** A Lack of trust in the police can lead homeless people to fear police presence and be reluctant to report crimes. The police in turn can perceive homeless people as perpetrators rather than victims of crime. In order to establish a more productive relationship and protect homeless people, these stereotypes must be actively broken down through training that involves the police and the homeless working together.
- **Crime between homeless people is confronted in full.** Being attacked by another homeless person is no less a crime than being attacked by anyone else. Indeed fear of retribution is common should a victim approach the police. Working alongside voluntary agencies the police can come to understand the issues that homeless people face, encourage greater reporting of incidents and be able to respond more effectively.
- **Police to work with providers to make safe and secure.** Victimisation, coercion, and theft can be commonplace in hostels. As many as 40% of homeless people feel safer on the streets than in a hostel<sup>11</sup>. The police need to work alongside hostel providers responding to their needs and helping them to ensure the safety of their residents.
- **Police link into multi-agency strategies to reduce homelessness.** In order to move beyond enforcement to long-term solutions to homelessness the police should pro-actively establish working relationships with agencies (voluntary and statutory) working with homeless people. Where such networks have been established there is widespread acceptance that collaborative working plays an

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<sup>9</sup> Ballintyne, S (1999) *Unsafe Streets-Street Homelessness and Crime* - IPPR

<sup>10</sup> Research and Information Services (soon to be published) *Steps off the street: solutions to street homelessness*

<sup>11</sup> Mannheim Centre for Criminology (2005) *Living in Fear: Violence and Victimisation in the Lives of Single Homeless People*

essential part in homelessness strategies<sup>12</sup>. The police in partnership with other organisations should establish a system of understanding, protection and referral, which will deliver more effective outcomes than the culture of enforcement.

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<sup>12</sup> Research and Information Services (soon to be published) Steps off the street: solutions to street homelessness

**DOES THE CODE AND THE GUIDANCE REFLECT THE STANDARDS THAT YOU EXPECT OF POLICE OFFICERS? IF NOT, PLEASE SAY WHY.**

- 1.0 Crisis would like to offer its support of the principles of Authority, Respect, Courtesy and Equality that are of particular relevance to our clients. However, we feel that although the Code talks of an ideal of equality and respect it fails to acknowledge that in order to achieve these outcomes vulnerable groups may need to be treated differently and have their specific needs met by the police force.
- 1.1 Single homeless people are amongst the most vulnerable individuals in our society. Homeless people suffer from high levels of unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, physical and mental health problems, family breakdown and staggeringly high levels of crime and abuse. Few (if any) are in that situation by choice but with no job, no home and often no experience or qualifications, homelessness becomes a self-perpetuating cycle.
- 1.2 The need to protect vulnerable adults from crime and abuse has been acknowledged in a series of reports. The 'No secrets'<sup>13</sup> report acknowledged a need for a multi-agency response to protect vulnerable adults while the recent 'Keep Safe' guidance to adults with learning difficulties<sup>14</sup> sought to advise them on how to protect themselves from crime. This work is hugely valuable. Crisis would welcome a similar focus on supporting and protecting homeless people.
- 1.3 Crisis recommend the following addition to the guidance:
- **Officers are trained to deal with and understand the problems of homelessness;**
  - **Homeless liaison officers are established in each force.**

**IS THERE ANYTHING THAT SHOULD BE ADDED OR REMOVED FROM THE CODE OR THE GUIDANCE?**

- 2.0 Crisis supports the principles of the new Code but feels that the guidance does not go far enough to ensure that the principles in the code become a reality for our clients. The police have been successful in reducing crime overall and in addressing the needs of certain vulnerable groups. Crime against homeless people, however, remains staggeringly high.
- 2.1 Crisis recommends the following additions to the guidance:
- **Officers are trained to deal with and understand the problems of homelessness;**
  - **Homeless liaison officers are established in each force;**
  - **Police to work with providers to make hostels safe and secure;**
  - **Police link into multi-agency strategies to reduce homelessness**

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<sup>13</sup> Department of Health and Home Office (2000) *No Secrets: Guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse*

<sup>14</sup> Home Office (2006) *Keep Safe: A guide to personal safety*

**DOES THE CODE AND GUIDANCE ACHIEVE ITS AIM OF ENSHRINING THE VALUES OF FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY IN POLICING? IF NOT, PLEASE SAY WHY.**

- 3.0 The principles in the code do promote the values of equality and fairness. However while the Code encourages police officers to act with impartiality and to respect the rights of all individuals equally, there is a need for particular recognition of the issues faced by homeless people.
- 3.1 To achieve equality of protection a different approach is required to policing homeless people than the general public. An example can be found with the Victim Support Glasgow City Centre Homelessness Project. This facility was established in 2001 in recognition that traditional Victim Support facilities were not being accessed by homeless people. After some initial reticence the project won the trust of the client group and has worked to expand its service. The project is a valuable demonstration of homeless people accessing services to which they were previously excluded, so giving them equal entitlement to the general public.
- 3.2 In order for the principles of equality and fairness to apply to homeless people, Crisis recommend the following additions to the guidance:
- **Work is actively undertaken to counter stereotypes;**
  - **Crime between homeless people is confronted in full.**



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