



Response to Petition P-05-864 Ban the use of 'Hostile Architecture'.

14th June 2019

Our vision

Everyone in Wales should have a decent and affordable home: it is the foundation for the health and well-being of people and communities.

Mission

Shelter Cymru's mission is to improve people's lives through our advice and support services and through training, education and information work. Through our policy, research, campaigning and lobbying, we will help overcome the barriers that stand in the way of people in Wales having a decent affordable home.

Values

- Be independent and not compromised in any aspect of our work with people in housing need.
- Work as equals with people in housing need, respect their needs, and help them to take control of their lives.
- Constructively challenge to ensure people are properly assisted and to improve good practice.

We welcome the opportunity to engage with this issue and provide some information to the Committee to support the petition.

Hostile architecture, also known as defensive or disciplinary architecture, is a term referring to methods designed to subtly or unobtrusively exert environmental social control which renders the building, furniture or area in question unusable to certain groups.

The trend of adding obstructive additions to public areas, including but not limited to: fencing; spikes; or railings on benches, all of which are designed to prevent homeless people from being able to lie or sit down, is a cynical practice that shows an intolerance of homelessness, and an inhumanity.

There is little data to show the scale of the use of these measures and it may be an issue that the wider public are somewhat blind to. However, if you were to put yourself into the shoes of someone who is sleeping rough and walk around towns and cities and try to see the landscape through the eyes of someone on the street it might look different.

You cannot design a way out of homeless, and the resources being used and spent on designing, installing, and maintaining these obstructions could be used better by addressing the core issues affecting people who have become homeless and preventing more homelessness – as opposed to moving them elsewhere as if to make the problem invisible and therefore easier to pretend it does not exist.

Quite often the justification for these measures is to encourage people to utilise existing services. However, [research](#) shows that there a range of reasons why people are reluctant or unable to use these services. Taking away other options to try and force them into services may just lead to people being put in precarious and more dangerous situations. For example, hostile architecture may force someone who is unable to sleep on a bench or in a space on the high street that is well lit and in the view of CCTV into a more remote area of the city where they are isolated and more vulnerable to a range of risks.

It is not just people who are sleeping rough that are affected by hostile architecture but also people who are in emergency accommodation and ‘engaging’ with services. Quite often this accommodation requires people to vacate by 9am and they are unable to return until 9pm, meaning they are left with nowhere to go during the day and often need a space in which they can settle for the day with their belongings. Hostile architecture removes these spaces for people.

We understand that not all examples of these measures are aimed at people sleeping rough, for example armrests on benches may be beneficial and essential for people with mobility issues. However, there are some measures that are used for nothing more than to design people sleeping rough out of the high street and other public spaces.

The resources spent on planning, designing, installing and maintaining hostile architecture could be better used to address the root issues rather than firefight the symptoms, demonising and marginalising people in the process. A continuation of the use of hostile architecture just pushes people, and the perceived problem, elsewhere, and comes no closer to addressing the growing issue of rough sleeping and homelessness, as well as restricting the wider public from using certain areas, just to punish a small and incredibly vulnerable group of people.

More worryingly this approach reinforces the myths around homelessness and can negatively influence the perception of the public, placing people at increased risk of victimisation. There are better ways of managing the public’s concerns about

homelessness and we would highlight our [7 Ways](#) campaign which includes education and promotes understanding and compassion whilst giving practical advice on how people can help.