

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS NEWS

# Open and shut case

**A “fatal” legal ruling has forced Manchester’s only emergency night shelter to close, leaving dozens of destitute homeless people with nowhere to sleep.**

Salford’s Narrowgate shelter shut at the end of April after Salford Council decided to stop all housing benefits payments to the facility. Five of the shelter’s seven staff have lost their jobs.

Manager Phil Brown called the decision “gut-wrenching and demoralising”.

He said: “How can the government and the lawmakers allow the closure of a shelter like this to happen when, on the surface, they are saying they want to help homeless people?”

“This will have a dramatic effect on the lives of people made homeless in Greater Manchester. Since it’s happened we’ve had no contact from the council to say that there is an alternative.

“One of the guys who struggles with alcohol said that before he would have an incentive not to drink so that he could get a bed here for the night. But now that incentive has gone. A lot of our clients have just gone underground, or are sleeping under railway arches or bridges.”

Salford Council says it was forced to make the decision after a court in Anglesey, Wales, ruled that night shelters that do not offer 24-hour access and storage could not be classified as a dwelling – rendering them ineligible to receive housing benefit on behalf of their clients.

Different interpretations of a legal ruling mean some emergency shelters for the homeless might shut while others stay open, reports **Helen Clifton**



The beds at the Narrowgate provided a last resort for rough sleepers in Salford

Councillor Gena Merrett, Salford’s assistant mayor for housing and environment, said: “This is the direct result of a decision made by the courts over which we have no say. It is a legally binding ruling which applies to all councils – we must obey the law.”

## In contrast to Salford, Blackpool Council has ignored the ruling

Yet in contrast to Salford, Blackpool Council has ignored the ruling, saying it sets no precedent. It has pledged to keep two local shelters open.

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Blackpool Council’s cabinet member for housing and public protection, said: “Night shelters play a very important role and we are pleased the support they receive via housing benefit will continue.

“We work in partnership with night shelters to tackle the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping in Blackpool and will continue to do so.”

Salford Council has also said all outstanding benefits owed to the Narrowgate from February to April will remain unpaid, leaving the struggling shelter in debt. A large chunk of the Narrowgate’s £10,000 a

month costs were covered by housing benefit.

“We’ve heard that up to ten housing shelters in London have had to close. Yet Blackpool have said that they want to support their night shelters,” Brown said. “It is down to each council to interpret the ruling as they see fit.”

In the last three years 135 organisations across Greater Manchester have referred 2,200 people to the Narrowgate for emergency overnight help. Of these, over 865 have gone on to find more permanent accommodation.

The shelter, which is run by Manchester City Mission, was open from 7.30pm until 7am in the morning. Its 28 beds were normally full every night. It operated a self-referral system, and were often the last resort for rough sleepers.

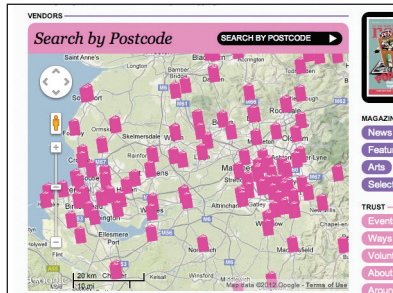
The shelter is now trying to find grant money to enable it to open 24 hours a day in order to fulfil Salford Council’s legal requirements.

Merrett said: “We are now exploring different options with the charity to try and help, and are keeping a careful eye out for any increase in rough sleepers in the city. The court’s decision has had a deeply regrettable impact on the charity’s excellent work.”

## VENDOR CODE OF CONDUCT

All vendors selling **The Big Issue in the North** must abide by the Code of Conduct, the set of rules governing how they work. Outreach teams from The Big Issue in the North patrol the streets daily to check vendors’ behaviour and to encourage and support them while working. Here are some of the key rules:

- Vendors can only sell on designated pitches organised by **The Big Issue in the North**.
  - Vendors cannot sell between 8.00pm and 7.00am (6.00pm in Liverpool city centre). Police officers have the authority to confiscate magazines and badges if they witness vendors selling during these hours.
  - Vendors must always wear their own badge when buying or selling the magazine and only sell magazines with their number on.
  - Vendors can only buy magazines for themselves.
  - Vendors must not use physical or verbal aggression towards the public or other vendors.
  - Vendors are not allowed to sell if staff feel they are unfit to do so.
  - Vendors must stand when selling; sitting down is an obstruction to the public highway and is illegal.
  - Vendors must not beg for money using the magazine. Asking for spare change or other items is considered to be begging.
  - Vendors can only charge £2.00 for each magazine and must always give the customer the magazine once paid for. Failing to do so is fraudulent and may result in police involvement.
- To comment on vendor behaviour, please call:  
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- The Big Issue in the North Trust raises funds to provide services for homeless vendors of this magazine.



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