

# Responses to begging

## Case studies of local responses

**Let's end homelessness together**

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## Introduction

In recent years, Homeless Link's members and stakeholders have reported a rise in the numbers of individuals begging on the streets in many areas of England. This briefing was developed following requests for examples of local partnership approaches to begging, in particular responses that tackle the common assumption that people who are begging are also homeless, and responses that prioritise support over enforcement.

If you have additional good practice case studies that could be added to this document, please contact:

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## Case study: Bath

Information provided by: Julian House

### Key points:

- **Popular tourist destination**
- **Multi-agency and community involvement**
- **Alternative giving campaign**
- **Promoted via the media**

### The local issue:

- Begging and anti-social behaviour associated with begging
- Perception that groups of 'professional' beggars controlled and rotated pitches
- Perception that certain events (e.g. rugby match, Christmas market) saw non-residents coming to Bath to beg, taking advantage of large crowds of visitors and residents
- Knowledge that very few of the persistent beggars are, or were, homeless
- Anti-social behaviour: intimidation by, and intoxication of, people involved in begging
- Impact on a world heritage city and popular tourist destination

### Steps taken to address it:

- Coordinated discussions with the Police, ward councillors, residents associations, Local Authority ASB & Community Safety Team, service providers from housing, homelessness, substance misuse agencies, the Big Issue, representatives from retail businesses and Bath Business Improvement District (BID), Bath railway station, Bath bus station, coach park and Bath tourism (including hotel and B&B proprietors), University of Bath.
- Used the ID PARTNERS framework approach to determine the problem, its scale and the solution.
- Agreed a campaign was needed to educate residents and visitors about the problem, coordinated solutions, and need for community involvement in implementation. Stated strongly that any campaign must not demonise rough sleepers.
- Looked at similar campaigns that had been run in Oxford and in London boroughs.
- Considered and agreed need to explain the campaign purpose, set up an alternative giving website to discourage people from giving directly to beggars.
- Agreed a Campaign name 'Your Kindness Can Kill'. Worked on publicity and promotional material that targeted Bath residents and students, tourists and visitors, beggars and people with street-based lifestyles, shopkeepers, hoteliers and transport providers.

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- Developed promotional materials which addressed FAQs and sought to gently educate the wider community and avoid demonisation of beggars and rough sleepers.
- Got media coverage on local and national radio, local TV and in print media.
- Secured funding from Community Safety, ward councillor budgets and Bath BID
- Used a public relations consultant.

### Outcomes:

- Tangible reduction in visible begging and associated ASB – recorded anecdotally, through analysis of police 101 call logs and through records kept by Homeless Assertive Outreach and other workers on the street.
- Initial high visibility of the campaign and personal invitations to talk to Community Associations, schools, University groups and others.
- Targeted enforcement action at different times led by the police
- Greater intelligence gathering and higher public awareness.

### Learning for improvements:

- Develop a longer lasting plan; the campaign was supposed to last 12 months, but died out after 6 months.
- Greater police involvement in enforcement (as last resort option) following other interventions and staged escalation of approach to persistent beggars.
- Better development of alternative giving approaches; supporting the public to engage with rough sleepers and agencies, and to be assured that their donations would benefit individual beggars directly.
- Secure more funding or in-kind donations to ensure that publicity and promotion could be renewed and refreshed more regularly during the course of a campaign.

## Case study: Leeds

Information provided by: [Change Grow Live \(CGL\)](#)

### Key points:

- **City centre begging; individuals with complex needs and complicated lives**
- **Multi-agency strategy and delivery**
- **Engagement and support intervention offered daily**
- **Enforcement is the last resort**
- **Public campaign**

### The local issue:

- Begging in Leeds city centre is extensive
- Intelligence that the majority of those begging do so to fund drug and alcohol dependency
- Intelligence that the majority of those also have access to accommodation
- Some begging due to benefit sanctions
- Non-engagement with services by some with more complex needs
- Police report that, as begging has increased, other crimes have decreased (shoplifting, car theft)

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### Steps taken to address it:

- Leeds City Council fund CGL to deliver an outreach service to beggars. CGL have extensive knowledge and information as also deliver the street outreach service.
- CGL's begging outreach is based on a partnership approach combined with street outreach and one-to-one engagement.
- They have recently launched a Leeds-wide anti-begging campaign in partnership with the council and other charities.
- CGL are part of a Leeds City Centre Strategy Group comprising West Yorkshire Police, the council, two city centre charities working with rough sleepers – St Anne's And St George's, City Centre Liaison team. This group meets fortnightly.
- On Monday to Friday the begging outreach workers carry out a 'begging sweep' for two hours each day in partnership with the Police, the Big Issue and Barca (a drug and alcohol provider). Information related to the shift is shared with relevant partners.
- A support network and plan is identified for each individual to shift them away from begging. Support includes referrals to appropriate services via the council and partner agencies.
- The CGL team can provide floating support to those with tenancies.
- The enforcement approach is only used when all other avenues have been explored and exhausted or aggressive/abusive behaviour is present.
- An enforcement approach is only used when aggressive begging/other behaviours occur.
- A campaign has been launched by CGL and other voluntary sector agencies during begging outreach work.
- The campaign entitled 'Think Before You Give' is aimed at the general public attempting to persuade them not to give to beggars, outlining why this can be detrimental.
- The campaign provides information on service where they can donate money.

### Key partners involved:

- Safer Leeds, West Yorkshire Police and The Big Issue in the North.

### Outcomes:

- The 'begging sweeps' allow services to build up profiles of the support and housing needs of the individuals and to identify, plan and engage the individual to access housing and support.
- Those begging due to benefit sanctions are easier to help as can be referred to food banks/meal services.
- The team are able to provide ongoing floating support.
- Those who accept assistance do so willingly.
- Referrals have been made to more intensive case management service; West Yorkshire Finding Independence (WYFI).

### Challenges:

- The campaign has received a mixed response and has led to trust issues for clients.
- There have been some results but the work is slow and painstaking.

## Case study: Westminster

Information provided by: Westminster City Council (WCC)

### Key points:

- **Two cohorts of beggars identified**
- **Lucrative due to huge tourist footfall**
- **Many agencies involved to plan and deliver interventions**
- **Two campaigns to be delivered**
- **Developing processes and training other agencies**

### The local issue and knowledge:

- Understanding the problem is an issue. Two cohorts of beggars identified.
- Cohort One: Individuals begging to fund a habit, predominantly drugs, predominantly UK/ROI Nationals and predominantly accommodated. A lot of those begging in Westminster are accommodated in our support services.
- From a social care perspective we want to break the cycle of cohort one. 25% of those begging in London also identify as having co-morbidity with mental health, drugs and alcohol. Sustaining people on the street is dangerous and the average life expectancy for someone on the street is 49 years old – a cycle we are committed to breaking.
- Cohort Two: Individuals begging in an organised way. Travelling into the UK and then from city to city throughout Europe making up to £300/day per person, collating the money and sending it to a central location. This cohort is challenging as legislation is not tough enough to prevent these individuals country hopping and committing low level crime and ASB. Under legislation they have 90 days to demonstrate they are exercising their treaty rights, to combat enforcement they tend to stay in one area for up to 60 days before leaving the country.
- Other issues include having a huge tourist footfall, handing over vast amounts of money as they apply the same rules in their countries as individuals here. This is particularly rife from American and Chinese tourists as the service provision in their countries is much more limited.

### Steps taken to address it:

- Involvement of agencies in partnership: Police, Home Office Immigration, city wardens, rough sleeping services, private security, landowners, businesses, residents, tourists and members of the public.
- Clear processes for our City Management departments – they feed directly into the Police and Immigration.
- Working to develop a clear platform to share data and encounters.
- Regular meetings take place, tasking Police, City Management and Immigration.
- Launching two campaigns, one addressing each cohort.
- Training for security firms provided.
- Social care working alongside reasons for enforcement – helping the individual make positive changes to their life

### Agencies involved:

- WCC Rough Sleeping department
- WCC City Management

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- WCC Communications
- Several voluntary sector agencies and churches
- Met Police and Home Office ICE
- Businesses, hotels, security firms and Business Improvement Districts

### Outcomes so far:

As the work is only just beginning outcomes have not yet been monitored. However it is known that the following aspects are crucial:

- Partnership working
- Information sharing
- Communication across agencies
- Ownership of problem areas

### Learning so far:

- The work should have started a lot earlier before numbers in cohort two began to escalate.
- It is important to constantly adapt and develop the processes to match the issue on the street.

Note: This information was collected in Autumn 2015. Westminster City Council has continued to implement this model throughout 2016 and have found it to be successful in reducing begging. As a result, this work will be embedded in the 2017 rough sleeping strategy and they will update Homeless Link as work progresses.

## Case study: Cambridge

### Information provided by: Cambridge City Council

#### Key points:

- **Prosperous town; liberal locals, tourists and students**
- **Alternative giving campaign**

#### The local issue and knowledge:

- Cambridge has a perennial begging problem; it is a prosperous town with a large number of well-meaning people and a fairly liberal attitude to begging.
- Tourists visit Cambridge in large numbers and tend to give quite generously to people they assume to be homeless, students are also very generous.
- Most would seem to be begging to support alcohol or drug addiction, and most of the regular beggars are well-known to services. Some have accommodation and those who are homeless have usually refused offers of accommodation due to conditions around addressing their substance use.

#### Steps taken to address it:

- We have tried to tackle begging from a number of angles
- This included a previous 'alternative giving' scheme aimed at persuading the public to give to homelessness agencies rather than directly to people on the street - backed by a poster campaign
- We have recently revised our 'alternative giving' scheme, which had run for five years and was pretty ineffective. This scheme now is completely unrelated to other approaches e.g. enforcement.

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### Who was involved?

- Housing advice and safer communities at the council
- Local homelessness charities

### About the alternative giving scheme:

- We were aware that campaigns that stereotyped people on the street would not work in Cambridge. We also wanted to separate the idea that begging was always linked to homelessness.
- We have developed 'Cambridge Street Aid' which was launched on 28 November and is already raising substantial amounts of money: [www.cambscf.org.uk/cambridge-street-aid.html](http://www.cambscf.org.uk/cambridge-street-aid.html)
- The Cambridge Street Aid Fund offers grants of up to £750 to help homeless or vulnerably housed people (referred by services) in Cambridge City to find and sustain accommodation and employment.
- Grants may cover small capital items or other costs such as training, travel or clothing.
- Enforcement will need to be a factor in the Council's response to begging but we are very clear that this needs to be kept separate from Street Aid.

The scheme was advertised to the public by:

- Press release (which generated good stories in two local newspapers and a long piece about single homelessness on BBC local radio).
- Council website
- Street Aid website – hosted by the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation
- 350,000 backs of bus tickets
- Four week bus advertising – interior and exterior
- Posters at local transport hubs and in council offices
- Local businesses – 'We support Street Aid' stickers in retailers' windows
- Postcard size information leaflets letting the public know the extent of local provision for street people
- Council newsletter and magazine

We plan to get a piece into the three university magazines and also try to get an open debate on the ethics of giving on the street as students appear to be big on-street givers.

We will keep interest going by publishing periodic 'good news' stories about what the fund has been used for.

## Other alternative giving schemes

### Manchester Big Change Campaign

<https://streetsupport.net/manchester/bigchangemcr/campaign/>

### Shrewsbury collection boxes

[www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk/alternative-giving-scheme](http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk/alternative-giving-scheme)

### Spare Change for Real Change – Winchester

<http://winchesterbid.co.uk/enhancing/spare-change-real-change/>

### Nottingham Alternative Giving Scheme

[www.endingalcoholharm.co.uk/altgiving/](http://www.endingalcoholharm.co.uk/altgiving/)



## **What we do**

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

## **Let's end homelessness together**

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