

Briefing to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee 9th November 2017 – provided by Community Safety Partnership

What is street culture, services in Sheffield, to include Begging, Drinking & Rough Sleeping

1. Background

This paper is in response to a request for an overview of the current approach taken by partners, led by Sheffield City Council (DACT, Public Health and the Community Safety Team) to address the causes and consequences of begging within the city centre. It will provide an overview of the extent of problem; the current strategy to address the issues, including begging, drinking and rough sleeping.

Some areas within the city centre have become social meeting points, creating a problematic “street culture” present on the streets. These groups are commonly referred to as “street drinkers”; however, the cohort is much more complex than this and includes individuals with mental health problems, substance misusers, rough sleepers and street beggars. In addition to this, some individuals in this group have multiple support needs and ineffective contact with services which can then reinforce their ‘chaotic’ lifestyle, making them hard to engage in support services.

In response to increasing complaints from the Sheffield City Centre Residents Action Group (SCCRAG, 2014), the then Director of Substance Misuse Strategy asked the DACT to work with agencies to address some of the issues raised by residents and local businesses, which included street begging, rough sleeping and antisocial behaviour (ASB), often fuelled by substance misuse. Work is ongoing to the present day

It was recognised early on that the causes and consequences of begging were as varied and multifaceted as the needs of those individuals who were begging. As such, no single agency can address the problem alone. The heart of the response is a strong multi agency partnership with an evolving strategy to address the causes and consequences of begging and the needs and vulnerabilities of the individuals

Agencies have approached the complex issues in partnership focusing on four areas

1. Intervention / Support
2. Enforcement
3. Positive communication

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2. To date, there have been the following responses from SCC and partners:

Intervention / Support

A multi-agency meeting was convened by DACT in January 2015, the purpose of which was to explore a joint coordinated partnership approach to tackling substance misuse related ASB in the city centre. Over time this group has become known as the 'City Centre ASB group': part of its remit has been to address the causes and consequences of begging and working primarily with individuals that have been identified by agencies as very vulnerable, and not necessarily just those who are engaged in prolific begging.

Agencies represented at the meeting were as follows. Agencies are keen to ensure that every effort is made to make individuals aware of support services and promote positive choices to address the causes of begging. They all subsequently went on to become members of the later incarnation of the group as the Multi Agency Working Group – responding to ASB and street culture:

Sheffield Treatment and Recovery Team (START) treatment services; South Yorkshire Police – city centre policing team, Public Health, Archer Project, Ben's Centre, Addaction, DACT, Sheffield Alcohol Support Service (SASS), Big Issue, Housing Independence Service, Adult Safeguarding, SCC, Faith based groups (providing soup kitchen, lunch clubs and Street Pastors), British Transport Police & Community Safety Team

The main function of the group is to:

Identify individuals who are a cause for concern who frequent the city centre;

- Establish if concerns are health, wellbeing, ASB, or both;
- Linking, re-linking perpetrators to sources of support, advice and guidance. This includes assertive outreach.

Rough Sleeping - There is the Rough Sleepers meeting which is held monthly and is ran and chaired by Housing Solutions team manager. This is attended by housing solutions and mainly vol sector working in the city around homelessness, this meeting purely focuses on homelessness, rough sleeping and getting the rough sleepers in to accommodation.

New psychoactive substances (NPS)

The NPS Multi-Agency Group meets monthly and chaired by DACT and is responsible for overseeing all NPS specific work in the City. The group

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reports to both adults and young people's substance misuse JCGs which in turn report to Safer and Sustainable Communities.

The overarching aims of the group are to:

- Improve our knowledge of NPS prevalence across Sheffield,
- Reduce the opportunities for further NPS outlets within communities
- Ensure up to date information is available universally in a range of media
- Provide targeted harm reduction to at risk groups of young people and adults
- Improve the skills and knowledge of a range of professionals
- Reduce and prevent serious harm and associated risk taking behaviours
- Maximise resources through multi agency partnership strategies
- Provide a joined up approach to all enforcement activity

Enforcement - Agencies recognised that for some individuals, proportionate enforcement activity is the most appropriate action, particularly where the behaviour presents a risk to the public. There is now a new SCC & SYP ASB meeting; members include community safety, DACT, and relevant partners whose role is to identify individuals who are consistently causing ASB, and who are or appear to be evading consequences for their behaviour.

Positive communication

In 2016, feedback from the general public and businesses in the city centre was that whilst they wanted to help, or donate, there wasn't enough information about the local charities and how to do this. The Help Us Help website was launched in September 2016 with support from both universities, local businesses and MP Paul Bloomfield with support from the following forums/groups:

- Retail forum – brings together retailers within the city centre, this has been an ideal forum to discuss issues in relation to begging and ASB in the city centre, and get buy in and support with the 'Help us Help' campaign.
- UNITE group – this brings together licensees from city centre, issues discussed are night-time economy, licencing issues, events, ASB etc. - this is an idea forum to engage/inform licensees about work being done to tackle ASB and begging.

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- Sheffield City Centre residents Group (SCCRAG) – city centre residents group, meets monthly.

To consider the growing issue of street begging in the city a workshop was held on 11 October 2017. This was led by senior officers from SCC and SYP and included a number of partners working in the city centre. The workshop considered the reasons for people turning to street begging and other related issues; the action taking place at present and any gaps and best practise from other area. An action plan is being produced following the workshop to set out the way forward.

Partners are intending to develop the Help Us Help campaign further from 30th November – 6th December hosting a Christmas cabin, promoting the website and partnership working, BID are investing into a wider campaign in 2018.

Other Partnership initiatives since early 2016, a separate meeting pulls together Sheffield's Town Centre outreach provision to share intelligence, identify hotspot areas, plan outreach times and coordinate rotas. This aims to maximise city coverage (in terms of times and location), reduce duplication, co-ordinate information and reinforce messages

The multiagency group have undertaken a number of specific targeted outreach initiatives, with people who beg (including Operation Duxford). This involves multiagency teams consisting of City Centre Ambassadors, Housing Solutions staff and Addaction workers.

Working with the Council's Housing Independence Service, the specification for the newly commissioned Rough Sleepers Service places additional emphasis on assertive outreach, out of hours client contact and working with people begging in order to respond to the issue and support this work. This is in recognition that begging is a risk factor for rough sleeping and vice-versa.

This work and the response to the needs of these individuals has been informed by the Sheffield Homeless Health Needs Audit (2016) and work around Adults with Complex and Multiple Needs.

Commissioning of Housing First (2017) in Sheffield which an approach that offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible for most vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness, and then provides the supportive services and connections to the community-based supports people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness.

3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

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Agencies are working closely sharing intelligence and working in partnership to respond to the support needs are been met, there are more people accepting support than refusing support.

There is information available about what support is offered in Sheffield and how the general public can help

4. Recommendation

The scrutiny panel acknowledge the innovative partnership work done so far to address this complex and multi-faceted issue.

A steer is given on whether the action plan to address the issues of street begging developed following the workshop on 11 October 2017 covers all elements or if further actions are required

That council resources are used to support and promote the help us help website

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