

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 7 February 2019

Subject: Begging and people who beg in the city centre

Report of: Strategic Director (Strategic Development)
Chief Operating Officer (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

This report is to advise the Committee further on the proactive partnership work on begging now being undertaken.

Recommendations

To consider and comment on the contents of the report.

Wards Affected: All (primary focus on Deansgate and Piccadilly)

Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The ambition to create and sustain a city which attracts visitors and businesses is supported by the work undertaken by partners addressing begging.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Providing support for individuals to improve their life chances and make a positive contribution through volunteering and enhancing work opportunities
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Seeing the potential in all residents and utilising 'Our Manchester' principles to build on strengths
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	This work supports the focus on making the city centre accessible and user friendly to all
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	The new E-CINS database exemplifies innovative partnership working utilising digital solutions

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

None.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The City Centre Public Services Review was undertaken in 2016. The purpose of the review was to create a better understanding of the complexities, demands and pressure points for services delivering in the city centre. A new board known as the City Centre Accountability Board was established to oversee progress and performance of public services aligned to the outcomes of the review.

1.2 The City Centre Accountability Board is chaired by the Leader of the Council and comprises senior elected member representatives, Council Executive members, senior Greater Manchester Police (GMP) representation and prominent members of the business community. The Board has focused on developing and introducing a shared proactive approach to begging in the city centre, in consultation with colleagues and partners in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

1.3 This report outlines the emerging findings about begging and people who beg in Manchester and provides information about the full scope of work being undertaken to address the issue of begging and its attendant issues.

2.0 Background / Context

2.1 In common with other UK cities, Manchester has seen an increase in the number of people begging. This is concentrated in the city centre but is also becoming more evident in other parts of the city.

2.2 A city centre survey was undertaken in the summer of 2018 to monitor perceptions of anti-social behaviour in the city centre including incidents of begging. Many respondents reported that begging was an increasing concern and was increasingly visible. 3,002 people completed the survey which launched on 27 July and ran for eight weeks. The survey aimed to capture the views of all city centre users, including residents, businesses and visitors, to understand to what extent public perceptions concerning the city centre had changed and to provide a benchmark for future similar surveys.

2.3 Nearly half of the respondents (1,430, 47.6%) were city centre residents, over a third (1,225, 40.8%) were visitors and 38% were people who worked in the city centre. In the section which asked about perceptions of begging in the city centre, approximately two thirds of visitors, workers and residents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they find individuals who beg intimidating. For the much smaller student group of respondents (4.7%), more than half gave this response. Almost half of all groups either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement 'begging stops me from wanting to visit the city centre'.

2.4 Whilst every person who begs has an individual story, common underlying themes include the impact of welfare reform, drug and alcohol misuse and homelessness.

2.5 A partnership approach is helping to understand the behaviour and characteristics amongst the people who are interacting with partner and Council

outreach teams. It evidences that not everyone who begs is homeless and that not every one who is homeless begs.

2.6 An update report on the Community Safety Partnership from the Chief Operating Officer - Neighbourhoods was discussed at the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee in November last year. In that report, information was provided about the new and proactive approaches which are now utilised to engage with people who beg including the establishment of a community safety commissioned project led by the voluntary and community sector (*Riverside, MASH and On the Out*) which works specifically with people who are in accommodation and beg in the city.

3.0 Begging in Manchester

3.1 Begging is a symptom of a complex range of issues which have both wider societal and personal elements specific to an individual. Our ambition in the city is to support each individual in addressing their particular situation thus reducing drivers leading to begging. This ambition takes account of the individual at a humane level whilst simultaneously addressing the concerns of the wider community including businesses which report the negative impact on them of people begging outside their premises and reports of harassing behaviour linked to begging.

3.2 Our approach is supportive and assertive. We support the message and campaign driven by *Big Change Manchester* which seeks to encourage members of the public to donate to charities and groups working with people who are on the streets rather than give money to people who are begging. This is to ensure that resources are used to support people to move on and make positive changes in their lives rather than sustaining a life on the streets. In Manchester city centre, there are free meals available provided by indoor services every day of the week including those commissioned by the Council. In addition, a range of faith and voluntary groups are active with street kitchens and food runs. Both Council outreach teams and the dedicated GMP team commence engagement with an individual on the street with an offer of practical support and signposting to relevant services. A proactive outreach team from drugs charity *CGL* is also part of the partnership and aims to motivate and support people to access treatment services. Whilst there has been success in many individual cases of working with people who beg and our approach is making a positive difference, the impact is diminished when the bigger picture is considered as the city continues to see new people on the streets. The case studies attached as appendix one illustrate this. The anecdotal national picture is that Manchester is sharing a common experience and that wider structural issues are continuing to lead to more people resorting to begging.

3.3 If we are unsuccessful in dissuading someone from begging, nor are they seeking support from relevant services despite our best endeavours, then a range of other methods may be used including civil and criminal justice action. Since the inception of the proactive partnership approach to begging, introduced after the City Centre Review, a wider range of legislation is now applied and the volume of cases involving the use of compliance and enforcement has risen significantly. It is recognised that the courts are limited by legislation in relation to court disposal options for individuals convicted of begging. Where possible, criminalisation is avoided and only used as a last resort, but arresting and taking someone through the

formal court process is a possible means of achieving behaviour change and so is part of the overall strategy where appropriate. Wherever possible, positive requirements are sought from the Court so that there is the chance of benefit to the individual such as attending for assessment and for substance misuse services. Begging is a trigger offence meaning officers have the power to carry out a mandatory drug test on arrest and over 90% of those arrested for begging in the city centre in 2018 have tested positive. We are actively liaising with colleagues in the criminal justice system such as Probation, CPS and the Judiciary to work together on achieving a shared understanding of the issues and constructive ways forward within the limitations of the sentencing process. We also seek to learn from other places to improve what we do in Manchester.

3.4 The focus of this report is on the city centre but begging is also taking place in other parts of the city particularly in areas with high footfall such as by shops. An example is to the south of the city centre around Chorlton and Didsbury. Chorlton-based *Reach out to the Community* is a volunteer run group providing support to people who beg and/or are sleeping rough. *Reach out to the Community* is a member of the Manchester Homelessness Partnership and active attendee of various of the sub-groups. They now have regular joint outreach with a link colleague in the Council's rough sleeping team so that support into accommodation will be given if a person begging in the locality needs this.

4.0 The emerging intelligence picture

4.1 Information from a range of partners who are interacting with people who are causing issues in the city centre is being used to help inform the strategy for addressing these issues. This includes people who are rough sleeping and begging.

4.2 It is important to note that people who are begging in the city centre are not a static group so the picture is constantly changing and it is difficult to get accurate demographic information from such a fluid population. However, information obtained by those engaged by one of the partnership teams indicates the following broad brush picture:

- The majority are male (about 20% female)
- Approximately a third are aged 26-35, a third are 36-45 with the remainder either older or younger
- Just over half are from Manchester, around a quarter are from other parts of Greater Manchester
- A significant number are using drugs and/or alcohol with heroin and cocaine/crack cocaine being the most prevalent

5.0 Next steps

5.1 Council and GMP city centre teams will continue to pursue the ambition of supporting and motivating individuals who beg to seek support and help to enable them to change their lives for the better, to live longer and more healthily.

5.2 We will seek to communicate with our partners in the criminal justice process to provide an up to date picture of begging in Manchester city centre. We will work with

partners to look at appropriate court outcomes to address begging and will continue to gather comprehensive business and community impact statements to support cases.

5.3 Through the Integrated Neighbourhood Management approach in the city centre, partners will work together with business and community sector groups to further reduce begging and the need to beg.

5.4 We will continue to seek best practice or a 'what works' approach to improve our strategy encompassing support and enforcement.